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How Family Advocates Home-Visiting In A Midwestern Urban Area Describe The Impact of Family Stress On Children’s Learning And Success In School

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HOW FAMILY ADVOCATES HOME-VISITING IN A MIDWESTERN URBAN AREA DESCRIBE THE IMPACT OF FAMILY STRESS ON CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Education

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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

This dissertation focuses on family stress and how it affects children’s success in school. Through much of my work and the programs I have led, I found that there are many reasons or variables that may affect a child’s success in school.

Economist John Komlos (2015) argues that we must look more deeply at the recent events in cities like Baltimore, New York and Ferguson, Missouri, and consider the socioeconomic plight of young black men in America, especially in neighborhoods where educational attainment is low and poverty is high. Komlos also states that in Baltimore, 22 percent of African American adults have no high school diploma, compared to 15 percent of whites. The PBS News Hour reported (2015) that even conservative Republican Alan Greenspan, an ardent advocate of free markets, is beginning to see inequality as a fundamental threat to the system and admits that, “You cannot have the benefits of capitalist market growth without the support of a significant proportion, and indeed, virtually all of the people; and if you have an increasing sense that the rewards of capitalism are being distributed unjustly the system will not stand.”

Komlos (2015) continued to say that the system was not standing very sturdily during the days of rage in Baltimore or in Ferguson. Therefore, we need to look beyond the ugly surface manifestations of young black men being shot in the back or suffocated and consider the deeper socioeconomic plight of this demographic in this country in 2015. The truth of the matter is that people of color are disadvantaged by the current socio-economic system from the very beginning of their lives.
Today, the University of Minnesota states that almost 30 percent of elementary schools in the Twin Cities metro area – including those in suburbia – have now reached the point where a majority of students are nonwhite and poor (MinnPost, 2008). Nearly 90 percent of those schools are considered "very high poverty" schools (defined as schools where at least 75 percent of the students qualify for free and reduced-price lunches). Fifty-six percent of students of color in the metropolitan area attend "high poverty" elementary schools (where more than 40 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-rate lunches), compared with 10 percent of whites.

**Personal Background**

Living in the Twin Cities and growing up I have been exposed to the most intense urban areas of Minnesota. I have witnessed friends and fellow students struggle through their education, many who were putting forth so much effort, which still resulted in distress and, sooner or later, their definite absence at school. As a young child, I was not mindful of why or what was hindering their individual situations. At times, I felt similar thoughts and struggles as my peers and some of the same feelings regarding school and the class work, I asked myself, “Why is school so difficult for some and so much easier for others?” I sometimes struggled along with them to complete the year and we gladly celebrated the permission to move on to the next together. I wondered what could be done differently that would help me as I entered the next year. Wanting to do better and having good parent support in doing so did not seem to be enough at times and the struggle continued in some of my years.
The Question

This section provides an overview of my past and present work with families and the supervision of others who work with families in a metropolitan urban area to help children attend or return to school successfully. For most children in kindergarten through fifth grades, stressors experienced by a parent, guardian or other adults in their life often impacts their success in school and creates many obstacles for a child attending school regularly. Through repetitive situations working with families and children, I came across my choice for my dissertation question: How do family advocates home visiting in the Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school?

As I examine this question, I hope I can find positive ways of better understanding how to work with families and how to help them get their children back to school each day. I also hope to find additional resources that can help guide them back to some normalcy so both parents and their children are not caught up in the stress and can retain health and some quality of life. I want to see children succeed in school for the world that awaits them and live better than what is predicted for them. I hope this dissertation will introduce a new ideas or information that will stimulate others to be concerned and act positively.

Limitations of the Study

In this study, I am concerned with the family stress that prevents elementary age children from moving successfully from one grade to the next level. My study is an
attempt to capture what families are experiencing in their lives that are hindering their daily attendance in school.

Although hundreds of studies have documented the association between family poverty and children’s health, achievement, and behavior, few measure the effects of the timing, depth, and duration of poverty on children, and some fail to adjust for other family characteristics such as single female head of households, a mother’s age, a parent’s health, on the impact of a child’s learning and success in school. Not only did my own community encounter many stressors of poverty, but also my work experience and career led me to this area even deeper. I had been visiting and counseling many families each year on a daily basis. I had pleasure of working with children, and had the added pleasure of working with their parents and other caregivers who wanted good things for their children.

In my work, I have seen the relationship between poverty and child outcomes in learning and in child/family well-being. Family income appears to be more strongly related to children’s ability and achievement than to their emotional outcomes. Children who live in extreme poverty or who live below the poverty line for multiple years appear, all other things being equal, to suffer the worst outcomes.

Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) say that the timing of poverty also seems to be important for certain child outcomes. Children who experience poverty during their preschool and early school years have lower rates of school completion than children and adolescents who experience poverty only in later years. It is also well documented that
interventions during early childhood may be the most important in reducing poverty’s impact on children.

Many aspects of family relations are affected by the stressors of poverty. Domestic abuse, including child abuse, is higher when poverty is a factor. The effects of domestic abuse on children’s development, mental well-being, and ability to learn are well documented. Children, Youth and Family Consortium, University of MN (2009) state that poverty itself creates tension and stress for families that can affect children’s well-being.

My passion in serving children, families, and communities has led me to pursue a career in the area of family sciences. I have had experience working at two universities preparing teachers to work with diverse communities, languages and ethnic backgrounds. My personal and work experiences have given me reason to ask questions, research, and to share what I have learned with others who have similar interests, and seek answers to some of the same questions. I hope my work will also contribute in some way to research that may benefit children, families, communities and schools.

**Significance of the Research**

Boyer's Scholarships

This study employed the scholarship of application--applying research to solve problems. For this dissertation, that meant gathering data from a group of family advocates about how to change the impact of OSFs (out-of-school factors) (Berliner, 2009) for elementary-age students to improve their school success.
During the writing of this dissertation, my employment remained within the areas of serving children, families and communities. I worked many hours supervising the home visits of my staff, training, and visiting one on one with parents/guardians and children. I also spent many hours with the counties in which I worked to help advise and provide input into what families may be experiencing, how we could impact communities positively and provide better avenues to them so that high absenteeism and truancy would be reduced. We found that high absenteeism and truancy are only “symptoms” of what is actually happening in a students’ life, but we needed to know more about how to impact their ability to regularly engage in school work and school activities successfully. I continually came across “symptoms” that I wanted to examine further so I could share my learning to other organizations or agencies that assist the students experiencing these difficulties in the communities we served.

My education and my work were devoted to studying within these areas with a promise that my learning would be shared with others who also had the same passion and interest I had. I was always aware that it did take a “village to raise a child” as Hillary Clinton stated in 1996 from the African proverb. This work has kept me engaged, particularly during the new 21st Century of learning that promised much more for children and their families.

In the previous and recent elections politicians talked about how children and their families deserved more in terms of health and better living. I attended many community meetings with other stakeholders of profit and nonprofits organizations who discussed education and ways of supporting children and their families. They talked
about the equality of education for all children, as they had in the past. Many of them wrote grants and received funds indicating that assistance was needed and together communities should continue seeking better health, education and social opportunities for themselves and their children, especially for families who had been underserved for generations (Craft, Axtell, Crawford, Dehn, Shabazz, Thomas, & Zulu-Gillespie, 2010).

The nation’s public schools were also facing enormous challenges that seemed difficult for them to face alone. Teachers in Minnesota were facing gaps in their college curriculum they had received and in the assistance from their own districts on how to help families who were highly mobile, had children who did not attend school regularly, were ill or where one or more members had been suffering from mental illness (Yuen, 2013).

Schools were suffering from the influx of new immigrants who spoke many new languages and dialects. The lack of information and assistance needed to serve the diverse populations was overwhelming to districts, and the results were costly in both funding and community relationships with schools and families. Schools were legally bound to educate some of the most diverse student bodies in their histories, and families were reaching for help in having health, education and social information that could help them understand the systems they needed to navigate in order to help their children and themselves (Zittlow, 2012).

It has been my own experience that many organizations and agencies work only with a student’s attendance and leave out other factors a student may struggle with.
These could include homelessness or high mobility, mental illness of themselves or their parents, or food insecurity. Some students may have more than one of these factors impacting their ability to engage in school. Berliner (2009) indicates that this leaves an even stronger impact and burden on young children and their families who may not understand the importance of school attendance and the state education law, especially when they are facing difficult situations and the inability to obtain their basic needs. It may help other organizations and agencies to recognize that monitoring school attendance alone is not sufficient for a student’s success in school. Berliner (2009) also says that research shows even less about chronic school absenteeism among preschool and elementary children.

For example, it was clear, in the initial stages of our non-profit department’s visitation of homes for absenteeism, that these were significant problems with highly visible and negative consequences for students of all ages and ultimately, for their quality of life as adults and citizens of our state and country. Through more in-depth visitation by family advocates and our unit’s case management meetings, it was evident that some important non-school factors, such as family stress on a child, go unrecognized among professionals and individuals who create laws, programs or incentives or teach.

Berliner states that significant attention should be focused on young children and students that the non-school factors affect most, especially those whose families face poverty and high family stresses. Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley (2004) state that professionals serving this population may find the knowledge of these factors helpful in recognizing how they are associated with family, community, society, and life problems
for low-income children and how they can hinder school success. The authors also continue to say that with this understanding and knowledge, professionals can include the non-school factors in their teachings, research, methods, and programs that will deepen learning and help to create healthier outcomes for students and young children.

Berliner (2009) also found other non-related school factors: low birth-weight and non-genetic prenatal influences on children; inadequate medical, dental, and vision care, often a result of inadequate or no medical insurance; food insecurity; environmental pollutants; family relations and family stress; neighborhood characteristics; and extended learning opportunities, such as preschool, after school, and summer school programs that contribute to the failures of students.

