

## Appendix A Demographic Questions

1. Please indicate your gender: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which of the following best identifies your race?
  - a) Caucasian
  - b) African American
  - c) Asian/Pacific Islander
  - d) Hispanic/Latin
  - e) Other
3. What is your level of education?
  - a) Master
  - b) Education Specialist
  - c) Doctorate
4. How many years have you been a school counselor?
5. What is the total number of students in your school?
6. What is the ethnic make-up of your school?
  - a) Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) African American \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Asian/Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) Hispanic/Latino \_\_\_\_\_
  - e) Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the socioeconomic make-up of your school?
  - a) Free/Reduced Lunch \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Full pay \_\_\_\_\_
8. What type of school setting do you work in?
  - a) Rural
  - b) Suburban
  - c) Urban

## Appendix B Interview Questions

1. Describe your current school counseling program.
2. What is your role and responsibility in this program?
3. What is social justice to you?
4. What is advocacy to you?
5. Where do your definitions of social justice and advocacy stem from?
6. What types of social justice-related issues do you see in your school?
7. What types of students do you identify as marginalized in your school?
8. What are you doing to help your marginalized students?
9. How do you explain your current stance as a social justice advocate?
10. How prepared do you feel to serve as a social justice advocate in your school?
11. What helps or would help you to be a successful social justice advocate in your school?
12. What recommendations would you suggest helping training programs adequately prepare school counselors-in-training to serve as social justice advocates in their prospective schools? What suggestions do you have for professional development for practicing school counselors?
13. Please take a moment to discuss any other information that you would like to add related to your experiences with social justice advocacy as a school counselor.

## Self-Efficacy as it Relates to Attributions and Attitudes Towards Poverty Among School Counselors-in-Training

Counselors-in-Training

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### Abstract

This study was conducted in order to examine the self-efficacy of school counselors-in-training and their attributions and attitudes towards poverty. The population for this study consisted of master's level school counseling students from two southeastern schools. All data were obtained via self-report measures and were collected using an internet survey and paper surveys. The study utilized a multiple regression analysis in an attempt to explore the relationships between attitudes and self-efficacy and attributions and self-efficacy. Although no significant relationship was found between self-efficacy and attitudes or attributions, the results of the study showed that school counselors-in-training held similar attitudes and attributions as the general American population which are primarily negative. Implications for training are discussed.

Keywords: poverty, attitudes, attributions, self-efficacy, school counselors-in-training

### Counselors-in-Training

A child is born into poverty every 41 seconds in the United States of America

(Ratcliffe, 2015). Currently, 21 percent of all children, one in five, live below the federal poverty threshold (Koball & Jiang, 2018). According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), about 15 million children in the United States live in poverty (Koball & Jiang, 2018). Of the total population of children living in poverty, 24 million live in urban areas, while 5.7 million children live in rural areas (Addy & Wright, 2012). Caucasian children make up the largest number of children living in poverty; while African American, American Indian, and Hispanic children have a higher proportion of poor children among their entire population (Addy, Engelhardt, & Skinner, 2013).

The poverty threshold, based on a calculation updated by the Census Bureau each year, defines the minimum annual income needed to meet basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing expenses (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2019). The 2019 guidelines for the thresholds of annual income ranged from \$12,490 for a family of one to just over \$43,430 for a family of eight (HHS, 2019). In school systems, the number of students

receiving free or reduced price meals (FRPL) is the primary indicator of a school's poverty level and can impact a student's quality of education (Bray & Schommer-Aikins, 2015). Based on students who attended high-poverty public schools in 2016, McFarland, J., Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Wang, X., Wang, K., Hein, S., Diliberti, M., Forrest Cataldi, E., Bullock Mann, F., & Barmer, A. (2019) reported approximately 75 percent of students who qualified for free or reduced price meals lived in either a city, town, or rural community compared to 18 percent in suburban schools. High-poverty schools are defined as public schools in which more than 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price meals (McFarland, J., Hussar, B., Zhang, J., et al., 2019).

