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AN INVESTIGATION OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL  
PSYCHOLOGISTS

By  
Noelle Bisinger

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
Of  
The Graduate School  
At  
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Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor

Date Approved 5-6-09

## ABSTRACT

Noelle Bisinger  
AN INVESTIGATION OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL  
PSYCHOLOGISTS

2008/2009

Dr. Roberta Dihoff  
Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to investigate public school teachers' general knowledge and perceptions of school psychologists. This research examined 144 Kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers' familiarity and interaction with school psychologists. Self-reported measures of school psychologists' helpfulness, performance, and general knowledge of school psychologists' duties and responsibilities were evaluated. Information pertaining to teachers' specialization, employment history, student population characteristics, and school size were also considered. It was hypothesized that years of teaching experience, teacher type (whether special or general education), and school population size would effect the ratings of school psychologists on all three subscales. A few significant correlations emerged: 1) Teachers with special education students in their classrooms rated school psychologists higher in the area of helpfulness than teachers with general education students in their classrooms, 2) Teachers with more years of experience reported higher ratings of school psychologists' helpfulness and performance. The responses provided by teachers suggest implications for administrators, teachers, and school psychologists.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Need

The responsibilities of a school psychologist span widely across students, teachers, parents, and administrators. In many cases when the school psychologist is involved, the interaction between him or her and a student's teacher is crucial. The resources, support, and knowledge of a school psychologist can prove valuable to many teachers who seek help with a student. Few studies have focused on the relationship between teachers and the school psychologist. More research is needed to examine the interaction and relationship between the two education professionals for several reasons.

The chronic shortage of school psychologists nationwide and the high student-to-school psychologist ratio found in many school districts often limits the role of a school psychologist to specific mandated responsibilities. Due to these constraints, teachers may have limited perceptions of school psychologists' range of expertise and may not fully utilize services that can be provided. Some researchers suggest that additional work by school psychologists is needed to inform teachers of their services in an effort to form more effective and collaborative relationships (Gilman & Medway, 2007).

The nature of the teacher- school psychologist relationship is of particular interest. Some literature has revealed that teachers react very positively to interaction with school psychologists, placing high priority on the process, and believing they would gain skills as a result (Gutkin, 1980). Alternatively, Gilman and Medway (2007) suggest that when



regular education teachers interact with a school psychologist, they may not view their role as an active partner in the collaborative process. This perspective may negatively influence their perceptions of school psychologist services. Teachers' perception of school psychologists' helpfulness and support is important to consider when examining the interaction and exchanges made between the two.

Lastly, it is important to consider teachers' perceptions of the school psychologist's functioning and job performance in relation to their general knowledge of school psychology. Often times, school guidance services and school psychological services are confused. Although, most teachers believe assessment-related activities are primarily delivered by the school psychologist, they also believe that most other services such as counseling, crisis intervention, and in-service training are provided only by school counselors (Gilman & Medway, 2007). Exploration and clarification is needed to provide educational professionals with a better understanding of the interactions and relationships between teachers and school psychologists in order to create more effective interventions and utilization of services.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate public school teachers' general knowledge and perceptions of school psychologists. This research aimed to examine teachers' familiarity and interaction with school psychologists. Self-reported areas of perceived support and helpfulness, knowledge of general duties, and perceived overall performance of the school psychologist were evaluated in this study. Information pertaining to the teachers' specialization, employment history, student population

(general education or special education), and school size were also considered. The responses provided by teachers provide insight on the attitudes and awareness of, as well as the interaction with the school psychologist. Data collected has implications for administrators, teachers, and school psychologists.

## Hypothesis

The first hypothesis of this study was directly related to the teachers' classroom composition. First, it was hypothesized that participants who taught special education would perceive the school psychologist more positively in the areas of performance, and support, and a greater amount of knowledge of school psychological services would be reported by this group. Second, it was hypothesized that, a) the larger the school, the less positive the school psychologist would be perceived by teachers and, b) the larger the school, the less knowledge of school psychological services would be reported by all teachers. Third, it was hypothesized that the greater the number of years of teaching experience a teacher reported, the more positive a school psychologist would be perceived in the areas of performance and helpfulness, and the greater amount of general knowledge of school psychological services would be reported by this group.

## Operational Definitions

This study aimed to investigate three main areas involving teacher perception and knowledge: 1) teacher perception of school psychologist overall job performance, 2) teacher perception of school psychologist support and helpfulness, 3) teachers' general knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of the school psychologist. For the purpose

of this study, a “Teacher Perception, Awareness, and Knowledge of School Psychology” questionnaire was created. This Likert type measure consisted of items which assessed perceived school psychologist performance, perceived school psychologist support and helpfulness, and teacher knowledge of general school psychologist duties and responsibilities.

