A Mouse Click Away: Internet Resources for Students in Crisis in

Geographically Isolated or Self-Sequestered Communities

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Abstract

The impact, incidence, prevalence, and severity of violence and trauma adversely affect students academically, behaviorally, emotionally, and socially. For students residing in geographically isolated or self-sequestered communities, trauma may be exacerbated when school counselors may be unprepared to respond effectively and timely because prevention and intervention options might be limited. Barriers to preparedness may be related to geographic, financial, cultural, religious, psychological, or linguistic reasons. This paper describes how a free, online repository of pre-screened crisis-specific counseling and guidance resources could be useful in supporting students' resiliency in geographically isolated or self-sequestered communities.

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School counselors report increasing incidents of violence, trauma, and family disruption among students (McAdams, Foster, Dotson-Blake, & Brendel, 2009). Students in crisis are more likely to be distracted in school and less likely to achieve academically when compared to students not in crisis (Gumpel, 2008; Mrug, Loosier, & Windle, 2008; Solberg, Carlstrom, Howard, & Jones, 2007). An inability to succeed in school, due to a crisis, frequently manifests itself emotionally and behaviorally. Students in crisis are in danger of failing a grade, dropping out of school, or being expelled for aggressive, defiant, truant, or disruptive behaviors (Barr & Parrett, 2001). By adulthood, children who were in crisis but were neglected, become at risk for illiteracy, anti-social unemployment or underemployment, teenage parenthood, substance abuse, behavior, or incarceration (Barr & Parrett, 2001; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Any child may experience negative consequences of the unaddressed effects of trauma and violence, as well as the effects of societal and familial stressors. Children's reactions to trauma are affected by their developmental stage and the ways in which they manage trauma (Bokszczanin, 2007; Gumpel, 2008; Lieberman & Knorr, 2007; Solberg et al., 2007). Traumatic experiences and crises occur in all social classes, in every ethnic and racial group, and in every school district. Trauma, crisis, and violence are broad concepts that encompass many entities and are used interchangeably in this paper.

Traumatic Range of Experiences

School Violence

Following a school murder, injured students, teachers, and administrators typically experience physical and emotional pain as well as the long term effects of victimization and survivor guilt (James & Gilliland, 2005). Students who witness the violence, tend to experience emotional pain and guilt about not intervening successfully to stop the assault while others experience grief from the loss of relationship with those who were murdered or permanently disabled at a premature age (Burgess, Garbarino, & Carlson, 2006; Gumpel, 2008).

Terrorism/Bioterrorism

Just about everyone in America was affected by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Some local students witnessed the building attacks and collapses and almost all school-age children watched multiple replays of the attacks on television. Some children experienced psychological distress and somatic reactions while others experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kerr, 2009; Mullett-Hume, Anshel, Guevara, & Cloitre, 2008).

Murder/Death

Death of a relative, friend, classmate, or teacher is an inevitable life experience. This event, however, may be overwhelming for a child who may be encountering a first experience with death without an adequate frame of reference, with inadequate coping skills, or with a limited support system. The chances that children will encounter someone's premature death are increased, for example, by a fatal automobile accident

(Stallard et al., 2006), by gang violence (Mrug et al., 2008; Solberg et al., 2007), or by American military troop deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries in turmoil.

Domestic Violence

Children who witness incidents of domestic violence may develop unhealthy perceptions of male-female relationships. They may over-identify with the aggressor or victim; may experience numerous somatic and psychological reactions; and may exhibit aggressive and violent behavior (Dutton, 2000).

Physical and Sexual Abuse/Incest

All forms of abuse affect children and the aftereffects may be apparent immediately or become evident later in life (Broman-Fulks et al., 2007). Some children try to deny or rationalize the abuse because, for example, the injuries did not require hospitalization; it only happened once; the parent did not mean to be abusive or did not know better; or other children live under worse conditions (Broman-Fulks et al., 2007).

Geographically Isolated and Self-Sequestered Communities

Geographic Isolation

In times of crisis, where can school counselors in geographically isolated communities readily locate state-of-the-art information, resources, and services for students? Geographically isolated communities are found in rural America, far from the large cities, sprawling suburbs, and growing exurbs in which crisis-related resources and expertise may be readily accessible. The isolated communities may have been established originally as small mining towns, ranching settlements, trading posts, forts, reservations, or "company" towns ("Hamlet," n.d.). Geographically isolated communities

are most prevalent in predominately rural states (e.g., North Dakota), on Native American reservations, and on remote U.S. military bases (e.g., Alaska).