Berliner continues to say that other school factors (OSFs) are related to a host of poverty-induced physical, sociological, and psychological problems that children often manifest, ranging from neurological damage and attention disorders to excessive absenteeism, linguistic underdevelopment, and oppositional behavior.

Living, working, and growing up in the Twin Cities I have been exposed to the most intense urban areas of Minnesota. I have witnessed friends and fellow students struggle through their education, many who were putting forth so much effort that still resulted in distress and sooner or later left school completely.

As a young child, I was not mindful of why or what was hindering their individual situations. At times, I felt similar thoughts and struggles as my peers and some of the same feelings regarding school and the class work, I too, asked, “Why is school so difficult for some and so much easier for others?” I sometimes struggled along with them
to complete the year and we gladly celebrated the permission to move on to the next
together. I wondered what could be done differently that would help me as I entered the
next year. Wanting to do better and having good parent support in doing so did not seem
to be enough at times and the struggle continued in some of my years.

Today, the programs I direct and oversee, I observe situations and see students
struggle with similar issues and emotional states largely because the social and economic
crisis for poor children and their families has not changed over the past decades, says the
Children’s Defense Fund of MN (May 2009). More recently, our present economic crisis
has affected the most vulnerable and poor. The recent foreclosures in real estate and
bank mortgages have forced many families out of their homes, leaving their children
without transportation to school and other important places of learning and socializing.

The first few years of life have a major influence on child's success later in life –
from their level of self-esteem and social skills to good health and success in school.
During these early years, a child’s brain develops incredibly fast and nerve connections
that are forged during this critical period through interaction with those closest to them
remain unchanged for the rest of their lives (UNICEF, 2010).

UNICEF’s report Unite for Children (2010) further states,
Overall emotional stability and feelings of trust are also established during the
first few years of life, and later become the basis for all important relationships
with peers, adults and partners, and even with one's own children. This critical
period of a child's development offers great opportunities for each child, but it is
also the period when those opportunities can be wasted. Poor upbringing in the
first years of life is later reflected in feelings of dissatisfaction with life, impaired relationships, learning difficulties, eating disorders, high rates of crime and violence, addiction and other personal and social issues. It is evident that such disorders become increasingly more expensive and difficult to treat later in life, often bringing no results (p. 1).

Many poor children our unit has visited in our family advocacy programs live without important care for their health and development. Some may go without basic meals each day, early childhood and kindergarten screenings, or school physicals to give them a healthy start in school. Others go without the ability to attend quality preschool learning environments that prepare them for kindergarten readiness and early socialization opportunities. Our unit also experienced that children in poverty we home visited, may live in unsafe communities that do not allow them the ability to walk to their daily school bus or play outdoors for daily exercise in fear of their safety.

Illig’s (1998) research describes that in the first years of life, small children usually live in the privacy of their homes and are completely dependent upon adults. Parenting skills are crucial in bringing up children, providing them emotional support, encouraging their development and establishing successful communication with them. However, Illig (1998) also states that it is well known that most young parents never have a chance to learn and acquire positive parenting skills. Although each child develops at his or her own pace, numerous studies show that development is the fastest during the period before the age of three.
Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley (2004) agree that when family advocates or other parenting professionals provide parents with support during the early years and help teach them parenting skills as their children develop, their children will have a better chance at successful lives in a healthy and progressive society.

Family income appears to be more strongly related to children’s ability and achievement than to their emotional outcomes (Hawley & Gunner, 2000). Children who live in extreme poverty or who live below the poverty line for multiple years appear to suffer the worst outcomes. Children who experience poverty during their preschool and early school years have lower rates of school completion than children and adolescents who experience poverty only in later years (Alberts, 2009). Although more research is needed on the significance of the timing of poverty on child outcomes, findings to date suggest that interventions during early childhood may be most important in reducing poverty’s impact on children (Brooks-Gun & Duncan, 1997).

Many families living in poverty experience similar stress from home environments that include dysfunctional homes, violent neighborhoods and homes, parents who abuse drugs or alcohol, and parents who suffer from mental disorders (Illig, 1998). The various factors can have an effect on children and be long lasting. It can also affect other family members who care for them.

Ineffective parent-child interaction, family social isolation, responsiveness of parent to child, and the lack of provision of appropriate toys or other learning materials, can all have negative effects on a child’s development and learning (Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004).
The Children’s Defense Fund of Minnesota (2009, May) research states that families who are new to our country may not have access to an informal network of community or family assistance. There may be a potential in neglecting their child’s needs or their own because of the lack of resources and knowledge they may have possibly accessed through their community or neighbors and friends or both.

Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley (2004) have said that home and neighborhood environments that display aggressive behaviors can make children feel confused and place negative affects upon them at home and at school. When parents are in dismay at work or in their home, they may impress a lack of maternal warmth and place stress upon their young children who may then act out with increased incidences of behavioral problems both at home and school. Conversely, they continue to say that higher levels of parent-child interaction are associated with increased school performance for children.

Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley (2004), see schools facing significantly greater challenges serving children and their limited resources are often overwhelmed. Efforts to improve educational outcomes in the schools are unlikely to succeed unless accompanied by a greater acknowledgement and efforts on the side of policy makers, educators, and other professionals who also create learning and living opportunities for children and their families. The researchers see poverty as limiting a student’s potential and requiring other areas (or factors) to consider when addressing why a child’s success in school is lagging or not reaching its full potential.
Summary

I have included in this introductory chapter my own personal background, followed by my interest and continued concern for the importance of family advocates, children’s learning, and what family stresses may cause a disruption in the success of a child moving on to each grade level and becoming a healthy adult.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters, with brief introductions to the chapters as well as a summary. I utilized Boyer’s Scholarship Revisited as the framework for this dissertation. I am also including definitions to terms that will be used in my writing to explain the field of family advocacy and home visiting.

Chapter one focuses on family stress and how it affects children’s success in school. Through my years of work, I have found that there are many factors that may affect a child’s success in school. I have worked with family advocates, schools, and community organizations who have home visited children and parents when children have had excessive school absences. My experiences and work have created many questions into this complexed issue. These help me to develop my dissertation question: How do family advocates home-visiting in the Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school?
Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of the study was to examine the stresses of families and how the stress may impact a child’s ability to learn and engage in school daily. My research question was: How do family advocates home-visiting in a Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school?

The literature review focused on barriers to school success, the achievement gap, poverty and school success, and the impact of family stressors.

Barriers to School Success

A review of research about school success showed that many people are concerned about eliminating or at least reducing the achievement gap, but what they fail to acknowledge is the impact of a multitude of factors out of the scope of the school that impact children’s ability to learn in school. Understanding and mitigating these stress factors is one of the key roles that home visitors have in promoting school success.

The present state of unemployment for families who have lost their jobs has left many parents in unhealthy emotional states, struggling and searching day to day for ways to survive physically for the most basic of needs. Many families are visiting food shelves for the first time and searching for medical care because of the loss of jobs or job status. Sadly, all this has had a broad affect not only on parents but also on other family members, including their children (Children’s Defense Fund Minnesota Newsletter, May, 2009). Due to the parent’s emotional states and job loss, there is also a concern for
families and their children who lack adequate medical care that could provide safe and healthy births, and later, healthy beginnings for a child’s first years of life.

More recently, our present economic crisis has affected the most vulnerable and poor. The recent foreclosures in real estate and bank mortgages have forced many families out of their homes, leaving their children without transportation to school and other important places of learning and socializing.

The Problem and the Achievement Gap

According to Berliner (2009), the U.S. has set as a national goal the narrowing of the achievement gap between lower income and middle-class students, and that between racial and ethnic groups. This is a key purpose of the No Child Left Behind act, which relies primarily on assessment to promote changes within schools to accomplish that goal. However, out of school factors (OSFs) play a powerful role in generating existing achievement gaps, and if these factors are not attended to with equal vigor, our national aspirations will be thwarted.

The factors that stress children and families in some communities is proof that children are experiencing stressors. Berliner (2009) continues to say that OSFs common among the poor that significantly affect the health and learning opportunities of children, and accordingly limit what schools can accomplish on their own. Six common OSFs are low birth-weight and non-genetic prenatal influences on children; inadequate medical, dental, and vision care, often a result of inadequate or no medical insurance; food insecurity; environmental pollutants; family relations and family stress; and neighborhood characteristics. Berliner (2009) explains that these OSFs are related to a
host of poverty-induced physical, sociological, and psychological problems that children often bring to school, ranging from neurological damage and attention disorders to excessive absenteeism, linguistic underdevelopment, and oppositional behavior. A seventh OSF, extended learning opportunities, such as preschool, after school, and summer school programs that can help to mitigate some of the harm caused by the first six factors.

Berliner (2009) adds that because American schools are so highly segregated by income, race, and ethnicity, problems related to poverty occur simultaneously, with greater frequency, and act cumulatively in schools serving disadvantaged communities. Berliner (2009) continues that these schools, therefore, face significantly greater challenges than schools serving wealthier children and their limited resources are often overwhelmed. Efforts to improve educational outcomes in these schools, attempting to drive change through test-based accountability, are thus unlikely to succeed unless accompanied by policies to address the OSFs that negatively affect large numbers of our nations’ students. Poverty limits student potential and their input is affected by their outputs in school.

Illig (1998) also focuses on factors that affect children during their first five years of life. Illig states that a substantial body of research supports the notion that a child’s early experiences – from birth to school entry – can influence significantly later cognitive, behavioral, educational, and economic outcomes. A key finding in his research is that children growing up in more stressful environments are more likely to experience delays in cognitive and behavioral development. Stressful environments are
described as dysfunctional homes, violent neighborhoods and homes, families living in poverty, parents who abuse drugs or alcohol, and parents who suffer from mental disorders. Such delays, in turn, can affect long term outcomes for children including school completion, employment, teen pregnancy and childbearing, substance abuse, and criminal behavior.

