

TENNESSEE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF A SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGIST

by

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my mother, Denice Maria Hoffeditz, who worked tirelessly to better the lives and education of her students. For my father, Daniel Lee Hoffeditz, who always believes in my ability to be successful in whatever I choose to do. None of my success in life would be possible without the love and support of my incredible parents.

“I am a more complete human being having experienced parenting, teaching, and special education. The parent helps me to see goodness in all children, while the teacher seeks daily to uncover the many talents of my students. The special educator never gives up because she knows that all children deserve the chance to learn in their best way, no matter where their abilities lie.”

Denice Marie Hoffeditz

Philosophy of Education, 1994

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine Tennessee teachers' perceptions of the role of a school psychologist. Participants included ($n = 101$) current and former teachers that had practiced in the state of Tennessee for a minimum of 1 year. Respondents answered a variety of questions related to their experiences working with school psychologists. Results showed that despite most of the teachers reporting limited knowledge of school psychology, they were satisfied with their school psychologists, found them to be generally helpful, and were likely to implement their recommendations. The teachers identified psycho-educational assessment as the service in that they would most likely consult a school psychologist and expressed a desire to have a school psychologist at their school more often.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

I distinctly remember the moment I decided to become a school psychologist. I had spent almost four years working on my bachelor's degree in psychology, and I was still undecided on what graduate degree to pursue. I knew two things, I loved psychology and I had a passion for working in the school system. I remember being encouraged by a fellow coworker in a district where I did substitute teaching to look into school psychology. I had never heard of the field but quickly began doing research.

From the beginning, I knew the field was the best choice for me, and I was disappointed I had not been introduced earlier. That was the start of the long journey of correcting people that I was not going to school to become a school counselor. In fact, I have yet to meet someone who needs no explanation of what a school psychologist does. I find that many of the people who work in the school system share this confusion. Professionals (e.g., teachers, principals, speech pathologists) that I thought would be very familiar with the career I had chosen, needed an explanation of the school psychologist's role. I quickly discovered that this is the unfortunate reality seemingly due in part to a devastating shortage of school psychologists that the *National Association of School Psychologists* often discusses (2016). Many districts do not have an appropriate ratio of school psychologists to students and some, like the district where I first worked, have no school psychologists at all. I wondered whether if schools were adequately staffed if perhaps more people would be

familiar with the work school psychologists do. Is it a typical occurrence for school psychologists to have their roles misunderstood or is it an isolated misconception for people that live in small rural towns like my hometown who have limited access to school psychologists?

How often do school psychologists have to explain their role in the schools they work? When I scrolled through different social media groups for school psychologists, I saw many comments from disappointed school psychologists that discussed how this is not an uncommon occurrence. Why is this such a problem? Perhaps, because the role of a school psychologist is one that frequently changes. A recent article featured in the *NASP Communique* explains how some school districts are working on expanding the role of school psychologists from primarily test-and-place to include prevention and serving the mental health needs of the students (Rivka, 2018). School psychologists are experts in education and mental health and are highly qualified to help address the needs of students and schools. A school psychologist is trained to provide many services, but their unique qualifications are often overlooked or misconstrued (Armistead et al., 2013; NASP, 2016)

This study is a continuation of a portion of a previous master's thesis in which the ultimate goal of the research was to determine if school psychologists' job satisfaction levels had changed since Tennessee's 2014 mandatory implementation of RtI² (Warner, 2018). In the third section of Warner's (2018) survey were questions that asked about the very issues I had been so curious. In this section, a subscale called *Perception of Role Expansion* included questions that were designed to assess whether administrators and teachers understood that the roles of school psychologists are changing. The questions were meant to assess the

supervisors' support of the school psychologists' changing roles and if school staff viewed the school psychologist as a resource. Fifty percent of the school psychologists reported that they did not believe that administrators at their school(s) understood the expanding role of a school psychologist. Fifty-four percent of the school psychologists said that teachers at their school(s) do not seem to understand the expanding roles of school psychologists. Seventy-one percent of the school psychologists agreed that their direct supervisor supports the role expansion of school psychologists. Eighty-one percent of school psychologists believed that administrators viewed them as a resource for understanding RtI² data and 71% believed that teachers viewed them as a resource for understanding RtI² data. Thirty-four percent of the school psychologists reported that they did not believe their school counselors saw them as capable of providing mental health services to students (Warner, 2018).

The data from Warner's (2018) research suggests that many school psychologists feel that their role is not understood by school staff. My interest is to find whether these feelings of being misunderstood are consistent with how teachers perceive school psychologists. Previous research suggests that many teachers carry similar perceptions to one another, but will this hold true when surveying teachers in Tennessee? Aside from the research conducted by Mark Warner (2018), there is little information out there regarding this topic and the state of Tennessee specifically. Even less research has been done about teacher perceptions of the role of a school psychologist. The purpose of my current research was to explore how teachers in Tennessee perceive the role of a school psychologist. Do they find us helpful? What do they think we do? Do they know the depths of our training? Do they think we just test for special education placement or do they think they can call on us for school crises or

mental health needs? Better insight into the thoughts and expectations of those we work so closely will allow us to tailor our role of a school psychologist to better meet a teacher's needs. The implementation of RtI² in Tennessee meant changes for the role of a school psychologist which in turn may have changed the perceptions of their role.

The Revised- RtI² Implementation Guide (2016) states that school psychologists are responsible for reviewing progress monitoring data and special education academic interventions. They may also be required to spend an increased amount of time to discover why a student continues to struggle academically. School psychologists may be asked to serve on teams surrounding Specific Learning Disability (SLD) referrals, consult with teachers about research-based curriculum, perform gap analyses to monitor progress and/or suggest changes to interventions, provide in-service training about RtI² intervention guidelines, and formally assess some students who have continuing intervention needs (Revised-RtI² Implementation Guide, 2016). Warner's (2018) research did not show a statistically significant difference in Tennessee school psychologists' job satisfaction between pre- and post-mandatory implementation of RtI², $t(118) = 0.05, p = 0.9606$.

