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Fear of Victimization in Rural Middle School Students

An EdS Field Project

Presented to the

Department of Psychology

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Specialist in Education Degree in School Psychology

University of Nebraska at Omaha

By

Benjamin H. Studley

August, 2002

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EDS FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree Specialist in Education in School Psychology,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Fear of Victimization in Rural Middle School Students

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University of Nebraska, 2002

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Recent research has revealed a decline in the percentage of students who experience fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school. However, a large number of students continue to experience fear at school (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Research attempting to identify variables associated with student fear is very limited. In addition, research regarding students attending rural schools as well as students attending middle schools is nearly nonexistent. The current study surveyed 88 students in 6th through 8th grade. The study examined: (a) previous victimization experienced by students at school and on the way to and from school, (b) the percentage of students who experience fear at school and on the way to and from school, and (c) factors related to student fear. Results indicated that rural middle school students experienced school related fear at school and on the way to and from school. In addition, the factors theft at school, threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school, attacked at school, item taken by force, weapon, or threat at school, hate-related crime, availability of alcohol, presence of gangs, safe neighborhood, noisy neighborhood, quality of neighborhood, and grade were found to be related to student fear. Middle school students were also found to experience relatively high levels of crime in the areas of: theft, items taken by force, weapons, or threats on the way to and from school, bullying, hate-related crimes, and hate-related words or symbols.

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Fear of Victimization in Rural Middle School Students

School safety has gained national attention in recent years due to school shootings in Jonesboro, Arkansas; Conyers, Georgia; West Paducah, Kentucky; Pearl, Mississippi; Springfield, Oregon; Edinboro, Pennsylvania; and Littleton, Colorado. According to the Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll (1998), school safety is the public's top concern in education. Although shootings in public schools was a rare phenomenon, its perceived threat is a significant factor, hypothesized to be related to increased levels of student fear of victimization. In addition, students, teachers, and school administrators also face a variety of other safety concerns. Criminal behaviors such as theft, simple assault, aggravated assault, robbery, rape/sexual assault, the presence of weapons on school grounds, and more everyday behavior such as bullying, are all present in public schools, and are related to the amount of fear experienced by students (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

Contrary to popular belief, recent studies regarding student fear of victimization have revealed a decline in the amount of student fear at school and on the way to and from school, indicating that student fear of victimization may not be as great of a concern as had been the case in recent years. In addition, the number of crimes occurring at school and on the way to and from school has also decreased. Data also suggest that the percentage of students who experience fear of victimization is not as great as the percentage of students who experience criminal victimization at school and on the way to and from school, suggesting that not all students who experience crime become fearful. Although the number of students who experience student fear is on the decline, a large number of students continue to experience fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school (approximately 1.1 million students age 12 through 18), which has the potential to be related to student learning (Kaufman et al., 1998). In turn, students may not receive the quality education they are entitled. Thus, it is important to further investigate the area of

student fear of victimization in order to better understand the influencing factors and the characteristics of students who experience school fear. Once a greater level of understanding has been obtained regarding student fear of victimization, interventions can be developed and implemented, which will decrease the amount of fear of victimization experienced by students.

The need to address student fear of victimization is important in order to provide a positive environment in which students feel safe and secure and are allowed to maximize their achievement potential. The presence of student fear is related to negative qualities present within the learning environment, and both factors are related to student achievement (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). As cited in Meyers (1996), Erik Erickson believes that an individual's basic safety needs first must be met in an environment before the individual will continue to progress and develop. In addition to Erickson, Abraham Maslow believes that the establishment of safety needs are at the bottom of his hierarchy, and must be met before an individual can continue to progress through his hierarchy of development. In fact, the perception of crime and violence has the potential to distract teachers and students from the learning environment. In a study conducted by Barton, Coley, and Wenglisky (1998), students whose school environment was considered safe academically outperformed students located in unsafe learning environments. Although the results were confounded by additional factors, it is important to be aware of the possible relationship that student perception of crime and violence and the presence of student fear has on the learning environment, which may act to lower student academic achievement. By identifying variables related to student fear of victimization, students who experience fear can be identified, and an intervention can be developed with the goal of reducing the level of fear experienced by students. In the process, the learning environment and school achievement will be improved.

The current study surveyed rural middle school students (6th-8th grade) in order to obtain a measure of student fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school, to identify factors related to student fear of victimization, and to obtain a measure of the victimization rate experienced by rural students. The rate of student victimization and level of fear experienced by rural students in a Midwestern sample can then be compared to the national percentage. In addition, factors associated with fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school will be identified, allowing school personnel to better identify students at risk of experiencing school related fear. Once students who experience such fear are identified, they can be provided with an opportunity to participate in an intervention aimed at reducing student fear.

Literature Review

School Safety

In response to the growing concern regarding school safety, and the lack of an information source regarding the rate of crime and violence in schools, the Department of Justice and Department of Education were called upon by former president Bill Clinton to create a national data base regarding the level of crime and violence in the nation's schools (Kaufman et al., 1998). The Departments of Justice & Education responded by creating a data base, the Annual Report on School Safety, to inform the public of the type and amount of crime that is present within the schools (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). In addition to the Annual Report on School Safety, the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics produced Indicators of School Crime and Safety, which provides detailed statistical information that supports the Annual Report on School Safety. According to the Annual Report on School Safety, and Indicators of School Crime and Safety, national data indicate that school crime, the number of weapons brought to school, and school related fear has declined in

recent years. However, despite this reduction, crime, violence, and school related fear remain present within schools (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).

The following summarizes the most recent information available regarding student victimization at school and on the way to and from school, change of crime rate over time, gender, age, race, and school location. Each area will be discussed provided the availability of information.

Crime

Crime Rate. Data indicated the overall crime rate experienced by students ages 12 through 18 declined between 1992 and 1998. In 1992, 14% of students reported to have experienced a school related crime. In 1998, the percentage of students who had reported experiencing a school related crime had decreased to 10%. The percentage of students who reported to have experienced victimization in this age group declined outside of school as well from 14% in 1992 to 10% in 1998. Regarding nonfatal violent crimes, serious violent crimes, and simple assault, the percentage of students who reported experiencing these crimes decreased from 5% in 1992, to 4% in 1998, for a total 1.2 million students (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). During the 1996-1997 school year, 57% of public school principles reported at least one episode of crime/violence had occurred in their schools that was reported to the police. This figure consisted of 37% of school principles who reported that between one to five crimes occurred in their schools, and 20% who reported six or more crimes occurred at their school (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). According to Chandler, Chapman, Rand, and Taylor (1998), between 1989 and 1995, the percentage of students who reported any type of victimization at school remained steady at 14%. However, between 1989 and 1995, there was a slight increase in the percentage of students who reported violent victimization at school (3.4%

and 4.2%, respectively).

Differences were present regarding the crime rate across gender, age, and school location. In 1998, males were more likely to be a victim of a nonfatal crime than were female students. Data suggested that 11% of male students reported to have experienced a nonfatal crime while at school or on the way to and from school, compared to 9% of female students. In addition, younger students age 12 through 14 were more likely to report having been a victim of crime while at school and on the way to and from school than were older students (ages 15 through 18). Data demonstrated that 13% of younger students (ages 12 through 14) and 8% of older students (ages 15 through 18) reported being victimized during 1998, indicating that age is a factor in student victimization. School crime was also found to differ according to school size, with larger schools more likely to experience crime than smaller schools. Regarding the risk related to school location, urban students were at a greater risk per capita of experiencing crime at school than were suburban or rural students. In 1998, 12% of students attending urban schools reported experiencing school related crime, while 10% of suburban and 9% of rural students reported to have experienced crime at school and on the way to and from school (Kaufman et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Data regarding racial differences were not available.

Physical Fights. In 1997, 15% of 9th through 12th grade students reported they had been involved in a physical fight on school property, and 37% reported they had been in a physical fight at any location (including school property) during the past 12 months. The number of students who reported fighting at any location has slightly declined in recent years. In 1993, 42% of students reported engaging in a physical fight at any location, compared to 39% and 37% in 1995 and 1997 (respectively). However, the number of students who reported being involved in a physical fight on school property has remained steady between 15% to 16% since 1993. Data showed that males were more likely to

engage in a physical fight at any location and while on school property. In 1997, 46% of males reported being involved in a fight during the past 12 months, and 20% said they had been in a fight while on school property. During the same year, 26% of females reported they had been involved in a fight, and 9% said they had been involved in a fight on school property. Regarding age differences, students in lower grades reported being in more fights at any location and while on school property. In 1997, 45% of 9th graders and 29% of 12th graders reported being involved in a fight at any location. During the same year, 21% of 9th grade students and 10% of 12th grade students said they were involved in a fight while on school property. Data were not available concerning racial and school location differences in the prevalence of physical fights.

