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# Middle School and Community Rockford, Illinios

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ABSTRACT

This study of 99 middle school students in an urban area examined the relationship between community factors and student outcomes. The community factors that were examined were school violence based on if a student was a victim or witness and also if the student was an offender of school violence, violence and substance use exposure based on student's home location, and socioeconomic status were also examined. Student outcomes were examined based on academic testing (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers or PARCC), grade point average (GPA), and school suspension (both Out-of-School Suspension or OSS and in-school-suspension/Alternative Learning Environment or ALE). Analysis consisted of bivariate correlations. Findings of this study show corollary relationships between students who are victim or witnesses to school violence and GPA. Additionally, a corollary relationship between GPA and suspension was found. The relationships found in this study suggest further attention is needed to understand student outcomes and to develop tools and interventions for middle school students to promote academic success.

Middle School and Community

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To a better understanding of public education.

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CHAPTER I

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

**Introduction**

The City of Rockford in Illinois requested that a diagnostic analysis of the city be conducted by the Office of Justice Programs. The City of Rockford identified areas of concern the Office of Justice Programs addressed in the Executive Summary of the Diagnostic Analysis of the City of Rockford, IL. The issues of concern identified by City of Rockford were issues related to violent crime, specifically domestic abuse, gun violence and drug usage. The Office of Justice Programs further identified and analyzed the factors contributing to the areas of concern. Among those areas of concern were education level and income level. The purpose of the report was to identify and analyze, recommend solutions and practices, and aid in development of a response to the areas of concern for the city (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center, 2015).

The middle school analyzed in this study is located in the northwestern area of Rockford, Illinois, has 89% of the students classified as low-income (Illinois School Report Card, 2014). The student population at this specific middle school is greatly affected by poverty. Additionally, it is especially important to consider the ways in which children in the area are affected by the issues addressed in the Diagnostic Analysis of the City of Rockford, Illinois. As noted, the residents of Rockford are affected by a lower income level and often a have a lower level of education. Violent crime in the area is often related to gun violence and domestic abuse. These are all aspects of community life

which may impact students. This information is important for all community members in the City of Rockford and Winnebago County.

It is necessary to examine the exposure of middle school students to drugs and violence. The Diagnostic Analysis of the City of Rockford states that there were differences in the demographics of individuals involved in different types of violent crimes. The majority of individuals arrested for aggravated domestic battery were white males, while the majority of individuals arrested for aggravated assault or battery and aggravated discharge of a firearm were black males. To further the importance of this information in relation to student outcomes, the report also states that 40% of the individuals arrested for aggravated discharge of a firearm were under 18 years of age. Also, 39% of the victims of the aggravated discharge of a firearm were also under 18 years of age. The majority, 53%, of individuals arrested for domestic battery were over the 30 years of age (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center, 2015).

The differences in crime based on racial demographics led to the need to note the racial demographics of the middle school examined. The middle school examined shows that 44.9% of the students are black, 29.7% are white, 16.2% are Hispanic, 1% are Asian, less than 1% are American Indian, and 7.9% are two or more races or bi-racial (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014). The city itself shows 20.5% of the population is black, 65.1% white, 15.8% Hispanic, 2.9% Asian, less than 1% other races, and 3.6% bi-racial (US Census Bureau, 2015). Rates of violent crime in the area increased from 1,446 per 100,000 to 2,037 over a 13 year period (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center, 2015). The student population at the school may be exposed to violent crimes such as aggravated discharge of a firearm, domestic abuse, and drug or alcohol use and abuse.

The City of Rockford requested analysis information on heroin use in the area. The rate of heroin use in the area has increased by approximately 300% over the past decade (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center, 2015). Based on Rockford and Winnebago County data, it was reported that 19% of drug treatment admissions were related to heroin use, 27% were alcohol related, 26% were cannabis related, 10% were cocaine related, 6% were related to other opiates or synthetics, and 12% were classified as other. The report found a dramatic increase in the number of overdose calls and the increase in treatment admissions related to heroin; however, there are other substance use concerns in the City of Rockford (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center, 2015).

In Rockford, approximately 16% of the population over the age of 25 has not graduated from high school or obtained the equivalent (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center, 2015). Rockford Public School District shows a graduation rate of 68%, and only 41% of all students meet or exceed the state standards on the standardized Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers  (PARCC) test (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015). The level of poverty in the City of Rockford is approximately 26% of the population (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center, 2015). Rockford Public Schools show that 78.7% of students are low income, which is higher than the city's 25.4% of persons living in poverty (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015; US Census Bureau, 2015).

It is important for Rockford Public Schools to understand the relationship between the community and student outcomes. Factors of violence, both gun violence and domestic abuse, are issues in the community in which the students live. Factors of substance use are also very important to consider for student populations; this includes

not only heroin but alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, synthetics, and other drugs. Furthermore, the City of Rockford has a poverty rate of 26%, while Illinois and the US poverty rate for individuals was approximately 15%, and between 15 to 20 percent of Rockford residents over the age of 25 have less than a high school education or equivalent (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center, 2015). These two additional factors can have a relationship to the current students in Rockford Public Schools.

## Conceptual Framework

Social work is concerned not only with the separate aspects of the life and development of the target individual or population but also with the relationship to the outer social environment in which the target individual or population lives (Boehm, 1958). The person-in-environment (PIE) system serves as a system developed to aide social workers in their ability to view problems in their social context. The PIE system consists of the following four factors: social-role problems, environmental problems, mental disorders, and physical disorders (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013; Snyder, 1997). These factors allow for a better understanding of a specific individual in a specific social environment. These factors are connected and can be directly related to the social-functioning perspective. This perspective allows social workers to narrow their focus to factors relevant to the performance of the roles expected of individuals within various social groups. In the social-functioning perspective:

The point of connection between people and environment is the social role. The social role is the unit of analysis that links individuals with various social systems. In assessing human behavior concerns, this emphasis on role behavior allows for

a shift in focus from the individual to the interaction of an individual with various

social systems. (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013, p. 33)

The environment, or social system, and the individual interact and are affected by

each other. The focus of the current research will examine the relationship between the

social systems, specifically community and related factors, and the relationship these

factors have with the target population outcomes as expressed by academic achievement.

The PIE system is very useful when analyzing one specific client; this view

allows a practitioner to examine the client and the client problem with a larger scope.