Ineffective parent-child interaction, family social isolation, responsiveness of parent to child, and the lack of provision of appropriate toys or other learning materials, can all have negative effects on a child’s development and learning (Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004).

The Children’s Defense Fund of Minnesota (2009) research states that families who are new to our country may not have access to an informal network of community or family assistance. There may be a potential in neglecting their child’s needs or their own because of the lack of resources and knowledge they may have possibly accessed through their community or neighbors and friends or both.

Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley (2004) have said that home and neighborhood environments that display aggressive behaviors can make children feel confused and place negative affects upon them at home and at school. When parents are overwhelmed at work or in their home, they may impress a lack of maternal warmth and place stress upon their young children who may then act out with increased incidences of behavioral problems both at home and school. Conversely, they continue to say that higher levels of parent-child interaction are associated with increased school performance for children.
Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley (2004) point out that schools facing significantly greater challenges serving children and their limited resources are often overwhelmed. Efforts to improve educational outcomes in the schools are unlikely to succeed unless accompanied by a greater acknowledgement and efforts on the side of policy makers, educators, and other professionals who also create learning and living opportunities for children and their families. The researchers see poverty as limiting a student’s potential and requiring other areas (or factors) to consider when addressing why a child’s success in school is lagging or not reaching its full potential.

**Important Years of Development**

Recent news stories about advances in our understanding of brain development during the early years of life have stimulated interest in early childhood intervention programs. Many experts in the field of early learning and development have proven through research that the first years of life are the most important in a child’s development and growth (Illig, 1998). A substantial body of research supports that a child’s early growth and development can influence significantly later cognitive, behavioral, educational, and economic outcomes (Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004).

UNICEF’s Unite for Children Report (2010) states that overall emotional stability and feelings of trust are also established during the first few years of life, and later become the basis for all important relationships with peers, adults and partners, and even with one's own children. The report also says that this critical period of a child's development offers great opportunities for each child, but it is also the period when those opportunities can be wasted. The report continues that poor upbringing in the first years...
of life is later reflected in feelings of dissatisfaction with life, impaired relationships, learning difficulties, eating disorders, high rates of crime and violence, addiction and other personal and social issues. It is evident that such disorders become increasingly more expensive and difficult to treat later in life, often bringing no results.

Illig’s (1998) research describes that in the first years of life, small children usually live in the privacy of their homes and are completely dependent upon adults. Parenting skills are crucial in bringing up children, providing them emotional support, encouraging their development and establishing successful communication with them. However, Illig (1998) also states that it is well known that most young parents never have a chance to learn and acquire positive parenting skills. Although each child develops at his or her own pace, numerous studies show that development is the fastest during the period before the age of three. If family advocates or other parenting professionals are able to provide parents with support during this period, teach them about parenting skills as their children develop, and offer them knowledge that will help fulfill the potential of their child with love, parents will give children a better chance at successful and happy lives in a healthy and progressive society (Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004).

In addition, accounts of domestic violence and child maltreatment, and concerns about the potential effects of welfare reform on children have stimulated interest in programs to mitigate the effects of such factors on children as they grow into adulthood. Interest in early childhood interventions also is stimulated by reports suggesting that families’ ability to provide effective support for children has diminished. Reasons include an increase in the number of single parent families, an increase in income inequality
(particularly for parents with little education), and an increase in the proportion of children living in poverty. These conditions are exacerbated further by the dual perception that the education system is failing, and that children are entering school unprepared (Illig, 1998).

Illig (1998) identifies associations between children’s outcomes and their early family and neighborhood experiences. He outlines the basis for past efforts to initiate early childhood intervention programs (such as home visiting, childcare, and preschool) along with strategies for families with infants and young children; and reviews early childhood programs operated by the federal and state governments in California, while identifying a number of policy issues and options the legislature may wish to consider when debating early childhood intervention proposals.

**Poverty and School Success**

Berliner (2009) develops a relationship between these stress factors and poverty. Berliner’s (2009) examination of poverty and school success, common among the poor, finds a significant affect in the health and learning opportunities of children, and accordingly limits what schools can accomplish on their own. These are related to a host of poverty-induced physical, sociological, and psychological problems.

Similar findings by The Children, Youth and Family Consortium at the University of Minnesota (2009) describes the Circles of Influence as the ecology of human development and speaks of the Berliner OSFs also explaining their relation to a host of poverty-induced physical, sociological, and psychological problems that children often
bring to school, ranging from neurological damage and attention disorders to excessive absenteeism, linguistic underdevelopment, and oppositional behavior.

The Consortium (2009) continues to discuss the seventh OSF, extended learning opportunities, such as preschool, after school, and summer school programs that can help to mitigate some of the harm caused by the first six factors. The Consortium recommends efforts that can be made such as reducing the rate of low-birth-weight children among African Americans; reduce drug and alcohol abuse; and reduce pollutants in our cities. The Consortium also recommends moving people away from toxic sites; provide universal and free medical care for all citizens; and insure that no one suffers from food insecurity. The Consortium believes that in reducing the rates of family violence in low-income households, along with improving mental health services among the poor and more equitable distribution of low-income housing throughout communities can help immensely. But the Consortium also says we must find ways to reduce both the mobility and absenteeism rates of children, provide high-quality preschools for all children, along with providing summer programs for the poor to reduce summer losses in their academic achievement.

Family income appears to be more strongly related to children’s ability and achievement than to their emotional outcomes (Hawley & Gunner, 2000). Children who live in extreme poverty or who live below the poverty line for multiple years appear to suffer the worst outcomes. Children who experience poverty during their preschool and early school years have lower rates of school completion than children and adolescents who experience poverty only in later years (Alberts, 2009). Although more research is
needed on the significance of the timing of poverty on child outcomes, findings to date suggest that interventions during early childhood may be most important in reducing poverty’s impact on children (Brooks-Dunn & Duncan, 1997).

**Impact of Family Stressors**

Illig’s (1998) reports focus on factors that affect children during their first five years of life. Within his work a substantial body of research supports the notion that a child’s early experiences – from birth to school entry -- can influence significantly later cognitive, behavioral, educational, and economic outcomes. A key finding in this literature shows that children growing up in more stressful environments are more likely to experience delays in cognitive and behavioral development. Stressful environments of dysfunctional homes, violent neighborhoods and homes, families living in poverty, parents who abuse drugs or alcohol, and parents who suffer from mental disorders. Such delays, in turn, can affect long-term outcomes for children including school completion, employment, teen pregnancy and childbearing, substance abuse, and criminal behavior.

Berliner (2009) has recommendations for what to do about these stress factors and their impact on children. Berliner (2009) states that schools can be powerful influences on youth when those schools are safe and have engaging curriculum and experienced and caring teachers who possess subject matter competency and pedagogical skill. Berliner continues to suggest that America’s public schools often come up short in these regards. Hawley and Gunner (2000) say that even near-perfect schools can show disappointing results, since school effects have limits. In part, this is because of time. Hawley and Gunner (2000) add that today, U.S. students spend about 1,150 waking hours a year in
school versus about 4,700 more waking hours per year in their families and neighborhoods.

Hennepin County Research, Planning and Development Department (2009) in its Education for Success Program further states that many schools have a one-size-fits-all orientation, not easily accommodating the differences in talents and interests among youth or helping them cope, in ways that youth find nurturing or useful, with school as well as non-school factors associated with family, community, society, and life’s problems. Such non-school factors, in fact, exert a powerful influence on student.

Stagner and Duran (1997) speak of the areas needed for equal opportunity for children to have neighborhoods with community resources such as high-quality schools, parks, libraries, community centers and quality after-school programs along with access to high quality child care. These are all important because the environments allow children to explore and interact in a positive way that supports and fosters their development. Unfortunately, many children live in neighborhoods that often lack these important resources. Without strong community supports and programs, children living in poverty are more vulnerable to the stress of living in an underserved community.

Craft, Axtell, Crawford, Dehn, Shabazz, Thomas, and Zulu-Gillespie (2010) reported that displacement has caused special problems for preschool and school-aged children. One example is that young children have to change schools because their families have moved to other neighborhoods, which interrupts bussing and other transportation needs. Family stress and competing priorities take their toll on children’s
attendance and school performance, with some children experiencing a drop-in grades or engaging in negative behavior in school in response to this stress.

**Summary**

The literature reviewed sources of families who are experiencing life stressors and indicated the importance of addressing stressors and coming up with possible strategies, including early interventions. Berliner (2009) states that currently minimal research has been conducted on what types of family resources are needed. For the families and children who incur stressors, finding positive influences and outcomes for children to be successful in school can be put into action through the assistance of community resources and family advocates.
Chapter Three

Methodology

The focus of this study was how family advocates home-visiting in a Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school. This chapter presents a rationale for the research; describes the research design, ethical considerations, the research design used for the study, and data collection and analysis processes.

Research Paradigm and Rationale

The research question was: How do family advocates home-visiting in a Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school? Due to my past and present work in the field of serving families and children at school, I wanted to deepen my understanding of how family advocates who home-visit in a Midwest urban area identified family stressors and how they saw it impact a child’s learning at school and success in their future education. According to Berliner (2009), many families with children may possess more than one or more stressors which can engage home visitors more intensely with the family and can make resourcing very important. Therefore, I used the qualitative method of interview with each home visitor that would allow me to ask questions regarding their home-visiting and how they saw parent stressors.

Qualitative research was used to address the research question. Patton (2005) states that qualitative research analyzes data gathered directly from any or a combination of the following: fieldwork observations; in-depth, open-ended interviews, written
documents. Patton further states that qualitative research focuses on naturalistic inquiry that studies real-world settings with the goal of generating narrative descriptions that yield patterns and themes. Using a qualitative framework helped me investigate and understand the lived experiences of the interviewees and to attempt to extract similar themes of each. Another aspect of the research paradigm was narrative. Noddings (1991) emphasized that narrative inquiry has the power to direct and even change lives. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) echoed this.