Consequently, low-income children characteristically live in poor neighborhoods and attend lower quality, underfunded schools with high teacher turnover and low morale (Brooks-Gunn, Linver, & Fauth, 2005; Cappella, Frazier, Atkins, Schoenwald, & Glisson, 2008; Griffin & Steen, 2011). Additionally, children living in poverty are often perceived less positively by their teachers, which results in receiving less positive attention and less reinforcement for good performance (McLoyd, 1998; Sorhagen, 2013). Yet with the appropriate training, school counselors are uniquely positioned to help remove barriers to academic and personal success for students living in poverty (ASCA, 2016).

Havlik, S., Neason, E., Puckett, J., Rowley, P., & Wilson, G., (2017) found that school counselors believed they were the first line of support, had the desire to help, and felt underprepared to support students living in poverty. While teacher and counseling education programs provide training on working with various diverse populations, it is unknown to what degree the training

impacts self-efficacy, stereotypes, assumptions, and attitudes of counselors when working with marginalized groups (Camp, Foxx, & Flowers, 2018). Research has shown self-efficacy related to working with students in poverty may influence the behaviors of school counselors and may also be related to beliefs or attitudes they hold towards individuals living in poverty (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006). Study findings have also indicated teachers and counselors who do not feel adequately trained may prefer to work in a school with similar ethnic and social class backgrounds to their own as oppose to high poverty schools (Bray et al., 2015; Groulx, 2001; Wolffe, 1996; Zeichner, 1996).

With the high number of children living in poverty, teachers and counselors-in-training are likely to work in schools with students who live in poverty. New teachers and counselors need to have attitudes and skills that enable them to work effectively with students and families of diverse backgrounds and of low socioeconomic status (Havlik, et al., 2017). Teachers and counselors who lack knowledge on reaching low-income students may need additional training to meet the needs of children living in poverty (Camp et al., 2018; Havlik, et al., Rowley, Puckett et al., 2017; Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). This training is important because an individual's belief as to what causes poverty can be linked to their attitude towards individuals living in poverty (Merolla, Hunt, & Serpe, 2011). Therefore, negative attitudes create a bias against individuals living in poverty. This bias adds to an inequality of support for programs designed to help the poor, including reducing the educational achievement gap (Limbert & Bullock, 2005).

In the school counseling field, educators in counselor education preparation programs

have concentrated on developing counselor awareness and knowledge in multiple areas and multilayered components including gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, and social class (Brinson, Brew, & Denby, 2008; Constantine, 2002; Wakefield, Garner, Tyler, & Pehrsson, 2010). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2019) provides a framework to help school counselors develop and maintain a comprehensive school counseling program to address the academic, career, and personal/social developmental needs of all students. To promote student success and the ethical practice for all school counselors, ASCA developed the ASCA Ethical Standards (2016) and the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2019). Both sets of standards serve as guides for school counselors, school administrators, and counselor educators to meet the demands of the profession as well as the needs of all students in multiple areas. According to the ASCA Ethical Standards (2016), school counselors are to advocate for the social justice of all students from all backgrounds and circumstances including social class as well as seek training to address personal biases, attitudes and beliefs. The ASCA School Counselor Professional Standard and Competencies (2019) further asks school counselors to demonstrate an awareness of the impact of cultural and environmental influences on student success and opportunities as well as to understand their personal limitations and biases.

The impact of multicultural biases in counseling has been widely researched (Burkard, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Alfonso, 1999; Gelso, Fassinger, Gomez, & Latts, 1995; Gushue, 2004; Sue & Sue, 2008). Specific research that addresses

counselors' and school counselors' in training attitudes towards poverty is limited but has revealed negative attitudes and attributions exist towards poverty and individuals living in poverty (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Camp, Foxx, & Flowers, 2018; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Manstead 2018). To better prepare school counselors to work in high-poverty schools, more research is needed to understand school counselors'-in-training self-efficacy, attitudes, and preconceptions regarding working in this type of environment (Camp, et al., 2018).

