ABSTRACT

HARTIS, BENJAMIN CONNER. Threat Assessment in Higher Education: The Role of University Law Enforcement (Under the direction of Dr. Michelle Bartlett).

The April 16, 2007, shooting at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) led to a radical change in campus safety and security views at institutions of higher learning and law enforcement agencies. Immediately after the devastating events at Virginia Tech, college and university leaders began to evaluate their best practices, migrating toward a concept developed by the U.S. Secret Service to analyze potentially dangerous situations: threat assessment. Administrators across the country began calling for the design and implementation of threat assessment or behavioral assessment teams on educational campuses. The purpose of such teams is to mitigate instances of violence on their respective campuses via the identification of concerning behaviors and case management of potentially threatening situations for students, faculty, staff, and other affiliated individuals. Numerous subject matter experts have discussed the recommended team composition; however, few scholars have addressed the inclusion and function of university law enforcement agencies in behavioral assessment teams.

The goal of this study was to explore the role of university law enforcement agencies in threat assessment teams at 4-year public institutions in the University of North Carolina System (UNC System). Data collection occurred via a survey and semi-structured interviews with law enforcement officers throughout the UNC System. The specific objectives of this study were to (a) identify the structure and training of law enforcement threat assessment units within UNC System police departments, (b) explore trends in the current operations of law enforcement-based threat assessment units, and (c) highlight the anticipated needs of law enforcement-based threat assessment units. The findings from this study could have significance to the UNC System

as a whole and for the police departments and threat assessment teams at each respective institution. Moreover, this study contributed to the existing research on higher education threat assessment teams by focusing on the unique role of university law enforcement in mitigating threats of violence and managing concerning behaviors.

Threat Assessment in Higher Education: The Role of University Law Enforcement

by
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BIOGRAPHY

Benjamin Conner Hartis earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in 2017 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He majored in English with a minor in cognitive science. In 2019, he graduated from North Carolina State University with a Master of Education in Training and Development. Additionally, Conner received a graduate certificate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Gilling's School of Public Health in Community Preparedness and Disaster Management. Conner has worked professionally at the North Carolina State University Police Department for over 4 years. Conner currently serves as Sergeant over the Criminal Investigations Division at the North Carolina State University Police Department and is a member of the University's Behavioral Assessment Team. During his time at the North Carolina State University Police Department, Conner has attended numerous training opportunities related to threat assessment, including those led by the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation's Behavioral Threat Assessment Unit, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Behavioral Analysis Unit, the United States Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center, and the United States Postal Inspector's Threat Assessment Team. Conner is also an active member of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Chapter 1 provides an overview of threat assessment in higher education and the gaps in knowledge and research related to the role of university law enforcement in higher education threat assessment and management teams. This chapter focuses on the problem at hand, the purpose of this study, and the guiding frameworks and research questions. Chapter 1 presents the foundation and an outline of this research study.

Overview

College and university leaders deploy various stakeholders to help with containment, mission continuity, and organizational recovery when critical incidents occur in the higher education setting. Increased rates of violent critical incidents have indicated the need to reexamine the stakeholders who handle pre- and post-critical incidents at universities. The numbers of mass shooting episodes, instances in which one or more assailants attempt to harm or kill multiple people, have continued to increase over the past few years, with approximately 980 mass shootings between 2014 and 2016 and approximately 1,360 between 2018 and 2020 (Gun Violence Archive, 2021). Of these incidents, some of the most deadly have occurred on educational campuses. Three shootings—at Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech)—contributed to over half the fatalities reported in the 215 mass shooting episodes between 1990 and 2012 (Shultz et al., 2013). College and university leaders throughout the United States have implemented measures to mitigate violence, shifting their emergency and crisis management plans heavily to favor preventative measures. The preventive measure most highly cited in the

related literature is multidisciplinary behavioral assessment teams at institutions of higher learning (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009; Van Brunt, 2014; Vossekuil et al., 2004).

Nature of the Problem

Colleges and universities throughout the United States must focus on the safety and security of students, faculty, and staff. Maintaining on-campus safety has become an increasingly difficult task due to continuous increases in the frequency and intensity of potential threats. On April 16, 2007, the massacre of 32 people in the mass shooting at Virginia Tech resulted in safety and security changes at every college and university in the United States. Virginia Governor Timothy Kaine formed a review panel of nationally recognized subject matter experts to complete a detailed after-action report immediately after the incident (The Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The Virginia Tech Review Panel Report found more than 31 separate reports made to Virginia Tech that indicated the shooter as a person of concern. The numerous deficiencies in safety and security highlighted after the Virginia Tech attack led to a national call for a large-scale change in violence prevention within higher education. One year after the Virginia Tech tragedy, a 2007 report by the University of North Carolina Campus Safety Task Force suggested the implementation of threat assessment teams throughout University of North Carolina System schools (UNC System; UNC Safety Task Force, 2007).