Teachers' Perceptions of the School Psychologist's Role in Iowa and Wisconsin

The purpose of Panske's (2008) study was to understand the perceptions teachers have of school psychologists so that school psychologists could effectively transition their role to what is most helpful in the school system. The participants included 250 teachers from Iowa and 250 teachers from Wisconsin. Wisconsin schools were at the initial stages of implementing a response to intervention model and, therefore, their school psychologists were thought to have a more traditional role as compared to school psychologists in Iowa

(Panske, 2008). Teachers completed a three-page questionnaire where they indicated which of the typical responsibilities listed the school psychologists in their school engaged. Other items asked the teachers to rate how important those responsibilities are to their school system (Panske, 2008).

Results showed that the teacher's perspective of what they thought was important was consistent with the services school psychologists provided. Starting with most important, the top four activities engaged in by school psychologists were perceived to be: (a) consulting with administrators, (b) consulting with teachers, (c) consulting with parents, and (d) evaluating students for special education eligibility (Panske, 2008). The top four activities thought to be the most important were: (a) consulting with teachers, (b) consulting with parents, (c) consulting with administrators, and (d) evaluating students for special education eligibility (Panske, 2008).

Teachers' responses were similar between the two states (Panske, 2008). The findings were encouraging because the services school psychologists were said to provide most, were also the services teachers felt were the most important. The teachers also believed that the most unimportant services were the same services school psychologists did not often provide. The bottom four activities performed by school psychologists were perceived to be: (a) developing curriculum, (b) assessing English language learners, (c) evaluating effectiveness of academic programs, and (d) conducting research. Panske's (2008) research showed that school psychologists from Wisconsin and Iowa were providing teachers with services they felt were important and beneficial.

Other results from Panske (2008) indicated that teachers believed school psychologists were more likely to engage in traditional activities rather than nontraditional role activities. A traditional role was described as a school psychologist evaluating students for special education eligibility, completing paperwork/writing reports, participating on pre-referral teams, developing IEP goals, and case managing students with 504 plans.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) defines the traditional practice of the school psychologist as involving three basic roles: (a) assessment, (b) intervention, and (c) consultation (NASP, 2016). Assessment includes collecting data, observing students, teachers and the classroom environment, testing, collecting assessment results, and writing reports (NASP, 2016). Intervention is defined as taking the assessment findings and developing recommendations and interventions (NASP, 2016). Consultation is a cooperative process of working with teachers to establish different interventions for students in a classroom (NASP, 2016). Nontraditional roles were defined as: (a) consulting with administration, (b) consulting with teachers, (c) consulting with parents, (d) conducting mental health screenings, (e) providing crisis intervention services, (f) developing/implementing behavioral intervention plans, (g) providing individual counseling services, (h) developing/designing academic interventions, (i) providing group counseling services, (j) conducting home visits, and (k) providing social skills training (Panske, 2008)

The results from Panske's (2008) study showed that teachers did not find a statistically significant difference in the importance between traditional and nontraditional role activities. Compared to Iowa, the teachers in Wisconsin saw their school psychologists as more likely to engage in the following: outside agency referrals, special education

evaluations, paperwork/report writing, consulting with parents, participating on committees, being a part of crisis intervention teams, and attending professional conferences (Panske, 2008). Overall, the teachers' perceptions suggest that school psychologists in Iowa and Wisconsin engage in traditional role functions more frequently than broad role functions (Panske, 2008).

Teachers' Perceptions of the School Psychologist's Role in Georgia, Nebraska, Arizona and Florida

Gilman and Gabriel (2004) found that teachers believed that school psychologists should provide more individual and group counseling services to students. Teachers and administrators across four states were asked to complete a survey about their perceptions of school psychology. The purpose of the study was to assess the following: (a) the level of teachers' and administrators' knowledge of school psychologists' role, (b) teachers' and administrators' satisfaction of services provided by their school psychologist, (c) perceived helpfulness of services provided by their school psychologist, (d) perceptions of the roles/functions of school psychologists, and (e) the desired roles/functions of school psychologists.

One thousand, seven hundred thirteen educational professionals participated in the study. These participants were from Georgia, Nebraska, Arizona, and Florida. Two of the districts were in rural settings, two were in suburban settings, and four in urban settings. Participants rated their knowledge of school psychology using a 4-point scale, with 4 being the most knowledgeable. Additionally, the participants were asked to rate how serious a student's problem should be before they referred the child to a school psychologist.

The results indicated that teachers reported significantly less knowledge of school psychological services (*somewhat knowledgeable*) than administrators (*moderately knowledgeable*). Regarding satisfaction with school psychological services, results showed that teachers were only *somewhat satisfied*, and administrators were *very satisfied*. Administrators rated school psychologists as *very helpful* whereas teachers only rated them as *moderately helpful*. Teachers reported that the problems should be *moderate* in degree of severity and school psychologists and administrators believe that the problem should be *less serious, but noticeable*.

Teachers' Perceptions of the School Psychologist's Role in the Suburban Southwest

Watkins, Crosby, and Pearson (2001) surveyed teachers from a suburban school district in the southwestern United States that employed a total staff of 1220 employees. The district had 17 school psychologists who served around 23,000 students. Questionnaires were distributed to the school staff (i.e., special/regular education teachers, support staff, and administrator) and 522 were returned. The participants included 419 regular education teachers, 18 administrators, 52 special education teachers and 33 support staff. The questionnaire listed 8 roles (consultation, counseling, assessment/special education input, school-community liaison, staff development, crisis intervention, behavior management, and parent education) along with a description of each role (Watkin et al., 2001). The questionnaire asked the respondents to rate the importance of each role for their self and their school.

