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School Social Workers Conducting Home Visits: Practice and Perceptions

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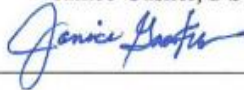
School Social Workers Conducting Home Visits: Practice and Perceptions

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ABSTRACT
School Social Workers Conducting Home Visits: Practice and Perceptions

By

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Kutztown University, 2024

Kutztown, Pennsylvania

Directed by Dr. Janice Gasker

School districts are serving populations of students being faced with more multiplex sets of individual, school, family, and community level risk factors (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Frey et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2010). Many children are unable to respond effectively to the school setting due to the stress in their family's lives and the stressors in their home environment (Openshaw, 2008). There is knowledge that social and environmental constraints can negatively affect a child's role in an educational setting and a student's capability to learn tends to be challenged if their emotional and physical needs are not fulfilled at home (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Ilhan et al., 2019). Even though there is research to suggest that socioeconomic factors are key influences in contributing to academic inequality (Dumont & Ready, 2020), the policy decisions made within school districts tend to be disconnected to the conditions outside of a student's school day (Downey & Condron, 2016).

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the practice of home visiting by school social workers conducting home visits for school districts. Gaining knowledge about home visits within school districts needs to come from comprehensive in-depth personal communication with school social workers to include their experiences and perceptions of the intervention of home visits. Three separate focus groups were conducted with a group of school

social workers from a school social work networking group. Grounded theory was used as the

research method to uncover the meaning of social processes, research, and concepts that include

social relationships and behaviors of school social workers which began with a set of

observations and then drawing on conclusions from those observations. For this research study,

the intersection of categories for construction of theory is as follows. School social workers

consider home visiting to be a part of their practice within school districts, but school social

workers are unaware of any policy and procedures to support their practice of conducting home

visits for school districts. School social workers are not supervised by social workers at their

school districts and do not receive formal supervision. This lack of guidance and support given to

school social workers significantly impacts their practice within schools and the intervention of

home visits. Based on the findings, recommendations for school social work education, practice,

research, and leadership are provided.

Keywords: school social work, home visits, intervention, national framework for school

social work practice, home visiting models, focus groups, grounded theory

Dedication

In loving memory of my father, Brian Kinnarney and my brother, Padraic Kinnarney.

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To my committee members, Dr. Vafeas and Dr. DeBiase, your suggestions and feedback were greatly appreciated. A special thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Gasker for the continuous edits and feedback during every stage of my dissertation. I am so thankful you were chosen as my committee chair. Kutztown University is so lucky to have you as well as any student that works with you. A shout out in my acknowledgement section is surely not a big enough thank you.

To my mother and brother, Jack. Thank you for the constant encouragement and push to apply, continue, and finish. Thank you for always believing in me and just being there.

To my Bill. Thank you for being my constant, no matter what. Thankful for your reassurance and advice that I continued to repeat in my head throughout this journey. Stop comparing myself, I am in this program for a reason, and time will continue to pass, so get it done.

To my closest friends and cousins. I needed your encouragement more than you know.

Thank you to my school social work networking group. You are all rock star social workers, and I am so thankful for your support.

To my cohort. We did it!

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Chapter One: Introduction

School districts in the United States have continued to grow more diverse in regard to culture, race, religion, and language, and the population of students being served by school districts are facing more complicated sets of community, school, family, and individual level risk factors (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Frey et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2010). The policy decisions made within school districts are often viewed as being disconnected from the conditions outside of a student's school day (Dumont & Ready, 2020) even though there is research to suggest that socioeconomic factors are key influences in contributing to academic inequality (Downey & Condron, 2016).

Research has suggested that there is knowledge social and environmental forces can negatively affect a child's role as a student, and a student's capacity to learn tends to be hindered if their emotional and physical needs are not met (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Ilhan et al., 2019). Many children cannot respond effectively to the school environment due to the stress in their family's lives and the stressors in their home environment (Openshaw, 2008). Some of the known influences that can disrupt a student's education include race, gender, family background, poor health care, poor nutrition, instability with familial structure, and neighborhood conditions (Kelly et al., 2010; Sherman, 2016; Wei et al., 2018). Education is vital to refining social justice, equity, economic growth and development, as well as health and safety, for any community, but it is an extremely challenging task for school districts to identify and meet the needs of all their students to ensure academic success (Wei et al., 2018).

The following information offered in chapter one will examine how school social workers can utilize the home visit as an intervention for school districts with the intended outcome of addressing the diverse needs of students and ensuring student success. This paper will also provide information on the influences that interrupt a student's ability to learn, which

tend to come from the student's family and the non-school environment. Along with the

explanation of the roles of school social workers, continuing to measure home visits provides

knowledge and evidence of the home visit as well as implications for school districts and school

social work practice, which supports the need for ongoing research literature.

Addressing Students' Needs

One goal of school social workers is to ensure all students receive an education while

being in a safe and healthy learning environment (Openshaw, 2008). School districts need to

provide the necessary resources to ensure students can achieve this (Openshaw, 2008; Wasik &

Shaffer, 2008). School districts often have a substantial role in more than just educational

outcomes. School districts tend to be challenged with addressing a wide array of issues that

students face, including truancy concerns, mental, physical, and health challenges, behavior and

discipline, drug and alcohol abuse, school performance, language barriers, family factors, and

much more (Ilhan et al., 2019; Kelly et al., 2010; Sherman, 2016; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008).

School social workers can assist school districts in adequately considering the unique individual

experiences that stem from the student's homes and communities (Charles & Stone, 2019).

Concept of Family Influence

To address significant issues, education systems struggle with understanding and

exploring practices that advocate for societal change, increase family participation and

engagement within their student's education, and support the student's home culture (Boske &

Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Manz & Ventresco, 2019). School districts should explore

comprehensive support that addresses the many out-of-school needs and barriers that limit a

student's educational success, and they should look to the family to help understand the needed

support (Finigan-Carr et al., 2018). For example, school social workers can work with families to

access community resources and outside support to reduce certain stressors they are dealing with.

Some of these stressors can include socioeconomic status, parenting challenges, healthy relationships, illness, and family trauma (Finigan-Carr et al., 2018). School districts need to have the ability to view and understand students holistically to be able to address school-based performance in the framework of family systems and potential trauma to address presenting problems with an all-encompassing frame of reference (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020). Addressing school-based performance cannot be micro-focused and needs to be understood simultaneously with the family-in-environment perspective (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020).

For school districts to address these challenges, they need to understand the influences and barriers that come from the environments in which their students live. The family-in-environment perspective can be utilized to assist school districts with understanding the influences that come from students' families and environments and how they interact (Biscontini, 2021; Gasker, 2023). Some of these influences include culture, language, race, socioeconomic status, beliefs, traditions, and religion, but some of these lived experiences of the children and their families tend to go unseen in educational settings (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010).

It has been widely documented that schools often aid as the most common entrance point and as the primary service providers for children with mental health needs (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020). There are growing concerns as to whether school districts are equipped to handle the inequalities and disparities students carry with them that influence student learning and success (Downey & Condron, 2016; Dumont & Ready, 2020). Bridging the gap between the psychosocial well-being and education of students is essential to the success of all students, not just the students identified as at-risk (Sherman, 2016). School social workers can be the needed link between the home environment of the student and the school district.

Influence of Non-School Environment

From an educational viewpoint, the home is where the students first learn, and the parents are the primary teachers (Allen & Tracy, 2004). For the average 18-year-old student, it is estimated that only 13 percent of their time awake is spent inside the school (Downey & Condron, 2016). It is important to highlight the amount of time spent in a non-school environment due to the potential impact these inequalities and influences have on student success from circumstances outside the school day (Dumont & Ready, 2020; Ilhan et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2018). The non-school environment can include the student's home, physical environment, and community in which they live. A complete understanding of the child must be fully known, and the child cannot be labeled as home-selves or school-selves. The whole child must be understood, and their needs cannot be based on the five hours a day in which the student is inside the school and in the teacher's eye (Charles & Stone, 2019).

Role of School Social Workers

School social work is a specialized area within the field of social work that often requires specific groundwork concerning the psychosocial functioning of individuals and takes place in the vigorous setting of the educational landscape (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; NASW, 2023). These practices are driven by the common vision of school social workers and their objective to support the holistic development of children and create the means for school districts to do so (Charles & Stone, 2019). The lack of achievement sustained by students is often due to outside influences that are not in a school's purview (Downey & Condron, 2016). Students face many obstacles that are greater than the school's educational knowledge and foundation, which makes it increasingly important for social workers within the school system to work with other systems involved in the family's life (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Wei et al., 2018). It can become the school social worker's job to gain a better understanding of the barriers to learning and ways to remove them (Smith & Todd, 2019) as well as assist in creating a school climate

that fosters positive social and emotional learning (McKinnon et al., 2018). Thinking back to the

work of the visiting teacher movement, school social workers have known for some time that the

educational outcomes for students are influenced by a combination of home and societal

conditions and school variables (Allen-Meares, 1994; Frey et al., 2012; Openshaw, 2008). When

a student's social background decides their academic success, the basis on individual ability is no

longer true, but rather the ability across environments, and these factors provide the influences

that either support or hinder the student (Paulus et al., 2021). Supporting students and families of

a school district is a major part of a school social worker's role and supporting the school district.

   School social work has increased in volume and intensity due to the increasing demands

and concerns communities are facing and the need to support school districts and students. This

has caused school social work to grow into a specialized, complex field of practice (Frey et al.,

2012; Kelly et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2016; Richard & Sosa, 2014). School social workers are

tasked with creating and implementing interventions to meet the needs of the students in their

districts due to educators being unable to conclude if the students are considered at risk based

solely on the presence of one or more predisposing influences during the school day. Profiling

these students based on these characteristics presents little to no support in preventing

compromising behaviors or upholding appropriate behaviors (Edwards et al., 2007). When a

student's ability to function and make academic progress in school is challenged, school social

workers become tasked with assisting in addressing these problems and assisting with

interventions to measure and create lasting change (Bye et al., 2009; Gherardi & Whittlesey-

Jerome, 2018; Sabatino, 2009).

   School social workers serve schools in a diverse range of capacities and perform duties

on many levels. Some of these roles can include providing services such as individual, group,

and family counseling, home visits, parent education and support, crisis intervention, skills

training, and advocating for students, families, and school system, and working with community

agencies (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Openshaw, 2008). School social

workers also provide consultation services consistent with school, individual, and group

assessments and interventions (Sabatino, 2009). School social work is differentiated from other

school-based professionals due to the significance of serving oppressed and marginalized

populations as well as the theoretical groundwork, which shapes the practice while being guided

by educational law (Richard & Sosa, 2014).

Social work is often seen as a hidden occupation, and one of the most private and

complex areas of this profession is the home visit (Ferguson, 2018; Saltiel & Lakey, 2019;

Winter & Cree, 2016). Being the linkage between the student's home, school, and community is

a unique opportunity school social workers can offer (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Richard & Sosa,

2014; Sherman, 2016). It is known the family needs to be utilized as a component in the

intervention (Allen & Tracy, 2004) and school districts need to expand their support further than

the school walls to understand, learn, and advocate for children, families, and the community

(Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Wasik & Schaffer, 2008). School-based social work aims

at addressing emotional, familial, behavioral, and community-related needs in comparison to the

student's education (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Openshaw,

2008; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). By school social workers improving the school-family

connections, other non-school factors tend to be addressed, which positively affect school

achievement (Ferlazzo, 2011). Some of these factors include fewer days absent, a decrease in

behavioral problems and school violence, greater graduation rates, overall present better

academically, and more confidence in their school performance and the home visit can be used

as a mode of intervention (Bye et al., 2009; Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Ilhan et al., 2019).

Home Visiting as an Intervention

Home visits have been recognized as a preferred model for delivering services to children, parents, and families identified as at-risk (Damashek et al., 2023; Nathans et al., 2019) and merely providing this type of support inside the family's home is key (Peterson & Roggman, 2019). Home visiting has been used as an intervention across different fields of human services for many years and has a long legacy in social work based on the advantages of providing services to families in their natural environment. Social work practice in the setting of the home includes many means of support. Some of these support services include: early childhood intervention programs, placement prevention and family reunification programs in child welfare (Allen & Tracy, 2008), community mental health services to children, adults, and their families, programs for court-involved youth, hospice care, community support programs for older adults, and adult protective services (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Damashek et al., 2023; Nathans et al., 2019; Schultz et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008).

Some home visiting programs have been utilized specifically to improve outcomes which include enhancing child development and health concerns, improving parenting skills, and preventing abuse and neglect (Damashek et al., 2023; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). Home visits for school districts can have different foci but hope to achieve the same outcome of student success. The school social worker can utilize the home visit to link families with services for support and coordinate activities across the home-school setting (Allen & Tracy, 2004). Flouri & Midouhas (2016), suggest that schools can break or reverse the effects of family and community inequalities on children's cognitive or academic outcome, contingent on the intervention provided. Based on the advantages of offering services to families in their natural setting and environment, home visiting can be used as an intervention strategy (Allen & Tracy, 2004). Being in the presence of the families in their communities permits school social workers to engage families in unique ways by obtaining an understanding about their local culture, values, and

language. This also allows for a more accurate assessment as the school social worker observes

the lifestyle and routines of the family (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Beder, 1998; Wasik & Shaffer,

2008). Meeting within a family's home can decrease the power imbalance amongst the school

social worker and family to help promote a trusting relationship (Allen & Tracy, 2004). Home

visiting is known as a deeply embodied practice in which all emotions and senses come into

performance and progress is pivotal (Ferguson, 2018).

Often, when students have prolonged absences, the school social worker visits the home

to assess the reasons for them and brings this information back to the school. When multiple

attempts have been made by school staff to contact a caregiver, the school social worker can do a

home visit to initiate this connection and discuss the barriers to the lack of response to the school

district. School social workers have also visited family's homes to assist caregivers with

reinforcing behavior interventions and management plans that the school has put into place as

well as provide individual and family therapeutic interventions, crisis interventions, and assisted

with advocacy. Putting these in-home activities in place can help with parental involvement,

which helps students succeed in school (Openshaw, 2008; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). These

exchanges during home visits are viewed as tools to help break down barriers between the

families and the school as well as barriers to assessing and obtaining services (Ilhan et al., 2019;

Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). Barriers that can be addressed with home visits include lack of

transportation, lack of time to attend meetings, not being able to understand the educational

materials, and not understanding the school system, language, school requirements, and laws,

etc. (Allen & Tracy, 2004).

Results from Home Visits

Some known results of school social workers conducting home visits include gaining an

understanding of external influences from the student's home and community and then bringing

this knowledge back to the school district to assist teachers with developing awareness and empathy for their students. The National Association of Social Worker Standards for School Social Work Services (NASW, 2012) lists standard number three as assessment. The assessment of the home during the visit should be used to re-assess the current dilemma the student is facing for the family as well as the teacher (Norris-Shortle & Cohen, 1987) and should have a goal of improving the students' social, emotional, academic, and behavioral outcomes (NASW, 2012). Giving teachers an awareness of the home life of their students can assist with individualizing lesson plans and services to meet their needs. This will then help teachers modify interventions and interactions inside the classroom (Allen & Tracy, 2004). The school social worker should use the home visit to listen to the families and see what the family identifies as their own needs. These visits will strengthen the home-school connection to achieve lasting outcomes and improve the child's interactions at school (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Harden, 2019; Ilhan et al., 2019). Continuing to increase caregiver engagement has been known to improve grades and test scores, better attendance, increase good behavior, less retention of the same grade, and higher graduation rates (Allen & Tracy, 2004). When a partnership is created between the families and the school district, families begin to see themselves as working with the school district rather than conflicting forces and lasting solutions begin to be developed. Bridging the gap between education and the psychosocial well-being of students is essential in success for all students in the school district, not just students identified as at-risk (Sherman, 2016). Functional approaches along with the use of ecological perspective need to be used to enhance the understanding of barriers to learning and provide interventions that foster the improvement of academic progress and student well-being (NASW, 2012). Home visits can provide interventions that can support immediate outcomes for students and secondary and lasting outcomes, and within a school system, school social workers can be the needed change agent.

Focal Problem

Individual and family characteristics are both elements of educational success (Ruzojcic et al., 2018). An example of this would be income being a significant social concern in the United States and the key element in reinforcing its decline is education (Wei et al., 2018) and a protective factor to combat it (Ruzojcic et al., 2018). There is knowledge that the social and environmental forces can negatively affect a child's role as a student and a student's capacity to learn tends to be inhibited until the emotional and physical needs are fulfilled (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Ilhan et al., 2019). Many children cannot respond effectively to the school environment due to the stress in their family's lives and the stressors in their home environment (Openshaw, 2008). School districts often have a substantial role in more than just educational outcomes. School social workers are known to provide the bridge between home, schools, and the community in the education setting where the support for families and students is diminishing but this area of need remains (Richard & Sosa, 2014). Educational success is important for all students, not just students at-risk which makes bridging the gap between the psychosocial well-being and education essential for school districts (Sherman, 2016). Currently, it is unknown whether school social workers are conducting and utilizing home visits to bridge this gap between the students' home and school.

Relevance to Social Work

Social workers deliver services in various settings, but home-based services are often utilized in conjunction with community-based services and is a chance to define and work with client's concerns in conceptually different ways. Social workers also value interdisciplinary collaborations when addressing multiple issues that affect a student (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2010). Like other human services such as early childhood intervention programs, child welfare services, hospice, and probation services, this can include

work in neighborhoods, homes, and other natural settings that possess significant promise for

innovative practice and the view of the importance of collaborating with all systems involved

within the family (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Kelly et al., 2016).

  School social work can be viewed as a practice that blends skills and knowledge from

education, along with utilizing a conceptual framework to guide practice. This type of practice

calls for more ecologically grounded social work that centers the students and families of the

school community and the school and students as targets for the intervention (Charles & Stone,

2019). Expanding school social work roles can be aided by utilizing the unique perspective the

visitor teacher movement created on the adequacy of the organizational and professional

structures within which the educators and school social workers' work with multiple levels and

systems involved in the students' life (Charles & Stone, 2019). This is important to note because

if school social workers focused solely on the issues being presented within the school, there

would be little context for understanding the students and families who are a part of the school

district (Finigan-Carr et al., 2018). School social workers are positioned well to be able to

support children, youths, families, and schools, to address the needs of in-risk and at-risk

students (Kelly et al., 2016) as well as utilizing competencies to understand how microsystems,

mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems, affect a child (Richard & Sosa, 2014).

  School social workers must develop needed competencies with working with students

and their families. These can be acquired through a strong theoretical foundation and knowledge,

but also developing skills through education, training, and practice (Nathans et al., 2019). The

best social workers pull from a wide range of knowledge and skills to serve students in a

multitude of ways (Finigan-Carr et al., 2018). There needs to be concrete linkages between the

home visit intervention and theory to assist with strengthening the school social workers home

visitor competence and skills (Nathans et al., 2019). Even though the field of school social work

comes with imperfections and challenges, school social work continues to thrive as a social work subspecialty (Kelly et al., 2010). There is no drafted plan for home visiting and social workers tend to have to make their own practices by utilizing their basis of skill, knowledge, education, intuition, ritual, and courage than governmental rules (Ferguson, 2018; Lyter & Abott, 2007). No two home visits are ever the same but by utilizing evidence-based practice to support the home visit, school social workers are more likely to achieve the goals of not only the school district but also the students and families they work with and assist with appropriate delivery of the services and supports needed (Ferguson, 2018).

Implications for Evidence Based Social Work Practice

Home visits have been a part of social work since the profession's establishment, dating back to the time of "friendly visitors" (Gasker, 2023). Social work practice skills used in a home setting can often be used in other practice settings, but some specific skills are required to be applied to interventions needed during home visits. These can include observation, engagement and resourcefulness. Along with the content offered in required social work curricula and courses, developing students' skills, knowledge, and values, should be incorporated into the instructional methods for integrating home-based content and to further understand aspects of the client system (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Beder, 1998; Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly et al., 2015; Lamorey, 2017; Nathans et al., 2019; Openshaw, 2008). Some of these methods include engaging in class participation, discussions, and debates about home-based practice, providing relevant readings and materials, using home-based case examples and role-plays, shadowing experiences, and engaging in experiential exercises related to home as a practice setting (Allen & Tracy, 2008).

Specific clinical skills are needed in home-based practice due to the challenging issues the family and school social worker will face in the field. Pre-service training is recommended

for school social workers which can be done by having an internship in a school setting and

being supervised by a school social worker. It is important that the generalist social work

curriculum is incorporated into pre-service experiences for new school social workers as well as

school social work curriculum and to include courses on policy, practice, educational

administration, and special education (Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly et al., 2015; Lamorey,

2017; Openshaw, 2008; Shultz et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2022; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008).

Field placements for social work students can provide opportunities to assist with

preparing for the utilization of home visits but specialized training is also recommended for

distinctive challenges that often occur during home-based work (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Gherardi

& Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Nathans et al., 2019; Roggman et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022).

Social workers need to be provided with the knowledge and skills of conceptualizing the dual

role within the practice of home visits. Social workers need to understand the ways in which

their perceptions of their role affect practice, job perception, and self-perception (Hancock &

Pelton, 1989; Nathans et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). Social workers

rarely receive formal training on conducting home visits and often, social workers create their

own style based on trial and error (Lyter & Abbott, 2007).

Implications for School Districts

It is an extremely challenging task for school districts to meet the needs of all their

students, but school social workers can help districts understand the needs and risks of students

to help identify more families in need of support and services. School social workers take on the

role of seeking out identified students and families and have the responsibility of assessing

problems and guiding interventions to ensure effective practices (Allen & Tracy, 2008). It is

important school social workers understand all potential influences that affect the student so

interventions can be individualized for each family. Developing a partnership between social

workers, students, and families is a trend for community-based practice and is important for the future of home-based services in social work (Allen & Tracy, 2008). By school social workers conducting home visits to increase the knowledge of how the home environment effects school success, this can assist school social workers with future research of interventions to support students, families, and the school (Allen & Tracy, 2008).

By school social workers being involved in assessments, new research can be used to assist school districts with interventions and needed programs and services to eliminate a range of obstacles to learning with the hopes of improving the conditions of the school for students and staff (Opensahw, 2008; Sherman, 2016; Smith & Todd, 2019). School social workers can increase evidence-based practice inside a school district by serving as consultants to ensure fidelity for interventions and increase the school districts knowledge of the need to support socioemotional behavioral needs of all students (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Sabatino, 2009).

School districts not only provide mental health and behavior expertise via school social workers, but they can also be utilized to assist with policy decisions around school level issues across educational practice such as responses to interventions, programs, technology, and curriculum (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Kelly & Stone, 2009). Understanding the concerns and challenges of not only school social workers but also school district staff and families it serves, can assist with needed intervention strategies. By continuing to research current data on school social wok practice, this can help gather information of this specialized field of practice and assist with future research, policies, and practice (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Ilhan et al., 2019; Kelly et al., 2010).

Gaining Evidence and Knowledge of Home Visits

School social workers have been providing services to students since 1906 and although changes in society have altered this position, being the liaison and link between home and school has never faltered as a role of the school social worker (Stalnecker, 2020). Gaining a deeper understanding of home visits will assist with future implications for school districts to better support the needs of the school social workers, which will then support the district in providing better quality services to the families, the school district serves.

Over time as social workers attained a more professional status, home visiting tended to sink into descent as home visiting was demoted to paraprofessionals, which left this a neglected area in practice, research, and professional training (Allen & Tracy, 2008). By continuing research surrounding home visits, this information can be used to improve how this service and intervention is delivered, increase needed assessment of the service of home visits, help improve the quality of home visits, and enhance the outcomes related to home visits (Harden, 2019; Nathans et al., 2019). School social work practice has required school social workers to have skills for all levels of practice including micro, mezzo, and macro (Openshaw, 2008).

For school social work, some items may be applied from home visiting strategies across other fields of practice (Allen & Tracy, 2004) but more research is needed to expand the knowledge of social work skills that are necessary for effective home-based practice, specifically school social work (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Nathans et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020). School social work is a broad category and the elevated contention in job function could support the reason for the lack of empirical data on school social workers conducting home visits (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Manz & Ventresco, 2019). Researching home visits comes with many complexities due to the importance of needing to include all empirical evidence. The knowledge to be gained about home visiting should come from in-depth comprehensive personal communication with school social workers about their experiences and perceptions of the

intervention of home visiting (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Allen & Tracy, 2008; Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Harden, 2019; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2015; Manz & Ventresco, 2019; Muzicant & Peled, 2018; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Shultz, 2020).

The function and purpose of the home visit is often understood according to the perceptions of the family and the social worker conducting the visit. This should include strengths and desired supports (Hancock & Pelton, 1989; Nathans et al., 2019; Peterson & Roggman, 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020) and more clarity is needed regarding what makes for effective home visiting (Harden, 2019; Nathans et al., 2019). The discrepancies surrounding the empirical evidence is often due to the need to include the experiences of social workers providing services in the home and this often includes differing expectations of providing these home based services as well as the intended outcomes (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Manz & Ventresco, 2019; Nathans et al., 2019; Openshaw, 2008; Roggman et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Sherman, 2016). Operating from an evidence-based practice framework will assist social workers with implementing interventions to families that propose the greatest evidence to intervene with each unique situation and problems families are facing

Need for Specific Literature

There is little general literature on home visiting or a proper way to plan and conduct home visits, which has left the home visit being under-researched and under-theorized (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Lyter & Abbott, 2007; Nathans et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Winter & Cree, 2016) although the home is a common place for social workers to provide services (Ferguson, 2018; Nathans et al., 2019). There is a wide range of competencies required of the home visitor, but despite the benefits to home visiting, conducting home visits without careful forethought can produce some risks (Schultz et al., 2019). Sometimes safety issues could arise

which can include physical safety, psychological safety, and professional safety. Many of these

risks can be avoided using known evidenced-based precautions (Gasker, 2023; Lyter & Abbott,

2007).

Measuring Home Visits

No organization has established a set of professional ethical guidelines for home visiting,

and often school districts provide no formal training opportunities for school social workers.

Unlike other classroom or office interventions, it is challenging to observe and analyze home

visits (Lamorey, 2017; Nathans et al., 2019). Few instruments are available for measuring home

visit quality so studies need to go beyond researching descriptions of services, activities, and

tasks to analyze the factors that shape the practice choices to ensure effectiveness of home

visiting programs (Kelly & Stone, 2009; Manz & Ventresco, 2019; Nathans et al., 2019;

Openshaw, 2008; Roggman et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020). Utilizing measurement tools

and rating scales can assist with gaining empirical evidence to be used to ensure the home

visiting programs are being implemented with fidelity and making the intended needed change.

Overview of Research Design

The following design for the intended research will be qualitative. This type of research

method was chosen due to the researcher intending to gain an understanding of school social

worker's reality concerning their understanding, attitudes, beliefs, and motivation surrounding

conducting home visits for school districts. Data collection for this research study will involve

focus group interviews to collect data rich in detail and context. For this study, the chosen

sampling frame will be school social workers from the public-school districts of Pennsylvania in

the counties of Cumberland, Dauphin, Perry, and Northern York. Along with school social

workers from these public-school districts, school social workers from the Capital Area

Intermediate Unit 15 (CAIU) will also be included. The CAIU provides cost-effective programs to 24-member school districts, 2 vocational technical schools, over 50 non-public schools, and several charter and cyber schools. The Capital Area Intermediate Unit serves as the professional partner and liaison between the local school districts and the Department of Education (Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15, n.d.). Currently, the total number of school social workers from the mentioned schools' totals 59 school social workers. All school social workers on this sampling frame will be contacted by email and dependent upon the number of school social workers who agree to be a part of the research study will decide the total number in the final sample to be researched. This sample of school social workers was chosen due to the already established School Social Workers Networking Group that consists of school social workers from the above identified public school districts, vocational schools, and from the CAIU 15.

Aims of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to investigate the practice of home visiting by school social workers conducting home visits for school districts. The School Social Workers Association of America has developed a national evaluation framework for school social workers to be utilized as a performance model to illustrate practice approaches and performance expectations of school social workers. Like this framework, the state of Pennsylvania has developed a practice framework that also provides tasks and responsibilities for school social workers. These frameworks will be discussed in detail in the following chapter due to home visiting being listed as an intended practice behavior throughout both frameworks.

The following research questions will be applied to gain a better understanding of school social workers conducting home visits.

1. With home visiting being listed as a practice behavior on the School Social Worker National Evaluation Framework, under what conditions are school social workers conducting home visits?

2. What do school social workers see as the benefits to conducting home visits?

3. What do school social workers see as the barriers to conducting home visits?

4. What do school social workers need to be successful in conducting home visits?

Researching and understanding previous and current home visit models, rating scales, assessment tools, and past studies, allows school social workers to gain a deeper understanding and adapt evidence-based practice models to guide their current use of the home visit as an intervention and practice behavior in the education system.

Chapter two will provide a historical overview and comprehensive synthesis of the conceptual framework drawn on theory and perspective, research and experience, and examine the relationship among ideas and constructs. The information will begin with an overview of the establishment of home-based social work and then discuss the inception of school social work. It will then provide relevant perspectives and theories to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships of all the systems that influence home visits along with the educational policies that have shaped school social work throughout history. The School Social Workers Association of America and Pennsylvania's School Social Work Practice Model will be evaluated along with a review of current home visiting models being utilized by various human service agencies, and lastly, provide a review of existing research studies about home visiting. The information being presented can be utilized to better understand implications for current and future school social workers in practice and education, as well as identify gaps in the research and literature.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Many practitioners and scholars pose comparable justification for delivering home based

services throughout a range of social work fields of practice and client populations (Allen &

Tracy, 2008). The concept of the home visit has been supported by many extensions of this

practice over the years which include the friendly home visitor to the health care worker, the

visiting teacher, visitors from the juvenile court, public welfare worker, child custody, and child

protective services (Hancock & Pelton, 1989). Tasks of school social workers have transformed

and evolved throughout the years due to responses to the changing political climate, educational

policy enactment, and development of conceptual frameworks of supportive theories and

perspectives. The following literature review will begin by providing a historical perspective of

the start of home visiting and the beginnings of school social work. The chapter will also provide

a detailed discussion on the conceptual framework of relevant perspectives and theories that

support and provide an understanding of the relationship between school social workers and

home visits. It will also discuss the changing educational policies that have influenced school

social work over the years. This literature review also evaluates the School Social Work

Association of America's practice model and the national evaluation frameworks being utilized

by school social workers nationally and in the state of Pennsylvania. Current home visiting

models being used by various programs will be analyzed and the final portion of this literature

review will provide a comprehensive summary of previous research studies surrounding home

visits.

The Start of the Home Visit

In the late eighteenth century during the social reform period, informal social work began

with the creation of the Charity Organization Society (Beder, 1998; Waugh, 2001). This

movement progressed in the United States as a reaction to the social order of the 1870's and

economic depression (Beder, 1998; Waugh, 2001). The friendly visitor carried out the work of

the Charity Organization Society by being a liaison between the Society and client system to

help those in need with specific financial and emotional support (Beder, 1998; Stalnecker, 2020;

Waugh, 2001). The volunteer position of friendly visitor became the precursor of the social work

position. A key influence of this movement was Mary Birtwell ("Philanthropy, Charities, and

Social Problems", 1902), who was a member of the Charity Organization Society. She

emphasized the need to uncover the supports, material, and natural resources of the families

being served and stressed the importance of understanding the family dynamics ("Philanthropy,

Charities, and Social Problems", 1902; Waugh, 2001). Mary Richmond (1917), another key

influencer, transformed the work of home visiting into constructive and deliberate casework.

With an emphasis on the scientific method, Richmond stressed the necessity to gather

information in a broader context of the client system and accentuated the need to understand the

client and the immediate family along with their financial, social, medical, cultural, and

economic forces that influence their lives (Beder, 1998; Richmond, 1917; Waugh, 2001).

Friendly visiting planted the tradition of home visits firmly in the profession of social work and

the friendly visiting movement can be seen as the predecessor of social work practice (Hancock

& Pelton, 1989).

Home based work for children began to gain momentum when there was an increase of

pressing needs in urban communities partly due to the influx of immigrants from Europe and

rapid industrialization, as well as the expansion of access to schooling for the poor by the

Equality of Educational Opportunity Act, H.R.40 (Charles & Stone, 2019). These challenges

were economic and cultural and the updated school laws did not consider the economic

constraints of the families that were reliant on the income from all family members that were

able to help generate it, including their children working rather than attending school (Charles &

Stone, 2019). Friendly visiting was seen as the most effective element of the helping process due

to these visits bringing out the distinct needs, problems, and possibilities, not just for the families but also the communities the families lived in (Hancock & Pelton, 1989). Friendly visiting began to change its role due to the growing recognition of the realities of poverty, coupled with the individual needs of the children being recognized as barriers to having success in compulsory schooling, and early school social work became to be known as the visiting teacher movement (Charles & Stone, 2019).

The Start of School Social Work

In the beginning of the twentieth century, school social work began to advance and progress in the United States out of the visiting teacher movement (Charles & Stone, 2019). During the time known as the Progressive Era, which conceptualized a fair standard of living to include the formation of workers' rights, fair and minimum wages, maximum hours worked, workers' compensation, access to age-old pensions, and the access to public institutions such as schools and hospitals, the work of the visiting teacher encompassed a dual role (Purdy, 2023). Along with being social activists, the visiting teacher's purpose was for teachers to connect the gap between the home and school by visiting student's homes and communities. Visiting teachers conducted community and home assessments which were seen as outside the teachers' scope of knowledge and expertise. Visiting teachers' work addressed home circumstances, academic performance, truancy, student behaviors, and assisted coordination with other city services and programs (Charles & Stone, 2019; Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Stalnecker, 2020). One of the objectives of this was to help families understand the requirements of the school as well as conveying the viewpoints and distresses of the families back to the school (Charles & Stone, 2019; Stalnecker, 2020).

The visiting teacher movement launched the discussion encompassing the significance of a students' home life and the effects these have on the educational experiences and successes of

the student (Charles & Stone, 2019; Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Stalnecker, 2020). This

movement intended to gain a better understanding of the pieces of a student that tend to be non-

existent to the classroom teacher due to the broadening gap between the students' home life and

school (Charles & Stone, 2019; Finigan-Carr et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2010; Stalnecker, 2020).

This allowed teachers to focus on academics and utilize the visiting teachers to assist with the

behavioral, mental, and emotional issues facing the students (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020). The

visiting teachers possessed a unique distinctive position in relation to other school professionals

(Charles & Stone, 2019). Visiting teachers were considered teachers and not solely social

workers (Charles & Stone, 2019) but out of this movement, a new education role was established

to address the concerns with the boundaries amongst home and school, relationships between

students, teachers, and families, and the overall organization of schooling (Berzin & O'Connor,

2010; Charles & Stone, 2019; Stalnecker, 2020).

Understanding the evolvement of home visits and school social work throughout history

is an important implication for current and future school social workers. Along with knowing

this rich history is also knowing a conceptual framework of theories and perspectives that have

assisted school social workers with developing and progressing their knowledge and skills to

support the practice within school districts and conducting home visits. The following section

will provide an overview of the conceptual framework to support school social workers at all

levels of systems to address the needs of students and school districts.

Conceptual Framework

The development of theories and perspectives within school social work has identified

the need for interventions at multiple levels of practice with an awareness to the individual,

family, group, community, and school (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; Kelly et al., 2016).

Theoretical development supports school social workers' need to practice across multiple

domains and systems to adequately serve students (Allen-Meares, 2006; Berzin & O'Connor, 2010). School social workers need to be able to conduct services within the context of all levels of systems to be able to address environmental and social forces that are hindering student's academic functioning. School social workers also need to be able to address the individual student's needs by utilizing the person-in-environment perspective, family-in-environment perspective, family systems theory, and ecological systems theory all while practicing as a generalist social worker (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020).

Generalist Social Work Practice

Generalist social work practice is theorized as a holistic view of the client systems which includes, strengths-based, sensitive to diversity, as well as practicing in multiple levels (Gasker & Vafeas, 2010). It is important that school social workers utilize a generalist perspective to intercede on all levels and all situations that occur with individuals, families, groups, community, and school teams within a school district (Openshaw, 2008). Practicing as a generalist social worker within a school district requires school social workers to understand that families and students, in all sized systems are constantly affected and being affected by multiple societal systems to meet their needs. All systems affect each other with input and output all at the same time (Gasker, 2023).

This practice relates specifically to people's interactions. School social workers utilize principles like practical interaction as well as concepts like systems and energy to influence their perspective and practice (Gasker, 2023). The generalist practice is built on four perspectives which will be discussed below. These include person-in-environment (PIE) perspective, the family-in-environment (FIE) perspective, the ecological perspective, and school social workers' role in maintaining strengths-based perspective while working with students and families (Gasker, 2023). The planned-change process to intervene within systems of diverse sizes is a

step-by-step model that includes assessing problem areas as well as identifying strengths, engaging with clients, creating and carrying out interventions and evaluating the success of those interventions, and then terminating the client-practitioner relationship (Openshaw, 2008). School social workers should use social work values and skills to carry out generalist social work practice on a micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Person-in-Environment Perspective

Examining how individuals' environments influence their beliefs, perspectives, and views, Person-in-Environment (PIE) is often used in social work to study these interactions and should be utilized by school social workers. The environment wherein individuals spend their time often influences their actions and view of the world (Biscontini, 2021). By assessing an individual's past life experiences to increase the understanding of the individual's actions and current perspectives to achieve a more complete understanding of their perspective, social workers are better able to assist them with achieving their goals (Biscontini, 2021).

Certain subsets included in PIE perspective offer unique viewpoints on how the individual's well-being and environments interact. Person-in-environment includes a micro, mezzo, and macro approach that divides the individual's needs into several categories that impact the individual's world view, which shapes their actions and perspectives (Biscontini, 2021). The micro level speaks to the individual's basic psychological and physical needs, which includes interpersonal relationships with biology, spiritual beliefs, and family members (Biscontini, 2021). The mezzo level urges the social worker to analyze the individual's relationships with coworkers, family members, and neighborhood, and considers how the different small groups affect the individual. Systemic issues are included in the macro level such as an individual's relationship with health care, national policy, and governments (Biscontini, 2021).

Person-in-environment can be used to monitor students and their contexts but dividing this theory into different approaches allows school social workers to better meet the students' individual needs (Gaines, 2004). Home visiting is crucial in client outreach and is vital to the person-in-environment perspective on service (Lyter & Abbott, 2007). Mary Richmond (1917) was influential in the foundation of this theory by visiting needy families in their homes due to her strong beliefs of needing to focus on both the environment and individual. This perspective provides social workers with a variety of effective approaches for assisting people as well as developing several approaches to theories that allow social workers to incorporate PIE into their relationships with individuals. Person-in-environment encourages social workers to utilize their unique strengths perspective to empower individuals and understand relationships among systems (Gasker & Vafeas, 2010).

Family-in-Environment Perspective

The articulation of the multi-level aspect of family-centered practice, Family-in-Environment (FIE) upholds the family as the fundamental social system (Gasker & Vafeas, 2010). Concerning students within a school district, the family can be comprised of the nuclear family, blended family, relational family, or the individuals the student lives with, traditional or not. The FIE framework has been developed from a mixture of policy analysis, logical expansion of relevant theory, and family-centered practice evaluations (Gasker & Vafeas, 2010). Included in the foundation of generalist practice, FIE is built on the person-in-environment perspective (Gasker, 2023).

There are many characteristics of family members that influence the success of students. Family members share a common history, emotional bonding, mutual support, and family identity (Gasker, 2023). School social workers need to operate on multiple levels of practice

within a school district but also recognize the family as the critical link between the school

district and students. As a practice perspective within a school district, school social workers

need to educate the school district about populations at risk and their difficulties that has come

from bringing diverse ethnic, cultural, and family traditions to school and how this has caused

students to adapt their own dynamics to function and meet their own needs (Gasker & Vafeas,

2010).

        During home visits, school social workers can measure how each family member fills

specific roles and in what way these individuals occupy their families (Gasker & Vafeas, 2010).

The school social worker can use this as part of the evaluation to assist the teachers and staff

with how they work with the students and adapt the school interventions that relate directly to the

specific student and families. This can help foster the involvement of families in their student's

education and engagement with the school district. Family-in-environment encourages school

social workers to view families as partners for implementation of interventions for students, be

consistent with the needs of individual families, and exercise family-centered practices (Gasker

& Vafeas, 2010).

        School social workers need to observe and respect the differences that come from the

family's lived experiences to utilize as the catalyst for positive change and development (Gasker

& Vafeas, 2010). The environment in which students live produces the collaboration that enables

the student and families, as well as other social institutions to carry out the needed functions for

change. This causes school social workers to take on the responsibility of using the family's

voice and opinion to assess efficacy in considerations of their interactions with larger systems

(Gasker & Vafeas, 2010). For school social workers, this includes their interactions with the

school system, school staff, and district as a whole and the environment of these.

Ecological Systems Theory

Included in the Person-in-Environment Perspective, Ecological Systems Theory

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979) looks at human development and the influences posed by the social

environment. Developed in 1979 by psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, this theory assumes that

humans interact with five different environmental systems and each system affects an

individual's relationships within the community, relationship between global cultures and

communities, and the individual's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory explains influences in

all structures of a student's environment including the physical, social, biological, health,

psychological, and economic (Edwards et al., 2007) and views students as being part of a larger

system of relationships and interactions beyond their individual selves (Kelly et al., 2010).

The micro system is the first layer which includes the individual affected by

characteristics specific to them which include gender, health, and age. Included in this layer are

the people closest to the individual such as parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and fellow

students (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The second layer is the mezzo system, known for analyzing the

strength of interactions. An example of these interactions may include the parents speaking to the

child's teacher (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Exosystem is the third layer that contains reasons the

child did not cause or have any affect and are out of the child's control. Examples of these can

include health and social services, local community, and neighborhood (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The fourth layer is the macro system, and this involves subculture and culture, social class,

religious traditions, and ethnic groups in which the child lives. The largest and last layer is

known as the chronosystem, and this consists of the patterns of social interactions that either

remain or change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Ecological influences that have been successful to youths in school have also been a

focus of school social workers as well as the influences that have hindered student success (Kelly

et al., 2016). The ecological perspective considers the influences from a student's life and environment that affect student functioning, behaviors, and presenting problems (Edwards et al., 2007). Clients need to be viewed in the context of their home, community, and neighborhood due to influences occurring at multiple levels throughout their environment (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Openshaw, 2008; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Sherman, 2016; Thompson & Frey, 2020). Ecological systems theory suggests all social workers, including school social workers to work with individuals at various levels of a client system to focus on the ways in which the involved separate systems' interactions could be influencing the child's well-being (Kelly et al., 2010). School social workers perform duties to all age groups within a school district and the knowledge that comes from utilizing the ecological systems perspective allows school social workers to add differing perspectives to intervention teams and contribute essential aspects to the assessment of students within the school district (Openshaw, 2008).