The purpose of this study was to discover school counselors'-in-training attitudes and attributes towards students living in poverty as well as examine the relationship between these variables and counselor self-efficacy. The researchers accessed 1) the attitudes school counselors-in-training held regarding poverty; 2) the attributions school counselors-in-training held regarding poverty; 3) the relationship between the level of perceived school counselor self-efficacy and attitudes toward poverty among school counselors-in-training; and 4) the relationship between the level of perceived school counselor self-efficacy and attributions toward poverty among school counselors-in-training.

## Method

The researchers examined the attitudes and attributes that school counselors-in-training held toward working with students living in poverty. Additionally, the self-efficacy level of school counselors-in-training when working with students living in poverty were examined. Analyses were performed to access how the variable related to each other, with specific considerations of how school counselors-in-training self-efficacy is related to attributions and attitudes towards individuals living in poverty. Lastly, data

about respondents' ages, gender, ethnicity, and family of origin socio-economic status were collected.

### Procedures

The data collected for this research study was facilitated through the use of previously collected data. This study included two urban institutions in the Southeast; one sample was at a large online and campus-based private institution, and another was at a large public campus-based institution. The participant population used for recruitment in this study was gathered from graduate-level school counselors-in-training at both institutions after institutional research approval was received from both universities. Faculty permission to recruit from counselor education courses was obtained prior to dissemination of research material.

Paper surveys were distributed and collected at the large public based institution, and online surveys were collected at the private institution through email using an online survey. At the online and campus-based university, the first researcher spoke to school counseling students to inform possible participants about the study. The students surveyed were enrolled in a variety of school counseling courses, including theories and techniques, group counseling, child and adolescent counseling in schools, career development, and school counseling program development. At the online university, the survey was emailed to individual professors in the school counseling department, and each professor emailed the surveys to their students in their school counseling courses. At the campus-based university, the first researcher gave a brief introduction to the survey and then handed out the assessment. Potential participants were

asked to review the informational letter, and if they chose to participate, they complete the provided survey. All responses received were anonymous, as identifiable information was not collected during this study. At the large public based institution, the first researcher told potential participants that they were being asked to participate in a study that would take 15-20 minutes, that participation was not linked to their current class, and it was voluntary. The instructors at the public institution who had participating classes were asked to leave the room during data collection. Survey packets were distributed, and potential participants were asked to review the informational letter, complete the provided surveys, and return the surveys in the provided envelope. Those who chose not to participate were asked to return the surveys, not completed, in the provided envelope.

The survey for this study consisted of four measures which included a demographics questionnaire, the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005), Attitudes About Poverty Scale (Yun & Weaver, 2010) and the Attributions of Poverty Scale (Bullock, 1999). After collection of surveys, all data were analyzed. Surveys were initially distributed to approximately 130 graduate level students. Based on the power analysis, the ideal sample size for this study was 88 participants with 90% confidence level and  $p < 0.05$ .

### Participants

Ninety-one students completed distributed survey packets. Eighty-seven percent ( $n = 79$ ) of respondents were female and 13% ( $n = 12$ ) were male. All participants recruited were 19 years of age or older. Participants reported ages ranging from 21 to 53, with a mean of 33. Participant

demographic characteristics included: African American ( $n = 19$ , 19%), American Indian/Alaskan Native ( $n = 1$ , 1.1%), Asian ( $n = 2$ , 2.2%), Hispanic/Latino ( $n = 5$ , 5.5%), White/Caucasian ( $n = 60$ , 65%), and other ( $n = 4$ , 4.4%). There were a total of 15.4% ( $n = 14$ ) of participants who reported their family of origin at or below poverty level, 9.9% ( $n = 9$ ) at just above poverty, 19.8% ( $n = 18$ ) at lower middle class, 37% ( $n = 34$ ) at middle class, 15.4% ( $n = 14$ ) at upper middle class, and 2.2% ( $n = 2$ ) at upper class. While examining the three categories which make up the middle class (lower middle class, middle class, and upper middle class) a total of 72.6% ( $n = 66$ ) reported their family of origin socioeconomic status to be in the middle-class range. Participants in this study were master's level school counseling students. The students' courses ranged from introductory counseling courses to advanced counseling courses; students were not selected based upon credit completion but based on entry into the school counseling graduate program. See Table 1 for participant demographic information.