Using the typical Native American reservation as an example, reservations were established to be geographically isolating. In the 19th Century, the Federal government established reservations away from metropolitan areas (LaFromboise, 1993). Today, Native Americans live on reservations, in isolated hamlets, and in metropolitan areas (LaFromboise, 1993). For those who live on the reservations or in isolated hamlets, some families may experience aspects of poverty, prolonged and consistent high unemployment, substandard housing, substance abuse, and high suicide rates, among other emotional, psychological, and social distracters (LaFromboise, 1993; Ward, 2005). These factors typically adversely affect Native American children's educational attainment, exacerbate traumatic experiences, and/or limit their degree of resiliency (LaFromboise, 1993; Ward, 2005). Native American academic achievement is reported to be below the national average and is the lowest of any major American ethnic group (LaFromboise, 1993; Ward, 2005).

Self-Sequestration

Older Order Amish and Hasidic Jewish residents traditionally live in self-sequestered communities. Their enclaves may be located near metropolitan areas (e.g., Lakewood, New Jersey), in rural areas or near small hamlets (e.g., Shipshewana, Indiana), and in cities (e.g., Brooklyn, New York). Residents of these enclaves choose to remain distinct from the American mainstream lifestyle and follow strict religious and cultural dictates of isolation and separation from, or limited contact with, mainstream residents. Using the Amish as an example, they shun the use of electricity, running

water, and other modern conveniences as part of their religion and culture and use the terms "the English" and "outsiders" to describe non-Amish people (Wittmer, 2003). In times of crisis, they tend to rely on each other for comfort and attempt to forgive the perpetrator (Wittmer, 2003).

Continuing to use the Amish as an example, Wittmer (2003) describes the traditional student's lifestyle. Amish children may attend a public school or an Amish sect school. They start school late in life (i.e., around 8 years old rather than the typical age of 5 or 6 years) and are educated through Grade 8, when most will turn 16 years old and traditionally stop attending school legally. Parents and elders believe that basic knowledge in reading, arithmetic, and writing is a sufficient education (Wittmer, 2003). Some Amish sects have established their own schools, through Grade 8, because their children were, at times, ridiculed by "outsider" students for adhering to Amish beliefs and values (Wittmer, 2003).

About the age of 16 years, male and female Amish teens enter the period of *rumspringa*, lasting until about the age of 19 years (Novotney, 2008). *Rumspringa* is a coming-of-age experience, as teens transition to adulthood. They leave their family and sheltered community to experience an "outsider" lifestyle. *Rumspringa* literally means "running around" (Novotney, 2008, p. 43). During *rumspringa*, they may freely drink alcohol, use drugs, drive cars, use cell phones, watch television and movies, date "outsider" teens, play video games, play sports, hang out at malls, listen to music, dance, experience no curfew, and enjoy other "outsider" activities without consequences. Some teens continue their education in a public high school during *rumspringa*. A mainstream teen's transition to adulthood is daunting for the average

teen. Amish teens however, experience this daunting developmental stage while simultaneously engaging in rapid immersion into the "outsider" lifestyle during their *rumspringa*, for which they have no adequate preparation. Consequently, substance abuse or date rape may emerge as traumatic experiences. At the conclusion of a teen's *rumspringa*, the vast majority return to their community and commit to a lifetime of loyalty to the Amish lifestyle (Edwards, 2002; Novotney, 2008).

Managing Trauma

Residents of geographically isolated areas or self-sequestered communities may cope effectively with meeting daily or routine needs. For instance, Bergin and Miller (1990) describe the counseling program of one elementary school in a southeastern hamlet in Oklahoma: one counselor offers counseling services for *one* hour per day, while also teaching Kindergarten and Grade 4 during the remainder of the school day. This arrangement may meet a student's typical needs. However, in the midst of a personal, family, school, or community crisis, additional resources may be required to meet a student's psychological and counseling needs which may exceed what local school counselors, parents, residents, and community leaders can provide. Yet, the additional services, expertise, and resources may not be readily accessible because of geographic, financial, cultural, or psychological barriers.