The four areas of practice known as evaluation, supervision, micro and macro are inserted in the ecological framework and the center of this framework are the skills and core values required for effective practice which include advocacy, practice, cultural competence, staff, family, accountability, data-based decision making, and community collaboration (NASW, n.d; Richard & Sosa, 2014; Sabatino, 2009; Thompson & Frey, 2020). External resources that provide positive experiences for students can come from family members, friends, school professionals, and empowerment from their community. Adopting and advocating for this model by school districts and school social workers, this can assist school social workers in promoting an ecological approach in a school district that often only supports micro-level interventions specific to educational needs (Richard & Sosa, 2014). This theory focuses on action, which means the interactions among all systems involved (Gasker, 2023).

With regards to home visiting, school social workers can use this theory as a categorizing framework to recognize resources and influences beyond the student and direct family unit. The corresponding influences of the social environment on human development from an ecological perspective can provide differing approaches related to school social workers conducting home visits (Allen & Tracy, 2004). This provides recognition of the impact the environment has on learning and behavior that hinder student success (Sherman, 2016) as well as providing unique ways to bridge connections across home, school, and community (Charles & Stone, 2019).

Utilizing this framework during a home visit can help families understand and adjust to their environment as well as adapt interventions to assist with the needs of the family to create change (Allen & Tracy, 2008). This approach will require school social workers to assess all contributing factors affecting students' lives. Some of these risk factors may include variables such as quality of caregiving, parental involvement and engagement with the school, gender, socioeconomic status, culture, peer competence, trauma, and stressful life events (Edwards et al., 2007).

The view of families' ecological contexts that home visitors receive while being in the homes and communities is crucial for individualizing services to the student and family's needs (Allen & Tracy, 2008). A combination of the interactions between a student's home, community, and school often results in a need for a specialized and individualized intervention to support student success (Edwards et al., 2007). It is important for school social workers to bring an ecological perspective of their students to the school district, so they are not exclusively viewed as clinicians working in schools and working with the family system becomes constant practice (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018).

Family Systems Theory

Families of students are inclined to be a necessary feature of the intervention that strengthens the link between the school and home. Within the theory of human behavior, family systems theory perceives the family unit as a social system in which they shape each other's behavior and the patterns of family relationships over time (Allen & Tracy, 2008). Like family-in-environment, this theory is meant to incorporate all supporting people within a family unit and stresses the importance of the intervention not being focused on the individual (Helm, 2023). This may include the immediate family, extended family and all members offering support, traditional or not. Examining a family is the best way to understand how the family unit works together and multigenerational behavioral patterns (Helm, 2023). The importance of providing services within the family framework and within the family's environment, is supported by the theory of family systems (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008).

In the 1950's during World War II, which caused the disruption of family relationships, family systems theory developed from several prominent influences which include developmental psychology, psychoanalysis, and general systems theory (Helm, 2023). Biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (Assche et al., 2019), the developer of general systems theory, influenced the development of family systems theory. He studied how parts of a system or organization connect and interact with one another to form an all-inclusive functioning system. Many other family theorists subscribed to the same basic beliefs of family systems. Some of these family theorists include Murray Bowen, Salvador Minuchin, Virginia Satir, and Jay Haley (Ray, 2016 & Johnson, 2016). One noteworthy belief is that family is an interconnected system or unit and the actions of one family member affect all members in the family system (Helm, 2023). Complexity of families, familial relationships, structure, and organization are examined by family systems theory and the family's social, psychological, and emotional boundaries

(Helm, 2023). For the education system, understanding these influences on student success is key for appropriate interventions.

Delivering services to families in the home setting provides a unique opportunity to work with family members who live together but also the possibility of being in contact with other members that have frequent contact with the family but do not live in the home (Allen & Tracy, 2008). It is important to recognize the significance of relationships outside of the nuclear family (Allen & Tracy, 2008) and the influence interpersonal relationships and boundaries that are deemed healthy and unhealthy within a family system (Helm, 2023). Families often receive support from members in the community and neighbors, so it is important to look to the family for who they identify as support and acknowledge the significance of them.

Interventions put into place will not be able to make lasting changes and sustain student success if the knowledge of the family and the systems within the family are not recognized. It is important for school social workers to work towards gaining knowledge of the family unit and connection between members to be able to individualize interventions and services specific to the family they are working with. Allowing the family to take the lead and assist with identifying and creating the goals needed for change is a characteristic of family centered approaches (Allen & Tracy, 2004).

The above conceptual framework of theories and perspectives have assisted school social workers with developing knowledge and skills to support their practice within school districts. The roles and responsibilities of school social workers have also continued to evolve throughout the years due to the influences from the changing of educational policies and political climate. The following section will provide an overview of the educational reform that took place throughout the United States.

Political, Social, Economic, and Cultural Dimensions

Over time, school social work has shifted due to the changing education policies, school-based research, and changes to school-based mental health related practices (Downey & Condron, 2016; Kelly et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2016). In 1966, a study known as the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) was conducted to examine the influence of disparities within a school system, specifically, sources from the non-school environment. The author of this study, James S. Coleman, along with the Equality of Educational Opportunity, part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, P.L. 88-352, guided this report. This report is one of the largest standalone survey and testing endeavors ever undertaken in U.S. schools and collected data from 4,000 schools, 66,000 teachers, and almost 600,000 first, third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth graders (Hill, 2017). This study generated evidence that non-school environments are the leading dynamic behind education inequality and achievement gaps (Downey & Condron, 2016). These include family backgrounds of students, specifically parental income, race and ethnicity, wealth, education, and aspirations for their children (Hill, 2017).

In the early 1970's, educational reform began developing, initiating the creation of the Education for All-Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142. School Districts were now required to generate curriculum to address and safeguard the students with learning, cognitive, physical, and behavioral challenges. School social workers often became the providers of the special education services due to their prior association with mental health services (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Sabatino, 2009; Sherman, 2016). This law describes roles of school social workers to include linking home and school to help school adjustments and adaptations, mobilizing community resources, completing social histories on students, and providing group and individual counseling (Richard & Sosa, 2014; Sabatino, 2009; Sherman, 2016).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, P.L. 89-10, was

established to guarantee equal education for all children regardless of their background and was

now considered a civil rights law. ESEA provided new grants to school districts serving low-

income students, which included federal grants for library books and textbooks, scholarships for

low-income college students, and funding for special education centers. Furthermore, this act

provided federal grants to state educational agencies to enhance the quality of elementary and

secondary education (ESSA U.S. Department of Education, 2023). The role of school social

workers was expanded by the enactment of this law, which provided additional funds and added

responsibilities to offer these extra services within a school district (Richard & Sosa, 2014).

In 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act reauthorized the federal Elementary and

Secondary Education Act, P.L. 107-110. This act shined light on the areas where students were

making progress in school and the areas where students needed additional supports despite the

family's income, zip code, home language, race, background, or disability (NCLB U.S.

Department of Education, 2023). This act is based on the emphasis of proven teaching methods,

increased flexibility, local control, supports comprehensive school reform, focuses on reducing

achievement gaps, provides more options for parents with school choice, and increases standards

and accountability to promote a high-stakes educational environment (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010;

Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Openshaw, 2008). This act was put into place for school

districts to assess and raise student achievement of marginalized populations across the country

and use evidence-based practices to focus more on prevention-based work but due to states

utilizing different sets of proficiency standards and tests, there were many inconsistencies with

this act (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Kelly et al., 2010; Ladd, 2017). Apart of this act

included the addition of Federal Title 1 funds, which were given to school districts to utilize for

the most at risk students and these funds were authorized to be used for prekindergarten and additional paraprofessionals inside the classroom (Kim & Sunderman, 2005).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, P.L. 108-446, was a continuance of the mandate introduced in the 1980's by the Education for All-Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142. This act ensured the right to a free public education and support family-directed home-based services to families and their young children who are at risk of concerning developmental outcomes or disabilities (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Kelly et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2016; Openshaw, 2008; Sabatino, 2009). IDEA required early assessment of both strengths and needs of children and their families and reinforced the use of specific evidence-based intervention models (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010). This act also altered the screening and identification procedures for children with disabilities (Frey et al., 2012) along with emphasizing the role of families in the educational experiences for children (Kelly et al., 2016). This act is meant to provide school districts assistance with identifying discrepancies between achievement and ability (Kelly et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2016). Under this act, school social work is a listed student service and specifically states that professionals need to apply scientifically based supported methods to verify if a child responds to an intervention (Kelly et al., 2016).

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into law Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), P.L. 114-95, to reauthorize ESEA and NCLB (ESSA U.S. Department of Education, 2023). This law incorporates provisions meant to help ensure success for students and schools. The new law advances equity by upholding critical protections for American's high-need and disadvantaged students by requiring students in America be taught to high academic standards to prepare them to succeed in careers and college by ensuring vital information is provided to the families, students, communities, and educators through annual statewide assessments that measure student progress (ESSA U.S. Department of Education, 2023). This act is also meant to

help grow and support local advances that include creating place-based interventions with local

leaders and partners and evidence-based interventions. ESSA is also meant to multiply and

sustain the growth of accessing high-quality preschool and sustaining the expectation that there

will be action and accountability to effect positive change in the nation's lowest-performing

schools (ESSA U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Impact of the New Structure of Public Education

Public education was constructed in the twentieth century and could be seen as an

establishment to obscure the cultural traditions and strengths of the growing immigrant

populations (Charles & Stone, 2019). The visiting teacher movement brought to light the

challenges individual students face due to the formation and structure of the education system

that often created more deficits that were related to the expanding and bureaucratizing school

system (Charles & Stone, 2019). The visiting teacher movement worked towards diminishing

this damage but also worked towards changing the system by recommending solutions for the

flaws (Charles & Stone, 2019; Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Stalnecker, 2020). The

changing demographics of Americans, along with new and changing educational legislation such

as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, P.L. 89-10, and the Education for All-

Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142, assisted in the increase of the advancement of social

work in school districts in the United States to meet the unique needs of students, communities,

and schools (Richard & Sosa, 2014, Stalnecker, 2020).

All the acts mentioned above were put into place to protect and promote the learning of

all students regardless of their physical, behavioral, environmental, and cognitive challenges

(Openshaw, 2008; Sherman, 2016) and provide protection to the students who were labeled at

risk of school failure (Edwards et al., 2007). The belief behind these acts were designed to

promote and assist with the adoption of evidence-based interventions within the school system

but these interventions often ignored some of the ecological influences that negatively affect student success in school (Edwards et al., 2007; Kelly et al., 2016). These acts accentuated the key role parents played in their children's educational experiences (Frey et al., 2012) but little is known about the barriers to implementation and if these research-based interventions are being implemented with fidelity or if school social workers have access to materials to support these interventions in a school setting (Kelly et al., 2010).

The inaction and changes of these acts over the years has modified the context in which school social workers practice (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010). It is necessary for school social workers to understand these laws to do their jobs effectively (Openshaw, 2008; NASW, n.d.). These acts also became particularly important for changes within school social work services (Frey et al., 2012) and have influenced their role by needing evidence-based practices, needing to understand the growing mental health concerns of students, data driven decision making, and accountability requirements (Richard & Sosa, 2014). School social workers can assist schools with the intended outcomes of the enacted laws by collaborating with the school districts to eliminate the barriers that impede student success. Over many years, the ongoing changes to federal law and changes within the social and political climate have caused the National Association of Social Workers to adapt and create needed changes within their organization to support school social workers.

National Association of Social Workers

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was founded in 1955 and is comprised of seven national but separate social work organizations (NASW, n.d). This includes American Association of Medical Social Workers, American Association of Psychiatric Social Workers, Association for the Study of Community Organizations, Social Work Research Group, American Association of Social Workers, and National Association of School Social Workers

(Facts about NASW, 2023). The NASW is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world and is committed to improving professional development and growth of all its members to create and maintain advanced sound social policies and standards for the profession. This organization also contributes to the well-being of individuals, families, and communities by its advocacy and dedicated efforts (Facts about NASW, 2023). The NASW has developed practice standards for the above seven separate social work organizations due to the specialization of each of these social work fields, including school social work. The principles and standards are revised every ten years by the NASW to intersect with the changes to federal law as well as changing social and political climate (NASW, n.d).

National Association of Social Workers Standards for School Social Workers

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), school social work service standards must meet the requirements of their corresponding state education agency while remaining in compliance with the NASW Code of Ethics. The NASW also outlines various responsibilities school social workers have in the education system. Some of these duties include completing family and student assessments, developing treatment plans, conducting home visits, student advocacy, and linking families to community resources (Sherman, 2016; NASW, n.d.). The school social work standards correspond with the NASW Code of Ethics and core values which include service, social justice, dignity and worth of the individual, importance of centrality of human relationships, competence, and integrity. There are eleven standards included in the three guiding principles of education/school reform, social justice, and multi-tier interventions. The eleven standards are: ethics and values, qualifications, assessment, intervention, decision making and practice evaluations, record keeping, workload management, professional development, cultural competence, interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration, and advocacy (NASW Standards for School Social Work Services, 2023).

An example of one of the ethical principles is client privacy. The school social worker needs to only reveal information to the school district needed to help the family and child but also decide what to share for what purpose and to whom. Both the School Social Work Association of America (n.d) and the National Association of Social Workers (n.d), have position statements drafted on confidentiality and school social work. School social workers, who rely on research-based practices and tools in conjunction with the integral ethical standard of valuing client input, will assist with lessening confirmation bias and increase effective and conscientious practice decisions that will lead to improved outcomes (Thompson & Frey, 2020). School social workers should stand true to their ethical principles.

It is essential to discuss the impact of diversity on the visiting experience within the exploration of the dynamics of home visitation. School social workers that conduct home visits might not be fully prepared for the impact of differences, depending on their degree of sensitivity to race, class, gender, and sexual difference (Beder, 1998). Social work education emphasizes culturally sensitive practices which need to value diverse experiences and perspectives as well as focus on the design of programs that are appropriate to the clients they serve and allows social workers to serve a variety of populations (Finigan-Carr et al., 2018). Home visitors work in various multicultural settings and frequently face differences in customs, values, and beliefs but also differences between themselves and their clients as well as differences between themselves and their own perception of the program and reasons for the home visit and/or intervention. It is extremely important for school social workers to practice cultural competence during home visits (Bryant et al., 1990; Schultz et al., 2019). Home-school collaborations are an important part of multilevel practice (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010), which allows social workers to be distinctively prepared to intervene with at-risk youth while inside the educational settings that tend to be affected by severe poverty, disabilities, neglect, and abuse (Allen-Meares, 2013).

Home visiting relies on the same principles that are the origin of successful generalist

social work practice in other settings and systems. Meeting with a family in their own home

environment or neighborhood affects social work practice in critical ways. Some of these

principles include the component of intervention being the family, which family systems

perspective, family-in-environment perspective, and strengths-based practice, all believe in the

families' capability to make informed choices concerning their children and needs and the

involvement with community influences and resources, such as a school. When school social

workers meet with families in their home environment, this supports the principle of engagement

based on the family's needs and interests. Successful interventions are based on relationships and

the engagement of families through a series of interactions. Social workers need to use

interpersonal skills to form trusting relationships and use problem-solving skills to respond to

family issues (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Nathans et al., 2019; Openshaw, 2008; Peterson &

Roggman, 2019; Roggman et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lakey, 2019). Assessment of clients' strengths

is an ongoing practice in social work but also ongoing in home-visit practice (Allen & Tracy,

2008). The assessment of family strengths within the setting of the physical environment of the

home and neighborhood, family resources as well as family interactions, provide the school

social worker essential information and allows the school social worker to have the advantage of

being a part of a family's community framework.

School Social Workers Association of America

The School Social Workers Association of America (SSWAA) was founded to legitimize

school social workers in all schools and was founded in 1994 through the unification of 20 state-

level school social work organizations (SSWAA, n.d.). The School Social Workers Association

of America defines a school social worker as, "Trained mental health professionals with a degree

in social work who provide services related to a person's social, emotional and life adjustment to

school and/or society. School Social Workers are the link between the home, school and

community in providing direct as well as indirect services to students, families, and school

personnel to promote and support students' academic and social success" (Role of School Social

Worker, 2023) and this can be supported by school social works adaptation of the national school

social work practice model.

School Social Work Association of America Practice Model

Standing as a national and international organization, SSWAA supports the profession of

school social work by way of professional development, research, and advocacy as well as

developing a practice model (Stalnecker, 2020; NASW Standards for School Social Work

Services, 2023; SSWAA, 2023). SSWAA created a universal model for national standards

promoting credentialing, practice, consistency in education, guiding principles, and evaluation of

school social workers known as the National School Social Work Practice Model (National

School Social Work Practice Model, 2013). This practice model can help clarify roles and

responsibilities of school social workers and provide a common framework for the profession.

This model is broken into five categories of school social work duties. These include services to

school personnel, services to students, services to parents and families, services to districts, and

school-community liaison (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et

al., 2016; National School Social Work Practice Model, 2013). These duties also include an

element of the school environment due to the awareness of the social and environmental forces

that affect a child's capacity to learn and the need for their emotional and physical needs to be

met (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Kelly & Stone, 2009).

The three main functions and practice goals for a school social worker defined by the SSWAA

practice model are to provide educational, behavioral, and mental health services, promote a

positive school environment, and maximize access to resources (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020;

Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2016; National School

Social Work Practice Model, 2013). These practices are guided by four key constructs which

include home-school community linkages, educational policy and ethical guidelines, education

rights and advocacy, and data-based decision making (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018;

Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2016). Under each main function and practice goals within the

practice model, home visits can be used as an example of a practice behavior to assist with

achieving each goal. Figure 1 provides an overview of the School Social Work Practice Model.
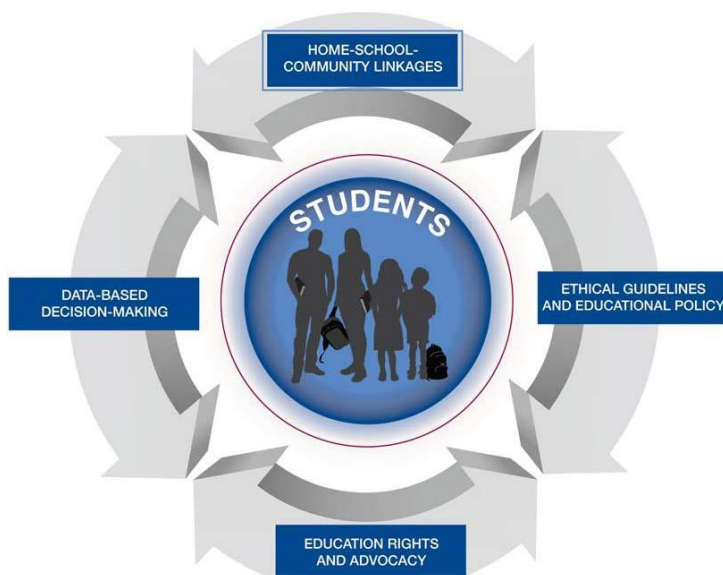
Figure 1: School Social Work Assocation Practice Model
Note. Reproduced with permission. Retrieved from
http://sswaa.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=459

School social workers often do not fit into a typical district form for evaluation and

employment. As a result, teacher evaluation forms are often used to evaluate school social

workers (National School Social Work Practice Model, 2013). SSWAA has developed a national

evaluation framework for school social work practice adapted from the framework for teaching

evaluation instrument by Charlotte Danielson, published by the Danielson Group. The SSWAA

national framework for evaluation of school social work practice is cross walked with the

SSWAA national school social worker practice model and the NASW's standards for school

social work services (National School Social Work Practice Model, 2013; NASW Standards for School Social Workers, 2023).

National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice

The National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice is a performance model endorsed by the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) and was adapted from the Framework for Teaching Evaluation (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013). The framework consists of four domains that illustrate the practice focuses and are broken down into the following domains; planning and preparation, school environment, resources and service delivery, and professional responsibility (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013). Every domain consists of various components that represent several behaviors and practice approaches implemented within the field of school social work. Each component is supported by the National School Social Work Practice Model (National school social work practice model, 2013). This model illustrates performance expectations that are based on practice approaches, activities that require specialized training in school social work and other areas of education, as well as level of competence and career status (Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly et al., 2016). This model can be used by school administrators and school social workers to assist with delivering performance evaluations. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of the National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice.

1. Planning & Preparation	
1a. Conducts multi-tiered school needs assessments 1b. Identifies scientifically supported educational, behavioral, and mental health services to address student needs 1c. Identifies school and community resources to meet school needs, i.e., home visits	1d. Establishes collaborative professional relationships, i.e., home visits 1e. Assesses family engagement, i.e., home visits 1g. Know current federal, state, and local laws and district policies/procedures
2. The School Environment	

1a. Contributes to a safe/healthy school environment, i.e., home visits 2b. Advocates for policies, programs, and services that respect diversity, address individual needs, and support the inherent dignity and worth of all students, families, and school personnel, i.e., home visits	2c. Identifies historical and current political, social, cultural, and economic conditions that impact the context for learning and advocates for change, i.e., home visits 2d. Challenges structural barriers, social inequalities, and educational disparities impacting learning outcomes, i.e., home visits
3. Service Delivery & Resources 3a. Implements and monitors multi-tiered empirically supported interventions that improve academic and behavioral performance 3b. Provides programs and services that foster social and emotional competencies, i.e., home visits	3c. Provides specialized services such as crisis intervention and consultation, i.e., home visits 3d. Provides program and services in a culturally sensitive manner, i.e., home visits 3e. Mobilizes school/community resources to maximize academic and behavior success, i.e., home visits
4. Professional Responsibilities 4a. Adheres to standards and practice requirements set by the State Education Agency 4b. Adheres to the NASW Code of Ethics and SSWAA ethical guidelines	4c. Maintains timely/accurate records and documentation in compliance with FERPA/ state requirements, i.e., home visits 4d. Continues Professional Development 4e. Establishes self-awareness, self-monitoring, and professional accountability

Figure 2: Visual representation of the National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice.

The first domain of the National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice is known as planning and preparation. This domain includes components, A-F, and assesses family engagement and acknowledgement of local, state, and federal laws and school district policies guiding school social work practice. Component A is, conducts multi-tiered school needs assessment (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) and these duties consist of facilitating individual student and school needs assessments, group/individual therapy, and being the truancy liaison for the school (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Component B is, identifies scientifically supported behavioral, educational, and mental health services to address school needs (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) which can consist of being the positive behavioral interventions and supports coordinator, review pre and post measures of referrals for suspensions, detentions, grades and

test scores, office referrals, student observations, teacher and parent interviews, attendance, and assessment scales to inform evidence-base practices (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Component C is, identifies school and community resources to meet school needs (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) and this can consist of being a part of a community advocacy board or a member of your local NASW chapter, surveying school and community resources, and monitoring the linkages between the students/families and identified services. Component D is, establishes collaborative professional relationships (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) meaning supervising an MSW (Master of Social Work) (Master of Social Work) intern or presenting about the social work profession at the local university, establishing working relationships with community providers, and developing partnerships between the community stakeholders and school (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Component E is, assess family engagement, including home visits, introduction to communication through emails/letters and phone calls to caregivers, and feedback from families about school concerns. Component F is, knows current federal, state, and local laws as well as school district procedures and policies that guide school social work practice (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) and this can be supported by attending professional development trainings and staying well-informed of new and changing federal, state, and school policies (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Home visiting is an example of a practice behavior that school social workers can utilize to support each of the practice focuses on each component. For example, home visiting can be utilized when assessing truancy, conducting parent interviews, and assessing family engagement.

The second domain of the National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice is the school environment. This domain includes components, A-D, meant to advance a student-centered school environment that shows regard for differences in backgrounds and

culture but also conducive to learning needs (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Component A is,

contributes to a safe and healthy school environment (National Evaluation Framework for School

Social Work Practice, 2013) which includes assisting with training for staff, assisting

administration with researching trainings, responding to confidential referrals pertaining to

students, facilitating social and emotional learning, and increasing and promoting students'

feelings of safety and connectedness to their school (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Component B

is, advocates for policies, programs, and services that address individual needs, respect diversity,

and support inherent dignity and worth of all school personnel, students, and families (National

Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013). This can involve assisting with

bullying prevention and services, providing services in a manner that respects diversity, and

educating families on their rights as a guardian regarding special education services (Horton &

Prudencio, 2022). Component C is, identifies historical and current social, cultural, political, and

economic conditions that impact the context for learning (National Evaluation Framework for

School Social Work Practice, 2013) and this can include implementing restorative practices

and/or the facilitation of a mentoring program for students, challenging practices and norms that

interfere with school success, and develop community-school partnership to assess additional

services and resources for students. Component D is, challenges social inequalities, structural

barriers, and educational disparities that impact learning outcomes (National Evaluation

Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) which can include assistance with

identifying students who qualify for services covered by the Stewart B. McKinney-Vento

Homeless Assistance Act, P.L. 100-77, as well as serving as the homeless liaison, identify school

procedures and policies that exclude students from participating in activities, and advocate for

changes within organizational plans and policies (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Again, home

visiting is an example of a practice behavior that school social workers can use to support each

of the practice focuses on each component. For example, a home visit can be used to assess

programs and services for the identified student and family, be utilized to understand the

students' feelings on safety and connectedness with the school environment and be used to

develop an understanding of the social inequalities and barriers the students are facing.

The third domain of the National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice

is service delivery and resources. This domain comprises components, A-F and involves utilizing

social work research, theory, and practice to implement evidence-based services and programs.

Component A is, implements and monitors empirically supported multi-tiered interventions that

improve behavior and academic performance (National Evaluation Framework for School Social

Work Practice, 2013) and can assist staff with using trauma-informed interventions for students

as well as other counseling programs, exhibit methods and knowledge of school social work

practices and techniques to address problems encountered by students (Horton & Prudencio,

2022). Component B is, provides programs and services that foster emotional and social

competencies (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013), and this

can entail providing school social work services to prepare students on how to have appropriate

peer interventions meetings but also providing consultation to students throughout this process to

promote behavioral and cognitive development in and out of the classroom setting (Horton &

Prudencio, 2022). Component C is, provides specialized services such as crisis intervention and

consultation (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) which

should include reporting suspected child abuse and neglect, conducting suicide assessments with

students, and informing staff on the possible outcomes of trauma and how these outcomes have

an influence on students (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Component D is, provides programs and

services in a culturally sensitive manner (National Evaluation Framework for School Social

Work Practice, 2013) and this means including administrators, staff, and faculty in discussions

on the socioeconomic barriers that students face to understand the importance of how differences

students have can shape their educational experiences, as well as working towards decreasing the

impact of personal biases when it involves diverse populations (Horton & Prudencio, 2022).

Component E is, mobilizes community and school resources to maximize behavior and academic

success (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) and this

requires school social workers to be a part of organizations with other social workers to network,

share resources, monitor ongoing updates to resources of community organizations to refer

students and families too, and establish and maintain relationships with families to foster

linkages between home and school (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). The practice behavior of home

visiting can be utilized again to support each practice in the components. For example, school

social workers can use a home visit to implement multi-tiered interventions for a student, assist

the student and family in crisis interventions as needed, gain an understanding of trauma the

student and family have faced to inform school staff of how this can influence school success,

and expand the schools' knowledge of socioeconomic barriers students face.

The final domain of the National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice

is known as professional responsibilities, and this includes components A-F and reiterates the

commitment to professional conduct meant to enhance student behavior and academic success.

Component A is, adheres to the standards and practice requirements by the State Education

Agency (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) and this means

following the federal laws that support students who receive special education services,

following proper procedures to address student discipline, parent complaints, and truancy

concerns, (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Component B is, adheres to the NASW code of ethics

and SSWAA ethical guidelines (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work

Practice, 2013). Some examples include maintaining confidentiality regarding state and federal

standards but also being aware when confidentiality must be broken due to concerns of abuse or

neglect, obtain informed consent for services, resolving ethical dilemmas by turning to theories

and ethical decision-making models (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Component C is, maintains

timely and accurate documentation and records in compliance with the Family Educational

Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S. Code § 1232g, and state requirements (National

Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013). An example of this would be

billing medical assistance for students who are eligible and receiving services through special

education services, keeping accurate case notes and information on supports the school district

provides to the student (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). Component D is, continuing professional

development (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013) which can

involve attending trainings and conferences as well as being a member of professional social

work organizations, and engaging in supervision. Component E is, exhibits self-monitoring, self-

awareness, and professional accountability (National Evaluation Framework for School Social

Work Practice, 2013) by ongoing data collection for performance and program evaluations,

documentation of contacts and interactions with families, administration, staff, and

organizations, recognize personal strengths and weaknesses, and demonstrating effective

communication skills (Horton & Prudencio, 2022). The practice behavior of home visiting can

support components in this domain with regards to educating families on FERPA and special

education services, and by continuing to engage families and document diverse ways in which

the school social worker has attempted to communicate and involve the family services for the

student.

It is important that a model of school social work assists with practice, advocacy, and

research efforts that supports practice, promotion, and evaluation of school social workers (Frey

et al., 2012; Kelly & Stone, 2009). School systems are invited to adapt this evaluation framework

to meet specific needs for evaluating their school social work services and programs (National

Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013). By school social workers

following a national framework for best practice, it allows school social workers to be able to

articulate their perspective and unique skills to those outside of the social work profession and

allow school social workers to be evaluated for their effectiveness in an educational setting (Frey

et al., 2012; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2016).

The National School Social Work Practice Model and the National Evaluation

Framework are meant to guide technical skills and the knowledge of school social workers. This

model and framework also provide practice behaviors and methods to define the roles of school

social workers but also how school social workers performance is evaluated in the school

environment (Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2015). The practice

behaviors and approaches inside the framework tend to fit into more than one category and

domain. For example, school social workers conducting home visits can be included in all the

domains as an example of a practice behavior to meet the competencies (Horton & Prudencio,

2022; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2015).

Pennsylvania Department of Education and School Social Workers

In 2020, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf's Reach Out PA initiative specifically stated

that, "School social workers play a unique role in addressing mental health by providing holistic

services and supports in the school setting, such as crisis management, mental health treatment,

and engaging in the school, family and community in enhancing existing student support

structures that ensure the success of all students" (Framework for PK-12 School Social Worker

Educational Specialist, 2020). In Pennsylvania, school social workers are considered highly

qualified professionals as they hold a master's degree in social work and are licensed through the

state as licensed social workers (LSW) or licensed clinical social workers (LCSW). Yet,

common social work education typically does not cover areas necessary for working in a school

(Framework for PK-12 School Social Worker Educational Specialist, 2020). Some of these areas

can include special education, school law, structure and organization of the school system,

learning theories/models, and curriculum development. School social workers are in a unique

position where expertise and knowledge in both education theory and practice are both needed.

Requiring education certification for all professional positions in public schools, the

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) requires school counselors, teachers, school

psychologists, administrators, and nurses to hold certifications in their area of expertise

(Framework for PK-12 School Social Worker Educational Specialist, 2020). Benefits of school

social worker receiving a PK-12 School Social Worker Educational Specialist Certification

include, equivalency with educationally certified colleagues, creates standards to ensure school

social worker are the only ones providing social work services in schools, Act 48 requirements,

Code of Conduct and Professional Educator Discipline Act, provides clarification on unions, can

assist districts in obtaining federal funding, accurate reporting to PDE, career advancement

within the school system, protection of the school social work title, and can assist with salary

negotiation for school social workers (Framework for PK-12 School Social Worker Educational

Specialist, 2020). The program design of this certification includes course work and field

experiences be initiated and completed in an approved and accredited Council of Social Work

Education (CSWE) master's degree social work program and focus on the competencies derived

from the NASW Specialty Certification Program Core Knowledge and Skills areas (Framework

for PK-12 School Social Worker Educational Specialist, 2020).

Certification Requirements for Pennsylvania School Social Workers

Beginning August 1, 2023, all persons employed as a school social worker in the state of Pennsylvania must hold a valid active Pennsylvania School Social Worker Educational Specialist certificate or have an emergency permit to be a LSW or LCSW and be enrolled in a PDE approved school social work program (Framework for PK-12 School Social Worker Educational Specialist, 2020). Pennsylvania Department of Education has created a framework for PK-12 School Social Worker Educational Specialist Preparation Program Guidelines for school districts which includes the Educator Effectiveness Observation and Practice Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals (NTP): School Social Worker and Home and School Visitor (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). Just like the National School Social Work Framework, this too was adapted from the Pennsylvania Department of Education from Charlotte Danielson's 2011, "Framework for Teachers" (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021).

Practice Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals

The Educator Effectiveness Observation and Practice Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals (NTP) classifies characteristics of a school social workers' responsibilities documented through theoretical research and empirical studies to promote enhanced professional practice (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). The framework is adapted to reflect school social workers and home and school visitors' tasks and provides examples of practice behaviors. The framework can be used to educate administrators of school social worker roles, tasks, and value, and creates questions for supervisors that encourage education and discussion (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). See Figure 3 for a visual representation of the Educator Effectiveness Observation and Practice Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals.

1. **Planning and Preparation**	

1a. Demonstrating knowledge of appropriate policies, procedures, laws, and regulations 1b. Demonstrating knowledge of students and families, i.e., home visits 1c. Setting Service Delivery Outcomes, i.e., home visits	1d. Demonstrating knowledge of resources, i.e., home visits 1e. Designing coherent service delivery 1f. Designing student assessments, i.e., home visits
2. Educational Environment 2a. Creating an environment of respect and rapport, i.e., home visits 2b. Establishing a culture for learning, i.e., home visits	2c. Managing Procedures, i.e., home visits 2d. Managing student behavior, i.e., home visits 2e. Organizing the environment, i.e., home visits
3. Delivery of Service 3a. Communicating clearly and accurately, i.e., home visits 3b. Using questioning, discussion, and consultation techniques, i.e., home visits 3c. Engaging students, families, and stakeholders in service delivery, i.e., home visits	3d. Using strategies in service delivery, i.e., home visits 3e. Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness, i.e., home visits
4. Professional Development 4a. Reflecting on practice and student learning, i.e., home visits 4b. Maintaining accurate records and systems for managing student data, i.e., home visits 4c. Communicating with families and stakeholders, i.e., home visits	4d. Participating in professional and school communities, i.e., home visits 4e. Growing and developing professionally, i.e., home visits 4f. Showing Professionalism, i.e., home visits

Figure 3: Visual representation of the Educator Effectiveness Observation and Practice Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals.

This framework has four domains, and each is supported by related components of professional practice. The four domains include planning and preparation, educational environment, delivery of service, and professional responsibilities (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). Each domain includes components of practice to help school social workers demonstrate appropriate practice behaviors. Included in domain 1 are components A-F and these ensure, "Effective NTPs (Non-Teaching Professionals) plan and prepare to deliver high-quality services equitably to all learners based upon extensive evidence-based knowledge of their discipline relative to individual and system-level needs and within the context of interdisciplinary collaboration. Service delivery outcomes are clear, measurable, and represent relevant goals for the individual and system" (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals,

2021). Each component has home visiting listed as evidence of practice. Specifically for domain

1, home visiting can be utilized to assist school social workers with understanding students and

families by interacting in a culturally appropriate and equitable manner, set cohesive service

delivery outcomes to encompass individual needs to fit within the context of systems-level goals,

ensure knowledge about home and community resources, and provide students and families with

culturally appropriate assessments (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021).

Included in domain 2 are components A-E and these ensure, "Effective NTPs assess and

enhance the quality of the environment along multiple dimensions toward improved academic,

behavioral and social-emotional outcomes. Environmental dimensions include adult-student

relationships, staff interactions, security and maintenance, administration, student academic

orientation, student behavioral values, student-peer relationships, parent and community-school

relationships, instructional and intervention management, and student activities" (Framework for

Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). Each component has home visiting listed as evidence of

practice. Specifically for domain 2, home visits can be utilized to assist the school with adopting

trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and inclusive approaches, linking families and children to

community resources to reduce barriers to academic success, and assisting and responding to

families when crises occur (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021).

Included in domain 3 are components A-E and these require, "Effective NTPs service

delivery and evidence-based practice originate from a problem-solving process that can be

applied at the individual, group, and systems level and is used for: (a) identification of priority

areas for improvement; (b) analysis of variables related to the situation; (c) selection of relevant

factors within the system; (d) fidelity of implementation of services and supports; and (e)

monitoring effectiveness of services" (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). Each

component has home visiting listed as evidence of practice. Specifically for domain 3, home

visits can be used to assist with meaningful communication and connections between the educators, students, and families, consult and collaborate to carefully consider the viewpoints of the families when making decisions, gaining and maintaining trust of families to ensure engagement with their students' learning, implement intervention strategies and monitor progress, and display responsiveness and flexibility to service delivery to meet the needs of students and families (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021).

Included in domain 4 are components A-F and these require, "Effective NTPs have high ethical standards and a deep sense of professionalism, focused on improving their own service delivery in an equitable and inclusive manner, and supporting the ongoing learning of colleagues" (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). Their record keeping systems are efficient and effective and NTPs communicate with all parties clearly, frequently, and with cultural sensitivity. These professionals assume leadership roles within the system and engage in a wide variety of professional development activities that serve to strengthen evidence-based practices. Reflection on their practice results in ideas for improvement shared across professional learning communities and contribute to improving others' practice (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). Each component has home visiting listed as evidence of practice. Specifically for domain 4, home visits can be used to guide planning, implementation, evaluation, and service delivery of educational and school social work services, assist with ensuring effective culturally sensitive communication and services appropriate for students and families, and aids school social workers with demonstrating core values of service which include social justice, importance of human relationships, dignity and worth of a person, competence, and integrity (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021).

As discussed in detail above, under every practice behavior listed in each component, home visit is listed as an example behavior function. This framework is specific to the state of

Pennsylvania but understanding school social work practice from a national level which includes

school social workers from Pennsylvania, is important for the profession at a local, state, and

national level. There have been two extensive school social work survey's that have taken place

over the years to analyze school social workers understanding of their roles and functions within

school districts which is so crucial to the school social work profession.

Analysis of the two National School Social Work Surveys

Understanding school social work practice from a national level was sought out by

initiating the first National School Social Work Survey that was conducted between February 28,

2008-May 31, 2008, by utilizing an online survey format and sending participants an email link

to access the online survey (Kelly et al., 2010). Contacts for school social worker participants

came from School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA), the school social worker

section of the NASW, and representative associations in every state. Participants agreed to

participate from SSWAA and organizations from 48 states, which included state schoolwork

associations, state NASW chapters, and state counseling associations that included both school

social workers and school counselors. The sample size of 1,639 portrays the population of school

social workers who belong to national and state associations that participated and was used for

analysis. An additional 1,317 people had responded but in a limited way with missing data

(Kelly et al., 2010). The survey focused on three areas of analysis of practice modalities, student

characteristics and utilization, and respondent characteristics. Prevention activities and clinical

activities were assessed under practice choices with a focus on estimated time spent on each and

then ideally the amount of time spent on primary prevention activities. The frequency of

engagement activities was also questioned under this section (Kelly et al., 2010). Student

characteristics and utilization patterns were assessed related to reasons students are at risk,

referral patterns, and use of supports which included special education, outside therapeutic

services, and governmental supports. The respondent characteristics concentrated on the

individual characteristics and workforce setting (Kelly et al., 2010).

Data analysis included frequencies to summarize and describe student utilization patterns,

characteristics, and used multiple levels of interventions and descriptive statistics. After the

descriptive analysis, bivariate methods were used to assess whether workplace and individual

characteristics were associated with distinct practice patterns (Kelly et al., 2010). This study's

primary focus was to describe the diverse interventions and practice contexts of school social

workers as well as the influence of individual characteristics and workplace contexts in

association with prevention orientation in response to the implementation of the No Child Left

Behind Act, P.L. 107-110 (Kelly et al., 2010). The findings from this study indicated that school

social workers are the main providers of mental health services and are faced with high caseloads

of complicated school, student, and family factors that impact practice behaviors. This study also

indicated a limited role for school social workers in leadership positions regarding school

committees, improvements to school culture, and development of prevention activities (Kelly et

al., 2010).

The second national school social work survey was based on the 2008 version, but

updates were made to classify demographics, communal student concerns, forms of obstacles to

school social work practice, and the degree to which SSWAA's practice model is being applied

by school social workers (Kelly et al., 2016). The survey was administered from February 3,

2014-April 7, 2014, through a tiered sampling strategy at the national, state, and local level. At

the national level of the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA), the School

Social Work Practice section of the NASW, and the American Council of School Social Work

distributed the survey to their members. At the state level, 35 associations were contacted and 33

states including the District of Colombia agreed to publicize the survey and lastly, 23 local

groups were discovered on social media platforms that were dedicated to school social work who permitted the posting of the survey on their websites. To reach individual practitioners at the local level, snowball methods were used (Kelly et al., 2016). The national sampling frame of school social workers according to data from SSWAA totals 8,500 practicing school social workers. The survey was initiated by 3,769 school social workers and 2,521 of those school social workers provided responses to all the questions on the survey which left 905 respondents with missing data. The results of the survey were categorized into the three practice domains from the national model (Kelly et al., 2016; SSWAA, 2013; Thompson & Frey, 2020).

The first domain represents providing evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services. Examples of this are direct observations, student and teacher assessments, use of existing data, standardized scales, universal screening, progress monitoring, and monitoring fidelity. The evidence-based practices that are included in this domain are online databases, journals, books, and online evidence-based sites, workshops and training, and peer consultation (Kelly et al., 2016; Thompson & Frey, 2020). Results of the survey suggested that school social workers reported the use of resources to identify evidence-based practice to a moderate degree but there was substantial variability in the use of the differing resources although the survey was unable to determine at what rate school social workers were implementing the evidence-based practices. The second domain includes promoting a school culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence which includes providing a setting so students can engage in learning and are given the chance to reach their educational goals (Kelly et al., 2016). The practice behaviors included in this domain are consultation with administration and other professionals, and supporting teachers with disruptive students, direct counseling, classroom management, referrals to services, and behavior management (Kelly et al., 2016). The results of the survey showed this practice feature is being implemented less frequently by school social workers due

to the assumption that promoting school culture is likely to happen at a prevention level and involve the entire school. The third domain is maximizing access to school-and community-based resources and these practice behaviors include home visits, parent workshops and advisory panels, referrals, promoting community service, engaging and consulting with businesses and services at the school (Kelly et al., 2016). Engagement of family and community support was reported as being done frequently (Kelly et al., 2016; Thompson & Frey, 2020).

Overall, this study confirmed the national model tends to be utilized in school social work practice (Kelly et al., 2016; Stalnecker, 2020). Home visiting is listed and referenced throughout the national school social work practice model as well as the national framework for school social work practice as a practice behavior to meet the goals of the practice model, but no specific home visit models are provided to follow. It is important to understand home visiting models being utilized across other fields of social work and human services because this can assist school social workers with knowledge and skills surrounding the intervention of the home visit for the educational setting.