### Assumptions

It was assumed by the researcher, for the purposes of this study, that the measure created to assess teachers’ perception of the school psychologist’s overall job performance, teachers’ perception of school psychologist support and helpfulness, and teachers’ general knowledge of the responsibilities of a school psychologist was reliable and valid.

It was also assumed that the participating teachers in this study have some knowledge of the working school psychologist in their schools.

### Limitations

In this correlational study, a few limitations existed and should be described. The first limitation involved the use of a self-report measure. By using this type of response method, all data was based solely on teachers’ perceptions and therefore was subject to demand characteristics. The second limitation to this study was one of geography. Because the study was performed in southern New Jersey, it cannot be generalized to other cultures, countries, or states. Lastly, the sample size was fairly small and may not be representative of the general population.

## Summary

This research study sheds light on the critical interactions between teachers and school psychologists. It offers considerations for education systems and suggestions for more effective collaborations. Chapter 2 contains a literature review of research that pertains to the purpose of this study. In Chapter 3, the research methodology, measures, participants, and procedure of the design will be described. Next, in Chapter 4, the results will be presented and analyzed. Lastly, Chapter 5 will summarize the findings and explain implications for education systems.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

As previously stated, this research was designed to investigate three areas: teachers' general knowledge of the responsibilities of school psychologists, teachers' perceived helpfulness and support of the school psychologist, and teachers' perceived performance of the school psychologist. In this research it is important to examine the field of school psychology, specifically its progression and development over time. It is also crucial to consider the roles of the teacher and the school psychologist and the nature of their relationship in the education setting.

### School Psychology: A brief overview

A number of changes have transformed the field of school psychology to its present discipline. One recent change involves new legislature that calls for models of service that require greater collaboration between teachers and school psychologists (IDEA, 2004). However, the role of collaboration in consultation has been the frequent subject of debate in school psychology literature.

Beginning in the late 1980s and persisting to the present, a number of serious challenges to the collaboration model of school-based consultation emerged (Gutkin, 1999). Originally, school-based consultation was thought to be most beneficial when practiced as a collaborative process between school psychologists and teachers (Gutkin & Curtis, 1982). It was viewed as a key component and appeared to be universally accepted (Reschly, 1976). However, one particular opponent to the collaboration model argued

that there was little empirical support in favor of the collaborative approach and much support suggesting the opposite (Witt, 1990).

Original support for the collaboration model of consultation stemmed from the recognition of the broad responsibilities of a school psychologist. According to Gutkin (1999) within this model, teachers are viewed as assistants who participate in the consultation process so that a greater amount of individuals in need of mental health services can be reached. Due to a growing number of students in need, a collaboration process with additional available consultees (teachers) would help solve this problem. School psychologists also came to realize that the increasing number of children experiencing psychological or academic difficulties translated into a need for incorporating preventative rather than corrective programs. Professionals in the field also became aware of the necessity of congruent teacher support for making progress with children in the classroom.

Although this model appeared logical, it was met with strong opposition by some researchers. Witt (1990) wrote in opposition to the collaboration model, arguing that additional research was needed before any conclusions could be made regarding a collaborative role in school-based consultation (as cited in Gutkin 1999). Erchul (1987) also challenged the collaborative principle of school-based consultation after he studied behavioral consultation relationships and found that consultants had a tendency to control the relationship through all stages of consultation. Resistance also came from Erchul and Chewning (1990) who studied verbal exchanges between consultation dyads and found that these relationships may have been cooperative in nature but did not appear collaborative due to consultants assuming control of the relationship.

Today, school psychologists “collaborate with teachers, parents, and school personnel to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students” (U.S. Dept. of Labor 2008-2009). According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2008) they are also responsible for developing programs to train teachers and parents about effective teaching, learning, and behavior strategies. School psychologists maintain a wide variety of domains of service including: advocacy and public policy, research and knowledge base, collaboration and communication, practice, preservice and training , and in-service training (Dawson, Cummings, Harrison, Short, Gorin, & Palomares, 2003).

During the 2002 multisite conference for the “Future of School Psychology” a number of themes emerged with reference to the current status and needs of the discipline. The first theme to emerge was a recognition of the present shortage of school psychologists and the need for members of the field to reduce the negative impact of this problem. An emphasis was also placed on evidence-based interventions and the reduction of traditional individual assessment. Among others, a focus on early intervention and prevention also emerged (Dawson et al., 2003).