The results showed that regular and special education teachers had different perceptions of the importance of assessment and special education input roles (Watkins et al.,

2001). Compared to regular education teachers, special education teachers perceived assessment and special education input as roles that were more important. Compared to secondary level staff, elementary level staff found consultation, assessment, and behavior management roles to be more important. Respondents rated six service roles (assessment, special education input, consultation, counseling, crisis intervention, behavior management) as *very important* and school-community liaison and parent education roles as *fairly important* and found staff development roles to be only *somewhat important*. The overwhelming majority of the respondents (82%) reported that they wanted school psychologists to provide services at their school five days a week. Teachers' open-ended feedback often acknowledged the school psychologists' heavy workload, expressed satisfaction with individual school psychologists and sometimes wrote of their frustration with the discrepancy between the services they wanted and those they received (Watkins et al., 2001).

More Teachers' Perceptions of the School Psychologist's Role in Iowa

In a study conducted by Gonzalez, Nelson, Gutkin, and Shwery (2004), 403 teachers from Iowa were surveyed about their perceptions of consulting with a school psychologist. In this study, consultation was defined as "working with school personnel and parents to develop intervention plans and provide information" (Gonzalez et al., 2004, p. 2). The initial part of the questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate the number of times they consulted with a school psychologist in a typical school year. Next, the respondents were asked to provide answers to questions involving their demographics, teaching experience, and experiences with school psychologists. In the final part of the survey, the respondents

used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to indicate their level of agreement with each of the items in the survey. The following are examples of questions included in the Gonzalez et al. (2004) questionnaire:

- (a) My school psychologist's primary role should be to test for special education eligibility purposes, (b) My school psychologist has expertise that is different from my own, (c) My school psychologist, in my opinion, is a skilled listener, (d) I believe my school psychologist is empathetic, (e) I feel my principal supports school based consultation with my school psychologist, (f) Consultation with my school psychologist is an efficient use of my time, and (g) Consultation is a 'give and take' in that we both have something important to give and gain from the experience (p. 7).

Twenty seven percent of the surveys were completed and returned. For the returned surveys, the average age for teachers was 44 years. The respondents taught for an average of 14 years at their current school and 19 total teaching of years. The average number of students in a school building was 407, and the school psychologist spent an average of 9 hours per week in the school building. Ninety percent of the respondents were women, and the majority (60%) worked in rural schools (Gonzalez et al., 2004).

Findings showed that the number of hours the school psychologist was in the building per week was positively correlated ($r = .30$) with the teacher's perception of the school psychologist's helpfulness (Gonzalez et al., 2004). This meant that the school psychologists who were at the school more often were perceived to be more helpful than those who were

there less often. Of the comments written in the margins of the returned surveys, most were related to the availability of the school psychologist. The teachers expressed that the school psychologists are not often available at their own schools because they worked at multiple schools. Wanting to increase the availability of the school psychologist was an important concern (Gonzalez et al., 2004). These findings were consistent with research conducted by Carner and Alpert (1995) who also found that teachers perceived school psychologists to be more helpful and necessary if they were on available regular basis rather than only a few days a week.

Teachers' Perception of the School Psychologist's Role in IEP Meetings

Arivett, Rust, Brissie and Dansby (2007) surveyed a national sample of special education teachers and asked about their perception of a school psychologist's role at IEP meetings. Participants completed a survey that included questions related to special education teachers' experiences at individualized education program (IEP) meetings. A total of 400 questionnaires were sent out and 115 were returned. Of the 115 participants, 105 were female, 9 were male, and one person did not specify their gender (Arivett et al., 2007). The participants reported that they worked with the following grades: elementary level ($n = 54$), middle school level ($n = 24$), high school level ($n = 28$), preschool level ($n = 8$), and one person was missing data (Arivett et al., 2007). The participants reported averages of 14 years in education and 8.7 years in their current professional role (Arivett et al., 2007).

The respondents indicated the number of IEP meetings they attended in the last year and the number of those meetings that a school psychologist had attended. Additionally, the respondents reported the number of the meetings led by each of the following: school

administrator, school psychologist, school counselor, special education coordinator, and special education teacher. Using a Likert scale (1 = *harmful*, 2 = *of no importance*, 3 = *of little importance*, 4 = *of considerable importance*, 5 = *extremely helpful*), the respondents rated the helpfulness/importance of the school psychologists at the meetings.

The results showed that the special education teachers had on average, 34.8 IEP meetings each year and a school psychologist was reported as attending 37% of those meetings. The teachers rated the school psychologist's helpfulness/importance as $M = 3.8$ ($SD = .998$), this is described as *of considerable importance* (Arivett et al., 2007). There was a positive correlation between participation in and leadership of IEP meetings by school psychologists ($r = .46$) with ratings of helpfulness/importance by special education teachers ($r = .31$). This indicated that the more meetings the school psychologists attended; the more helpful/important the special education teachers reported the school psychologists to be (Arivett et al., 2007).

Teachers' Perceptions of the Schools Psychologist's Role in Michigan and Indiana

Ball State University researchers, Peterson, Waldron, and Paulson (1998), surveyed sixty-four practicing teachers from Michigan and Indiana. The survey given to participants consisted of 3 primary sections: (a) demographic information, (b) existing roles and interactions with school psychologists, and (c) degree to which teachers want information that benefits their teaching (Peterson et al., 1998). A variety of question structures were used including likert scale items, ranking choices, open-ended questions, and a yes/no format (Peterson et al., 1998).

