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Graduate Research Conference 2014

It's a Different Culture: A Qualitative Comparison of
Rural, Urban and Suburban School Psychologists

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Abstract

Children across the nation experience significant academic and social-emotional problems. School psychologists are often the first line of defense in providing assessment, intervention, and consultative services to children and their families. School psychologists play an especially important role in providing services in communities where there are few mental health resources.

In addition, with the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in public schools in the United States, school psychologists also have an important role to play in meeting the needs of children from diverse backgrounds (Oritz, 2008). School psychologist should make efforts to receive the training and experiences to further develop his or her cultural competence (NASP Principles for Professional Ethics). Cultural competence is the ability to effectively interact and provide culturally appropriate care to individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Volberding, 2012). Cultural competence is composed of many factors. For instance, cultural competence entails being aware of one's own prejudices and biases toward others (e.g., students and their families). Also, culturally competent school psychologists should

learn the traditions and values of diverse cultural groups and develop specific skills in assessment and intervention that are applicable with different groups (Sue, 2001; Sue, 2010).

Providing culturally competent services, therefore, is critical to ensuring that children are receiving appropriate services. School psychologists must become familiar and understand the culture of the community in which he or she is employed. Indeed, there are cultural differences between rural, urban, and suburban communities that a school psychologist should consider not just because of the differences in the physical environment, but because of the differences in social environments as well. For instance, urban areas are more likely to have large disparities in socioeconomic status and higher crime rates (Bureau of the Census, 2002) while rural areas are more likely to have greater numbers of people living in persistent poverty (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 2010). There are also other differences in community factors. People living in rural areas, for example, tend to have social networks that last for long durations and consist of norms of self-help and reciprocity (Phillips & McLeroy, 2004). Therefore, acknowledging such differences in sparse, moderate, or densely populated areas may inform

training in cultural competency and better prepare school psychologists to provide appropriate services.

The purpose of this presentation is to examine school psychologists' perceptions of their cultural competence to practice in their school and community. Specifically, this qualitative study will explore similarities and differences of cultural competence training and practice of rural, urban, and suburban school psychologist.

Method

Participants and Procedure. School psychologists ($n = 231$) who work in public schools in the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain region of the United States were recruited to participate in this study. School psychologists from rural ($n=94$), urban ($n=27$) and suburban ($n=87$) settings participated in the study. Approximately 79% of participants surveyed are female and all participants received at least a Masters Degree in School Psychology or Education.

Measures. The online survey consisted of a demographic questionnaire as well as closed- and open-ended questions related to their current roles and responsibilities in their school and communities. For this study, specific open-ended questions will be utilized to examine cultural competence training across the three groups. The selected

questions are as follows: 'Did you receive training in cultural competence?' 'If yes, do you think you received adequate training in this area?'

Data Analyses. Responses to the two questions will be analyzed for themes across the three participant groups (i.e., rural, urban, and suburban). Passages of text will then be coded based on major themes across responses. This coding will determine: (a) Do school psychologist receive cultural competence training; (b) If so, was the training adequate; and (c) If not, how was a level of cultural competence achieved? Two researchers will code the data using Nvivo and determine inter-rater agreement.

Implications

Given the dearth of research examining the cultural competence of rural school psychologists, this study will provide an initial exploration of the differences in training and practice among rural, suburban and urban school psychologists. Furthermore, identifying the unique challenges school psychologists encounter in each of these settings will inform and shape graduate training and professional development programs.

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