The demands of the school psychologist as well as growing numbers of students with mental health or special education needs combined with a limited number of available school psychologists make collaborative practices a necessity in most schools (Dawson et al., 2003). To ensure common goals and strategies, a cooperative effort is critically important. More research is needed to further investigate the relationship between school psychologists and teachers.

## The Collaborative Relationship

The nature of the collaborative relationship between teachers and school psychologists is one that can vary depending on school size, staffing, and district demands. However, the need for successful interventions and programs most often requires the support of teachers. It is important to consider the components of this relationship when developing methods for more successful student interventions.

One study focused on the level of equality between school psychologist and teacher during the consultation process. Gutkin (1996) assessed which co-worker spoke most often during collaborative meetings and found that teachers spoke more words or phrases than school psychologists. In the same study, findings indicated that equal levels of leadership existed between each group on measures of content and processes.

One of the main differences found between teachers' and school psychologists' behavior during the consultation process involves the request of more information. School psychologists are more likely to ask for more information from teachers than vice versa, according to Erchul (1987), Erchul and Chewning (1990), and Gutkin (1996).

In an earlier study performed by Lambert, Sandoval, and Corder (1975) data revealed positive exchanges between teachers and school psychologists. Evaluations from 53 teachers indicated that school psychologists were appreciated in their role as consultants. Teachers in this study went so far as to request additional consultant services and less traditional services.

Contrary to arguments against the collaborative approach to school-based intervention, much of the literature indicates that this process is associated with positive outcomes when school psychologists display directness and leadership qualities (Graham,



1998; Houk & Lewandowski, 1996; Erchul & Chewning, 1990). In addition, most research suggests that collaboration is an important element of consultative relationships regardless of the teachers' knowledge or history (Sheridan, 1992; Gutkin & Curtis, 1990). In some cases school psychologists may even need to serve teachers as educators of new or unfamiliar strategies or intervention techniques (Watson & Robinson, 1996; Wilson, Gutkin, Hagen, & Oats, 1998). Although multiple studies have demonstrated the efficacy of school-based consultative approaches, (Kratochwill, Elliot, & Busse, 1995; Gutkin, Singer, & Brown, 1980) some resistance to participation still exists on the parts of teachers (McClesky & Pacchiano, 1994). Further investigation of the nature of the school psychologist-teacher relationship is necessary to address this concern.

### Teachers' Perceptions

School psychologists and teachers collaborate with a common goal of attempting to meet the needs of all students (Fagan & Wise, 1994). It is important for school psychologists to work with both special educators and general educators as part of the district's entire education program (Buktenica, 1980). Continued discussions about the role of school psychology in schools has focused on how the field can expand its emphasis on assessment related procedures to greater involvement in creating and executing academic and behavioral programs, consultation, and counseling (Gresham, Beebe-Frankenberger, & MacMillan, 1999; Roberts, Marshall, Nelson, & Albers, 2001; Sterling-Turner, Watson, & Moore, 2002; Prout, Alexander, Fletcher, Memis, & Miller, 1993).

One approach involves school psychologists directly seeking the perspectives of teachers or administrators to help transform the profession (Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Nastasi, 2000). Little is known about whether school psychologists involve outside school personnel in attempting to learn how their discipline is perceived and utilized. Requesting input from teachers or administrators may help school psychologists understand how their services are viewed by professionals outside of the field and in turn foster better student advocacy and interventions.

A review of relevant literature focusing on education professionals' perceptions of school psychological services reveals that a majority of studies were conducted one to two decades ago. Very few recent studies have focused on educators' perceptions of school psychologists. Previous findings indicate that education professionals primarily viewed school psychologists as assessment experts (Abel & Burke, 1985; Cheramine & Sutter, 1993). Other studies suggested that teachers and administrators expressed a need for greater counseling involvement (Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Hughes, 1979) and in-service training (Sneft & Snider, 1980).

Additional aged reports have shown lower teacher satisfaction ratings with school psychological services when compared to administrators (Anthun, 1999; Landau & Gerken, 1979). In another study, teachers reported that school psychologists were less helpful to children and educators when compared to administrators' reportings (Abel & Burke, 1985).

A study performed by Roberts and Solomons (1970) concerning the actual roles of IEP meeting members revealed disagreement between teachers and school psychologists. The two groups disagreed about who should interpret test results and

present the results to the parents. School psychologists in this study reported that they did and should interpret assessment results, however teachers reported that they were more involved in the interpretation process and should be even more so. The authors concluded that gaps of communication appear to exist between the two professions and that the roles and responsibilities appear to not be clearly defined in the districts of their sample. This study highlights the importance of a collaborative, cooperative, and effective IEP team.