A study of U.S. colleges and universities showed that approximately 80% of institutions had active campus threat assessment or management teams (Bolante & Dykeman, 2015; Mardis et al., 2013; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). Increasing incidents of campus shootings have caused numerous state and local government officials to advance violence prevention efforts, passing legislation mandating the creation of campus threat assessment and management teams (Mardis et al., 2013). The presence of threat assessment and management teams has become a common

practice on nearly all higher education campuses; however, there is still a vital need for attention to the area of threat assessment. Between 2019 and 2020, 196 reported incidents of gunfire on school grounds occurred throughout the United States, resulting in 46 deaths and 107 injuries (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2021). Of the 196 reported incidents, 12 occurred on educational campuses in North Carolina, six of which were UNC System institutions (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2021).

Problem Statement

Higher education leaders across the United States began evaluating the effectiveness of the policies, procedures, and frameworks of their institutions for mitigating threats of violence after the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting. Many scholars have sought to define threat assessment as a discipline and outline the tools and frameworks for the best practices for mitigating threats of violence; however, few have addressed the specific needs and roles of law enforcement within higher education threat assessment proceedings (Mardis et al., 2013; Wang & Hutchins, 2010). Existing research on threat assessment in higher education has suggested the implementation of multidisciplinary teams but provided minimal guidance for establishing the specific goals and objectives of each stakeholder on the team (Jonson, 2017). A notable gap exists within the literature surrounding the competencies, training, and designated roles of university law enforcement agencies in campus threat assessment teams. The success of such teams in a higher education context requires policies, procedures, and frameworks to address the specific, invaluable role of university law enforcement agencies in mitigating violence on college and university campuses.

Purpose Statement

This study focused on the role of university police departments in threat assessment and management teams at UNC System institutions. This mixed methods case study addressed the existing practices of UNC System police departments concerning higher education threat assessment and contributed to the field of threat assessment and intervention on college campuses. Identifying the current structure of the threat assessment units of university police departments and the future needs of law enforcement-based threat assessment units could be a way to inspire change within departments throughout the system and better prepare multidisciplinary team members in the UNC System to mitigate and manage instances of violence.

Theoretical Framework

Systems Theory

Systems theory was this study's theoretical framework. According to Greenwood and Levin (2007), systems theory suggests that every entity consists of "systems that interact" in ways that scholars can examine to determine "holistic concepts." Systems theory was the framework used to view university police threat assessment units from a holistic, multidisciplinary perspective. Using systems theory further enabled the analysis of university police departments as both autonomous systems and entities that comprise university-specific behavior assessment teams. This theory was also the framework used to explore university police departments as individual systems within the more extensive UNC System.

Higher education threat management teams consist of various stakeholders from a diverse range of backgrounds, professional capacities, and disciplines. Each team member adds insight that contributes to the success of the multidisciplinary team. In this study, systems theory was the

means used to examine individual university police threat assessment units both as separate police department systems and members of larger university threat management teams.

Conceptual Framework

A mixed methods case study approach was used to answer the study's guiding research questions. The research questions focused on law-enforcement-based threat assessment units at UNC System schools and the significant implications of the use of UNC System police departments for threat management. A case study approach was suitable to conduct an in-depth exploration of the issues related to threat assessment in real-life settings within each UNC System police department.

Research Questions

The overarching research question was: What role do university police departments have in university-wide threats assessment teams, and what needs still exist within police threat assessment teams? There were four sub questions.

R1: What is the makeup of threat assessment units within police departments within the University of North Carolina System?

R2: What are the existing policies, procedures, mission statements, and vision statements concerning the roles and responsibilities of university police threat assessment teams?

R3: How have police threat assessment teams evolved within each respective sample university police department?

R4: What are the projected future needs of university police threat assessment teams?

Limitations and Delimitations

This section presents the limitations and delimitations of the study. The section addresses the study's limitations, such as the restrictions associated with the mixed methods case study

methodology. There is also a focus on delimitations, including the study's scope and literature review.

Limitations

Method. This case study included a specific sample group of police departments within the UNC System. The bounded context of the case study design could have impacted the findings' generalizability to other educational institutions, law enforcement agencies, and threat assessment or management teams. Additionally, the collected data and analysis focused on the state of law enforcement-based threat assessment teams in the UNC System—changes in the environment and context of the sample population could produce different results.

Participants. The participants of this study came from university police threat assessment units within the UNC System. The participants from the invited police departments took part voluntarily. Fifteen institutions received invitations to participate, with individuals from eight police departments ultimately responding and taking part in the study. This study's findings were limited to the data collected from eight departments.

Delimitations

Scope. This study had a scope limited to fully sworn police departments at 4-year public institutions within the UNC System. The findings might not be comparable to other law enforcement agencies at the county, city, and state levels. This study focused on university law enforcement agencies to address the role of law enforcement within higher education threat assessment teams. The goal of the research was to improve the policies, practices, and procedures of university law enforcement via an exploration of the current university law enforcement structure to suggest areas for improvement. Additionally, the sample contained only eight participants. All the participants were supervisors of their respective police departments;

therefore, the lack of diversity among participants could have resulted in a limited range of perspectives, policies, and procedures during the data collection.