### Measures

**Demographic questionnaire.** The demographic questionnaire was designed to collect specific and relevant participant information. The questionnaire consisted of five questions focused on demographic data relevant to the participants. This included data regarding gender, age, ethnicity, current state/location, and socio-economic status of family of origin. The self-reported family-of-origin socio-economic status item was a scale previously used by Haydon (2010) with six categories: poverty level or below, just above poverty, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, and upper class.

**Attributions of Poverty Scale.** The Attributions of Poverty Scale (Bullock, 1999) is a 45-item, self-report instrument designed to measure three dimensions of attributions held towards poverty: individualistic explanations, structural explanations, and fatalistic explanations. The scale assessed a broad range of explanations for poverty across individualistic (e.g., laziness, anti-work mentality, and breakdown of traditional families), structuralistic (e.g., lack of transportation), and fatalistic (e.g., sickness, bad luck) attributions. For the purposes of this study, beliefs about the causes of poverty were assessed using a modified, 36-item version of the Attributions of Poverty Scale. The alpha coefficients for the three constructs were reported as 0.91 (individualistic), 0.91 (structuralistic), and 0.72 (fatalistic). The survey is a 5-point Likert scale with 1 indicating "not at all important as a cause of poverty" and 5 indicating "extremely important as a cause of poverty."

**Attitudes about Poverty Scale.** The Attitudes about Poverty Scale (Yun & Weaver, 2010) is a 21-item, self-report instrument designed to measure a range of diverse attitudes about poverty and individuals living in poverty: personal deficiency (7 items), stigma (8 items), and structural perspective (6 items). Participants respond to each statement by using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "Strong Agreement (SA)" and 5 = "Strong Disagreement (SD)." Scoring of the Attitudes about Poverty Scale show the higher the score, the more favorable the respondents' attitude toward individuals living in poverty. Yun and Weaver (2010) report internal consistency of the total scale to be established with an alpha coefficient of 0.87. The overall total alpha for the current

study is 0.65. The alpha coefficients of the subscales of the Attitudes about Poverty Short Form ranged from 0.50 to 0.70.

**The School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale.** The School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005) is a 43-item, self-report instrument designed to measure school counselor self-efficacy. The School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale uses a 5-point Likert Scale to measure responses and consists of five subscales: personal and social development; leadership and assessment; career and academic development; collaboration and consultation; and cultural acceptance. Correlations of the subscale ranged from 0.27 to 0.43. On the Likert Scale, a rating of 1 indicated “not confident” and a rating of 5 indicated “highly confident.” A composite mean is calculated to demonstrate the overall level of self-efficacy. The alpha coefficient for the scale score was found to be 0.95 (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005).

### Analyses

The first researcher collected data and analyzed school counselors-in-training attitudes about poverty, attributions of causes of poverty, perceived self-efficacy when working with students in poverty, and demographic factors. The first researcher used the Statistical Product for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 computer software to enter and analyze data in an aggregate manner. A correlation analysis was used to assess 1) the relationship between school counselors' in training attitudes about poverty and 2) the relationship between school counselors' in training attributions of causes of poverty. A within subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test difference among subscales. Next, a multiple regression was used to assess the predictability of

relationships across variables. Furthermore, a backwards elimination regression was used to determine the strongest predictors of counselor self-efficacy.

### Results

The first research question addressed in this study was, “What is the nature of the attitudes school counselors-in-training hold regarding low SES?” The Attitudes about Poverty Scale results indicated school counselors-in-training were most likely to identify personal deficiency factors (highest level of agreement) as related to the causes of poverty (e.g., laziness anti-work mentality) ( $M = 4.14$ ). The results indicated that school counselors-in-training identified personal deficiency factors as the primary contributing factor for poverty and were more likely to adhere to attitudinal statements about poverty that focused on individual deficits. Similarly, Toporek and Pope-Davis (2005) found these attitudes about poverty point towards individual choices and behaviors as being the primary cause of poverty. The mean scores of the other subscales were  $M = 2.83$  (Stigma) and  $M = 2.64$  (Structural). Subscale difference were examined using a within-subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Results of the analysis found significant differences between personal deficiency and stigma ( $p < .001$ ) as well as personal deficiency and structural ( $p < .001$ ); however, there was not a significant difference between stigma and structural ( $p > .001$ ). See Table 2 for descriptive statistics of these scales.