The interview method selected is from Robert Weiss (1994) wrote, “Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others” (p. 1). Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived. Weiss wrote that if we have the right informants we can learn about the quality of neighborhoods or what happens in families or how organizations set their goals. Interviewing can inform us about the nature of social life. Weiss also stated that researchers can learn about the work of occupations and how people fashion careers, about cultures and the values they sponsor, and about the challenges people confront as they lead their lives.

**Weiss’ Model**

Weiss (1994) states that quantitative studies pay a price for their standardized precision. Because they ask the same questions in the same order of every respondent, they do not obtain full reports. Instead, the information they obtain from any one person is fragmentary, made up of bits and pieces of attitudes and observations and appraisals.
Qualitative interview studies generally begin with decisions regarding the sample to interview, move on to data collection and conclude with analysis. But more so than is the case in qualitative research, the phases of work in qualitative research overlap and are intermeshed. Analysis of early data contributes to new emphases in interviewing, and the new data collected by the modified interviewing then produces new analyses. The focus of the research effort necessarily shifts as the study progresses from its early stages, when recruitment of respondents is likely to be a major issue, to its concluding stages, during which the investigator is primarily concerned with how best to interpret and report the data (1994).

**Participants and Interview Settings**

All interview sessions were recorded on the interviewer’s personal and private cell-phone device requiring both a safe personal identification and password protection. They were saved in the interviewer’s Hamline University’s cloud that is locked by interviewer’s unique identification log in and safe password. All interviews were all transcribed by the interviewer. All respondents’ identities were confidential and pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation. All interviewees signed the consent form.

**Pilot Interview Participant**

There was a pilot interview to test the questions. This pilot took place at the pilot interviewee’s private office at the person’s request. The pilot interview was a female, European American with 32 years of experience working in the urban, suburban, and rural areas of Minnesota as a teacher and social services. Twelve open-ended interview
questions were provided at the pilot interview (Appendix A). The pilot interview respondent reviewed the format of the interview and each question. The pilot respondent made minimal changes regarding how the order of the questions would be asked to the other six interviewees. The changes to the order of the questions were made before the six interviews took place.

**Individual Interviews**

Each interviewee was asked the question: How do family advocates who home-visit in Minnesota’s urban areas describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school? The interviewer gave an explanation of the Out of School Factors (OSFs) that are common among the poor that can significantly affect the health and learning opportunities of children (Berliner, 2009): (1) low birth-weight and non-genetic prenatal influences on children; (2) inadequate medical, dental, and vision care, often a result of inadequate or no medical insurance; (3) food insecurity; (4) environmental pollutants; (5) family relations and family stress; (6) neighborhood characteristics; and (7) extended learning opportunities, such as preschool, after school, and summer school programs that can help to mitigate some of the harm caused by the first six factors.

The conducting of the six individual interviews at locations chosen by each interviewee took place. Assurance of privacy and confidentiality at each location was made and the interviewer and interviewee were the only two present. The six interviewees were asked the same twelve questions. No changes were made to the questions only to the order of the questions the pilot interview had asked to be made.
All six remaining interviews were done in person and individually. To begin the interview, and before asking the twelve questions, the interviewees were asked to state their name, age, gender, marital status, number of children, race, ethnic background, years of advocacy, location of home-visiting and whether they worked in urban, suburban, and rural locations. All interviews began by explaining the question: How do family advocates home-visiting in a Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school?

In the interviewing process, there were six interviewees. Two were male (one Asian-American and one African-American) who had worked 10 to 28 years in in the urban areas of Minnesota.

The remaining interviews consisted of four females (two African-American, one Japanese-American, one Mexican-American). The four worked 10 to 30 years in the urban areas of Minnesota. All six respondents were presently working in a social service agency with families and children who were at risk for educational neglect and home visited in urban Minnesota.

Interviewee 1 was the first interview. She was once a home-visiting advocate, a director of a children’s crisis center, and a unit manager for county child protection unit which provided many visits to families in crisis. She has a master’s degree in social work and is recently ABD in sociology. Interviewee 1 has lived in Michigan as a young child and teen. She moved to Minnesota when she married. She has two children one son and one daughter and a grandchild. She is a minister at her church in a major urban area
where she creates programs for underserved children that include nutrition and clothing for the needy at her church.

Interviewee 2 was a Japanese woman, age forty-eight, who works as a supervisor for a child protection unit. She supervises her staff daily as they home-visit families needing resources for family violence, parent education, and basic needs, including housing. Along with her staff she also does home-visiting, and attends court sessions for many of her families. She has lived in a large urban area of Minnesota all her life. She is married to an African-American male, and they have two children.

Interviewee 3 was forty-eight years old, and a single African-American woman who has lived in a Minnesota urban area most of her adult life. She has no children, but says her work with young children gives her purpose and meaning. She has worked for a non-profit agency as a home-visitor for ten years, mainly with the urban public schools for education neglect.

Interviewee 4 was Chinese-European American male who grew up in Wisconsin and moved to Minnesota as a young adolescent. He has recently received his degree in school psychology and before that had been a home-visitor in the urban area for many years in a non-profit agency.

Interviewee 5 was an African American male has worked as a home-visitor for school success in the urban area for more than twenty years. He works with many families, and single mothers and fathers who have had difficulties keeping their children in school and has an undergraduate degree in social work.
Interviewee 6 was a sixty-two-year-old Mexican American who is bilingual. She has previous experience working as a social worker for a municipal agency in service with families and children. She was employed at a non-profit Latino agency in the urban area of Minnesota. She has been a social worker and home-visitor for thirty-years. She works with predominantly Spanish-Speaking families whose children are not attending school.

**Group Interview**

The group interview meeting was held at a library in a safe, private meeting room. Its purpose was to provide a chance to think further or add anything they did not say in their individual interviews. Of the six interviews three female respondents were present.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study was concerned with the family stressors that prevent young children from moving successfully from one grade to another. My interviews attempted to capture how family advocates see what families are experiencing in their lives and what hinders their children's daily attendance in school.

One limitation was the small sample size. I was not able to draw any specific conclusions or generalizations for the research question. However, the data did provide pertinent information from family advocates who held considerable years in the field and were able to capture their personal experiences with families and children who had barriers preventing school success.
A second limitation was having only one interview with each respondent. A third was that their experience was limited to only one urban area. More interviews with a wider participant base may have yielded differed conclusions.

**Data Collection**

My sample size is considered smaller, so I researched literature that is focused on sample size and found Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) comments that validated my sample size by suggesting, “data collection typically continues until theoretical saturation takes place,” (p. 292). The authors continue to say that in smaller studies, such as this one, it is acceptable to simply stay within the limits available for time and money,” (p. 292).

Each individual interview was driven by a set of questions based on the relevance of my primary question. Every attempt was made to not ask the respondents any leading questions or pose any statements that implied I was looking for a specific answer.

**Data Analysis**

A simple coding system of tables was used to compare and find correlations to each interview question by respondents. Responses from each interview question were analyzed by their frequency in a table form. The responses were analyzed to understand relationships among answers, as Fink explains (2006), and to identify patterns among categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Reviewing the interview transcripts permitted me to identify common ideas and dominant patterns. Common words or statements were studied as to how often and from what years of experience that could be relevant to this study and how often they were repeated by some or all of the interviews. Many ideas resonated with my own experiences and concepts of the literature
reviews I had made. There were not many responses that were unfamiliar, in fact many of them I had found very familiar.

**Approval to Conduct Research**

My application to conduct this research was approved by Hamline’s Institutional Review Board. Those agreeing to participate signed an individual copy of the Hamline University Approval to Conduct Research. Each interviewee was sent a consent letter and all consent forms stated they were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the rationale for selecting qualitative research framework including the strengths of this methodology to help answer the research question about how family advocates home-visiting in a Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school.
Chapter Four

Results

How do family advocates home-visiting in a Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school? This chapter discusses the results of six interviews and a group interview with three people who had individual interviews. The Weiss (1994) in-depth interview model was to gather data. The interview results are presented by each of the twelve questions asked by the interviewer. The following are introductions of each participant and my findings from each of their interviews. Included are experiences of each participant that emerged from the coding of the collective interview data. Lastly, I present the themes that emerged which enabled me to compare between my literature review findings and my research findings. The participants are referred to as interviewees, home-visitors, and family advocates in this chapter.

According to Berliner (2009), families with children may possess more than one or more stressors or out-school-factors which can engage home visitors more intensely and can make resourcing very important. The information provided in the six interviews seem to connect to that which Berliner found.

In the literature review, Patton (2005) stated that qualitative research focuses on naturalistic inquiry that studies real-world settings with the goal of generating narrative descriptions that yield patterns and themes. This framework helped me investigate and understand the lived experiences of the interviewees, or home-visitors, and to extract similar themes, patterns and differences of each.
Robert Weiss (1994) wrote, “Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others” (p. 1). Through interviewing we can learn about settings in which we have not lived. Within the results of the interviews, the similarities in settings that home-visitors (the interviewees) made daily were important data for the study. Each participant talked about how “home settings” provide a lens into a family’s dynamics that they could not otherwise see in a typical office setting.

Weiss also wrote that if we have the right informants we can learn about the quality of neighborhoods or what happens in families or how goals are set. The stories of the families’ communities gave an in-depth look at what was happening to a family politically and socially. The interviews provided information about the nature of social life. Many of the home-visitors learned about the violence in the neighborhoods of families. Their reasons were also similar stating that some families lose children to gang violence, random shootings that affected trauma in many of the children and their parents. All home-visitors were familiar with cases focused in the media about two young children were paralyzed by random shootings while they were studying and doing their homework in their homes. Three home-visitors had gone to the funerals of their families and brought both physical and emotional responses within their interviews.