Violent Deaths. Compared to the number of violent deaths away from school, the number of violent deaths committed at school were relatively rare. During the 1997-1998 school year, there were 60 school related violent deaths involving school children ages 5 through 19, including 47 homicides, 12 suicides, and 1 student who was killed by law enforcement in the line of duty. Out of the 47 school homicides, 35 included school children, and 7 of the 12 school related suicides involved school age children. During the same year (1997-98), a total of 2,717 homicides and 2,054 suicides involving students ages 5 through 19 occurred away from school. During the 1998-1999 school year, the number of violent deaths at school declined from 60 in 1997-1998 to 50 during the 1998-1999 school year. The 1998-1999 violent deaths consisted of 38 homicides, 9 suicides, and 2 adults killed by a police officer in the course of duty, and one unintentional shooting (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Data regarding gender, age, racial, and school location difference were not available.

Serious Violent Crime. Students ages 12 through 18 are less likely to experience a nonfatal serious violent crime (i.e., rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault)

while at school than away from school in the community. In 1998, 2% of students were victims of serious violent crimes away from school, a total of 550,200 serious violent crimes. At school or on the way to or from school, 1% of students were victims of serious violent crimes, for a total of 252,700 serious violent crimes. This figure has remained constant since 1992. Concerning the percentage of schools experiencing serious violent crime, 10% of public schools reported one or more serious violent crime, and 47% of public schools reported a less serious violent crime to law officials during the 1996-1997 school year. Differences were present among schools regarding location of school, grade level and the number of serious violent crimes reported. During the 1996-1997 school year, 17% of urban schools reported at least one serious violent crime, compared to 5% of suburban schools, and 8% of rural schools. Regarding differences between grade level, 21% of public high schools, 19% of middle schools, and 4% of elementary schools reported at least one serious violent crime to law officials (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). The majority of crimes reported by public schools represent less violent or nonviolent crimes. In 1996-1997, 402,000 out of the 424,000 total crimes reported to police by schools were less violent, or nonviolent, in nature, indicating that 22,000 serious violent crimes were reported to police. According to U.S. public school principals, during the 1996-1997 school year, the serious violent crimes reported to police officers consisted of: 4,000 incidents of rape or other type of sexual battery, 7,000 robberies, and 11,000 incidents of physical attacks or fights in which a weapon was used (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). Data were not available regarding gender and racial differences as they related to serious violent crimes.

Weapons in Schools. A weapon is defined as any instrument or object that is used with the intent to threaten, injure, or kill another individual; examples include knives, guns, or clubs (Kaufman et al., 1998). Between 1993 and 1999, the number of students,

grades 9th through 12th, who reported carrying a weapon (i.e., knives, guns, or clubs) to school at least once during the previous 30 days declined from 12% to 7%, respectively. In 1997, males were about three times more likely to report that they had carried a weapon to school than were females (13% and 4%, respectively). During the same year, students in lower grades were more likely to report they had carried a weapon at any location than were older students (23% and 15%, respectively). However, while on school property, students in lower grades were equally likely to report carrying a weapon to school as were older students. For example, 10% of 9th graders, 8% of 10th graders, 9% of 11th graders, and 7% of 12th graders reported carrying a weapon to school during 1997 (Kaufman et al., 2000). Examination of racial differences revealed there was a decline in the percentage of students who had reported carrying a weapon to school during the past 30 days for white (6%), black (5%), and Hispanic (8%) students during 1999, as compared to 8%, 9%, and 10%, respectively, in 1997. The number of students expelled for bringing a firearm to school also declined from 5,724 for the 1996-1997 school year, to 3,658 for the 1997-1998 school year, to 3,523 for the 1998-1999 school year. Finally, the number of students who reported being injured with a weapon has remained stable over the past 10 years. In 1998, less than 5% of 12th grade students reported being injured on purpose by a weapon, and 11% reported being injured on purpose without the use of a weapon during the previous 12 months (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Data were not available regarding differences in the number of weapons brought to school by students across different school locations.

Injuries and Threats. Data suggested the number of students in grades 9th through 12th who reported being injured at school, inside or outside of school, or on their way to or from school, has remained constant in recent years. Between 1993 to 1997, about 7% to 8% of students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon at school. In each surveyed year, males were more likely than females to report being threatened or injured

with a weapon at school. In 1997, 10% of males and 4% of females reported being threatened or injured while at school. Interestingly, among 9th through 12th graders, younger students were more likely to have reported they had been threatened or injured with a weapon at school than were older students. For instance, in 1993, 9% of 9th grade students and 6% of 12th grade students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon while at school. In 1997, this number increased to 10% of 9th graders, while the percentage of 12th grade students who reported being threatened or injured with a weapon remained at 6%. Regarding differences between racial/ethnic groups, slight differences were present regarding the number of students in grades 9th through 12th who reported being threatened or injured with a weapon at school. In 1995, 8% of the total student population reported they had been threatened or injured with a weapon while at school. This consisted of 7% of white, 11% of black, 12% Hispanic, 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 10% other, non-Hispanic. In 1997, the percentage of students who reported being threatened or injured with a weapon while at school remained constant. During this year, 7% of the total student population reported being threatened or injured with a weapon at school. This included 6% of white, 10% of black, 9% of Hispanic, 5% of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 10% of other, non-Hispanic (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Data were not available regarding the percentage of students who were threatened or injured with a weapon across school locations.

Hate-Related Words and Graffiti. The experience of hate-related words and graffiti (derogatory comments regarding race/ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation) while at school interferes with the learning process and effects the level of safety experienced by students. In 1999, 13% of students reported experiencing hate related words, and 36% reported that they had experienced hate-related graffiti at school during the past six months. Females are more likely than males to report having

experienced both hate-related words (14% and 12%, respectively) and graffiti (39% and 34%, respectively) at school. Differences in the percentage of students who reported experiencing hate-related words and graffiti also occurred across racial/ethnic groups. In 1999, 13% of white, 17% of black, 12% of Hispanic, and 16% of other, non-Hispanic students experienced hate related words, while all groups were equally likely to experience hate-related graffiti while at school (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Data were not available regarding the percentage of students who experienced hate-related crime across age groups or school location.

Gangs. Between 1995 and 1999, the percentage of students ages 12 through 18 who reported the presence of street gangs at their school declined from 29% to 17%, respectively. The presence of gangs differed according to school location. In 1999, 25% of urban students, 16% of suburban students, and 11% of rural students reported that gangs were present at their school. Differences in the percentage of students who reported gang activity at school were also present between racial/ethnic groups, with Hispanic (28%) and black (25%) students more likely than white (13%) and other, non-Hispanic (17%) students to report gangs are present at their school (Kaufman et al., 2000). Data regarding age and gender differences were not available.

Theft. Between 1992 and 1998, students ages 12-18 were more likely to be a victim of theft while at school than away from school. In 1998, 1.6 million thefts occurred at school (58% of all school crime), making it the most common crime committed at school. Away from school, students experienced 1.2 million thefts (49% of all crime away from school). Between 1992 and 1998, the percentage of students who reported experiencing theft declined from 10% in 1992 to 6% in 1998. When also taking property damage into consideration, about one-third of students in 9th through 12th grade reported to experience some form of theft or property damage (car, clothing, books) against them on school property in 1997. During previous years, males were more likely than females to report

experiencing theft or property damage, with 36% of males and 29% of females reporting that they had experienced theft or property damage during 1997. Also, students located in lower grades were more likely to report they had experienced theft or property damage against them than older students. For example, in 1997, 37% of 9th graders and 28% of 12th graders reported experiencing theft or property damage at school during the past 12 months (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Data regarding racial and school location differences were not available.

Bullying. Bullying is one of the most common types of violence in schools across all grade levels. According to the National School Safety Center, bullying is “the most enduring and underrated problem in American schools”, and is believed to be the underlying cause of school violence (Mulrine, 1999). Bullying is defined as the threatening of another individual abusively, or to affect others through the use of force or coercion; examples include picking on others or making another student give something up, such as money (Kaufman et al., 1998). In 1999, about 5% of students ages 12 through 18 reported being bullied at school during the past six months. Students in lower grades reported experiencing a higher incidence of bullying than students in higher grade levels. For example, 10% of 6th and 7th grade students reported having been bullied at school during the previous six months, compared to 5% of 8th and 9th graders and 2% of 10th and 11th grade students. In addition, males in grades 6th and 7th were more likely than females to have reported that they experienced bullying while at school (12% and 7%, respectively), while no gender differences were present at the other grade levels. Regarding racial/ethnic group differences, white (5%) and black (6%) students were more likely to report they had experienced bullying than were students of other, non-Hispanic origin, (2%). Also, a similar level of bullying was reported across urban, suburban, and rural schools (Kaufman et al., 2000).

