ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: A non-hardened preventative approach to deterring school crime and violence: The significance of threat assessment teams in schools across the United States.

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Daily incidents of crime and violence occur across all types of schools in the United States each year. While school crime and violence cannot be entirely eliminated, several available safety and security measures provide school districts the opportunities to deter, avert, or reduce such unnecessary acts. Due to a strong emphasis over the past twenty years for school districts to implement tangible security measures (e.g. door access controls and surveillance cameras), non-hardened proactive measures such as interpersonal relationships with students, educational, and non-educational stakeholders (i.e. the human element) have largely been overshadowed. One non-hardened example includes school threat assessment teams, which may be referred to as a formal group of people and processes that identify, assess, and manage students who might be a potential risk for violent or harmful behavior towards themselves or others (Padgett et al., 2019). While currently a majority of the states do not mandate school districts implement threat assessment teams, more states are beginning to adopt such policies (Sawchuk, 2019). The purpose of this quantitative study moreover, is to understand common characteristics of those schools that had threat assessment teams and review whether a non-hardened safety and security measure such as threat assessment teams (and the frequency with which threat assessment teams formally met) has a relationship to school crime and violence

incidents as measured by national archival quantitative data. The data studied was from a nationally representative cross-sectional survey, titled "2017-18 School Survey on Crime and Safety" (SSOCS:2018), managed by the National Center for Education Statistics within the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences.

More specifically, this quantitative study addresses the following research questions:

1. What percentage of schools had threat assessment teams and what were the most common characteristics describing those schools with teams?

2. What relationships exist between schools with (and schools without) threat assessment teams and the number of crime and violent incidents at school?

3. What relationships exist between the frequency with which threat assessment teams formally met and the number of crime and violent incidents at school?

In view of these questions, this study examines data derived from SSOCS:2018 participants which included school administrators or the person most knowledgeable about school crime and policies and with the most safety knowledge pertaining to their school. The sample of the study included 2,762 schools. This study incorporates descriptive and inferential statistics through cross tabulations along with binary logistic regression and ordinal regression analysis to explore relationships and the significance of school threat assessment teams to school crime and violence incidents. Statistical software, SAS and SPSS, were used to analyze the data.