In a study by Short, Moore, and Williams (1991) teachers were asked to rate school psychologists in areas of expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Teachers were shown a video of a school psychologist consulting with a teacher and were told that the school psychologist either had a master's degree or a doctoral degree. Findings indicated that degree level was related to teachers' perceptions of the school psychologist. Teachers who were told that the school psychologist had a doctoral degree rated the psychologist higher on expertness.

Abel and Burke (1985) asked 115 special education teachers and 170 regular education teachers to rate their school psychologists on helpfulness. Both groups, on average, rated school psychologists as "slightly helpful". In this same study, teachers perceived school psychological services to be less helpful to children when compared to administrators.

Gutkin (1980) assessed teacher perceptions of school psychology consultation services in 12 midwest schools. Findings revealed that teachers had very positive reactions to consultation services, placed high importance on working with school psychologist consultants, and felt as though their professional knowledge and capacities

would improve as a result of such interactions. Specifically, 84% of teachers in the sample reported that a psychological consultant was desirable. Sixty-nine percent of the teachers felt as though the consultative services were more effective than traditional assessment centered services.

A study by Gerner (1981) examined how school psychologists with or without teaching experience were perceived by teachers and principals. One hundred fifty six teachers and 84 principals were surveyed about their satisfaction with the services of their school psychologist. No significant differences were found between ratings of school psychologists with no teaching experience and those with teaching experience.

#### Recent Literature

More recent studies have investigated education professionals' perceptions of school psychologists. A study performed in Norway by Anthun (1999) assessed a sample of 333 teachers, 136 administrators, and 38 school psychologists. Findings showed that teachers and administrators reported similar levels of satisfaction with school psychological services. However, in this study, teachers reported a greater desire for more consultation and counseling than administrators. All three groups in this study placed less emphasis on the need for student assessment and diagnosis.

School psychologist roles and responsibilities may be subject to regional, local, and district demands (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). A multi-state pilot study by Gilman and Gabriel (2004) surveyed 1,600 teachers' and administrators' perceptions of school psychology across geographic regions of the United States. The authors assessed three areas: (1) level of knowledge, satisfaction, and perceived helpfulness of school

psychology services (2) perceptions of the roles and functions of school psychologists and (3) desired roles and functions of school psychologists. The responses were compared to school psychologists from corresponding districts. The authors reported that teachers showed significantly less knowledge of school psychological services than administrators. Teachers also reported lower satisfaction with psychological services and lower helpfulness scores when compared to administrators. Teachers also responded differently on a measure assessing the level of seriousness warranting consultation with a school psychologist. They reported that the problem should be moderate in severity, while school psychologists and administrators believed the problem should be less serious. This study also took education professionals' age into consideration. Among teachers, the only significant difference found was on the measure assessing perceived knowledge of school psychology, with older teachers reporting greater knowledge. Overall, the authors report that their data suggest considerable differences between teachers' and administrators' perceptions of what school psychology is and the daily practice of it. Between and within group comparisons revealed that teachers and school psychologists had similar responses on a variety of questions. Specifically, the majority of school psychologists and teachers reported desiring a greater involvement of the school psychologist in individual counseling, group counseling, and with children in general education. Gilman and Gabriel (2004) also assessed whether teaching specialty was associated with differences in perceptions of school psychologists. They compared special education teachers' ratings to regular education teachers' ratings and found no significant differences.

Gilman and Medway (2007) performed a study involving 1533 regular education and special education teachers from 8 school districts and 4 states. Teachers rated their knowledge and satisfaction with school psychological services. Teachers' perceived helpfulness of school psychological services to children was also examined. When compared, regular education teachers reported less knowledge of school psychology than special education teachers. This group also perceived school psychologists as less helpful and reported lower satisfaction with services. However, the authors note that both teaching groups had limited awareness of the roles and duties of school psychologists. Both groups also viewed school counselors as providing more services than school psychologists. The findings suggest that the amount of contact a teacher has with the school psychologist may impact teachers' perceptions.

Watkins, Crosby, and Pearson (2001) surveyed 522 school staff members including regular education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and support staff about the duties of a school psychologist. School staff members reported that assessment, consultation, special education input, crisis intervention, and counseling were all important roles of the school psychologist, with primary importance being assessment.

Arivett, Rust, Brissie, and Dansby (2007) assessed the views of 115 special education teachers regarding their perceptions of school psychologists during the Individualized Education Program meeting process. Special education teachers rated the presence of a school psychologist as "moderately important". The authors report that school psychologists' participation and leadership at IEP meetings was positively correlated with increased ratings of helpfulness and importance.