Weiss stated in the literature review that researchers can learn about the work of occupations and how people fashion careers, about cultures and the values they sponsor, and about the challenges people confront as they lead their lives. All of the interviews expressed the importance of their knowledge around the culture of the people they home-visited. It was important to each of the interviewees because each one was a person of
color and had some similar family experiences. They knew that if you were invited into a home you must understand and be open to learning about different values and ideals that may or may not be your own. They understood that their visits needed to be open to the possibility of including more than the parents, and may also include grandparents or other caregivers who are part of the child’s life within their family or community. Home-visitors learned that a meeting may not start or end at a scheduled time. Home-visitors also understood there may be interruptions of other family members who wanted to have a say in the children’s school, attendance, or health concerns. This also meant the possibility of bringing in translators who were able to keep confidential information and translate on behalf of both the family and the home-visitor.

The interviews centered on the practices, methods, and stories that have helped home-visitors dismantle the physical, emotional and social stress children have experienced within their family structures that have lived under the conditions of poverty and stress.

**The Interviewees**

In the interviewing process there were six interviewees. Two were male (one Asian-American and one African-American) who had worked 10 to 28 years in the urban areas of Minnesota. The remaining interviews consisted of four females (two African-American, one Japanese-American, and one Mexican-American). The four worked 10 to 30 years in the urban areas of Minnesota. All six respondents were presently working in a social service agency with families and children who were at risk for educational neglect and home visited in urban Minnesota. Throughout the
dissertation, participants are referred to as Interviewees 1-6 to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

**Pilot Interview**

The pilot interview’s purpose was to test the questions. It took place at the pilot interviewee’s private office at her request. The interviewee was European American with decades of experience working in the urban, suburban, and rural areas of Minnesota as a teacher and in social services. Twelve open-ended interview questions were provided at the interview. The pilot-interview respondent reviewed the format of the interview and each question. The pilot respondent made minimal changes regarding the order of the questions. The changes to the order of the questions were made before the final six interviews took place.

**Data Analysis**

A simple coding system of tables was used to compare and find correlations to each interview question by respondents. Responses from each interview question were analyzed by their frequency. The responses were analyzed to understand relationships among answers, as Fink explains (2006), and to identify patterns among categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). The interview transcripts were analyzed for common ideas and dominant patterns. Common words or statements were studied as to how often and from what years of experience that could be relevant to this study and how often they were repeated by some or all of the interviews.
Analysis of Individual Interviews

All interview sessions were recorded on the interviewer’s personal and private cell-phone device requiring both a safe personal identification and password protection. They were saved in the interviewer’s Hamline University’s cloud that is locked by interviewer’s unique identification log in and safe password. All interviews were transcribed by the interviewer. All interviewees signed the consent form.

The conducting of the six individual interviews at locations chosen by each interviewee took place. Two interviews took place in the private offices of the interviewees. They picked this space because they informed me it was private and secure for the interview. The other four each met at separate times and days with this interviewer at a public library in a private meeting room. Assurance of privacy and confidentiality at each location was made and the interviewer and interviewee were the only two present. The six interviewees were asked the same twelve questions.

At each interview began with an explanation of the Out of School Factors (OSFs) that are common among the poor that can significantly affect the health and learning opportunities of children (Berliner, 2009): (1) low birth-weight and non-genetic prenatal influences on children; (2) inadequate medical, dental, and vision care, often a result of inadequate or no medical insurance; (3) food insecurity; (4) environmental pollutants; (5) family relations and family stress; (6) neighborhood characteristics; and (7) extended learning opportunities, such as preschool, after school, and summer school programs that can help to mitigate some of the harm caused by the first six factors.
The final individual interviews were done in person and individually. To begin the interview, and before asking the twelve questions, the interviewees were asked to state their name, age, gender, marital status, number of children, race, ethnic background, years of advocacy, location of home-visiting and whether they worked in urban, suburban, and rural locations. All interviews began by explaining the question: How do family advocates home-visiting in a Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school?

Analysis of the Individual Questions

The purpose of the interviews was to gather the experiences in the actual words of the home-visitors and to find if they had witnessed the out-of-school factors in their own work. I also wanted to explore if the home-visitors saw one or more of the out-of-school factors as described by Berliner’s work within the literature review. The interviews were transcribed and examined to determine relevant ideas, similarities and differences among the interviewees, as well as relevant patterns. The transcripts are not included in the dissertation to protect anonymity and confidentiality.

1. What are your job responsibilities as a Family Advocate/Home-visitor?

All six interviewees responded that they did home-visiting within urban communities. All interviewees had at least twenty years or more experience, with one male interviewee stating he had ten years. This person was the youngest among the group interviewed. Two of the females had additional duties of supervising units of home-visitors and, in addition, did home-visiting also. All but one interviewee had a background in social work. Interviewee 3 worked at home-visiting through her
community-based agency and also did not have a background in social work. Interviewee 3 had adapted to her home-visiting position through her job in a social service agency.

2. Can you tell me about the demographics of the children and families you serve?

All six replied their demographics were predominantly African-American, stating similar percentages between 50 - 60%. Second largest demographics were European Americans and Hispanics. All but one home-visitor had Tribal jurisdictions within their home-visit expectations.

Interviewee 3 was very quick to reply that although African-American children and families were stated as the highest population reported, she believed that this was due to subtle racism. She continued to say that many of the referrals came from social services or county workers who did not understand the family culture of African-American children and families and therefore report about this population more.

Interviewee 1 stated that it is getting very hard to know a race of a child due to many inter-racial marriages or families.

Interviewee 4 also believes that culture plays a large part in referring a family to her. She also feels that because she works with predominantly Spanish-Speaking families many are undocumented and this presents issues for the family as well as other barriers. Interviewee 6 continues that if no one understands the issues that encompass undocumented individuals, they are not able to give the kind of assistance a family will need.
Interviewee 5 retorted that it feels like African-American families and their kids are a large proportion of the clients. He finds that he often asks himself why. Interviewee 5 believes that many of them only suffer from poverty or lack of resources but they are checked out very closely.

The pattern among the interviewees was that African-American children and families are their largest population but in many cases the reports are unfounded due to lack of cultural knowledge, family values, and racism.

This question connected to the literature review of Weiss (1994) that stated that researchers can learn about the work of about cultures and the values they sponsor, and about the challenges people confront as they lead their lives.

3. Describe any frameworks of assessment that help you to provide support to families experiencing poverty and stress.

Because all interviewees worked as county employees or at social services with contracts from the county, most had been trained for the same frameworks of assessment.

Interviewee 1 stated this framework teaches social workers and home-visitors to seek first for strengths rather than weaknesses.

Interviewee 2 said that of course abuse and neglect are always areas to look at but families also possess many strengths. Interviewee 2 believed that this is historically not seen as true through the eyes of the system.

Interviewee 3 comments were similar and she believed there have been too many perceptions regarding families who have been home-visited. Interviewee 3 said that presently they are learning to listen to what the parent has to say and asking what issues
they have instead of leaving them out of the conversation. Interviewee 4 statement supported this. He believes that almost all parents know what is best for their children and people seem to forget this.

Interviewee 5 answered that looking at the strengths of families is hard for the system to do. He added that we have been taught to look for weaknesses and flaws and this has scared many parents away from seeking resources that would help them.

Interviewee 6 commented that many of the needs of families can be a lot easier to fix with the right resources, such as food shelves, but the hardest are housing and medical care. So many have no insurance, including dental which is needed for school exams and completion for entering school or joining activities.

Two respondents, Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 were similar in their responses and expressed the importance of looking at a family's strengths versus their weaknesses. One example was to listen to a parent instead of deciding for them or judging what was seen without allowing an explanation.

Interviewee 1 told a story of a young girl who came to school fifteen minutes late each day. When the principal asked the mother why, she replied that it took her a long time to fix the child’s hair and board the bus on time. The mother suffered from depression and no one had noticed that she drove the child to school each day even with her mental health issue. There was no one giving the mother positive feedback. Regardless of her lateness the child did come each day due to the mother’s follow through. Interviewee 1 continued that many parents make positive attempts to satisfy schools but somehow it goes unnoticed.
Stagner and Duran (1997) wrote about the areas needed for equal opportunity for children to have neighborhoods with community resources such as high-quality schools, parks, libraries, community centers and quality after-school programs along with access to high quality child care. These are all important because the environments allow children to explore and interact in a positive way that supports and fosters their development. What is not mentioned in the literature review is that families can be misunderstood due to systems who have not moved into the Twenty-First Century recognizing the new populations and health issues that bring barriers into their lives and make it difficult to raise their children the way society would like to see children raised.

4. Which stressors or OSFs do you recognize that prevents parents and guardians from sending their children to school?

Interviewee 1 does home visits and said many parents have never had parenting themselves and so they do not know what to do for their own children. Interviewee 1 added that many parents and guardians suffer with mental health issues that interfere with making good choices for their children.

Interviewee 2 stated similarly that many woman have stress due to lack of medical care for themselves or their ill children. They have no one to ask what to do regarding immunizations or special needs of their children. Many new Americans have no insurance, doctors, or resources. They may lack the skills to interpret English and know no one who can help them.
Interviewee 3 stressed that she works with many parents who are battling alcoholism and their children have fetal alcohol syndrome. Without mental health care they are lost.

Interviewee 6 indicated that many immigrants have moved many times and changed complete locations. This moving interrupts their children’s understanding of homework and grade levels their children cannot reach. Families do not always know what schools their children should be attending after they have moved. They are confused and they do not know who to go to for help.

Interviewee 3 seemed to agree with a lot of what JN has stated in this area, and that is that families move so many times during a school year. Many of them move due to poverty and they cannot pay their rent.

Interviewee 4 stated that there is no one-size-fits-all in a family’s assessment. Many parents have multiple issues. Interviewee 4 said, “Of all the issues seen in child protection poverty is huge but if you add race it is even bigger. And for many it has been generational.”

Interviewee 5 has experienced that if you add all the stressors families have and put poverty and social justice on top of these, it is overwhelming for the family and the home-visitor. Interviewee 5 response was similar to Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 4 in that many families move due to poverty and poor neighborhoods infested with insects, rodents and drugs.