Home Visit Models

Home visits have been used to assess, prevent, and treat numerous family difficulties by helping professionals other than social workers (Allen & Tracy, 2004). Home visiting must consist of interdisciplinary teams including services and family members driven by family priorities and needs. Home visiting models have included experts such as allied health professionals, nurses, hospice workers, representatives from the criminal justice system, early intervention, geriatric services, wrap-around services, and individuals and families involved in the community mental health and psychiatric services (Lamorey, 2017; Lyter & Abbott, 2007; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). Some home visiting programs, like child welfare and medical

programs, have been deeply tested and researched while other programs have been implemented

with insufficient empirical evidence or research to guide their work (Wasik & Shaffer, 2008).

Medical Home Visits

Dating back to the early 1900's, social workers were being ordered to go to homes as

helpers in medical care. The reason for social workers visiting homes was so the physicians

could gain a better understanding of their patient's social environment, which assisted with the

proper medical treatment (Beder, 1998). This type of program began from the shared vision of

Dr. Charles Emerson at Johns Hopkins Hospital and Dr. John Cabot of Massachusetts General

Hospital (Beder, 1998; Rosenberg, 1979). By social workers visiting the home of medical

patients, they provided the link between the hospital, the patients' home, and community. Ida

Cannon (Bartlett, 1975), and her ongoing recognition of the importance of the relationship

between the home and hospital influenced the idea of the social worker being the liaison of the

hospital (Bartlett, 1975; Beder, 1998; Rosenberg; 1979). Together, these created an outline for

how medical social work has been modeled. Today, home visits in the medical field continue to

be used as home health care.

Public Welfare Home Visits

Due to the provisions made to the Title IV of the Social Security Act, §§601–687 (Aid to

Dependent Children or ADC), by 1935 home visits became a regular practice to examine

eligibility of families with children as well as older adults and people with disabilities. Home

visits became rooted in public welfare and by the 1960's through the present, evaluation and

home visitation has been utilized by public welfare systems and services who investigate child

neglect and abuse (Beder, 1998; Hancock & Pelton, 1989). An intensive in-home crisis

intervention program to assist families to stay together began in 1974 and was known as

Homebuilders, P.L. 93-415. This program delivered intensive services to families whose children were at risk for out-of-home placement. This program utilized an intensive case management, multi-systemic, and family-based treatment model to deliver services in the home which utilized the family and social support system as the target of the service (Beder, 1998; Hancok & Pelton, 1989). The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, P.L. 96-272, mandated pre-placement services and the model of intensive family preservation services began to grow considerably. The Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1993, P.L. 103-66, included the Family Preservation and Supports Program, which was meant to promote family stability and strengths, work at protecting children by providing family support and preservation services, and enhances parental functioning. This program is built on the Homebuilders model and the services provided were culturally sensitive, community based, and provided in the home, which was seen as the program's biggest strength (Beder, 1998).

National Home Visiting Programs

Some other national programs that include an aspect of home visiting are Parents as Teachers, Healthy Families in America, Early Head Start Program, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (Shultz, 2020; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). These home visiting programs focus on outcomes that include maternal and child health, parenting practices, school readiness, family violence, and economic self-sufficiency (Lamorey, 2017).

Parents as Teachers (PAT) (Parent as Teachers, 2022) is a home-based intervention used to provide childhood family support and parent education beginning with pregnancy and is intended to extend until the child enters kindergarten. In the early 1980's, the state of Missouri forged the concept of partnering with parents to incorporate their vital role as their child's first and most influential teacher. This concept was developed due to Missouri educators noticing

children were starting kindergarten with varying levels of school readiness and basing the

concept off research which showed that greater parent involvement is the critical link in the

child's development of reading, writing, and learning skills (Parent as Teachers, 2022). This

program is a family focus, universal-access education program that highlights parent behavior as

the channel through which looks to achieve positive effects on the children (Wagner et al., 2003).

This program encourages group instruction and uses individual home-based instruction to

educate parents of parenting skills and target child developmental milestones of young children

(Wagner et al., 2003).

The PAT program follows an evidence-based home visiting logic model focusing on

human ecology and family systems (Parent as Teachers, 2022). This program utilizes certified

parent educators to visit parents and children in the home for a specified amount of time,

depending on the needs of the family. This model is based on the underlying beliefs that learning

begins at birth and families play a critical role in the development and growth of their children

(Wagner et al., 2003). There is a center known as the Parents as Teachers National Center, which

has developed the evidence-based and comprehensive research-based foundational curriculum

(Lahti et al., 2019). This curriculum includes two sets. The first curriculum covers prenatal to

three years and the foundational 2 curriculum covers three years to kindergarten. This curriculum

is a part of the PAT model and initiates goals during each home visit. Lahti et al. (2019) and

Wagner et al. (2003) have included these five goals:

- increasing the parental knowledge of early childhood development
- improving parenting practices, providing early detection of developmental delays and/or health issues
- preventing child abuse and neglect

- increasing children's school readiness and school success (Lahti et al., 2019; Wagner et al., 2003).

A crucial aspect of interventions is goal setting with families. Concerning home visits, goals tend to be behaviorally specific, short term, and relevant to the child's school performance (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Roggman et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022). This program also offers group gatherings including presentations, community events, family activities, parent cafes, and group meetings. These gatherings are used to provide families with social support and to share experiences to obtain information with one another (Lahti et al., 2019). Expanding across the United States and to six other countries, the PAT embraces learning experiences that are customized and relevant for the individual needs of each child and family (Parent as Teachers, 2022). The PAT program concentrates on the family microsystem aligned with ecological systems theory and the idea that education success is influenced by inequalities families encounter (Lahti et al., 2019).

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a "war on poverty" due to the government being influenced by new research surrounding the effects of poverty as well as its impact on students' education. Further research indicated a responsibility to compensate for these inequalities surrounding the economic and social conditions of the disadvantage groups (Head Start Program, 2022). A panel of experts were assembled including Sargent Shriver, Dr. Robert Cooke, and Dr. Edward Zigler to develop a comprehensive child development program to help communities meet the needs of disadvantaged preschool children. The Head Start program began as an eight-week demonstration project designed to help break the cycle of poverty. The program provided families and their preschool aged children from low-income areas, an all-inclusive program to meet their social, emotional, educational, and nutritional needs (Head Start Program, 2022).

Early Head Start Programs and Head Start Programs (Head Start Program, 2022) are based off a child and parent-based curriculum which is constructed on the needs of the child and focused on development (Goodban, 2014; Roggman et al., 2019). This program was designed to ensure children would have a better chance at school success who were growing up in poor neighborhoods (Head Start Program, 2022). Early Head Start begins working with expectant families and children age birth to 3 and then the Head Start program picks up from age 3 to the start of kindergarten. Some goals of the Head Start Programs include developing a comprehensive transition program for all families involved, promote family-self-sufficiency through supports from agency collaborations and job training opportunities, involve families in literacy programs which are already established by agencies in the service area, and assists with promoting and locating affordable and accessible childcare services for low-income families (Goodban, 2014). Head Start programs are accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children and are given grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administration for Children and Families. Since 1965, this program has served more than 36 million children and is active in all 50 states, the District of Colombia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories, including Alaskan Native, American Indian, and Migrant and Seasonal communities (Head Start Program, 2022).

Like the Head Start model, Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) (Nurse-Family Partnership, 2023) is an evidence-based community health program geared towards improving the health and lives of first-time moms and their children affected by economic and social inequality. This program has 45 years of research which has shown significant improvements to the families involved (Nurse-Family Partnership, 2023). NFP is available in 40 states plus Washington, D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands, and some Tribal Communities. Since 1996, this program has served 385,375+ families. This program provides first-time moms, specialty education nurses who visit

the families starting in early pregnancy up until the child's second birthday (Nurse-Family

Partnership, 2023). Moms enrolled in NFP benefit from the support and care with hopes of

working towards a healthy pregnancy all while families develop a close relationship with the

nurse who becomes a trusted resource. Research steadily proves that the partnership between a

mom and the nurse is a successful combination that makes long-term, measurable differences for

the family (Nurse-Family Partnership, 2023). Studies have shown this model has provided

benefits to mothers and children into adulthood (Goodban, 2014) along with being measured

utilizing a specific measurement tool known as the Helper-Client Relationship Inventory.

A common goal of all the above in-home programs is to create an environment that

promotes growth for children within their own cultural and socioeconomic circumstances, but

these programs do not include any information specific to school social workers and their roles

with conducting home visits (Wagner et al., 2003). Utilizing measurement tools and rating scales

can assist with gaining empirical evidence to be used to ensure the home visiting programs are

being implemented with fidelity and making the intended, needed change.

One measurement tool that was designed specifically for the home visiting program

known as the Nurse Family Partnership Program to assess the client-home visitor alliance is

known as the Helper-Client Relationship Inventory (Young & Poulin, 1998). This inventory was

later used to assess perceptions of home visitors of the Early and Head Start Program. This

inventory concentrates on elements including promoting family harmony, coaching, and being

empathetic and caring. It also incorporates questions about the perceptions of clients concerning

the provider being collaborative, supportive, and trustworthy (Young & Poulin, 1998). A

measure was completed by 39 assorted home visiting clients during pregnancy. The participants

had to be involved in the Nurse Family Partnership program and Early Head Start Program in

mid-western community in the United States (Damashek et al., 2023). By utilizing the Helper-

Client Relationship Inventory, this study found clients who had positive perceptions of their home visitor were more likely to remain involved in the program longer and be satisfied with services than clients who had lower scores on the inventory. Assessing client's perceptions of the home visitor and the relationship between them is crucial to evaluate due to these perceptions having an influence on the retention of services (Damashek et al., 2023).

Another known measurement tool is the Home Visiting Rating Scale (HOVRS) (Roggman et al., 2019). This scale has been used to evaluate the home visiting programs of the Early and Head Start Programs, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, and Healthy Families of America. This scale has been updated over the years with the first rating scale being used in 1997 (Peterson & Roggman, 2019) but was first developed from field-based descriptions of successful home visits and was supported by home visiting research across multiple disciplines (Roggman et al., 2019). This scale is currently on its third version and has contributed to the home visiting field by presenting a psychometrically and conceptually thorough tool that is utilized to measure structure and quality for the process of home visits for programs that serve families with infants and young children. Some of the structural aspects of this scale include supervision and case load size (Harden, 2019; Peterson & Roggman, 2019; Roggman et al., 2019). This scale is meant to produce multidimensional examination of quality indicators of the service rather than individual strategies and goals of the service (Harden, 2019; Manz & Ventresco, 2019).

The HOVRS entails two scales, the Home Visitor Practice Scale and the Family Engagement Scale. The Home Visitor Practice Scale includes four subscales. These are Responsiveness to Family Strengths and Culture, Relationship with the Family, Facilitation of Parent Child Interaction, and Non-Intrusiveness and Collaboration. The Family Engagement Scale consists of Parent Child Interaction, Parent Engagement, and Child Engagement subscales.

The structure of this scale was designed to be multidimensional and was conceptually designed to provide ratings that are skill-specific for the facilitation of home-visitors' professional development, practice with families, engagement, and supervision (Harden, 2019; Manz & Ventresco, 2019; Peterson & Roggman, 2019; Roggman et al., 2019). Minimal empirical attention has been given to the interrelationship of home visit quality and family demographics with regards to this scale even though individualizing service delivery to family's unique needs is suggested as well as understanding the interrelationship of family characteristics (Harden, 2019; Manz & Ventresco, 2019). Along with reviewing measurement tools and rating scales for home visiting programs, reviewing previous studies surrounding the intervention of the home visits is critical for school social workers.

Previous Studies of Home Visits

For assisting families at risk, home visitation programs can be seen as a desired model for delivering services, but few studies have assessed the home visitor's success. Nathans et al. (2019) conducted a study examining three of the home visiting programs mentioned above, Nurse-Family Partnership, Early Head Start, and Healthy Families America (Nathans et al., 2019). This study included three objectives of, identifying similarities and differences in the home visitor's initial readiness, explore home visitors' perceptions of and experience with ongoing supervision and support, and examine differences in job satisfaction (Nathans et al., 2019). Data was collected from 82 home visitors from the years of 1999-2004 and included ten home visiting programs that included three sites from Nurse-Family Partnership, two sites from Early Head Start and five sites from Healthy Family America. Data was collected from staff interviews and surveys (Nathans et al., 2019). Analysis of covariance was used to assess differences between the three models on all study variables. Fisher's least significant difference tests were engaged to determine statistically significant differences between the means. The

program's location was used as the covariate to control differences and programs were dummy coded (Nathans et al., 2019). An ordinal scale was applied to reflect the ratio of supervisors to staff. Results indicated that Nurse Family Partnership home visitors had bachelors' degrees in nursing whereas Healthy Family and Early Head Start visitors were mostly paraprofessionals (Nathans et al., 2019). This study also indicated that Nurse Family Partnership and Healthy Family America had the highest job satisfaction scores but there were no significant differences between programs as far as quality or frequency of supervision as well as the use of the intervention model (Nathans et al., 2019). All three programs recognized the environmental constraints had a negative impact on parenting capacity and the importance of intervening with at-risk families is key in the enhancement of parenting and children's wellbeing. The need to attend training and supervision was noted as a principal factor in home visitors feeling better prepared to handle circumstances they may encounter as well as the commitment to the intervention model to be better prepared for providing interventions (Nathans et al., 2019).

Another program mentioned above known as the Parents as Teachers had a study completed at a school district in Arizona to determine the impact of this home visiting program on student reading, math, and English language skills as well as absence rates and school suspension rates in comparison to a group of non-PAT group of students. This study used a matched comparison group quasi-experimental design and assessed three years of academic and school disciplinary data (Lahti et al., 2019). Findings from this study indicated that compared to the non-PAT control group, the PAT student group performed better in terms of reading and math achievement and had lower rates of absenteeism, out-of-school, and in-school suspension. Parents involved in the PAT program also showed increased scores on parenting measures at post-test relative to pre-test. This study's findings indicate that participation in the PAT program

is a worthwhile means to improve school behavior, parenting behavior, and child academic outcomes (Lahti et al., 2019).

Like the study above and analyzing student success by employing a home visiting program, this two-year study utilized home visits to try to build a stronger and more impactful learning community for one school district. The participants of this study included 1 school social worker, 2 school leaders, 9 teachers, 2 parents, and 4 elementary children. Five types of data were used to collect information. These included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, writing narratives, observations, and field notes (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010). Five focus groups were conducted, including teachers, school leaders, and parents who participated in the weekly home visits. The theoretical framework contained the Funds a Knowledge Framework (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) to provide the basis of formulating the interview questions as well as organizing and pursuing data to build the home-school relationship (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). This framework incorporates culture and history from the students and family into knowledge and skills that are essential for individual or family well-being and functioning. This framework can be adapted by school staff to engage families outside of the school with hopes of gaining knowledge of the families' culture to bring back and apply in a school setting (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992).

Findings showed the significance of people's educational philosophies, backgrounds, and dispositions had on bridging the gap between home and school as well as forming meaningful relationships with students and parents (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010). Distinctions between the reasons for the home visit were also noted as influencing the gap between the home and school. Teachers and school leaders had initially entered the homes of students without an appreciation for the diverse cultural settings but soon realized children's backgrounds can be a

considerable influence of their lower academic achievement. In this study, school leaders, teachers, and families highlighted the importance of an ethic of care, increasing empathetic responses, and a commitment to building the link and connections between school and home (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010). Three themes were developed from the data collected, including the power of lived experiences, relationships matter, and limited cultural awareness. This study showed that home visits were effective due to the visits encouraging school leaders and teachers to use nontraditional methods to improve students' educational experiences for both the children and families (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010). The data showed an emphasis on the importance of building bridges between home and school and deepening an ethic of care and empathetic responses. Teachers and school leaders realized the need to advocate for diverse learning environments to support culturally lived experiences of the students and families and validate these experiences to help deepen the understanding of both the school and families to foster engagement (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010).

Investigating how effective home visits are on academic success for the student is essential, but gaining an understanding for home visit influence on student behavior is also valuable. Ilhan et al., (2019) researched the effectiveness of home visits regarding student behavior inside the classroom and academic success. These home visits were conducted by teachers and not school social workers (Ilhan et al., 2019). This study also looked at parent involvement of the students who had home visits conducted compared to the students who did not have home visits conducted. This study utilized an exploratory mixed method to determine the influence of home visits compared to students who did not have home visits conducted. There were two phases to this study. The first phase contained a survey to measure teachers' perspectives regarding student behavior and academic success. The second phase of this study included interviews with teachers to explore their perceptions of home visits (Ilhan et al., 2019).

The sample size of this study totaled 128 teachers who had been teaching in public schools in the

United States and 10 of those participants were also interviewed. Results of this study indicated

that family engagement and home visits positively impacted students' attitudes in school and

academic success (Ilhan et al., 2019). Results also showed significant affirmative differences in

classroom behavior and teacher-student-parent relationship compared to students not visited at

home by teachers. The quantitative and qualitative data reflected that teachers who had

conducted the home visits recommended that most teachers should visit the parents of students to

improve student attitudes as well relationships with the parents and students (Ilhan et al., 2019).

Although these home visits were not conducted specifically by school social workers, this study

indicated benefits to schoolteachers taking on this role of conducting home visits.

There is a lack of research on what social workers do face to face with clients during

home visits. Ferguson (2018) managed a previous study and drew on findings from ethnographic

research in which social workers were observed on home visits. This study was meant to extract

the practices and hidden occurrences of social workers to further understand, develop, and

conceptualize their experiences (Ferguson, 2018). This researcher adapted an ethnographic

approach which involved following social workers around while conducting the home visits.

Being physically close to the social worker, families, and children allowed the researcher to view

the practice of the home visit and pay attention to the interactions between the family and social

worker. The research involved twenty-four social workers who were observed, audio recorded,

and 87 practice encounters (Ferguson, 2018). This study is intended to provide better clarity

about what social workers do and how theoretical resources are needed to help social workers

identify skills, core processes, and an embodied practice of home visiting can be developed and

recognized. A key implication of this study is the recognition of having no set blueprint for

conducting home visits and social workers often must make their own practice by improvising

(Ferguson, 2018). School social work practice should be highly informed with educational policy as well as integration of these policies but also maintaining the social work identity, which is necessary to employ in macro level practice (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018).

This study supports social workers needing to act based on skill, knowledge, intuition, courage, and rituals rather than bureaucratic rules in the field (Ferguson, 2018). Social workers can never be sure what they are walking into and being able to respond effectively is a key part of providing services in the home. Effectively preparing social work students for home-based practice should involve directed course content. The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (2022) can instruct this content across all sequence areas that are required for baccalaureate and master's level social work education (Allen & Tracy, 2008). School social workers need to understand their responsibilities for the school district and families they work with.

Role clarity for school social workers is not only important for the individual school social worker, but also for the school district they work for and the families they interact with. A study was conducted with the entire population of Louisiana school social workers that were employed at public school districts, charter schools, Recovery School District direct-run public schools, agencies that contract with schools to provide social work services, and school-based health clinics to examine the role of school social workers (Richard & Sosa, 2014). In 2010, 487 school social workers were recruited for the study by email and directed to a link for the survey instrument. Of the participants, 378 completed the survey. The survey was developed based on the national and state descriptions and standards of school social work practice, national and state surveys previously conducted and school social districts' social work job descriptions (Richard & Sosa, 2014). This created a 46-closed ended Likert scale instrument with one final question being open-ended. The survey collected demographic information and the roles in their

school districts the school social workers served. A pilot of this survey was conducted with

twelve school social workers in Louisiana and eight of the twelve agreed to participate (Richard

& Sosa, 2014). The pilot participants provided feedback on the content of the survey, the

relationship to the school social workers practice, the amount of time needed to take the survey

and their opinion on the length of the survey (Richard & Sosa, 2014). Based on the information

provided from the pilot survey, no changes were made. The results were summarized with

univariate analysis. Descriptive analyses were used to describe the study participants and most of

the questions on the survey were at a nominal level of measurement (Richard & Sosa, 2014).

The responses were categorized into practice roles, credentials and job titles, supervision,

and identified needs of changing roles. Richard & Sosa's (2014) categories of practice roles

indicated that Louisiana school social workers are frequently engaging in:

- indirect services (76%), which include school wide intervention, prevention services, multidisciplinary team collaboration, administrative duties.

- direct services (70%), which include group, individual, and family counseling, family counseling, crisis intervention, or parent education.

- assessment and evaluation (58%), which include assessment of students for special education services.

- case management (45%), which includes referrals to outside sources, abuse and neglect reporting or monitoring, and community collaborative services.

- professional development and supervision (28%), which includes supervision, attending professional development conferences and seminars, and policy development (Richard & Sosa, 2014).

Under the category of credentials and job titles, 95 percent held an MSW degree, 82

percent were licensed clinical social workers, 49 percent were certified school social work

specialists, and 47 percent held a Louisiana Department of Education ancillary certification of

qualified school social worker (Richard & Sosa, 2014). Most of the school social workers

received annual evaluations (90 percent) under the supervision category but only 19 percent of

those were supervised by a social worker. The survey respondents also believed they were

offered adequate training opportunities by their school district, and 87 percent felt the training

was directed towards school social work. This study can be used to fill the gaps of literature

when defining school social worker roles and work towards developing a conceptual model of

practice (Richard & Sosa, 2014).

Role Ambiguity

Roles and responsibilities of school social workers tend to vary across school districts

and even within school districts. Various job descriptions of school social workers tend to be

influenced by the community in which the district resides in, and each school has unique diverse

needs that typically guide the school social worker's tasks (Stalnecker, 2020). The NASW has

created broad goals for the standards for school social work services to illustrate the expectations

of school social work, but role ambiguity continues to be problematic for school social workers

(Stalnecker, 2020). Like in the National School Social Work Practice Model, home visiting is a

practice behavior that can be included in each category mentioned above in this study.

There are differing prerequisites between states about licensure requirements and services

provided by school social workers to schools and students (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018;

Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2015; Richard & Sosa, 2014).

Certain levels of skills and educational training are recommended for school social workers but

are not required by some state educational agencies (Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly et al.,

2015). The educational licensing and professional licensing boards vary dramatically which promotes increased inconsistency of services, role ambiguity, and potential consequences for job performance and satisfaction (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Kelly et al., 2015; Richard & Sosa, 2014; Schultz et al., 2019). Due to the differences among state requirements, substantial differences exist in the quality and quantity of assistance and services provided (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly et al., 2015). These differences can create a lack of understanding about training, practice behaviors, and potential roles for school social workers, which can also affect performance evaluation (Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Roggman et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Along with the inequalities students face and bring with them to school, the changes in education have implications for social work practice and school social workers' capability to align their practice with the school's goals. These changes include shifts within policies, updated information regarding children's mental health, and theoretical developments in the standards of school social work practice (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; Kelly et al., 2008). Academic performance has had numerous studies but the influences from the students' community and neighborhood that affect the students, families, and schools, are showing many gaps in research (Wei et al., 2018).

By use of conceptual frameworks, like school social workers practicing from a generalist perspective and utilizing person-in-environment, family-in-environment, ecological systems, and family systems perspectives and theories, coupled with updated education policies, and evidence-based interventions, school social workers can better intervene at multiple levels including microsystems, mezzo systems, and macrosystems to address student and family's needs by utilizing the intervention of home visits. It is important for school social workers to

understand the national evaluation framework for school social work practice to be aware of

performance expectations, but further research and explanation is needed for school social

workers to fully understand the practice behavior of conducting home visits for school districts.

School social workers are in a unique position to be able to use the home visit as an intervention

for school districts, but more support, education, and research is needed for school social

workers to provide this intervention effectively to work towards the goal of student success. The

information presented in chapters one and two supports the need for the information presented in

chapter three surrounding the methodology and research approach.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Approach

An extensive review of literature has been conducted surrounding school social workers

to examine the home visit as an intervention method for school districts. This literature review

has consisted of the history of school social workers and home visits, a conceptual framework of

perspectives and theories that support home visiting, previous and current educational laws,

national frameworks for school social work practice, current programs that utilize a home

visiting model, and past research studies on home visiting. The comprehensive review of

literature has provided an explanation for the need for further research surrounding school social

workers and the practice behavior of conducting home visits for school districts.

A methodology within qualitative research contains procedures that are illustrated as

inductive, evolving, and shaped by the researcher's experiences in gathering and examining the

data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This methodology begins with stating the intended research

questions as well as identifying, conceptualizing, and operationalizing the variables. It then

provides a rationale of the suitability of the methodology and research approach to address the

intended research questions. The research context is then justified by providing a history and

background of the phenomenon, which is followed by a description of the research sample and outlines ethical considerations pertaining to the participants. The data collection methods and analysis are then justified as well as measures taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. The methodology concludes with identifying potential weaknesses to the study which include external conditions that could constrain or restrict the study's scope and potential outcome.

Research Questions and Variables

The purpose of this research is to investigate the practice of home visiting by school social workers conducting home visits for school districts. Four research questions will be applied to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. These include:

1. With home visiting being listed as a practice behavior on the School Social Worker National Evaluation Framework, under what conditions are school social workers conducting home visits?
2. What do school social workers see as the benefits to conducting home visits?
3. What do school social workers see as the barriers to conducting home visits?
4. What do school social workers need to be successful in conducting home visits?

A concept can be considered a rational illustration that represents an object, idea, behavior, event, or person (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Concepts are derived from data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) pulled from existing theories, previous research and literature, go through open coding with the objective to remain inductive by creating a conceptual framework featuring categories (Padgett, 2016). The properties and dimensions of the data are organized into discrete categories and are identified due to their general properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Through these research questions, the concept of conducting home visits was explored, including the factors promoting home visits and prohibiting them. The collected data was broken

down and compared for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The similarities

within the data were grouped together under the same conceptual heading and after further

analysis, these concepts were grouped together to form categories. The properties and

dimensions of each category become integrated around a core category. This core category

becomes the major theme of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The term operational is used to

determine the attributes we observe about a specific notion (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Operationalism is a reality that can be measured objectively (Padgett, 2017). The evidence from

the data collected is what became generated as categories to illustrate the concept about the

specific notion (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Showing the relationship between concepts is a key

aspect of theory building (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). School social workers tend to make their

own practices for home visiting based on knowledge, skill, education, intuition, experiences, and

governmental rules (Furguson, 2018; Lyter & Abott, 2007). School social workers need to be

aware of the knowledge and skills but also an understanding of the ways in which their

experiences and perceptions of their role affect aspects of home visits. It is important to create

concrete linkages between variables that have an influence on school social workers and the

home visit, and all potential influences need to be taken into account.

Concepts allow the researcher to group similar data under one heading which creates the

structure to form the theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Concepts are meant to provide grouping

of the data to assist with organization and to reduce the data to common characteristics of

variables grouped together (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). To operationalize variables, they must be

defined at one or more of the four levels of measurement which include, nominal, ordinal,

interval, and ratio (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). When referring to the attributes that are different

from one another, this refers to the nominal measurement levels. For this study, the gender of the

school social worker was a variable included in the nominal level of measurement with the

categories of male, female, and other (Mills, 2012). Analyzing gender will not focus overly on

the language choice but rather examines the way gender impacts the choices made of the

participants (Mills, 2012). The current school district where the school social worker is

employed along with the school district's geographic location was also a part of the nominal

level of measurement. The elements of the geographic location include four basic types based on

the National Center for Education Statistics (2021). These four choices include city, suburban,

town, and rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). The next variables that were

studied in the nominal levels of measurement included if the school social worker conducts home

visits for their school district, if the school social worker is required to conduct home visits for

their school district, and if conducting home visits is part of their school social work job

description along with describing their current job duties. The next variable included how

prepared school social workers are to conduct home visits. These elements included what

training the school social worker has received to conduct home visits and if their awareness of

the school social worker national evaluation framework to support the practice behavior of home

visits. When addressing if the school social worker has an accompanying person while

conducting home visits, the elements included colleague, police, resource officer, and/or none

and if the school social worker has a school vehicle to use while conducting home visits. These

variables were meant to be defined in terms of qualitative attributes that are categorical only.

When variables can be ranked in order, show progression, and can be ranked from more

to less, this is known as ordinal levels of measurement (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Included in this

variable is the school social worker's highest level of education they have attained with the

elements being bachelors, masters, post masters, and doctorate. Previous positions held by the

school social worker were included in this variable with the elements of a previous school social

worker, another social work position, or another position not considered a social worker. Another

variable included the school social worker's degree of satisfaction with their education to support

their preparation for conducting home visits as well as their degree of concerns or challenges for

conducting home visits. The final variable included the socioeconomic status of their current

school district will be based on if their district is considered a Title 1 school district and/or

school (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023). The differences in these attributes are not

precise due to not knowing the degree of satisfaction (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

When variables have differences between levels but have the same meaning, this refers to

the interval levels of measurement. The attributes included in these variables were ranked in

order but also separated by a standardized distance between them (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Included in this level of measurement was the percentage of time the school social worker is out

in the field.

Like interval levels of measurement, ratio measures include the same attributes but are

based on a true zero point (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Included in this level of measurement was

the age of the school social worker as well as the number of years the participants have been

school social workers and the total number of school social workers at their school.

It is important to not limit variables to only observable indicators that can be counted for

and anticipated in advance (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Qualitative research requires immersion into

a more subjective, flexible, and open-ended observations of the phenomena, as they occur

naturally to differentiate themes and patterns from the unstructured group of observations (Rubin

& Babbie, 2017). In qualitative research, the researcher is constantly revising and updating

concepts and adding new concepts due to seeing different relationships between the updated

concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The listing of the concepts is not what creates the theory so

the identified concepts must be linked back together to the original research questions but in

conceptual terms (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The variables listed above specific to the school social worker and specific to the school

social worker's school district can provide insight into perceptions of the school social workers

surrounding home visits and possible correlations can be made. Essential qualities associated

with the conceptual categories of home visiting and the conceptual properties are conceptualized

to find meaning which supports the hypotheses or relationships among the categories and their

properties (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The variables can then be turned into abstract concepts and

be measured and the conceptual categories or properties from evidence are generated and then

that evidence that has emerged from the category is used to explain the concept when

discovering theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These concepts become the relevant theoretical

abstraction that explains what is going on in the area being studied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The

concepts indicated by the data are both the categories and properties (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

and are grouped together under one heading to show similar data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The

well-developed categories become the themes that are developed in terms of their properties and

dimensions which form the theoretical framework to explain the phenomena (Corbin & Strauss,

2015).

Rationale for Research Design

Qualitative research logically plays a role in social research and has a long history in

behavioral and social sciences (Thyer, 2009). Qualitative research is known to be involved

firsthand with the social world and studies individuals or groups in their natural environments by

embracing the idea of multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thyer, 2009). Qualitative

reports do not necessitate statistical insight or decoding, and focus on naturalistic detail and

context (Padgett, 2016). They also rely on a variety of theories and conceptual frameworks to

source significant concepts (Padgett, 2016). The review of literature is both evaluative and

descriptive and the theoretical frameworks, ideas, and concepts that are configured, often

continue to be referenced throughout the analysis but new ones tend to be incorporated as well

(Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016).

The overall research design refers to all choices made surrounding the planning and

performing of the research. These choices include the measurements, sample being studied, data

collection methods and tools, and the rational for the composition of the interpretations of

findings (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Methods involved in qualitative research tend to unfold during

the investigation and will include the study design, sample selection, study procedure, and data

collection (Thyer, 2009). Specific to social work research, qualitative research's purpose is to use

an individual's observable behavior and/or spoken or written language to produce abundant, and

rich descriptive data to enhance their social conditions (Gaizauskaite, 2012; Thyer, 2009). In a

sense, the world is turned into a series of interpretations that include interviews, conversations,

field notes, photographs, memos, and recordings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). It strives to

understand and make sense of the experiences humans have from their own frame of reference

and searches for causes and facts of social phenomena by creating experimentally developed

evidence as well as legitimate observations used to study human phenomena (Creswell & Poth,

2017; Thyer, 2009). Qualitative research uses equivalent tools of the physical and natural

sciences of scientific inquiry (Thyer, 2009).

The samples for this research study were focus groups. A focus group is known as a

qualitative research technique to organize discussions to gain information about a topic with a

group of selected individuals (Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). The interactions that occur

among participants during focus groups often supplies information that would not be discussed

or obtained using individual interviews or surveys (Gaizauskaite, 2012). The focus group can use

a structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interview format to question several individuals

apart of a specific population or group (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Focus groups often allow for

rich data to be collected and assist with in-depth analysis (Reynaert et al., 2022).

Focus groups were chosen as the data collection method due to the researcher exploring a

range of ideas and differing perspectives of school social workers surrounding home visits.

Focus groups can be used as the data collection method to uncover factors that are behind

motivations, behaviors, attitudes, and opinions of a group of selected participants on a specific

topic (Gaizauskaite, 2012; Linhorst, 2002). When interviewees are similar and cooperative with

one another, the interactions among the interviewees will possibly yield the best information,

which makes focus groups very beneficial (Creswell & Poth, 2017). For each focus group, the

same topics were covered using semi-structured interviews. This allowed participants to add

anything else to the interviews relevant to the discussion. This type of interview format also

allows the researcher to ask additional questions for clarity on certain points (Corbin & Strauss,

2015).

Analyzing home visits tends to pose more challenges than other interventions such as

interventions inside classrooms. A previous study conducted by Lamorey (2017) utilized focus

group discussions to understand perceptions of social workers surrounding conducting home

visits. Two separate focus groups were conducted, and each focus group watched sample videos

of a home visit in two separate cultures (Lamorey, 2017). One focus group took place in the

United States while the other focus group took place in Turkey. The focus group that took place

in the United States comprised of 28 female home visitors and the focus group that took place in

Turkey comprised of 35 female home visitors (Lamorey, 2017). Each focus group was shown a

15-minute video segment of a home visit and were asked open ended questions about their

overall perceptions regarding the home visit, the role of the home visitor, what was working well

during the home visit, and opinions about what should be done differently (Lamorey, 2017). The

video during the focus groups were used as stimuli to evoke reactions about their perceptions of

the home visitors. The responses were taped and transcribed and then coded into three categories.

These included roles of the home visitor, roles of the family members, and roles of resources

(Lamorey, 2017). Themes were attached to each category and supported by direct quotes from

the transcribed data. The author described the focus groups as being a unique and useful process

in exploring first person access to culturally informed practice and attitudes, rich discussions

about home visiting as a practice, and professional insights about the participants' perceptions.

The author also noted that the method used in this study was in itself, a significant research

outcome (Lamorey, 2017).

In social work practice, education, and research, part of its foundation is developing

theory (Akesson et al., 2018). Throughout the data analysis stage, some form of theorizing

continues to take place (Padgett, 2016) and theory should be developed constantly (Akesson et

al., 2018). Theory is meant to help social work researchers advance their visions from the

interpretation of data and find meaning in their research (Akesson et al., 2018).

A distinct methodological framework is used to investigate a research study's phenomena

and at the conclusion of this study to explain the findings, the analysis of grounded theory was

used to produce results of a simple exploratory theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Thyer, 2009).

Glaser and Straus (1967) developed the qualitative methodology known as grounded theory

(Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The purpose of this qualitative methodology is to construct theory

grounded in the collected data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Grounded theory has arisen as the most

widely used in qualitative research and was chosen for this research study with the notion to

develop a new theory, theoretical model, or a deeper contextualized perspective about the

identified phenomenon (Akesson et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). Grounded

theory is a research method used to uncover the meaning of social processes, research, and

concepts that include social relationships and behaviors of groups beginning with a set of

observations and then drawing on conclusions from those observations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967;

Sims-Schouten & Thapa, 2023). Grounded theory methodology fits well into social works roots

of the person-in-environment theory and has the capability of developing social work theories

that are relevant to social work practice (Oktay, 2012). In the work of non-traditional areas

where there is little literature, bringing the generation of theory becomes an important strategy

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). When the theory becomes a process, it is an ever-developing entity and

is not considered a perfected product (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Often times, the interventions that social workers provide are given extensive attention

and research more so than the actual process with the clients. Included in these interventions

were the feelings of the social workers during this process, the need to create space for reflection,

and understanding the in-depth relationships that come with working with clients to address

needs (Glumbikova, 2020). These items need to be seen as just as important as the actual

intervention itself. Glumbikova (2020), conducted a research study with twelve social workers

that work with families to explore how the social workers perceive their own practice of field

social work. The data collected came from three focus group interviews and was then processed

using grounded theory. From the data analysis, two categories arose from the grouping of codes

within the findings, which included the self of a technicist professional and self of a reflexive

worker. This research study created a unique understanding of self through the perspectives of

social workers working with families and the realities they experience (Glumbikova, 2020). This

research study confirms the need to allow social workers to explore and reflect on their processes

and experiences with working with families.

Qualitative research often avoids identifying the problem early on and the specific phenomena being studied may not be evident until the completion of the research study (Thyer, 2009). Understanding home visits should begin with developing a strong theoretical foundation and comprehension (Nathans et al., 2019) as well as empirical evidence directly from the school social workers themselves about their experiences (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Allen & Tracy, 2008; Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Harden, 2019; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2016; Manz & Ventresco, 2019; Muzicant & Peled, 2018; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Shultz, 2020).

Research Setting/Context

Students attending school are facing many issues which make it difficult for them to respond effectively to the school setting. Most of the issues students face are at the individual, school, family, and community level and the stressors that come along with these issues tend to stem from the non-school environment (Berzin & O'Connor, 2016; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Frey et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2010; Openshaw, 2008). These stressors from the non-school environment are known to negatively affect a student in the educational setting (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Ilhan et al., 2019) but school districts often struggle with identifying all these needs and how to ensure academic success (Wei et al., 2018). The psychosocial well-being and education of students is a gap that must be addressed for them to succeed academically (Sherman, 2016).

School social workers have been known to assist school districts with identifying the needs of students that originate from the students' home and community. Providing insight to school districts about these unique individual experiences (Charles & Stone, 2019) as well as the barriers and influences, school-based performance can begin to be addressed by using the framework of family systems and family-in-environment perspective (Biscontini, 2021; Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Gasker, 2023). School districts need to increase their support to the families

of the school district due to the knowledge of family needing to be a component within an

intervention (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Wasik & Schaffer,

2008).

Home visits have been used as an intervention strategy across many human services and

can be seen as a preferred model for delivering services (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Damashek et al.,

2023; Nathans et al., 2019; Shultz et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008) and

home visits can be used as an intervention method to reach the families of the school district.

Research on home visits can be used to create links between theory and the intervention of the

home visit (Nathans et al., 2019). It is important to learn perceptions of school social workers

about home visits and how these views can affect their job perception, self-perception, and acting

roles (Hancock and Pelton, 1989; Nathans et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022; Wasik & Shaffer,

2008). These perceptions need to include positive and negative, strengths and challenges

(Hancock & Pelton, 1989; Nathans et al., 2019; Peterson & Roggman, 2019; Saltiel & Lackey,

2020). It is important to continue researching home visits and the practices of school social

workers to increase knowledge about the environments students come from to assist with future

interventions to aid the school, students, and families (Allen & Tracy, 2008). For the future of

social work policies, practice, and research, continuing to explore current data on school social

work practice is needed (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Ilhan et al.,

2019; Kelly et al., 2010). The home visit is known as being a private complex area within social

work (Ferguson, 2018; Saltiel & Lackey, 2019; Winter & Cree, 2016) and there is no specific

way to plan or conduct home visits which has left the home visit under-theorized and under-

researched with little literature specific to this (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Lyter & Abbott,

2007; Nathans el al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Winter & Cree, 2016).

The School Social Workers Association of America (SSWAA) is an organization apart

from the National Association of Social Workers to legitimize school social workers across

schools in America (SSWAA, n.d.). SSWAA has endorsed a National Evaluation Framework for

School Social Work Practice that illustrates practice focuses broken down into four domains;

planning and preparation, school environment, resources and service delivery, and professional

responsibility (National Evaluation for School Social Work Practice, 2013). Each domain

includes various components to represent behaviors and practice approaches for school social

workers. Specific to the state of Pennsylvania, a similar framework has been adapted which is

known as the Educator Effectiveness Observation and Practice Framework for Non-Teaching

Professionals (NTP), which classifies characteristics of a school social worker's responsibilities.

This framework includes four domains; planning and preparation, educational environment,

delivery of service, and professional development (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals,

2021). Included in the domains are several components meant to represent the behaviors and

practice approaches for school social workers.

For each evaluation framework, the practice approaches and behaviors within the

frameworks overlap each other into more than one domain and category. Specific to home visits,

this practice behavior is included in each domain on both frameworks as evidence of practice to

meet each competency (Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2015). It is

currently unknown whether school social workers are conducting and utilizing home visits as an

intervention method even though the home visits are listed throughout both frameworks as an

expected practice behavior for school social workers.

Research Population, Sample, and Data Source

The intentional process of choosing respondents based on capability of supplying

desirable information about the research problem under investigation is known as purposeful

sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). Purposeful sampling provides greater

understanding and suitability because the topic of research can be more easily addressed

(Padgett, 2016). This type of sampling is considered a nonprobability type of sample, and the

researcher needs to use their own judgement for selection (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The

researcher assessed the candidates for eligibility based on the criteria for this research study

(Padgett, 2016). This research study focused on school social workers and home visits, so the

sample only included school social workers.

For researchers to obtain the optimal sample size, it is suggested to start recruiting locally

and then modify the sampling strategy as needed (Padgett, 2016). A feasible number of

participants in a focus group can range somewhere between 6-12 people in one group

(Gaizauskaite, 2012). For this study, the chosen sampling frame was school social workers from

the public-school districts of Pennsylvania in the counties of Cumberland, Dauphin, Perry, and

Northern York. Along with school social workers from these public-school districts, school

social workers from the Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15 (CAIU) were also included. The

CAIU provides cost-effective programs to 24-member school districts, 2 vocational technical

schools, over 50 non-public schools, and several charter and cyber schools. The Capital Area

Intermediate Unit serves as the professional partner and liaison between the local school districts

and the Department of Education (Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15, n.d.). Currently, the total

number of school social workers from the mentioned schools' totals 59 school social workers.

All school social workers on this sampling frame were contacted and due to the number of

school social workers who agreed to be a part of the research study, this decided the total number

in the final sample that was researched.

This sample of school social workers was chosen due to the already established School

Social Workers Networking Group that consists of school social workers from the above

identified public school districts, vocational schools, and from the CAIU 15. Participants in a

focus group do not need to be strangers to one another. Different research studies require

different approaches and previous studies have benefited from using preexisting social networks

(Cohen & Garrett, 1999). Having control over the similarities and differences is key for

uncovering categories emerging theoretical properties which is crucial when developing theory

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This allows the researcher to have control over the theoretical

relevance of the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The researcher identified and went through local approvals for the site and participants

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). Qualitative studies often require gatekeepers to provide permission to

begin research and participant recruitment (Oktay, 2012; Padgett, 2016). For this study, the

gatekeeper is someone who needs to be contacted to gain access to the site where the interviews

will occur. This is often done in the form of a signed letter (Padgett, 2016). This letter will

include the reasons the site was chosen for the study, how much time will be spent at the site by

the researchers, what will be done at the site during the research study, if the researcher's

presence will be disruptive, how will the results be reported, and what will the gatekeeper,

participants, and the site gain from the study. See Appendix A for the email script to request the

use of the identified site location. It is important qualitative researchers go where their

respondents are rather than the other way around and select a site that will not raise power issues

with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016).