The second research question addressed in this study was, “What is the nature of the attributions toward poverty held by school counselors-in-training?” On the Attributions of Poverty Scale, school counselors-in-training indicated they were most likely to attribute the causes

of poverty to individualistic factors ( $M = 3.52$ ). Individualistic factors deal specifically with laziness and an anti-work mentality. The mean scores of the other subscales were  $M = 3.30$  (Structural) and  $M = 3.32$  (Fatalistic). When using an ANOVA with repeated measures with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction, the mean scores for attributions were not statistically significantly different  $F(1.46, 139.75) = 1.46, p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, there were no statistically significant differences among the three-scale means. Given the non-significant F test, no post-hoc tests were performed.

The third research question addressed in this study was, “What is the relationship between the level of perceived school counseling self-efficacy and attitudes toward low SES among school counselors-in-training?” To specifically address the relationship between the level of perceived school counseling self-efficacy and attitudes towards low SES among school counselors-in-training, a backwards elimination regression was used to determine the best predictors of counselor self-efficacy. Using three predictors, an overall  $R^2$  of 0.04 was reached. Through backward elimination, a simpler model retaining just one predictor emerged. The final restricted model contained the Structural Attitude Scale and achieved an  $R^2$  of 0.04 ( $F = 3.16, p = 0.08$ ). The difference of .006 between these two models was not statistically significant ( $F = 0.25, p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, the more restricted model was preferred. Structural factors accounted for 3.7% of the variance of attitudes about poverty ( $R^2 = 0.04$ ). This indicates there was no significant relationship between self-efficacy and attitudes about poverty.

The fourth research question addressed in this study was, “What is the relationship

between the level of perceived school counseling self-efficacy and attributions toward low SES among school counselors-in-training?” Finally, to specifically address the relationship between the level of perceived school counseling self-efficacy and attributions of poverty, a backwards elimination regression was used to determine the best predictors of counselor self-efficacy. Using three predictors, an overall  $R^2$  of 0.07 was reached. Through backward elimination, a simpler model retaining just one predictor emerged. The final restricted model contained the Structural Attribution Scale and achieved an  $R^2$  of 0.06 ( $F = 4.87, p = 0.03$ ). The  $R^2$  difference of .009 between these two models was not statistically significant ( $F = 0.38, p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, the more restricted model was preferred. Structural attribution factors accounted for 5.6% of the variance of attributions towards poverty ( $R^2 = 0.06$ ). This indicated there was no significant relationship between self-efficacy and attributions towards poverty.

### Discussion

In the first research question, the researcher accessed the attitudes school counselors-in-training held regarding poverty. The researcher found an individual's belief as to what causes poverty can be linked to their attitude towards individuals living in poverty (Merolla et al., 2011). School counselors-in-training indicated they were most likely to identify personal deficiency factors when discussing persons living in poverty (e.g., laziness). Individuals who identify personal deficiency factors as the primary contributing factor for poverty are more likely to adhere to attitudinal statements about poverty that focus on individual deficits. Example statements included, “If poor people worked harder, they could escape poverty,” and “Most poor

people are satisfied with their standard of living” (Atherton & Gemmel, 1993). These attitudes about poverty point towards individual choices and behaviors as being the primary cause of poverty (Bray et al., 2015). The results are very similar to prior research which has shown Americans favor individualistic causes over structuralistic and fatalistic causes (Bray et al., 2015; Bullock et al., 2003; Cozzarelli et al., 2001). Bray & Schommer (2015) specifically found that school counselors believe poverty was attributed to either internal, personal characteristics such as laziness and loose morals or external forces such as structural causes and bad luck. These findings are reflective of the negative bias toward poverty, primarily suggesting that poverty is largely the result of limitations, deficiencies, and problems associated with the individual (Bray et al., 2015; Cozzarelli et al., 2001, Payne, 2005).