Literature. This study focused on threat assessment teams in higher education settings. The literature review did not include research on threat assessment teams at private institutions or in local governments. The review excluded literature not explicitly related to police threat assessment units in a university context.

Definition of Terms

Higher education institution. An institution for students with secondary degrees or equivalents that provides a 2-year or greater program for graduate or professional degrees (20 U.S. Code § 1001, n.d.).

Threat assessment. The act of "identifying and evaluating risk factors to help prevent escalation" (Bennett, 2015, p. 5).

Threat assessment and management teams. Multidisciplinary teams in which the members review and discuss individuals who have displayed concerning behaviors, may pose a risk to themselves or others, or could significantly disrupt the campus environment (Deisinger et al., 2008).

Threat management. The process of developing and implementing plans to alleviate the threat of violence posed by an individual (Meloy et al., 2013).

Organization of the Study

This study has five chapters. The first chapter provided the nature of the problem, the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of key terms, and limitations and delimitations. The second chapter is a review of the literature on the development and implementation of threat assessment and management teams

and the role of law enforcement in threat management teams. The third chapter presents the study's research methodology, design, and data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter includes the study's findings and implications. Finally, the fifth chapter consists of conclusions and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Relevant Literature

Conducting a research study requires framing the research in the real-world context of the subject matter. Chapter 2 presents the study's context of threat assessment in higher education settings. Additionally, this chapter includes the literature on threat assessment in higher education and indicates the need for further research on law enforcement's role in higher education-based threat assessment processes.

Overview

In the wake of the mass casualty shooting at Virginia Tech, higher education and government leaders rushed to make recommendations for mitigating instances of violence on educational campuses. Government leaders at the local, state, and federal levels unanimously called for enhanced violence prevention and threat assessment programs at institutions of higher learning (Cornell, 2010). The research and literature on threat assessment conducted after the Virginia Tech shooting have shown the necessity of well-designed planning and training for first responder agencies; however, threat assessment, as a violence prevention strategy, is another means of preventing the need to implement first-response plans.

Specific to incidents of mass violence continue throughout the U.S. higher education system, the term "threat assessment" has broad, undefined meanings. The U.S. Secret Service and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) suggested using the term "threat assessment" to describe the investigation of an individual or individuals in a specific group who have communicated, displayed, or hinted at threatening behaviors (Cornell, 2010). Moreover, effective threat assessments require that the members of threat assessment teams respond to each threat collaboratively to determine the level of the threat, the best interventions, and the best

means of developing a continued response plan. Each threat assessment team requires an individualized approach for team membership, training, and intervention methodologies.

Numerous subject matter experts have indicated threat assessment as an extremely promising field for assessing and mitigating instances of violence within schools (Fien, 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2004). In an analysis of 37 incidents of targeted school violence between 1974 and 2000, the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education found that school-based attacks are most often planned and contain pre-attack indicators and other potentially detectable elements (Vossekuil et al., 2004). The 2007 Virginia Tech Review Panel Report provided support for these findings. The shooter had a documented history of mental health concerns, including homicidal ideations, and had been the focus of numerous concerning behavior reports. Additionally, previous school systems had suggested the provision of intensive psychiatric care for the shooter. Such information about the offender would have provided invaluable information for a threat assessment investigation.

History of Law Enforcement-Based Threat Assessment

U.S. Secret Service

The U.S. Secret Service is the primary law enforcement agency responsible for the prevention of targeted violence and the assessment of threats of harm to and assassination of national leaders (Borum et al., 1999). U.S. Secret Service officials have developed protocols and conducted threat assessment investigations since 1990, earning a reputation as the experts of threat assessment among law enforcement agencies throughout the country. Specifically, U.S. Secret Service officials have received credit for developing, refining, and sharing the first fact-based method of threat assessment evaluations with law enforcement agencies throughout the world.

In the report *Preventing Assassination: Secret Service Exceptional Case Study Project*, Fein and Vossekuil (1997) focused on the details and data related to 83 attempted attacks on public officials that occurred from 1949 to 1996. According to the study, violence is the final result of a process of thoughts and behaviors. In addition, the individuals who engage in violence do not match standard profiles, and the majority of violent incidents include the exhibition of identifiable concerning behaviors or elements of planning and preparation before the acts of violence. This study, which provided fundamental threat assessment research, presented a broad basis of understanding for law enforcement professionals throughout the country; however, there was still a need for continued research.

On April 20, 1999, the Columbine High School massacre resulted in the deaths of 12 students and one teacher (Vossekuil et al., 2004). The Columbine High School shooting resulted in an exponential increase in the need for further research on threat assessment within a school setting. In response to the Columbine High School shooting, the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education published *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. In this study, the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education officials collaborated to review the documents, behaviors, and facts of 37 school shootings that occurred between 1974 and 2000. The findings from this study mirrored the U.S. Secret Service's previous findings by indicating that attacks are rarely impulsive occurrences and that they often contain detectable elements of planned acts of violence. Based on their extensive research and experience with threat assessment investigations, the U.S. Secret Service developed and published 10 critical questions for the threat assessment process at law enforcement agencies (Borum et al., 1999).