Results showed that 89% of the teachers had talked to a school psychologist at some point. However, the number of total professional interactions were small, with 72% of teachers having only 0-5 professional interactions with a school psychologist during a typical school year (Peterson et al., 1998). Comments from the teachers included: "All we get from the school psychologist are test results", "We don't work with school psychologists-We just get the results of the tests." Only 1% of teachers had had more than 16 interactions a year with a school psychologist (Peterson et al., 1998). Fifty-five percent of the teachers felt they had a good understanding of their school psychologists' roles. The teachers indicated a significant preference for the psychometrician ($m = 1.87$) and problem solver ($m = 1.87$) roles. Least helpful roles included trainer/educator ($m = 2.96$) and fact finder ($m = 3.21$).

Using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*) the teachers surveyed seemed to feel comfortable working with school psychologists in solving education ($m = 3.81$) and behavioral ($m = 3.80$) problems. The teachers believed psychologists could offer good suggestions regarding teaching practices ($m = 4.06$). However, the results of a within subjects MANOVA showed that the teachers did not often seek help from a school psychologist ($m = 6.48$) even though they believed they would be helpful if they did.

Using an additional 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Most Often*, 5 = *Least Often*), teachers were asked who they would turn to for advice if needing help with students with learning disabilities and behavioral problems. For learning disabilities, teachers reported they would first turn to other teachers at the school ($m = 1.76$) and then to the assistant principal or principal ($m = 3.17$) or school counselor ($m = 3.31$) (Peterson et al., 1998). All ranked

higher than the school psychologist ($m = 3.43$), with only a friend or family member ranking lower ($m = 3.91$). For help with behavioral problems, teachers reported that they would first turn to other teachers at the school ($m = 2.31$) (Peterson et al., 1998). Their next choice was the school counselor ($m = 2.52$), assistant principal or principal ($m = 2.69$), and then the school psychologist ($m = 3.69$), with a friend or family member ($m = 3.74$) being the least likely choice (Peterson et al., 1998). The results made it clear that the teachers were not turning to school psychologists for help with students with learning and behavior problems. The teachers indicated that they felt comfortable working with school psychologists, and they believed they have valuable information, so why are they not going to them for help? It could likely be due to the availability of school psychologists within their schools. Many of the comments and remarks written on the questionnaires involved the lack of access teachers have to a school psychologist. Teachers also seemed to understand this lack of access as they also noted the large caseloads school psychologists and how they were not often available outside of testing (Peterson et al., 1998).

Summary of Teacher Perception Research

Previous research shows that the role, and more importantly, the perception of the role, of a school psychologist varies from state to state. Warner's research showed that the many school psychologists in Tennessee do not believe that their role is understood by the teachers. Teachers in Iowa and Wisconsin perceived that the services school psychologists were providing were beneficial and important to teachers. These teachers believed the most important services were consulting with administrators, teachers, and parents and evaluating students for special education eligibility. Additionally, the school psychologists in Iowa and

Wisconsin seemed to follow the more traditional role and when asked about school psychologists expanding their services (i.e. providing group counseling services), teachers did not see this as necessary or important (Panske, 2008). Another study conducted in Iowa (Gonzalez et al., 2004), found that the more often school psychologists were present at the school, the more helpful teachers perceived them to be. Arivett et al. (2007) found that special education teachers thought their IEP meetings went better if a school psychologist attended and they would prefer if a school psychologist could spend more time at their schools. Teachers from Georgia, Nebraska, Arizona, and Florida were found to be less knowledgeable of the role of a school psychologist when compared to the school administrators. The teachers also reported a lower level of satisfaction with school psychologists and perceived them to be less helpful (Gilman and Gabriel, 2004).

Special education and regular education teachers in the southwestern United States rated assessment and special education input differently. Special education teachers found these roles to be more important. Many of the respondents (82%) expressed the desire to have a school psychologist at their school five days a week (Watkins et al., 2001). Seventy-two percent of the teachers in Michigan and Indiana reported having only 0-5 professional interactions of a school psychologist during a typical school year (Peterson et al., 1998). They believed the most important role a school psychologist could play was that of a psychometrician and problem solver (Peterson et al., 1998). They also indicated that even when needing help with a student with a learning disability, they would ask another teacher, principal, or school counselor for help before asking their school psychologist (Peterson et al., 1998).

Overall, the reviewed research showed that teachers find school psychologists helpful. Many agreed that when a student is suspected of needing special education services, a school psychologist is a valued resource. Many teachers expressed having limited professional interactions with school psychologists and wished they could be available in their schools' more often. Though school psychologists are trained to provide various other services, the literature seems to indicate, if it's not a problem involving evaluation for special education services, then school psychologists are not seen as an immediate resource.

The Current Study: Research Objectives

Some of the research reviewed in the current study showed that teachers do not always have an accurate expectation of a school psychologist and are unsure of what circumstances require the use of a school psychologist's services. Much of the research shows that teachers believe school psychologists mostly provide diagnostic testing. Though this may be true, we as school psychologists are trained and capable of doing much more. My goal is to find out what Tennessee teachers believe school psychologists do and whether they find us helpful. Being able to answer these questions will provide school psychologists with a greater understanding of the needs and expectations of teachers. Perhaps, it will encourage role expansion and the ability to fully utilize school psychologist's professional knowledge and skills.

Hypotheses

- 1.) Teachers will perceive school psychologists as helpful.

- 2.) The majority of Tennessee teachers do not believe they are very knowledgeable about school psychology in general.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Survey respondents were 101 teachers from Tennessee who worked in the state for a minimum of one year. The Facebook group, *TN Teachers United* and my personal Facebook page was used to invite participants to complete a *School Psychology Perception Survey*.