Researchers need to consider ethical issues that might surface within all stages of the

research study and need to have methods to plan for them. Responsible qualitative research

involves the need for the researcher to confront several ethical issues that can possibly arise from

direct contact between the participants and researcher (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Prior to

conducting the study, the researcher submitted for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval

(Creswell & Poth, 2017; Oktay, 2012). The research protocol submitted to the IRB included the rationale for the study, literature review, and hypotheses of the research study. The researcher also included a detailed sample of how many people will be studied and the characteristics of the sample of participants. This sample included the inclusion and exclusion criteria and if any vulnerable populations are included (Oktay, 2012). The recruitment procedures, data collection instruments, and data analysis strategy were also built in. The researcher included a detailed schedule for the study to show when data will be collected and when analysis will take place. It is suggested the researcher integrate data analysis into the data collection to provide direction of what should come next (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Informed consent was included which stated a clear purpose of the study, length of the focus group interviews, the list of risks and benefits, and instructions on what to do if participants are harmed (Oktay, 2012).

As mentioned above, a grounded theory study is meant to incorporate new dimensions and theories gathered from the data. This researcher anticipated possible challenges with the IRB approving this grounded theory research study. To avoid this, the researcher included a detailed explanation of the intended research method (Oktay, 2012). The researcher provided evidence to the review board that the study design follows ethical guidelines for conducting research (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

It is also important the researcher is aware of the biases that exist within the samples and data. Closeness of the relationships and sensitivity to the subject matter can present challenges (Padgett, 2016). Ethical complications increase when the topic and setting a researcher chooses is something personal and of interest to them (Padgett, 2016). The researcher recognized the importance of the subjectivity of their own lens and the powerful position they have within the research but also acknowledged that participants are the true owners of the information being collected as an ethical practice (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Seeking out additional qualitative

researchers or a research mentor and advisor to debrief with regularly to provide advice and emotional support can help tremendously. This researcher consulted with their committee chair throughout the entire research process.

A classifying feature of qualitative inquiry is the active interaction between the researcher and the participants that affects one another in unpredictable ways (Padgett, 2016). Sometimes the researcher does not have a lot in common with the participants and sometimes they do but social responsibility is an ethical stance which includes being sensitive to diversity. Intersectionality of fixed identities such as age, sex, race/ethnicity, and social class need to be considered as well as changing characteristics such as demeanor and dress (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). Included in the demographic characteristics, there are a number of acquired characteristics researchers carry with them into the field. These can include personal, professional, recreational, and political. The influence of the identities mentioned above on the research study is an issue of appropriateness and context, and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) advises members to engage in research while being aware of possible harm (NASW, 2021; Padgett, 2016). For this particular study, the researcher took the following needed steps to ensure a culturally competent research study.

The researcher spent time with the participants who were involved in the study to become aware of any minority groups participating so the research design could be altered if needed. This researcher did not automatically assume means of data collection that have been used before will grant valid information for this particular study. Ensuring the use of culturally sensitive and nonbiased language during data collection occurred and this researcher ensure no non-English translation was needed. The researcher also refrained from using sexist language or concepts and avoided using double standards while interviewing participants.

Being prepared to reconcile concerns and issues related to the sampling of the study was also a requirement of the researcher. Unexpected ethical dilemmas can evolve at any time and the researcher anticipated and became flexible in dealing with these. Ethical concerns warrant continual consideration in a qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). Some dilemmas such as maintaining confidentiality, avoiding coercion, and tending to emotional and sensitive issues can be planned for and dealt with ahead of time (Padgett, 2016). Disguising the nature of the study is known as deception and this is unethical and forbidden across all research (Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Participants as well as the gatekeepers were informed in advanced and no data collection occurred until after informed consent is granted (Padgett, 2016). Informed consent is considered a negotiated and ongoing process that is required for face-to-face engagement for data collection (Padgett, 2016).

Informed consent for this research project like mentioned above, included a description of the study as well as the procedures for the current research study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These procedures included the anticipated number of focus group interviews that will be conducted, anticipated length of the study, and participants' role in the study. Guaranteeing to participants that their involvement is voluntary, and they hold the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time without consequence, was included (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Information about the benefits and risks of participation in the research study was also included (Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). See Appendix C for a copy of the Consent to Participate in Research.

For this study, there is a potential for participants to feel vulnerable emotionally due to the nature of the information shared and the possibility these emotions are unable to be resolved. Procedures were built into the research design for psychological support (Padgett, 2016) which included a list of resources participants can use to follow up on any taxing and worrying issues

that may arise. Information with regards to psychological counseling and methods of referrals was also provided in the unlikely event that intense emotions of the participants are unable to be resolved. During the focus group interviews, participants may share stories or opinions about things that can produce an array of many different feelings. To avoid this, the researcher provided the list of intended interview questions to participants beforehand and asked them to contact the researcher with suggested changes. By providing the participants with the questions beforehand, this allowed participants to be prepared not to answer if they so choose. Follow up emails to participants after each focus group also occurred to check in with participants about any unmet needs. The continual reminder that participation is voluntary, and participants can take a break or leave the room at any time is acceptable (Linhorst, 2002). Participants may also obtain incorrect information from other participants during the progression of the discussion and if this occurs, the researcher has an ethical obligation to correct the misinformation (Linhorst, 2002). Due to the relationships of the qualitative researcher and the participants, there was a possibility that sensitivity could be unknowingly offended, loss of privacy could accidentally occur, and boundaries can naively be crossed (Padgett, 2016).

The participants in a qualitative study often disclose a great amount of personal information so ensuring protection of their interests, well-being, and confidentiality during data collection as well as when the findings are reported, needs to be clarified not just by getting informed consent (Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Confidentiality needs to be addressed and promised but informing participants about the possibility of breaking confidentiality due to state law requirements of mandated reporting as well as the risk of focus group members violating confidentiality, also was stated.

The informed consent also included the benefits to this research study. This included possible ownership in the research project (Linhorst, 2002). Previous research conducted on

focus group participation identified the feeling of empowerment from participating in focus

groups and a therapeutic effect (Linhorst, 2002). It is important the researcher set ground rules at

the beginning of the focus group about information sharing (Linhorst, 2002). Participants were

informed that the focus groups will be audio recorded and they can request a copy of this

recording was included in the informed consent. For this research study, pseudonyms were used

when results were reported, and inconsequential facts were changed to help prevent breeches in

confidentiality. Participants were assured that their identities would never be revealed or

connected to the information they provided without their permission. The researcher guaranteed

human subjects protection and privacy laws for participants and ensured the appropriate

documents are signed in advance from all persons who will be audiotaped.

A major element of success is being able to retain study participants. It is important the

researcher can provide possible incentives for participation as well as contact information where

participants can reach out with concerns or questions (Padgett, 2016). This research study

provided compensation naturalistically and the participants were informed their contribution

would be used to assist and provide insight into school social work practice and possibly igniting

future research for other school social workers. One incentive was ensuring the findings would

be shared with participants and informing them they deserve to see the results of the study they

played a significant role in.

Prior to conducting the focus groups, the research participants in this study were given a

copy of the informed consent they signed as well as the methods used to maintain their

confidentiality throughout the duration of the research study. Along with informed consent, a

written statement included the full identity of the researcher with contact information as well as

the sponsoring organization of the research study, what the study is about, its voluntary nature,

what their participation will entail, and the protection provided by the strict confidentiality guidelines. This strategy is useful when recruiting participants (Padgett, 2016).

Ensuring enough data is collected from the identified samples to provide contextual meaning to the phenomena being studied also was a concern of the researcher (Thyer, 2009). It is recommended that at least two focus group interviews be conducted as the first interview involves building rapport and creates the momentum for the next interview (Padgett, 2016). Ongoing interviews bring engagement and allow the researcher to fill in overlooked information and follow leads of information from former interviews (Padgett, 2016). Rapport between the researcher and study participants included respect, positive regard, and trust to increase honesty and frankness (Padgett, 2016).

This researcher referred to three guiding principles to ensure ethical considerations pertaining to the participants occurred. These included the respect for persons, which included privacy and consent, concern for welfare, meaning every attempt has been made to minimize harm and increase mutuality, and justice by ensuring equitable treatment and encouraging inclusivity (Creswell and Poth, 2017).

Positionality Statement

This researcher has been a licensed social worker in a public school district since 2017. Through the experiences of being a school social worker, this researcher has seen how social and environmental constrains can negatively affect a child's role in an educational setting and the importance of a student's emotional and physical needs needing to be met at home. This researcher has seen firsthand the importance of needing to view students holistically to be able to address school-based performance in the framework of family systems to understand the barriers and influences that come from the environments students live in. Bridging the gap between the

psychosocial well-being and education of students is essential and school social workers can be the needed link between the home environment of the student and school district.

The past and current experiences have guided the researcher through their work as a DSW student and researcher. This researcher is aware of the opportunities and privileges they have been given and the effect this can have on the current research study. This researcher is committed to continuing to challenge their own cultural biases and beliefs and how these can and will affect others. The six professional code of ethics defined by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) are what guides the researcher's personal and professional life. The principles of social justice, service, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence truly reflect what is unique about the social work profession (NASW, n.d.). These core values provide the researcher with purpose and perspective on a daily basis. This researcher believes the social work profession is held to a higher standard due to the code of ethics. This researcher is a social worker that is obligated and committed to following these and understanding the positionality of others towards the code of ethics.

During this research study, the researcher is committed to gaining new insights and information from other school social workers about their perspectives and experiences surrounding conducting home visits. This researcher will look to the participants as experts with open eyes and ears to use their experiences to develop a meaningful and purposeful research environment and study. To work towards avoiding biases within this study, the researcher will use multiple forms of data collection which includes focus group interviews, reviewing current literature and documents, and analyzing the data by use of grounded theory to ensure trustworthiness of the study.

Data Collection Methods

Focus group research collects a mixture of opinions, experiences, evaluations, needs, and ideas, surrounding a research topic from a group of purposefully selected participants (Gaizauskaite, 2012). It is common for more than one focus group to occur (Gaizauskaite, 2012; Rubin & Babbie, 2017) and this investigation sampled units from a minimum of two separate focus groups conducted two separate times per group. The goal was to conduct three focus groups per group. The average time of a focus group discussion should take about one and a half hours, but the actual length is defined in terms of the efficacy of conversation (Gaizauskaite, 2012).

The setting of the focus group can make a difference in the comfortability of the participants, which can affect the contributions (Padgett, 2016). When information is asked of individuals, it is answered through a sift of apprehension about what will make them look good especially when answering in front of other professionals or co-workers (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Purposeful sampling can also carry the risk of participants being concerned with speaking about their own group (Padgett, 2016). The field setting where data collection takes place is taken seriously by qualitative researchers due to the effect this has on the study and observations of the subjects as well as the collection of data (Thyer, 2009). It is important the researcher determined the feasibility and suitability beforehand by visiting the setting. The researcher requested and acquired written permission to come into the setting, which included ethical consent approval and considering possible restrictions and obstacles within the setting and managing how to negotiate them (Thyer, 2009).

For this research study, the focus groups occurred in-person at the Capital Area Intermediate Unit Office where the group of identified school social workers often convene for various meetings and obligations. This location was able to provide private spaces for conversation and was distraction free. As previously stated, focus groups are a good match for

collecting data from a group of social networks already established. Sometimes, common

formats of computer-mediated data collection for qualitative research can include virtual focus

groups (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The intent of this study was to have all the focus groups occur

in person but due to participants' needs, some focus groups were conducted virtually.

There are skills needed of the researcher who conducted and facilitated the focus groups.

It is important the researcher used the values of empathy and individualism as well as their

knowledge of group dynamics to assist with modification of the focus groups (Cohen & Garrett,

1999). The role of the researcher in focus group interviewing became the moderator of the group

by asking open-ended questions to group participants. It is important the moderator provided

control to the group but only to ensure that the group's flow, had revealing discussions (Padgett,

2016) and ensured they are getting input from every participant in the focus group (Gaizauskaite,

2012). Reaching a consensus is less important than gaining all viewpoints (Cohen & Garrett,

1999). It is important the researcher was well-informed enough about the topic to ensure there

was an informative and smooth discussion (Cohen & Garrett, 1999; Padgett, 2016) but also no

disruption to the flow of the focus groups or unnecessary interruptions (Gaizauskaite, 2012).

Qualitative researchers are certain that the more data collected can only generate more

meaning to the phenomena of study so the more sampling perspective, the better (Thyer, 2009).

It is typical for qualitative researchers to use multiple data collection approaches as the study

evolves due to qualitative research being conducted with moderately few controls in a naturalist

setting (Thyer, 2009) but focus groups can be the sole data source in a research study (Linhorst,

2002) which is the case for this current research study.

For this research study, the basic strategies of observation, reading/reviewing,

interviewing, and listening took place throughout the duration of the research study (Thyer,

2009). Observation is a vital tool for collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These observations included seeing, watching, and observing normal and abnormal events throughout the focus groups. Previous studies as well as published and unpublished materials were read, reviewed, and then analyzed. Interviews were conducted with the group of school social workers during the focus groups and listening while observing/noting information heard within the setting during the interactions also occurred.

Prior to the focus groups being conducted, an interview guide was completed with corresponding questions and leading topics (Gaizauskaite, 2012; Linhorst, 2002). This consisted of open-ended questions organized around the current areas of interest and domains. It is suggested the interview guide consist of seven to twelve open ended questions with sufficient space between the questions to write interviewees responses and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Gaizauskaite, 2012). Qualitative interviews need to be flexible and spontaneous to succeed and the researcher needed to have certain probes ready to assist the conversation but also needed to be patient and rely on participants to discuss the meanings of their experiences was needed (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Linhorst, 2002; Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Probes are questions or nondirective phrases to encourage a more complete answer (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Leading questions were not included in the interview guide and close attention to wording was important to avoid confusion (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). The researcher needed to be aware of the sequencing of questions and the possibility of skipping questions that have already been discussed or are no longer relevant to the discussion or study (Padgett, 2016). Along with the sequence of questions, the researcher examined their own biases regarding the questions. This was done so the preconceptions the researcher carries did not unconsciously influence the discussion (Cohen & Garrett, 1999).

Audio recording the focus groups is a preference within data collection. Audio recording allows for capturing what is said to be verbatim as well as vocal intonations and sounds (Gaizauskaite, 2012; Padgett, 2016). It is important that no attempt was made to paraphrase, summarize, or correct grammar in any way. The researcher transcribed both verbal and nonverbal content thoroughly (Gaizauskaite , 2012). The exactness of responses is particularly important when it comes to the researcher coding the responses (Rubin & Babbie, 2017) as this allows for descriptive validity and coherence and safeguards against loosing important information (Gaizauskaite, 2012).

In addition to the data collection tool of audio recording the focus groups, observation notes were taken by the researcher in real time to note representation of experiences during the observations. This researcher logged observations for analysis. These notes from the observations included vital raw data that was unable to be conveyed in the verbal recording and this assisted with directing the researcher to create a more focused follow up focus group (Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Observations included many things unsaid such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice (Padgett, 2016). The researcher was aware of psychological terms and personal preferences when taking field notes of the observations and reflections, due to no observer being a bias-free instrument (Padgett, 2016).

In conducting qualitative social work research, the researcher must occupy various roles and responsibilities that have an influence on the conduct of qualitative research. These roles included flexibility, reflexivity, and capability to multitask (Padgett, 2016). The researcher was involved and was an active participant of the event that is being investigated and was not just an attached observer, which made the researcher apart of the study itself and an instrument of the data collection (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009). The researcher was a part of the research process as much as the participants and the data they provided (Corbrin & Strauss, 2015). In qualitative

social work research, the researcher is an abstract thinker, is process orientated, and needs to

enter the natural setting of the sample and bring a subjective lens in order to observe the subjects

of study (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009). No matter the level of participation from the researcher,

the potential for reactivity needed to be considered due to the possibility of changes from the

researchers' presence (Padgett, 2016).

It is important the researcher collected contextual, rich, and complete descriptive data by

gaining a holistic experiential in vivo perspective that involved a setting to feel, observe, touch,

and live the participants' experiences to highlight subjective meaning and question their

objective reality (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009). This extensive data was produced in the form of

pictures, sketches, diagrams, maps, and written notes and not just recorded detached objective

facts (Thyer, 2009). Transparency required maintaining thorough notes and records to maintain

accountability for decisions and what was being done throughout data collection (Padgett, 2016;

Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Researchers need to be aware of the personal biases they carry and how

to manage them by examining oneself through reflexivity (Padgett, 2016).

The researcher understood and developed empathy for individuals in the field setting and

was able to examine the ongoing process without interrupting, disturbing, or imposing an

outsider's point of view (Thyer, 2009). It is important to note that one observation can shape the

perception of the other as well as the other way around (Thyer, 2009). In qualitative social work

research, it is important to carry out these various roles and responsibilities, but these can also be

considered for good social work practice (Thyer, 2009).

The ever-changing landscape and unpredictability of qualitative inquiry, flexibility and

on the spot, decision making were a part of the researcher's data collection method (Padgett,

2016). The researcher anticipated issues with data collection that could have arisen which is

known as field issues (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Some of these issues include needing to leave the

field site early which may have contributed to a loss of information and having inadequate data

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). Managing data storage of qualitative data was an extremely important

part of data collection. The data stored for this research study included transcripts, field and

observation notes, and rough jottings. Some principles about data handling and storage included

developing backup copies of computer files, using a high-quality recording device for audio

recording information during the focus groups, keeping a master list of the types of information

gathered, and ensure confidentiality of participants by disguising the names in the data (Creswell

& Poth, 2017).

A previous study conducted by Phillippo et al., 2017, sampled 60 school social workers

to explore their practice decisions and what guides those decisions. This study used a series of

focus groups as its methodology. The researchers conducted two separate sets of focus groups.

The focus groups consisted of 6-12 participants with 6 focus groups per two sets totaling 16

focus groups. The focus groups conducted lasted approximately one hour. The first set of focus

groups, participants were grouped by their work setting and explored their professional role

definition and practice experiences (Phillippo et al., 2017). The second set of focus groups,

participants were grouped by corresponding years of postgraduate experiences and explored the

needs for professional support and learning and the use of a practice model and practice

decisions. Data analysis was conducted by reviewing transcripts separately and then developing

analytic categories applied to greater sets of transcripts while categories were refined (Phillippo

et al., 2017). Using NVivo qualitative analysis software, coders reached Cohen's kappa and

proved interrater reliability. Cohen's kappa provides an explanation of the collected data in the

study to show correct representations of the variables measured to test interrater reliability

(McHugh, 2012). This statistical test was created by Jacob Cohen (1960), to account for the

possibility that some researchers can guess on at least one of the variables due to uncertainty (McHugh, 2012). The results showed that participants across the focus groups acknowledged an obvious disconnect involving their school district working conditions and the field of social work which included training, professional norms, and interventions to use (Phillippo et al., 2017). These focus groups that were conducted allowed the researchers to be provided elaborate responses from the participants. The researchers stated it was observed that the participants contributed more information due to hearing other group members' responses regardless of if the responses were similar or different from their experiences (Phillippo et al., 2017).

Data Analysis Methods

Grounded theory is the systematic making of data-based theory to create explanations, concepts, hypotheses, descriptions, and meanings of a phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thyer, 2009) with a goal of explaining an action, practice, or process (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). Grounded theory begins with observations and then explores the themes, common strategies, and patterns that develop. This analysis was not meant to confirm or disconfirm specific hypotheses, but the researcher needed to constantly be comparing data from the participants and going back and forth between participants to fill in the gaps to create ideas about an emerging hypothesis or theory (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). In-depth interviews and conversations with people are what produces the dynamism characteristics within grounded theory, and this can be supported by conducting focus groups to help develop the theory (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). Grounded theory interviews should focus on the process within the questions at first but later move towards theoretical interests identified in the literature review (Padgett, 2016).

Central to qualitative research is the process of coding, which entails making sense of the transcript from the focus groups, observations, and documents (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The

researcher used the procedures from grounded theory for developing categories of information (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This is known as open coding, and the researcher assessed the data, including the transcripts, field notes and observations, and documents for relevant categories of information supported by the literature. This step was done to allow categories to emerge from the data rather than forcing it into preconceived categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padget, 2016; Sims-Schouten & Thapa, 2023). During this step, the researcher attempted to saturate categories until new information attained did not provide additional insight. When the data collected reached a point where the themes and codes created were redundant and no longer providing new information, the notion of saturation was attained (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016).

Included in this open coding was the use of concepts pulled from existing theories, previous research, and literature, but the overall objective remained inductive by creating a conceptual framework featuring categories (Padgett, 2016). A previous study conducted by Surgue et al., 2016, started their data analysis with a literature review prior to data collection. This study examined factors contributing to chronic absenteeism, specific interventions and engagement strategies used by agencies within the community studied, and the fit between the two (Sugure et al., 2016). A preliminary code book was developed from information found in the literature review. Three focus groups occurred at each agency along with thirteen interviews (Sugure et al., 2016). Both the interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, recorded, and then transcribed. The data from the transcripts were uploaded into the NVivo qualitative analysis software and thematic analysis was conducted (Sugure et al., 2016). This data went through two rounds of coding by the authors to collapse and expand the codes as well as develop themes and categories. The authors noted the rich data collected from the focus groups provided to the complexity of information for this research study (Sugure et al., 2016).

For this current research study, after the first set of categories were created, the researcher identified a single category from the list of open codes as the dominant phenomenon of concentration. Once this dominant open code was selected, the researcher then situated that dominant code as the main feature of the theory (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher then returned to the database to gather more information and categories related to this dominant phenomenon. This is known as axial coding, when the database is reviewed to provide additional understanding to specific codes related to or to explain the dominant phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A codebook was created by the researcher to finalize the list of codes with descriptions for each code (Creswell and Poth, 2017).

The information gathered from the above coding phases was organized into a diagram that presents a theoretical model of the method under study. These are the steps that were taken to generate and build a theory. The intersection of categories is what became the theory. These theories then generated statements and hypotheses that connected the categories within the coding template. This step is known as selective coding (Crewell & Poth, 2017). In grounded theory, the emphasis needs to be on the values, beliefs, views, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of the participants rather than on the methods of research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The data gathered from the situations, settings, and respondents, went through constant comparative analysis conducted by the researcher. The researcher went beyond the codes and themes to see the greater meaning of the data. This procedure began with the creation of the codes, establishment of themes from the codes, and then the configuration of themes into greater elements of concepts that made sense of the collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The steps involved in the coding allowed the analysis of data to be created from the ground up and permitted the researcher to create and test out categories meant to capture the collected data (Sims-Schouten & Thapa, 2023). It is the role of the researcher to constantly be updating and

revising concepts to add new concepts, dimensions, and properties when new relationships are seen between concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Theorizing allowed the researcher to conceptualize the data without producing a theory (Padgett, 2016). Grounded theory often uses thematic analysis to identify a lived experience and address commonalities across reported data (Padgett, 2016). The search of creating midrange theories has made grounded theory an attractive and suitable outcome of qualitative research, but the researcher was aware of some challenges (Padgett, 2016). There are times when the study may not provide a completion of categories or a development of theories and identifying when saturation has occurred can be questioned (Akesson et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016).

The software of NVivo was used to store data and facilitate coding and analysis. NVivo helps manage, analyze, and shape qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). This software allowed the researcher to search for hierarchies and connections among codes. NVivo also assisted with auto-coding the data (Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017) and provided security by storing files and databases together in a single file which enabled the researcher to easily influence the data and perform searches (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

A previous study conducted by Ambrose-Miller and Ashcroft (2016), utilized focus groups as the data collection method and thematic content analysis with grounded theory as the data method analysis. This study's sample consisted of social work faculty members of a Canadian University as well as educators, researchers, and practitioners attending the annual Canadian Association for Social Work Education (Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016). This study looked at identifying barriers as well as facilitators to collaboration. Eleven individuals participated in the semi-structured focus groups. Grounded theory was used to analyze the data

which went through three phases of mutual coding, focused coding, and axial coding. After these

phases of coding, a preliminary coding scheme was developed to identify major themes

(Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016). Six themes emerged from the data which include

collaborative culture, self-identity, role clarification, decision making, power dynamics, and

communication. The authors of this study noted that this study produced a great deal of

communication between the participants and provided rich data for analysis (Ambrose-Miller &

Ashcroft, 2016).

It is important to consider ethical issues across all data analyses. One type of ethical issue

that needed to be addressed was the protection of participants from harm. It is important the

researcher avoided disclosing information that would harm the participants and ensure

identifiable data to a particular source or participant, was not disclosed (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

To avoid these ethical issues, the researcher masked the names of participants, assigned aliases to

the data, and created composite participant profiles. Another ethical issue that was addressed is

issues surrounding the disclosure of comprehensive findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The

researcher needed to be aware of not siding with participants and being sure to disclose all

findings, not just the positive results. Negative findings needed to be reported if they were

relevant to the analysis, especially in evidence-based practice processes (Creswell & Poth, 2017;

Rubin & Babbie, 2017). It is also important the researcher did not limit access to the analysis

procedures and limited the lack of agreement about how the findings were represented. To avoid

these ethical issues, the researcher inserted member-checking strategies and ensured the

procedures and results were shared (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Issues of Trustworthiness

A difficult question qualitative researchers have to answer is being able to define what a

valid, good, or trustworthy qualitative study is (Padgett, 2016). This type of study is one that is

carried out ethically and fairly and the experiences of the participants are represented as closely as possible in the findings (Padgett, 2016). It is important to check the rigor of the techniques and methods of the qualitative study from the earliest stages within the current research. The process of conceptualization within the research process began with the researcher considering what they brought to the study which can include their view of themselves and others, personal history, and political and ethical issues. When researchers position themselves in the research, they need to acknowledge how their interpretation from their own historical, cultural, and personal experiences flows into their research (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

One way to check is to determine how much the setting is reacting to the researcher, which is known as reactivity. Another is to examine the researcher's perspective or biases involved in the study as well as the biases that the subjects of the study have that could affect the method or findings of the study. It is important to identify how the researcher's biases influence the study as well as how the respondent biases influence the study (Thyer, 2009). Reflexivity is often applied to acknowledge the subjectivity of the researcher (Padgett, 2016).

To ensure the quality of qualitative studies, researchers can increase reliability and validity of the study depending on the researcher's capability to propose studies with the applicable methods as well as the skills the researcher carries (Thyer, 2009). Carrying out an ethical study to produce findings that closely capture and represent the participants' experiences and validating the accuracy of the account, increases the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). A measure that is reliable does not guarantee it is valid (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Reliability

When data collection procedures and analysis produce the same response for differing participants within the research process, reliability has been achieved (Thyer, 2009). This means other researchers completing similar observations and evaluations would create comparable explanations and results, which means the more reliable the measure, the less random errors in it (Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). When various forms of the same questions are asked and there is a correspondence between the responses participants provide, this can be justified as a reliability check (Thyer, 2009). For this study, the questions asked to participants during the focus groups were open-ended which required participants to provide an in-depth explanation and exploration of their perspectives. The researcher was prepared with specific probes that were referred to when expansion was needed with responses. The use of open-ended questions and probes when needed protected against publicly pleasing responses, which helped the researcher assess internal consistency.

Qualitative research makes every effort for precise measurement and findings, but the methods often use purposive or biased samples, irregularities or atypical events, and the findings are targeted to conclusions that are more general rather than precise conclusions, which makes the generalizability considered low (Thyer, 2009). Ensuring data recordings are accurate by selecting appropriate research methods and interpreting the data logically, empirically, and replicable, is significant to intensifying the study's reliability (Thyer, 2009). This researcher established recording procedures for the data that was collected. The first account of data was the verbatim data that was recorded from the focus groups and transcribed word for word. The researcher ensured good quality recording devices were used and the data transcribed included overlaps and pauses (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thyer, 2009). The next data recorded was the observation notes and logs. These were completed while the focus groups occurred to ensure amplified memory of events (Thyer, 2009). A field journal was kept by the researcher, which

contained insightful experiences that pertained to emotions, mistakes, and ideas, and possible

concerns about the process. This researcher also kept an ongoing log of the interpretations and

analysis of what they performed throughout the processes in the field setting (Thyer, 2009).

All the methods mentioned above for establishing recording procedures also ensured the

researcher stayed as close to the empirical data as possible. This means recording and reporting

the subjective, descriptive meanings, and verbatim accounts of the participants (Thyer, 2009).

The researcher used exact quotes from participants to reinforce the presumed statements about

the data and included a thorough description of what was being investigated. The researcher also

analyzed how many statements were made across instances that supported the believed

conclusion (Thyer, 2009). This is how the researcher resolved concerns with internal reliability.

A research design can produce internal and external issues and reliability is contingent on

the solution. The researcher used grounded theory to highlight concepts, new hypotheses,

proposals, and discovered theories with the collected data from the field setting rather than

relying on theories that already existed (Thyer, 2009). This analytic approach involved a series of

processes for collecting and explaining data and a theoretical framework (Thyer, 2009). The

form in which the theory is presented was independent of the process of the generated theory

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). When independent researchers create the same paradigms or themes in

similar or the same settings, external reliability is attained (Thyer, 2009). When a researcher is

given a collection of previously created themes or concepts which can match the data the same

way the original researcher did, internal reliability is achieved (Thyer, 2009).

Dependability is also a term for reliability in qualitative research and this refers to the

researcher's effort to justify changing conditions within their observations as well as

modifications within the design that may arise once they are collecting data in the field setting

(Thyer, 2009). This is to reach elevated steadiness and fidelity of observations across different periods of time and settings (Thyer, 2009) and the procedures are traceable and documented (Padgett, 2016). The researcher developed a document that included a running explanation of the procedures throughout the study. This is known as an audit trail and will entail the raw data, analysis and interpretations, and findings (Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). This helped the researcher ensure that all data was collected and arranged for analysis and provided details of the names and descriptions of the coded data (Thyer, 2009). This also assisted with incorporating the write-up of findings and the storing of materials and data after research was completed (Thyer, 2009). An audit trail is important to justify if the strategies were properly implemented throughout the research study (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Researchers need to develop a consistent method for handling their data to increase reliability (Thyer, 2009). The researcher used NVivo computer software as a data management tool for managing the collected data. This software assisted the researcher with organizing and managing data, the growth of reproducible analysis, and the audit trail mentioned above.

Validity

When a researcher can see what they think they are seeing, and the empirical measure sufficiently replicates the real meaning of the concepts being studied, this is considered finding validity in qualitative research (Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). The researcher must deliver a series of evidence and a collection of narrative justifications that are trustworthy and plausible to establish credibility (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009). Various sources must be used to test the interpretations and findings from data collection sources (Thyer, 2009).

Just like ensuring rigor of techniques and methods, reactivity, researcher biases, and respondent biases, are three broad headings that can threaten the validity of a research study. The

potential to misrepresent effects of the qualitative researcher's presence in the field refers to

reactivity, and the researcher's bias can distort the findings. When it comes to respondent biases,

there is a potential for information to be presented differently than other witnesses perceived it or

the possibility of information being withheld or answer in some way to distort the true views and

behaviors (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). Reflexivity assisted

with these threats and was practiced by the researcher throughout the research study. This helped

recognize how their assumptions and pre-conceptions possibly influenced the gathering and

processing of the data (Thyer, 2009). This became a part of the research method, and the

researcher examined themselves and disclosed their understandings about the values, biases, and

experiences they brought to the research study, so the reader understood the position of the

researcher and how they have assumed the investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thyer, 2009).

When a subject is being studied, the researcher must collect data that is accurately

identified and described to ensure an accurate representation of the current reality, so it is

credible to the participants as well as the individuals who are reading and checking the results of

the study (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009). It is important the researcher can prove adequate time

was spent in the field setting to be able to justify their representation of it. The journal kept by

the researcher was used to question this reality of the interpretations and findings (Thyer, 2009).

The site where the focus groups occurred was frequently visited by the participants and

researcher on separate occasions for various reasons, so the possibility of misrepresentations

generated by the researcher's presence were weakened due to the site being used often by the

school social work networking group (Thyer, 2009). The use of prolonged engagement allowed

the researcher to examine their own perceptions and biases as well as the biases of the

participants which reduced the impact of reactivity and respondent bias (Creswell & Poth, 2017;

Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). When multiple subjective realities can be revealed in a

study, this too can lessen the concern for respondent biases and increase the importance of engagement with participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Prolonged engagement allowed the researcher to learn the context and culture more so than they already did, build rapport with the gatekeepers and participants, and check for misrepresentations that could come from falsehoods brought forth from participants or the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher was familiar with the field site and participants, which confirms this validation strategy.

When samples and setting events can be matched to one another and similarity can be established, transferability and external validity is attained (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009). In this case, purposeful sampling assisted the researcher with replicating the findings (Thyer, 2009). This researcher chose the population of school social workers by purposeful sampling to gain evolving perceptions about what is significant and pertinent to the research questions and developing findings (Thyer, 2009). The researcher conducted across-case analysis to test findings and interests to specific questions (Thyer, 2009). Transferability refers to the generalizability of the findings from the study, not of the sample, and it is dependent on a match of characteristics as well as the information necessary to test the degree of match between cases, which was provided by the researcher (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009).

There are methods and means that can assist with increasing validity and credibility. By following precise details about the research design being employed and the researcher's theoretical perspective, threats to internal or external validity were avoided (Thyer, 2009). For this study, the researcher became familiar with the setting and topic being researched, ensured there is sufficient data to analyze, ensured systematic comparisons, and created logical links between the data, analysis, and the findings (Padgett, 2016). The researcher ensured originality by identifying new conceptual interpretations but also challenged or improved existing concepts, practices, and ideas. The researcher revised their hypothesis or analysis until all findings were

accounted for throughout all the examined cases. This practice is known as negative case analysis and will increase the probability of gaining credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thyer, 2009). This method was used by the researcher to show there has been extensive searches for discredited evidence and irregular cases that do not fit into the interpretations made by the researcher (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). It is possible the researcher may not find negative case analysis, but it is important to practice so the researcher can use it to provide an alternate explanation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The researcher provided updated categories that capture completeness of the experience studied and generate findings that make sense to the participants (Padgett, 2016). The researcher showing how the interpretations can be used in the everyday world will demonstrate the usefulness of the study and how the analyses can generate future research (Padgett, 2016). Looking for negative case analysis is meant to provide a fuller explanation of a concept (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Every feature of data collection and analysis must be outlined and authenticated by others (Thyer 2009). This was ensured by creating thorough logs and accounts of the researcher's processes, key decisions, methods, and potential consequences. This is known as leaving an audit trail and will allow outside researchers to recreate the work of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thyer, 2009). It is important this method be used to cross-check or critically evaluate the collection of data and analysis (Thyer, 2009). By leaving a detailed audit trail, this assisted the researcher with creating abundant descriptions of the content at the completion of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thyer, 2009). These detailed transparent descriptions will allow other researchers and readers to decide how versatile the findings are from one case to another (Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). This researcher created an appendix to their study which included a full description of all related factors regarding the study. By doing these steps, the reader will

be able to reenact the developed analysis, check the transformation fidelity of concepts, and the rational validity of the conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thyer, 2009).

When the researcher demonstrates the study's findings are tightly linked to the data, confirmability has been achieved (Padgett, 2016). This study achieved this due to the collected data coming directly from the accounts and statements made by the school social workers during the focus group interviews. When a final report produces findings that readers and other researchers can apply to the context or populations they are concerned with, transferability has been established (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Transferability in qualitative studies refers to the comparison of findings to other settings and contexts rather than to larger populations from which the sample was drawn (Padgett, 2016). This was achieved by the researcher providing enough detail about the participants and study context that a future reader can be confident the findings can be transferred to other similar populations and situations.

Limitations and Delimitations

Often within the helping profession, researchers are interested in studying difficulties within the populations they serve but this can pose some risks (Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Social workers often conduct research in their own knowledge of practice settings due to the want to improve practice. Some advantages include already having knowledge about the topic, having higher comfort levels, and accessibility to respondents and a research site (Padgett, 2016). When participants are recruited exclusively through service settings, this can produce a skewed sample due to the exclusion of nonservice users (Padgett, 2016). Disadvantages include being too close to the research and role confusion (Padgett, 2016). Other threats can include reactivity, research biases, and respondent biases. For this current research study, researcher bias can be seen as a limitation due to the researcher being a school social worker just like the participants. Due to this, there was a concern for the interpretations and observations being

clouded by personal opinions and preconceptions about roles of school social workers as well as

school social workers conducting home visits. Due to the researcher currently being employed as

a school social worker, there was a concern for overfamiliarity of the current topic (Padgett,

2016).

Potential for coercion can be seen as tricky when the study involves co-workers or for

example in this research study, the researcher was a part of the school social work networking

group being studied. Although this can be seen as a positive due to the possibility of a trusting

relationship between the researcher and participants, there was a concern for a lack of motivation

or the possibility of deception or social desirability bias (Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Participants may be concerned with answering truthfully due to being with co-workers and other

social work professionals within a focus group setting, which can create some concerns with a

power imbalance (Linhorst, 2002; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). On the other hand, participants may

be more willing to share sensitive information due to the support of the group (Linhorst, 1999).

When participants are aware of being observed, either by the researcher or other participants, this

can compel them to behave in ways to meet certain expectations for the study. This is known as

obtrusive observation (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Which can lead to the possibility of biases within

the findings.

Although the expectation of asking for consent is meant to be handled with

thoughtfulness, this can be seen as interfering with a professional relationship and concerns of

coercion need to be thought about and addressed. Every effort was made to ensure the anonymity

of participants' identities and confidentiality of the information they report. Due to the current

research design and population of participants, this study ran the risk of breaching

confidentiality. This was due to the data collection method being focus groups and having no

control over what participants discuss outside of the focus groups. Due to the participants being

school social workers and the researcher being a school social worker, the legal obligation and

requirements of mandated reporting could be a reason confidentiality may be broken.

Role ambiguity can transpire in any research study but specific to focus groups, the in-

depth conversations that occurred surrounding naturalistic inquiry confirms the possibility of

ethical dilemmas can occur at any given time (Padgett, 2016). This study created the possibility

of participants disclosing qualities and viewpoints of themselves that may create feelings of

disbelief, annoyance, resentment, and force participants to face qualities of themselves they

normally would not consider (Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The unique qualities of

trust and passion within qualitative research provided feelings of security to be honest and

transparent about opinions, dishonesty, and morally unlawful acts (Padgett, 2016).

Another limitation for this research study is the sole data collection method was focus

groups and this was the only data source and there was no other source to interpret the data.

When the study involves multiple data collection methods, member-checking with a few brief

follow-up interviews with individuals can be seen as a validation strategy (Creswell & Poth,

2017; Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). This researcher conducted one-on-one individual

interviews with participants as a validation strategy. The participants of this research study were

not involved in confirming or disconfirming the accuracy of the research interpretations or

observations (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). This researcher was the only observer and only coder that

classified the collected observations and data from focus groups, which can be seen as a

limitation to validation.

One limitation to the study's reliability occurred due to the possibility of not having an

intercoder agreement or interrater reliability. One researcher conducted this current research

study so the transcription of data was analyzed and coded by one person which can be seen as a

limit to reliability (Crewell & Poth, 2017; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). One thing this researcher did to lessen the concern for this was developing a preliminary code list and establishing a common software to plan for coding. The software mentioned above is known as NVivo. Another way the researcher limited this concern was the researcher applied the codes to additional transcripts included in the data to assess consistency (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The researcher involved the participants throughout the research process as much as possible, but the participants were not involved in key research decisions such as developing data collection protocols or being involved in the data analysis and interpretation which can be seen as a limit to validity (Creswell and Poth, 2017). There was not an opportunity for this research study to involve a co-researcher as a validation strategy. This research study cannot guarantee a peer-review will occur either, as a validation strategy.

External validity contributed to the generalizability of this research study which is considered low due to the purposive sampling method of school social workers from one networking group. The personal nature of the measurements and observations made by this researcher produced results that carry the possibility of not being replicated by another independent researcher (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The comprehensiveness of the in-depth interviews that occurred during the focus groups can be less generalizable than results that are based off standardized measurements and rigorous sampling (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The sample selection included social workers from public school districts, vocational schools, and the Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15, all in the same general area in Pennsylvania. Although each school district is a part of different geographical regions (urban, rural, suburban), the findings produced low generalizability to other school districts.

Data saturation is considered the point in the study when collecting more data in the

qualitative study will not enhance what has already been collected and no additional data has

been found (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Thyer, 2009). Saturation is a characteristic of grounded

theory that creates difficulties for many researchers (Oktay, 2012). For this study, discriminant

sampling was not able to be utilized to assist with determining saturation (Crewell & Poth,

2017). The purposeful sampling method of selecting school social workers did not allow the

researcher to gather additional information from individuals different from the participants

initially interviewed to determine if the outcome of the study holds true for additional

participants.

Summary

Although the investment of new knowledge exceeds all other motives for conducting

qualitative research in social work, other reasons include the want to delve into a phenomenon

that little is known about to capture the lived experiences and create meaning from the

perspectives of those who have lived it even if it contains emotional depth and sensitivity. Other

reasons include wanting to study complex social processes, giving expression to a group and

creating the possibility to unify research with social activism and advocacy or exploring specific

practices, interventions, and programs (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009). The final presentation or

written report is meant to include participant voices, the researcher's reflexivity, a multiplex

interpretation and description of the phenomena, and the contribution to the literature or a

request for change (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

School social work is a practice that uses a conceptual framework and education to blend

knowledge and skills to guide practice (Charles & Stone, 2019). Calling for a more ecologically

grounded social work, this type of practice centers the students and families of the school

community as targets for interventions (Charles & Stone, 2019). Known as a deeply embodied practice that brings in all senses and emotions into performance and progress, home visiting needs to be researched qualitatively (Ferguson, 2018).

There is no drafted plan to assist school social workers with conducing home visits but applying evidence-based practice that supports the home visit, school social workers will be better equipped to deliver services and supports to families in the home setting as well as being more confident doing so (Ferguson, 2018; Lyter & Abott, 2007). The complexities with researching home visits often come from needing to include all empirical evidence. It is important this information includes the experiences and perceptions of the intervention of the home visit by way of in-depth comprehensive personal communication with the school social worker (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Allen & Tracy, 2008; Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Harden, 2019; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2015; Manz & Ventresco, 2019; Muzicant & Peled, 2018; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Shultz, 2020). The information provided from school social workers needs to include their reality of strengths, challenges, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and desired supports about their experiences (Hancock & Pelton, 1989; Nathans et al., 2019; Peterson & Roggman, 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020). It is important studying home visits go beyond researching descriptions of services, tasks, and activities, to analyze the features that influence the practice choices of school social workers to ensure the effectiveness of home visits (Kelly & Stone, 2009; Manz & Vantresco, 2019; Nathans et al., 2019; Openshaw, 2008; Roggman et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020).