Question 1. What motivated the subject to make statements or take the action that caused

him/her to come to attention?

This question addresses the "why" behind the investigations and indicates the need for investigators to ground each case in the unique context of the individual of concern (Borum et al., 1999). An investigation should commence with an examination of the motive of the subject of concern and the impact of statements or actions on the reporting parties to find a foundation for continued threat assessment investigations. Ultimately, this question is a means of identifying the perceived problem so that investigators can find an avenue for resolving the issue before individuals feel that they must employ violence as a means to an end.

Question 2. What has the subject communicated to anyone concerning his/her intentions?

This question is a reminder that a threat communicated directly to a target should not be the only factor for assessing risk (Borum et al., 1999). Investigators should examine collateral information and analyze the individual of concern's internet history and social media presence and interview informants, such as family, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. Gaining collateral information during investigations could be a way to reduce the impact of bias and frame the incident within the totality of the circumstances.

Question 3. Has the subject shown an interest in targeted violence, perpetrators of targeted violence, weapons, extremist groups, or murder?

Affiliation with a particular group or subject matter may not always be a predictive factor for targeted violence; however, instances of targeted violence can begin with an unusual fixation on specific interests (Borum et al., 1999). Investigators must examine the subject of interest's access to weapons, group memberships, and subject matter knowledge or previous training and experience to assess threat level. Understanding the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the subject of concern enables investigators to access the incident and assign a level of risk.

Question 4. Has the subject engaged in attack-related behavior, including menacing, harassing, and/or stalking-type behaviors?

Conducting a threat assessment requires examining the criminal histories of all involved parties (Borum et al., 1999). A critical step is to determine if a suspect has had any non-criminal interactions with law enforcement, including calls for service or non-criminal reports. Criminal history does not always correlate with the potential for violence; however, a pattern of behaviors, such as fixation or issues with authority and boundaries, could be information helpful for assessments.

Question 5. Does the subject have a history of mental illness, including command hallucinations, delusional ideas, feelings of persecution, etc., with indications that the subject has acted on those beliefs?

Mental illness should not automatically cause an investigator to assign risk to a subject or case. As indicated in Question 5, components of mental illness, such as hallucination or paranoia, could be essential information for threat assessment cases; however, such information should only be one factor in the assessment (Borum et al., 1999). Threat assessment cases involving individuals with mental illnesses require establishing the individuals' normal or baseline behaviors and finding deviations of escalations of those from historical norms.

Question 6. How organized is the subject? Is he/she capable of developing and carrying out a plan?

One factor essential in all threat assessment cases is access or means (Borum et al., 1999). Investigators gauging access must determine if the subject has access to the tools necessary to carry out targeted violence. When addressing means, investigators must determine if the subject has the ability to carry out a plan, such as the cognitive faculties needed to develop

and implement an action, geographic proximity, and physical ability.

Question 7. Has the subject experienced a recent loss and or loss of status, and has this led to feelings of desperation and despair?

Conducting any assessment requires highlighting and examining any personal stressors that could contribute to a negative mentality or result in the escalation of a pre-existing negative mental status (Borum et al., 1999). Investigators must broaden their research by examining the subject of concern's negative experiences or perceptions with individuals and more expansive organizations. An investigator must consider the subject's feelings of hopelessness or desperation while gauging the subject's response to further conflict or interactions with others.

Question 8. What is the subject saying, and is it consistent with his/her actions?

An investigator with the opportunity to interview and corroborate collateral information with the subject of concern must evaluate the thoughts and feelings of the subject compared to those of other involved parties (Borum et al., 1999). Interviewing a subject of concern is a way to assess the credibility or plausibility of third-party reports of the subject's statements. A subject who remains clear and consistent in communicated threats could be an enhanced risk compared to a subject who has disjointed, fleeting displays or communication of threats.

Question 9. Is there concern among those who know the subject that he/she might take action based on inappropriate ideas?

Gathering information from individuals with close relationships with a subject of concern is an essential step of threat assessment (Borum et al., 1999). Third-party acquaintances might find a subject's behavior concerning; however, the investigator must see if the others with close relationships with the subject have observed described behavior consistently as well. One way to assess risk is to interview close friends and family to distinguish between the normal behavior of

the subject and unexplainable changes.

Question 10. What factors in the subject's life and/or environment might increase/ decrease the likelihood of the subject attempting to attack a target?

An effective threat assessment investigation also requires examining the subject's life circumstances, including stabilizing and destabilizing events (Borum et al., 1999). An investigator must document events or incidents that could result in the escalation of a subject's concerning behaviors while also documenting positive experiences or buffers. An investigator must identify negative areas that could cause increased volatility while preserving and using existing support systems and buffers to mitigate the escalation of violent behavior escalation.