Measures

School Psychology Perception Survey – Teachers' perceptions of the role of school psychologists was measured through an online survey (Appendix C) that was partly adapted from the survey used in the Panske (2008) study. The survey was created through MTSU's online survey system, QualtricsXM. The first part of the survey asked teachers to provide specific demographic information including; gender (question 2), currently taught grade level (question 3), teaching environment (question 4), years of teaching experience (question 5), level of education (question 6). The second section of the survey asked about teacher's knowledge of school psychology (questions 7, 10, 11, experiences with school psychologists (questions 9, 16, 17, 18, 15, 19) and services provided by school psychologist (question 8, 12, 13, 14, 20, 21). The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Procedures

In order to gather participants, I sent the group administrator of *TN Teachers United* a message explaining my purpose and asking permission to post the study link to the page. Permission was granted and I was able to post a link to the electronic survey for all group

members to see (Appendix A). Once the teachers accessed the survey link, the informed consent form and all other relevant information about the study was displayed (Appendix B). The teachers who selected “I agree” after presented the informed consent were then shown questionnaire. The survey was distributed through an anonymous link; therefore, no identifiable information of the participants could be obtained. Data was compiled through QualtricsXM and then manually entered into Microsoft Excel. Ethical clearance for the study was granted by The Middle Tennessee State University’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix D).

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Respondent Demographics

The sample of respondents ($n = 101$) consisted of 13.86% males and 85.15% females. Grades taught by the respondents were as follows: preschool (3%), kindergarteen-4th (26%), 5th-8th (15%), 9th-12th (38%), and other (18%). The teachers taught in urban (15.84%), suburban (32.67%), and rural (51.49%) environments. Years of teaching experience were as follows: 0-10 years (50.5%), 11-20 years (21.78%), 21-30 years (17.82%), and 31+ years (9.9%). Respondents' education levels were as follows: 24.75% hold a bachelor's degree, 53.47% hold a master's degree, 18.81% hold an Ed.S., and 2.97% hold a Ph.D. See Table 1 for a summary of respondents' demographics.

Table 1

Respondent Demographics

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	14	13.86%
Female	86	85.15%
Prefer Not to Answer	1	0.99%
Grade Taught		
Preschool	3	3.00%
K-4 th	26	26.00%
5 th -8 th	15	15.00%
9 th -12 th	38	38.00%
Other	18	18.00%
Teaching Environment		
Urban	16	15.84%
Suburban	33	32.67%
Rural	52	51.49%
Years of Teaching Experience		
0-10	51	50.50%
11-20	22	21.87%
21-30	18	17.82%
31+	10	9.90%
Level of Education		
Bachelors	25	24.75%
Masters	54	53.47%
Educational Specialist	19	18.81%
Doctoral	3	2.97%

Hypothesis 1

It was hypothesized that the majority of teachers would report that they perceive school psychologists are helpful. This hypothesis was tested using questions 17 and 18 of the survey. Using Excel, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure the internal consistency reliability of the 2 questions on the survey that asked about helpfulness of school

psychologists. Cronbach's alpha for the 2 questions relating to hypothesis 1 was $r = 0.57$, indicating poor reliability.

When asked how helpful school psychological services are to children, 62.63% of the respondents indicated *Very Helpful* ($n = 62$), 35.35% indicated *Somewhat Helpful* ($n = 35$), and 2.02% indicated *Not At All Helpful* ($n = 2$). When the respondents were asked how helpful school psychological services were to teachers, administrators, and student support personnel 59.60% said *Very Helpful* ($n = 59$), 35.35% responded *Somewhat Helpful* ($n = 35$), and 5.05% indicated *Not At All Helpful* ($n = 5$).

To test hypothesis 1, an average response score across participants for questions 17 and 18 was calculated in Excel. Response options were coded as either 3, 2, or 1 (*Very Helpful* = 3, *Somewhat Helpful* = 2, *Not At All Helpful* = 1). An average score of 4 or higher would indicate support for hypothesis 1. A one-tailed one sample t-test ($\alpha = .05$) was run in Real Statistics to compare the mean of the sample ($M = 4.58$) from the survey to the expected mean ($M = 4$). Results indicated that the mean of the sample group differed from the expected mean; $t = 8.53$, $p < .00001$. These results support the hypothesis that teachers find school psychologists helpful.

Hypothesis 2

It was hypothesized that the majority of Tennessee teachers do not believe they are very knowledgeable about school psychology. This hypothesis was tested by questions 7 and 10. Using Excel, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure the internal consistency reliability of the 2 questions on the survey that asked about how knowledgeable teachers are

of school psychology. Cronbach's alpha for the 2 questions relating to hypothesis 1 was $r = 0.71$, indicating fair reliability.

When asked how knowledgeable they were about school psychology the respondents answered as follows: *Very Knowledgeable* (11.88%, $n = 12$), *Moderately Knowledgeable* (45.54%), *Slightly Knowledgeable* (35.64%, $n = 46$), and *Not Knowledgeable At All* (6.93%, $n = 7$). When respondents were asked about how knowledgeable they were about the services school psychologists provide, they answered as follows: *Very Knowledgeable* (14.14%, $n = 14$), *Moderately Knowledgeable* (44.44%, $n = 44$), *Slightly Knowledgeable* (30.30%, $n = 30$), and *Not Knowledgeable At All* (11.11%, $n = 11$).

To test hypothesis 2, an average response score across participants for questions 7 and 10 was calculated in Excel. Response options were coded as either 4, 3, 2, or 1 (*Very Knowledgeable* = 4, *Moderately Knowledgeable* = 3, *Somewhat Knowledgeable* = 2, and *Not At All Knowledgeable* = 1). An average score of 6 or lower would indicate support for hypothesis 2. A two tailed one sample t-test ($\alpha = .05$) was run in Real Statistics to compare the mean of the sample from the survey ($M = 5.18$) to the expected mean ($M = 6$). Results indicated that the mean of the sample group differed from the expected mean; $t = -4.91$, $p < .00001$. These results support the hypothesis that teachers have limited knowledge about school psychology.