In a study by Knoff, Sullivan, and Lui (1995) teaching experience was related to teachers' views of the school psychologist. Participants completed the "Consultant Effectiveness Scale" (Knoff, McKenna, & Riser, 1991) and reported their perceptions of the importance of certain factors of consultation. The authors found that teachers with 16 years or more of experience rated the items related to knowledge as more important compared to the teachers with less than 16 years of experience.

Although consultation is a preferred mode for delivering psychological services, (Conoley, 1986; Conoley & Gutkin, 1986) some teachers are still hesitant to become involved in the consultation process. Stenger, Tollefson, and Fine (1992) identified variables that distinguish elementary school teachers who participate in school-based consultation from those who do not. About half of the sample's 352 respondents had participated in school-based consultation with a school psychologist and half had not. The authors used a stepwise discriminant function analysis of 8 teacher response variables and found that 5 variables significantly separated the two groups. The variables included: school psychologist offering help, teachers' scores on the Problem Solving Inventory, perceptions of psychologist training in problem solving, years of teaching experience, and perceptions that a school psychologist's training is different from that of a teacher. An overwhelming majority (91%) of the teachers in the consultation group reported that they believed the school psychologists' training was different from that of teachers, and 73% believed that the school psychologist's position required more training at entry-level than a teaching position at entry level. In addition, this same group had "lower Problem Solving Inventory scores, acknowledged the offering of help, had fewer

years of teaching experience, and reported that they believed that there was a difference in the training of teachers and school psychologists” (p.147).

In a study performed by Smith and Lyon (1986) 243 school psychologists nationwide were surveyed about the types of consultation cases most likely viewed as successful or unsuccessful and the reasons for their perceptions. Data analysis indicated that the school psychologists attributed about 22% of successful cases and 6% of unsuccessful cases to themselves. In addition, they attributed 42% of successful cases to the consultee (teacher or parent) and 77% of failures to the consultee. Among teacher only consultations, school psychologists attributed approximately 61% of unsuccessful cases to teachers. Specific reasons for success attributed to the school psychologist were credibility (57%) and interpersonal skills (25%). “The reasons for success attributed to the consultee fell primarily into 3 categories: (a) cooperation and motivation (36%), (b) flexibility and openness to new ideas (21%), (c) follow through and consistency (19%)” (p. 207). Mutual cooperation (44%) and effective communication (34%) were the reasons for success attributed to the consultant-consultee relationship most often.

Erchul, Raven, and Whichward (2001) investigated the influence of social power in consultations involving teachers and school psychologists. The authors examined school psychologist and teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of 11 types of social power that psychologists might use with resistant teachers. Results suggested that both groups had similar perspectives about power within consultation. Both teachers and school psychologists reported expert and informational power as the most effective bases of power and indicated that psychologists would be more effective using subtle, positive, and non-coercive bases of power in consultation.



## Chapter Three: Research Design

### Participants

The participants in this research study consisted of 144 Kindergarten to Twelfth grade general and special education teachers. Seven schools within the Southern New Jersey area, specifically Atlantic and Camden counties, participated. The sample included 47 male and 97 female teachers ranging in years of experience from 1 to 36 years. The mean years of teaching experience was 15.6 years. Two of the schools were elementary schools, while the other five were high schools. Of the five high schools, one consisted of grades seven through twelve while the other four were comprised of grades nine through twelve. All teachers from the seven schools were asked to participate through contact via teacher mailboxes. All of the seven schools had provided their consent for the research to be performed.

The number of students per school ranged from 273 to 1578. The number of teachers per school ranged from 24 to 108. The response rate for this study was 29 %. A majority of the participants were White/Caucasian (96%) and female (67 %). The percentages of teachers who reported teaching a general education student population, special education population, and both general and special education populations were 15%, 11%, and 76% respectively.

## Instruments/Measures

The measure used in this study was created by the researcher. The first part of the measure asks demographic information, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and years of teaching experience.

In part two, participants responded to items assessing their knowledge of school psychological services, perceived helpfulness, and perceived support of the school psychologist. Teachers were asked to rate their feelings about the school psychologist in their district on a 5 point Likert-style scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree, and 5=Strongly Agree. This section was composed of 3 subscales which assessed teachers' knowledge of school psychological services, perceived helpfulness, and perceived support of the school psychologist. There were 3 performance subscale items, 5 knowledge subscale items, and 4 helpfulness subscale items. Most of the items assessing teachers' general knowledge of school psychologist's responsibilities were based on information provided by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) website, [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org), but were not taken directly or exclusively from this source. Please refer to the Appendix for details.