What stood out in this question was that medical care for families was very important to help them gain control of their day-to-day living in order to provide
care. Hawley and Gunner (2000) state that family income appears to be more strongly related to children’s ability and achievement than to their emotional outcomes. Children who live in extreme poverty or who live below the poverty line for multiple years appear to suffer the worst outcomes. Children who experience poverty during their preschool and early school years have lower rates of school completion than children and adolescents who experience poverty only in later years (Alberts, 2009). Although more research is needed on the significance of the timing of poverty on child outcomes, findings to date suggest that interventions during early childhood may be most important in reducing poverty’s impact on children (Brooks-Dunn & Duncan, 1997). The issue for many families in poverty is that without full-time employment many of them do not have sufficient incomes or employment with health insurance.

5. What types of supports have been most helpful in addressing the family OSFs you described?

   Interviewee 1 gave strong, definitely not traditional responses. Education neglect and maltreatment are like peeling the onion back, so many layers. For example, if a mother is suffering from mental health issues like depression, she can’t get up in the morning to get her children ready or on a bus. She needs support and mentoring.

   Interviewee 2 would like everyone to know that most parents care about their children. Some may not look like they do but given the right resources we see vast improvements for many.
Interviewee 3 had a similar answer stating that people cannot see how much love is in a family, through all the mess they are going through, they still are very tight and care about each other.

Interviewee 4 believed that parents have to know how to maneuver within the system of schools and law. So many schools have different cultures and parents are struggling to learn about them.

Interviewee 5 replied that teachers don’t have the time and school counselors have large caseloads. He added that he understands this, but the kids continue to suffer, especially if no one at home knows what is going on.

Interviewee 6 believed similarly that many families suffer from lack of supports and said schools are too busy for some kids with bigger issues. Interviewee 6 has found that going directly to school counselors works best because they more open to help with a child’s school credits, classroom curriculum, or community resources needed like ESL. Interviewee 6 has seen that kids can get lost in the system, and schools need to look at the whole picture by connecting and bringing the family’s supports together.

A consensus was that in order for families to do better they needed resources and direction from people in the system. All commented that parents do care about their children and want the best for them.

Berliner (2009) has recommendations on what to do about stress factors and their impact on children. He stated that schools can be powerful influences on youth when those schools are safe and have engaging curriculum and experienced and caring teachers who possess subject matter competency and pedagogical skill. Berliner suggested that
America’s public schools often come up short in these regards. Hawley and Gunner (2000) wrote that even near-perfect schools can show disappointing results, since school effects have limits. In part, this is because of time. Hawley and Gunner (2000) add that today, U.S. students spend about 1,150 waking hours a year in school versus about 4,700 more waking hours per year in their families and neighborhoods.

6. What has helped parents in lessening school absences for their children during the occurrence of the out-of-school factors?

Interviewee 5, Interviewee 1, Interviewee 6, Interviewee 4 said allowing parents a place in making decisions their own children. They need to know we are working with them not against them. Interviewee 2 stated, “When parents know we are allowing them to speak for themselves about their own children, we have less resistance. They feel a part of their child’s success.”

Interviewee 3 responded that it is important for parents to feel empowered by what we are working towards together. Interviewee 3 strongly stated that this gives their next child a better chance too and these parents are now in a position to help others going through the same challenges.

Interviewee 6 believed that knowing the bus and transportation systems is important and commented that “Most parents I serve do not have cars.” Many of the school staff who do not know poverty have a hard time understanding this. Words similarly used by Interviewee 6, Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 3 were “allowing parents to have a voice” or “empowering parents” and “allowing parents speak for themselves.”
Berliner (2009) stated that currently minimal research has been conducted on what types of family resources are needed. The home-visitors’ answers confirmed Berliner’s research that families and children who incur stressors search for positive influences and outcomes for children to be successful in school. They can be put into action through the assistance of community resources and family advocacy.

7. What factors in the school setting made it hard for children to return to school?

Interviewee 1 said that very often it has been behavior issues that make it hard for children to return to school. More and more kids suffer from mental health issues, and trauma is a huge issue in many of our children. Interviewee 1 has witnessed traumas in children who come from war-torn countries where they have seen executions or burning villages. Interviewee 2 remarked that many of the children with gay/transgender issues get bullied and are experiencing great emotional pain or trauma. Many are unaccepted by their own families and don’t know what to do so they become runaways or disappear. Interviewee 3 said that many of the children she visits are in foster care and have experienced loss and grief: Loss of all their childhood possessions and loss of a parent who was suddenly taken away from them.

Interviewee 4 believed many of the teachers are young or not prepared to deal with children’s issues. Even students who are ESL are misunderstood and given other labels by teachers such as low functioning, when it is not so. They just do not know enough English to explain themselves or a situation, or ask for help. Interviewee 5 acknowledged that when parents had a bad school experience, they are more standoffish
and feel uncomfortable coming to school to ask questions. They may even give a bad impression about school to their children.

Interviewee 6 was very emotional when she answered, medical issues. So many kids have asthma these days. It is due to poor housing and air quality. Parents have no medical insurance, or primary care physicians. The Health Departments are being called but it seems to be such a slow process to have anything change in the home.

Loss, trauma, pain, are words familiar to home-visitors. This seemed to have a pattern and it physically showed on some faces of the home-visitors who deal with this population every day.

A review of Berliner’s research about school success showed that many people are concerned about eliminating or at least reducing the achievement gap, but what they fail to acknowledge is the impact of a multitude of factors out of the scope of the school that impact children’s ability to learn in school. Understanding and mitigating these stress factors is one of the key roles that home visitors have in promoting school success.

8. Are there resources or community health programs you found more useful than others to help with parents experiencing stress and/or children experiencing out-of-school factors (OSFs)?

Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 responded “Home-visiting.” Each said that home-visiting provides a close look into families’ lives, seeing their living environments gave you the best opportunity to give assistance where it made the most powerful impact -- at home, together.
Interviewee 1 stated that as a systems professional, she sees organic services for families, such as community churches, or activity centers, but they do not get the same credit as evidence-based programs even though many have shown some success and are friendly for families in the community.

Interviewee 2 believed that parents who are stressed out use home-visiting as a live resource to provide structure through advocates who help mentor them weekly.

Interviewee 3 believed that home-visiting provides mentoring and help to parents for day to day living. Home-visiting is a great helper in providing daily routines for parents struggling with mental health issues, or those lacking in parenting skills.

Interviewee 4 was disappointed that only programs that dominant culture provide seem to get the money and support to keep going. He stated similar observations to Interviewee 1 that many community resources are successful in helping children and families.

Interviewee 5 restated that home-visiting helps family in their most stressful times. Families who have no other members in their families to hear their needs or help with the younger children get time out during home-visiting. Many times they are able to put their children on the county list for child care that provides breaks for those with mental health needs or possibilities for job searching, and placement.

Interviewee 6 felt that there are not a lot of resources or community health programs for people who do not speak English. The waiting is long and many shy away due to immigration status.
9. What was the most important resource parents/guardians needed to keep family stability and health so children could go to school daily?

Interviewee 1 believed that knowledgeable teachers and social workers who are familiar with diverse resources for diverse populations are good resources for families. Even food shelves are important because many communities offer the types of food that new populations are accustomed to.

Interviewee 2 said that families have different cultural needs. Kids need time to adjust in school and in their community. Parents need to know what activities are available for their children after school, school breaks, and during summer vacation.

Interviewee 3 firmly believed that families need mental health professionals that understand traumatized children. Many mothers and children have experienced violence in their homes and neighborhoods. So many go untreated and this is hard to live with daily."

Interviewee 4 had seen similar issues. As an Asian American he had his own adjustments to make since his father had different cultural beliefs than his mother. Growing up it was hard for Interviewee 4, and he stated he could only imagine what it is like for other kids trying to adjust to the school system.

Interviewee 5 had witnessed through his visits that many school climates are very different. If kids move around a lot, they will most likely be visited at one time or another by the educational neglect teams. The educational neglect meetings can add more confusion to a family already stressed by other OSF’s.

Interviewee 6 worried that so many children can benefit from good medical care.
Some of our communities have doctors and dentists who volunteer and serve the most needy, but there still is not enough assistance. Interviewee 6 said that mothers need better prenatal care and the WIC program provides good food for children under five. They get the nutrition they need for good brain development and this so important. Interviewee 6 gave the example that during summer there are food programs for the children whose only meal during the school year was lunch. The food programs offer children of all ages and their parents a free lunch during the day and some serve dinner in the evening.

According to the literature review, the Children’s Defense Fund Minnesota Newsletter (May 2009) stated that many families are visiting food shelves for the first time and searching for medical care because of the loss of jobs or job status. Due to the parent’s/parents’ emotional states and job loss, there is also a concern for families and their children who lack adequate medical care that could provide safe and healthy births, and later, healthy beginnings for a child’s first years of life.

10. Did children return to school daily because of the resources you gave to them to ease OSFs or family stress?

Interviewee 1 proudly stated that child protection has had a combination of successes. Interviewee 1 saw families coming to court when all the perspective system workers came together, and said that everyone was on the same page, medical, school, child protection, and home-visiters. Families improved faster with this approach.

Interviewee 2 said helping families gain stable housing made a big difference.
Kids were going to their schools where their friends were. They did not have to make great changes. Homework was less, but workable to help the student get back on track.

Interviewee 3 supported the fact that when parents had help with medical care, they felt better and took better care of their kids. Interviewee 3 believed the Obama Care really helped them.

Interviewee 4 witnessed that when someone helped kids with their homework, they were able to catch up and that was important. When he went to their homes and helped they confided in him that they were embarrassed to go back to school because they felt “dumb” because they did not know what to do anymore. They felt lost.