Fear

As a result of the crime and violence present in our nation's schools, many students experience fear of victimization while at school or on their way to and from school. Although the number of students who experience fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school has declined and is currently lower than the amount of crime present within our nation's schools, a large number of students continue to experience school related fear which interferes with their education.

In 1995, 9% of students ages 12 through 18 reported that they feared attacked or harmed while at school. In 1999, the number of students who reported fear declined to 5%. In addition to the decrease of student fear while at school, the percentage of students who reported fear of attack on their way to or from school also declined. Between 1995 and 1999, the number of students who reported to experience fear on their way to and from school decreased from 7% to 4%, respectively. The reduction of fear occurred across all ethnic groups; however, black and Hispanic students continued to report greater fear of attack or harm than did white students. In 1999, 4% of white, 9% of black, 8% of Hispanic, and 4% other, non-Hispanic students age 12 through 18 reported experiencing fear at school during the past six months. During the same year, 2% of white, 8% of black, 8% of Hispanic, and 4% of other, non-Hispanic reported fear on their way to and from school during the previous six months. Although there has been a decline in the number of students who experienced fear while at school and on their way to and from school in recent years for students in all grades, students in lower grades were more likely to report fear at school than were students in older grades. In 1999, 9% of 6th graders reported experiencing fear while at school compared to 3% of 12th graders. Students in lower grades were also more likely to report experiencing fear on their way to and from school. In 1999, 5% of 6th graders and 3% of 12th graders reported experiencing fear on

their way to and from school. The level of fear experienced by students also declined across all areas of location (urban, suburban, and rural). However, urban students were more likely to report fear at school and on their way to and from school. In 1999, 7% of urban students, 5% of suburban students, and 4% of rural students experienced fear at school. During the same year, 8% of urban students, 3% of suburban students, and 2% of rural students experienced fear on their way to and from school (Kaufman et al., 2000).

In addition to the overall measure of student fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school, many students also feared victimization at certain locations in and around the school. As a result, many students consciously avoided specific locations in school and on school property. Between 1995 and 1999, there was a decline in the percentage of students ages 12 through 18 who reported avoiding one or more school locations from 9% in 1995 to 5% in 1999 (representing 1.1 million students). There was also a decline in the percentage of students across all ethnic/racial groups who reported avoiding specific school locations. However, students of black, Hispanic, and other, non-Hispanic racial/ethnic group reported more fear than did white students. In 1999, 4% of white, 7% of black, 6% of Hispanic, and 5% of other, non-Hispanic avoided specific school locations out of fear. A decline in the percentage of students who experienced fear of a specific school location also occurred across all grade levels; however, students in lower grades were more likely to avoid school locations than were older students. In 1999, 6% of 6th graders and 2% of 12th graders reportedly avoided specific school locations out of fear. During the same year, the percentage of students who avoided specific school areas also declined across school location. In 1999, 6% of urban students, 5% of suburban students, and 3% of rural students reported avoiding a specific school location out of fear (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). For some, the fear of school violence was so great that some students stay home from school as a result of fear. In a survey of high school students, 5% reported to have

stayed home at least one day in the past one month due to the fear of school violence (MacLellan, 1999).

In recent years, the crime and violence rate present within our nation's schools has been well documented. Data suggested that the level of crime and violence has declined. However, a large amount of crime continues to exist in our nation's schools (Kaufman et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). According to Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1998), the mere presence of crime and violence within schools negatively affects some students, indicating that students who do not directly experience school crime can be impacted by its presence. Thus, the presence of crime and violence appears to be one factor related to student's fear of victimization. However, student fear of victimization is a complex construct that is influenced by multiple factors, and due to measurement differences used in previous studies, additional factors related to student fear of victimization have not been agreed upon.

Presently, measures of student fear of victimization have largely focused on obtaining a general measure of student fear; they have been part of larger studies attempting to measure the level of crime and violence present within schools. The general measure of student fear indicates the percentage of students who experience fear of victimization. As a result, school related fear is not being directly assessed. However, in order to provide a quality level of education to all students, the school related fear experienced by students must also be directly addressed. By identifying student characteristics related to student fear of victimization, students at risk for experiencing school related fear can be better identified, and their fears can be directly addressed through interventions focused specifically on reducing fear experienced by students.

Predictors of Criminal Victimization

The crime and victimization rate experienced by students in school has been

extensively studied in recent years, and although a general measure of student fear has been obtained (about 5% of students age 12 through 18), the identification of predictors of student fear has been relatively ignored. One study that examined the predictors of student fear at school was conducted by May and Dunaway (2000). As part of this study, 742 Mississippi high school students were randomly selected (according to four geographically distinct areas) to complete a survey composed of items relating to their experiences and attitudes regarding crime. Student's fear of criminal victimization at school was measured by having students respond to four questions regarding the level of fear experienced in and around the school environment. May and Dunaway utilized a six point Likert-scale for each question related to student fear. The independent variables included: (a) race or ethnic origin, (b) gender, (c) economic status, (d) grade, (e) criminal victimization at school, (f) perceived safety at school, and (g) perceived neighborhood incivility.

The results obtained by May and Dunaway (2000), suggested that adolescents who perceived their neighborhood as incivile were more likely to experience higher level of fear. Furthermore, student's perceived safety at school was also found to be negatively correlated with level of fear. Students who reported lower levels of safety while at school experienced higher levels of fear. In addition to neighborhood incivility and perceived safety, racial differences were also found among males, with African-American males experiencing higher levels of fear. However, no racial differences were found among female students. Results also found that when controlling for race, female students were found to experience higher levels of fear than male students. The variables criminal victimization and perception of safety significantly predicted fear in females but not males. Finally, student's grade level in school also produced significant differences. Results suggested that younger students experienced greater fear at school than older students. On the other hand, socioeconomic status did not demonstrate significant effects on student fear.

In another study, conducted by Alvarez and Bachman (1997), the factors related to student fear at school and on their way to and from school were also examined. The data used for this investigation were taken from the School Crime Supplement of the National Crime Victimization Survey. Interviews for the larger study were conducted from January through June of 1989. Students ages 12 through 19, who attended school at any time during the previous six months were eligible to participate in the study, resulting in a total of 10,449 participating students. Alvarez and Bachman examined student's perceived fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school. They examined the factors: previous victimization experiences; gangs and violent subcultural milieu; alcohol/drug availability; mode of transportation to and from school, and demographic variables.

The results obtained by Alvarez and Bachman (1997), indicated that students who had previously been the victim of personal larceny, attack, or threat of attack were significantly more likely to experience fear of victimization while at school and on their way to and from school. Students who had been previously attacked at school were over three times as likely to experience fear of victimization at school. Results also suggested that the presence of gangs and the availability of drugs and alcohol also increased the level of student fear while at school and on the way to and from school. However, teacher attack only influenced student fear at school, and did not affect student fear while commuting to and from school. Age and family income were found to be negatively related to student fear of victimization at school, indicating that younger students and those with lower family incomes were more fearful at school and on the way to and from school than older students and students from families with higher incomes. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that females, African Americans, and Latinos were more likely to experience fear on their way to and from school. In addition, students who relied on city transportation or walked to school were significantly more fearful than students who took

school buses or private transportation to and from school. Students who attended urban schools also experienced more fear on the way to and from school than did students from nonurban schools. Another notable finding that did not achieve significance involves gender differences. Although not significant, males were found to experience greater levels of fear at school than females.

In the development of the fear of victimization surveys in May and Dunaway (2000), and Alvarez and Bachman (1997), both studies adopted the recommendations stated by Ferraro and LaGrange (1987), regarding the construction of surveys measuring fear of crime. Thus, the surveys measured the emotional aspect of fear, instead of an individual's beliefs or concerns about crime. Also, questions made specific reference to the crime. A third recommendation made by Ferraro and LaGrange, stated that specific types of victimization should be identified within each question, which added validity and reliability to the participants responses. Finally, questions were stated in a nonhypothetical format, and questions measured an individual's experience of fear in their everyday life. Otherwise, no discussion was available regarding the validity of the surveys included in the studies conducted by May and Dunaway or Alvarez and Bachman. Regarding reliability, May and Dunaway conducted an item analysis on the variable of fear of criminal victimization at school, and the variable demonstrated an internal reliability of .71. However, reliabilities were not calculated for the other variables included in the study. Furthermore, reliabilities were also not reported for the study conducted by Alvarez and Bachman.