## Procedure

Before any data was collected, schools were contacted through the mail with formal letters describing the nature and purpose of the study. After consent to participate was obtained from each school, the questionnaires were distributed in teacher mailboxes, along with a brief explanation of the study and concise directions. The directions on the

questionnaires asked participants to return their responses in a drop box located in the mailbox office. Data was collected shortly after the second half of the school year began.

### Hypothesis

First, it was hypothesized that participants who teach special education would perceive the school psychologist more positively in the areas of performance, and support, and a greater amount of knowledge of school psychological services would be reported by this group. Second, it was hypothesized that, a) the larger the school, the less positive the school psychologist would be perceived by teachers and, b) the larger the school, the less knowledge of school psychological services would be reported by all teachers. Third, it was hypothesized that the greater the number of years of teaching experience a teacher reported, the more positive a school psychologist would be perceived in the areas of performance and helpfulness, and the greater amount of general knowledge of school psychological services would be reported by this group.

### Design

The analysis design of this study was experimental. Independent variables included gender, years of teaching experience, time in contact with the school psychologist, and type of teacher (special or general education). Dependant variables in this study included teacher knowledge of school psychological services, perceived helpfulness, and perceived support of the school psychologist in district.

## Summary

In summary, this chapter described the research procedure in detail including the participants, measures, hypothesis and analysis. The results of this study provide valuable information to current School Psychologists and administrators as well as prospective School Psychologists who will soon enter the field. Insight into the types of interactions and perceptions maintained by teachers could provide valuable information for the education setting. It is crucial to consider the roles of the teacher and the school psychologist and the nature of their relationship in the education setting as these factors may contribute to the quality of educational services children receive within a school setting.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate public school teachers' general knowledge and perceptions of school psychologists. This research was aimed at examining teachers' familiarity and interaction with school psychologists. Self-reported areas of perceived support and helpfulness, knowledge of general duties, and perceived overall performance of the school psychologist were evaluated in this study. Information pertaining to the teachers' specialization, employment history, student population (general education or special education), and school size were also considered. The responses provided by teachers provide insight on the attitudes and awareness of, as well as the interaction with the school psychologist. Data and results obtained present implications for administrators, teachers, and school psychologists.

There were a few main hypotheses for this study. First, it was hypothesized that participants who taught special education would perceive the school psychologist more positively in the areas of performance, and support, and a greater amount of knowledge of school psychological services would be reported by this group. Second, it was hypothesized that, a) the larger the school, the less positive the school psychologist would be perceived by teachers in the areas of performance and helpfulness and, b) the larger the school, the less knowledge of school psychological services would be reported by all

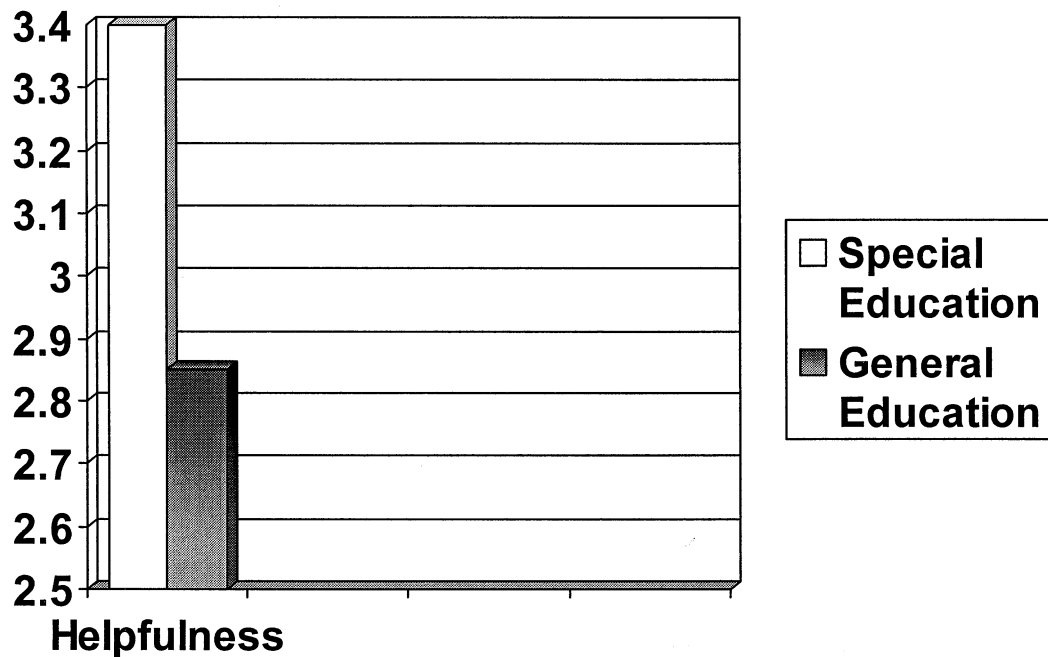
teachers. Third, it was hypothesized that the greater the number of years of teaching experience a teacher reported, the more positive a school psychologist would be perceived in the areas of performance and helpfulness, and the greater amount of general knowledge of school psychological services would be reported by this group.