Interviewee 5 saw many families who felt ashamed because they did not have enough food for their families and they did not like going to ask at food shelves. But some of them began to volunteer at the food shelves and the shame slowly left. They felt like they were working and not just receiving.

Interviewee 6 had said that many of her Spanish-Speaking clients did not know how to make many of the foods that were on the shelf at the donation centers. When she home-visited, she gave cooking lessons and it was enjoyable for them. The mothers felt empowered that they could make new recipes, like mac and cheese that their kids loved or ate at school. She also learned new recipes they shared with her.

In the literature review, the Consortium (2009) recommends efforts that can be made. This included reducing the numbers of low birth-weight children among African Americans, reducing drug and alcohol abuse, and reduce pollutants in our cities. The Consortium also recommends moving people away from toxic sites, providing universal
and free medical care for all citizens, and ensuring that no one suffers from food insecurity. The Consortium believes that in reducing the rates of family violence in low-income households, along with improving mental health services among the poor and more equitable distribution of low-income housing throughout communities can help immensely. But the Consortium also says we must find ways to reduce both the mobility and absenteeism rates of children, provide high-quality preschools for all children, along with providing summer programs for the poor to reduce summer losses in their academic achievement.

11. Are there any interventions or resources for families you found unavailable? If yes what are they?

Interviewee 1 was saddened that medical care was not always available or if an appointment was made families had to wait for long periods of time. She stated concerns especially for pregnant mothers and children with special needs or terminal illnesses.

Interviewee 2 said it was important to have dental care for children, but it was very difficult to find. Many of the kids were losing their teeth, had cavities, or needed molars removed.

Interviewee 3 agreed with Interviewee 2 statement that dental for young children is very necessary. Many of the children did not have toothbrushes. Some used small clothes in place of a toothbrush and rubbed their teeth with baking soda or just warm water.

Interviewee 4 said he saw time and again how the high cost of after-school
activities prevented many of the children from attending. He firmly believes it was necessary for the children to attend the after-school activities because of the danger in their neighborhoods. Drugs, prostitution, and predators were present, so after school students to come directly home, lock doors, and stay in until their mother came home, many times very late. Many kids did not get good exercise, fresh air, or time to just play. Some of them had gained a lot of weight because of lack of play and exercise.

Interviewee 5 was told by families that they did not trust the system, which included schools. So, the school was off-limits when it came time to find out information for their children or just to ask questions about homework or field trips.

Interviewee 6 thought teachers could have helped more and said that many did not know poverty in their own lives, so they were unaware of what was happening to students in their classrooms. They misjudged students because they didn’t know what the children were going through.

Hennepin County Research, Planning and Development Department (2009) in its Education for Success Program states that many schools have a one-size-fits-all orientation, not easily accommodating the differences in talents and interests among youth or helping them cope in ways that youth find nurturing or useful, with school as well as non-school factors associated with family, community, society, and life’s problems. Such non-school factors, in fact, exert a powerful influence on student.

12. Is there anything more you would like to add or I may have forgotten to ask you?

Interviewee 1 thought we need to look further at more teachers of color in the classrooms and said she was not sure if this is the answer, but thinks it would
help. Teachers of color may have the same experiences as the students and be able to help them at a deeper level.

Interviewee 2 stressed that children need to like school or love it. If another adult person at school would show some of the kids they care, this could be their way to believe in school again. Even the janitor could do this, or the cook. Kids would look forward to going to school versus not going.

Interviewee 3 was quick to say that she loves her work because her location of work is in the school. She gets to work with all the school personnel. She said, “We come together for the child and family and it feels like a team, parents feel better about having a voice that is heard.”

Interviewee 4 responded that he did not have anything now but may get back later if he thought of anything else. As of this writing he has not continued any further thoughts on this subject.

Interviewee 5 was strong in stating that parents care about their kids. African-American families need more mentoring and need to feel positive, not bad about parenting.

Interviewee 6 let the interviewer know she will call if she thought of anything more. As of this writing she has not continued any further thoughts on this subject.

After reviewing the transcripts of the individual interviews, it appears that what most home-visitors have in common is the care and effort they put into the families they serve. Their descriptions of families were positive and home-visiting provided a way to make many breakthroughs that other parts of the social system could not. Going into a
home and seeing parents in their own environment, how they live, eat, and where they sleep gave them an inside look at what families were going through, how they were making do with what they had, despite their issues.

Home-visiting families was a way to ensure that many services for children were accepted and followed through by the parents or caregivers. Creating a team with the parent, home-visitor, and child helped to ensure school attendance could be met daily. Many families learned skills from home-visitors but it was also clear that the families gave vital learning information to the home-visitor to enable them to help the next family.

I found that the questions and interview responses related directly to all of the OSFs. The answers reflected the stress on families who had one or more of the OSFs that included medical, food insecurity, environments or housing, family relations or stress and neighborhood characteristics. All the families discussed had family stress due to one or more of these stressors which was in agreement to Berliner’s work on this subject.

**Group Interview Analysis**

The group interview was small with three out of the six returning to the discussion of the Out of School Factors (OSFs) that occur in families they serve within their work as home-visitors.

The group interview meeting was held at a library in a safe, private meeting room. Its purpose was to provide a chance to think further about the questions that were presented during the individual interview or add to anything they did not say in their
individual interviews. The three respondents present were all female: two African-Americans and one Mexican-American (Interviewees 1, 3, and 6).

They discussed the twelve questions and exchanged what they had expressed in their own words.

Interviewee 1 had an additional thought about her work as she home-visited with families. She talked about many of her families who did not have enough storage and their clothing was tossed around a room. The young children had a hard time finding what to wear the next day and when they did their clothing was very wrinkled. Interviewee 1 went to the grocery store before her next visit and got empty, clean boxes. Interviewee 1 took the boxes into the home and gave one to the mother and each of her children. They all began folding and sorting their clothes. The children even colored and drew pictures on their boxes and put their names on them too. Interviewee 1 explained that this was a happy moment for the mother as she was not an organizer and she found a new skill. At the same time, she felt the children learned a skill too, and it was a great time to say, “Now you can find your clothes and get to school on time.”

Interviewee 6 told her story of taking a mother to the food shelf. When they arrived there were not enough foods that the mother was familiar with and did not know how to cook some of them or knew what they were. Interviewee 6 helped the mother at home cooking some of the food, and the family, especially the children, loved what they made. Interviewee 6 felt she introduced this family to better nutrition and some new foods. The mother now goes to the food shelf once a month and is not afraid to try new foods. She will even call Interviewee 6 up and ask questions regarding new
foods. Interviewee 6 says this is a new skill because the mother would never call before that time.

Interviewee 3 responded with her own story of home-visiting. Interviewee 3 recalled many times trying to teach a skill that everyone thinks is easy: making a much-needed appointment for the children to go to a doctor. Interviewee 3 said she will give the mother the phone number of the doctor, wait with her to call, and then help the parent put it on the calendar. Interviewee 3 said, “That should be easy, right?” She explained that if you are a low-functioning parent or have mental illness it is not easy. Interviewee 3 felt certain that if you can help build a pattern, then many parents or guardians can follow and know what to do for their children’s care. Interviewee 3 added that it is important to do, and you may have to repeat it, but sooner or later they catch on. She is proud of helping her families become independent.

The stories were very important to share and exchanging these stories helped validate the work of home-visiting and the power the home-visitors profess it has for families.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the rationale for selecting qualitative research framework including the strengths of this methodology to help answer this research question: How do family advocates home-visiting in a Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school? I continued with the interview method selected from the Robert Weiss interview model. Each of the twelve questions were presented by asking each respondent the same identical questions. The interviewer
used numbers as a reference to identify the participant’s responses. Each individual interview was driven by a set of questions based on the relevance of my primary question. Every attempt was made to not ask the respondents any leading questions or pose any statements that implied I was looking for a specific answer.

Chapter Five that follows represents a summary of the findings, a reflection on the findings, and the recommendations of this study.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

The focus of this study was how family advocates home-visiting in a Midwestern urban area describe the impact of family stress on children’s learning and success in school. This research focused on home-visiting through the lived experience of family advocates. Throughout this chapter, the terms family advocates and home-visitors will be interchangeable.

The significance of the study is based on the Out of School Factors (OSFs) that are common among the poor that can significantly affect the health and learning opportunities of children (Berliner, 2009): (1) low birth-weight and non-genetic prenatal influences on children; (2) inadequate medical, dental, and vision care, often a result of inadequate or no medical insurance; (3) food insecurity; (4) environmental pollutants; (5) family relations and family stress; (6) neighborhood characteristics; and (7) extended learning opportunities, such as preschool, after school, and summer school programs that can help to mitigate some of the harm caused by the first six factors. These out-of-school factors can influence what occurs in families with children not attending school regularly and are shown to have powerful effects in a child’s learning and daily attendance. The effects described by the home-visitors show great similarities to Berliner’s own research on the OSFs through the interviewing process of this dissertation.

Vital information within the OSFs was important to research due to growing numbers of children not attending school because they have experienced one or more of the out-of-school factors that interrupt their attendance and learning. The focus in this
field has been mainly on children who are not attending school, leaving out the important issues of why that may not be addressed. The intention of this study was to extend the Berliner OSFs more broadly to schools and educational systems, along with my own findings, which may help others to understand the barriers and stress many families have at home.

**Connections to the Literature Review**

The interviews are closely related to my literature review where Patton (2005) stated that qualitative research analyzes data gathered directly from any or a combination of the following: fieldwork observations; in-depth, open-ended interviews, and written documents. Patton further stated that qualitative research focuses on naturalistic inquiry that studies real-world settings with the goal of generating narrative descriptions that yield patterns and themes. Using a qualitative framework helped me investigate and understand the lived experiences of the interviewees and to attempt to extract similar themes of each. The literature also noted that Noddings (1991) emphasized that narrative inquiry has the power to direct and even change lives. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) echoed this.