However, the purpose of the current research is to look at environmental factors and the

outcomes of middle school students. To allow for a better understanding of the

overlapping systems in which middle school students live, PIE and the social role are key

viewpoints. These ideas of the social-functioning perspective, PIE, and the social role are

theories that allow one to better understand relationships between an individual and

society. PIE focuses on the individual and understands the environment is a factor, while

the social-functioning perspective sees the social role as the key between environment

and individual. Still, it is difficult to understand how individuals and societies interrelate,

and this process is a "two-way street" (Hunt & Colander, 2011, p. 143). These are the

filters through which this research will be gathered, examined, and reviewed to further

the current understanding of environment and student outcomes for middle school

students.

### Research Question

With this understanding of the City of Rockford and the conceptual frameworks

of social functioning, the social role, and PIE, this research will aim to aid in

understanding the connection and relationship between community factors and student

outcomes in school. The following literature review will provide an understanding of

middle school students, risk factors associated with the age group, and the current

environment Rockford. The question that will be addressed through this literature review

is:  In what ways do student outcomes correlate with school violence, community factors,

and socioeconomic status?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The current status of schools and education in the United States is of great

importance. In the United States, the high school graduation rate is 80% (Swanson,

2014). In the City of Rockford, the high school graduation rate is at approximately 68%

(ISBE, 2015). Educational concerns are similar in the state of Illinois and in the City of

Rockford. In the state of Illinois approximately 13% of residents do not have a high

school diploma or equivalent, and approximately 18% of Rockford residents do not have

a high school diploma or equivalent (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center,

2015). The information provided by the Diagnostic Analysis of the City of Rockford,

Illinois, may prompt community members to further explore the implications of the

findings. The Diagnostic Analysis notes concerns expressed by the City of Rockford. To

further develop an understanding of the current status of the factors noted in the report

and how they affect middle school students, it will be necessary to discuss both the

developmental stage of middle school students and environmental factors as they relate to

this age group.

**Developmental Stage of Middle School Students**

The age of middle school students generally ranges from approximately 10 to 14

years of age. Adolescence generally begins around 10 to 12 years of age. Students in

middle school face different developmental themes all at once. The physical changes of

puberty are only one aspect of this development. Adolescents also face stages of

psychosocial development, cognitive development, and moral development. Youth at this stage of development are specifically faced with Erikson's stage of development of industry versus inferiority and a stage of identity versus role confusion (Salkind, 2005; Ashford & LeCroy, 2013). Piaget's concrete operations stage and formal operations stage are also experienced by youth of this age (Torres, 2013; Ashford & LeCroy, 2013). Also, adolescents are progressing through Kohlberg's moral developmental stages (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013).

**Physical Development**

Students at this age experience an adolescent growth spurt; this includes hormonal changes as well as the psychological consequences of puberty. This pubertal process begins with hormonal changes, which take place approximately 1 year prior to any visibly noticeable changes. In this stage of development the adolescent experiences a rapid gain in height and weight. Girls experience this growth spurt around the age of 10. There is a large range of variability, and this process may occur as early as seven. Boys experience this stage beginning around the age of 12. Again, the age at which this change occurs can vary greatly and, for boys, this may be as early as nine. The normal age range for girls to begin puberty is from ages 9 to 14, and the normal age range for boys to begin the puberty process is from 8 to 13. For both genders the process lasts approximately 2 years (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013; Soliman, De Sanctis, Elalaiy, & Bedair, 2014).

**Psychosocial Development**

Erikson's stages of development for youth of this 10-to-14 year age range are also important to consider. Students in middle school are making a transition from the industry versus inferiority stage to the identity versus role confusion stage. The industry

versus inferiority stage of psychosocial development begins around the age of 6, youth

considered school age or in middle childhood, and ends with the youth's progression into

adolescence. The identity versus role confusion stage is the stage through which

adolescents struggle until early adulthood (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013; Domino & Affonso,

1990). Each stage can be viewed as a progression through a crisis or conflict. Erikson

argued that the crisis or conflict was driven by internal developmental conflicts rather

than live events, and these conflicts are not to be viewed negatively, as they allow for

growth and understanding (Erikson, 1963, as cited in Svetina, 2014). Progression through

the industry versus inferiority stage of development is very important for a youth's sense

of worthiness. In this stage of development, youth are working towards competence in

social and other skills needed to function within the setting or community in which they

live. Through this process youth are developing their own relationships with peers and

adults, but parents or caregivers remain influential (Erikson, 1963, as cited in Karkouti,

2014; Salkind, 2005). The next stage of psychosocial development is the identity versus

role confusion stage. During this stage of development a youth is beginning the process

of puberty, experiencing physical changes, and having increased demands placed upon

him or her. Most aptly, this stage "represents the process of transition from childhood

into adulthood" (Erikson, 1963, as cited in Karkouti, 2014, p. 258). Youth are expected to

develop their own identity during this stage, and this includes demonstrating and

developing personal interests and noting career choices and other expectations (such as

higher education or the intent to raise a family) for themselves. These are all aspects

through which youth will find their own identity (Salkind, 2005).

Identity development includes many different aspects. During this stage of adolescence, the youth begins to develop peer relationships. This time of psychosocial development may also be a time when the adolescent becomes more independent from parents. Most adolescents have satisfying relationships with parents; however, conflict between the parent and adolescent may exist (Ashford & LeCory, 2013). Often times the conflict is viewed more negatively by the parent. While some conflicts may exist, parental involvement is associated with academic success (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Peer relationships are important to the adolescent, as well as the child-parent relationship. These relationships aid and influence the development of the adolescent's trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry (Jones, Vaerlaus, Jackson, & Morrill, 2014).

**Cognitive Development**

While psychosocial development is a key component of a youth's development, Piaget's cognitive developmental theory is also important to consider when discussing middle school students. Youth in middle school range from 10 to 14. This age range spans across two different stages of Piaget's cognitive development. Youth in the age range of 7 to 11 are in the concrete operations stage (Torres, 2013; Ashford & LeCroy, 2013). At this stage of development, youth are able to use rules and logic. However, their thinking is limited to concrete objects and not generalizable (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013). When youth progress into the formal operations stage, they gain the ability to think abstractly and hypothetically (Torres, 2013). Piaget's theories have been further explored, and it is important to note that during youth memory capacity increases, thus allowing for abilities to progress in complex problem solving, which moves youth into a new stage of cognitive development (Carey, Zaitchik, & Bascandziev, 2015).