Summary and Conclusion

The studies conducted by Alvarez and Bachman (1997), and May and Dunaway (2000), produced a significant advancement in the area of identifying variables associated with student fear. However, inconsistencies were found between the two studies regarding variables that significantly predict student fear of victimization, specifically regarding the

influence of previous victimization, gender, and socioeconomic status. As a result, it is difficult to determine whether or not interventions aimed at reducing student fear of victimization target the correct students. The current study investigated the areas of inconsistency, and examined additional variables not included in the previous studies. Furthermore, limitations in the manner in which the factors related to student fear were measured were also present within the previous studies. For example, race was coded as African-American and White in May and Dunaway, and in the study conducted by Alvarez and Bachman, race was coded as African-American and nonAfrican-American, thus not adequately measuring fear across different racial groups. The current study coded race using multiple racial groups in an attempt to adequately describe the surveyed population. In addition, previous victimization was measured using one general victimization question in May and Dunaway, and Alvarez and Bachman did not examine previous victimization that occurred on the way to and from school. Finally, due to the limited available information regarding students who attend rural schools in multiple crime categories (physical fights, weapons, injuries and threats, and hate related words), rural students were the focus of the present study.

The current study also expanded on the availability of psychometric data regarding the student fear of victimization survey used to measure student fear. Currently, little information is available regarding the psychometric properties of surveys that are used to measure student fear. The available information regarding the surveys used in previous studies consist of internal reliability provided by May and Dunaway (2000), other than this, no information was available regarding the psychometric properties of surveys measuring student fear of victimization. Thus, the internal consistency of the student fear of victimization survey was examined in the current study.

Present Study

The present study replicated and expanded on the study conducted by Alvarez and Bachman (1997), by identifying factors related to student fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school. The current study was composed of specific questions included in Alvarez and Bachman. As part of the study, previous victimization experiences, gangs and a violent subcultural milieu, alcohol/drug availability, mode of transportation to and from school, and demographic variables of age, gender, race (white, black, Hispanic, Asian, other), and grade level were examined to determine which factors were related to student's perceived fear, and were included in the present study. In addition, neighborhood incivility included in May and Dunaway's (2000), was also incorporated in the current study. Student fear was measured in a manner consistent with the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000.

The current study also examined previous victimization experiences in greater detail in order to examine if different types of previous student victimization experienced at school and on the way to and from school influenced student fear differently. The questions used to further investigate the area of previous victimization experiences were obtained from the survey utilized in The Annual Report on School Safety: 2000. Information was not provided regarding the reliability and validity of the questions included in the survey; however, the recommendations presented by Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) were followed in the question construction. In addition, the current study also examined socioeconomic status in a manner that helped clarify differences May and Dunaway (2000), and Alvarez and Bachman (1997), demonstrated in their results. Socioeconomic status was examined by obtaining the parental occupation from students, which was coded (using the 1980 Census Code) and standardized within the participant population, which produced a measure of socioeconomic status. In the situation where the participant was from a two-parent family, the two occupational codes were combined

before standardization, and participants from single family homes, the single occupational code was utilized. The present study also examined the effect that time spent at present school and participation in extracurricular activities had on student fear of victimization.

The first research question asked: What is the prevalence of student fear and victimization in rural Midwestern middle school students? The current study hypothesized that rural middle school students experience similar levels of victimization and fear as reported in the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000. Although the prevalence rate of student fear for rural middle school students was not included in the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000, 4% of rural students reported to have experienced fear of victimization at school, 2% reported experiencing fear of victimization on the way to and from school, and 3% reported to have avoided a specific location in and around the school as a result of fear in a sample of rural 6th through 12th grade students from across the nation.

The second hypothesis involved the question: Do rural Midwestern middle school students who experience previous victimizations report greater levels of fear compared to other rural middle school students who do not experience previous victimization? Rural middle school students who had an item taken by force, weapon, or threat, experienced nonviolent crimes (such as bullying, harassment, and theft), who were physically attacked, threatened with a weapon at school and on the way to and from school were believed to experience greater levels of fear at school and on the way to and from school as compared to students who did not experience the specific types of victimization. The current hypothesis was supported by the results of Alvarez and Bachman (1997), who found that students who were previously victimized were over three times as likely to experience fear at school.

The third research questions consisted of: Do rural middle school students who report a presence of a violent subcultural milieu and neighborhood incivility experience greater

levels of fear compared to rural middle school student who do not report the presence of a violent subcultural milieu? The current study predicted that students who reported a presence of gangs, the availability of alcohol, and neighborhood incivility would report greater levels of fear at school and on the way to and from school as compared to students who did not report their presence. The third hypothesis is supported by the results of Alvarez and Bachman (1997) and May and Dunaway (2000), who found that students who reported a presence of gangs, alcohol/drugs, and neighborhood incivility experienced greater levels of school fear.

The fourth research question asked: Are demographic factors related to student fear in rural middle school students? The hypothesis stated that rural middle school students who are younger in grade and from low-income families would experience greater levels of fear at school and on the way to and from school as compared to rural middle school students who were in higher grades, and who were from families with higher levels of socioeconomic status. In addition, rural middle school male students were expected to experience greater levels of fear of victimization at school compared to rural middle school female students. Female and Hispanic rural middle school students were believed to experience greater levels of fear on the way to and from school when compared to male and non-Hispanic rural middle school students. The results of Alvarez and Bachman (1997) and May and Dunaway (2000) both suggested younger students experience greater levels of fear than older students. However, the two studies produced conflicting results regarding the effect of gender and socioeconomic status. Alvarez and Bachman found that students from low income families experienced greater levels of fear. In addition, males were found to experience greater levels of fear at school (although significance was not achieved). On the other hand, May and Dunaway's results suggested that females experience greater levels of fear, while socioeconomic status was not related to student fear. As a result of Alvarez and Bachman's use of a sample that was more representative

of students from across the nation, student from families with low socioeconomic status were expected to experience greater levels of fear at school and on the way to and from school, while male students were expected to experience greater fear at school. Females and Hispanic students were predicted to experience greater levels of fear on the way to and from than male and non-Hispanic students, which is consistent with May and Dunaway's findings.

The final research question involved: Do rural middle school students who do not participate in extracurricular activities, and students who were new to the school, experience different levels of fear compared to rural middle school students who were involved in extra curricular activities and who have attended their current school for longer than 6 months? Students who did not participate in extracurricular activities and students who attended their current school for less than six months were believed to experience greater levels of fear at school and on the way to and from school. Student participation in extracurricular activities and time spent at current school has not been examined by previous studies.

Method

Participants

The participants for the present study included 88 students (48% male and 52% female) from public schools located in the rural Midwest. Out of the 88 students, 61 (69%) of the students attended a public middle school located in a town with a population of 8,500. Approximately 374 students were enrolled in the middle school at the time the study was conducted. The population consisted of approximately two-thirds Caucasian and one-third Hispanic (including English and non-English speaking students). The remaining 27 students (31%) attended a consolidated public middle school of three surrounding towns, with a combined population of approximately 4,000 residents. Approximately 100 students attended the middle school at the time the study was

conducted. The student population of the consolidated middle school was largely comprised of students with Caucasian descent (99%), with the remaining students being of Asian and Hispanic descent. Sixth grade students accounted for 33% of the sample, while 37.5% were 7th graders, and 29.5% were 8th grade students. Regarding the racial composition of the sample for the current study, 87.5% (n=77) of the sample was Caucasian, while 12.5% (n=12.5%) of the sample was Hispanic. The entire Hispanic population sampled in the current study attended the middle school with the largest student participation.

An adequate range of Socioeconomic Status ratings were obtained in the current sample according to the 1980 Occupational Census Report. Occupational ratings in the current sample ranged from a low rating of 23 to a high rating of 132. Categorization of the sample indicated that 34.1% of the sample were considered low SES, with an occupational rating between 23 and 60. Middle SES consisted of 31.8% of the sample, and was composed of the occupational ratings between 61 and 82. Finally, 34.1% of the sample was considered high SES, ranging from a rating of 83 to 132. The two middle schools combined produced a student participation rate of 23%. That is, 23% of students returned the necessary permission forms and were allowed to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

The student fear of victimization survey measured student fear and identified factors related to student fear while at school and on the way to and from school. The development of the survey was based on surveys utilized in previous studies that measured student fear of school victimization (Alvarez & Bachman, 1997; May & Dunaway, 2000); as well as the survey administered as part of the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000 (U. S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). However, modifications were included. The survey was composed of questions designed to measure student's fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school. The survey

also attempted to identify factors related to and which contribute to student's fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school (Appendix A).