Assessments of targeted violence are an increasing challenge to law enforcement professionals, mental health providers, and other first-response agencies. U.S. Secret Service officials have conducted extensive research on instances of targeted violence over the past two decades and used those findings to develop an effective framework for assessing the potential of targeted violence (Vossekuil et al., 2004). The fact-based methods of the U.S. Secret Service focus on a subject's patterns of thinking, histories of behavior, and unique contexts to indicate the extent of risk. With this, the tools provided by the U.S. Secret Service are not a guarantee of success; each case requires a personalized assessment approach to preventing targeted violence.

Federal Bureau of Investigations

The U.S. Secret Service has received credit for designing and implementing the first protocols for law enforcement threat assessment; however, the FBI has provided two units for conducting threat assessments throughout the country. Specifically, the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) and the Behavior Analysis Unit (BAU) are the groups tasked with threat assessment (Fitzgerald, 2007).

The mission of the NCAVC is to use investigative and operations functions to conduct research and design training for local, state, federal, and foreign law enforcement agencies surrounding the investigations of unusual or repeated violent crimes (Fitzgerald, 2007). The NCAVC's primary goals are research, training, and education rather than direct threat assessment casework. The NCAVC provides support for the BAU, the FBI's threat assessment investigative branch.

The BAU's mission is to provide behavioral-based investigative and operational support; its overarching goal is to provide on-site case consultations via an extensive network of BAU special agents (Fitzgerald, 2007). The BAU addresses threat assessment through a criminal investigative analysis that includes a detailed examination of the offender's behavior for threat analysis, critical incident management, and broader case management. The BAU is a resource for local, state, or federal law enforcement agencies requiring assistance with threat assessment cases.

Association of Threat Assessment Professionals

Founded in 1992, the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) addresses the standardized training, education, and professional practices of the threat assessment community (ATAP, 2010). The nonprofit organization consists of law enforcement professionals, legal professionals, mental health clinicians, corporate security professionals, and other individuals involved in professional threat and violence risk assessment. ATAP provides a platform for continuing education for threat assessment professionals by hosting and requiring continuing education courses for active membership. Additionally, ATAP is the organization responsible for the testing, accreditation, and issuance of the Certified Threat Manager credential, a certification highly regarded throughout the professional threat assessment

community.

Higher Education Threat Assessment Team Composition

Examining the role of university law in the higher education threat assessment process requires understanding the typical composition of threat assessment teams at institutions of higher learning. According to Deisinger and Scalora (2016), threat assessment teams should have between four and eight members, with each having a written position description. Selecting members for a multidisciplinary team reflective of the university community requires choosing individuals based on their expertise and availability. A multidisciplinary team in the higher education setting enables enhanced collaboration and coordination between various stakeholders throughout the campus community, including academic affairs, student affairs, residential life, employee relations, campus law enforcement, student health, and university legal departments.

In 2012, the Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (HEMHA) provided a guide for the design, selection, and implementation of threat assessment teams at educational institutions. According to the HEMHA, developing and maintaining a threat assessment team within a higher education setting requires a personalized, fluid approach that matches the institution's contextual setting, including its size, history, resources, and existing policies and procedures. Selecting core members for the team requires locating individuals with a good understanding of the culture and events on campus and selecting individuals with authority to recommend or take actions as necessary for cases (HEMHA, 2012).

University Core Members. A 2010 survey of 175 schools found that the most frequently mentioned representatives of on-campus teams were counseling center directors (153 teams), deans of students (114 teams), vice presidents of student affairs (61 teams), faculty representatives (72 teams), health services directors (81), Office of Student Conduct staff (112

teams), housing directors (125 teams), and directors of public safety (139 teams; HEMHA, 2012). These stakeholders comprised the highest volume of team members. Additional members included representatives from women's services, the university registrar, career services, academic advising, financial aid, legal counsel professionals, and staff from campus ministries, athletics, the international office, and disability services. The survey found that many institutions had two teams: one focused on students and the other focused on faculty and staff.

Mental Health Providers. Participation from clinicians within the mental health field is an essential factor in examining the potential impact of mental health on cases or case-related outcomes. Around 75% of mental illnesses are established by age 24 years (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2021). From 2007 to 2017, the rate of college students engaging in mental health treatment increased from 19% to 34%, with the rate of diagnoses among the population also increasing from 22% to 36% (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2020). In addition, from 2009 to 2015, the average number of students utilizing on-campus mental health resources increased 30%, while academic enrollment only grew 5% (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2020). The numbers of mental health concerns continue to increase; therefore, mental health provider representation should include professionals from on-campus counseling centers, outside mental health resources, or student health centers. More than one individual from the selected mental health facilities should assist with team membership, as no team member connected to a subject of concern as a provider should serve as a consultant on any cases where bias could affect the ability to remain impartial (Deisinger et al., 2008). Including mental health professionals on threat assessment teams is a way to ensure that team members can more quickly and effectively distinguish between the symptomology of mental health conditions and elements of concerning or threatening behaviors.