Additional Descriptive Results

When the teachers were asked what service they would most likely consult a school psychologist, 36.78% ($n = 32$) selected Psycho-educational Assessment, 33.33% selected Behavioral Assessment/Management ($n = 29$) and 29.89% ($n = 26$) selected

Intervention/Counseling. When the teachers were asked to select all the activities in which their school psychologist engages in most, the top two responses were *Evaluates Students for Special Education Eligibility* (10.13%, $n = 83$) and *Completes Paperwork/Writes Reports* (9.40%, $n = 77$). The service selected the least was *Case Manages Students with IEP/504 Goals* (2.69, $n = 22$).

When the teachers were asked if they had ever utilized a school psychologist's services, 71.72 % ($n = 71$) indicated *yes* and 28.23% indicated *no* ($n = 28$). When the teachers were asked how likely they were to implement recommendations that have been suggested by a school psychologist, 77.78% ($n = 77$) replied *Often*, 21.21% ($n = 21$) replied *Sometimes*, and 1.01% ($n = 1$) indicated *Never*. Of the respondents, 16.33% ($n = 16$) indicated that a student's problem had to be *Very Serious* before they would seek the help of a school psychologist, 77.55% ($n = 76$) of the teachers indicated the problem should be *Somewhat Serious* and 6.12% ($n = 6$) said the problem could be *Not at All Serious* and they would seek the help of their school psychologist.

When the teachers were asked how many school psychologists were in employed in their district, 4.11% ($n = 3$) said *zero*, 54.79% ($n = 40$) said *1-4*, 6.85% ($n = 5$) said *5-9*, and 34.25% ($n = 25$) said *10 or more*. When the teachers were asked how often a school psychologist is at their school and available for services, 28.36% ($n = 19$) reported *0-1 days per week*, 54.23% ($n = 37$) reported *2-3 days per week*, and 16.42% ($n = 11$) reported *4-5 days per week*. The majority (65.31%, $n = 64$), reported they would like to have a school psychologist available and at their school *5 days of the week*. When asked about their general

satisfaction with school psychologists, 52.53% ($n = 52$) were *Very Satisfied*, 39.39% ($n = 39$) were *Somewhat Satisfied*, and 8.08% ($n = 8$) were *Not at All Satisfied*.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The results of the current study supported Hypothesis 1 and showed that the majority of teachers in Tennessee perceive school psychologists as very helpful. In Gilman and Gabriel's (2004) research, the results showed that the majority of teacher's in Georgia, Nebraska, Arizona, and Florida found school psychologists to be only *moderately helpful*. Being as Gilman and Gabriel's (2004) research was conducted before the implementation of RtI², this could account for why teachers in Tennessee perceive school psychologists as being more helpful. RtI² subsequently allowed for more interaction with school psychologists as many of us are thoroughly trained at many levels, from system-wide program design to specific assessment and intervention efforts with individual students (NASP, 2006).

The results also supported Hypothesis 2 and showed that the teachers in Tennessee believed they had limited knowledge about school psychology. This was consistent with Gilman and Gabriel's (2004) research that showed that teacher's in Georgia, Nebraska, Arizona, and Florida believed they were only somewhat knowledgeable about school psychology. Though the teachers in Tennessee did not deem themselves very knowledgeable of school psychology, they still considered school psychologists to be helpful. To me, this is a very fair discovery as I believe this is the consensus with a lot of professions. We may not always know what a job entails but we certainly know when that job is helpful and beneficial to others. I suspect many of the respondents answered just as I would if I were asked about my level of knowledge regarding a job or responsibility, I did not personally engage. I

believe it says a great deal for the majority to admit to not fully understanding our role, but still speak highly of what we do.

Though much of the results from previous studies suggested psycho-educational assessment was the service teachers were most often using from a school psychologist, the results from the current study were a little different. It is worth noting how similar the teachers ranked psycho-educational assessment, behavioral assessment/management, and intervention/counseling when asked what services school psychologists would be most likely to provide. Thirty-two of the respondents (36.78%), ranked psycho-educational assessment as the first service in which they most likely consult a school psychologist. I was expecting the overwhelming majority to select psycho-educational assessment as their first choice, but this was not the case. In fact, only three more teachers ranked psycho-educational assessment higher than behavioral assessment/management, (33.33%, $n = 29$) and 26 of the teachers are using their school psychologists mainly for intervention/counseling (29.89%).

The results of the current study show that school psychologists in Tennessee are certainly not only being used for psycho-educational assessment as I had originally anticipated. Much of the reviewed research expressed a desire for more than psycho-educational assessment, but because that was the main, and sometimes only, role of their school psychologist. I believe that the current push for mental health services in schools, along with the implementation of RtI², has allowed many school psychologists to engage in more roles.

When the teachers were asked about the number of school psychologists employed in their districts, 4.11% of the teachers reported not having one at all. All the respondents who

reported this also reported working urban and rural environments. Due to the well-known lack of resources associated with these areas, this was not surprising. Most of the respondents, 54.79%, reported their district having only 1-4 school psychologists. Knowing that it is recommended by NASP that districts should have one school psychologist for every 500 to 700 students (NASP, 2011), the results show that most districts of survey respondents have a shortage of school psychologists which is consistent with the literature.