**Moral Development**

　　The last developmental theory that requires review is Kohlberg's moral development theory. Kohlberg argued there are three different levels of reasoning and six stages, two stages under each different level. While each individual may be at a different stage, generally older children and young adolescents, ages 6 to 12, are at the conventional level of moral reasoning, which includes stage three and stage four. Youth at stage three of the conventional level of moral reasoning are working to secure relationships, or act in ways to be known as a "good boy/good girl." Youth working through the fourth stage are able to realize their relationship with society, or rather that there is law and order and one must follow rules that all are to abide. Students in middle school may also be in the post-conventional stage of moral reasoning, ages 13 to 18, specifically the fifth stage of development. This entails the student understanding of the social contract. For example, while the youth may understand that stealing is wrong, stealing may be justified if the person stole to feed himself or herself and his or her starving family. Or, while it may be morally wrong to kill someone, there are states in which capital punishment is legal (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013; Scobey, 2015).

　　These different theories of development allow for a better understanding of the different dilemmas youth in middle school are muddling through. The physical changes a youth faces are only part of teen and pre-teen development. These biological changes coincide with the youths' progress in becoming more independent from parents and learning their own personal identity. The youth are also progressing in their abilities to learn, and development of new cognitive abilities is noted. On top of all these other changes, youths develop moral reasoning and through this learn expectations, rules, and

some differences in relationships. These different theories of physical, psychosocial, cognitive, and moral development are also to be viewed through and in conjunction with the lenses of social-functioning perspective, PIE, and social role theories. One is able to see the differences of the theories and the ways in which they overlap, and this allows for a more holistic view of students in middle school.

## Risk Factors for Middle School Students

Middle school students must handle physical changes and other developmental stages of growth. They also face a wide variety of risk factors. Some of the risk factors are related to physical location and include violence both at home and in the school setting. Some risk factors are related to sociological development and social contexts; factors such as family and peer relationships, and community and government systems (churches, gangs, or the child welfare system). Middle school students also experience major psychological hazards, both internalizing and externalizing disorders. Moreover, there are issues related to gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

### Physical Hazards

Risk factors related to the child or adolescent's physicality, both their person and their physical location, include multiple types of violence. For the purpose of this research, the World Health Organization definition of violence will be utilized:

> Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. (WHO, 2016)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2015), additionally notes that youth violence may include a victim, offender, or a witness to the violence. Children face a variety of different forms of violence, which include homicide (both victim and perpetrator), sexual assault, assault, child maltreatment, school violence (both physical and psychological, like bullying), gang violence, dating violence, and suicide (Seifer, Schmidt, & Ray, 2012). As noted, one risk factor that is important to consider when examining student outcomes is the level of violence to which a student may be exposed.

**Sociological Hazards**

There are also many risk factors related to the student's social environment. One aspect of this is the school setting and the resources and programs the school has available to its students. This may include after-school programs, programs related to a specific problem for a given area (programs designed to target dropouts, youth runaways, or teen sexual activity), or sport activities and academic clubs. Peer and family relationships are also an important aspect to consider. At this early stage of adolescence, youth are often peer- focused and may have more conflicts with parents (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013). However, the types of relationships youth develop are very important, and a healthy parental relationship is also very beneficial to youth. There are community factors outside of the school setting that may be applicable, as there are church programs, Boys and Girls Club programs, and other beneficial programs that are important for youth. However, there are also factors that may be detrimental to youth, such as gang or criminal activity in a neighborhood in which youth live. Other areas to be considered are culture, gender, sexuality, and race and ethnicity and the differences in student outcomes based on these factors.

Development of identity is a very important task for adolescence. Adolescents of color face additional concerns because they have to combine their own image of their ethnic or racial group and that of the majority white culture (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013). Ethnic and racial identity is defined by Umana-Taylor et al. (2014):

as a multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic-racial group memberships, as well as the processes by which the beliefs and attitudes develop over time. (p. 23)

Youth develop the ability to identify themselves and others based on racial and/or ethnic labels. The development of this ability for the adolescent also includes the adolescent's understanding of racial/ethnic stereotypes and how the adolescent feels other groups or the majority culture views his or her race/ethnicity (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

**Psychological Hazards**

The majority of adolescents will become healthy and independent adults. However, there are psychological areas of concern that may present problems to youth in this age group. Among the most common psychological hazards faced by youth are internalizing disorders, such as depression and suicide, and externalizing disorders, such as conduct disorders and delinquency (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013).

Bullying and cyberbullying, both in the school setting and in one's community, is another area of concern when discussing middle school students and depression and suicide. Victimization of peer harassment has been shown to contribute to depression, and an examination of links between victimization and factors such as social anxiety, low self-worth, or maladjustment is important for the middle school age group (Graham &

Juvonen, 1998; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Furthermore, violence may include witnessing a violent crime or conflict within a family. Individuals who are bullied and those who bully others are at an increased risk for suicidal thoughts, attempts, and completions (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2010). Youth who witness other factors of violence such as violence within the community and violence within the home have also been shown to have an increased risk for depression while young and continuing into adulthood (Dong et al., 2014; Eisman et al., 2015).

In addition to internalizing risk factors for middle school students, it is important to note externalizing disorders, such as conduct disorders and delinquency. Exhibition of externalizing disorders, including emotional and behavioral disorders, in the school setting can be difficult to understand, and teachers and staff may have a key role in noting clinical concerns for such student. Students who have emotional and/or behavioral disorders have been shown to exhibit significant academic differences and deficits when compared to students without these disabilities (Mattison, 2015; Nelson, Babyak, Gonzalez, & Benner, 2003). Furthermore, it is important to note the relationship between suspension and academic achievement. Specifically, out of school suspensions have been shown to have a negative relationship with student achievement. The relationship between internalizing disorders and externalizing disorders and the school's understanding of these disorders and how they relate to students in the school setting should be considered (Hecker, Young, & Caldarella, 2014; Noltemeyer, Marie, McLoughlin, & Vanderwood, 2015).

**Risk Factors Specific to the Rockford Area**

Utilizing the Diagnostic Analysis of the City of Rockford, it is apparent that youth in the area are likely to encounter several hazards such as violence in multiple forms and substance abuse. The report also noted the income level and education level of residents in the area (Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center, 2015).