Based on the study conducted by Alvarez and Bachman (1997), questions related to previous victimization experiences, including personal larceny and attack at school (item 15), the presence of gangs and violent subcultural milieu (items 16), alcohol/drug availability (item 18 and 19), mode of transportation to and from school (item 20), and demographic variables (items 1 through 9) were included in the present study. As was the case with Alvarez and Bachman, questions regarding previous victimizations, presence of gangs, and violent subcultural milieu in the current study were measured using a yes/no response, while alcohol/drug availability was measured using a four point Likert-scale. In addition, perceived neighborhood incivility (items 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26) were also included in the current study, which were taken from May and Dunaway (2000). In congruence with May and Dunaway, the current study measured questions related to neighborhood incivility using a six point Likert-scale.

In addition, the current study also expanded on the available research regarding student fear of victimization by adding student's time spent at current school, participation in extracurricular activities to the present questionnaire. A more in depth examination of previous victimization and socioeconomic status was also conducted (items 5, 10, and 15 in the School Fear Survey). Previous victimization included questions that measured additional areas of student victimization to determine if one area had a greater influence on student fear than did the other areas. Specifically, previous victimization included questions regarding theft, physical attacks, threats, bullying, harassment, and hate-related crime, which were all taken from the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000 and were measured using a yes/no response format. Socioeconomic status was measured by obtaining information regarding parental occupation. Once parental occupation was obtained, the 1980 census occupational data was used to classify parent's occupation, and

the rating associated with the census occupational code was recorded. The occupational ratings were then arranged in order from lowest to highest and divided into three categories, representing low, middle, and upper socioeconomic status. Student socioeconomic status was then decided based on the category in which the parental occupational code was located. As a result, student socioeconomic status was able to be categorized and coded.

The questions related to student fear (student fear of victimization at school, fear of victimization on the way to and from school, and student avoidance of a specific location at school) were developed and measured according to the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000. The measure of student avoidance of a specific location on the way to and from school was not included in the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000; however, it was measured in a similar manner as the other questions related to student fear. The current study measured student fear of victimization using a four point Likert-scale, similar to the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000.

Procedure

The study began by addressing the students one week prior to administering the survey. At this time, the students were explained the purpose of the study and issues related to confidentiality. Students were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine student fear and areas of previous victimization at school and on the way to and from school, and to examine and identify factors associated with student fear. Students were also informed that their responses on the survey would be kept confidential. At this time, parental consent and student assent forms were distributed to the students. It was also explained to students that they must return the parental consent and student assent forms before the specified day in order to participate in the current study. The students were also informed that each student who returned the signed consent forms would be entered into a drawing, and have a chance to win one of three prizes, consisting of gift

certificates for two to a local movie theater. For non-English speaking students, the information was translated to them through the use of a bilingual peer.

On the scheduled day for the survey administration, the primary investigator again addressed the classroom students, and read the cover letter that discussed the purpose of the study and issues related to confidentiality (Appendix B). After reading the cover letter to the students, the researcher administered the surveys to the students who returned parental consent and student assent forms. While the students who returned parental consent forms were completing the survey, students who did not return parental consent forms were asked to read or work on school work. In the case of non-English speaking students, the questions were read to them in Spanish by a bilingual peer.

Data Analysis

The present study examined five areas. First, the current study examined internal consistency to determine the reliability of the items included in the survey. Internal consistency was examined by calculating the overall alpha for the four questions examining student fear. Secondly, the researcher conducted a frequency analysis that examined the percentage of students who experienced fear at school, on the way to and from school, and the percentage of students who avoided specific locations at school and on the way to and from school out of fear. The percentage of student fear was also calculated for the measure total student fear. This measure was obtained by combining the four measures of student fear (student fear of victimization at school, student fear of victimization on the way to and from school, student avoidance of a specific location at school as the result of fear, and student avoidance of a specific location on the way to and from school as the result of fear) into one measure of total fear. Once the values were combined, the values 4 and 5 were equivalent to the never category of student fear. The values six through nine corresponded to the almost never category of student fear. The sums 10 through 13 related to the category of experiencing fear some of the time. Finally,

the values 14 through 16 indicated student fear was experienced most of the time. A second frequency analysis was conducted to examine the prevalence of student victimization at school and on the way to and from school.

A correlational analysis was also conducted to examine the relationship between student fear and other areas of interest (demographic variables, previous victimization, gangs and violent subcultural milieu, alcohol/drug availability, mode of transportation, economic status, neighborhood incivility, duration of attendance at current school, and participation in extracurricular activities). Multiple regression analyses were also computed to determine which factors significantly predicted total student fear, student fear of victimization at school, on the way to and from school, and students who avoided specific locations at school and on the way to and from school out of fear. Multiple regression analyses included the Enter technique in which all variables that produced significant correlations with the dependent variables were entered into the equation at the same time to determine the amount of variance all variables accounted for together. Finally, a Stepwise multiple regression technique was also conducted in which the variable that accounted for the greatest amount of variance was entered first, then upon reexamination of the remaining variables, the variable that accounted for the greatest amount of variance was entered next. This continued until the remaining variables did not account for a significant amount of variance. This analysis informs us as to the amount of variance each variable accounts for in regards to a specific independent variable.

Results

The present study examined student fear of victimization, the prevalence of student victimization at school and on the way to and from school, and factors related to student victimization. The current study is similar to the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000 in that both studies obtained a measure of student fear and of student victimization. The studies differ in that the current study only surveyed 6th through 8th grade students, while

the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000 included a rural population that consisted of 6th through 12th grade students from across the nation. The studies also differ in that the current study utilized a smaller sample size, and though some of the questions were from the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000, the current study includes questions that were adapted from other surveys that measured student fear of victimization.

Reliability.

Reliability analysis was conducted to examine the reliability associated with the four measures of student fear (student fear of victimization at school, student fear of victimization on the way to and from school, student avoidance of a specific location at school out of fear, and student avoidance of a specific location on the way to and from school out of fear). Reliability analyses using the SPSS program revealed an overall alpha of .80.

Frequency Analyses.

Frequency analyses revealed that student fear of victimization was present in the current sample of rural middle school students. Although student fear was present in rural Midwestern middle schools, the majority of rural middle school students do not experience fear at school or on the way to and from school. Results of frequency analysis regarding student fear of victimization are displayed in Table 1 through 3. Frequency analyses also indicated that students surveyed for the current study reported experiencing relatively high levels of crime and victimization in specific areas (Table 4).

Correlational Analyses.

Correlational analyses were examined to determine significant relationships between student fear of victimization and other factors of interest. Results of the correlational analysis for each measure of student fear variable can be found in Table 5. The variable item taken by force, weapon, or threat was found to be significantly related to the most measures of student fear (fear of attack at school, avoidance of a specific location at

school, avoidance of a specific location on the way to and from school, and for the total fear measure) as compared to other factors examined in the current study.

Multiple Regression Analyses.

The correlational analyses that produced significant results ($p < .05$ significance level) were then included in a multiple regression analysis to determine the amount of variance the variables accounted for in student fear at school and on the way to and from school. The significant variables were first analyzed using a multiple regression Enter method, following this the same variables were analyzed using the Stepwise technique of multiple regression. For the Stepwise method, all significant predictor variables were entered into the regression equation at the same time, and the variable that was found to have the highest zero-order correlation with the criterion was entered into the analysis first. This continued until the factors no longer accounted for a significant amount of the variance. If at any time, a variable that had been entered into the equation no longer accounted for a significant portion of the variance, it was no longer included in the stepwise regression technique.

First, the overall measure of student fear was regressed on theft at school, item taken by force, weapons, or threats, threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school, hate-related crime, safe neighborhood, and quality of neighborhood. The Enter method of multiple regression indicated that the R^2 was .18, $F(6,79)=2.81$, $p < .02$. Together the factors accounted for 18% of the variance in the measure of total student fear. Stepwise results are presented in Table 9.

Next, the predictor variables of gender, item taken by force, weapons, or threats at school, physically attacked at school, threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school, hate-related crime, safe neighborhood, and quality of neighborhood were regressed on the dependent variable of student fear of attack at school. The R^2 was .34, $F(7,76)=5.52$, $p < .01$, indicating the predictor variables accounted for a significant portion

of the variance in the variable student fear experienced at school. Together, the predictor variables accounted for 34% of the variance. Results of the Stepwise method are presented in Table 6.

Student fear of attack on the way to and from school was then regressed on the variables grade and threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school. The results indicated that the predictor variables accounted for a significant amount of variance, $R^2=.16$, $F(2,85)=8.05$, $p<.01$. Together, the predictor variables accounted for 16% of the variance of student fear on the way to and from school. Stepwise results indicated that threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school was the only factor to account for a significant amount of variance in student fear of attack on the way to and from school, accounting for 13% of the variance in student fear of victimization on the way to and from school.