The data collection method of focus groups helped explore a range of ideas and differing perspectives around home visits from the purposeful sample of school social workers. Focus groups allowed for rich data to be collected and assisted with in-depth analysis (Reynaert et al., 2022). The data analysis method of grounded theory was utilized to uncover the meaning of

concepts and social processes of school social workers surrounding home visits (Sims-Schouten & Thapa, 2023) and provided an emphasis on the views, beliefs, feelings, values, ideologies, and assumptions rather than the method of research (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Every effort was made to ensure this research study was carried out ethically and the results produced were valid and trustworthy. The many methods listed above assisted with creating a trustworthy study and the needed steps taken during the earliest stages of the research study enhanced credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Limitations and delimitations to the study were identified, and the measures taken to lessen these were outlined above.

Considering the rationales of conducting qualitative research objectively, they merge properly with the values and mandates of the social work profession (Thyer, 2009). The social work values of independence and social justice are congruent with qualitative research (Padgett, 2016). Producing practice knowledge for the social work profession is of importance and qualitative social work research is a practical method to do so (Thyer, 2009). Research and open discussion to elicit deeper reflection among school social workers about home visiting is vital to understanding the practice (Hancock & Pelton, 1989).

Chapter Four: Findings

A comprehensive review of literature has been conducted surrounding school social workers to examine the home visit as an intervention method for school districts. This review of the literature in Chapters 1-2 has provided a history of school social workers and home visits, a conceptual framework of theories and perspectives that support home visiting, previous and current educational laws, national practice model for school social work practice, current programs that currently utilize a home visiting model, and past research studies on home visiting.

This extensive review of literature has provided an explanation for the need for further research surrounding school social workers and the practice behavior of conducting home visits for school districts. Chapter 3 has provided a detailed methodology that has included the research questions and identified the variables to be conceptualized and operationalized. Chapter 3 has also provided a rationale of the suitability of the methodology, research approach intended to address the research questions, history and background of the phenomenon, description the research sample, ethical considerations pertaining to the participants, data collection methods and analysis, and then concludes with a detailed discussion on the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 4 consists of the findings from the current research study. It begins with restating the research questions and then jumps into a summary of literature which supports the research questions. The findings from this research study are connected to the literature and this chapter includes a description of the chosen research design, rationale for the data analysis, description of the participants involved in the research study, and then the research questions are discussed in detail to show connection to the findings.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the practice of home visiting by school social workers conducting home visits for school districts. Four research questions will be applied to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. These include:

1. With home visiting being listed as a practice behavior on the School Social Worker National Evaluation Framework, under what conditions are school social workers conducting home visits?

2. What do school social workers see as the benefits to conducting home visits?

3. What do school social workers see as the barriers to conducting home visits?

4. What do school social workers need to be successful in conducting home visits?

Summary of Literature

Children's needs cannot be based solely on the five hours a day they are in the teacher's eye and inside the school building. The time children spend outside of the school environment is important to note due to the inequalities that potentially have an impact on and influence student success (Dumont & Ready, 2020; Ilhan et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2018). The outside influences that are not in a school's purview tend to cause the biggest impact on the lack of achievement sustained by students (Downey & Condron, 2016). One school social worker, T.C. stated,

> Um I feel like, this one father, like, I think how it impacts is you have a different relationship um with the family, which I think then you get to understand a little bit more of what they are going through and then I feel like, with teachers, they sometimes do not understand but then I was able to see, for example a father of 5 was trying to figure out how to navigate that and then was homeless and then now I don't know, different things and just being able see something and being able to take that back to the teacher and saying, there is a lot going on and there are reasons why the father can't ya know, meet with you during the day due to him working twelve jobs or whatever, 3 jobs at the time and then hopefully in my mind, trickles down to the child and how, I don't want to say treated that sounds terrible but I just feel like, that opens up my taking back that information to understand this is not personal and it is not the father not wanting to do something. He did, he just needed support.

This school social worker confirmed how outside influences and inequalities tend to be unknown to school staff within the school district, but these often create an impact on the students' education.

Individual and family characteristics are both components of educational success (Ruzojcic et al., 2018) and it is known the environmental and social influences can negatively affect a child's role as a student and when their emotional and physical needs are not being fulfilled, their capacity to learn tends to be impacted (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Ilhan et al., 2019). School social worker, B.G. corresponded with this statement by saying, "I agree, that I think it so informative to see families in their kind of natural habitat and what that looks like and what that day-to-day um life looks like. I think it helps with like, with like, that empathy producing, and it sometimes really stinks that we sometimes have to see it like, to get it." The stress in students' lives and the stressors in their home environment often do not allow students to respond effectively to the school environment (Openshaw, 2008). A child cannot be labeled as home selves or school selves and a complete understanding of the child must be fully known (Charles & Stone, 2019).

School social workers can provide a unique opportunity by being the link between the student's home, school, and community (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Richard & Sosa, 2024; Sherman, 2016). School social worker, T.J. concurred and stated, "I agree because I would see one of my biggest um roles or something that I try to make my biggest roles is that I am the go between the school and the parents and I try to be someone like, positive that is on their side." Bridging the gap between education and the psychosocial wellbeing of students is essential in success for all students within a school district, not just students categorized at-risk (Sherman, 2016).

School districts often have a more substantial role than just with educational outcomes (Richard & Sosa, 2014). School social workers within a school system can work with the other systems involved in the family's life to gain a deeper understanding of the obstacles students face due to these being greater than the school's educational knowledge and foundation (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Wei et al., 2018). School social worker, B.M. stated,

With our role and as a school like, we are more than just giving your child education. We have resources to help you with um reaching out to people for housing, for mental health services, for food banks, for clothing banks, and things like that, and I think that's important that they know that it's kind of a, you know, 360 picture that we do more than just want your child in the classroom. Yes, that's important but we want to make sure that all their basic needs are being taken care of.

School social worker, B.M. confirmed working with students' families and other systems involved due to school districts having a responsibility bigger than just education.

The home is where students first learn, and their parents or caregivers are the primary teachers (Allen & Tracy, 2004). School social workers can assist with gaining an enhanced understanding of the barriers to learning and approaches to removing them (Smith & Todd, 2019). "To me, social work is about removing barriers," said school social worker, J.M.,

And so like, if, if like, mom is not going to do it, what it takes to get the kid a pair of glasses, like, I'm gonna get permission to put the kid in my car and take them and get the eye appointment. Like, we're just doing it, we're doing it because mom is not my client, the kid is and they're gonna suffer if they don't get what they need. So, that's where I see social work being like advantageous to a school and if we're not doing it, then we're going to lose our, our glow.

School social worker, J.M., proved the importance of removing barriers that affect learning.

Home visiting has been used across different fields of human services for many years as an intervention especially in social work based on the advantages of providing services to families in their natural environments (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Damashek et al., 2023; Nathans et

al., 2019; Schultz et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). School social worker,

J.M. stated,

> I frequently do home visits alone without school personnel, but I will often do home
>
> visits with CYS, JPO, MST, or Justice Works. Um the nature of my home visits is
>
> definitely attendance, providing stuff, getting signatures, um just to meet the family
>
> where they are. It is one thing to have a phone call with a parent, but I am a huge
>
> advocate of home visits and like, to get to know what is going on, I am going to do that
>
> um so I'm, I am a huge fan of them.

This statement validated the use of the home visit as an intervention not only for the school

district but also other human services.

This research study was conducted to gain an understanding of school social workers'

reality concerning their understanding, attitudes, beliefs, and motivation surrounding conducting

home visits for school districts and investigate the practice of home visiting. The School Social

Workers Association of America has developed a national evaluation framework for school

social workers to be utilized as a performance model to illustrate practice approaches and

performance expectations for school social workers. Similar to this evaluation framework, the

state of Pennsylvania has developed a practice framework that also provides tasks and

responsibilities for school social workers. Included in the tasks and responsibilities for school

social workers, is the practice behavior of conducting home visits.

Chosen Research Design

Qualitative research focuses on naturalistic context and details rather than statistical

insight (Padgett, 2016) and specific to research within social work, it is meant to use an

individual's observable behavior as well as their spoken/written language to produce descriptive

data (Gaizauskaite, 2012; Thyer, 2009). It studies a human phenomenon by making sense of and understanding the experiences participants have from their own frame of reference (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thyer, 2009).

This research study utilized focus groups as the sample for data collection due to this researcher exploring a range of ideas and differing perspectives of school social workers surrounding home visits. Cohen & Garrett (1999) explains that reaching a consensus is less important than gaining all viewpoints during a focus group. These focus groups consisted of a semi-structured interview format to question a group of school social workers from a specific school social work networking group. This specific networking group was chosen as the sample due to evidence showing that when interviewees are similar and cooperative with one another, the interaction among participants yields the best information and makes for a beneficial way to collect qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The interactions during the conducted focus groups were used to collect a mixture of experiences, opinions, needs, evaluations, and ideas (Gaizauskaite, 2012) surrounding the topic of home visits specific to school social workers conducting them. The interactions and information that is supplied during focus groups often delivers information that would not be obtained or discussed by a researcher using surveys or individual interviews (Gaizauskaite, 2012). "I'm glad that these issues are being addressed", said school social worker, R.H., "I mean that sincerely that I appreciate you, that we need to develop these questions and need to be asked, to be asked in a serious structured manner."

The focus group method for this research study was in itself, a significant research outcome and provided rich discussions about home visiting as a practice as well as gaining professional insights about the participants' perceptions (Lamorey, 2017). School social worker, T.J., began the second focus group by stating,

I don't know if this has to do with your what you're working on but um, it was really nice
to have like, that discussion [the first focus group]. Um, I feel like we should maybe like,
when we have our networking meetings, like pick topics kind of similar to this and like,
just have like, that open forum of being able to talk because it was like, nice to hear what
other people are doing and their feedback. So um I didn't expect to like, enjoy that as
much as I did, so I thought that was something maybe to consider. I don't know how we
would do it, but.

This statement was followed up by school social worker, T.C., who stated,

And to be honest, too, like I was kind of feeling like, I don't know, really tired and
burned, not burned out, but just tired and it kind of was like, energizing to be like, okay,
I, you know, I wasn't thinking that way or you know, I don't know, it was just very
helpful that I think more about kind of how I follow up with stuff.

These encouraging statements from some of the school social workers show the comfortability of
the school social workers during the conducted focus groups.

Going where the respondents are rather than the other way around as well as selecting a
site that will not raise power issues within the participants, is important for qualitative research
(Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). Padgett (2016) explains that the setting of the focus
group can make a difference in the comfortability of the participants, which can affect the
contributions. The focus groups conducted for the research study were conducted virtually and in
person at the Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15, where the school social work networking group
meets regularly. The room where the in-person focus group occurred provided a private
conference room space with tables and chairs shaped like a horseshoe. This set up encouraged
group discussion during the focus groups.

The intended goal was to have at least two sets of focus groups meet two-three times each. Due to participant availability and turnout, three sets of focus groups were conducted. One group met two separate times and the other two groups met one time each. The first group of participants involved in the first set of focus groups met in person. The second and third group of participants involved in the other set of focus groups met virtually. Conducting three sets of focus groups allowed for an iterative process to occur, which was a benefit to this research study. The sequence of the iterative process allowed for this researcher to refine the questions asked during each focus group and build from each conducted focus group to improve the design to gain the best results. The continual discussions of school social worker's needs became the main theme within the iterative process between each focus group. During each focus group, school social workers defined needs regarding their specific practices at their school district. As each focus group continued, the needs identified were built upon from one group to another. This iterative process became a part of the data analysis and synthesis section in Chapter 5 and supported the creation of the memos and diagrams. These are both explained in detail in Chapter 5. Figure 4 below shows progression of the changes of needs identified by the school social workers.
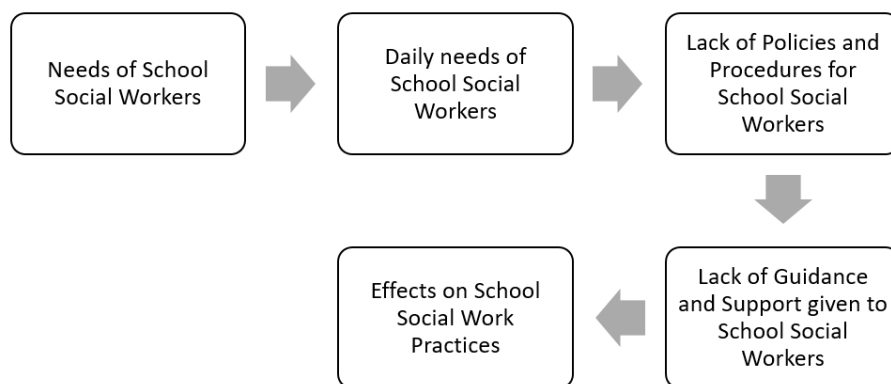
Figure 4: Iterative Process

Every focus group lasted between one and a half to two hours, for 300 minutes, which equals 5 hours of total data collection. The length of time for each individual focus group was based on the efficacy of conversation between participants and researcher. This researcher also conducted individual one-on-one in-depth interviews with two school social workers separately.

This researcher noted that the conducted focus groups allowed for elaborate responses from participants and this researcher observed participants being willing to contribute information based on other group members' responses even if their responses and opinions differed from others within the focus group. Disagreements occurred throughout the focus groups, but these remained friendly and allowed the discussion to include multiple perspectives. School social worker, J.M. commented at one time during the discussion, "But I digress on all of it. Absolutely hear your woes and I recognize um we're on the other side of it from one another, but all, all respect. Truly love the discussion."

Rationale for Data Analysis

Analyzing home visits is often more challenging than other interventions such as interventions that occur inside the classroom (Lamorey, 2017). Included in social work practice, education, and research, is the foundation of developing theory (Akesson, et al., 2018). Social work researchers use theory to advance the visions from the interpretation of data and find value in their research (Akesson et al., 2018). Ongoing throughout the data analysis phase is the ongoing practice of developing theory (Akesson et al., 2018; Padgett, 2016). For this study to explain the findings, the analysis of grounded theory will be used to deliver results of a simple exploratory theory from the collected data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Thyer, 2009).

Grounded theory was chosen by this researcher due to the need to uncover a better understanding of the perceptions and practices of school social workers conducting home visits.

This research method allowed this researcher to reveal the meaning of social processes, research, and concepts that have included the behaviors of a group of school social workers that began with a set of observations and then drawing on conclusions from those observations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sims-Schouten & Thapa, 2023).

This analysis began with observations from the conducted focus groups and then were broken down into common strategies and themes to create patterns. This was done by the researcher going back and forth between participants' recorded responses during each focus group to compare and create ideas about emerging theories or hypotheses.

Grounded theory can develop social work theories relevant to social work practice and fits well into social work roots of the person-in-environment perspective (Oktay, 2012). It is important to show relevance of home visiting to social work practice and theory to others other than just social workers. School social worker, B.G. spoke about this being a challenge and, "Trying to advocate for their [school social workers] ability to leave campus to go do things that are very aligned with our NASW Code of Ethics and social work 101 um was a very difficult process because trying to get somebody who doesn't understand the nature of our work to understand why it was important to go out." This confirms the significance of not just school social workers understanding the practice of conducting home visits, but others within the school district and other human services.

Demographics of Participants

It is important the researcher has some control over the theoretical relevance of the collected data as this is key for uncovering categories and emerging theoretical properties to develop theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Research studies require different approaches, but previous studies have benefited from using preexisting social networks (Cohen & Garrett, 1999).

That is, choosing respondents based on the means of contributing necessary information is the intentional process known as purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016) which provides greater awareness and suitability because the topic of research can be more effortlessly addressed (Padgett, 2016). This researcher chose participants based on the eligibility and specific criteria of being a school social worker.

This research study focused on school social workers and home visits so the sample will only include school social workers specific to the already established School Social Work Networking Group. This networking group consists of school social workers from the public-school districts of Pennsylvania in the counties of Cumberland, Dauphin, Perry, and Northern York as well as school social workers from the Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15 (CAIU). This researcher contacted 59 school social workers included in the School Social Work Networking Group by email inviting them to participate in three focus groups. This researcher included a doodle poll within the email to decide on a date and time for each focus group. See Appendix B for a copy of the email invitation to participate. This researcher conducted three separate sets of focus groups. Group one consisted of five school social workers, group two consisted of two school social workers, and group three consisted of seven school social workers. The final number of participants was 14 school social workers.

Descriptive Statistics

This researcher utilized IBM SPSS Statistics to create descriptive statistic charts. The below descriptive statistic charts summarize the participants connected to the given data set included in the demographics. These descriptive statistic charts are also explained in detail throughout the findings to show their significance to the study.

Table 1 shows the genders of the participants. This variable is included in the nominal level of measurement. Table 1 shows that 13 out of 14 participants were female and 1 out of 14 participants were male. Please refer to Table 1 below.

Gender of Participants
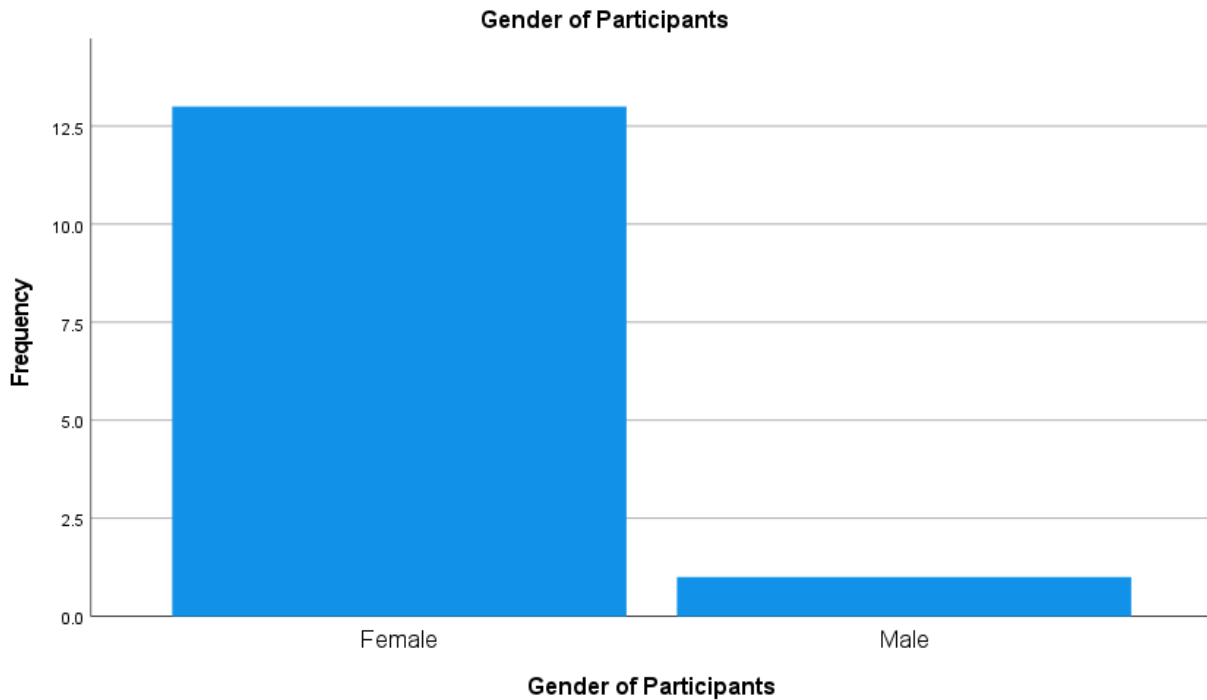
Table 1: Gender of Participants

Table 2 shows the mean, median, mode, and range specific to the number of years the participants have been practicing as school social workers. The total number of participants is 14. The mean is 10.5 years, the median is 7.5 years, and the range is 27 years. These findings show that 75% of the school social workers interviewed had over 15 years of experience being a school social worker and 50% of school social workers interviewed had over 7 years of experience being a school social worker. Please refer to Table 2 below.

Statistics

Years as SSW

N	Valid	14
	Missing	0
Mean		10.5000
Median		7.5000
Mode		3.00
Range		27.00
Percentiles	25	3.7500
	50	7.5000
	75	15.5000

Table 2: Mean, Median, and Mode for Years as School Social Worker

Table 3 displays a Bar Chart for the Years as a school social worker per school social worker interviewed. See Table 3 below.
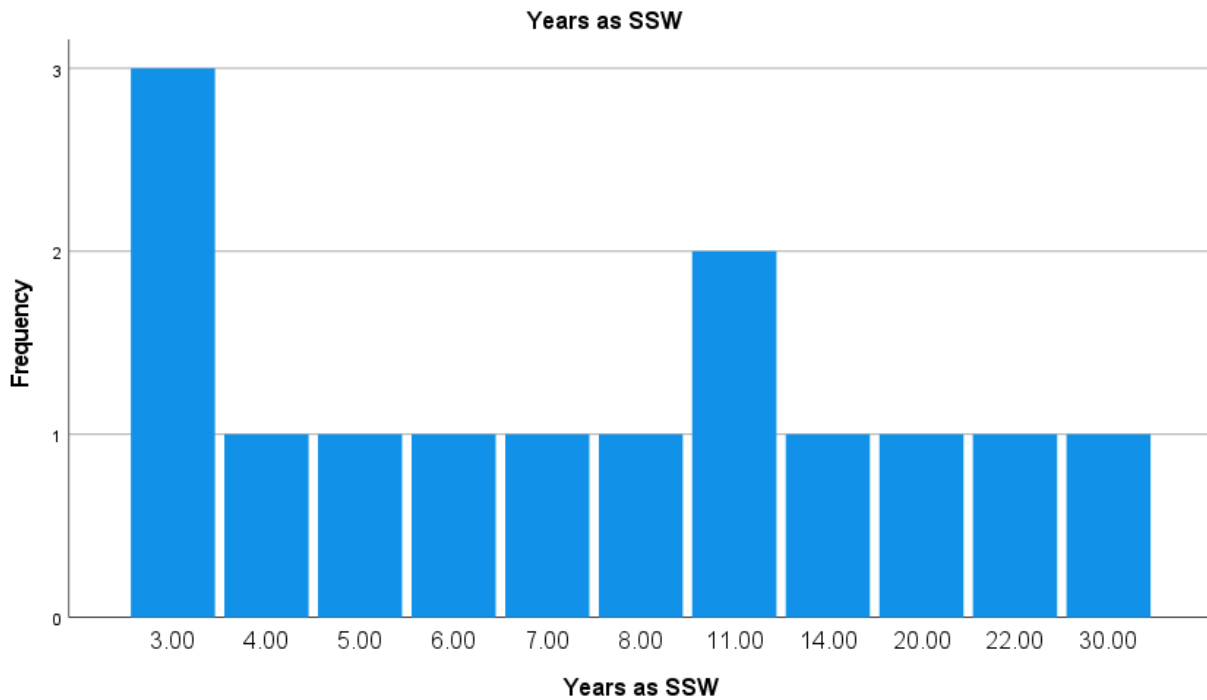
Table 3: Bar Chart for Years as School Social Worker

In terms of days, Table 4 shows about on average, school social workers are spending at least one day a week outside of their school building. Table 4 is a table that shows the mean, median, mode, and range of the percentage of time school social workers spent outside of their

school building each week. The table shows the average of time school social workers spent

outside of their school buildings each week was 21 percent. See below for Table 4.

Number of School Social Workers	14
Mean	21%
Median	18%
Mode	5.00
Range	59%

Table 4: Mean, Median, and Mode for Percentage of Time Spent Outside of the School

Table 5 shows the number of school social workers required, not required, and sometimes

required to conduct home visits for their school districts. This table shows 21.4 percent of school

social workers are not required to conduct home visits, 28.6 percent of school social workers

indicated they are sometimes required to conduct home visits, and 50 percent of school social

workers indicated they are required to conduct home visits. These findings show that three

quarters of the school social workers were required at least some of the time to conduct home

visits while only about one quarter of school social workers were not ever required to conduct

home visits. See Table 5 below.

Required to Conduct HV

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	7	50.0	50.0
	No	3	21.4	71.4
	Sometimes	4	28.6	100.0
	Total	14	100.0	

Table 5: School Social Workers Required to Conduct Home Visits

Table 6 shows a pie chart of school social workers required to conduct home visits

connected to Table 5 above. See Table 6 below.

Required to Conduct HV

Legend:
- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
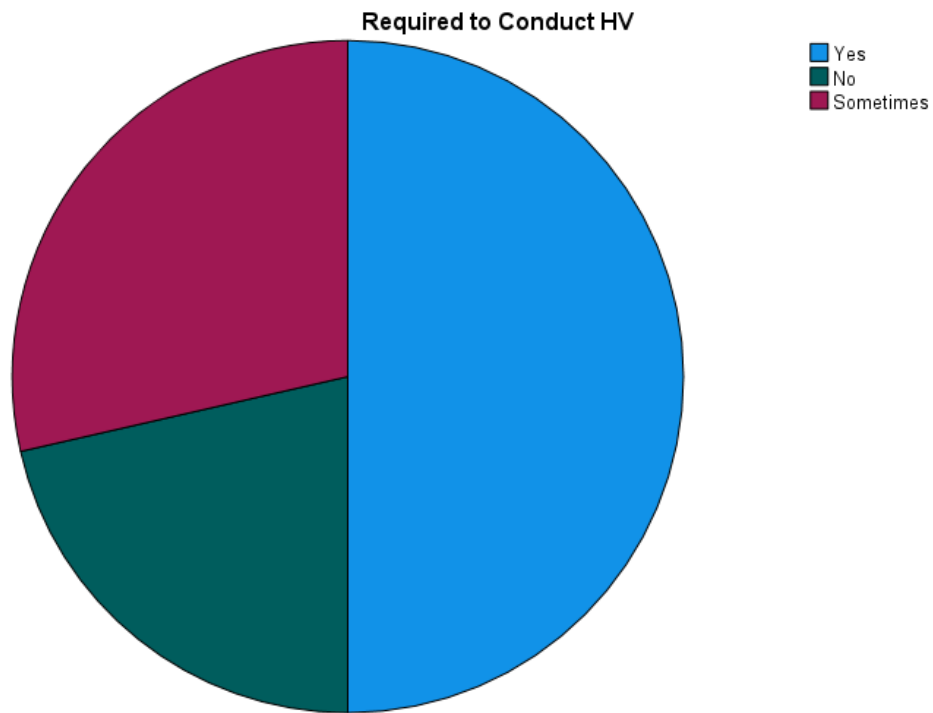
Table 6: Pie Chart of School Social Workers Required to Conduct Home Visits

Table 7 shows the percentage of school social workers supervised by social workers. This table shows that 100 percent of school social workers interviewed were not supervised by a social worker. See Table 7 below.

Supervised by Social Worker

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	14	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 7: Percentage of School Social Workers Supervised by a Social Worker

All the above charts are discussed in detail in the findings section below as well as the analysis section in Chapter 5.

Findings

Social work is often seen as a hidden profession and one of the most private complex areas of this career is the home visit (Ferguson, 2018; Saltiel & Lackey, 2019; Winter & Cree, 2016). To gain knowledge about home visits within school districts, comprehensive in-depth

personal communication with school social workers is recommended. This in-depth

communication must include the school social worker's experiences, practices, and perceptions

surrounding the intervention of home visits. For this research study, the findings have come from

in-depth communication with school social workers in the form of focus groups and interviews.

During the focus groups, open ended questions were asked to the school social workers to

produce a more in-depth exploration and explanation of perspectives surrounding conducting

home visits. These focus groups were audio-recorded, and the responses were transcribed

verbatim to enhance reliability. The following section is broken down into the four research

questions. The findings from the focus groups are connected to the completed literature review

and research questions.

Under what Conditions are School Social Workers Conducting Home Visits

The findings connected to this research question came directly from the school social

workers that were a part of the conducted focus groups. All school social workers spoke towards

the need for school social workers to conduct home visits for school districts and the reasons

varied. These reasons included individual needs, the roles of school social workers, needs of the

school district, family needs, educational needs, and environmental needs. The following section

will provide detailed findings to explain further the conditions school social workers are

conducting home visits for school districts which include the various needs listed above and

reasons for the home visit.

Individual Needs

A student's ability to respond to the school environment and learn is often affected

negatively if their social, emotional, and physical needs are not being met in their home

environment (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Ilhan et al., 2019; Openshaw, 2008). Discussing

addressing needs in school, school social worker J.M. spoke about their background and stated,

Child welfare background kind of coming out but just those basic Maslow's Hierarchy. Um, I sometimes worry we're at a real identity crisis in school social work because I hear some saying we're clinicians, we're mental health workers, we're uh this, we're that, we're experts but like, first and foremost we got to go back to Maslow's Hierarchy. And while I've got kids that have mental health needs in my K-12 building like, I have a kid in a homeless camp. Like, I have a kid living in an RV. Well, I've got lots kids in RVs. I've got lots of kids in hotels. So where I find my role as this whole social worker is that meeting those basic needs and and so I think a challenge is like I would LOVE to be more involved and running more groups and supporting my counselors and doing more mental health-based stuff, more tier two and tier three but, like, there's no room for that when we have kids that don't have food or their siblings don't have diapers.

This statement verifies how important the need is for students' social, emotional, and physical needs to be met at home and how this is a direct correlation to student success. These statements validate the importance of school social worker's roles within school districts.

Roles of School Social Worker

School social workers have known for many years that the combination of home and societal conditions, along with school variables, often influences the educational outcomes for students (Allen-Meares, 1994; Frey et al., 2012; Openshaw, 2008). School based social work targets to address emotional, behavioral, familial, and community related needs in association to the student's education (Allen-Meares, et al., 2013; Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Openshaw, 2008; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). School social worker T.C. explained some of their home visits,

Have been to help with like accessing services in the different area in which they are and

um that can be um I am just thinking about the last one I did was the family actually uh

needed help with interpretation too so I had somebody with me that helped me

interpreting but was following up with trying to get the the child some behavioral health

services and just community services. They were, ya, in a home, but needed help with

other local community needed support.

This statement proves that a combination of needs often must be addressed by school social

workers.

Needs of the School District

A major part of a school social worker's role within a school district is providing support

to the students, families, and the school district. School social worker T.C. speaks about the role

of inner agency coordination and was explained as, "When a school was at risk of not being able

to provide Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to their students, they can bring me in and

then even though you're all there [school social workers], I can be this extra layer of like, that

connection with community agencies."

Assisting school districts as well as families is important because educators are not

capable of presuming if the students are considered at risk based solely on the existence of one or

more predisposing influences during the school day (Edwards et al., 2007). School social worker

W.P. stated possible reasons for conducting home visits which include, "Truancy from school uh

every now and then it's a situation with a parent and we're kind of going out almost like a

wellness check like, you haven't been here for a while and we want to make sure everybody's

okay and we want to get a look at ya know, where you're living." Another school social worker

B.M. discussed reasons which were, "Kind of the same. Um, if we have concerns of the student

with truancy or um, sometimes we set up parent meetings, the parents don't call, don't show um,

the phone gets turned off so we have to go out and see that line of communication is broken, so

we just kind of go out to see what's going on." Similarly, from another focus group, school social

worker A.M. stated home visits were conducted, "For attendance um, for delivering paperwork,

if the parents have not returned any kind of like, needed paperwork. I deliver food. I deliver

clothing. Um, I'll even, even do like attendance, like, welfare checks kind of."

Family Needs

Addressing the needs of the families and the school district is important, and it is evident

that supporting the school district and families is often the role of school social workers. School

social worker T.J. explained,

> I take them things. Um, clothes, food um, if SAP [student assistance program] paperwork
>
> isn't getting signed and we need that signed due to a meeting being the next day. Um, I
>
> haven't done this in a little while but with IEP's, they weren't showing up to meetings
>
> and going back to the house, going over the IEP with them and then if they would sign
>
> the NOREP.

The needs of families and the school district vary. Assisting with getting needed paperwork

signed is important but also assisting the school district with addressing the behaviors of

students.

Educational Needs

School social workers often become tasked with assisting to address the problematic

behaviors and assist in creating and implementing interventions to meet the needs of the students

(Bye et al., 2009; Edwards et al., 2007; Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018). School social

workers also have knowledge of the family needing to be a component in the intervention (Allen

& Tracy, 2004). "We often find out things that the school either has just misconstrued or we didn't know," stated school social worker B.O., "but in order to help the families and the students um they need to be more part of the process to get better resources for the ability to learn better in school."

School social workers also provide services that include individual, group, and family counseling, home visits, parent education and support, skills training and advocating for students, families, and school system, crisis intervention, and working with community agencies (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Openshaw, 2008). School social worker B.G. stated that,

> During Covid, um the frequency of home visits was definitely greater um and that was everything from ensuring families had laptops, hot spots, paperwork, school um assignments, that kind of stuff. Um I've been in the home like I said before to conduct threat assessments cause the student is out of school, um we go for school attendance, um to provide resources, um I've gone and done home visits like after a crisis and the kiddo has been sent home and not admitted to assure safety planning has been followed through.

School social workers are able to provide a range of services to families while at the home and connect with other service providers.

Environmental Needs

It is important school social workers value interdisciplinary collaborations when addressing multiple issues that affect a student and utilize home based services in conjunction with community-based services and all systems involved within the family (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2010). School social worker J.M. spoke about importance of interdisciplinary collaborations and, "Coming in with, the

personal phone numbers of our CYS people, our JPO people, our drug and alcohol, crisis

intervention like, and that's where I see social work having like, such an advantage to the

school."

School social workers work within the organizational and professional structures within

the education system to support school social workers' work with multiple levels and systems

involved in the student's life (Charles & Stone, 2019). School social worker J.M. provided an

example of, "With my older students when I am going out on truancy, and JPO, CYS stuff, um it

is just so much more of a sometimes a two-way relationship." Partnerships between the home

and school are an important part of multi-level practice (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010), which

allows social workers to be uniquely equipped to intervene with at-risk youth within the

educational settings that tend to be affected by disabilities, severe poverty, abuse, and neglect

(Allen-Meares, 2013). School social worker T.J. discussed their role as a school social worker

and stated,

> So my role is kind of um interesting. One of you said generic social work and that's been
>
> like, I kind of think like, um, that's the part of the job I love the most. I love doing like,
>
> um, just connecting. I like, I like to say like, I'm like, the in between the family and the
>
> school. So like, being that link.

T.J. went on to say, "I'll do anything, if a kid, if it's impacting their school success, that's always

like my trigger thing, I'll say like, I will get involved and I'll see you what I can do." Home visits

can be conducted to assess what is impacting school success and many other reasons.

Reasons for Home Visits

Thinking back to chapter two and the discussion surrounding the history of the visiting

teacher movement, home visits have been used for school districts to address home

circumstances, truancy, academic performance, student behaviors, and to assist coordination with

other city programs and services (Charles & Stone, 2019; Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Stalnecker,

2020). Another intention of this movement was to help families understand the requirements of

the school as well as express the viewpoints and difficulties of the families back to the school.

The hope was to gain a better understanding of the pieces of a student that often are not present

to the classroom teacher (Charles & Stone, 2019; Finigan-Carr et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2010;

Stalnecker, 2020).

Today, school social workers have continued to visit homes for similar reasons. School

social workers have visited the homes of students for truancy concerns to assess the reasons for

the absences. Home visits have been conducted when multiple attempts have been made by

school staff to contact a caregiver and the school social worker can initiate this connection and

assess the barriers to the lack of response and follow through to the school district (Openshaw,

2008; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). When discussing connecting with families, school social worker

W.P. explained they think home visits,

> Helps them see that we really are there for them regardless. Like, even if you don't show
> up here, I'm coming to you. Like, if I said we're gonna talk about this, we're going to talk
> about this if that means I have to storm into your bedroom at 8am were gonna talk about
> it so I think it just it helps hold us accountable too, what we're telling them. Like yes,
> even if you don't hold up your end, I'm coming out.

Another school social worker H.H. spoke about concerns for connections not happening and

stated,

> I think if not, they kind of just fall through the cracks and, and we wouldn't know what's
> going on with them or be able to you know, try to re-engage with them. Like if I'm

thinking attendance wise or if it's you know, to get IEP paperwork signed like, things just

wouldn't happen I feel like if we didn't.

Following up to this statement, school social worker K.W. stated, "Yeah, I agree. It's definitely

for the follow through piece, um, just to kind of hold families accountable but also to make

follow up and make sure that they're, you know, getting the stuff they need for their kids."

Home visits can be used to assist caregivers with reinforcing management plans and

behavior interventions that the school has put into place and offer individual and family

therapeutic interventions, crisis interventions, along with assisting with advocacy (Openshaw,

2008; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). School social worker J.K. spoke about their use for home visits

and confirmed, "For homebound students that can't get in school, It's the only way I can get

counseling kind of with them. So, that's the benefit." They went on to state,

> I think like, the school district can then show like, they're still making an effort to provide
>
> these services and you know, if parents ever go to due process, we can say like, well it's
>
> in the IEP that they're getting 30 minutes a week of counseling and we sent someone and
>
> got that in there. So you know, and keeping that relationship with the family as well so
>
> that you know, when the kid does come back to the district, you know, he's gotten the
>
> services he needs and then that relationship is still intact when, when they have to work
>
> with the parents again.

Home visits can be conducted for various reasons by assisting caregivers in numerous ways and

addressing the many barriers which influence student success.

Some known barriers that can be addressed with home visits include caregivers lack of

time to attend meetings, lack of an understanding of educational materials, the school system,

language, school requirements, and laws, and lack of transportation to name a few (Allen &

Tracy, 2004). When discussing known barriers for families, school social worker B.M. acknowledged,

> It really just depends if there's kind of things going on with my students. If I can't get a
> hold of parents, I will go out to the house and kind of just see what's going on, um if they
> need anything, um but that's kind of just if it gets there and then I weirdly sometimes if
> we have some transportation issues with some of my kids, then it will kind of turn into I
> pop in check in with the parent.

School social worker S.R. corresponded by stating, "That engagement that removal of the barrier of transportation. The fact that it shows that we care." Home visits can be used to break down these barriers to assessing and obtaining services (Ilhan et al., 2019; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). Other reasons for conducting home visits are included in the evaluation framework utilized by school social workers as a practice behavior.

National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice

The National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, endorsed by the School Social Work Association of America, discussed in detail in chapter two, consists of four domains to illustrate the practice of school social workers nationally. These four domains include planning and preparation, school environment, resources and service delivery, and professional responsibility (National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice, 2013). Similarly, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has created a framework for PK-12 School Social Worker Educational Specialist Preparation Program Guidelines for school districts, which includes the Educator Effectiveness Observation and Practice Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals (NTP): School Social Workers and Home and School Visitor (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). This framework classifies characteristics of a school social

workers' responsibilities, tasks, and practice behaviors to enhance professional practice. This framework also has four domains, which include planning and preparation, educational environment, delivery of service, and professional responsibilities (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). When discussing the Educator Effectiveness Observation and Practice Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, school social worker C.P. stated, "You all should be aware of that because you should be getting evaluated on it this year." School social worker R.H. spoke about the versions of this framework and stated, "The original version was to specifically put in social workey stuff rather than educational stuff but there is a newer version but that, which combined home and school visitors and social workers and actually wrote separate ones in the original version, but they were combined subsequently." Some concerns were brought up about this and having school social workers on the same evaluation form as home and school visitors due to role confusion. School social worker J.R. stated,

> I guess just more clear guidance, you know and maybe it comes from PDE, maybe it comes from PASSWP. I don't know uh, because clearly you know, we all function so differently. My, my, the district next to me has a school social worker that rarely does home visits because of IEP stuff. Then they have a home and school visitor who's out there and calls himself, the truancy officer, so imagine my heartache getting mixed up with that guy. I love him but you know, that's I, I have more concerns about, you know, back to the, I am aware of the NTP [Educator Effectiveness Observation and Practice Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals] thing and it's helpful, but I really wish that we were teased apart from home and school visitors. Um, I know you said that they tried to do that so and maybe that's where the distinction can come from. If we're looking at practice behaviors from the NTP stuff, you know, home visits for a home and school

visitor to address paperwork is far more appropriate than a home visit for a social worker

to get something signed that's, I agree, not a great use of our time.

Along with discussing the various conditions and reasons school social workers have had to

conduct home visits, it is important to discuss the benefits of conducting home visits. This is one

of the research questions included in this study.

What do School Social Workers See as the Benefits to Conducting Home Visits

The findings connected to this research question come directly from the school social

workers interviewed during the focus groups. The school social workers spoke about specific

benefits home visits for the students, families, and school districts. The following section will

provide detailed findings to explain further the benefits they as school social workers see to

conducting home visits for school districts.

It is often a challenge for school districts to identify and meet the needs of all their

students to ensure academic success (Wei et al., 2018). When school social workers improve the

school-family connection, many of the non-school factors tend to be addressed which has a

positive impact on school achievement (Ferlazzo, 2011). School social worker B.M. coincided

with this statement by stating,

> I also think that it's beneficial with the parents. Once they know, because sometimes we
>
> get in this relationship where they're upset with the school so the school social worker is
>
> kind of there to mend the relationship um with the parent but I also think it's important
>
> for them to know that we're not CYS. Our goal is not to come in and take your kids and I
>
> feel like, a lot of the times that's what it's looked at as, so going there and explaining like,
>
> we are just here to help, give you resources, get your kid in school, get them what they

need. I think that's really beneficial just to have that relationship with the family or the parents.

School social workers can become an advocate and ally to the caregivers and students when they have had negative experiences with the school district and may be distrusting of institutions (Keller & Grumbach, 2023). Continuing to improve caregiver engagement has been known to improve grades and test scores, increase good behavior, better attendance, higher graduation rates, and less retention of the same grade (Allen & Tracy, 2004). Engagement is key to the process of unlocking boundaries amongst systems (Keller & Grumbach, 2023).

The many out of school needs and barriers which limit a student's educational success, should be addressed by the school social worker with help of the family (Finigan-Carr et al., 2018). School social worker J.M. felt that home visits,

Can really tear down relationship issues like, with parents. Often I find myself on the other side of the table than with my administrators cause I am aligned with the parent um, and I am more of that mediator middle ground and I am able um, to marry the two and so like, a big thing I also do is I text my parents. Nobody else will just download the damn voice app or phone app through google and it takes two seconds, text your parents. No one else does it. I get emails to text my parents. Ridiculous. Um, so even that it does build relationships and the district benefits.

School social worker T.J. then voiced,

Like you said on the other side of the table, that made me laugh because I feel like sometimes I show up at the meetings or anything and I get that look of like 'oh here comes the social worker, they're not going to agree with what were saying, ya know, I just think there is benefits to that because then the parent will say oh well, so and so, dropped this off or I texted with, so and so, about this. So even though I don't always

think the school sees it as a benefit, as a whole, I think there is just so many just with

building the relationship and rapport that you are going to have with the family.

Building relationships is important when it comes to understanding the family's needs.