**Violence**

As noted there are different types of violence to which students may be exposed. During school students may be exposed to bullying, and outside of school they may be exposed to gun violence or domestic violence. The Diagnostic Analysis report noted the different offenses and the most common victims related to both gun violence and domestic abuse in Rockford, and students in the area may witness gun violence and domestic abuse. There are differences in exposure to community violence based on race/ethnicity. Witnessing violence and being a victim of violence have different outcomes on students; however, childhood maltreatment and community violence are risk factors that impact mental health functioning (Cecil, Viding, Barker, Guiney, & McCrory, 2014; Zimmerman, & Messner, 2013). Community violence exposure and maladjustment is a very complex issue concerning youth. Another study suggests in a sample of low-income, urban, African American youth, the youth who were exposed to community violence, as both victims and witnesses, appear to be coping with the violence and adapting to the violence, some argue through the use of community assets (Carey & Richards, 2014; Nebbitt, Williams, Lombe, McCoy & Stephens, 2014). This may be noted as a positive for the population; however, the findings may not be

generalizable to areas of high neighborhood decay, specifically older public housing (Nebbitt, et al., 2014).

**Exposure to Drugs**

Substance use is not an indicator of child abuse. Researchers have, however, linked substance use and abuse to child maltreatment; for example, children living with parents that use methamphetamines are at an increased safety risk (Akin, Brook, & Lloyd, 2015; Blau, Whewell, Gullotta, & Bloom, 1994; Testa & Smith, 2009). Methamphetamine use is not the only drug that puts children at increased safety risks. Crack cocaine and alcohol abuse by parents are also detrimental to children. The issues surrounding children living in homes with parental substance abusers has become a major concern for child welfare workers and is often a cause of child removal (Akin, Brook, & Lloyd, 2015; Testa & Smith, 2009).

**Socioeconomic Status**

While socioeconomic factors are often discussed for adults and families, it is important to consider the different ways in which youth are affected by poverty. African American and Hispanic youth are more likely to witness violence than their Caucasian counterparts; furthermore this likelihood does not decrease as substantially as that of Caucasian youth when income level increases (Crouch, Hanson, Saunders, Kilpatrick & Resnick, 2000).

**Empowerment Zones**

In 2012, Rockford city officials identified geographic areas within the city requiring additional resources. The Rockford Public School District in conjunction with the city mayor's office and other city officials identified schools in the given geographic

areas and set plans to provide additional support to elementary schools in the areas. The empowerment zones or "9-1-1 zones" were noted as these regions have high crime rates and a higher volume of 911 calls than other areas within the city. The schools in the given areas have "chronic truancy, crime and poor student performance" (Bayer, 2012; Mayor's Office, 2014, Rockford Public Schools, 2012).

## Summary

Based on areas of concern identified by the City of Rockford and utilizing the conceptual framework used to view the current status of middle school students, it is important to examine student outcomes as they relate to the relevant factors of Rockford. Through the conceptual framework lens, and with an understanding of the different developmental themes, one is better able to obtain a holistic view of students. By looking at the different risk factors that students of this age group may be affected by, an understanding of possible relationships between environmental factors and student outcomes is noted. Through the following methodology for data collection, this research will examine possible correlations between noted factors and student outcomes.

## Research and Hypotheses

With this understanding of the City of Rockford, the conceptual framework, and review of current literature, the aim of this research is to aid in understanding the relationship between community factors and student outcomes in school. The question that will be addressed through this research is:  In what ways do student outcomes correlate with school violence, community factors, and socioeconomic status?

After conducting this literature review and noting the concerns of the City of Rockford, two separate hypotheses were developed.

**Hypothesis I**

Students living in an empowerment zone will have lower PARCC and GPA scores than those who live outside empowerment zones.

**Hypothesis II**

Students living in an empowerment zone will be more likely to be involved in school violence as an offender.

Again, this research will address the following question:  In what ways do student outcomes correlate with school violence, community factors, and socioeconomic status?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

After a review of the current literature, there are many areas of interest that still require further analysis and exploration for the population of middle school students in Rockford, Illinois. This research adds to the current information available in the City of Rockford. Moreover, this research is specific to a middle school in the northwestern area of Rockford, Illinois and may be of value to Rockford Public Schools. This information can allow teachers and staff to have a better understanding of students at school, and add to the understanding of the relationship between community and academic success.

In order to answer the question: In what ways do student outcomes correlate with school violence, community factors, and socioeconomic status, this exploratory research allows for the examination of the conditions of the City of Rockford as presented in the Diagnostic Analysis of the City of Rockford, Illinois, and the relationship these conditions have with student outcomes. This research also allows for a better understanding of the relationship between community factors and youth outcomes in the school setting.

**Sample**

Ninety-nine student records were reviewed. All available information that is applicable as described under both independent and dependent variables was recorded. Additionally, demographic information was recorded. The sample of research participants was a sample of 100 seventh grade students. The selection process consisted

of a "research randomizer" program. For this, www.randomorganizer.org was utilized.

One-hundred unique numbers were selected. The list of numbers generated was matched

to a list of seventh-grade students. The generated list of all students had a duplicate entry

among the selected participants (one student appeared twice on the list), and a random

replacement research participant was not selected, resulting in a total sample size of 99

students. Lastly, there was no exclusion criteria for research participants.

### Independent Variables: Community Factors

For the purpose of this research, it was necessary to identify the following

community factors and the methods by which these aspects were measured.

There are multiple types of violence, including but not limited to community,

school, and family violence as well as physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual violence.

These are different types of violence to which students at middle schools may be

exposed. Other community factors such income can also be utilized when examining a

student's status. For the purpose of this research school violence, violence and substance

use exposure, and socioeconomic status will be examined.

**School Violence**

Violence is the purposeful, threatened or actual, use of force against oneself,

individuals, or groups, which results in or may result in physical or psychological harm

(WHO, 2016). School violence specifically was measured through the Rockford Public

School "eSchoolPLUS" system, a program utilized to note information on each specific

student. Through this system the researcher measured school violence in two manners.

The researcher noted if the research participants had been involved in school violence.

First, it was noted if the research participant was or was not a victim of violence.

Additionally, it was noted if the participant was a witness to violence. Second, it was recorded if a youth was an offender within the school discipline recording system or not. These offenses included profanity, disobedience, misconduct, reckless behavior, verbal abuse, disruption of learning environment, fighting, horseplay, theft, interference with school personnel, sexual harassment with sexual misconduct, physical contact, and disrespect.