## Results

Directionally adjusted items were totaled to create summary perceived performance, knowledge, and helpfulness scores for each participant. Participants who were not teachers were excluded from analysis.

For the first hypothesis, a Mann-Whitney U test was performed to assess the relationship between teachers' student population (special education or general education) and perceived performance, perceived helpfulness, and knowledge of psychological services. A significant difference was found between teacher type on the helpfulness subscale. Teachers who reported having special education students in their classrooms rated school psychologists as being more helpful (special education teachers:  $M = 3.4$ ,  $n = 122$  versus general education teachers:  $M = 2.85$ ,  $n = 22$ ,  $p = .05$ ; See Graph 1.0). No significant differences were found between teacher type on the performance or knowledge subscales.

Graph 1.0: Special and general education teachers' perceptions of school psychologists' helpfulness.



For the second hypothesis, mean scores for each of the three subscales (performance, helpfulness, knowledge) were calculated for each school (see table 1.0). The hypothesized trends were not confirmed by the analyzed data. However, it was notable that the largest school in the study showed the lowest average scores on both the performance subscale and the helpfulness subscale, as well as the second lowest average score on the knowledge subscale.

Table 1.0 : Mean scores on the performance, knowledge, and helpfulness subscales.

Total school population	School Type	Mean Performance	Mean Knowledge	Mean Helpfulness
1578	High School (9-12)	3.11**	3.62	3.06
1466	High School (9-12)	3.35	3.64	2.83
1231	High School (9-12)	3.56	4.01*	3.73
872	Jr./Sr. High School (7-12)	3.63	3.69	3.09
662	High School (9-12)	3.96	3.78	3.48
392	Elementary School (K-6)	4.03*	3.75	3.79*
273	Elementary School (K-5)	3.14	3.4**	2.52**

\* indicates highest score in each category

\*\* indicates lowest score in each category

For the final hypothesis, a non parametric correlation coefficient, Gamma, was used to determine the relationship between years of teaching experience and perceived performance, helpfulness, and knowledge of school psychologists. A significant relationship was found between the number of years of teaching experience and perceived helpfulness ( $p=.001$ ). A significant relationship was found between the number of years of teaching experience and perceived performance ( $p=.001$ ). Teachers with more years of experience reported higher ratings of school psychologists' helpfulness and performance. No significant relationship was found between years of teaching experience and knowledge of school psychologists.

A Mann- Whitney U test was performed to investigate the effect of gender on the three subscales. No significant results were found.



## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Overview

Chapter one described the purpose of this study, which stems from an effort to better understand teachers' perceptions of school psychologists. Three hypotheses were proposed that related to the type of student population (whether special education or general education), school size, and years of teaching experience. Chapter two consisted of a literature review of past research pertaining to educators' perceptions of school psychologists. Chapter three detailed how the study was designed. A questionnaire was distributed to teachers among 7 schools within Southern New Jersey. It contained questions that examined their perceptions of school psychologists' performance, helpfulness, and duties and responsibilities. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion, limitations, and implications for future research.

### Discussion

The difference that emerged on the helpfulness subscale between teachers of special education students and teachers of general education students was consistent with expectations of one aspect of the first hypothesis. Teachers with special education students in their classrooms rated school psychologists higher in the area of helpfulness than teachers with general education students in their classrooms. The mean responses for the two groups fell between the likert response categories of "Neutral" and "Agree"

and “Disagree” and “Neutral”, for teachers of special education students and general education students, respectively. However, no significant differences were found between the two teacher types on the performance or knowledge subscales. It was originally hypothesized that the teacher type variable would have an effect on all three subscale outcomes. The results of this analysis suggest an inconsistency in teachers’ attitudes regarding the functioning of school psychologists.