The dependent variable, avoid a specific location at school was regressed with item stolen by force, weapons, or threats at school, availability of alcohol, and noisy neighborhood. The Enter method of multiple regression indicated that the R^2 was .19, $F(3,82)=6.25$, $p<.01$. Together, the variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in student avoidance of a specific location on the way to and from school out of fear, accounting for 19% of the variance. Results of the Stepwise technique are presented in Table 7.

Finally, student avoidance of a specific location on the way to and from school out of fear was regressed on item taken by force, weapons, or threats at school, presence of gangs, presence of alcohol, and safe neighborhood. This regression produced significant results, $R^2=.25$, $F(4,80)=6.49$, $p<.01$, indicating that the predictor variables accounted for 25% of the variance in student avoidance of a specific location on the way to and from school. Stepwise results are presented in Table 8.

Discussion

The current study examined factors related to student fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school using a sample that consisted of 6th through 8th grade rural Midwestern middle school students. Results of the study indicated that the majority of rural middle school students did not experience fear at school or on the way to and from school. However, student fear was found to be present for some individuals at school and on the way to and from school in rural Midwestern middle school students. In addition, rural Midwestern middle school students were also found to experience relatively high levels of victimization in the areas of theft at school, items taken by force, weapons, or threats on the way to and from school, bullying, harassment, hate-related crime, and hate-related words.

One explanation for the presence of student fear in rural middle school student involves the level of reported victimization. Student previous victimization in the current study may have influenced the level of fear reported by students who had experienced previous victimization, as well as in students who had not experienced previous victimization but who were aware of the high levels of victimization. The relatively high rate of previous victimization reported in the two Midwestern rural middle schools could have created an environment that fostered fear in all students.

Another plausible explanation for the presence of student fear in rural middle school students involves the age of the students included in the current sample. Previous studies that examined student fear indicated that younger students were found to experience greater levels of fear compared to older students. As a result of the inclusion of middle school students in the current sample, an increased level of fear is likely to be present compared to student fear in high school students. However, as the result of differences in sample characteristics between the current study and previous studies that examined student fear (location of school, sample size and composition) caution should be utilized

when making comparisons between the results of the current study and previous studies that examined student fear.

Specific areas of previous victimization were found to be related to student fear in the current sample. Students who reported to have experienced theft at school, item taken by force, weapons, or threats at school, physically attacked at school, threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school, and students who experienced a hate-related crime experienced greater amounts of fear than did students who did not report to have experienced the specific types of victimization. Thus, for schools attempting to address student fear of victimization, it may be advantageous to target students who have experienced specific types of victimization that are related to student fear.

Students who reported to experience previous bullying and harassment were not found to experience greater levels of fear. The present findings are interesting due to the relatively high incident rates reported at the schools surveyed for the current study. One would believe that students who reported experiencing greater levels of bullying and harassment would have experienced greater levels of fear; however, this is not the case in the current study. Perhaps the results indicate that it is not whether or not students have experienced previous victimization, or a specific level of victimization, but whether students have experienced severe types of victimization. The results indicated that rural students in the current study experienced relatively high levels of bullying and harassment; however, these variables were not significantly related to student fear. On the other hand, students who had experienced theft at school, were threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school, physically attacked at school, had an item taken by force, weapon, or threatened at school, and who experienced hate-related crimes were more likely to have experienced student fear of victimization. This may indicate that it is the more severe types of victimization, rather than more common, everyday types of victimization that influenced student fear at school and on the way to and from school. Also, as a result of

the large number of rural middle school students who reported experiencing bullying and harassment, rural middle school students may have become immune to fear associated with these events. Bullying and harassment may have become such a common occurrence that students have accepted this as being part of the normal school routine. In addition, it may have been the case that a small group of individuals were responsible for the majority of the bullying and harassment present in the schools. As a result, students who experienced victimization at the hands of the small group of students may not have experienced heightened levels of fear due to the expected pattern of behavior demonstrated by these students. On the other hand, if a greater number of students were present who engaged in the victimizations of bullying and harassment, student fear may have been more greatly influenced as a result of the unexpected and random experience of victimization.

Students who were threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school experienced significant amounts of student fear of victimization at school. The results indicated that students who experienced a fearful act while traveling to and from school take this feeling of fear into the school building and continue to experience fear throughout the school day. This suggests the important role that events occurring off school ground, on the way to and from school, have on student perceived safety while at school, and should be an area of concern for schools attempting to decrease student fear of victimization.

In addition to the important role previous victimizations play in student fear, students who reported that alcohol was available experienced greater levels of fear than students who did not report alcohol was available. Alcohol availability was significantly related to student avoidance of a specific location at school and on the way to and from school as the result of fear. One explanation as to why students who have methods available for obtaining alcohol experienced greater levels of fear is that since they were present in

environments where alcohol was available, or associated with individuals who had alcohol available, they were at greater risk of experiencing dangerous, violent, and illegal events or substances, which had the potential to increase student fear. In addition, students who report the availability of alcohol may be more aware of possible negative situations that could occur, which causes them to experience greater fear.

The findings related to neighborhood incivility indicated that measures of neighborhood incivility were related to student fear. In the current study, safe neighborhood and quality of neighborhood was found to be related to the total measure of student fear. In addition, safe neighborhood, noisy neighborhood, and quality of neighborhood were related to student fear of victimization at school, while safe neighborhood was related to student fear of victimization on the way to and from school. It was expected that measures of neighborhood incivility would be more strongly related to student fear of victimization on the way to and from school. However, this was not the case. The findings can be explained by the fact that participants in the current study all resided in rural towns in the rural Midwest. Students who live out of town, or on the edge of town, rode the school bus to school, and in the process received supervision on their way to and from school. On the other hand, students who walked to school only had a short distance to travel before arriving at school or getting out of the neighborhood that may have been judged to be incivile. Thus, students were able to avoid fear invoking situations on the way to and from school, due to the short commute from home to school. However, once students were present at school, they were unable to avoid the fear provoking neighborhood incivility situations they were exposed to, or had experienced, while at home, outside of school hours. As a result, they experienced greater amounts of fear while at school.

The presence of gangs caused some students to avoid specific locations on their way to and from school; however, while at school, gangs played no role in student fear. One

possible explanation for this finding is that students in the current study were aware of areas in which gangs, or groups of students who were believed to engage in gang activity, were present before and after school. As a result of this knowledge, students were able to avoid the locations in which gangs reside. Students continued to experience fear of specific locations on the way to and from school regardless of their active avoidance of gang related areas; however, since they were successful in avoiding these areas, they did not experience fear of attack on the way to and from school. Another possibility is the fact that gangs reported by the current sample may have been less violent and dangerous when compared to gangs located in other areas. The gangs may have been threatening to the point in which students avoided locations where the gangs resided on the way to and from school; however, once at school, the gangs may not have intimidated student enough to cause fear. Finally, it may have been the case that only a small number of suspected gang participants were located at the schools sampled for the current study. Perhaps if a greater number of gang members were present, students would experience greater fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school.

Regarding student demographics, grade was related to student fear of victimization on the way to and from school. It was surprising that with the relatively high level of bullying and harassment reported in the current study, student grade was only significantly related to student fear of victimization on the way to and from school since it is typically the older students who bully or harass the younger students, which also occurs at school. This finding could be explained by the fact that smaller schools were included in the present study. Though large amounts of bullying and harassment were present, perhaps this does not influence younger students much due to the smaller size of the school, the close proximity of teachers throughout the school day, and the increased level of familiarity that students have with each other in a smaller town.

Student socioeconomic status was not related to student fear of victimization.

Perhaps as a result of the small sample size and relatively limited socioeconomic range utilized in the current study, differences in student fear across different levels of socioeconomic status was not able to be identified. In addition to the small sample size, the lack of a racially diverse sample may have influenced the relationship between socioeconomic status and student fear. It may have been that students of diverse races experience different amounts of fear across categories of socioeconomic status. Due to the lack of racial minority students, the influence of socioeconomic status on student fear may not have been recognized.

Female students were found to experience similar amounts of fear on the way to and from school as male students. However, females were found to experience significantly more fear than male students in the area of fear of victimization at school. The high level of female fear of victimization at school can be explained by the differences in victimization between male and female students. Females were found to experience a greater number of thefts, harassment, and hate-related symbols. The higher rates of victimization reported in these areas could have influenced females to experience an increased amount of fear at school.