**Violence and Substance Use Exposure**

The measure for these factors is based on the elementary school zone in which the student lives. The City of Rockford has areas labeled as "9-1-1 Zones" or "Empowerment Zones." These areas have been used by Rockford Public Schools for elementary school purposes to initiate programs of additional support for students who live in these areas. This was used to measure violence and substance use exposure, because the police department noted that these regions have high crime rates and a higher volume of 911 calls that other areas within the city. It was marked if a research participant lived in an elementary school zone that is considered an empowerment zone. This information was obtained through eSchoolPlus; the program notes specific information on each specific student. It was recorded if a student lives or does not live in an empowerment zone.

**Socioeconomic Status**

The measure for this factor was determined based on school records showing students who received free or reduced lunch. The current data noted if a student received free or reduced lunch. The eSchoolPlus system only specifically noted the following: free, and reduced, and denied or "information not noted," as for many students this field

was blank. The data were recorded to reflect free and reduced, while the blank fields were ultimately coded with those students who denied the program.

## Dependent Variables: Student Outcomes

The relationship of the independent variables and student outcomes will be measured through examination of the following variables. The independent variables will be measured and compared by measurement of student outcomes. Student outcomes will be measured based on eSchoolPlus data. Specifically the following information will be gathered:

### Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC)

Student test scores for the standardized PARCC test were gathered. There are two standardized PARCC tests: one for math and the other for English language. Scores were recorded as, did not yet meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, or exceeded expectations. Additionally, it was recorded if a student did not take the standardized PARCC tests, or if the student was a transfer student and the test scores were unavailable. The scores of research participants will also be utilized to note student academic level.

### Grade Point Average (GPA)

The standardized PARCC scores are only one aspect of student outcomes. Student grades are also very important to measure, as this will allow for an understanding of the students' capabilities in following rules in the classroom as well as the students' level of effort. This measure categorized the student's GPA at 4.0 to 3.0, 2.9 to 2.0, 1.9 to 1.0, .9 to 0, and it was also noted if the students GPA was not available.

**School Suspension**

Another measure of student outcomes is school suspension. For the purpose of the research, suspension information was noted as "Out of School Suspension" (OSS), "Alternative Learning Environment" (ALE), both, or no school suspensions. ALE is a form of in-school suspension. Overnight suspensions were not recorded as these are generally instances of discipline related to student tardies or hall sweeps, which are also related to tardies. The number of days a student was in OSS or ALE was recorded, and coded into categories of zero days, 1 to 5 days, 6 to 10 days, 11-15 days, or 16 or more days. Additionally, it was noted if a student was expelled.

## Data Collection

To ensure protection of research participants, the researcher received Institutional Review Board approval (Appendix A), and the researcher successfully completed a web-based training course, "Protecting Human Research Participants," from the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research. The information gathered was existing data; however, it pertained to children. Children are considered a vulnerable population and consideration must be given to ensure protection of vulnerable populations. To protect research participants, the gathered information was aggregated and de-identified. Furthermore, the researcher filed a FERPA Exception Form to ensure FERPA guidelines were met. There is no foreseeable or potential harm to the participants. There are no potential benefits to the current research participants.

The necessary information needed to examine these relationships was gathered from Rockford Public Schools eSchoolPlus system. The researcher was provided a list of current 7th grade students. One hundred students were randomly selected from the list,

each student's eSchoolPlus file was examined to gather the data needed. One research

participant appeared twice on the master list of all students, resulting in a total of 99

research participates, as a replacement participant was not selected. To gather the

necessary data, each student's eSchoolPlus page was examined to review a link for each

aspect (each page had links with data for GPA, PARCC testing, incident listing which

noted if students have been an offender, victim, or witness of school discipline, and other

required data). Each student's school zone for elementary school was noted and recorded

as "yes" if a student lives in an empowerment zone or "no" if the student does not live in

an empowerment zone. The specific elementary school was also recorded only for the

purposes of identifying whether or not a student was living in an empowerment zone. The

specific elementary school information was deleted with the identifying information

when de-identified, as it was only necessary to note whether or not the student was in an

empowerment zone. The yes or no assumes a measure of exposure to violence and/or

exposure to substance use/abuse as these regions have high crime rates and a higher

volume of 911 calls than other areas within the city. School records were also reviewed,

and it was noted if a student has been a victim of or witness to any sort of school

violence, including bullying, extortion, or harassment. Furthermore, it was noted if a

student was an offender requiring school discipline; this was recorded as yes or no. These

offenses included: profanity, disobedience, misconduct, reckless behavior, verbal abuse,

disruption of learning environment, fighting, horseplay, theft, interference with school

personnel, sexual harassment with sexual misconduct, physical contact, and disrespect.

Lastly, the eSchoolPlus system noted, free, reduced, and denied for the free or reduced

lunch program; however, this area was left blank for all other students. The information was recorded as free, reduced, denied or not noted.

Student outcome measures were also gathered from the Rockford Public Schools eSchoolPlus system. For each research participant data was collected on the students PARCC score. Scores were recorded as, did not yet meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, or exceeded expectations. Additionally, it was recorded if a student did not take the standardized PARCC tests, or if the student was a transfer student and the test scores were unavailable. The scores of research participants can be utilized to note student academic level. After collecting the data, this information was transformed. This was done by only noting if the student met that state expectation (yes) or did not meet the state expectation (no). The research participant's GPA was recorded as 4.0 to 3.0, 2.9 to 2.0, 1.9 to 1.0, .9 to 0, and it was also noted if the student's GPA was not available. After data collection this information was transformed, this allowed for the information to be examined on a scale, but also as "yes" if passing or "no" if failing. Lastly, for student outcome measures, data was collected on the research participant's disciplinary record. For the purpose of the research, suspension information was recorded for each student noting if the student had OSS, ALE, both, or no school suspensions. Overnight suspensions were not recorded. The number of days a student was in OSS, ALE or both was recorded. Additionally, it was noted if a student was expelled.

The analyzed data contributes to a better understanding of the relationships between negative community factors and student outcomes. This information may allow for school personnel, including teachers and administrative staff, to better understand the

student population with which they work. This research also presents potential for future researchers to examine what types of interventions, programs, or supports may prove beneficial to the student population.

## Data Analysis

Data were coded and collected on an Excel spreadsheet on a school computer. The data were collected with an identifying marker. When all the data were collected, the identifying marker was deleted and the file sent to the researcher's personal computer without identifying information. After de-identification the information was moved to a personal computer to be analyzed. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program was utilized to analyze relationships between the independent variables of violence (in school and out of school), socioeconomic status, and substance use/abuse exposure as based on residence in an elementary school empowerment zone to dependent variables of PARCC scores, GPA scores, and suspension data. The data were compared in multiple ways, and transformed in some ways to allow for a better understanding of the data. These collected data allow for the analysis of specific independent variables and the relationship the variable may have with different dependent variables.