Student Affairs. Student affairs professionals on threat assessment teams can provide access to student-related data, such as student conduct files, demographic information, parental contact information, application essays, and other self-disclosed information (Deisinger et al., 2008). Student affairs members can also provide student-centered perspectives helpful for navigating the impact of decisions on the student of concern's academic career and implications for the larger campus community. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) focuses on the role of student affairs professionals in higher education threat assessments. With this, NASPA implemented a unit on "Campus Safety and Violence Prevention" (NASPA, 2021). The goal of the Campus Safety and Violence Prevention group within NASPA is to enhance campus safety and violence prevention efforts via training so that student affairs professionals can collaborate on their institutions' threat assessment teams.

Academic Affairs. Representatives from a university's Academic Affairs Department can connect the team with various academic units and provide insight into academic policies, resources, and academic performance (Deisinger et al., 2008). While often overlooked, the Academic Affairs Department is one of the most effective at finding external factors with an influence on how a subject of concern presents (i.e., academic standing, upcoming major assignments, and progressions within fields of study).

University Law Enforcement. The primary goals of law enforcement professionals on threat assessment teams are to conduct criminal investigations, provide collateral information related to a subject of concern's prior criminal history or interactions with law enforcement, and serve as liaisons between outside law enforcement agencies at the local, state, and federal levels (Deisinger et al., 2008). Some institutions may not have independent law enforcement agencies; therefore, incorporating a local law enforcement agency representative as a member of the team

is beneficial.

Residence Life. Representatives from residence life are liaisons between on-campus housing staff (e.g., resident advisors, community directors, and others) and behavioral assessment team members. The Association of College and University Housing Officers (2021) indicated that residence life professionals are safety nets for students when it comes to noticing initial signs of concerning behaviors and monitoring students post-intervention. Residence life staff members often provide information related to how individuals fit within living communities and are great points of contact for how individuals of concern navigate conflict. Residence life staff members are also effective team members for implementing intervention strategies and continuing case management (Deisinger et al., 2008).

Legal Counsel. Legal counsel from the university can provide guidance for legal barriers, protected information, and other relevant laws, policies, and procedures that could impact or delay the assessment process. The context of higher education threat assessment teams requires extensive understanding of various federal laws such as the Federal Education Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA) and antidiscrimination laws covered by the Title IX of the U.S. Education Amendments of 1972. Any legal counsel invited to join an assessment team must have experience and knowledge of local, state, and federal laws pertaining to higher education and confidentiality and privacy issues related to students (Deisinger et al., 2008).

Case Manager. Developing a threat assessment team and navigating large caseloads requires obtaining team members who are independent case managers. The case manager's role is to collect and document all necessary information while managing follow-up and continuous outreach to the subject of concern. Case managers have the responsibility of running threat assessment meetings and guiding the team through the threat assessment process (Deisinger et

al., 2008).

Disability Services. The role of the disability services representative is to be a subject matter expert about policies, procedures, and laws for protecting individuals with recognized disabilities. Disability services representatives work to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities while also providing the team with ideas for ongoing treatment, resources, and case management (Deisinger et al., 2008). The Association of Higher Education and Disability (2021) provides continuous training for navigating the overlap between threat assessment proceedings and disability services at colleges and universities.

Human Resources. The role of the human resources representative is to provide the team with information about employment status and job performance while also helping develop and implement a response plan. The human resources representative can provide invaluable insight on university policies, contractual issues, mandated evaluations, and terminations (Deisinger et al., 2008). Lastly, human resources representatives can provide insight into mandating performance plans or terminating faculty and staff members who pose ongoing risks to the university community.

University Communications. University communications or public relations representatives are vital team members for managing potential high-profile cases; however, a representative from communications does not need to attend all meetings. The role of this member is to be a liaison for the media and the public (Deisinger et al., 2008). This representative's primary goal is to share clear, consistent messages with relevant stakeholders throughout the campus community during times of crisis. External communication is a necessity; however, internal communication issues could result in unnecessary delays and conflict in the threat assessment process.

Challenges for Threat Assessment Teams

Threat assessment and management teams have varying needs based on the context of the campus (e.g., size, history, resources, policies, and procedures). Each threat assessment team has a unique makeup, but the goal of each team remains the same: identifying, evaluating, and intervening in situations of potential threats or risks (Bennett, 2015). Working to achieve the shared goals requires threat assessment team members throughout the country to continuously battle the challenges of assessing threats in the field of higher education. The threat assessment process has numerous challenges; however, navigating ethical and legal considerations are the most frequent concerns. With this, threat assessment team members must avoid infringing on the subject of concern's constitutional rights while protecting the public and promoting public safety (Jones & Gray, 2020).