It is important the school social worker sees what the family identifies as their own needs

(Allen & Tracy, 2004; Harden, 2019; Ilhan et al., 2019). School social worker S.R. discussed the

family's increased communication within the home while conducting visits and stated, 'More

just for engagement like, I find that parents are more willing to communicate in their home

environment. I can get more information that way, um build a better relationship." Another

school social worker A.M. agreed and felt that, "When you see them, their home, and things like

that, they are trusting, their guard is down. It allows you to build that rapport and that

relationship. It just helps them in that respect." Together, comprehensive supports from the

family, outside persons, and community resources can assist with reducing evident stressors the

family is dealing with (Finigan-Carr et al., 2018). School social worker T.C. spoke about

comprehensive team support when discussing home visits by stating, "For me, just the various

programs that I'm in and know. It could be delivering a resource but it often could be meetings

that are with team meetings that happen." Utilizing comprehensive support is key due to the

importance of working with all systems involved in a student's life that tend to influence school

success. "Um, so I am really big on working with community resources to get stuff," said school

social worker J.M., "I am a big stuff person, like, if I can show up to your hotel with, like,

laundry detergent and a hot pan and some things and diapers and, like, to get to know what is

going on, I am going to do that."

School based performance cannot be addressed by school districts using a micro-focused

lens. It is important school districts can observe and understand students holistically with the

framework of family systems and with the family-in-environment perspective to address

potential trauma and presenting problems with an all-encompassing frame of reference (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020). The influences and barriers that come from a students' home environment and how they interact can be understood by utilizing the family-in-environment perspective (Biscontini, 2021; Gasker, 2023).

School social workers can be the vital link between the home environment of the student and school district. Bridging the gap amongst the psychosocial well-being and education of students is essential for all students (Sherman, 2016). The school social worker can coordinate activities across the home-school setting and link the families with these services for support (Allen & Tracy, 2004). When school social workers are in the presence of the families in their communities, this allows for a more accurate assessment since the school social worker observes the lifestyle and routines of the family and is able to engage the families in unique ways by obtaining an understanding about their local language, values, and culture (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Beder, 1998; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). During an individual interview, school social worker R.H. spoke about using empowerment when visiting families in their home and feels,

> They would see the social workers being someone who can provide support and
> assistance, empowerment. Outside of the school, that they see, that you go as a
> representative of the school district, or or IU, school district, school entity, and that they
> see you as operating. And I, I very much have the opinion, others may disagree of social
> workers being um empowers, the empowerment model of social work so i would be
> helping them identify resources and helping them get those resources themselves rather
> than turning up, well with the exception of the Elect Program [mother and baby
> program], but we did turn up every week with diapers and such like but I don't see that as
> my role. My role is maybe bringing them, if they need them right now but also telling
> them about how to get how to get medical assistance, how to get a prescription, and how

to get somebody to, you know, the system, the system will provide those resources all the elsewhere rather than me be being the person to bring them stuff.

School social workers need to use the skills of empowerment when working to engage students and their families and use an ecological approach to assess (Keller & Grumbach, 2023). It is important school social workers uncover the supports, material, natural resources, and gain an understanding of the family dynamics of the families being served ("Philanthropy, Charities, and Social Problems", 1902; Waugh, 2001). Another school social worker disagreed and felt part of their role was to provide those physical resources and materials to families. T.J. stated,

Like, if we as social workers aren't doing these things, like who is. Then they aren't getting something that they need um and I too sometimes don't even like, interact with the kids at all, like, when I am going, it's just more of a um connection with the parents and I don't know who said this but I, like, meeting them where they are at. They don't have to be embarrassed, I am just showing up with this stuff, just take it, like, its not a big deal. And I think that just gives like, a different perspective to them too like, I am not here to judge you or anything, I am just dropping off some stuff that I have as if you were anyone that would need something.

When school social workers observe family's lifestyles, routines, and dynamics, this allows for a more accurate assessment.

Assessment is known as one of the National Association of Social Worker Standards for School Social Work Services (NASW, 2012). An assessment during the home visit should be used to re-assess the current dilemma the student is facing for the family but also the teacher (Norris-Shortle & Cohen, 1987) and work towards improving the students' emotional, social, behavioral, and academic outcomes (NASW, 2012). School social workers can support school

districts in effectively considering the unique individual experiences that often stem from the student's home and community (Charles & Stone, 2019). Home visits can be used to gain an understanding of external influences from the student's home and community and then bring this knowledge back to the school district to assist teachers with developing awareness and empathy for their students (Norris-Shortle & Cohen, 1987). School social worker A.M. agrees with this benefit and stated,

> Sharing information with the family's approval, I think it helps the school to see and understand the barriers and instead of like, maybe passing judgment on the family, they're more open and understanding but of course it's only with the family's permission that I will share that with the school. And I think it then opens the school to having a little bit more understanding of the family's situation.

School social worker T.C. identified a similar thought about school staff gaining an understanding of their students as a benefit by stating, "Again, I think it is just educating them, hopefully the empathy piece. I hope." The assessment during the home visit can provide the school district with valuable information about the student and family, which can be used to support the student inside and outside the school building. Along with all the benefits home visits provide, there are also many barriers to conducting home visits in which school social workers face. This is one of the research questions included in this study.

What do School Social Workers see as the Barriers to Conducting Home Visits

The findings connected to this research question came directly from the school social workers that were interviewed during the conducted focus groups. The barriers that the school social workers identified surrounded the lack of guidance, lack of support, and lack of supervision they currently receive in their school districts by their supervisors. Other barriers

discussed included differences in roles across school districts and a lack of training and

education surrounding conducting home visits. The following section will provide detailed

findings to explain further the barriers they as school social workers are facing conducting home

visits for school districts.

The lack of empirical data on school social workers conducting home visits may be based

on the fact that school social work is a broad category and there are many components included

in the job functions of school social work (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Kelly & Stone, 2009;

Manz & Ventresco, 2019). Roles and responsibilities of school social workers tend to be

different across school districts and even within school districts (Stalnecker, 2020). School social

worker J.M. stated, "We do need language and contracts for this. I mean I fall under our CBA

[Collective Bargaining Agreement]. Um in one district our social workers are Act 93 and one

district the social worker falls under Support Staff, eh awful."

There are differing prerequisites between states about licensure requirements and services

provided by school social workers (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jermone, 2018; Horton & Prudencio,

2022; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2015; Richard & Sosa, 2014). Professional and

educational licensing boards differ considerably, which furthers the inconsistencies of role

ambiguity, services, and prospective consequences for job satisfaction and performance

(Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Kelly et al., 2015; Richard & Sosa, 2014; Shultz et al.,

2019). Due to these stated substantial differences, there is a concern for a lack of understanding

surrounding training, practice behaviors, roles of school social workers, and quality and quantity

of assistance and services provided (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Horton & Prudencio,

2022; Kelly et al., 2015; Roggman et al., 2019). School social worker J.M. stated, "It just feels

like we're sometimes at an identity issue but I'm glad to hear a lot of people feel the same way as

me."

All of these can also influence school social worker's performance and performance

evaluations (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly et al., 2015;

Roggman et al., 2019). School social worker T.J. deliberated about this concern and stated,

> Alot of the things that tie back to why of home visits I think are so important are those
>
> basic child welfare needs. Um, but I'm not gonna lie, there are concerns and challenges.
>
> The main things for me is with me having multiple buildings and I don't know how
>
> sometimes I would like, draw the line on when I would go, and where I would go um
>
> based off their needs. Um our district is also more like, spread out so, we're, there like,
>
> parts of our district that are pretty suburban and then there's parts that are a little bit more
>
> rural, so that would be uh an issue. I would have to, you know, kind of get around. Um I
>
> don't know who said this, but about the supervision. That is something, that is something
>
> we do not have at all. Um, I'm under special education and my supervisor, her
>
> background is teaching so um, we don't ever really have any discussion about like the
>
> safety or the liability of um, how those would look. I always just go back to what I did in
>
> my internship, in undergrad, that was um, out in Western Pennsylvania, that looks a
>
> whole lot different than here and that was a long time ago now. But I think about what I
>
> did then and used those skills now, but I mean it's 2023 and the world is different so I
>
> don't know again, if that's the best way to do it.

Following up to this statement, school social worker J.M. harmonized and stated,

> I didn't anticipate it coming into this field, I didn't anticipate the barriers it would present
>
> with because I'm so used to, I went from um child welfare into drug and alcohol and then
>
> into the schools and I always had done part-time work, I worked at crisis and now I do
>
> outpatient and there's always been this weekly supervision thing, like you talk about your

cases. And I, the first time I sat down with my director to be like, and he, he was like, oh, we're gonna meet once a week, and I started talking about my cases, and I think he was like, what? He was like what are you doing? Um so I feel a little bit on an island and it's made me have to rely on my other school social workers, so I will frequently call like, my neighboring districts and be like, what would you do.

Common social work education in general does not cover areas necessary for working in a school (Framework for PK-12 School Social Worker Educational Specialist, 2020). Not one school social worker in any of the focus groups conducted had received any education in regard to conducting home visits. Specifically, school social worker R.H. felt, "I don't think you could do a three credit course in home visits. I'm sure you could um but there are a few interesting do's and don'ts and things, you know that you're alluding to that's um but nothing kind of generic but there should have been." Following up to this statement, school social worker J.M. agreed by stating,

> I don't know that a course in home visits um, I just don't know how helpful it might be, I guess in theory maybe it might be but then we're like many things, where the rubber meets the road is where you actually implement practice and so um, the best training I've ever had has been supervision and having supervisors take me out in child welfare, doing that you know, eight month internship to prepare for a job in child welfare um, was probably best, right?

A set of professional ethical guidelines for home visiting has not been established by any organization and school districts seldom have no formal training opportunities for school social workers (Lamorey, 2017; Nathans et al., 2019). None of the school social workers ever received any type of training to conduct home visits for their school district. The school social workers

who received training opportunities had come from previous job positions. Some school social

workers indicated they had received zero training opportunities in previous or current job

positions. School social worker R.H. indicated, "My training was this is the agency, this is our

agency procedures. And then, this is our agency's procedure. I don't think um you know, it's

relatively easy once you get there." School social worker C.P. stated,

> Um, I think when I was a probation officer or children youth worker, it was just part of
>
> the job. So I never really thought about it. Um, and I've done some research in home
>
> visiting and so it's only then that I became very aware of the lack of education, the lack of
>
> education for all of us. Um, how that puts us at risk. I think I, I lived in a kind of naive
>
> world of, this is what we do, and we're going to be okay and um, I put in the chat about,
>
> social workers have been killed um, in in the course of home visiting and, and it's very,
>
> very scary. Um, and I, and I think I just became aware of it in doing some research on it
>
> and I became very dissatisfied. I think I was ignorant before but now I'm very dissatisfied
>
> with the training that I've received. I do try now to, if there's elements of a training,
>
> particularly with cultural awareness, I try to um, attribute that to home visiting and how
>
> can I increase my cultural awareness skills when I, when I home visit not just when you
>
> know families come to me kind of things.

When school social workers discussed how they know how to conduct visits, most stated

previous internships, job positions, shadowing other workers and trial and error. During an

individual interview with school social worker B.G., they spoke about their experiences and

stated,

> Ya, it's interesting because I think like, you don't know what you don't know so you
>
> know mid 20's new social worker when I was like ya, let's go and this is kind of exciting

and you know, adrenaline but um, looking back at that, um you know, now being experienced in the field for 15 years now, like, oh my gosh, like I mean, we always use the joke that we're in the same homes that like probations at and you know, they've got guns and we've got, here's my badge. Um, you know, so I think looking back, I'm like oh my gosh that's crazy that they released me into that without something more formal. Um, but ya, I think at, at the time, you don't know what you don't know. I mean, here's the job, you go and do it um but part of me feels like that in my experiences and a lot of my roles as a social worker, like earning my MSW, I think both my internships was also like, you got it and I was like, alright, now you go and I was just like, wow, I am going into somebody's home who's a known perpetrator of sexual abuse and talking about it, um, ya, I think to look back at it now, It's pretty alarming, ya, but at the time, I didn't know.

School social worker C.P. spoke about their experiences and stated, "My training came from a seasoned colleague about when to go, what to do, recognizing the color of my skin. So I just had a very seasoned caseworker way back." School social worker T.J. stated a previous supervisor at an internship assisted with training and stated,

I had went and did a home visit situation with who I was doing my internship with and she gave me really good training. Other than that, I don't feel as if I've ever had training on what to do, exactly in a home visit. No education. I, I had a good supervisor at children and youth when I first started that would go out with me. But no, no formal class, training, anything. And now my up aboves, none of them would have a clue as to how to even act in someone's house.

School social worker J.M. commented,

Getting that training as an intern where like, you're following someone, you're seeing

how they do it, they're, you're having conversations in the car afterwards about like, was

that a safety threat, is that you know, is the hole in the floor of the trailer really a safety

threat if the six-year-old can jump over the hole? No, probably not. But if it's a crawling,

um 18 month old then yeah, it's a safety concern. So, talking through those things and

seeing them I think that's where the practicality and all those learned things really helped

but otherwise I've never had any type of training.

Affirming these statements, during an individual interview, school social worker B.G. agreed

that, "I don't think that it was like specific, like train, like I feel like the trainers at times would

share about their own experiences and I think that's probably like more, I started going out with

like other workers or other um you know, case managers kind of hearing like their stories and

tricks of the trade but there was nothing I believe formal." Supporting this statement, school

social worker J.K. stated,

I don't think I've ever received any like, formal training on how to do a home visit safely

from like, my organization. It's always just been like, either colleagues that are saying, oh

well, I know I always do x, y and z before I go or if I come back from a home visit with

concerns, they would say, oh make sure you don't always do this, then uh always sit at

the dining room table and not on the sofa because the house is dirty and that sort of stuff.

Continuing this discussion, school social worker T.C. stated,

It's interesting now looking back, I'm like, was I trained like, in foster care? But nothing,

yeah, nothing. I mean I would go, like you said, I, like with a supervisor when I first

began and just went out and from other case workers we learned things. Yeah so that was

how yeah like, watched this through this, you know, whatever, just things, but no,

nothing. I can't think of a single class ever. That's really interesting.

Other school social workers commented on the preparation they were given to conduct home

visits and school social worker B.M. stated, "Learning on the fly," which was followed up by

school social worker W.P. stating, "Show up and see what works."

For school social workers that did receive some sort of training for conducting home

visits, concerns surrounding the type of training were discussed. Multiple school social workers

spoke about previous training coming from law enforcement personnel and not social workers.

School social worker S.R. discussed,

> So I remember having somebody from, um that worked with our probation department
>
> come and just do some kind of trainings about like being a little bit more aware about
>
> your surroundings and how to position your body in a room, like where to sit, you know,
>
> so you can get out some of that kind of stuff. So I guess that was somewhat helpful again,
>
> it was always so challenging because I don't think there was the understanding of how
>
> important that engagement piece was in our role versus like an officer's role.

School social worker J.M. attended the same training with law enforcement in a previous

position and stated,

> We all we all kind of went through a day of training together and there were actors, there
>
> were items um and thanks to that training I was actually able to identify
>
> methamphetamine being made at a hotel one time during a home visit. So um you know
>
> very specific training on like what does, what does making meth look like. Um and what
>
> does it smell like and so that was really helpful. What I didn't love about that training was
>
> like, what I took away from that was basically call the police each time and that's not

always a real, like realistic or fast response. Um but you know as a training by the police

for the police basically, so some good tips I thought though.

School social worker J.M. went on to discuss the lack of preparation they have been given,

And honestly reflecting back like even you know my my work, I, my coursework on

individual work or group work. I don't know that I ever remember anything about safety

so you know, I find myself even in my clinical work, you know a client's escalated, like I

don't ever recall anything formally about safety. Um more behavioral stuff like

behavioral interventions but no. You know, and you know, like being, working in crisis

intervention and being in a home and having a gun pulled on somebody by law

enforcement, like we talk about safety but you don't know what you're going to do in that

moment until it's, until it's happening and I think for me, it was kind of like a freeze

situation. I was so shocked to see that happening because we went there to help an

individual and I was um, disturbed that law enforcement would pull a gun, but their

training is just so different. I mean, they do have such a safety focus um and it's about

like protecting themselves to the point that they are prepared to hurt someone else and

that is something I, I don't ever want to see for social work. I have no doubt I could have

verbally de-escalated the client but law enforcement chose to pull a gun on him and then

ultimately tased him in front of me. Um so like that was triggering, um and I would so, I

would caution the field of social work maybe against uh, that kind of stuff and so I don't

know how you, I think we need better training in de-escalation probably.

Conducting home visits can produce some risks without careful forethought (Shultz et al.,

2019). School social worker R.H. discussed his concern as, "The expectation that a visit

happened, and that was to solve the problem and my sense of that is not necessarily going to

solve it. Sometimes I think it may serve to exacerbate a problem or push, pushing families

further away." R.H. went on to state,

>It bothers me when I hear about colleagues who are doing visits without being aware of
>
>the potentiality and what can go wrong. And not having preparation, which could be done
>
>just, just board policy and procedure um that's agreed upon. Um, that um, these things
>
>happen that, you know, that without policy procedure, I think that that's a problem. I
>
>think every social workers should not be visiting someone's home without that, and I
>
>think they're also the wider question as for the purpose of, of they shouldn't just be doing
>
>it just to check the box to say, we did it. I mean that's what registered letters are for, you
>
>really need to do, that's a lot cheaper.

School social workers must consider the power differential and remember they can be seen as an

authority figure and as much as school social workers work towards a collaborative relationship,

families they work with may see them as someone who represents authority that can "fix" the

student (Keller & Grumbach, 2023). During an individual interview, school social worker R.H.

eluted to the importance of being aware of the power differential that can occur. School social

worker R.H. stated, "So there are expectations from the district and a feeling that if you visit

somebody, something will happen but I'm not sure that's necessarily what they [families] desire

to happen." This demonstrates the importance of self-awareness needed throughout the social

work process (Keller & Grumbach, 2023). School social worker B.O. spoke about

appropriateness of the home visit and stated, "Culture is of concern. Like some cultures are not

too open to having people, come to their house. Um, and uh, lately too, like getting the school

staff to understand the appropriateness of going to the home. Um we're not children and youth so

we need, we're trying to make, build rapport with families, not go out and investigate what their

home environment is looking like because they have an odor or something at school." Following

up to this statement, school social worker S.R. expressed,

> I totally agree with that, um, I used to work for children and youth so like it is a very
> different blend now and I always try to seek family's permission when I can. I always
> seek permission because I think it helps build that relationship. And I'll be honest, a
> concern that I have like, I think about one particular family that I would love to just show
> up because attendance of the student is huge concern, but I also have feelings that
> domestic violence might be a concern and I worry that like me showing up may put other
> people at risk, so I mean, I guess I'm worried about other people's safety if I just show up
> to the home to be honest.

School social worker S.R. went back to appropriateness and different cultures of families and

stated,

> I do think it's really challenging when cultures collide. When two things collide. We've
> had challenges for like, we've had families that you know, we take off your shoes and
> you walk in the home but our safety person was like you're an idiot, why would you ever
> take your shoes off? What if you have to get out of there? So I do think it's really
> challenging and I think it's good to have more um training on like, how to have those
> conversations in a way that you're like, I need to keep these on for whatever reason but in
> a way that's not disrespectful.

The physical safety, professional safety, and psychological safety of the school social

worker can be seen as a risk but many of these risks can be averted using established evidence-

based precautions (Gasker, 2023; Lyter & Abbott, 2007). When discussing this concern, many

school social workers agreed with safety concerns. In an individual interview, school social

worker B.G. stated,

> How do we assess for safety? Um you know, I know that, that's a needed conversation
>
> and I know that is stuff that they talk about um but I think being aware of your own
>
> safety um and just even what people define as safety can be very different. I think so
>
> much of social work is we put ourselves in these high risk situations um because that's
>
> where our families are and that's what we do um but how do we assure for our own
>
> safety?

School social worker T.C. spoke about being uncomfortable with certain places during the focus

group and stated concerns with,

> Some of the places I've been. I mean, I have been in roles for thousands of years, ya now
>
> as a foster care caseworker, that was a previous position but I was allowed to say we were
>
> not comfortable and we could just sign that we weren't and then document that we were
>
> when we were going to a location or something um some of the places were inner city
>
> Philadelphia at times, um and so we were able to do that. Here we were not required but I
>
> don't know there was ever any, we weren't really given any information on what to do
>
> and not to do so it was up, kind of, our supervisor and whoever the supervisor was. So I
>
> would say that is a concern here.

Safety was an ongoing concern discussed. Multiple school social workers felt safety was a

principal barrier to conducting home visits. School social worker A.M. discussed, "Safety is

probably the biggest in terms of where I travel. I always let somebody know when I'm leaving

and what time I'm expected back as an option." The many barriers to home visiting discussed

show the difficulties school social workers are faced with. The research study's findings have

shown that school social workers agree with the need to conduct home visits for school districts, but the satisfaction level with how they have been informed to do so is also a barrier.

Satisfaction Level with being Informed how to Conduct Home Visits

After discussing the education and training school social workers have received regarding home visits, the discussion on satisfaction level surrounding conducting home visits began. School social workers were asked to discuss their satisfaction level with how they have been informed to conduct home visits. Most of the school social workers had similar responses. School social worker T.C. specified by saying,

> I will say it is horrible. It's terrible. I don't know what else to say. Yeah, and I know of issues, so I kind of like, I'm not the social work co-chair, but a lot of people still come to me for different things and I hear like, different situations and it makes me very sad. Like, even very upset because I don't think anybody, if there is an issue, I don't feel it, there is a great uh, support to it.

School social worker T.J. stated, "My satisfaction would be none." Another school social worker H.H. identified that, "Um, I don't know that I was ever really informed so probably dissatisfied, I'd say," which was followed up by another school social worker C.P. who also stated, "dissatisfied" and another school social worker J.K. stating, "definitely dissatisfied with the level of training I've been given like in order to do home visits" and school social worker B.O. concluded with, "I would pretty much agree with what everyone said. Not, not a whole lot of satisfaction here." Two more school social workers commented and B.M. stated, "Zero, I am not satisfied" followed by W.P. stating, "Um, not at all. Zero out of 10."

School social worker K.W. explained,

We just um a couple years ago, we hired a safety and security, I don't really know his title but he's actually taught, after being in the district so many years and doing so many home visits, he's taught me some really cool stuff about safety in terms of like even how you position your car and park in front of the house and how you approach the house and like, in those are, in those, you know, more um risky kind of home visits not like if you're getting paperwork signed kind of ones but it's been really, it's eye opening. So I'm satisfied with, I'm satisfied with that. I mean, I've learned a lot.

School social worker J.M. had a similar thought about satisfaction and stated,

I'm saying its never been a clear expectation since they [school district] did not know what I could do as a social worker. I think like, that's more of systems problem. I don't necessarily, I don't mind doing the home visit so like I kind of feel like you know, if this is the thing that's going to connect the family to the school like that is my my function and my purpose. Um I, when I first arrived they, I said I was gonna do home visits and my administration was like, well you can't go alone and I was like, why not? Um and then they were fine with it. Um especially because I was doing them so often. So, I don't know. I, I think um to me, it's a practice behavior and it's like really important and I I hear lots of different sides of this discussion and I think what's so confusing in Pennsylvania is this home and school visitor thing and the school social work thing and um there's a real, there's confusion amongst us with what our roles are so you know, imagine how other people must feel look from the outside looking in. Um so I don't know. I really feel like it's very, it's important and I, I'm satisfied with how my district, they just, they they trust me to make those calls when I need to. They don't like, if I said, no I'm not doing a home visit, I don't think that I'd get any pushback, they would understand. So I, I think I'm satisfied with it. Yeah…but, but I also am like very strongly

of the mindset and feel, if it's not evident, very very strongly that we should be actively

doing home visits. We should be engaging. It's one of our practice behaviors. It's our role,

it's our job. It's, we are to be the home and school connection. So um I feel sad when I see

on some of these online forums and when I talk to school social workers in the state, I

feel sad when I hear that they're not doing home visits. I think it's, I think they're not

fulfilling what their role could really look like so, I don't know. Overall, I'm satisfied.

Sorry for the tangent.

This was followed up with school social worker R.H., who was not in agreement. They stated,

I, I would disagree with you but um going back to my training when I did my Master's

degree. Many years ago, I'm not trying to pull rank or anything. I remember my professor

said to me um you've got to know why. You don't just go barging in. if people came into

your house, and started looking around, if people went into your house right now, how

would it look, you know, but the time and actually right now my house is a freaking mess

and I wouldn't feel happy. I prefer I have a half an hour later that you would come in,

sweep, clean up. Yeah, um and so um that was, she said, and I remember, I was in

supervision once and I said, well, i'm gonna do the home visit, find out what's going on

here, what's going on there. She said, calm down. A good social worker can bear not to

know. I hate that I'm saying that but it's it's true that we don't need to know everything.

We use our instincts and our wisdom, and our training.

R.H. continued and referred to the previous statement by stating, "You said, you said if you

didn't want to do a visit, the school wouldn't, wouldn't make you? Well, I'm sure they wouldn't

make you because they know that if anything happened, there would be, there would be a lawsuit

and there would be some exposure." This statement was then followed up by school social

worker J.M. asking,

I'm curious though. I, I'm curious about how you reconcile though that like what just, what what makes us any different than a school counselor? You know like to me school social work and social work in general, like that is what sets us apart is the ability to to meet families where they are to get to know them to like, I've, you know, I have this educational specialist cert and I certainly don't feel, I guess I'm an educational specialist in that I try to create, I try to be the affiliate, liaison and the connection to the school um, because beyond that, I feel I'm my expert, to my expertise is anything but the school. Um, so I want to help families, connect them to, to community resources, to what they need in their home, to what, how they can make their families function better. Um, and I feel like if I wasn't doing but if I wasn't doing home visits, I feel like I'm I would be a school counselor.

A separate school social worker T.J. added,

Yeah, well that's a constant struggle. I'll say for me, and I think it's kind of from up above and how the staff is, they don't understand the difference. Um I don't do a lot of home visits. I'm willing to do home visits. I think um what I try to say that my distinction is though is like my approach to it because like you're saying, even though we have this educational specialist thing, that's not, I'm a social worker. Like I'm a, I feel like, I'm like a social worker working in a school and that like, I'm separate, um which isn't always a great feeling but in ways I've created that for myself, but I, I don't know, I see it both ways because I also think like we are that in between the schools and the families.

This was followed up by school social worker R.H. who stated,

I'm not saying that we shouldn't visit. I'm think, I'm thinking that social workers should be involved in the community that the kids and their families operate in. They should be.

I do think however, that it goes back to the question is that, why do we, doing this? Um, and I think that, that there's more that social workers do than just home visits, but I think if, when we do them, we need to do them bearing in mind, and working with a public agency. And we have to follow those standards and protocols, I think if they're they're wrong and they, or if we go and against them, we've got to be careful. You know, talk to your union.

This discussion ultimately led to the next research question surrounding how school social workers can be successful in conducting home visits and what school social workers feel they need to support them conducting home visits.

What do School Social Workers need to be Successful in Conducting Home Visits

The findings connected to this research question came directly from the school social workers that were interviewed during the conducted focus groups. The school social workers identified specific needs they feel they must have to conduct home visits for school districts. These needs surround leadership, guidance, and supervision. The following section will provide detailed findings to explain further what school social workers need to be successful in conducting home visits for school districts.

Social workers often do not receive formal training on conducting home visits and frequently, social workers create their own approach based on trial and error (Lyter & Abbott, 2007). School social worker J.K. felt they needed, "Specific training on like, you know, like said previously being SCM [Safe Crisis Management] trained if there's an emergency and like having, you can't prepare for every like, emergency or scenario, but like, having some guidance at like, okay, you should plan on like if this happens, you do this, if this happens, you do this."

Field placements and internships can present social work students opportunities to support needed preparation to utilize the intervention of the home visit for school social workers but specialized training is also urged for the distinctive challenges that may occur during home-based work (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Nathans et al., 2019; Roggman et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022). School social worker R.H. feels strongly that, "Policy and procedure is needed." This was followed up by school social worker S.R. who also stated, "Developing some kind of process and procedure." School social worker T.J. agreed and stated,

> Yeah, because I don't think we have anything. I don't. There's nothing written in anything about home visits or who should do it or when or someone needs to go out with you. I think even like, our principals, if they have to go out or anything like that, now they actually take our resource officer.

This school social worker went on to state,

> And since we don't have a lot of like, guidance or direction, like, I don't know, I feel there's just so much of it that's like, a moving part of like, if this doesn't work and then this affects this and I don't know. I think like, too for me, like, not being able to like, I don't know, trust isn't really the right word but maybe it is like, trust that without having a policy or procedure, trust that people would like, have my back in certain situations.

This was followed up by school social worker R.H. who stated,

> You're working for a government organization, and everything has to be, because we're publicly accountable. A big, good, and bad thing about public education. Ya have to have a school board. You, you can get sued, you're a public figure. People have to know how much money you get paid because it's all accountable and that's again, the good and the bad thing.

Along with discussing the lack of policy and procedures specific to school social workers conducting home visits, the conversation shifted to specific support school social workers feel they need in the educational setting to assist with conducting home visits.

When responding to family issues, social workers need to use problem solving skills and interpersonal skills to form a trusting relationship. Interventions tend to be successful based on the relationships and engagement of families through the interactions with the school district (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Nathans et al., 2019; Openshaw, 2008; Peterson & Roggman, 2019; Roggman et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2019). This has appeared to be a deficit within school districts as school social workers have been unable to discuss their problem-solving skills and methods when working with families due to the lack of supervision school social workers have received within their school districts. Not one school social worker that attended the focus groups indicated they receive supervision at their school district, nor were any school social workers supervised by social workers.

> One of the things I'm very aware of is, we don't get supervision. I mean, but that would be the place where you could raise concerns. You know, somebody asked me to do a home visit, can I talk with you about it? Um you know, from the clinical social work, you know, ask questions. Um, my first supervisor was well, my first two were psychologist. So there was some who got it and thereafter I think they were special ed teachers

School social worker R.H. stated. School social worker B.M. agreed and stated, "We don't receive any supervision." This statement was followed up with, "I think that too," T.J. stated,

> Like my initial, when I first came to schools, I was supervised by the um, I don't even know what her title was then, they switched it to the assistant superintendent and now like I said I'm supervised by, she's the director of special education but her background is teaching. So, um, like, linking that to what you're saying with the home visits, I don't.

She doesn't give any guidance or support with anything like that, so if I am like,

wondering if it's a good idea, if I should do this or I need to do it, I talk to the other social

workers or like, email in the group like, I wouldn't actually ask my supervisor who does

my evaluation.

The discussion continued around guidance and supervision and was followed up with

B.G. by stating, "Um, I need a supervisor, who either is a social worker or is willing to learn

about social work, or who will just get out of my way then. Sorry you are getting me all ralled

up." Another school social worker T.C. agreed and stated, "Ya, I think that's where I'm at as

well." School social worker J.M. then added, "I think we need more of a pathway for social

workers to become administrators. I think we need to make it more accessible for our social

workers so they can become supervisors and supervise social workers. That's my opinion."

Tied to these statements, school social worker B.M. also agreed they need, "Administrator

support," to be successful in conducting home visits.

It is important understanding home visits begins with developing a strong theoretical

foundation and comprehension (Nathans et al., 2019) as well as empirical evidence directly from

the school social workers themselves about their experiences (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Allen &

Tracy, 2008; Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Harden, 2019; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2016;

Manz & Ventresco, 2019; Muzicant & Peled, 2018; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Shultz, 2020). Tied

to the discussion of supervision, school social worker W.P. stated, "I get my best ideas from the

other school social workers that I would have never thought about." These statements made by

the school social workers have identified various needs of school social workers to be successful

in conducting home visits.

Summary

Chapter Four provided detailed findings directly quoted from the school social workers interviewed during the focus groups. These findings were able to be connected back to the literature as well as address and support the research questions. The following chapter, chapter 5, synthesizes and discusses the findings from chapter four and presents a thorough reflection on the findings and this researcher's interpretation and analysis of the collected data.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Synthesis

It is important to show concrete linkages between the home visit intervention and theory to help strengthen the school social workers home-visitor competence and skills (Nathans et al., 2019). Chapter 5 will provide synthesis and discussion of the results while considering the study's research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. This chapter will discuss the patterns and themes found, and the ambiguities and inconsistencies. To achieve this, this chapter begins with a discussion on steps that were taken prior to the collection of data and then discusses the various rounds of data analysis. It will then provide a detailed explanation of concerns surrounding the study's trustworthiness. Overall, this chapter provides a thorough reflection on the study's findings and the practical and theoretical implications.

Introduction

The advancement of theories and perspectives within school social work has recognized the need for interventions at various levels of practice with a recognition of the individual, family, group, community, and school (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; Kelly et al., 2016). The development of theories has supported school social workers' demand to practice across multiple areas and systems, to effectively serve students (Allen-Meares, 2006; Berzin & O'Connor, 2010). The systems at every level which are involved in a student's life, including the environmental and social forces that are hindering student's academic functioning, need to be

addressed (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020). It is important that school social workers can address the individual needs of students and their families by utilizing the person-in-environment perspective, family-in-environment perspective, family systems theory, and ecological perspective theory, all while continuing to practice as a generalist social worker.

School social workers need to pull from a wide range of knowledge and skills to serve students in many ways (Finigan-Carr et al., 2018). Social workers are often forced to make their own practices when conducting home visits by utilizing their skills, knowledge, education, courage, intuition, and rituals rather than governmental rules due to there being no drafted plan for conducting home visits (Ferguson, 2018; Lyter & Abott, 2007). School social workers can refer to evidence-based practice to support the home visits due to no two home visits ever looking the same (Ferguson, 2018). By using evidence-based practice, school social workers are more likely to assist with appropriate delivery of the services and support needed for the students and families and the school district (Ferguson, 2016).

Gaining knowledge about home visits within school districts needs to come from comprehensive in-depth personal communication with school social workers to include their experiences and perceptions of the intervention of home visits. This is why research surrounding this topic comes with many complexities due to the value of including all empirical evidence (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Allen & Tracy, 2008; Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Harden. 2019; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Kelly et al., 2015; Manz & Ventresco, 2019; Muzicant & Peled, 2018; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Shultz, 2020). School social workers often have differing experiences and expectations of providing services in the home along with their intended outcomes, which creates discrepancies within the empirical evidence (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Manz & Ventresco, 2019; Nathans et al., 2019; Openshaw, 2008; Roggman et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Sherman, 2016). Analysis is considered exploratory due to the significance of

all possible meanings within the collected data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The below section of data analysis discusses the concepts and researcher's thought process of assigning meaning to the collected data. This section will include explanations of the codes, themes, recorded memos, and diagrams.

Prior to Data Analysis

To begin gathering data to analyze, this researcher created interview guides for each focus group that consisted of corresponding questions and guiding topics. The interview guides consisted of open-ended questions surrounding the research questions and the current areas of interest and domains. This researcher left ample space in between each question to notate participants' responses and observations. Throughout each focus group, this researcher utilized the basic strategies of observation, reading/reviewing, interviewing and listening, which are all vital tools for collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

This researcher audio recorded each focus group to capture what was said verbatim and the sounds and vocal intonations of each participant. This researcher did not paraphrase, summarize, or correct grammar of the participants, and transcription of both verbal and nonverbal content occurred. Ensuring exactness of participant responses is important, specifically when it comes to data analysis phase of the research study and coding the responses (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

This researcher logged observations for analysis as this data includes vital raw data often unable to be conveyed in the verbal recordings. The stored data for this research study included the audio recordings of the focus groups, transcripts of the focus groups, and observation and field notes. This researcher saved two copies of each recorded focus group and two copies of each transcript to ensure backup copies were available and emailed themselves copies of the

recordings and transcripts. The participants of each focus group had their names disguised and were distinguished by creating pseudonyms and given initials at random. These initials were used throughout the study.

The software of NVivo was utilized to store the collected data and facilitate the coding and analysis. NVivo was used to help manage, analyze, and shape the collected qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). NVivo also assisted this researcher with auto-coding the data for each layer of interpretation which will be discussed below. All these above steps were completed by the researcher prior to the first round of data analysis.

First Round of Analysis

The concept of conducting home visits was derived from collected data, existing theories, previous research and literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Padgett, 2016). The first round of data analysis began with data and observations collected from the conducted focus groups. This information was then broken down into common strategies and themes to create patterns. This was done by the researcher going back and forth between participants' recorded responses during each focus group to compare and create ideas about emerging theories or hypotheses.

The properties and dimensions of school social workers conducting home visits were organized into discrete categories created from the collected data and then was broken down and compared for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The similarities within the data were grouped together to form categories which then became integrated around a core category that developed the major theme of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The categories from the collected data are what become the illustration of the concept regarding the specific notion being researched. This relationship between concepts is a central aspect of theory building (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These concrete linkages made between

concepts provide evidence of the influences that affect school social workers and home visits.

These concepts have been identified from the data and are classified surrounding their properties

(Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Categories denote the major themes that are developed when basic

level concepts are grouped together and become more abstract (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

During data analysis, the researcher continued to revise the concepts by updating and

adding new concepts due to continuing to see different relationships between each revision

(Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The finalized concepts explain what is going on in a study by

producing relevant theoretical abstractions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data was then reduced

to form common characteristics of variables that were grouped together to assist with

organization.

Variables

Variables became operationalized and defined at one or more of the four levels of

measurement known as, nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Gender

For this study, gender of the school social worker is included in the nominal level of

measurement due to the impact this may have on choices made by the school social worker

(Mills, 2012). The categories in this include, male, female, and other. This variable was

discussed during the focus groups with one participant identifying their gender was a concern

and something that needed to be considered when conducting home visits. One school social

worker stated, "Uh, one is about liability. Um, particularly as a male social worker, um, and I

think there is you know, I know that there are other issues with female colleagues as well but

certainly the male social worker one of liability."

Geographic Location

Another variable considered is the location where the school social worker is employed. The variable surrounding the school district's location was identified as a challenge for some school social workers. School social worker W.P. spoke about this challenge and stated, "Just finding the address because some of them are really weird and you're in the middle of nowhere." Another school social worker T.J., spoke about their schools' geographic location as a concern when conducting home visits and stated, "Um, our district is also more, like, spread out. So, we're, we have, like, parts of our district that are pretty suburban and then there's parts that are a little bit more rural. So that would be, uh, an issue. I would have to, you know, kind of get around." This variable was identified as a challenge for school social workers when conducting home visits due to the distance and time spent getting to student's homes. School social worker J.K. stated, "Um, obviously the time. It takes a lot longer to go to a family's house then have them come to you or do a phone call."

Requirement/Job Description

The next variables being looked at are if the school social workers are required to conduct home visits for their school district and if home visiting is written in their job description. This variable was significant due to some school social workers being unaware if home visiting was listed in their job description. School social worker T.C. stated, "I don't know. I don't think it is," which was followed up by school social worker B.G. stating, "I feel like we are probably covered under other duties assigned." School social worker R.H. stated, "Um, I can't remember". School social worker B.M. answered and stated, "I have no idea," which was agreed upon by school social worker W.P. who said, "I'm not sure. I'd have to go back and look at it. I think it is."

Preparedness

Another variable considered is the school social worker's preparedness to conduct home visits. The findings showed school social workers felt their preparedness to conduct home visits came from previous internships and previous positions held. School social workers felt they gained almost all of their knowledge and skills to conduct home visits from shadowing other workers as well as having a good supervisor and regular supervision in a non-school setting.

Training/Education

Another variable discussed was the elements of training and education the school social worker has received to conduct home visits. School social workers indicated they have had absolutely no educational courses to assist them and their practices of conducting home visits. The school social workers spoke about previous training they had regarding being in the field, but every school social worker indicated these trainings were always conducted by some law enforcement office. The findings showed this produced many challenges for the school social workers and their practices.

Awareness of Evaluation Framework

Another variable discussed was the school social workers' awareness of the school social worker evaluation framework. Most school social workers identified knowing about the evaluation framework but felt strongly their current (non-social work) supervisor may not be the best one to provide the evaluation due to their lack of knowledge and background surrounding social work. The school social workers indicated their lack of being supervised by social workers is significant to their practice within school districts. For example, school social worker J.M. stated,

> Um, I recently had, like, a pretty significant ethical dilemma. I felt like, and his
> [supervisor] guidance was eh not great. Um, he was a school psychologist than got his

supervisor cert and he's great but in 95 percent of the time were aligned, but not always

and that's a problem so.

The findings show that school social workers were not receiving regular supervision and felt this

was needed to practice social work within school districts. When concerns and challenges arose

for school social workers, they indicated difficulty with receiving guidance from supervisors and

often turned to their current networking group consisting of social workers for support.

Previous Positions

Previous positions held by the school social worker were discussed as an ordinal level of

measurement. This variable was directly connected to the variable surrounding school social

workers preparedness and the previous trainings surrounding conducting home visits. The school

social workers who held previous positions that required home visits demonstrated a more

preparedness to be in the field and home of clients. This variable was discussed in detail in

Chapter Four.

Degree of Satisfaction

Another variable taken into consideration was the degree of satisfaction regarding the

education school social workers have received to support conducting home visits. The findings

showed that not one school social worker indicated they were satisfied with their education and

the preparation they have been given to be able to conduct home visits. This variable can be seen

as a challenge for school social work practice.

Time Spent Outside the School

The variable included in the interval level of measurement is the percentage of time the

school social worker is out in the field and out of the school building. This variable was

connected to the school social workers job description and duties and varied immensely between

school social workers.

Concepts are what form the structures for the theory. These concepts are what provide the

details, variations and interest to make the creation of theory relevant (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Included in the data analysis phase are the important analytic tools known as the use of memos

and diagrams (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This researcher utilized memos during each layer of data

interpretation to move the analysis further in each step (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The use of

memos helps support the development of concepts in terms of dimensions and their properties

(Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Diagrams are what becomes the visual representation of the concepts

and the relationship between them. Throughout each layer of data interpretation, the diagrams

have evolved and have become more complex through each later of interpretation (Corbin &

Strauss, 2015). The constructed memos and diagrams shown in each layer of data interpretation

will show the relationships between the identified concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The above-mentioned distinguished categories were included in the process of coding.

This process of within-code comparison has been used in this research study to uncover the

various dimensions and properties of the identified concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This

procedure is utilized during grounded theory and starts with open coding (Corbin & Strauss,

2015). This researcher assessed the collected data, which included the transcripts from the audio-

recorded focus groups, observation and field notes, and collected information and documents

within the literature review. This step was done first by the researcher to allow categories to

emerge from the data rather than forcing the data into preconceived categories (Corbin &

Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padget, 2016; Sims-Schouten & Thapa, 2023). Different

aspects were brought out regarding the overall phenomenon during the coding phases. The data

that this researcher found to be conceptually similar were grouped together under a conceptual

label (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). These categories were kept in an initial code book and the verbatim transcripts from each focus group were uploaded into the NVivo qualitative analysis software.