When respondents were given the opportunity to list additional services, they wanted school psychologists to provide, they wrote the comments requesting help with behavioral issues, more work with regular education students, counseling, and trauma informed care assistance. A specific comment left by a respondent (e.g., “Literally all our school psychologist does is screen students for IEP’s. I would love to see them do so much more and really work with kids”) encompassed the common view held by teachers in the reviewed researched. It was surprising that this was the only comment from the current study that expressed school psychologists have a very narrow role. The results from the current study seemed inconsistent with Warner’s (2018) research where less than 27% of school psychologists in Tennessee perceived that teachers in their assigned school(s) understood the different services provided by school psychologists. In fact, the current research shows that teachers want school psychologists to expand their role beyond psycho-educational assessment and many already appear to be doing so.

Limitations

The present study was limited to teachers who were currently working or have worked in Tennessee. However, it may not adequately represent school psychologists across

the state. Not all teachers practicing in Tennessee received the request to participate in the study and may not be representative of the general population of teachers in Tennessee. The questionnaire was sent out to members of the TN Teachers United Facebook page.

Additionally, it was posted as a link to my personal Facebook page. From there, my Facebook friends were able to share the link in hopes of reaching a wider audience of Tennessee teachers. However, there is no way to know exactly where in Tennessee the respondents worked.

Another limitation of the present study is its sample size. Not all participants completed 100% of the questions in the survey. It is unknown why some questions were not answered, but it is possible that the participants skipped the questions they were unsure of or the entire survey was too time consuming to complete. Some of the questions were not interpretable because of their format. For example, question 11 asked about the teachers' beliefs of the highest level of education school psychologists have and should not have had a *select all that apply* answer format. I believe it would have been beneficial to ask more open-ended questions asking the respondents to describe the role of their district's school psychologist(s).

Future Research

I found no studies of similar research that has been conducted in the state of Tennessee. It would be beneficial to continue this study and to reach a wider audience of teachers in the state of Tennessee. Also, additional questions created to survey respondents other than teachers would also be valuable. Examining the perceptions administrators,

counselors, speech/language pathologists, teacher assistants, and others school personnel that work closely with school psychologists would allow for a greater range of thoughts and ideas. For further research, the scale used in the current study would need further development to be considered reliable. I would suggest using more open-ended questions that explore specific interactions with school psychologists and modifying the questions so that the survey results are more interpretable.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment Script

Hello everyone! I am a school psychology graduate student at Middle Tennessee State University. I am currently on internship for the 2019-2020 school year and thrilled to be working in the state of Tennessee. I am offering each of you the opportunity to participate in my Thesis research examining Tennessee teachers' understanding of the role of school psychologists. Your participation is voluntary and will consist of one online questionnaire that can be completed on your own time. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. All survey responses are completely confidential and anonymous. If you have taught or currently teach in the state of Tennessee, your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your participation in this study!

Please click on the web link below to begin the study.

https://mtsu.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bHHVuxCGdfwSmIR

Sincerely,

Danielle Hoffeditz

APPENDIX B

Information and Consent Form for Teachers

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Tennessee Teacher's Perspectives of the Role of School Psychologists

Researcher(s): Danielle Hoffeditz, Middle Tennessee State University
Dr. Monica Wallace, Middle Tennessee State University

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are a teacher in that state of Tennessee. You must be age 18 or older to participate in the study. The information in this consent form is to help you decide if you want to be in this research study. Please take your time reading this form and contact the researcher(s) to ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of the research study is to examine the perceptions and knowledge that Tennessee teachers have of school psychologists. This study is being conducted by researchers at the Middle Tennessee State University's School Psychology graduate program.

What will I do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will complete an online survey. The survey includes questions about your experiences and knowledge of working with a school psychologist and should take you about 10-15 minutes to complete. You can skip questions that you do not want to answer.

Can I say "No"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can stop up until you submit the survey. After you submit the survey, we cannot remove your responses because we will not know which responses came from you. Either way, your decision won't affect your employment or relationship with other employees in any way.

Are there any risks to me?

We don't know of any risks to you from being in the study.

Are there any benefits to me?

Your participation is anticipated to help us learn better ways to serve teachers and schools. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

What will happen with the information collected for this study?

The survey is anonymous, and no one will be able to link your responses back to you. Your responses to the survey will not be linked to your computer, email address or other electronic

identifiers. Please do not include your name or other information that could be used to identify you in your survey responses. Information collected for this study will be published.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, contact the researchers.

Danielle Hoffeditz, dh5k@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Dr. Monica Wallace, monca.wallace@mtsu.edu

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board

2269 Middle TN Blvd

Sam H. Ingram Bldg (ING) Room 010

Box 124 (Previously 134)

Murfreesboro, TN 37132

Tel: 615 898 2400 | FAX: 615 898 5028

Email: irb_information@mtsu.edu

Statement of Consent

I have read this form, been given the chance to ask questions and have my questions answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By clicking the link and completing the survey, I am agreeing to be in this study. I can print or save a copy of this consent information for future reference. If I do not want to be in this study, I can close my internet browser.

APPENDIX C

School Psychology Perception Survey

1. Informed Consent
I agree
2. Please indicate your sex.
Male
Female
Prefer not to answer
3. What grade do you currently teach?
Preschool
K – 4th
5th – 8th
9th – 12th
Other
4. What type of environment best describes where you teach?
Urban
Suburban
Rural
5. How many years' teaching experience do you have?
0-10
11-20
21-30
31+
6. Highest Degree Obtained:
Bachelors
Masters
Educational Specialist
Doctoral
7. How knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about school psychology?
Very Knowledgeable
Moderately Knowledgeable
Somewhat Knowledgeable
Not At All Knowledgeable

8. How many school psychologists are employed by your district?
 - Zero
 - 1-4
 - 5-9
 - 10+

9. Have you ever used a school psychologist's services?
 - Yes
 - No

10. How knowledgeable would you say you are about the services that can be provided by school psychologists?
 - Very Knowledgeable
 - Moderately Knowledgeable
 - Slightly Knowledgeable
 - Not Knowledgeable at All