Ethical Concerns

The primary ethical goal of threat assessment teams is assessing and preventing imminent harm to the subject of concern or third parties (Jones & Gray, 2020). Threat assessment team members may have to work cases in which the subjects of concern have committed no criminal acts or demonstrated behaviors that indicate the need for a mental health commitment. In such cases, threat assessment teams must rely on consent from the subject of concern to develop relationships, gather information, and assess incidents. Developing working relationships with subjects of concern presents unique ethical concerns, as investigators must cultivate working relationships while remaining unbiased during investigation. Threat assessment teams have the ethical obligation of collecting data and collateral information helpful to form an objective conclusion; however, discerning the best method of data collection may be a challenge.

ATAP (2010) provided guidance for ethical considerations during the threat assessment

process with the ATAP Code of Ethical Conduct. ATAP is the institution responsible for governing the industry practice of threat assessments. The ATAP Code of Conduct provides goals and "enforceable expectations of appropriate conduct in certain areas of practice" (ATAP, 2010). Threat assessment team members should adhere to ATAP ethical guidelines as well as the ethical standards provided by their professionals or employers. A host of professional threat assessment organizations exist. The International Association of Chiefs of Police and the American Psychological Association have provided broad guidelines and principles for resolving ethical issues and conducting threat assessments in a competent manner while protecting privacy and confidentiality (Jones & Gray, 2020).

Legal Concerns

In addition to ethical concerns in the field of threat assessment, team members must understand the statutes, regulations, and case laws relevant to threat assessment investigations (Jones & Gray, 2020). Threat assessment in educational settings requires remaining aware of the numerous federal laws that require states receiving federal funding to have policies and provide reports of students of concern to local law enforcement agencies. Additionally, numerous educational institutions have workplace and campus violence prevention policies that require reporting and cooperation with educational threat assessment teams. Educational threat assessment teams must have foundational legal guidance; however, many local and state settings lack regulatory guidelines and standards for the role of law enforcement in threat assessment investigations. Without specific legal guidance, legal standards for law enforcement-based threat assessment originate from the various civil rights laws in the United States Constitutional Amendments, mainly the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments. The goal of the Fourth Amendment is to protect against unreasonable search and seizure by government entities; thus, it

addresses the need for voluntary interactions with subjects of concern absent reasonable suspicion or probable cause that the subjects have committed or are committing crimes. The Fifth Amendment protects against self-incrimination, while the Sixth Amendment provides the right to counsel. These amendments require consideration when working to avoid the violation of a subject of concern's rights via interviews that could result in criminal action.

Threat assessment team members must also remain cognizant of federal regulations, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule and FERPA, while collecting data and gathering information to use to corroborate or refute concerns. HIPAA and FERPA enable limited information-sharing related to medical and behavioral health information and student-protected information (Jones & Gray, 2020). Threat assessment team members conducting noncriminal assessments must carefully navigate legal restrictions by soliciting consent from the subjects of concern or the subjects' legal guardians. Ultimately, the field of threat assessment is a dynamic one in which changing guidance, statutes, and procedures present challenges to teams for assessment and intervention. Threat assessment teams must remain current with ethical codes and local, state, and federal legal standards with an impact on the assessment process while monitoring the evolution of the threat assessment field.