The first round of coding has produced a list of open codes, which included the many opinions of school social workers surrounding the concept of conducting home visits for school districts. The list of open codes included why home visits are necessary for school districts and the reasons they have been conducted. These reasons and opinions included the concerns and challenges school social workers have faced while conducting home visits. The below initial memo denotes the properties and dimensions of the codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Memo 1

The concept of school social workers conducting home visits was explored. School social workers identified that home visits are used as part of their practice within school districts. Through the school social workers describing their practice and perceptions of this practice behavior, these statements were conceptualized into the broad categories of the use of home visits, concerns and challenges of home visits, and the practice of conducting home visits. Discussion of the outcomes of the home visits gave a dimension of the property of the home visits' use. The use of the home visit provided outcomes specific to the students, family, and school district. Through identifying the use of home visits, the lack of guidance and supervision school social workers receive provided a dimension within the property of concerns and challenges regarding the home visit. All these identified properties provide a dimension within the property of school social workers' practice within school districts. These properties of conducting home visits provide insight into the practice and perceptions of school social workers conducting home visits for school districts.

The previously given memo and the diagram below (see Figure 5) begin the initial data analysis. The concept of school social workers conducting home visits is identified and the properties and dimensions (use, concern/challenges, practice) make up the concept of school social workers practice and perceptions of conducting home visits for school districts.
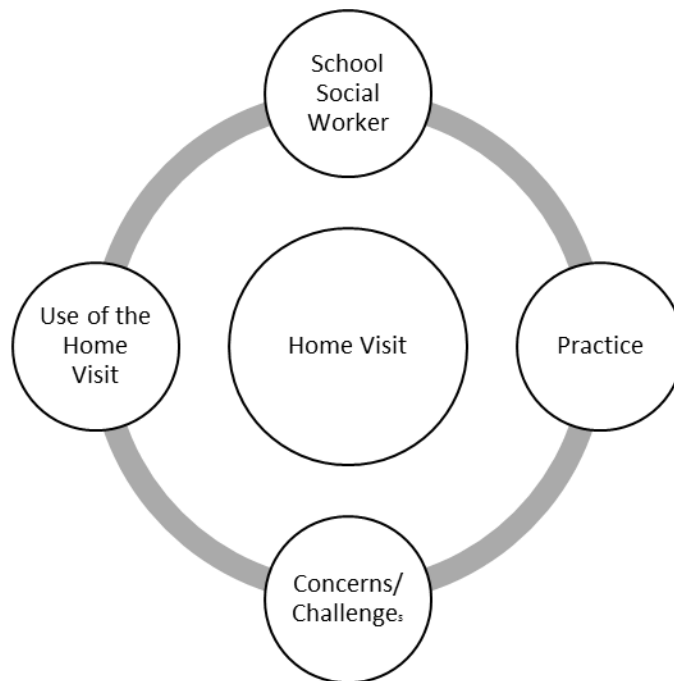
Figure 5: First Round of Data Analysis

This researcher identified a single category from the initial list of open codes created which became the dominant phenomenon of concentration. Once the single category was selected, this researcher chose this as the main feature of the theory. The main feature identified in the first round of coding was the lack of guidance and support school social workers receive from their school districts regarding conducting home visits. All school social workers felt home visits were appropriate and necessary at times, and produced positive results for school districts, but the lack of support given to school social workers affects their practice of conducting home visits. After the identification of this single category, the researcher then returned to the database and gathered more information and categories related to this dominant phenomenon. This second

layer of interpretation is known as axial coding. This layer of interpretation will be explained in more detail below.

Second Layer of Interpretation

Axial coding was used in this layer of interpretation to review the collected data again with hopes of providing additional understanding to the specific codes related to the dominant identified phenomenon. School social workers felt home visits were appropriate and necessary at times for school districts, but school social workers lacked the guidance and support to do this. Specific codes were created to bridge the gap between the results of conducting home visits for school districts and barriers school social workers face trying to achieve this. This included the connection between the home and school, increased relationships and connections, producing empathy for the students, and increasing resources for the students and families. Included in the need for school social workers to conduct home visits, many barriers were identified. These barriers contained the lack of guidance and supervision for school social workers and the concerns and challenges that school social workers face related to conducting home visits. Due to the axial coding stage, another memo was created by this researcher to provide additional understanding of school social workers conducting home visits. This memo provided more detail into the school social workers' practice and perceptions.

Memo 2

This memo provides more in-depth details based on the data and is meant to provide more complex properties and dimensions to continue to explore the practice of home visits for school social workers. The broad categories of the use of home visits, concerns and challenges of home visits, and the practice of conducting home visits were included again, but this researcher provided additional properties related to the dominant phenomenon. Building from the first memo, the use of the home visit has provided many outcomes specific to the students, families,

and school district. These outcomes have been overwhelmingly positive which have included dimensions of empathy, engagement, relationships, connection, bridging the gap, removal of barriers, and resources to name a few. The concerns and challenges surrounding home visiting also provided additional properties related to the dominant phenomenon. These included a lack of policy and procedure, lack of education, lack of training, and lack of guidance and supervision given to school social workers to conduct home visits. The final category expanded on was the practice of home visits for school social workers. Additional properties surrounding school social work practice include the concerns and challenges that create barriers to school social work practice and effects the overall successfulness of the home visit for school districts.

The diagram below (Figure 6) is based on Memo 2 and lays out the possible dimensions of the practice and perceptions of school social workers conducting home visits for school districts. These dimensions are listed under each of the broad categories identified as the use of the home visit, concerns and challenges of the home visit, and the practice of conducting home visits.
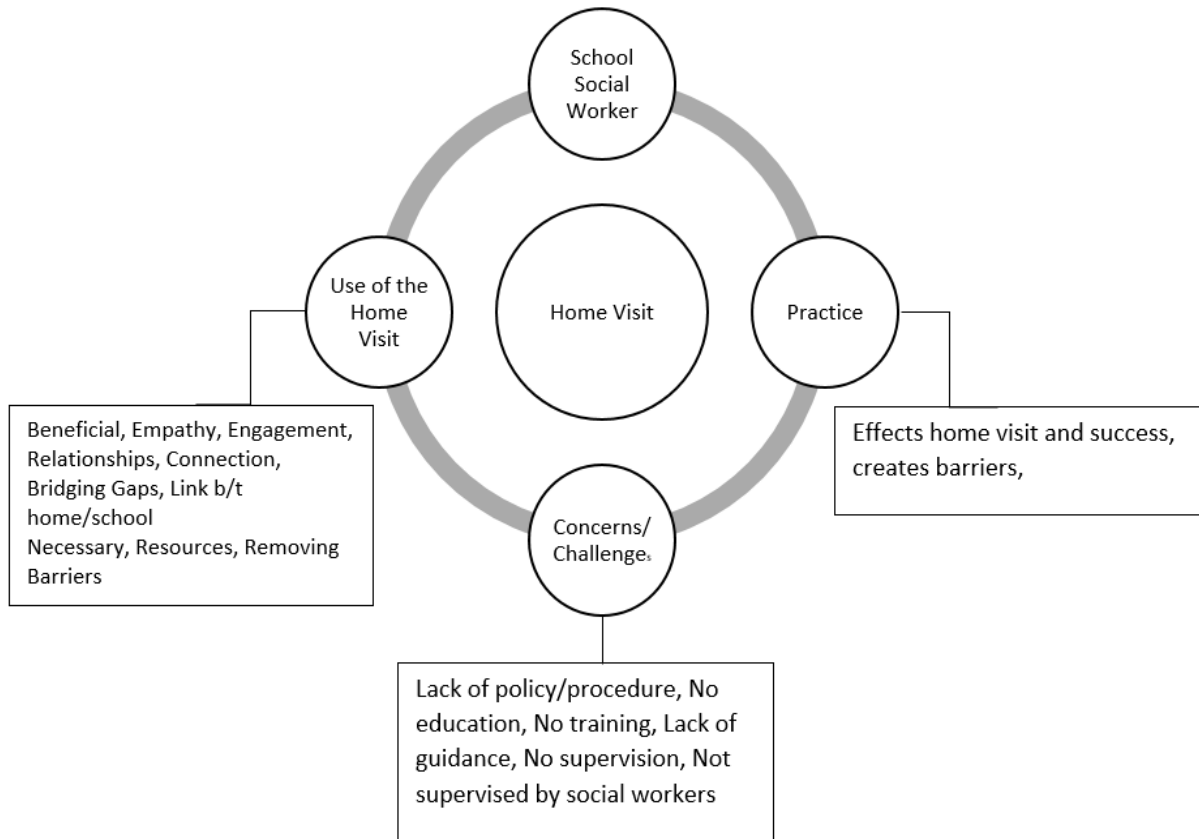
Figure 6: Second Round of Data Analysis

A codebook was then created by the researcher to finalize the list of codes with a

description of each code. This codebook was created using NVivo. Please see Figure 7, the

codebook below for a list of codes and their descriptions.

Name	Description
Barriers to HV	
Lack of supervision guidance	What type of guidance and supervision do SSW receive
Liability	No policy and procedures to protect SSW. Liability within the field

Places	Safety, Places SSW are visiting, Getting to the homes
Training education for HV	Any training or education received to conduct HV.
Know how to conduct HV	How do SSW know how to conduct HV
Benefits to HV	Benefits to students, benefits to families, benefits to SD
Parents	Benefits to parents
SD	Benefits to the school district
Students	Benefits to the students
Needed to be successful in conducting HV	What do SSW need to conduct HV for SD successfully
Procedures	Policy and Procedures to ensure liability
Support	
Supervision	Needed support within SD
Reasons for HV	
Reasons for HV	All reasons SSW have had to conduct HV

SSW awareness of framework evaluation	

Figure 7: Codes and Descriptions: Practice and Perceptions of School Social Workers Conducting Home Visits

Analysis and coding are often used interchangeably (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The above codebook was created by going through the data and designating concepts to represent the data. These created codes support the properties and dimensions of the above categories and variables. Below are two important diagrams created within NVivo that are connected to the dominant phenomenon. Figure 8 is a NVivo Diagram that shows the breakdown of the code, Benefits to Home Visits. This diagram is significant due to showing the benefits of home visiting equally affecting students, families, and the school district. This coded diagram is directly related to the category of home visit use and shows significant benefits stemming from school social workers conducting home visits.
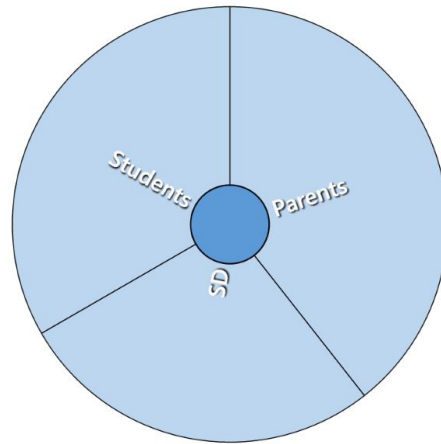
Figure 8: NVivo Diagram, Benefits to Home Visits

The second NVivo Diagram, Figure 9, is a hierarchy chart created within NVivo to show

the barriers to home visits. This chart supports each layer of data interpretation. This chart shows

the biggest barriers to conducting home visits for school social workers are the lack of

supervision and guidance school social workers receive in school districts and the lack of

training and education school social workers receive regarding home visits.
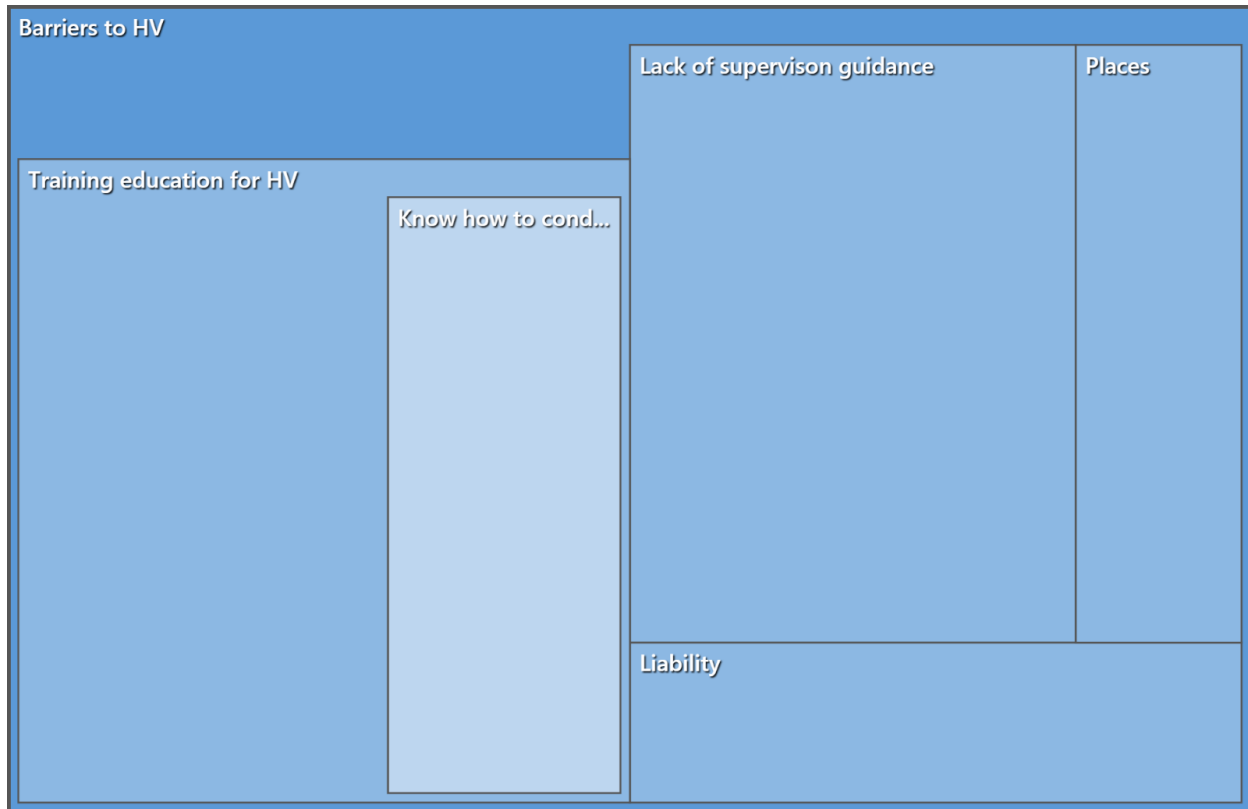
Figure 9: NVivo Hierarchy Chart of Barriers of School Social Workers Conducting Home Visits. The meaning behind the concepts and their relationships has assisted this researcher with

moving from raw data to theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This has brought us to the third and

final layer of interpretation of the data began. This final layer of interpretation of the data is

explained below in detail.

Third Layer of Interpretation

Information gathered from each of these phases of coding was organized into a diagram

that can be presented to support a theoretical model of the method under study. These steps are

taken to build and generate a theory. The intersection of categories developed from the coding

phases became the theory. This step is known as selective coding and is meant to generate

statements or hypotheses that connect categories within the coding template (Crewell & Poth,

2017). The concepts that have been refined and identified have continued to integrate around the

core category denoting relationships between them all (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). To support the

third layer of data interpretation known as selective coding, a third memo was created.

Memo 3

This memo provides more in-depth details based on the data and is meant to provide

more complex properties and dimensions to continue to explore the practice of home visits for

school social workers. The broad categories of the use of home visits, concerns and challenges of

home visits, and the practice of conducting home visits were included again, but this researcher

provided additional properties related to the dominant phenomenon. Building from the first and

second memo, the use of the home visit is a necessary practice behavior for school social

workers. There are benefits for the students, families, and school district, but school social

workers are facing concerns and challenges. The concerns and challenges surround the lack of

policy and procedures surrounding home visits which creates a concern for liability. The school

social workers are not provided supervision at their school districts or supervised by social

workers, which significantly impacts their practice within school districts. The concerns and

challenges identified impact their practice within school districts.

The diagram below (Figure 10) is based on Memo 3 and lays out the possible dimensions

of the practice and perceptions of school social workers conducting home visits for school

districts. These dimensions are listed under each of the broad categories identified as the use of

the home visit, concerns and challenges of the home visit, and the practice of conducting home

visits.

```
                              ┌─────────────┐
                              │   School    │
                              │   Social    │
                              │   Worker    │
                              └─────────────┘

   ┌──────────┐          ┌──────────────┐          ┌──────────┐
   │ Use of the│         │  Home Visit  │          │ Practice │
   │   Home    │         │              │          │          │
   │   Visit   │         └──────────────┘          └──────────┘
   └──────────┘
```

Practice Behavior for School Social Workers Necessary for schools but comes with concerns and challenges		Concerns/Challenges identified significantly impacts practice of school social workers and practice of home visits

Concerns/Challenges

Unaware of Policy/Procedures
Liability for School Social Workers
No Supervision, Not Supervised
by Social Workers
Concerns/Challenges Effect
Practice of School Social Workers
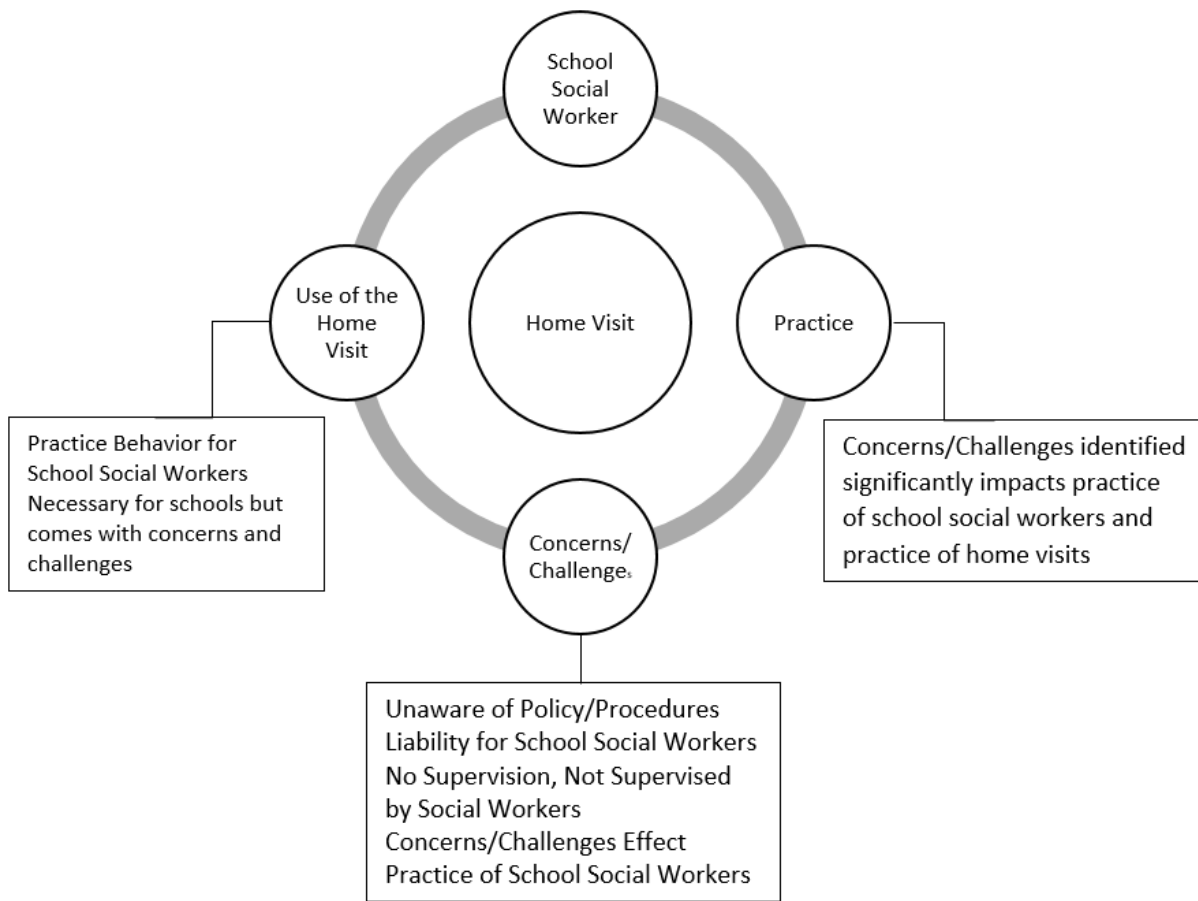
Figure 10: Final Interpretation of Data Analysis

For this research study, the intersection of categories for construction of theory is as

follows. School social workers felt home visits needed to be a part of their practice within school

districts, but school social workers are unaware of any policy and procedure for conducting

home visits for school districts. School social workers are not supervised by social workers at

their school districts and do not receive formal supervision. This lack of guidance and support

given to school social workers significantly impacts their practice within schools and of

conducting home visits. This researcher has been able to show the relationships between the

concepts, which is known as the most important aspect of theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The

final interpretation of data has been able to define the main area under investigation, explain the

context for action-interaction, relate the interaction to the meaning of the problem, and relate the

results and outcomes to the interaction (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Completed Data Interpretation

Analysis is an ongoing process throughout the research study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015),

but interpretation of data is completed when the data collected reached a point where codes and

themes created became redundant and do not provide new information. Specific to grounded

theory, the emphasis on the collected data comes from beliefs, values, feelings, assumptions and

ideologies of the participants and not on the specific methods of research (Creswell & Poth,

2017). Exclusive to this study, the emphasis of collected data came from the beliefs, practices,

perceptions, feelings, ideologies, and assumptions of the participants of school social workers

surrounding home visits. The data collected was constantly going through comparative analysis

by the researcher to go beyond the codes and themes to see a greater meaning of the data.

The layers of interpretation began with the creation of codes, then the establishment of

themes from the codes, and then the configuration of themes into greater elements of concepts

that make sense of the collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). All these steps included in each of

the above coding phases, allowed the researcher to create and test out categories meant to capture

the collected data (Sims-Schouten & Thapa, 2023). The phases of coding allowed this researcher

to continually examine the created categories between the literature and collected data from the

focus groups. Throughout every layer of interpretation, this researcher was constantly updating

and revising concepts to add new properties, dimensions, and concepts when new relationships

were established between concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Symbolizing the concepts and their

relationships is what transfers the research from collected data to theory (Corbin & Strauss,

2015).

Thematic analysis is often used in grounded theory to identify a lived experience and address commonalities across the reported and collected data (Padgett, 2016). This specific analysis assisted the researcher with the identification, analysis, and interpretation of the lived experiences of the school social workers. There is little general literature on home visiting or a proper way to plan and conduct home visits, which has left the home visit being under-researched and under-theorized (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Lyter & Abbott, 2007; Nathans et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Winter & Cree, 2016) although the home is a common place for social workers to provide services (Ferguson, 2018; Nathans et al., 2019). Where there is little literature in the work of non-traditional areas, bringing the creation of theory becomes a valuable strategy (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theorizing allowed the researcher to conceptualize the data without producing a specific theory (Padgett, 2016) and used theoretical sampling to analyze previous data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

With the stated theory above, this researcher was able to identify concepts that were developed in terms of their properties and dimensions and were integrated around a core category through statements representing the relationships between all categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This researcher has been able to link the concepts back together to tell the original main story of the research in conceptual terms (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and show the meanings envisioned by the participants. Increasing the trustworthiness of a research study can be done by producing findings that capture and represent the participants' experiences as closely as possible while validating the accuracy of their accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Being able to define what a good, valid, and trustworthy qualitative study is, can often be a difficult question for researchers to answer but it is important to show a study is carried out

fairly and ethically (Padgett, 2016). Starting in the earliest stages of a research study, checking

the rigor of techniques and methods is key (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Ethical issues can arise

within all stages of the research study, but it is up to the researcher to include methods to plan for

them (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). These applicable methods and skills discussed below show how

this researcher increased reliability and validity throughout the research study to increase its

trustworthiness.

Research Protocol

This researcher submitted a research protocol to the Kutztown Institutional Review Board

prior to conducting the current research study. This protocol included the rationale for the study,

literature review, hypotheses of the research study, and a detailed sample of the intended

participants for the study. Recruitment procedures, data collection instruments, and data analysis

strategies were also built into the submitted protocol along with an intended schedule for the

study. An important piece to this protocol is the informed consent, which was also given to the

participants. This document included a clear purpose of the study, length of the focus group

interviews, lists of potential risks and benefits, and instructions on what to do if participants feel

discomfort and harm. One important part of the informed consent is informing participants their

involvement is voluntary and they hold the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

This researcher received signed copies from each participant and were scanned and sent back to

each participant individually.

Prior to each focus group being conducted, this researcher provided the list of intended

interview questions to participants, so participants were prepared not to answer if they chose not

too as well as giving the participants an opportunity to contact this researcher with any questions

or suggested changes. This method was also used to limit participant apprehension when

answering in front of other professionals (Rubin & Babbie, 2017) and lessen a risk specific to

purposeful sampling of participants being concerned with speaking about their own practices

(Padgett, 2016) which can be seen as a possible limitation.

Following each focus group, this researcher sent follow up emails to participants

thanking them for their participation and encouraging them to reach out to this researcher with

any unmet needs or questions they may have. This researcher was not contacted by any

participant before or after the focus group suggesting changes to the interview schedule or any

unmet needs. However, this researcher was contacted by numerous participants following the

focus groups, thanking this researcher for the opportunity to be a part of the focus group

discussion as well as acknowledging the importance and need for this type of research study.

Stated in the research protocol, specific to grounded theory, this study is meant to incorporate

new dimensions and theories gathered from the collected data (Oktay, 2012). The collected data

came from an extensive literature review and participation in focus groups with school social

workers from one identified networking group.

Assessing Biases

Researchers are often interested in conducting research within the populations they serve

due to having their own knowledge of the practice setting and wanting to improve practice

(Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). This creates advantages and disadvantages within a

research study and this researcher has acknowledged they have chosen a research study

surrounding their current profession, practice setting, and population they serve (Padgett, 2016;

Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

This researcher has considered what they brought to the study. This is known as

conceptualization, which often includes the views of themselves, others, personal history, and

ethical and political issues. Interpretations of the researchers' cultural, historical, and personal

experiences will flow into the study due to the position they hold within any given study

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). Reactivity can be used to determine how much the research setting

reacts to the researcher and examine the biases and perspectives of the researcher and

participants involved (Thyer, 2009). There was no way to avoid reactivity within this research

study due to this researcher being a part of the conducted focus groups, but this researcher

examined the biases and perspectives of themselves and the participants.

Within this study, this researcher was aware of biases that exist within the samples and

data. This researcher has applied reflexivity to acknowledge the subjectivity of their own lens

and powerful position they held within the research study and understood that ethical

complications have a potential to increase when the topic and setting a researcher chooses is

something personal and of interest to them (Padgett, 2016). This researcher was very aware of

the subjectivity of their own personal perceptions and personal practices surrounding conducting

home visits for school districts. This researcher practiced reflexivity throughout this research

study to help with the awareness of personal biases and how to manage them.

Researcher bias can be seen as a limitation due to the researcher being a school social

worker apart of the networking group just like the participants and the concern for

overfamiliarity of the current topic was noted. This researcher also had to examine their own

biases regarding the questions asked to participants during the focus groups so the

preconceptions this researcher holds did not unconsciously influence the discussion (Cohen &

Garrett, 1999). To lessen this concern, the researcher used the literature review information to

create the research questions and the semi-structured interview schedule during the focus groups.

Social desirability bias was noted as a possibility due to the sample of participants and

researcher being a part of the School Social Work Networking Group. This created the potential

for a lack of motivation or deception. The findings showed participants being willing to share sensitive information due to the support of the group but there is a concern some participants may have been apprehensive with answering truthfully due to being with other school social work professionals and concerns with a power imbalance. Obtrusive observation can also be noted as a possible concern due to participants being aware they were being recorded and observed by other participants and the researcher, which may have compelled them to behave or answer in ways to meet the expectations of the study. The sample of participants involved in the chosen networking group continue to meet regularly so hesitation with answering truthfully during the focus group could be a possibility.

For the focus groups conducted, the use of a semi-structured interview schedule allowed the discussion to be very interactive between all participants. Throughout the focus groups, there were many participants that agreed with one another and then there were times when participants disagreed with one another. The active interaction between the researcher and the participants is a classifying feature of qualitative inquiry and can affect one another in unpredictable ways.

This researcher needed to be aware of the many acquired characteristics they carried with them into the field, which included professional, personal, political, and recreational (Padgett, 2016). This researcher also acknowledged the intersectionality of fixed identities which included sex, age, race/ethnicity, and their social responsibility as an ethical stance to be sensitive to diversity (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). To guarantee this occurred, this researcher ensured their awareness of any minority groups participating and made sure the language used on the informed consent and during the focus groups was culturally sensitive, non-sexist, and non-biased. The observation notes taken by the researcher during the focus groups needed to not include any personal preferences or psychological terms, to support the least bias-free instrument possible.

Rapport between the researcher and study participants needs to include respect, positive regard, and trust to increase honesty and frankness (Padgett, 2016). This researcher created an open environment and encouraged a rich discussion of all opinions participating in the focus group. Due to participants knowing one another, this helped create an atmosphere of trust and respect for one another.

Retaining Participants

Success in a research study is often dependent upon retaining participants (Padgett, 2016). This researcher did not provide incentives for participation but informed participants this study will provide compensation naturalistically due to their contribution being used to assist and provide insight into school social work practice surrounding home visits and contributing to the potential of future research for other school social workers. This researcher also included the incentive of informing participants they can be shared the findings of the research study they played a significant role in. This researcher gave the participants true ownership of the information collected and used this as an ethical practice (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This was done by the researcher using verbatim quotes from the participants to support the hypotheses, literature review, and research questions.

This researcher provided their contact information to each participant and encouraged them to reach out with questions or concerns. This researcher remained in constant contact with each participant throughout the duration of the study by email before and following each focus group. Another useful strategy that was used to recruit and retain participants, like mentioned above, included informing participants the purpose of the study, intended length of the study, its voluntary nature, what their participation will entail, and the guidelines used to maintain confidentiality. This researcher warranted ethical considerations to increase participation by respecting all participants. This included consent and privacy, minimizing harm, and increasing

mutuality and justice by encouraging inclusivity and equitable treatment (Creswell and Poth, 2017).

Included in retaining participants was the issue of participants needing to leave the field site early or participants not being able to attend all scheduled focus groups. This is known as field issues, which contributed to a potential loss of information (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This researcher was aware of this potential due to the ever-changing and unpredictability nature of a qualitative research study. This researcher used flexibility and, on the spot, decision making during the data collection phase to ensure enough data was collected (Padgett, 2016). This involved this researcher changing the interview schedule slightly to ask participants all intended questions due to participant availability.

For participants that had to leave the focus group early or not able to attend the focus groups, this researcher did follow up with participants by email and was able to meet with them individually in-person and over zoom. This validation strategy known as member-checking assisted with lessening this limitation and provided support to the data collection method of conducting focus groups to support credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These interview responses are included throughout the findings and are defined as individual interviews.

Conducted Focus Groups

This researcher needed to ensure enough data was collected from the identified samples to provide relative meaning behind the phenomenon (Thyer, 2009). As previously stated, focus groups are an appropriate method for gathering data from a group of social networks already established. Padgett (2016) recommends at least two focus group interviews be conducted. The more data collected can only produce more meaning to the research study so the more sampling perspective in qualitative research, the better (Thyer, 2009). The intended goal was to have two

sets of focus groups meet two to three times each. Due to participant availability and turnout, three sets of focus groups were conducted. The first group met two times and the second and third groups met one time each.

The first group of participants involved in the first set of focus groups met in person at the Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15 (CAIU) two separate times. This location provided a private space for a distraction free conversation. The second group and third group of participants involved in the next set of focus groups met virtually but fortunately, focus groups often utilize the common format of computer-mediated data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These separate sets of focus groups only met one time each due to participant availability. Due to this, this researcher needed to change the interview schedule slightly to be able to ask all intended questions to participants.

Often, qualitative researchers utilize multiple data collection approaches due to qualitative research is often being conducted with relatively few controls in a naturalist setting (Thyer, 2009) but for this study, focus groups were the sole data source. This can be seen as a limitation, but within this data source, the basic strategies of observation, reviewing/reading, listening, and interviewing took place throughout this research study to help ensure enough data was collected. This researcher was the only observer and coder to classify the collected observations and data from the focus groups, which may also be a limitation to validation.

Due to this research study recruiting participants exclusively through one specific group known as the already established School Social Work Networking Group discussed previously, there is a concern for this to produce a skewed sample due to the exclusion of school social workers not involved in this networking group. Although school social worker T.C. stated, "I think there's so many differences within all of us, even within this Intermediate Unit. We all

have so many differences," recruiting participants exclusively through one specific group, can be

seen as a disadvantage due to concerns of the researcher being too close to the research and the

possibility of role confusion (Padgett, 2016). This is due to the researcher being a member of the

established networking group used for the focus groups.

Ensuring Confidentiality

During qualitative studies, especially focus groups, participants often disclose a vast

amount of personal information (Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017) so this researcher needed

to ensure the protection of participants well-being and interests as well as confidentiality during

data collection and the reporting of findings. This researcher addressed confidentiality in the

informed consent and before each focus group. This researcher informed participants that

confidentiality could be broken due to this researcher having no control over group members

violating confidentiality after the focus groups are conducted. This researcher also addressed the

state law requirements of mandated reporting and the potential of breaking confidentiality if

certain disclosures were made during the focus group.

This researcher informed participants that the focus groups would be audio recorded in

the informed consent but also stated this prior to each focus group. This researcher ensured

participants that pseudonyms and made-up initials will be used when reporting the findings and

their identities will never be revealed or connected to the information they provide.

Confidentiality was discussed in detail in the informed consent.

Reliability

When other researchers complete similar evaluations and/or observations and produce

comparable results and explanations, the reliability of a research study is greater (Rubin &

Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). For this research study, various focus groups occurred where similar

observations and results were produced to support the reliability of the study. For this study, the researcher asked open-ended questions during each focus group, which required participants to provide more in-depth exploration and explanations of their perspectives. The use of open-ended questions during the focus groups helped protect the use of publicly pleasing responses from participants, to help the researcher assess internal consistency. The same open-ended questions were asked during every focus group and the correspondence between the responses of participants can be seen as a reliability check. This researcher established recording procedures for the collected data and transcribed the participants' responses verbatim to enhance reliability. This researcher also recorded observations during the focus groups and kept an ongoing field journal during the entire research process.

All these steps taken by the researcher have ensured the researcher stayed as close to the empirical data as possible. Due to this need, this researcher recorded and reported verbatim accounts and the descriptive, subjective meanings of the participants. This researcher used exact quotes from the participants to reinforce the presumed statements about the data along with a thorough description of the phenomenon being investigated. This researcher analyzed how many statements were made across instances that supported the considered conclusion to resolve concerns with internal reliability (Thyer, 2009).

It is normal for research designs to produce internal and external issues, and reliability is dependent upon the solution (Thyer, 2009). This researcher showed external reliability was achieved due to being able to show similar themes and paradigms across each focus group (Thyer, 2009). This researcher also showed internal reliability was achieved by connecting the newly collected data with previous concepts and literature but some limits to the overall reliability were noted (Thyer, 2009). One researcher conducted the entire study, which means the transcription of data was analyzed and coded by one person. To lessen this concern, this

researcher created a preliminary code list and applied it to all the transcripts from the focus

groups to assess consistency and use NVivo, the qualitative software to assist with coding.

Dependability

Changing conditions within a research study can affect its dependability, and it is

important a researcher can justify these changes (Thyer, 2009). Since there were multiple focus

groups that took place, this researcher documented the ongoing procedures to show steadiness

and fidelity of observations across each focus group. This researcher kept an audit trail that

included a running explanation of these procedures throughout the study. This step safeguarded

the collected data and assisted with the analysis to show how the data was coded and analyzed to

incorporate the findings.

Validity

To achieve validity in qualitative research, the researcher must provide a sequence of

evidence and narrative justifications that are plausible and trustworthy (Padgett, 2016; Thyer,

2009). This researcher used various sources to test the interpretations and findings from the data

collection sources, including the extensive literature review and the various accounts provided by

the participants during each focus group. This researcher was able to connect the responses of the

participants to the literature review.

This researcher did not have a chance to involve a co-researcher as a validation strategy,

and this study will not be peer-reviewed. Participants were involved through each phase of the

conducted focus groups but were not involved in key research decisions which included the

development of collection protocols, analysis, or interpretations of the data.

Reflexivity was practiced by the researcher throughout the study to help attain validity

(Thyer, 2009). This researcher was aware of the biases they carry and the possibility this had of

distorting the findings. This researcher ensured reporting findings exactly from the participants'

accounts occurred. Since the data was collected from participants in the form of focus groups,

this researcher was aware of the potential of biases within respondents. This included the

possibility of information being presented differently than other participants or witnesses

perceived it. Reactivity refers to the possibility of certain information being withheld, and

answers being distorted due to the researchers' presence (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Rubin &

Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). There was a concern for this due to the researcher and participants

being a part of the same School Social Work Networking Group and the possibility of school

social workers answering with hesitation. By practicing reflexivity throughout the study, there is

a true understanding of the values, biases, and experiences this researcher brings to the study

with a true understanding of their position. This researcher's positionality statement was

discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Prolonged engagement was used by this researcher to examine their own biases and

perceptions and the participants' biases in order to reduce the impact of reactivity and respondent

biases (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Thyer, 2009). The use of prolonged

engagement allowed this researcher to understand the context and culture of the participants and

space where the focus groups occurred. Since multiple focus groups took place at different times

and the researcher visited the site where the focus groups occurred on numerous and separate

occasions, it is possible the misrepresentations generated by the researcher were lessened

throughout the data collection. The use of virtual focus groups also supported this. All these

steps confirm a useful validation strategy to show this researcher is familiar with the field site

and participants.

This research study utilized purposeful sampling to gain study participants. The use of

purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to show transferability and external validity due to

replicating the findings and establishing similarities between participants (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009). This researcher also conducted an across-case analysis to test findings and interests to specific questions asked during the focus groups (Thyer, 2009).

Transferability refers to the generalizability and comparison of the findings, not the sample and this researcher was able to show this due to the match of characteristics between cases (Padgett, 2016; Thyer, 2009). This researcher collected data directly from the accounts and statements made by the school social workers during the focus group interviews but due to the participants coming from one specific networking group, generalizability is considered low. The in-depth interviews conducted during the focus groups are known to be less generalizable compared to the results that come from standardized measurements and precise sampling (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The personal nature of measurements and observations constructed by the researcher may produce results that may not be replicated by another independent researcher (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

The sample selection of participants included school social workers from one networking group. This networking group included school social workers from public school districts and the Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15. Although each school district may be a part of a different geographical region, they are in the same general area in the state of Pennsylvania which can contribute to low generalizability within the findings.

This researcher has been able to avoid certain threats to internal and external validity by staying on track of the employed research design and the theoretical perspective (Thyer, 2009). The researcher took the following steps to increase validity and credibility of this study. This researcher became very familiar with the setting and topic being researched, ensured there was sufficient data to analyze by conducting numerous focus groups, confirmed systematic

comparisons, and created plausible links between the data, analysis, and findings (Padgett, 2016). This researcher continued to update the categories to capture completeness of the experience studied and produce findings sensible to the participants (Padgett, 2016). By taking these steps, this researcher showed how this study can be used in the everyday world, its usefulness, and how the analyses can be used to create future research (Padgett, 2016).

This researcher was aware that ethical issues could have arisen at any time during the duration of the study, so this researcher remained flexible in dealing with anything that arose. This researcher consulted with their research advisor regularly to debrief and provide support due to there being only one researcher conducting this study.

Saturation of Data

Some challenges are known to occur within grounded theory when attempting to create theory. Identifying when data saturation has occurred can be of question due to the study not providing a development of theories or completion of categories (Akesson et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016). This researcher utilized theoretical sampling during the data collection phase to assist with reaching saturation. This researcher followed the lead of concepts created from the analysis and these concepts generated questions which lead to the creation of more questions to enhance the data to be collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This circular process has been illustrated in the development of memos and diagrams (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Theoretical sampling fits well into purposeful sampling due to the researcher creating questions from the data and literature review and then looking for the best sources to find answers to those questions.

For this research study, it was the school social work networking group that provided the data to analyze. The purposeful sampling method of school social workers did not allow this

researcher to gather additional information from individuals different from the participants

originally interviewed to determine if the outcomes hold true for additional participants, which

can lessen the possibility of saturation of the data. This researcher was unable to use discriminant

sampling to help achieve this (Crewell & Poth, 2017).

To assist with reaching saturation, the software NVivo was used to store the data and

facilitate coding and analysis. This software was used to manage, analyze, and shape the

collected qualitative data and find connections and hierarchies among the codes (Creswell &

Poth, 2017; Padgett, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Using NVivo helped reach saturation due to

the study's time constraints. For this research study, saturation appeared to be reached due to no

new categories or themes emerging after the third layer of data interpretation.

Conclusion

Analysis within a research study is meant to reduce the amount of data a researcher needs

to work with by outlining concepts to represent the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This chapter

explained the steps this researcher took to analyze the collected data and steps taken during the

coding process to create the concepts which stand for the researcher's interpretation of the

meanings envisioned by the participants. This chapter also discussed issues surrounding the

trustworthiness of the study and steps this researcher took to lessen these concerns. The next and

final chapter, Chapter Six, presents a set of concluding statements and recommendations. These

conclusions are based on the findings, analysis, interpretation, and synthesis from chapters four

and five and the recommendations are considered the application of the identified conclusions.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

A comprehensive review of literature has been conducted surrounding school social

workers to examine the home visit as an intervention method for school districts. This review of

the literature in Chapters 1-2, has provided a history of school social workers and home visits, a

conceptual framework of theories and perspectives that support home visiting, previous and

current educational laws, national practice model for school social work practice, current

programs that currently utilize a home visiting model, and past research studies on home visiting.

This extensive literature review explained the need for further research surrounding school social

workers and the practice behavior of conducting home visits for school districts. Chapter 3 has

provided a detailed methodology that includes the research questions and identified the variables

to be conceptualized and operationalized. Chapter 3 has also provided a rationale of the

suitability of the methodology, research approach intended to address the research questions,

history and background of the phenomenon, description the research sample, ethical

considerations pertaining to the participants, data collection methods and analysis, and then

concludes with a detailed discussion on the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 4 consisted of findings from the current research study. The findings from this

research study were connected to the literature and the chapter included a description of the

chosen research design, rationale for the data analysis, description of the participants involved in

the research study, and then the research questions are discussed in detail to show connection to

the findings. Chapter 5 provided synthesis and discussion of the results while considering the

study's research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. This chapter discussed

the patterns and themes found, and the ambiguities and inconsistencies. Chapter 5 also discussed

steps taken prior to data collection, discussed the various rounds of data analysis, and explained

concerns surrounding the study's trustworthiness.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, presents a set of concluding statements and

recommendations. These conclusions are based on the findings, analysis, interpretation, and

synthesis from chapters 4 and 5 and the recommendations are considered the applications of the identified conclusions.

Conclusions Based on Findings

The already established School Social Work Networking Group created a rich and plentiful discussion during each conducted focus group. It was evident that the school social workers were yearning for connection and supervision with other school social workers to discuss the research topic and other topics that transpired during the focus groups. Through this research study, clear gaps within the practice, education, research, and leadership of school social work were identified.