11. What is the highest level of education you think school psychologist have? Select all the apply.
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Master's Degree
 - Educational Specialist
 - Doctoral Degree

12. In rank order (most likely item at the top), what services would you be most likely to consult a school psychologist for?
 - Psycho-educational Assessment
 - Behavioral Assessment/Management
 - Intervention/Counseling

13. How often is a school psychologist at your school and available for services?
 - 0 Days per Week
 - 1 Day per Week
 - 2 Days per Week
 - 3 Days per Week
 - 4 Days per Week
 - 5 Days per Week

14. How often would you like to have a school psychologist at your school and available for services?
- 0 Days per Week
 - 1 Day per Week
 - 2 Days per Week
 - 3 Days per Week
 - 4 Days per Week
 - 5 Days per Week
15. How likely are you to implement recommendations or accommodations that have been suggested by a school psychologist?
- Often
 - Sometimes
 - Never
16. How serious would you say a student's problem should be before involving the school psychologist?
- Very Serious
 - Somewhat Serious
 - Not At All Serious
17. Generally speaking, how helpful to children are school psychological services?
- Very Helpful
 - Somewhat Helpful
 - Not At All Helpful
18. How helpful are school psychological services to teachers, administrators, and student support personnel?
- Very Helpful
 - Somewhat Helpful
 - Not At All Helpful
19. In general, how satisfied have you been with school psychologists?
- Very Satisfied
 - Somewhat Satisfied
 - Not At All Satisfied

20. In which activities do you believe a school psychologist is most likely to engage? Select all that apply.

- Evaluates students for special education eligibility
- Provides individual counseling services
- Provides group counseling services
- Provides social skills training
- Consults with teachers
- Consults with parents
- Consults with administrators
- Conducts Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs)
- Develops/implements Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs)
- Develops Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals
- Develop/designs academic interventions
- Provides staff training/in-service activities
- "Case manages" students with IEPs
- "Case manages" students with 504 plans
- Participates on school committees/teams
- Provides crisis intervention services
- Screens students for mental health concerns
- Refers students/families to outside agencies
- Evaluates the effectiveness of academic programs
- Evaluates the effectiveness of behavioral programs
- Attends professional conferences
- Conducts research
- Completes paperwork/writes reports

21. Please list any additional services that are not currently provided but you would like to see provided by the school psychologist.

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 Office of Research Compliance,
 010A Sam Ingram Building,
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129

**IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE**

Friday, January 31, 2020

Principal Investigator **Danielle Hoffeditz** (Student)
 Faculty Advisor **Monica Wallace**
 Co-Investigators **NONE**
 Investigator Email(s) *dh5k@mtmail.mtsu.edu; monica.wallace@mtsu.edu*
 Department **Psychology**

Protocol Title ***Tennessee teacher perceptions of the role of school psychologists***
 Protocol ID **20-1109**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXEMPT** review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category (2) *Educational Tests*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	EXEMPT from further IRB review***	Date	1/31/20
Date of Expiration	12/31/2020		
Sample Size	1,000 (ONE THOUSAND)		
Participant Pool	Healthy adults (18 or older) - Tennessee State School Teachers		
Exceptions	Online consent followed by internet-based survey using Qualtrics is permitted (Qualtrics links on file)		
Mandatory Restrictions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants must be 18 years or older 2. Informed consent must be obtained from the participants 3. Identifying information must not be collected 		
Restrictions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All restrictions for exemption apply. 2. Mandatory active informed consent with age-verification. 3. NOT approved for in-person data collection. 		
Approved IRB Templates	IRB Templates: Online Informed Consent Non-IRB template: Recruitment script		
Funding	NONE		
Comments	Qualtrics link added to protocol on 02/05/2020		

***Although this exemption determination allows above defined protocol from further IRB review, such as continuing review, MTSU IRB will continue to give regulatory oversight to ensure compliance.

Summary of Post-approval Requirements:

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all applicable post-approval conditions (refer "Quick Links" below for more information):

- PI must close-out this protocol by submitting a final report before **12/31/2020**; if more time is needed to complete the data collection, the PI must request an extension. **NO REMINDRES WILL BE SENT. Failure to close-out (or request extension) may result in penalties including cancellation of the data collected using this protocol or withholding student diploma.**
- IRB approval must be obtained for all types of amendments, such as:
 - Addition/removal of subject population and sample size
 - Change in investigators
 - Changes to the research sites – appropriate permission letter(s) from may be needed if the study will be conducted at a non-MTSU location
 - Alternation to funding
- Modifications to procedures must be clearly described in an addendum request form and the proposed changes must not be incorporated without an approval
- The proposed change must be consistent with the approved protocol and comply with exemption requirements
- Research-related injuries to the participants and other events, such as, deviations & misconduct, must be reported within 48 hours of such events to compliance@mtsu.edu

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to implement minor and significant amendments that would not result in the cancellation of the protocol's eligibility for exemption. **Only THREE procedural amendment requests will be entertained per year. This amendment restriction does not apply to minor changes such as language usage and addition/removal of research personnel.**

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Post-approval IRB Actions:

Date	IRB Action(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Mandatory Data Storage Requirement: All research-related records (signed consent forms, investigator training and etc.) must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data must be stored for at least three (3) years after the study is closed. Additionally, the Tennessee State data retention requirement may apply (refer "Quick Links" below for policy 129). Subsequently, the data may be destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects. **The IRB reserves the right to modify/update the approval criteria or change/cancel the terms listed in this notice.** Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:

- Post-approval Responsibilities: <http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/PostApprovalResponsibilities.php>
- Exemption Procedures: <https://mtsu.edu/irb/ExemptPaperWork.php>
- MTSU Policy 129: Records retention & Disposal: <https://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/129.php>