Specifically, frequencies were run for age, race and ethnicity, and gender. Two-tailed bivariate correlations were run for all factors, the independent variables of school violence (both as a perpetrator and a victim and/or witness), exposure to violence and substance use (as assumed by whether or not the student lives in an empowerment zone), and socioeconomic status (assumed by whether or not a student qualifies for free or reduced lunch) and the dependent variables of PARCC scores, GPA scores, and school suspensions. Age, race and ethnicity, and gender were excluded from the bivariate

correlations. When necessary, data were transformed in SPSS utilizing "Recode into Different Variables." This created a new variable for a measure of a student's PARCC scores, socioeconomic status, and exposure to school violence. Transformations were made in a variety of ways. First, PARCC testing was transformed from scale to nominal variables of "yes" or "no" if the student met or did not meet the state expectations. Socioeconomic status was coded as free, reduced, denied, or not noted; this information was transformed to combine free and reduced into one category and denied and information not noted in another category. Lastly, the original data relating to violence within the school setting were coded as victim, not a victim, or a witness; data were recoded with victim and witness combined, as witnessing violence has been supported in research to be analogous to being a victim of violence (Carey & Richards, 2014).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The collected data offered descriptive statistics, valuable information pertaining to the research question and hypotheses, as well as provided additional findings.

**Description of Sample**

The sample consisted of a variety of youth coming from a variety of backgrounds. The white and black populations within the sample were almost equal with 39.4% of the sample population black and 40.4% of the sample population white. The majority of students in the sample were 12 or 13 years of age, and the sample consisted of more females than males. This information can be viewed in Table 1. The table shows additional statistics on race/ethnicity, provides percentages on age and gender, and notes the number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

**Hypotheses**

In order to answer the question:  In what ways do student outcomes correlate with school violence, community factors, and socioeconomic status? The data were put through inferential data analyses. In order to determine the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable, correlations were run and revealed the following.

**Hypothesis I**

In order to test the hypothesis that: Students living in an empowerment zone will have lower PARCC and GPA scores than those who live outside empowerment zones. A

correlation test was conducted. There was no statistical significance found when examining a relationship between students who live in empowerment zones and the student outcomes based on PARRC scores or GPA scores.

Table 1

*Demographics of Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Poverty Indication*

| Variable | Frequency (*n*) | Percent % |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | | |
|   Female | 57 | 57.6 |
|   Male | 42 | 42.4 |
| Race/Ethnicity | | |
|   Black | 39 | 39.4 |
|   Bi-Racial/Multiple | 6 | 6.1 |
|   Hispanic or Latino | 14 | 14.1 |
|   White | 40 | 40.4 |
| Age | | |
|   12 | 42 | 42.4 |
|   13 | 57 | 57.6 |
| Poverty: Qualifies for Free/Reduced Lunch | | |
|   Free | 50 | 50.5 |
|   Reduced | 5 | 5.1 |
|   Denied or Unknown | 44 | 44.3 |

$N = 99$

**Hypothesis II**

The second hypothesis examined was: Students living in an empowerment zone will be more likely to be involved in school violence as an offender. Utilizing a bivariate two-tailed correlation this analysis yielded no statistical significance.

**Study Findings**

While these hypotheses were not supported, the data were examined to understand what other factors show correlations. In order to determine the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable bivariate correlations were run. Corollary relationships between independent and dependent variables were found. Being a victim or witness to school violence, for example, was shown to have a negative

correlation with PARCC English and GPA. Student exposure to violence in the school is

correlated with lower GPA and PARCC English. Students who were offenders of school

violence were shown to have a negative correlation with GPA and a positive correlation

with school suspension. Fewer suspensions show higher or passing GPA and PARCC

English scores, and students with offenses were shown to also have more suspensions.

Furthermore, students in poverty, assumed by qualification of free or reduced lunch,

showed no statistically significant results. Table 2 shows the specific correlations.

Table 2

*Dependent and Independent Variable Pearson Correlation*

| Variable | PARCC English ($n = 85$) | PARCC Math ($n = 85$) | GPA ($n = 97$) | Suspension ($n = 99$) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Victim or Witness | -.221* | -.546 | -.259* | .159 |
| Offender | -.153 | -.079 | -.411** | .839** |
| Empowerment Zone | .135 | .007 | .137 | -.102 |
| Lunch Qualification | -.184 | -.144 | -.115 | .015 |

*\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*
*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

**Other Findings**

In order to determine the relationships between the independent variables and the

dependent variable bivariate correlations were run. The SPSS results also showed

corollary relationships between the measures themselves. Table 3 shows the results. The

bivariate correlations examined show a negative correlation between students living in an

empowerment zone and students who witness and/or are a victim of school violence

(both independent variables). Specifically, students living in the empowerment zones

were shown to a not be victim or witness of school violence. Table 3 also shows the

relationships between the dependent variables. GPA and PARCC testing shows positive

relationships, meaning students with passing GPAs are also shown to have passing

PARCC scores.  Additionally, there was a strong negative relationship between GPA and

suspension.  Students who have passing GPAs were shown to have fewer or no

suspensions.  There are additional findings listed in the table.

Table 3

*Correlations*

| Variable | 1 (n = 97) | 2 (n = 85) | 3 (n = 85) | 4 (n = 99) | 5 (n = 99) | 6 (n = 99) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GPA (1) | 1 | .410** | .290** | -.459** | -.259* | .137 |
| PARCC English (2) | .410** | 1 | .437** | -.178 | -.221* | .135 |
| PARCC Math (3) | .290** | .437** | 1 | -.121 | -.066 | .007 |
| Suspension (4) | -.459** | -.178 | -.121 | 1 | .159 | -.102 |
| Victim/ Witness (5) | -.259* | -.221* | -.066 | .159 | 1 | -.643** |
| Empowerme nt Zone (6) | .137 | .135 | -.007 | -.102 | -.643** | 1 |

*\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*
*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

## Summary of Hypothesis and Significant Findings

To allow for a better understanding of the relationship between community

factors and student outcomes the collected data was analyzed. The data does not support

the hypotheses and there were no statistical findings between empowerment zones and

the noted student outcome measures.  However, the research questions did allow for an

examination of independent variable and dependent variables that show corollary

relationships.  Most notably, the relationship between student offenders and dependent

variable measures of GPA and suspension, and the relationship between victims of school

violence and GPA.  Also, students in poverty, assumed by qualification of free or reduced

lunch, showed no statistically significant results. Additionally, bivariate analyses also

showed relationships between the outcome measures and the independent variables

themselves.  For example, strong positive correlations between GPA and PARCC scores were noted, as well as the correlation between GPA and suspension and the correlation between PARCC and suspension.  Table 2 and Table 3 also show correlations between students who were victims or witnesses of violence in the school setting and GPA and empowerment zones.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Through the analysis of the collected data, one is able to note the importance of continued evaluation of relationships between community and school in relation to youth outcomes. The gathered and analyzed data suggests the need for continued review and consideration.