Home Visits are Needed

Most school social workers felt strongly that home visits were necessary for school districts. School social worker J.M. stated, "If you look at the practice behaviors, like, home visits is one and that's a conversation I have with folks that disagree with me. I'm like, you got to do it, you got to do it." School social worker B.G., agreed and stated, "I'm just like, this is where it is, like, this is where you learn the most information. This is where you build the most relationships. Um, so it, it, its again, it's one of those things." The findings showed home visits have many benefits to the students, families, and school district but many concerns, challenges and needs were identified surrounding school social workers conducting home visits. School social worker T.C. spoke about their overall opinion of conducting home visits for school districts and stated,

> I mean, I think with good supervision and something, and yeah, absolutely. I feel like
> they're necessary. I think, um, I don't think you do one just because, like, I, I hate when
> I'm asked to do one because something is not, I don't know, I don't know how to put that.

I guess I'm giving up some information there too but I want a purpose. I want, I also want

the family to understand that I'm coming. I hate when people, even just phone calls. Like,

can you call this family? They're having such and such happening and I'm like, no. Like, I

want you to talk to them first, to know who I am so I'm not, you know, scaring them.

Yeah, and so I think, I'm not doing, I'm doing one with a purpose and I'm going to go

with, yeah, that in mind and they understand that I'm coming now.

This statement is linked to some concerns identified in the findings of school social workers'

roles within school districts and again is tied to supervisory support. School social worker B.G.

stated

Ya, um, again, I think it's a necessary and needed and beneficial part of the role of social

workers. Um, again I think some of the areas of concern that we've identified throughout

our conversation, um, is that some of the attitudes or understanding and application of the

role of social workers, um, prevents them from wanting to do and being invested in that

process. Um, sometimes supervisors are not supportive of that, or think our job is

specifically in the building. Um, ya, so again, I think it's needed and vital part of the role

of social work. I don't know that it is widely understood, even to our administrators, kind

of what service that provides and how it benefits them so.

Lack of Guidance/Direction

The above statement again is tied directly to the conclusions based on the findings

surrounding the lack of policy and procedures for conducting home visits for school districts and

lack of direction given from their superiors. School social worker B.M. commented,

My school district created this school social work role not knowing what the heck they

were posting. They didn't even ask for the right requirements when they posted it. Like,

we don't really have a guideline of what the expectations are for us. Luckily, we both

have a background in mental health and social work that we know what we need to do but if we didn't have that, I don't even know what this role would look like. So, I think feature wise is that, some like, like, we need somebody to conduct supervision but also have a guideline of what do you want this role to look like? What are our expectations supposed to be? We've just created them on our own.

Concerns surrounding school social workers conducting home visits were apparent and validated. Most school social workers identified that their current school districts did not have any sort of policy or procedures with regards to school social workers conducting home visits or they were not aware of any policies regarding this. "I think there's a singular lack of policy and procedure," stated school social worker R.H., "I mean, I obviously been involved a lot of years and kind of known about other situations, legal situations with the union, um, and it's you know, I think social work colleagues really expose themselves for a lot of liability when they do home visits without process and procedure." Most of the school social workers were not aware if they were required to conduct home visits for their school districts or if home visiting was listed in their job descriptions.

Lack of Preparedness

Along with the lack of policies and procedures for school social workers conducting home visits, school social workers had not received any type of education, training or preparation from their school districts surrounding home visits. School social workers have based their practice on previous experiences. Discussing preparation for home visits, school social worker K.W. stated, "I didn't have any, like, courses or any official education. I think it was, just be on the site job back in the day, early intervention and, like, the therapist that I followed around to learn how to do the job. So that is pretty much it." A conclusion drawn from this is it is apparent that the school social workers who have had previous experience with conducting home visits

were more comfortable with conducting home visits for their school districts. School social

worker B.G. stated, "That's where I think being, whatever the job is, I feel like you have to have

been in somebody's home to then come in and, like, be able to understand." School social

worker J.M. commented,

> I hear what you are saying, you cannot cheat your way through this experience. You have
>
> to be in the trenches and as much as I look back on my child welfare experience with
>
> trauma, capital T, I took away so many soft skills from that, like, I couldn't get in ten
>
> years in the school. Like, conflict resolution, the crisis management, like you have to, I
>
> don't know.

J.M. went on to discuss previous experiences of school social workers in the field and stated,

"It's just different. There is a clear difference."

Lack of Supervision

Another conclusion drawn from this research study is the lack of supervision and

guidance school social workers receive in their school districts. Not one of the school social

worker participants was supervised by a school social worker. The lack of supervision and

guidance school social workers receive directly impacts their practice of conducting home visits.

School social worker R.H. states, "Basically, a lot of the training in home visits would have been

with supervisors in supervision."

Differences Among School Social Workers

An additional conclusion gained from this research study is the differences in job duties

of school social workers across school districts and even within school districts. School social

workers tend to be on different employment contracts which can create confusion for other staff

members and school social workers. School social worker R.H. stated, "I think you know, one of

the issues is often, and I see it, I think a lot of it is around because there are more social workers, um, that schools and teachers have like, an idea of what social workers are and what they can do."

Recommendations

The foundation of social work practice, education, and research includes developing theory (Akesson et al., 2018). The above conclusions' applications have produced recommendations for future social workers regarding social work practice, education, research, and leadership. The below recommendations are actionable and propose implications for policy and practice, supports the belief that scholarly work initiates further practice and research, and describes topics that require closer examination and suggests new questions for future research. The following section will provide recommendations directly related to the conclusions from this research study's findings regarding school social work education, practice, research, and leadership.

Recommendations for School Social Work Education

Developing social work students' skills, values, and knowledge, must be incorporated into the teaching methods for integrating home-based content and should be included in required social work curricula and courses (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Beder, 1998; Horton & Prudencio, 2022; Kelly et al., 2015; Lamorey, 2017; Nathans et al., 2019; Openshaw, 2008). Some of these needed techniques include discussions and debates about home-based practice, engaging in class participation, being provided relevant materials and readings, using role-plays and home-based case examples, shadowing experiences, and engaging in experiential exercises related to the home as a practice setting (Allen & Tracy, 2008). Home-based practice also demands the use of specific clinical skills due to the possibility of the school social worker and family dealing with challenging issues while in the field. Some of these skills can be obtained by pre-service training

for school social workers and having an internship in a school setting while being supervised by

a school social worker. School social worker J.M. discussed a concern about the current

preparation and requirements given to social workers interested in school social work. J.M.

stated,

> And I'm, I'm worried, like, I'm really worried about the trajectory of our profession with
>
> the creation of this certificate and the type, um, we're pipelining people K-12 to a four
>
> year institution, to an MSW in a year, they're going to do one internship in a school. Like
>
> you might as well make them school counselors because they're gaining no experience.

This was followed up by school social worker B.G. who stated, "I definitely see that line

between the social workers that have outside school experiences and those that only have school

experiences." Due to the diverse needs of students within a school district and due to the diverse

roles school social workers have within school districts, it is recommended that social work

curricula include various opportunities for social workers. School social work curricula must also

include pre-service experiences for new school social workers, and it is important the curriculum

include courses on practice, policy, special education, and educational administration (Horton &

Prudencio, 2022; Kelly et al., 2015; Lamorey, 2017; Openshaw, 2008; Shultz et al., 2020; Walsh

et al., 2022; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008).

Recommendations for School Social Work Practice

School social work operates using a conceptual framework and a blend of skills and

knowledge from education to guide practice (Charles & Stone, 2019). The practice of school

social work often demonstrates the importance of more ecologically grounded social work that

focuses on the students and families within the school community and puts the school and

students as targets for the needed interventions (Charles & Stone, 2019).

It is recommended that school social workers have a certain level of skills and

educational training, but this is not required by some state educational agencies (Horton &

Prudencio, 2022; Kelly et al., 2015). The conclusion of school social workers not receiving any

training or preparation for home visits has come directly from the findings within this study as

well as the conclusion of school districts having no policy and procedures to conduct home

visits. "The more that were talking about it, like, I felt for a long time that, I just think the policy,

procedure, like, I think there should be at least something to say. I don't know, I don't know

what, what I want it to look like yet," stated school social worker T.C. They went on to state,

> I would like to just know, like, somebody is looking into this and trying to figure this out
>
> and it's good to hear that somebody is. I mean, like, all the times that I went, you know,
>
> charging over to do good work, you know, and knowing though kind of again, I don't
>
> know where I was taught it but you know, to have this, like, knowledge, like, even what I
>
> wear on those days, like I'm not going to dress the same way that I would just to go to a
>
> meeting, like, all those things that I learned over time.

A recommendation for the conclusion of the lack of policies and procedures for school social

workers conducting home visits is that every school district should create a board policy to

support this practice behavior. School social worker R.H. provided an example of items to

include in a policy or procedure as,

> Who decides you have to do them and if it seemed to be an appropriate interventional
>
> support to offer that resource, what we need to have is a clear procedure as to how to do
>
> it, whether it is, whether you do it on your own, whether it is, whether it is you do it with
>
> somebody else but, but, you know, it's that, so, have some kind of process and procedure

if things go pear shaped. Um, a process and procedure to protect and gather my liability

and, and, or could involve other agencies, other people coming along as well.

Without policy and procedure, school social workers often must create their own methods

for conducting home visits. The findings suggest that school social workers base their practice of

home visiting on previous experiences. School social worker B.G. spoke about their previous

position and how this has shaped their practice of home visiting and challenges that have

stemmed from this. School social worker B.G. stated,

> My history is, like, previously I have always been in the homes, whether it be my job
>
> with CYS, family based, um, so, like, the fearlessness with that. I am, like, sure and
>
> again, like, there is no specific training, like, where you sit and all that kind of stuff, um, I
>
> actually have really struggled when I came into the schools where I was, like, this kid is
>
> not here I am going out and they were like, slow your roll but I'm like, wait, like, a kid
>
> needs me, I'm going. Um, so I, I struggle with that and I look at our social workers and it
>
> is really funny because I have some social workers with a CYS background. They're the
>
> ones that are out on home visits, um, and then I have some social workers that have only
>
> ever worked in the schools and have no idea what, like, a home visit looks like. Um, and
>
> so, it's interesting because at the IU, because, like, so many of our kiddos at the IU are
>
> some of the highest risk kids and it's bonkers to me at times that were not during more
>
> home visits and have a better set of eyes on what's really going on in the home. When I
>
> think of, like, the frequency of again school attendance, um, the amount of ChildLine
>
> reports we're making on a daily basis, and that we, and it's not a more kind of practice
>
> thing that we do. Um, ya, I mean, so I think some of the challenges especially at the IU is
>
> that we are not supervised by social workers, um, and so I don't think they always
>
> understand our role.

This statement along with other statements quoted in the findings suggests that school social workers have had to make their own practices for home visiting based on previous positions. School social worker W.P. commented and stated,

> I feel, like, I'm pretty decent at it but it's only through trial and error over 22 years that I could say by this point, yeah I'm pretty good at it but it's not because anybody taught me other than, like, tips I got from other people along the way.

School social worker B.M. agreed and stated,

> It was just kind of a learning curve, you know, you start out as a kid. I was what, 18 when I was a TSS [therapeutic support staff] starting in a home and I had no idea what I was doing to now, like, I feel like, I'm better with getting in the home, having conversations with the parents, you know, building that relationship. But again, that was just on my own figuring it out and talking, just like you said, to other people. Not necessarily what a home visit is supposed to look like, we're not robots, they're all different.

This can also be connected to the conclusion of the differences in practices and job duties among school social workers and how this has an influence on the needs of school social workers. "I guess just more clear guidance," stated school social worker, J.M., "you know, and maybe it comes from PDE [Pennsylvania Department of Education], maybe it comes from PASSWP [Pennsylvania Association of School Social Work Practice]. I don't know, um, because clearly you know we all function so differently."

The lack of support and supervision at the school district level has contributed to this challenge. Knowing this information is true to most school social workers, a recommendation for school social work practice is to create the ability for school social workers to receive supervision from social workers.

Intermediate Unit's Role

Due to the possibility of school districts not being able to fulfill this need, it is recommended that the Intermediate Unit (IU) take on this role due to the IU serving as the professional partner and liaison between the local school districts and the Department of Education. School social worker R.H. stated,

> The Intermediate Unit is the intermediate between the state and school districts and that is where the idea came from, I've said this before, um, but um, you know, you are, you're right, an IU has got hundreds, literally, little budget headings, whereas the school district, you, you're a taxing authority saying, we need this many million to run our school program.

R.H. went on to state, "The IU literally gets hundreds of different grants, some are huge, small, some are very detailed." The IU offers pupil services, nonpublic school services, and other core support services and participates in cooperative statewide projects. The IU also offers a wide range of services for school districts which include technology, curriculum, special education, and staff development (Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15, n.d.). School social worker B.M. suggested, "I wonder if there is a way that we can set up to, like, be within the IU group because we get no supervision whatsoever." They went on to state,

> I think we should definitely talk to our admin about that. About, like, once a month, like, we are out of the building, like, we need supervision to continue to do what we do. I mean we have each other, and we talk about things but, like, we are closed off unless, like, we get on those you know, the big social work networking meetings and get filled in on everything but that's not supervision, ya, it's just information but not supervision. I haven't had supervision since I started here.

School social worker B.G. spoke about the creation of their role and the support they provide to school social workers. B.G. stated,

> So, in my role, it was created, I think to kind of fill a little bit of that need and that our supervisors are not social workers and so it's interesting because I host one of our social worker meetings and one of the supervisors had been one of our school psychs so when I started running them I asked if they wanted me to invite them again and they were like 'no we just want us to be together'. So it is interesting, I think to, again, with my role being very unique, that I provide support to all of our social workers and just hearing like, how grateful they are, um, to not be alone in difficult decision making. Um, and you know, oftentimes, it is just, like, here's what has happened, here is what I'm thinking, here's what I want to do, like, they just want, you know, another brain to think with sometimes and, you know, its one of the benefits of being with IU is that we have access to 30 other social workers. Um, I think it can sometimes be pretty isolating to not have that? Um, so, definitely, I think probably the biggest concern is people sometimes giving direction don't understand the nature of the work that we're doing.

Regarding supervision and being supervised, school social worker T.J. spoke about a complaint they had regarding the evaluation framework used for their evaluation. They stated,

> My supervisor, who evaluates me, and her background is teaching, and she talks about it all the time. I don't feel like she should be at all, the one evaluating me on that. So, I think it would be better if it was the other social workers or I don't know who, but not her.

This statement along with the various statements made in the findings show that school social workers are not provided the social work support needed to do social work within a school district.

Recommendations Connected to Competencies

The Council on Social Work Education provides a competency-based education framework known as the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs. This framework is used to identify and assess how students demonstrate these competencies in practice (CSWE, 2022). Competence within social work is recognized as the capability to apply and integrate the values, skills, and knowledge of social work as well as the affective and cognitive processes to practice situations (CSWE, 2022). This is meant to be done purposefully, professionally, intentionally, and culturally responsively to promote community and human well-being. The 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs acknowledges a holistic view of competence (CSWE, 2022). School social workers must be aware of the competencies needed to be utilized in order to understand how microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems affect a child (Richard & Sosa, 2014) as well as addressing the needs of the in-risk and at-risk students by supporting the children, youths, families, and the school district (Kelly et al., 2016).

School social workers can strengthen their development of the needed competencies when working with students and their families by ensuring a strong theoretical foundation and knowledge but continue to develop skills through education, training, and practice (Nathans et al., 2019). The evidence of competence must be shown in the social worker's critical thinking and use of judgement concerning distinctive practice situations. Social workers can demonstrate this by pulling from their values, skills, knowledge, and affective and cognitive processes

(CSWE, 2022). A social worker's competence is a dynamic and developmental process that evolves over time due to changes within the social environment, professional knowledge base, and continuous learning. An outcome-oriented approach is key to competence-based education (CSWE, 2022). This research study provides recommendations to support current and future school social worker's education and practice situations to support a competency-based approach.

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Demonstrating ethical and professional behavior is a requirement of school social workers. School social workers must understand the relevant policies, regulations, and laws that affect their practice with individuals, families, groups, organization, and communities of the school district (CSWE, 2022). Educational reform within the United States has been ongoing since the 1970's to protect and promote the learning of all students regardless of their physical, behavioral, environmental, and cognitive challenges (Openshaw, 2008; Sherman, 2016) and provide protection to the students who were labeled at risk of school failure (Edwards et al., 2007). The belief behind these acts were designed to promote and assist with the adoption of evidence-based interventions within the school system (Edwards et al., 2007; Kelly et al., 2016). School social workers must demonstrate critical thinking skills and ethical decision making within the educational system to support the frameworks within research, practice, and policy arenas (CSWE, 2022). It is necessary for school social workers to understand these laws to do their jobs effectively (Openshaw, 2008; NASW, n.d.).

School social workers must apply the school social worker service standards of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), during all decision making. School social workers can assist schools with the intended outcomes of the enacted laws by collaborating with the school districts to eliminate barriers that impede student success. To achieve this, it is

recommended school social workers be provided supervision and consultation to guide

professional judgement and behavior. The findings within this research study show a need for

school social workers to be given the opportunity for ongoing supervision and consultation.

Competency 2: Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice

School social workers must advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and

environmental justice within the education system. School social workers are aware of the

ongoing injustices throughout history, which has caused inequalities within the education system

(CSWE, 2022). School social workers must be aware of the social inequalities and educational

disparities which impact learning outcomes (National Evaluation Framework for School Social

Work Practice, 2013).

School social workers must work towards reducing inequalities and ensuring dignity and

respect for all students and families within their school district. The findings within this research

study show school social workers must advocate and engage in strategies to eliminate the

inequalities and barriers to education while advocating for human rights at the individual, family,

group, organizational, and community system levels (CSWE, 2022). Continuing research on

school social work practice also supports this competency and recommendation. School social

worker B.G. stated,

> I appreciate the discussion and look forward to seeing what you do. And I think
>
> advocating as we, and again, because I think we're all in this room because we're
>
> passionate about social work, passionate about working in the schools. Again, in my
>
> thousand other jobs, prior to being in the schools, I love that we are here. Like, when I
>
> think of like, schools, like, that we are with our kids the 37 and a half hours a week, so

the opportunity to make positive impact and you know, produce some change, I think it's incredible, so I'm excited about that.

Competency 3: Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice

Understanding how intersectionality and diversity shape identity development, human experience, and affect inclusion and equity of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities, is included in the role of a school social worker (CSWE, 2022). The two constructs of racism and oppression influence practice at all levels and effects policy and research. School social workers must recognize the intersectionality of the students and families of their school district, which may include poverty, oppression, alienation, and marginalization and even privilege and power (CSWE, 2022).

Education is vital to refining social justice, equity, economic growth, and development, as well as health and safety, for any community, but it is an extremely challenging task for school districts to identify and meet the needs of all their students to ensure academic success (Wei et al., 2018). "The reason we're here is the same, you know, as hospital social workers. You're there for people to get well," stated school social worker R.H. in an individual interview. They went on to state,

> I mean, and um, and children and youth and you know, the stuff that, you are, you're there because there's a concern, particular issue. They've, your presence to lead to improvement, welfare of kids. There's kids getting killed, whatever. It's good, good for us if kids are staying at school, if they're doing well at school, they're getting smart and poverty and other social and injustices are ameliorated, alleviated by our presence and kids could be more successful, than that's why we're here.

The findings in this research study showed the importance of social workers valuing cultural humility and recognizing the extent to which their student's culture affects school performance. The findings also support the recommendation that school social workers continue to utilize the home visit as an intervention for school districts with the intended outcome of addressing the diverse needs of students and ensuring student success.

Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

Gaining a deeper understanding of home visits will assist with future implications for school districts to better support the needs of the school social workers, which will then support the district in providing better quality services to the families, the school district serves. It is important that school social workers use current research to inform their practice decision making but also convey how their practice experiences inform evaluation and research decisions (CSWE, 2022).

The findings within this research study show the importance of applying current and past research findings to inform and improve programs, policy, and practice of school social workers within school districts and recommends continued research of school social workers and their practices. The data analysis for this research study confirmed the need to be aware of the inherent bias in research and evaluate design, analysis, and interpretation while operating from an anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspective (CSWE, 2022). This study also confirmed the importance of sharing the research findings to be used and expanded on for various constituencies and clients. No matter how long a researcher spends on a study, analysis is never finished due to researchers always thinking, extending, amending, and reinterpreting interpretations into new insights (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice

The policy decisions made within school districts are often viewed as being disconnected to the conditions outside of a student's school day (Dumont & Ready, 2020) even though there is research to suggest that socioeconomic factors are key influences in contributing to academic inequality (Downey & Condron, 2016). School social workers must be aware of social policy at the local, state, federal, and global level that affects the well-being, human rights and justice, access to social services, and service delivery for students and families within the school district (CSWE, 2022). School social workers must be familiar with previous and current structures of social services and policies and the responsibility of policy in service delivery while functioning from an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens.

School districts not only provide mental health and behavior expertise via school social workers, but they can also be utilized to assist with policy decisions around school level issues across educational practice such as responses to interventions, programs, technology, and curriculum (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Kelly & Stone, 2009). The findings within this research study confirms the importance of school social workers needing to assist with policy formation, analysis, implementation, and evaluation within the practice setting of the school district, which includes individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations of the school district (CSWE, 2022). The findings from this research study also recommend the importance of developing policy and procedures specific to conducting home visits for school districts.

Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

To address significant issues, education systems struggle with understanding and exploring practices that advocate for societal change, increase family participation and

engagement within their student's education, and support the student's home culture (Boske &

Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Manz & Ventresco, 2019). Engagement is an ongoing piece of

school social work practice with and on behalf of individuals, families, groups, organizations and

communities within the school district. School social workers must know the importance of

valuing human relationships and facilitating engagement of the students, families, constituencies,

and other systems (CSWE, 2022). School social workers need to be able to engage with systems

of differing sizes and be able to adapt these engagement strategies to diverse client systems

(Keller & Grumbach, 2023). Continuing to increase engagement has been known to improve

grades and test scores, better attendance, increase good behavior, less retention of the same

grade, and higher graduation rates (Allen & Tracy, 2004).

When school social workers meet with families in their home environment, this supports

the principles of engagement based on the family's needs and interests. Successful interventions

are based on relationships and the engagement of families through a series of interactions.

School social worker W.P. stated that home visits, "Builds the parent rapport and the family's

buying into what the school district is trying to do so anytime we can strengthen that

relationship, I think the district benefits, um, you know, from the work we do." The findings

from this research study showed the significance of using empathy, interpersonal skills, and

reflection to engage in culturally responsive practice with the students and families of the school

district. This research study also confirmed the importance of applying knowledge of

interprofessional conceptual frameworks as well as human behavior and the person-in-

environment to support this engagement (CSWE, 2022).

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and
Communities

Assessment is a constant factor within the interactive process of social work practice. School social workers need to be aware that assessment is an ongoing process and social workers need to use the knowledge they have surrounding the theories of human behavior and person-in-environment (CSWE, 2022). Assessment of clients' strengths is an ongoing practice in social work but also ongoing in home-visit practice (Allen & Tracy, 2008). The assessment of family strengths within the setting of the physical environment of the home and neighborhood, family resources as well as family interactions, provide the school social worker essential information and allows the school social worker to have the advantage of being a part of a family's community framework. "I'm think, I'm thinking that social workers should be involved in the community that the kids and their families operate in," stated school social worker R.H., "they should be able to, you know, you should know the local free store and, and, see where the families are."

School social workers must critically assess and use this knowledge for a culturally responsive assessment with the students and families they work with. The findings within this study recommend the need for school social workers to engage in the collaborative process involved in assessment to define the presenting challenges and strengths with the students and families they work with to create a mutual, agreed-upon plan (CSWE, 2022).

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Included in the interactive process of social work practice is the ongoing component of intervention. School social workers need to be able to use their understanding of theories of human behavior and person-in-environment as well as other conceptual frameworks to select culturally responsive interventions for their students and families (CSWE, 2022). Meeting with a family in their own home environment or neighborhood affects social work practice in critical

ways. Some of these principles include the component of intervention being the family, family systems perspective, family-in-environment perspective, and strengths-based practice, all believe in the families' capability to make informed choices concerning their children and needs and the involvement with community influences and resources, such as a school.

The study's findings recommend the need for school social workers to understand methods of identifying, analyzing, and implementing evidence-informed interventions for the students and families of the school district. The findings also indicate the importance of school social workers participating in interprofessional collaboration to achieve the goals of their students and families (CSWE, 2022).

Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social work practice includes the ongoing component known as evaluation. School social workers must recognize this process is interactive and involves working on behalf of diverse students and their families (CSWE, 2022). School social workers need to apply anti-oppressive and anti-oppressive perspectives when evaluating outcomes and use their knowledge of theories of person-in-environment and human behavior.

Home visits can be used to guide planning, implementation, evaluation, and service delivery of educational and school social work services, assist with ensuring effective culturally sensitive communication and services appropriate for students and families, and aids school social workers with demonstrating core values of service which include social justice, importance of human relationships, dignity and worth of a person, competence, and integrity (Framework for Non-Teaching Professionals, 2021). School social worker C.P. spoke about the use of home visits and stated,

I think it builds trust, um, that you know, we, that the district cares enough to send out food, to get paperwork, to recognize families' barriers, that we would go and send somebody out to get paperwork signed, deliver food, um, provide those resources, sit down with them and fill out an MA [medical assistance] application, do the IEP preview, things like that. I think it just builds that trust.

The findings from this study indicate a recommendation for school social workers to evaluate processes and outcomes to increase the practice, policy, and service delivery effectiveness to their students and families. The findings also indicate the need to evaluate outcomes and practice effectiveness using qualitative and quantitative methods (CSWE, 2022).

Competency number four states that social workers must engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice. The following section discusses recommendations for school social work practice regarding research.

Recommendations for School Social Work Research

There is a lack of general literature on home visiting or a suitable way to plan and conduct home visits. This has caused the home visit to be under-researched and under-theorized (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Lyter & Abbott, 2007; Nathans et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020; Winter & Cree, 2016). School social workers can assist with future research of interventions to support students, families, and the school, by continuing to conduct home visits to increase the knowledge of how the home environment affects school success. This will also increase the partnership between the school social workers, students, and families, which is important for current community-based practice and the future of home-based services in social work (Allen & Tracy, 2008).

Continuing to research current data on school social work practice, this can assist with gathering information on this specialized field of practice to support future research, practice, and policies (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Boske & Benavente-McEnery; 2010; Ilhan et al., 2019; Kelly et al., 2010). This information collected can be used to improve how the service and intervention of the home visit is delivered, help improve the quality of home visits, enhance the outcomes related to home visits, and increase needed assessment of the service of home visits (Harden, 2019; Nathans et al., 2019). Research on school social work practice has a direct impact on current school social workers' practice. School social worker R.H. stated,

> There is a lot of us [social workers], a lot of new essential workers, they get because there is some grant money. They are getting pushed around and we're, I thank you for the doctoral program and the more people who do that, you know, the more people we will be able to find in the state and create like a body of knowledge of, yes, this is, these social workers, this is what social workers do.

It is recommended that school social workers be given opportunities to continue research in this field to better understand their roles within school districts and the practice behavior of conducting home visits for school districts. This recommendation is also supported by Competency number four, which was explained in detail above.

Recommendations for School Social Work Leadership

The perceptions of school social workers about home visits are important to learn due to these views having an impact on their self-perception, acting roles, and job perception (Hancock 7 Pelton, 1989; Nathans et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022; Wasik & Shaffer, 2008). The study's conclusions have shown a lack of leadership roles within school districts and a lack of leadership

for current school social workers. "I think we need more of a pathway for social workers to become administrators," stated school social worker J.M. They went on to state,

> I know, I hear the, like, oh we have a cert now, we can do it but, like, actually to get into a principal, I looked into the principal cert program through Shippensburg and I was literally told, and I know we have social workers going through it but, I was told, like, you will have barriers through PDE because this is not, this is not shored up yet. Like, you're supposed to be coming into this program with a master's in education and we've had people go through it and have trouble. Um, my psychologist supervisor who's now a director and went and got his supervisory stuff, um, he went through the whole doctor in educational leadership and was denied his letter of eligibility because he never taught in a classroom and he had to go get an entire master's in education. Like, Pennsylvania is so broken with this, and so, like, I don't know if there's a DSW and principal cert route. I wouldn't pursue a DSW without, like, if I'm going to stay in education. Why wouldn't I get my principal cert? I think we need to make it more accessible for our social workers so they can become supervisors and supervise social workers in the school district. That's my opinion.

Through the conclusion of findings, it is recommended that school social workers be given more of an opportunity to become administrators within the education system. Currently, for someone to become an administrator in the public education system, a principal certification is needed even though the DSW degree has a focus on leadership. The question of social work representation at the Department of Education was brought up and the confusion this brings to the education system and among school social workers. School social worker B.G. stated,

> I think the, I mean, social work historically and education we've been, you know, the square peg in the round hole, we haven't, we don't, we're not understood, um, and nobody

has, I think really, has attempted to understand us, and, and again, when we look at like

supervisory roles within education, I'm like, do we have social work representation at

PDE? And like what does that look like? And so again, that, our defining body, I don't

even think best understands us. So how can we make that path forward when there's, you

know, still creating that, so it again, I think we need to infiltrate to kind of, the whole

spectrum of education, to be able to create that change, you know, and I think that

hopefully, through that, would create some of these standard practices for social workers

because it is interesting to me to see like the varying degrees or the caliber of social work

or attitudes within kind of our own field.

Having school social workers in leadership roles within school districts will not only support the

current practicing school social workers but also assist with the other professions that work with

the school social workers within school districts. The need for mutual support among school

social workers is evident and role confusion is apparent across school districts and even within

school districts. "I feel, I feel, like, we gotta get it together because if we're confused, like, our

administrators are confused," stated school social worker J.M. They went on to state,

I think what this ultimately comes down to is, like, we need good supervision in schools.

Because, like, T.J. had shared, there's no way any of my administration has and not to

like sound…I don't know, like, I think, I know they don't have a 10% of the practical

knowledge that I have in doing home visits. Now I don't have 10% of the practical

knowledge they have you know, in education but um, they definitely cannot provide me

supervision or, or, you know, thank God I came into this work with a background. I don't

know what they would have done if they hired someone right out of grad school. The

person wouldn't do home visits.

Through the findings within the research study, it is recommended that school social workers be given opportunities to be in leadership roles at the school district level.

Conclusion

For effective home-based practice specific to school social work, more research is needed to increase the development of necessary social work skills (Allen & Tracy, 2008; Nathans et al., 2019; Saltiel & Lackey, 2020). Researching and understanding previous and current home visit models, rating scales, assessment tools, and past studies, allows school social workers to gain a deeper understanding and adapt evidence-based practice models to guide their current use of the home visit as an intervention and practice behavior in the education system. By school social workers operating from an evidence-based practice framework, school social workers will be better equipped to intervene with the unique situations and problems families face by implementing interventions that demonstrate the greatest evidence.

For the future of social work policies, research, and practice, continuing to explore current data on school social work practice is necessary (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Ilhan et al., 2019; Kelly et al., 2010). This research study confirms the need to allow social workers to explore and reflect on their processes and experiences with working with families.

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Appendix A
Email Script to CAIU to Request use of Site Location

Dear Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15,

The reason I am contacting you is to request the use of a conference room located in your facility for a research study I am facilitating with school social workers. For this research study, I will be facilitating focus groups with a group of school social workers involved with the Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15. School social workers from the CAIU 15, Cumberland, Perry, and Dauphin Counties will be invited to participate in this research study. This research study will be focused on school social workers and their practice of conducting home visits.

The above sample of school social workers was chosen due to the already established School Social Work Networking Group that meets quarterly at your site location throughout the school year. I am currently the school district social worker for the Steelton-Highspire School District and I too am a part of the School Social Work Networking Group but this research study is being conducted as fulfillment toward the completion of a Doctorate in Social Work degree.

    I am requesting the use of a conference room three separate times between October-November. The focus groups will last no longer than one and half hours long per focus group. All technology needed for these focus groups will be provided by myself as the researcher so the only item I am requesting is the use of a conference room. Once available dates and times are provided, I will be sending a Doodle Poll to the above sample of school social workers to find the best dates and times that work best for all.

    I hope you will give this request serious consideration, as I believe the CAIU 15 is the most appropriate site location to facilitate the focus groups with the already established School Social Work Networking Group. I am happy to discuss any questions or concerns you may have regarding this study or the potential of hosting the focus groups. You may contact me at skinn106@live.kutztown.edu or 856-430-1000.

    Thank you for your consideration and I hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Sadie Kinnarney
Doctoral Candidate, Kutztown University
Skinn106@live.kutztown.edu
856-430-1000

Appendix B
Email Invitation to Participate (School Social Workers)

Dear School Social Worker,

The reason I am contacting you is to request your participation in a study to explore the practice of home visiting by school social workers conducting home visits for school districts. Your input will help gain insight from the viewpoint of a school social worker. This study is being conducted as fulfillment toward the completion of a Doctorate in Social Work Degree.

Participants will be asked to participate in a minimum of two in-person focus groups with the possibility of a third in-person focus group. Each focus group will be audio-recorded and should last no longer than one and a half hours. The focus groups will occur at the Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15 located at 55 Miller St. Summerdale, PA 17025. Dependent upon the scheduled time of the focus groups, breakfast or lunch will be provided.

Please see the attachment of the Consent to Participate in the Research and the attachment of the anticipated Interview Schedule for each focus group. Should you agree to participate, please respond by Friday, September 8, 2023 by clicking on this link (LINK) to a Doodle Poll to provide your preferred date and time to attend the focus groups. You will be required to sign the attached Consent to Participate in the Research in-person at the initial focus group and a signed copy will be provided to you.

I sincerely hope you will give this opportunity serious consideration, as I believe your perceptions about school social workers conducting home visits will provide insight and improve the practice of school social workers. I would be happy to discuss any questions or concerns you may have regarding this study or your potential participation. Please feel free to contact me at skinn106@live.kutztown.edu or 856-430-1000.

Thank you for your consideration and I hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Sadie Kinnarney, MSW, LSW
Doctoral Candidate, Kutztown University
skinn106@live.kutztown.edu
856-430-1000

Appendix C
Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: School Social Worker's Practice and Perceptions of Conducting Home Visits

Researcher: Sadie Kinnarney, MSW, LSW, and Doctoral Candidate, Kutztown University

Introduction:

You are being invited to participate in this research study because you currently are employed a school social worker. Please read this form carefully which will outline what you can expect if you decide to participate. You may contact the researcher and ask any questions you may have prior to deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study aims at investigating the practice and perceptions of school social workers conducting home visits. The intent is to gain an understanding of school social workers reality concerning their understanding, attitudes, beliefs, and motivation surrounding conducting home visits. Findings of this study are anticipated to be useful within the profession to improve how the service and intervention of home visits is delivered, increase needed assessment of the service of home visits, help improve the quality of home visits, and enhance the outcomes related to home visits. By continuing to research current data on school social worker conducting home visits, this can help gather information of this specialized field of practice and assist with future research, policies, and practice.

Procedures:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to discontinue participating in this study at any time. If you agree to be in the study, will be asked to be involved in the following:

- Completion of this Consent to Participate in Research.
- Attend and participate in three separate in-person focus groups at the Capital Area Intermediate Unit located at 55 Miller St. Summerdale, PA 17025, which is anticipated to take approximately one and a half hours long per focus group. The researcher will provide you a copy of the anticipated interview schedule at a later date prior to attending the focus groups.
- The focus group is meant to take place in-person with a semi-structured interview format to question several individuals apart of a specific group to allow for rich data to be collected and assist with in-depth analysis. The focus group is meant to explore a range of ideas and differing perspectives of school social workers surrounding home visits. Audio recording is necessary for the researcher to accurately transcribe the interview.

Risks/Benefits:

The only noted risk to participating in this study includes the potential for role ambiguity due to the in-depth conversations that will occur. This study creates the possibility of disclosing qualities and viewpoints that may create feelings of disbelief, annoyance, resentment, and force participants to face qualities of themselves they normally would not consider. During the focus group interviews, stories or opinions may be shared about things that can produce feelings of embarrassment or anger. The unique qualities of trust and passion with focus groups can provide feelings of security to be honest and transparent about opinions, dishonesty, and morally unlawful acts.

Procedures will be built into the research design for psychological support which will include a list of resources participants can use to follow up on any taxing or worrying issues that may arise. Information with regards to psychological counseling and methods of referrals will also be provided in the unlikely event that intense emotions are unable to be resolved. The researcher will also provide the list of intended interview schedule of questions prior to participating to allow participants to suggest changes to the researcher or to be prepared not to answer if you so choose.

Focus groups also run the risk of obtaining incorrect information from other participants during the progression of the discussion. If this does occur, the researcher has an ethical obligation to correct the misinformation.

Benefits to this study can include the ownership in the research project. The feeling of empowerment from participating in this research project can occur. The intent of this research study is to provide compensation naturalistically during the study due to participant contribution being used to assist and provide insight into school social work practice and the possibility of igniting future research for other social workers. The findings from this study will also be shared with all participants due to each participant deserving to see the results of the study they played a significant role in.

Confidentiality:

There is a risk of breaking confidentiality due to state law requirements of mandated reporting as well as the risk of focus group members violating confidentiality. The researcher has no control over what participants discuss outside the focus groups but the researcher will set ground rules at the beginning of each focus group about information sharing.

All information collected will be used for research purposed only. All names will be known only to the researcher and the participants in each focus groups. During the data analysis phase, ID numbers will be assigned to each participant to ensure confidentiality. During the data reporting phase, participants will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Anecdotal information that may be included in the written study will be identified by the pseudonym.

Data Storage:

Confidentiality will be strictly observed. The audio-recordings and transcriptions will be stored on the researcher's computer which requires a password to access. In order the back up the data, a flash drive will be utilized which will be kept in a secured locked office for three years in accordance with federal regulations.

After completion of this research study, the audio-recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed after three years according to federal regulations.

Participant Rights:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the option to withdraw from participation at any time without consequence to you. The Institutional Review Board at Kutztown University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable for human subject research.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Sadie Kinnarney at skinn106@live.kutztown.edu or researcher supervisor, Dr. Janice Gasker at gasker@kutztown.edu. You may also contact the Kutztown University's Institutional Review Board at werner@kutztown.edu or 484-646-4167.

Statement of Consent:

> By checking this box, I am indicating that I have read and understood the information outlined above, that I will be audio-taped, have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name & Date: _____

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Appendix D
Tentative Semi-Structured Interview Schedule Focus Group 1

Demographic Information:
1. Please state your name or what you would like to be referred to during this focus group as well as the school district where you currently are a school social worker for?
2. What gender do you identify with?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. How long have you been a school social worker?
5. Roughly, how many students are in your school district?
6. What is the geographic location?
7. What is the socioeconomic status?
8. How many school social workers are at your school district?

Discussion Questions:
9. In terms of percentage, roughly how much time do you spend in the field (outside of the school building) on a given week?
10. Do you conduct home visits?
    a. Are you required to conduct home visits?
    b. Is conducting home visits listed on your job description?
    c. Are you accompanied by anyone while conducting home visits?
    d. Do you have access to a school vehicle to conduct home visits?
11. Describe the reasons you have had to conduct home visits?
12. Describe the benefits you see home visits having on students?
13. Describe the benefits you see home visits having on the families of students?
14. Describe the benefits you see home visits having on the school district?
15. Please explain concerns you have about conducting home visits?
16. Please explain challenges you have or have had conducting home visits?
17. What do you feel you need to be successful to conduct home visits?
18. What is your overall opinion of school social workers conducting home visits?
19. Are there any questions you wished I would have asked?

Appendix E

Tentative Semi-Structured Interview Schedule Focus Group 2

Demographic Information:
1. Please state your name and current school district where you work. Please use the same name used in the previous focus group for identifying purposes.

Discussion Questions:
2. Prior to beginning the discussion for our second focus group, is there anything anyone would like to follow up on from the first focus group?
3. What previous positions have you held as a social worker prior to becoming a school social worker?
4. What are your current job duties at your school?
5. What education or training have you received for conducting home visits?
6. How do you know how to conduct home visits?
7. Explain your satisfaction level with how you have been informed to conduct home visits?
8. Please explain your understanding or knowledge of the National Evaluation Framework for school social workers?
9. Discuss your confidence level in your knowledge and skills surrounding conducting home visits?
10. What do you think is most important feature that should be given to you to assist with conducting home visits?
11. About your experiences conducting home visits, is there anything else you would like to add or discuss?
12. Are there any questions you wish I would have asked?

Appendix F
Tentative Semi-Structured Interview Schedule Focus Group 3

Demographic Information:
1. Please state your name and current school district where you work. Please use the same name used in the previous focus groups for identifying purposes.

Discussion Questions:
2. Prior to beginning the discussion for our third focus group, is there anything anyone would like to follow up on from the first or second focus groups?
3. Please describe ways in which you engage the families of your students.
4. Please describe the ways in which you gain an understanding of the barriers students face when it comes to their education.
5. What specific skills or knowledge do you feel you need to work in the field setting of students' homes?
6. What do you think makes a home visit effective?
7. Any questions needed to follow up on from previous focus groups will be entered here.
8. About your experiences conducting home visits, is there anything else you would like to add or discuss?
9. Are there any questions you wish I would have asked?

Appendix G
IRB Approval Letter

KUTZTOWN
U N I V E R S I T Y

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
110 Old Main, PO Box 730, Kutztown, PA 19530
(484)-646-4167

DATE: September 29, 2023

TO: Sadie Kinnarney
                               Dr. Janice Gasker
                               Department of Social Work

FROM: Jeffrey Werner, Chairperson
                               Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: School Social Workers Conducting Home Visits: Practice
                               and Perceptions

IRB NUMBER: IRB01092023

SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial Application

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited

EXPEDITED CATEGORY: 6 & 7

ACTION: Approved

APPROVAL DATE: September 29, 2023

The Kutztown University IRB has approved the initial application for your research study.
Your research study has been assigned the IRB Number IRB01092023. This number must
be referred to in any future communications with the IRB.

In addition, the following language must be added to the consent form, "This research has
been approved by the Kutztown University IRB – approval #01092023."

This research approved as Expedited will have no expiration date. However, any
revisions/changes to the research protocol affecting human subjects may affect the
original determination therefore must be submitted for review and subsequent
determination.

Research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. You must seek approval from the IRB for changes and ensure that such changes will not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. You must submit the Application for Revisions / Changes form to the IRB, prior to making changes.

It is your responsibility to report all adverse events / unanticipated problems to the IRB. You must report adverse events that are unanticipated, regardless of seriousness, or report events that are more serious or more frequent than expected.

Records relating to the approved research (e.g., consent forms), must be retained for at least (3) three years after completion of the research. Refer to the IRB procedures regarding records.

Please go the IRB's website to review procedures and to obtain forms as needed. If you have any questions, please contact the IRB at 484-646-4167.