Between the mid-1990's and mid-2000's, there were many well publicized news reports about school violence in isolated or self-sequestered communities. A few are described. In 1996, a 14 year old junior high school student entered his algebra class in Moses Lake, Washington and opened fire ("Frontier Middle School Shooting," n.d.). Moses Lake is located midway between Yakima and Spokane in central eastern

Washington, that is, 90 minutes from either town, or 180 miles from Seattle. According to news reports, he dressed as a Wild West gunslinger and carried a concealed hunting rifle and two handguns. He killed the teacher and two students and wounded another student. He took the remaining classmates as hostages but they were eventually released. He previously reported being bullied in school and complained about being beaten and sexually harassed by other students. One of the dead students was reported to be one of his bullies. This was the first highly publicized school shooting in the United States ("Frontier Middle School Shooting," n.d.). In 2005, a school murder-suicide occurred on the remote Chippewa Indian region known as Red Lake Indian Reservation in Minnesota ("Ten Dead in Minnesota Indian Reservation," 2005). According to news reports, the high school shooter, acting alone, killed nine people (including relatives, students, and teachers), injured 14 others (including five students), and then committed suicide. At the time, the rampage was the deadliest school shooting since the Columbine High School (Littleton, Colorado) shootings ("Ten Dead in Minnesota Indian Reservation," 2005). In 2006, in an Amish one-room schoolhouse in Pennsylvania, a school shooting involved the taking of hostages and resulted in a murder-suicide, with six people dead at its conclusion ("Amish School Shooting," n.d.).

Violent incidents such as these three events in isolated or self-sequestered communities may begin to erode some students' comfort zones, test their coping skills, and exacerbate any previous or co-occurring trauma (Mullett-Hume et al., 2008; Murg et al., 2008). Extraordinary resources and expertise may be required to facilitate students' resiliency.

Prevention and Intervention of Trauma in Students

The impact, incidence, prevalence, and severity of a crisis, as well as societal/community and familial traumas, have increased counselors' awareness to intervene early to foster healthy coping skills and resilience in students in order to achieve academically (Dean et al., 2008; McAdams et al., 2009; Silva et al., 2003). Counselors and other school specialists such as teachers, psychologists, principals, social workers, and nurses will confront the effects of trauma in students but may be unprepared to respond effectively and timely with crisis-specific resources, especially in isolated or self-sequestered communities, in which options and resources may be limited.

A counselor's traditional approach to seeking crisis-related state-of-the-art counseling and guidance resources includes many options. These may include subscriptions to journals, implementation of evidence-based prevention programs, purchases of books and therapeutic material, hiring of consultants and trainers, and development of partnerships with local college or university faculty members. A higher education partnership may offer a broad range of evidence-based services and skills that may be useful in preventing or mitigating a crisis as well as offer access to experts, new crisis management techniques, and college/university library acquisitions. Most of these counseling options though, necessitate a financial commitment or require a college or university location within a reasonable commute. Financial and physical barriers to access and expertise may be significant obstacles to overcome for some school district specialists. Yet, if counselors can overcome financial and physical barriers to prevent or mitigate emotional distress as well as teach healthy coping skills,

facilitate resilience, and instill academic achievement, it is a win-win situation for students, counselors, and parents/guardians.

Counseling and Technology

Computer technology is altering the way counselors may comfort and educate students about emotional distress related to trauma and violence when their options for state-of-the-art information are limited and when financial resources are scarce (Borzekowski, Fobil, & Asante, 2006; Godin, 2005; Greenfield & Yan, 2006; Price, 2008; Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006). In the critical time following a crisis, a counselor may search the Internet for relevant resources, an uncommon action just a decade ago (Godin, 2005; Greenfield & Yan, 2006; Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006). Credible, and often free, Internet resources are a mouse click away and will assist counselors to teach healthy coping skills to students in emotional distress.

A typical counselor might begin the search for relevant web sites by using a search engine, which may produce hundreds or thousands of web sites through which a counselor must cull and waste valuable time. Some sites will be appropriate for children's issues but other sites may be commercial or for-profit, may focus on for adult issues, or may be irrelevant. Due to increases in student caseloads and/or additional administrative responsibilities (Erford, 2007), counselors typically do not have the luxury of time to conduct a time-consuming and cumbersome search. Counselors could benefit from the efficiency of accessing a compilation of pre-screened web sites covering a wide variety of traumas experienced by students that is online, credible, age- and grade-appropriate, and free or inexpensive.