**Recoded Data**

After the data collection process it was necessary to recode some data in order to better understand the relationship between factors. This narrowed down student outcomes to "yes" or "no" responses. Specifically, the measures for GPA and PARCC were recoded from scale measures to "yes" receive a passing GPA or PARCC score or "no" received a failing GPA or PARCC score. Additionally, when student scores for the GPA and PARCC variables were not available the field was left blank and not coded "Not Applicable" or "Information not Available."   Utilization of the data as "yes" and "no" responses allowed for a better understanding of the relationships for the researcher. This is noted as, originally, scale measures were utilized in the data collection process. The current research does not examine higher scores or scales.  Rather it notes if students received marks that are passing and not the level of the student's outcomes.

**Hypothesis I & II**

There was no statistical significance found when examining a relationship between students who live in empowerment zones and the student outcomes based on

PARRC scores or GPA scores. Also, the second hypothesis examined utilizing a bivariate two-tailed correlation yielded no statistical significance. There are many reasons these results may have been unfounded. For example, the data collected were originally intended for a different purpose not as a measure or indicator. Or, there may be no relationship between the factors.

## Relation to Literature

Students in the middle school setting are progressing through a wide variety of changes and developing in their experiences and understanding. It is important to note the physical, psychological, cognitive, and moral development of youth and also note that there are risk factors involved in the progression from late childhood into adolescence and from adolescence into young adulthood. These factors are difficult to account for in research, but it is necessary to understand that students may be experiencing issues related to these developmental factors. Furthermore, there are risk factors associated with middle school students. These factors include physical, sociological, and psychological hazards that students face in middle school (Ashford & LeCroy, 2013; Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Seifer, Schmidt, & Ray, 2012). While there are risk factors associated with all middle school students, there are also risk factors that are specific to the student's geographical location and the environment within the community in which a student and school reside (Cecil, Viding, Barker, Guiney, & McCrory, 2014; Dong et al., 2014; Eisman et al., 2015; Zimmerman, & Messner, 2013). For the current study, it was important to note that violence, exposure to drugs, socioeconomic status, and the local empowerment zones, are specific to the urban area of the school utilized for the research sample.

The gathered data do show a relationship between discipline referrals (offenses) and suspension and GPA and PARCC scores, in that students with referrals and suspensions were shown to have lower GPAs. This study has shown results similar to those found in a meta-analysis regarding school suspension and academic outcomes (Noltemeyer, Marie, Mcloughlin, & Vanderwood, 2015). The current research also allows for similarities facing urban areas. This is important to note, as there are great differences in urban and rural settings when discussing middle schools students. Additionally, this is important considering low-income and urban schools face "greater challenges related to achievement and dropout," and these schools have higher rates of suspension utilization. (Noltemeyer, et al., 2015, p. 234)

Demographics of the school group sample were similar to that of the population as noted by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The sample consisted of approximately 40% white students, 40% black students and 16% Hispanic or Latino students, while ISBE shows that 44.9% of the students are black, 29.7% are white, 16.2% are Hispanic, 1% are Asian, less than 1% are American Indian, and 7.9% are two or more races or bi-racial (Illinois School Report Card, 2014). Concerns for students of different racial or ethnic backgrounds must be considered when examining student outcomes (Noltemeyer, et al., 2015; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). This was not examined in the current study.

Other results from this study were show inconsistent and mixed results with literature. The current study noted a weak negative correlation between higher (passing) GPAs and incidence of victimization (to include witnessing) school violence. Other literature found that in a sample of low-income, urban, African American youth, the

youth who were exposed to community violence, as both victims and witnesses, appear to be coping with the violence and adapting to the violence, some argue through the use of community assets (Carey & Richards, 2014; Nebbitt, Williams, Lombe, McCoy & Stephens, 2014). These results may be inconsistent due to the measure used in the current research, as the measure was specific to school violence not community violence and the student outcome was not based on GPA rather specific coping measures. The result of this study may be inconsistent with the other literature as the current study did not specifically examine African American youth. While there were aspects of the current study that were inconsistent with the literature, one aspect may show one way in which specific students in the study do show coping skills. The current study examined students living in empowerment zones, which assumes a level of exposure to violence and substance use, and found a strong negative correlation with being a victim or witness in the school setting. The students living in empowerment zones were not shown to have any correlation with GPA or other outcome measures.  The current study measures of violence are different and the outcomes measures are different.

It is interesting to note that this research measured violence by the student's community, based on empowerment zone, as well as by victimization (to include witnessing) and by student offences.  However, there were no positive correlations between these factors.  The significance between a student being a victim or witness and an offender ($p = .051$) shows a near statistical significance. Students who are offenders of school violence are arguably also victims and/or witnesses to such offenses. The strong negative correlation between students living in empowerment zones and the students

shown to not be victims of violence in the school setting is interesting as this was the only statistical finding for students living in empowerment zones.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was drawn from one school district. Due to the small sample size and small area from which the sample was drawn, generalization to larger populations may not be applicable. The sample may not be consistent with the school population and the results may be skewed based on the small sample size. However, the demographics of the sample were comparable to the demographics of the school and indicate low sampling error. There are two additional issues related to the sample for this study.  This sample included Special Education students.  This is important to note, as special education students can take different standardized testing, specifically the Discovery Education Assessment (DEA), or the PARCC testing with accommodations. Furthermore, special education students, while held to the same standards in regards to school offenses the disciplinary measures can look different from that of regular education students.  This sample also contained students involved in the Creative and Performing Arts Academy (CAPA), which is a competitive program for the Rockford area.  CAPA students can live in the school district or can live in another school district. The sample of the research had no exclusionary criteria, students in regular education classes, with or without special education (or Individualized Education Plans), and students in the competitive art program could affect the results of the study.