Analysis of school size and mean subscale scores revealed that the author’s second hypothesis was also disconfirmed. It was originally hypothesized that the schools with large student populations would be associated with lower scores on all three of the subscales. This trend was not confirmed in the study. Surprisingly, the smallest school in the sample (273 students) emerged with the lowest mean helpfulness and knowledge scores. An elementary school with a student population of 392 rated school psychologists the highest on performance and helpfulness. A high school with a student population of 1,231 showed the highest mean score on the knowledge subscale. The lowest mean performance rating emerged from the largest school in the sample, populated by 1,578 students.

The last hypothesis involved the relationship between teaching experience and teachers’ perceptions of school psychologist’s performance, helpfulness, and knowledge of school psychologists’ duties and responsibilities. Teachers with more years of experience reported higher ratings of school psychologists’ helpfulness and performance. No significant difference was found between years of teaching experience and knowledge of school psychologists. This finding may be related to a greater number of interactions

or exchanges between more experienced teachers and school psychologists, compared to newer teachers.

### Limitations

The first limitation involves the use of a self-report measure. By using this type of response method, all data is based solely on teachers' perceptions and therefore is subject to demand characteristics. The second limitation to this study is one of geography. Because the study was performed in southern New Jersey, it cannot be generalized to other cultures, countries, or states. Third, the sample size was fairly small and may not be representative of the general population. Fourth, it was assumed by the researcher that the measure created to assess teachers' perceptions of the school psychologist's overall job performance, teachers' perception of school psychologist support and helpfulness, and teachers' general knowledge of the responsibilities of a school psychologist was reliable and valid.

Lastly, differences in teacher attitudes could reflect differences in school psychological services, such as service delivery, child study team roles, and the site location of the school psychologist within a school or district.

### Implications for future research

Although the sample size of this study is not considerably large, important conclusions can be drawn from the data and its analysis. The responses reported by teachers provide valuable insight on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers, as well as

their interactions with school psychologists. The results have implications for administrators, teachers, and school psychologists.

Findings from this study suggest that teaching experience and specialization (in general or special education) effect the way a school psychologist is perceived by teachers in terms of helpfulness and performance. Results also show that knowledge of the responsibilities and duties of school psychologists was not particularly high. Only one school scored in the 4 point range on the knowledge subscale, while all other scores were 3.78 or below, on the 5-point scale. This specific finding speaks to the familiarity and assumptions teachers have regarding the job of a school psychologist. In addition, years of teaching experience did not effect teachers' knowledge of school psychologists' obligations, suggesting that teachers' length of employment did not impact their understanding of school psychological services.

Future research examining the qualities that teachers prefer a school psychologist to display might be particularly valuable. Future studies should address specific characteristics that teachers find helpful and beneficial. In addition, to obtain a better perspective on teacher-school psychologist relationships, research should be aimed at collecting qualitative data. Interviews and open ended questionnaires could serve as invaluable sources of data.

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## APPENDIX

### School Psychology Questionnaire

1. How many years have you been employed as a teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Race/ Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
4. The student population you teach includes:

Special education students \_\_\_\_\_

General education students \_\_\_\_\_

Both special and general education students \_\_\_\_\_

3. On average about how many times do you interact or communicate with the School Psychologist(s) in your school or district ?

Daily \_\_\_\_\_ Weekly \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly \_\_\_\_\_ Every few months \_\_\_\_\_

Every six months \_\_\_\_\_ Once a Year \_\_\_\_\_ Never \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Using the scale below, please mark a number on the blank line next to each statement to indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with it.

-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----

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Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

- \_\_\_\_\_. The job of a school psychologist is basically the same as that of a guidance counselor.
- \_\_\_\_\_. I have been provided with helpful information from the school psychologist in my school or district.
- \_\_\_\_\_. School Psychologists work with special education students only.
- \_\_\_\_\_. School Psychologists provide psychological counseling.
- \_\_\_\_\_. I think the School Psychologist at my school does a good job.
- \_\_\_\_\_. School Psychologists are trained in both Education and Psychology.
- \_\_\_\_\_. On one or more occasion I have been provided with help or support from the School Psychologist.
- \_\_\_\_\_. In general I know very little about the role and responsibilities of a School Psychologist.
- \_\_\_\_\_. I know the name(s) of the School Psychologist(s) in my district or school.
- \_\_\_\_\_. When needed, the School Psychologist has provided me with effective or helpful intervention or learning strategies.
- \_\_\_\_\_. School psychologists evaluate the eligibility of students for special services.
- \_\_\_\_\_. I have no complaints about the School Psychologist at my school.
- \_\_\_\_\_. School Psychologists may diagnose mental illness.

\_\_\_\_. If I have a concern that requires the School Psychologist, he/she effectively helps me address it.

\_\_\_\_. Overall, the school psychologist in my school performs well.