In the second research question, the researcher accessed the attributions school counselors-in-training held regarding poverty. While taking the survey, school counselors-in-training indicated they were most likely to attribute the causes of poverty to individualistic factors. Individualistic factors deal specifically with laziness and an anti-work mentality. Individuals who attribute poverty to individualistic factors place the blame on the individual, believing individuals living in poverty have caused their own conditions and also lack motivation (Bray et al., 2015; Bullock et al., 2003; Merolla et al., 2011). These findings are disconcerting because they suggest that school counselors-in-training may conceptualize the causes of poverty as being only based on individualized deficits, in essence solely focusing on blaming the individual (Bullock et al., 2003). This may lead to bias in how they see and

work with children and adolescents living in poverty as well as their parents. It also may limit their ability to identify societal or economic barriers that could be addressed in counseling. Attitudes and attributes related to poverty have been infrequently considered in the counseling arena and are potentially of great importance. A counselor’s impressions of a client help set the foundation for the working relationship (Smith, Mao, Perkins, & Ampuero, 2011).

The findings of the current study have parallels to other studies findings that have indicated that counselors and those in related fields may hold negative assumptions or beliefs about persons living in poverty. Earlier researchers have found within studies that school counselors-in-training held a bias against individuals living in poverty (Bray et al., 2015; Neynaber, 1992) and stereotypes towards individuals living in poverty were reinforced (Schnitzer, 1996). Similarly, Shapiro (2004) found counselors have negative attitudes towards individuals living in poverty including a resistance of working with individuals living in poverty and their belief psychotherapy could help low-income individuals.

The results of this study indicated that participants assigned more structural attitudes and individualistic attributes toward individuals living in poverty. Examples of structural attitudes held by individuals include believing external and economic forces are at fault such as society lacks social justice, or individuals living in poverty are exploited. Examples of individualistic attributions towards individuals living in poverty include the belief that poverty is caused by the individuals themselves, a lack of effort to find employment, and money spent on inappropriate things.

In the third research question, the researchers accessed the relationship between the level of perceived school counselor self-efficacy and attitudes toward poverty among school counselors-in-training. Overall, the results of this study showed that the best predictor of counselor self-efficacy was the Structural Attitude Subscale. Structural attitudes hold the social system at fault while looking at a variety of factors including economic, societal, and government barriers (Merolla et al., 2011). However, once the relationship between the structural factors and self-efficacy was examined, it was determined there was no significant relationship between self-efficacy and attitudes about poverty. One point of concern may be that this group of school counselors-in-training held a relatively high level of self-efficacy with limited actual counseling experience or experience with individuals living in poverty.

In the fourth research question, the researchers accessed the relationship between the level of perceived school counselor self-efficacy and attributions toward poverty among school counselors-in-training. Similar to the previous discussion of attitudes, results of this study suggested that the best predictor of counselor self-efficacy was the Structural Attribution Subscale. Merolla, et al. (2011) found individuals attribute economic, societal and government barriers towards reasons individuals are living in poverty. However, once the relationship between the structural factors and self-efficacy were examined, it was determined there was no significant relationship between self-efficacy and attitudes about poverty. Again, one point of concern may be this group of school

counselors-in-training held a relatively high level of self-efficacy, with limited actual counseling experience and experience with individuals living in poverty.

### Implications

Although no significant relationship was found between self-efficacy and attitudes or attributions, the results from the study revealed that the participants demonstrated relatively negative attitudes and attributions related to poverty. The researchers hope the implication for future research from this study could bring about intentional dialogue regarding the root causes of poverty and its perceived associated biases. The researchers suggest a comparison of programs that include cultural diversity training verse those without. This would speak to the idea that institutions may reevaluate their programs of study to ensure that cultural diversity and sensitivity is addressed by making it a core component of their curriculum. Thus, suggesting the need for counseling education programs to consider how to address this issue in training.