The interview method selected was Robert Weiss’ (1994) who wrote, “Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others.” (p. 1). Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived. Weiss wrote that if we have the right informants we can learn about the quality of neighborhoods or what happens in families or how organizations set their goals. Interviewing can inform us about the nature of social life. Weiss also stated that
researchers can learn about the work of occupations and how people fashion careers, about cultures and the values they sponsor, and about the challenges people confront as they lead their lives.

According to Berliner (2009), many families with children may possess more than one or more stressors which can engage home visitors more intensely with the family and can make resourcing very important. Berliner believes that children experiencing one or more of the OSFs can be hindered in both learning and attendance. This is especially true for families in poverty.

Summary of Findings

The family advocates across the interviews talked about their visits that seemed to be important to each. At different times, some spoke of how preparation before a visit was significant. Getting to know the information for a family beforehand was important. Who the children are, ages, who are the parents or caregivers, what paperwork for consent was necessary.

A second finding was making sure each home-visitor made the families feel safe with the confidential information they would talk about and respecting the home and individuals living there. Both family and visitor welcomed each other and relaxed just as they or the visitor would do with company.

Third, explaining services that will be provided is important because families regard many county services as intrusive or unfriendly. All family advocates regarded this as a way to make or break the relationship with the parent or caregiver. The best strategy was to explain and be honest about what the visitor could do and have culturally
appropriate community resources that would be advantageous for other issues the family was having. This was a large part of the visitors’ work because the resources depended on their own partnerships they made with other organizations.

Sharing ideas was another finding. Home-visitors and families can learn from each other in many ways. This also helped a family get validation that they were on the right track and that meant they could be empowered to continue their care for their children with confidence. The home-visitors expressed that they learned a lot from each family or visit.

Working with families where they are was a finding that was expressed in their frameworks of assessments. Home-visitors found that a relationship with a family should be based on strengths versus deficits.

**Implications of the Study**

The study shows that a focus should be on young children and students that the non-school factors affect most, especially those whose families face poverty and high family stresses (Berliner, 2009). Professionals serving this population may find the knowledge of these factors helpful in recognizing how they are associated with family, community, society, and life’s problems for low-income children and how they can hinder school success (Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004). With this understanding and knowledge, professionals can include the non-school factors in their teachings, research, methods, and programs that will deepen learning and help to create healthier outcomes for students and young children.
Under the leadership of the Department of Education, the Obama Administration charted a course toward ensuring that every student in America is prepared for college and a career (US Department of Education, 2014). The budget plan pairs new and ongoing K-12 investments with an ambitious new preschool initiative to prepare four-year-olds for learning, and with college cost reforms to improve access, retention, and graduation rates for all students. The budget also focuses on improving student learning outcomes in mathematics and science, and on preparing students for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) career opportunities. During Obama’s presidential term the Democratic Party stated that children and their families deserved more and continued to say that our country needed to support children from cradle to college.

During the writing of this dissertation, the nation’s public schools were facing enormous challenges. Teachers working in the K-12 grades continue to face gaps in understanding how to help families who are highly mobile, have children who did not attend school regularly, were ill, or where one or more members had been suffering from mental illness or family traumas. Schools also experience the influx of new immigrants who speak new languages and dialects. The lack of information and assistance needed to serve diverse populations is overwhelming to districts and the relationships among community, schools and families can be affected. Discussions continue on what can be done to assist students and their families directly or ease conditions families are going through that affect their children.
Schools are being asked to educate some of the most diverse student bodies and families are reaching for information and assistance in health and education that can help them understand the systems they need to navigate in order to help them thrive.

**Plan for Communicating or Using Results**

Communications need to be made so home-visiting services are used more to assist families. Strategies can be developed to improve the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of home-based services must be considered. Improvement of community linkages for family resources should aim for a more seamless continuum. Another important communication is to focus on improving the quality of home-visiting services, which might take the form of improved training and supervision for staff, better data collection, enhanced evaluation, or other activities. Both require strong leadership from organizations and each has the potential to maximize available resources.

It would be important to communicate to both public and private leaders to help assist home-visiting programs and ultimately families through performing more research on how to effectively deliver different models of service. Asking federal leadership to support state and local home-visiting programs, especially in funding, is important. It will be beneficial to keep an on-going conversation to practitioners, service organizations and policy makers to increase the understanding of the role and limits of home-visiting, especially for younger children.

State-level leaders should keep informed regarding the improvement of the quality of home-visiting services, more effectively replicate model programs, and link home-visiting programs to other efforts focused on promoting optimal early childhood
health and development. They can do this by implementing deliberate strategies, policies and program designs to achieve quality and improved child and family outcomes from their investments in home-visiting.

Policy makers can also help communities and programs to align the home-visiting interventions with family needs. Early childhood professionals can assist in supporting a continuum of early childhood services that can address a wide range of family needs and achieve results in a cost-effective manner. Professionals can administer affordable staff training and promote quality by making them affordable, especially to nonprofit organizations. Both for-profit and nonprofit centers can analyze current spending on home-visiting programs to blend funding where necessary. Funding must also support research and data systems that can expand the knowledge of programs and what is needed for the future to keep programs advanced intact.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study was concerned with the family stressors (Out of School Factors) that prevent young children from moving successfully from one grade to another. The interviews sought to capture how family advocates see what families are experiencing in their lives and what hinders their children's daily attendance in school.

There were five limitations to the study. First, the sample size was small because of the limited number of family advocates who had more experience in the role. Other potential interviewees were not as seasoned in the work or did not have a depth of education or necessary experience in the home-visiting experience. Second, there was one interview with each respondent. Follow-up interviews could have expanded the data
collected. Third, the group interview was conducted with three of the six original interviewees. More participants would have provided more data. Fourth, this study focused on one county in one state. Interviewing home-visitors in other counties with different or similar demographics might have yielded different results. A fifth limitation was all respondents received their training from the county where they had direct services to the families. This meant the frameworks for assessment that many worked under were also similar. The interviewees regarded the frameworks for assessment as a good evidenced based practice to use with their families.

In general, many of the answers were similar, but provided in-depth and valuable information for this study and for the field of home-visiting.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Many ideas resonated with my own experiences and the concepts of the literature reviews I had made. There were not many responses that were unfamiliar, in fact many of them I had found very familiar after working in the field for many years.

Family advocates that I have worked with over the past play an important and intricate role in home-visiting families whose children are experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, and attempted suicide. It was also important to note that all six interviewees stressed the importance of treating all families the same, acknowledging that all of them have strengths and all of them care about their children.

Our county has commented many times on the need for home-visitors working in both for-profit and nonprofit settings. Hennepin County Research, Planning and Development Department (2009), state that much of the work for children and families
could not be done without the advanced knowledge of culture, linguistics, and family dynamics that “relevant” community practitioners practice.

Children need a public commitment to solve poverty. With a strong public commitment, eliminating child poverty is possible. There are many examples of programs doing exceptional work to give children the essential foundations they need to grow and become positive adults. In doing preliminary literature searches, I have found that across the country, there are programs that are making a difference. Many programs recognize the non-school factors that are important for families to engage in their child’s school, and most importantly, create healthy outlooks for their children’s education.

Little was written about the impact communities have on a family’s ability to increase their child’s chances of progressing in school. Schools claim that families must be more helpful in their child’s academics and attendance. Families claim schools must do more for their children and understand a family’s dynamics, language, and beliefs in making them a part of their child’s school experience. What has been left out of the circle is the help that lies between them – communities. Communities help both the family and school work together providing many resources and opportunities for additional learning.

Today’s economic hard times are affecting the minds and bodies of young children in Minnesota and around the world. The lessons learned from home-visitors regarding children who are stuck within the economic crisis confirms the value of visits with parents and must continue to be told to educators and policymakers regarding the lives of those stricken by poverty.
References


Minnesota Statutes. (2011). 120A.22 COMPULSORY INSTRUCTION


http://www.unicef.hr/show.jsp?page=159295

Appendix A

Individual Interview Questions

Out of school factors or OSFs are common among the poor that significantly affect the health and learning opportunities of children. They are: (1) low birth-weight and non-genetic prenatal influences on children; (2) inadequate medical, dental, and vision care, often a result of inadequate or no medical insurance; (3) food insecurity; (4) environmental pollutants; (5) family relations and family stress; and (6) neighborhood characteristics. These OSFs are related to a host of poverty-induced physical, sociological, and psychological problems that children often bring to school, ranging from neurological damage and attention disorders to excessive absenteeism, linguistic underdevelopment, and oppositional behavior. A seventh OSF, extends learning opportunities, such as preschool, after school, and summer school programs that can help to mitigate some of the harm caused by the first six factors.

With these questions in mind:

1. What are your job responsibilities as a Family Advocate/Home visitor?
2. Can you tell me about the demographics of the children and families you serve?
3. Describe any frameworks of assessment that help you to provide support to families experiencing poverty and stress.
4. Which stressors or OSFs do you recognize that prevents parents and guardians from sending their children to school?
5. What types of supports have been most helpful in addressing the family OSFs you described?
6. What has helped parents in lessening school absences for their children during the occurrence of the OSFs?

7. What factors in the school setting made it hard for children to return to school?

8. Are there resources or community health programs you found more useful than others to help with parents experiencing stress and/or children experiencing OSFs?

9. What was the most important resource parents/guardians needed to keep family stability and health so children could go to school daily?

10. Did children return to school daily because of the resources you gave to them to ease OSFs or family stress?

11. Are there any interventions or resources for families you found unavailable? If yes what are they?

12. Is there anything more you would like to add or I may have forgotten to ask you?
Appendix B

Group Interview Questions

1. What are some of the questions from your individual interview that you would like to further discuss?

2. Have you found new skills to your home-visiting that have benefited the families you visit?

3. What new resources have you discovered that have increased assistance to families and eliminated some stress?

4. What stories from your own home-visiting experience can you share today?
Appendix C

Interviewees Demographics

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