Hispanic students failed to experience more fear on the way to and from school than did non-Hispanic students. The results regarding this factor may have been influenced by the small number of participants who were Hispanic in the current study. The limited number of Hispanic participants may have resulted from the presence of language barriers. A large number of Hispanic students who attended the study in the current study have parents did not speak English, and as a result, they may not have understood the purpose of the permission form that was sent home for them to sign. In addition, there were Hispanic students who attended the middle schools who did not speak English. Perhaps the non-English speaking students did not fully understand the purpose of the current study following the translation into Spanish by a bilingual peer, or they may not have felt

comfortable participating due to the language differences.

Students who did not participate in extracurricular activities and students who attended their current school for less than six months did not experience greater levels of fear at school and on the way to and from school than student who attended their school for longer than six months and who participated in extracurricular events. Time spent at current school and participation in extracurricular events were unique to the present study, and no previous research was available regarding these areas.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations present in the current study include the fact that only middle school students from two rural Midwestern middle schools were included in the present study. Furthermore, the population sampled for the current study largely consisted of Caucasian students, while the remainder of the participants were of Hispanic descent (English and non-English speaking). Thus, the results of the current study may not generalize to other rural Midwestern middle schools as a result of differences in population characteristics.

Another limitation of the current study is the low return rate of permission forms by students. As a result of the low return rate, a small sample of students participated in the current study, which may not have been representative of students in this age group. Those students who returned the permission forms may have experienced greater levels of fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school and wanted to participate because of this. In addition, students who participated in the current study may have been from homes more supportive of research in the area of student fear of victimization. Finally, language differences may have prevented some Hispanic student from participating in the current study. The study was explained to students by the examiner in English. In addition, the permission slip sent home to parents was written in English. Although the purpose of the study was translated into Spanish by a bilingual peer, some non-English speaking Hispanic students may not have completely understood the current

study, which prevented their participation. As a result, a representative sample may not have been obtained in the current study.

A final limitation is that only rural Midwestern middle school students (6th through 8th grade) were included in the current study. Although previous studies that solely addressed student fear in rural Midwestern middle school students are not available, the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000 provided data regarding student fear of victimization in rural students ages 12 through 18. The Annual Report on School Safety: 2000 found that younger students reported experiencing more fear than older students. However, caution should be used when comparing the results of the Annual Report on School Safety: 2000 and the current study as the results of sample differences (age, location, population composition).

Implications for Intervention

The results of the present study indicated that school personnel should be aware of specific factors found to be significantly related to student fear. The measures threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school, attacked at school, item taken by force, weapon, or threatened at school, hate-related crime, quality of neighborhood, safe neighborhood, noisy neighborhood, availability of alcohol, presence of gangs, grade, and gender were found to be significantly related to student fear.

The results of the present study provide school personnel with factors they could target when attempting to identify students who experience fear on the way to and from school. Due to the important role that previous victimization has on student fear, schools should encourage students to report victimization attempts (both successful and unsuccessful attempts) that occur at school and on the way to and from school. The information obtained from student reports can then be used to identify students who may benefit from school interventions aimed at reducing student fear of victimization. Possible suggestions regarding interventions include providing a support group to students who

have experienced crime and victimization and who experience school related fear, providing them with an opportunity to discuss their experiences and fear with school personnel. Another possibility involves developing a school improvement group consisting of a variety of students. Students who are part of the school improvement group would receive instruction regarding the problem solving process. Once the students have learned this process, they then apply it to school safety concerns that are identified by students. Throughout the process, students would receive guidance from an adult who is familiar with the process, but it is up to the students to generate ideas and carry through with the generated ideas.

Conclusions

The current study attempted to replicate results produced by previous studies regarding student fear of victimization, and in the process expanded on available information in the area of student fear of victimization. Prior research has demonstrated that the number of students who experienced fear of victimization at school or on the way to and from school and the number of crimes has declined in recent years. In addition, not all students who experienced crime or victimization became fearful. Though the current study has demonstrated that rural middle school students experienced relatively high levels of fear and victimization in specific, the present results also indicated that not all students who experienced crime or victimization experienced fear at school or on the way to and from school. The current study also produced results similar to prior research in the area of identifying factors significantly related to student fear of victimization, which school personnel should be aware of.

In addition to validating previous results, the present study also expanded on available data regarding student fear. The current study did so by surveying 6th through 8th grade rural middle school students in an attempt to produce information that was not available for this population of students. Previous studies that examined student fear of

victimization focused on 6th through 12th grade students from rural, suburban, and urban schools. In some cases, data were not available regarding the percentage of students who experienced specific crimes or victimizations across different grades or school locations (rural, suburban, and urban schools). No information was available regarding student fear and victimization for the rural middle school population of students. The available information regarding student fear was also expanded by examining the effect participation in extracurricular events and time spent at current school had on student fear, which failed to find significant relationships.

Future research should continue to examine relationships that exist between populations of students, environmental variables, as well as exposure to previous events. In addition, research should attempt to explore individual variables, characteristics, and resources present to the students who experience crime and victimization but do not experience fear as a result. Finally, future research should attempt to implement interventions aimed at reducing student fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school.

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Appendix A

School Fear Survey

1. Age _____
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Race: Caucasian Hispanic Black Asian Other
4. Grade _____
5. How long have you been attending your current school? _____
6. What is the highest level of education completed by your mother?

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Elementary School | High School |
| Technical/Junior College | College |
| Graduate College | Don't Know |
| Does Not Apply | |
7. What type of work does your mother currently do?
(such as: teacher, secretary, ect.) _____
8. What is the highest level of education completed by your father?

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Elementary School | College |
| High School | Graduate College |
| Technical/Junior College | Does Not Apply |
| Don't Know | |
9. What type of work does your father do?
(such as: teacher, secretary, ect.) _____
10. Are you involved in any extracurricular events (school related activities separate from classes)?
Yes / No; If yes please list all events _____
11. How often are you afraid that some one will attack or harm you at school?
Never Some of the Time Almost Never Most of the Time
12. How often are you afraid that someone will attack or harm you on the way to and from school?
Never Some of the Time Almost Never Most of the Time
13. How often do you avoid a specific area within the school, or on school grounds, because you thought someone might hurt or bother you there?
Never Some of the Time Almost Never Most of the Time
14. How often do you avoid a specific area on your way to and from school because you thought someone might hurt or bother you there?
Never Some of the Time Almost Never Most of the Time

15. The next questions are about some things which may have happened to you while you were at school or on your way to and from school. During the last 6 months...

- Did anyone steal something from your desk, locker, or some other place at school?

Yes / No; If yes how many times _____

- Did anyone take money or things directly from you by force, weapons, or threats at school?

Yes / No; If yes how many times _____

- Did anyone take money or things directly from you by force, weapons, or threats on your way to and from school?

Yes / No; If yes how many times _____

- Did somebody physically attack you at school?

Yes / No; If yes how many times _____

- Did anyone physically attacked you on your way to and from school?

Yes / No; If yes how many times _____

- Did anyone threatened you with a weapon while at school?

Yes / No; If yes how many times _____

- Did anyone threatened you with a weapon on your way to and from school?

Yes / No; If yes how many times _____

- Have you experienced any incidents of bullying?

Yes / No; If yes how many times _____

- Have you experienced any incidents of harassment (unwanted verbal or physical behavior that made you feel uncomfortable)?

Yes / No, If yes how many times _____

- Has anyone called you a derogatory or bad name at school having to do with race, religion, Hispanic origin, disability, gender, or sexual orientation? We call these hate-related crimes.

Yes / No

- Have you seen any hate-related words or symbols written in school classrooms, school bathrooms, school hallways, or on the outside of your school building?

Yes / No

16. Are there any street gangs at your school?

Yes / No Don't Know

17. To your knowledge, did a student attack or threaten to attack a teacher in your school in the past 6 months?

Yes / No Don't Know

18. How easy or hard is it for someone to obtain alcoholic beverages at your school?

Easy Hard Impossible Don't Know Don't Know Drug

19. How easy or hard is it for someone to get the following things at your school: (a) marijuana, (b) cocaine, (c) crack, (d) uppers/downers, (f) other illegal drugs?

Easy Hard Impossible Don't Know Don't Know Drug

20. How do you get to school most of the time?
 Walk School Bus Public Bus Car
 Bicycle, Motorbike, or Motorcycle Other
21. My neighborhood is noisy.
 Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree
 Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know
22. The streets in my neighborhood always seem to have litter on them.
 Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree
 Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know
23. There are gangs in your neighborhood.
 Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree
 Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know
24. There are drug dealers in my neighborhood.
 Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree
 Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know
25. I feel safe from crime in my neighborhood.
 Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree
 Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
26. Crime in my neighborhood is getting worse and worse all the time?
 Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree
 Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Appendix B

Cover Letter

Students,

We are going to take a few minutes to complete the survey which you were informed about earlier in the week. The survey will measure student victimization and fear of victimization that you experience at school and on the way to and from school. Additional questions will also be asked that will attempt to measure additional variables (such as gender, grade, time spent at present school, the presence of gangs, availability of alcohol/drugs, mode of transportation to and from school, participation in extracurricular activities) which will be used to determine the effect they have on student fear of victimization at school and on the way to and from school. Please take your time and answer the questions truthfully, and remember the only people that will be allowed to view your completed surveys will be the individuals conducting the research study. Please do not put your name on the survey since it will not be needed. Please begin completing your survey, and thank you for participating.