Bray and Schommer (2015) suggested students who desire to work as helping professions should be informed of social justice issues. This is an important aspect of training because it determines how they will empower or harm individuals in poverty (Krumer-Nevo, Weiss-Gal, & Monnickendam, 2009; Mullaly, 2007). Past research has shown counselors hold negative bias towards individuals living in poverty (Neynabar, 1992; Toporek & Pope-Davis, 2005). In addition, recent studies have found counselors hold negative attitudes towards individuals living in poverty and more positive attitudes towards the working-class population (Smith et al., 2011, Bray et al., 2015). This current study also supports the argument

that school counselors-in-training hold negative attitudes and stereotypes towards individuals living in poverty. With this in mind, it is imperative that counselor education programs seek innovative approaches to help counselors-in-training debunk the negative attitudes. Innovative approaches may include incorporating appropriate socioeconomic training, adding advocacy and service-learning projects into counseling programs, as well as encouraging students to work specifically with marginalized and high-poverty school populations during practicum and internship courses.

Bray and Schommer (2015) suggested school counseling programs look at more strength-based approaches such as the CARE model as an approach for professionals working with marginalized students (Foss, Generali, & Kress, 2011). In the CARE model, the counselor cultivates relationships with individuals living in poverty, acknowledges the realities of poverty, removes barriers, and expands clients' strengths (Foss et al., 2011). By understanding the attitudes and attributions held by school counselors-in-training, counselor educators can make necessary adjustments to courses and programs to ensure the appropriate implementation of humanistic and social justice frameworks.

It is our belief that the results of the study are a step forward in providing a foundation for understanding the attitudes and attributions school counselors-in-training hold towards individuals living in poverty. This study and the implications for the counselor education field can help provide information for addressing the impact of the issues and steps forward in implementing a social justice framework into school counseling programs.

### Limitations

One of the first limitations to be considered in this study is the possibility of differences that may exist between counseling programs. Responses for this study were limited to two universities in the southeast region of the United States. Results cannot be generalized to all counseling programs. Additionally, the small sample size and geographical area that was surveyed in this study may limit the generalization to other counselors-in-training. Self-reporting measures also limit the ability to draw direct reference to actual behavior; participants may under-report or exaggerate to minimize or intensify the results.

Caution should also be taken when generalizing the results to counselors in practice or individuals in other areas of the helping profession. A parallel concern is the relatively high level of school counseling self-efficacy among the sample. The sample population had a limited opportunity to have developed counseling experience while in their programs and training. Their self-reported level of self-efficacy may be falsely elevated and not a realistic demonstration of their actual competence. This may limit discussion of this variable in relation to attitudes and attributions toward poverty.

There was found to be a low alpha on the Attitudes about Poverty Scale. These findings have to be viewed with caution when considering the low reliability reported for the subscale personal deficiency in this study. The low reliability score could be due to a small sample size or only a small correlation among the variables. Additional testing is needed to ensure application of these findings to other school counselors.

### Recommendations

Future research should be completed

assessing the attitudes and attributions of school counselors-in-training, taking into account several of the methods, findings, and limitations of this study. First, this study looked closely at school counselors-in-training in the southeast region of the United States. Future research should be expanded to include school counselors-in-training from different regions as well as school counselors who are already in practice. In addition, a comparison study of school counselors-in-training and school counselors may bring forth information as to similarities and differences and how best to serve this population. A qualitative study which examines in depth attitudes, attributions, and self-efficacy of school counselors-in-training can also offer additional insight into this phenomenon. Future research done in a qualitative manner may help determine a deeper understanding of attitudes and attributions towards individuals living in poverty. Specifically, researchers could look at various counselors' backgrounds to determine if their background may impact perceptions and self-efficacy.

School counselor training programs should review their curriculum to determine the level of training school counselors-in-training are being provided on working with students in poverty. By increasing school counselors'-in-training knowledge of the "macrosystemic influences impacting poor families" via readings, video/films, guest speakers, reflective techniques and experiential activities, they can move beyond the common stereotypes held by some educators (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007, p. 86). Moreover, counselor education programs can facilitate the development of counselors-in-training by increasing their knowledge of class bias and privilege (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007).