An informal online compilation of web sites, *Repository of Internet Resources to Prevent or Reduce Violence and Trauma in Schools* presents a useful resource for school counselors (Gary, 2008). The collection of over 100 pre-screened counseling- and guidance-related web sites is organized to empower counselors when assisting students in crisis to cope effectively as well as reduce or prevent crises from developing. Each entry includes the web site's name, a brief summary of its main features, and the URL. Sites are sponsored by counseling organizations, education associations, mental health associations, professional organizations, media groups, universities, and government agencies. Commercial and for-profit web sites that may make fraudulent claims, may offer seductive promises, or may supply dubious testimonials, are not included. The counselor will find fact sheets, multimedia presentations, action kits, curriculum guides, awareness campaigns, online bookstores/libraries, training opportunities, group activities, and online journals. Counselors may use the information for psychoeducation, support groups, and counseling. While all web sites in the *Repository* may be used by counselors and other school specialists, some web sites also address the specific needs of parents/guardians and youths in coping with and preventing crises. Other sites offer multilingual information for English language learners (ELLs).

The *Repository* provides resources and information for issues such as youth gangs and violence, cyberbullying/bullying, natural disasters, hate crimes/bias incidents, and sexual violence, among other relevant issues affecting students. Sites with a student focus provide information and action kits to coordinate student-organized school activities such as awareness days or awareness weeks on a variety of issues that may

lead to emotional trauma (e.g., cyberbullying). The *Repository* also identifies web sites that address the needs of parents/guardians and English language learners (ELLs). For parents/guardians, information from web sites could be used to facilitate parent/guardian consultations about a student's coping skills and support family relationships during a crisis. Finally, multilingual web sites may be helpful to empower those parents/guardians with limited English language reading and comprehension skills to seek information written in a native language, thereby reducing anxiety and facilitating empowerment.

The *Repository* was compiled as a service and for informational purposes. Inclusion in the *Repository* should not be considered an endorsement. Users must evaluate web sites for their specific needs. Web sites are generally unreliable for longevity and consistency. Those web sites that address a specific trauma or incident (e.g., Hurricanes Ike or Katrina) are often temporary and expire when no longer deemed timely by the sponsors, while those sites that address general traumas (e.g., child abuse) are usually robust. The *Repository* is updated periodically.

Implications for School Counselors

The effects of trauma may be exacerbated in isolated or self-sequestered communities due to an inadequate access to crisis-specific counseling and guidance resources or may be compounded by physical, cultural, or psychological isolation (Ho, Rasheed, & Rasheed, 2004; LaFromboise, 1993; Wittmer, 2003). For instance, in a school shooting or if a parent or other close relative is killed during active military duty, students may be directly confronted with death and mortality for the first time. Computer technology ensures that school specialists in isolated or self-sequestered communities,

who otherwise may not have access to adequate or relevant assistance for their students, may access state-of-the-art services and resources online if and when they are needed (Price, 2008). The *Repository* is one practical, online tool that complements other counseling and guidance resources in the counselor's tool kit to deliver programs and services to students in emotional distress, regardless of their geographic location.

How may the *Repository* be used specifically with students residing in self-sequestered or isolated communities? In self-sequestered communities, Amish or Hasidic Jewish residents, for instance, may not seek information and services outside of their enclave, and this includes voluntary use of the *Repository*. Everyone has culturally-based life experiences, coping mechanisms, personal attitudes, biases, beliefs, and knowledge that influence one's ability to seek help. These cultural influences affect what is deemed to be culturally appropriate to discuss within and beyond family and community boundaries as well as how and when to seek help (Wu, 1999). Yet, in the throes of a crisis, one may not realize that others struggle with the same or similar issue. This is not always evident to a distressed student who may be emotionally withdrawn or emotionally distraught and whose isolation may be exacerbated by geographic location or by cultural traditions that reinforce suffering in silence. Therefore, during periods of severe crisis, there may be circumstances in which parents and leaders of self-sequestered communities may seek (and have sought) assistance from an "outsider" and collaborate with "outsiders" about helping their children to cope effectively. This *Repository*, along with other prevention, education, and intervention programs (Dodge, 2008) may be employed, with sensitivity to cultural and religious beliefs and values, during these limited opportunities. The following examples illustrate

the *Repository's* use with self-sequestered communities (e.g., Older Order Amish) and in isolated communities (e.g., Native American reservations and isolated hamlets).