Table 1

Fear of Victimization

| | <u>At School</u> | <u>On the Way to and From School</u> |
|------------------|------------------|--|
| Level of Fear | Percentage | Percentage |
| Never | 45.5 (40) | 55.7 (49) |
| Almost never | 38.6 (34) | 27.3 (24) |
| Some of the time | 11.4 (10) | 12.5 (11) |
| Most of the time | 2.3 (2) | 4.5 (4) |

Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate actual number of students reporting specific level of fear.

Table 2

Avoidance of a Specific Location Out of Fear

| | <u>At School</u> | <u>On the Way to and From School</u> |
|------------------|------------------|--|
| Level of Fear | Percentage | Percentage |
| Never | 61.4 (54) | 59.1 (52) |
| Almost never | 18.2 (16) | 25.0 (22) |
| Some of the time | 13.6 (12) | 12.5 (11) |
| Most of the time | 6.8 (6) | 3.4 (3) |

Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate actual number of students reporting specific level of avoidance.

Table 3

Measure of Total Fear

| Level of Fear | Percentage |
|------------------|------------|
| Never | 45.5 (40) |
| Almost never | 42.0 (37) |
| Some of the time | 11.4 (10) |
| Most of the time | 1.1 (1) |

Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate actual number of students reporting specific level of fear.

Table 4

Previous Victimization at School and on the Way to and From School

| Category | Percentage for Current Study | Percentage for <u>Annual Report on School Safety: 2000</u> |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| Theft | 30.7 | 6 |
| Item taken by force, weapons, or threat on way to and from school | 4.5 | *** |
| Item taken by force, weapons, or threats at school | 4.5 | 1 (Serious violent crime, including: rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault) |
| Physical attack at school | 9.1 | 15 |
| Physical attack on way to and from school | 3.4 | *** |
| Threatened with a weapon at school | 5.7 | 7 - 8 |
| Threatened with a weapon on way to and from school | 3.4 | *** |
| Bullying | 39.8 | 5 |
| Harassment | 28.4 | *** |
| Hate-related crime | 29.5 | 13 |
| Hate-related symbol | 51.5 | 36 |

Note. *** indicates data was not available

Table 5

Relationships Between Student Fear and Predictors

| Independent Variable | <u>Dependent Variable</u> | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-------|------|------|------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| School | -.10 | .05 | .02 | .05 | .01 |
| Age | -.21 | -.22 | -.03 | -.12 | -.20 |
| Gender | -.32* | -.12 | -.06 | -.12 | .15 |
| Race | .20 | .07 | .06 | .06 | .12 |
| Grade | -.17 | -.22* | -.02 | -.07 | -.18 |
| Time spent at current school | -.16 | -.18 | -.08 | -.06 | -.16 |
| SES | -.18 | -.04 | -.08 | -.07 | -.15 |
| Extracurricular participation | -.09 | -.09 | -.16 | -.16 | -.19 |
| Theft at school | .14 | .21 | .19 | .08 | .23* |
| Item taken by force, weapons, or threats at school | .23* | .15 | .25* | .25* | .25* |
| Item taken by force, weapons, or threats on way to and from school | .09 | .09 | .19 | .10 | .17 |
| Physically attacked at school | .23* | .13 | .16 | -.09 | .14 |
| Physically attacked on way to and from school | .08 | .00 | .20 | .09 | .17 |

| | | | | | |
|--|-------|------|-------|------|------|
| Threatened with weapon at school | -.03 | -.02 | -.17 | -.00 | -.03 |
| Threatened with weapon on way to and from school | .32* | .36* | .07 | .17 | .26* |
| Bullying | .11 | .17 | .16 | .10 | .18 |
| Harassment | .10 | .10 | .02 | -.17 | .01 |
| Hate-related crime | .26* | .20 | .08 | .19 | .22* |
| Hate-related symbols | .05 | .04 | .15 | .13 | .17 |
| Gangs | -.02 | .01 | .13 | .28* | .13 |
| Teacher attack at school | .19 | .20 | .12 | .11 | .19 |
| Availability of alcohol | .06 | .12 | .22* | .26* | .10 |
| Availability of drugs | -.06 | -.03 | -.05 | .04 | -.08 |
| Method of traveling to and from school | -.02 | -.10 | .01 | -.09 | -.07 |
| Noisy neighborhood | -.15 | -.07 | -.23* | -.09 | -.18 |
| Neighborhood trash | -.15 | -.04 | -.17 | .04 | -.11 |
| Gangs in neighborhood | -.15 | -.05 | .02 | .04 | .09 |
| Drug dealers in neighborhood | -.18 | -.10 | .04 | .02 | -.08 |
| Safe neighborhood | .28* | .16 | .15 | .29* | .28* |
| Quality of neighborhood | -.25* | -.17 | -.10 | -.18 | .23* |

Note. Dependent variables include: 1 = Student fear of victimization at school; 2 = Student fear of victimization on way to and from school; 3 = Student avoidance of a location out of fear at school; 4 = Student avoidance of a location out of fear on the way to

and from school; 5 = Measure of total fear. The negative relationship involving gender indicated that females experience greater levels of fear. * indicates $p < .05$.

Table 6

Stepwise Regression Analysis for Student Fear of Victimization at School

| Variable | <u>B</u> | <u>SE B</u> | <u>β</u> |
|--|----------|-------------|----------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Threatened with a weapon on way to and from school | 1.35 | .43 | .33 |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Threatened with a weapon on way to and from school | 1.28 | .41 | .31 |
| Gender | -.46 | .15 | -.30 |
| Step 3 | | | |
| Threatened with a weapon on way to and from school | 1.08 | .40 | .26 |
| Gender | -.57 | .15 | -.37 |
| Attacked at school | .75 | .26 | .29 |
| Step 4 | | | |
| Threatened with weapon on way to and from school | .93 | .40 | .22 |
| Gender | -.55 | .15 | -.36 |
| Attacked at school | .75 | .26 | .29 |
| Safe neighborhood | .10 | .05 | .20 |

Note. $R^2 = .11$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .09$ for step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .08$ for step 3; $\Delta R^2 = .04$ for step 4.

$p < .05$.

Table 7

Stepwise Regression for Student Avoidance of a Specific Location at School Out of Fear

| Variable | <u>B</u> | <u>SE B</u> | <u>β</u> |
|--|----------|-------------|----------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Item taken by force, weapon or threat at school | 1.13 | .48 | .25 |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Item taken by force, weapon, or threat at school | 1.18 | .47 | .26 |
| Quality of neighborhood | -.14 | .06 | -.24 |
| Step 3 | | | |
| Item taken by force, weapon, or threat at school | 1.11 | .46 | .24 |
| Quality of neighborhood | -.17 | .06 | -.29 |
| Availability of alcohol | .22 | .08 | .26 |

Note. $R^2 = .06$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .06$ for step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .07$ for step 3. $p < .05$.

Table 8

Stepwise Regression for Student Avoidance of a Specific Location on the Way to and From School Out of Fear

| Variable | <u>B</u> | <u>SE B</u> | <u>β</u> |
|-------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Safe neighborhood | .15 | .06 | .29 |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Safe neighborhood | .17 | .05 | .32 |
| Availability of alcohol | .20 | .07 | .28 |
| Step 3 | | | |
| Safe neighborhood | .16 | .05 | .30 |
| Availability of alcohol | .19 | .07 | .26 |
| Presence of gangs | .22 | .10 | .23 |

Note. $R^2 = .08$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .08$ for step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .05$ for step 3. $p < .05$.

Table 9

Stepwise Method for Total Student Fear

| Variable | <u>B</u> | <u>SE B</u> | <u>β</u> |
|--|----------|-------------|----------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Safe neighborhood | .13 | .05 | .28 |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Safe neighborhood | .11 | .05 | .24 |
| Threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school | .86 | .41 | .22 |
| Step 3 | | | |
| Safe neighborhood | .01 | .05 | .18 |
| Threatened with a weapon on the way to and from school | .94 | .41 | .24 |
| Item taken by force, weapon, or threat at school | .74 | .36 | .22 |

Note. $\underline{R}^2 = .12$ for step 1; $\Delta\underline{R}^2 = .07$ for step 2. $p < .05$.