Secondly, measures were taken for different time periods and for different purposes. GPA scores were from the most recent quarter, and PARCC scores were from

the previous school year. Some data were unavailable, as students may be relatively

transient and move from school to school within the school district or move from one city

to another. There is a level of mobility within the student population that is not accounted

for in the current research, as students may be homeless and able to choose the school

they attend, or students may move from school to school or from city to city. Free or

reduced school lunch was utilized to note a measure of poverty. However, school records

did not consistently mark student qualifications for free or reduced lunch. The collected

data for the measure of poverty did not meet the statistics on the school at the time it was

collected, as 89.3% of students are considered low income according to Illinois State

Report card, and the collected data showed 55% of students marked as receiving free or

reduced lunch. Because the data were collected for different purposes and during

different time spans the results may have been impacted in that they are not accurate due

to the validity and reliability of the noted measures.

The researcher may exhibit biases as a paid intern with the school district. The

research may show the school district in a more positive or negative manner. Specifically,

the empowerment zones were specific to the city, and were the target of school and city

interventions in the past, this could skew results, as the students may have been the

recipient of past intervention.  Or, the assumptions made by the researcher about the

operationalization of violence and substance use exposure based on empowerment zones

as these students may not have personally witnessed violence, as there was no correlation

between empowerment zones and offenders and there was a negative correlation between

empowerment zones and being a victim or witness of school violence. Furthermore, the

researcher who collected the data also analyzed the data, allowing for possible bias in collection and analysis.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

One of the goals of this research was to allow for a better understanding of community factors and the relationship these factors have with student outcomes in the middle school setting. Understanding this relationship can allow teachers and staff within schools to better understand the student population and risk factors as they relate to academic achievement. The current research did not fully allow for a better understanding of the relationship between community factors and relationship these factors may have with student outcomes; however, the research did allow for one to see a correlation between student discipline and academic achievement. Correlation between students who were victims or witness of violence in the school setting and academic outcomes, and community was also noted. The findings have implications for future research, policy, and practice for middle school students in the school setting.

**Implications for Future Research**

Continued research is needed to understand the multitude of ways in which students may be affected by community factors. The current finding suggests that there is a weak negative correlation between community factors, specifically empowerment zones and students who were shown to be victims or witnesses of school violence. Furthermore, student victims and witnesses of violence in the school setting were shown to have lower GPA and PARCC English scores. Continued examination of these relationships are necessary. Other researchers have been specific about one aspect being measured and the relationship that aspect may have with a student's outcome. While this

allows one to note a specific relationship, it is also important to consider youth may be experiencing more than one variable. Examining of victimization in the school setting and the relationship victimization has on student outcomes is important to consider, as well as development of aid to students to promote academic achievement.

Another prevalent implication is the need for continued research in the area of disciplinary measures within schools, this includes in-school-suspension (like ALE) and out-of-school suspension. In the school setting teachers are an integral part of student development and success; the teacher and administration understanding of behavioral and emotional issues is also important as internalizing and externalizing disorders may be prevalent in the student population. These are factors that require further analysis. The current research showed a strong negative corollary relationships between suspension and GPA. The students who receive suspension were shown to have lower GPA scores. This is important to note as there was no relationship between students who received suspension and PARCC scores. This suggests that teacher opinions can potentially affect a student's GPA. Again, the relationship between internalizing disorders and externalizing disorders and the school's understanding of these disorders and how they relate to students in the school setting should be considered (Hecker, Young, & Caldarella, 2014; Noltemeyer, Marie, McLoughlin, & Vanderwood, 2015). Future research is needed to fully understand the relationships between such factors as out of school suspensions and the negative relationship with student achievement, as well as teacher perceptions of externalizing disorders such as conduct disorders.

Demographics in urban schools are one aspect that should be considered. The current research did not examine the independent variable or dependent variable based on

age, gender, or race. However, such examinations are necessary in future research to better understand victimization and suspension and how these relate to academic success based on age, gender, and race.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

When one considers students with discipline referrals, it may be important to examine the policies and practices to which these students are exposed. The implications for policy relate to the use of OSS or ALE as disciplinary measures. There is a negative relationship between OSS and ALE and student achievement, and this may prompt one to seek alternative measures of discipline that still allows for students to develop tools to take responsibility for their actions. This may prompt school personnel to seek out alternative methods of discipline, which can continue to teach students responsibility and aid students in their academic achievements. Specifically, administration or teachers may examine the teacher relationships with students to seek mediation to allow students to remain in classrooms. Students who have suspensions could be provided additional tutoring to help grade performance.

Also noted in the findings is the weak negative correlation between students who are victims or witnesses of school violence that were shown to have lower GPA and PARCC scores. Bullying and other forms of violence and victimization in the school setting requires constant monitoring to ensure student safety. Administration, teachers, and other school staff can benefit from understanding what this may look like for different students, and also tools that students can use to protect themselves without becoming a bully themselves. Again, ensuring student safety in the school setting in difficult and requires constant monitoring.

## Summary

This study sought to examine relationships between student outcomes (in terms of GPA, PARCC scores, and student suspension) and the independent variables of school violence (as victims or witnesses and as offenders), community violence and substance use exposure as based on the students school or empowerment zone, and socioeconomic status to provide teachers and staff a better understanding of their students in the middle school setting. Results did not indicate there was a relationship between students living in empowerment zones or poverty and student academic outcomes based on grades (GPA), PARCC scores, or suspensions. However, the research did find a relationship between GPA and PARCC scores and suspensions or school discipline referrals. Additionally, there were findings related to students who are victims or witnesses of violence in the school setting and the academic outcome measures. The current study suggest continued research in needed to better understand such relationships and to also develop intervention tools for students involved in suspension as well as students who are victims in the school setting.

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# APPENDIX A

## IRB APPROVAL LETTER

**ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**
*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*

**Office of Research and Sponsored Programs**
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

3/22/2016

Katera Smith

Department of Social Work

ACU Box 27866

Abilene Christian University

Dear Ms. Smith

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled Middle School and Community Rockford, IL

was approved by expedited review (46.110(b)(1) category 5 ) on 3/21/2016 for a period of one year    (IRB # 16-018 ). The expiration date for this study is 3/21/2017   . If you intend to continue the study beyond this date, please submit the Continuing Review Form at least 30 days, but no more than 45 days, prior to the expiration date. Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make **any** changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

*Our Promise: ACU is a vibrant, innovative, Christ-centered community that engages students in authentic spiritual and intellectual growth, equipping them to make a real difference in the world.*