Amish Community

A teen's *rumspringa* may be filled with adventure, novelty, and carefree fun but it may also be tumultuous and result in emotional distress (e.g., depression), personal crises, and substance abuse (Edwards, 2002; Novotney, 2008). In Shipshewana, Indiana, the Amish elders established a partnership with "outsider" mental health and nursing professionals, something few Amish do, to offer drug and alcohol education to Amish teens, ages 16 to 19 years, called The Amish Youth Vision Project ("Amish Youth Vision Project," n.d.; "Need for Alcohol and Drug Classes," n.d.; Novotney, 2008). The *Repository* could be used to supplement culture-specific information in sessions and could be used by "outsider" counselors in schools and substance abuse treatment centers when they encounter Amish teens in distress. Specifically, multimedia information from the teen-friendly web site, "Just Think Twice" ("Adolescent Addiction," n.d.), could be incorporated in drug and alcohol education sessions with Amish teens. Counselors will find the teacher's guide to "Just Think Twice"("A Guide," n.d.) to be useful in facilitating psychoeducation sessions in classrooms.

Native American Reservation

When confronted by a crisis such as child sexual abuse on a reservation, for instance, the *Repository's* "Stop It Now!" web site offers *Warning Signs about Child Sexual Abuse* ("Warning Signs," n.d.). This site could be used as one component of a grade-appropriate school activity on sexual abuse awareness. Its PARENT*talk* newsletter could be distributed to parents during parent-teacher conference meetings to

promote general awareness about child sexual abuse and other related topics and facilitate communication about sensitive issues. The newsletter, written by and for parents, offers parents an opportunity to break the isolation surrounding issues of child sexual abuse and offers support through personal stories. Some Native American parents might be inclined to submit their own stories, describing the role of kinship patterns, organizational structure, and cultural practices, as they relate to parenting skills and confronting sexual assault, to the newsletter and thereby feel empowered to confront this issue within their comfort zone. The newsletter also offers articles written by professionals.

Hamlets

Prior to the murderous rampage in Moses Lake, Washington, an isolated hamlet, in which the perpetrator reported being bullied and later killed one of his bullies during his attack, the *Repository's* "Committee for Children" web site may have proven useful in reducing bullying incidents. *Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program* ("Steps to Respect," n.d.) offers a research-based school-wide bullying prevention program that engages counselors, parents, and students in creating a safe and respectful environment. The implementation of this prevention and education program, or a similar one, may have raised awareness, especially in a small school district, that bullying existed in Moses Lake. The counselors may have been able to intervene effectively with the alleged bullies and support the victim/perpetrator (and other bullied victims) before the perpetrator's level of distress resulted in murder.

Evaluation

The *Repository* contains an online feedback/evaluation survey to assess usefulness. Feedback is received by the author. Users may access web sites without completing the feedback survey. The evaluation process is voluntary and the respondent's name and school district are optional inclusions, if anonymity is important. Based on respondents' recommendations, new web sites are reviewed and added periodically.

As computer technology expands accessibility to include online state-of-the-art resources, outcome research must focus on the most efficient and effective uses of technology in assisting students in crisis, when local options are limited or when supplementing existing programs. Finally, program evaluation research must be applied to measure the *Repository's* efficacy across a variety of community settings and for a variety of traumatic situations.

Conclusion

The *Repository of Internet Resources to Prevent or Reduce Violence and Trauma in Schools* (Gary, 2008) is an online, user-friendly, and free collection of pre-screened, crisis-related counseling and guidance web sites that may assist counselors and other school specialists to help students cope effectively with a variety of violent and traumatic experiences. For students residing in geographically isolated or self-sequestered communities, the focus on this paper, trauma may be exacerbated when school counselors may be unprepared to respond effectively and timely because prevention and intervention options might be limited or unavailable for geographic, financial, cultural, religious, psychological, or linguistic reasons. The author discussed

how counselors with limited access to state-of-the-art resources may embrace the

Repository, along with other proven prevention and intervention tools, to assist students

through a crisis, or to mitigate one, thereby promoting students' resiliency and returning

their focus to academic achievement.

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