Additionally, related to the ASCA National Model Professional Standards and School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies, it is imperative that school counselors engage in "continual professional development to inform and guide ethical and legal work" (ASCA, 2019, p.3). School counselors-in-training and practicing school counselors should adhere to this standard and engage in professional development opportunities targeted at working with individuals living in poverty. It is essential for student achievement that counselors-in-training and other school staff understand poverty and its impact on learning.

### Conclusion

While ASCA's ethical standards serve as a guide for the school counseling profession, it alone cannot address the attitudes and beliefs an individual hold towards another. School counselors are on the front lines of support and can play a pivotal role in combating the academic, social, and emotional barriers that students living in poverty experience (Havlik, et al., S., Neason, E., Puckett, J., Rowley, P., & Wilson, G., 2017). With the appropriate culturally specific training, current school counselors, as well as school counselors-in-training, can become better skilled to work with this population. It is our belief that counselor education programs can facilitate the development of counselors-in-training by increasing their knowledge and understanding of individuals living in poverty (Bray et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was to explore relationships among counselors'-in-training self-efficacy and their attributions and attitudes towards students living in poverty. School counselors-in-training were surveyed to explore each area. Though no significant relationship was found between

self-efficacy and attitudes or attributions, this study did reveal that school counselors-in-training tend to hold negative attitudes towards individuals living in poverty. While these results align to past research looking at the general population or other groups, it is one of few studies looking specifically at school counselors-in-training. Researchers believe results may assist counselor education programs and current school counselors by shedding light on an area that needs further examination in order to support students living in poverty.

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**Table 1**  
Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (N = 91)

Characteristic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%) of N
Gender		
Female	79	87
Male	12	13
Race/Ethnicity		
White		65
Black or African American		19
Indian or Alaskan Native		1.1
Asian		2.2
Hispanic or Latino		5.5
Other Race/Ethnicity		4.4
Family of Origin SES		
At or below poverty level	14	15.5
Just above poverty level	9	9.9
Lower middle class	18	19.8
Middle class	34	37.4
Upper middle class	14	15.4
Upper class	2	2.2

**Table 2**  
Descriptive Statistics for Scales

Scale	# of items	Cronbach's	Mean (SD)	F
Attitudes About Poverty				76.60*
Personal Deficiency	7	.37	4.15 (.53)	
Stigma	8	.83	2.84 (.72)	
Attributions of Poverty				1.46
Individualistic	15	.63	3.52 (.63)	
Fatalistic	8	.97	3.32 (.56)	
Structural	13	.86	3.31 (.64)	

## Attributes, Attitudes, and Perceived Self-Efficacy Levels of School Counselors Toward Poverty

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### Abstract

School counselors' attitudes, attributes, and self-efficacy levels while working with individuals living in poverty were examined using quantitative measures. Qualitative measures were used to assess challenges and recommendations of participants working with students impacted by poverty. Findings indicate school counselors' rate personal deficiencies higher regarding their attitudes toward individuals living in poverty and rated fatalistic causes higher for explaining causes of poverty.

Keywords: poverty, school counseling, self-efficacy, adolescents, children

### Introduction

Childhood poverty is associated with a range of negative developmental, behavioral and emotional consequences (Haft & Hoefft, 2017). For students living in poverty, one of the greatest challenges is academic failure (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007; Hopson & Lee, 2011). Past research has indicated that students living in poverty are 10 times more likely to drop out of school than students from higher income

families (Hopson & Lee, 2011) and living in poverty during early childhood is associated with lower than average rates of school completion (Kena et al., 2015). In fact, the academic achievement gap of students living in poverty has been well documented against the achievement levels of middle and upper socioeconomic students (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Yettick & Lloyd, 2015). This disparity is seen across all aspects of education. Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) found that children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to have an elevated school failure rate, developmental difficulties and delays, lower standardized test scores and graduation rates, and higher rates of school tardiness, absenteeism, and school dropout.

The educational disparities are even more concerning when considered in relation to the growing numbers of children and adolescents living in poverty. Estimates are that over 30 million children in the United States live in low-income families and over 14 million children in the United States live in poor families (Jiang, Ezkono, & Skinner, 2015; Macartney, 2011). Currently,