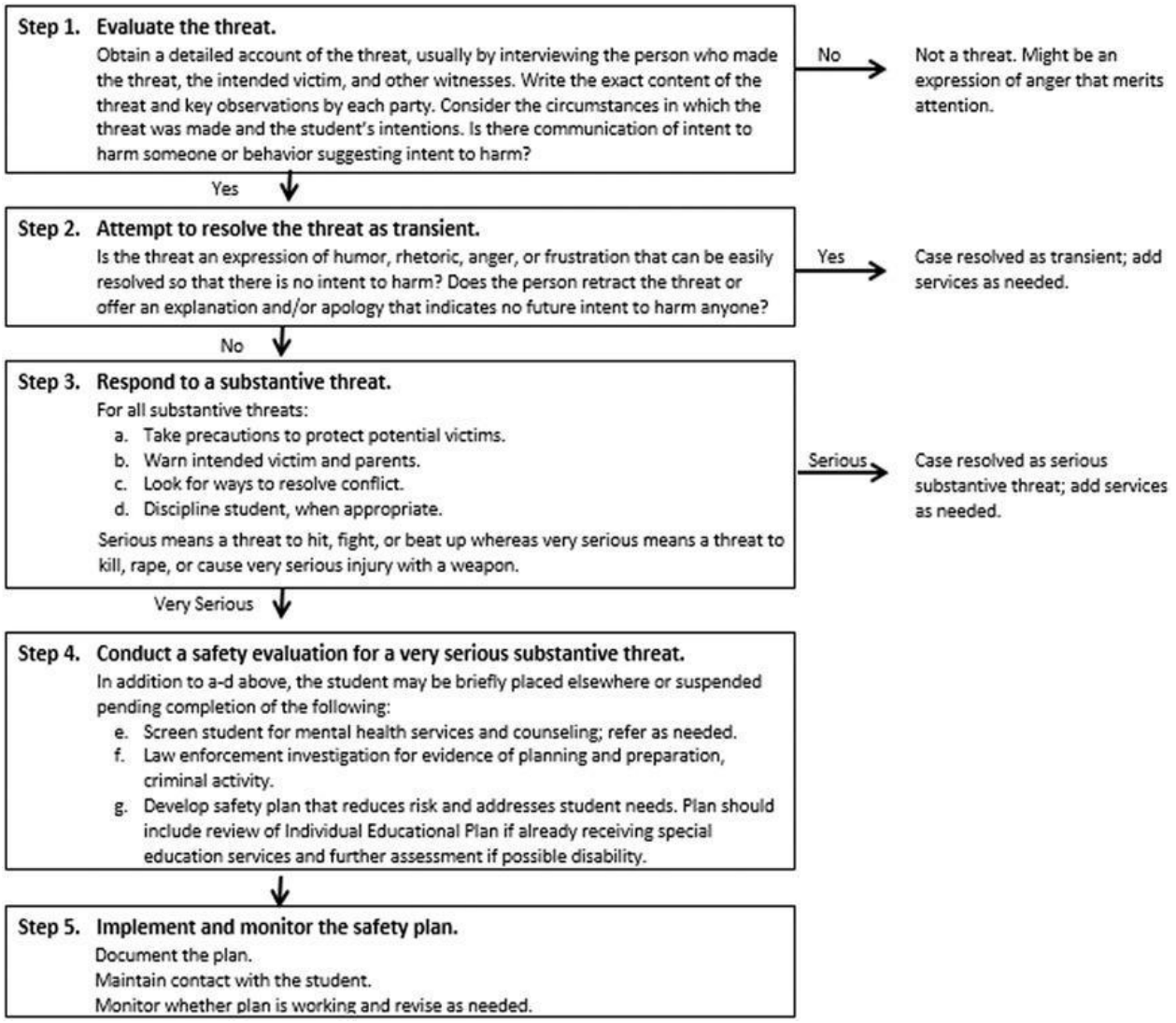
Steps for Threat Assessment and Case Management

In 2006, the FBI, the U.S. Secret Service, and the Department of Education provided the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines manual that contains recommendations and guidance for school-based threat assessment teams (Cornell, 2020). The guidelines present a systematic approach to threat assessment edited and field-tested by subject matter experts throughout 35 Virginia schools. In 2018, officials renamed *The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines* manual the *Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines*

(CSTAG) to broaden the published policies and procedures to apply to educational threat assessment teams throughout the United States. The CSTAG provides various strategies for preventing violent incidents; however, threat assessment teams do not have the responsibility of predicting violence or how a subject of concern will respond in a given situation (Cornell, 2020). Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the five steps of the CSTAG model widely used in assessments of identified threats and the mitigation of instances of violence.

Figure 2.1

Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines Model.



Source: "Threat Assessment as a School Violence Prevention Strategy," by D. G. Cornell, 2020, *Criminology & Public Policy*, *19*(1), 235–252. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12471

The CSTAG model provides five steps for conducting threat assessments, as outlined in Figure 2.1. In Step 1, threat assessment team members identify and evaluate the threat via extensive data-gathering. The threat assessment team must remain aware of the concerns of the organization they serve. Deisinger and Scalora (2016) noted that everyone within an institution

must know about the existence of the threat assessment team and how to report concerning behaviors. Organizational leaders must cultivate and maintain institutional cultures supportive of reporting. Working with threat assessment cases requires adopting a broad reporting stance to avoid overlooking potential threats. Each incident, from an angry outburst to deliberate communication of threats, requires a report and assessment. After receiving reports of concerning or threatening behaviors, investigators should conduct interviews with the subjects of concern, witnesses, and other individuals who can provide collateral information to determine the risk of the threat. This step requires gathering as much information as possible to differentiate between jokes, figures of speech, outbursts, and deliberate, intentional threats (Cornell, 2020). The team members can move to Step 2 after identifying and conducting an initial screen of the threat for validity.

In Step 2, the threat assessment team members determine if they can address the threat appropriately through educational counseling or mediation or initiate disciplinary action (Cornell, 2020). Investigators must navigate this step by examining the context of the incident, identifying risk factors, and understanding mitigating factors to prevent escalation. The team members might not be able to address all threat assessment cases in Step 2. Each case requires independent evaluation and could require immediate, enhanced intervention.

In Step 3, the threat assessment team members respond to verified threats in an effective, timely manner. The goal of this step is to develop an intervention to reduce the risk of violence and address other underlying concerns. At this stage, the team members should make every effort to evaluate the safety of involved parties and develop intervention plans (Cornell, 2020). Potential intervention plans include engagement with the subject of concern, outreach to the subject's family and friends, mandated mental health assessment, removal from the organization,

law enforcement intervention, and civil proceedings, such as restraining orders (Deisinger et al., 2008).

During Step 4, the threat assessment team members implement intervention strategies and mitigation plans through a collaborative approach. This step should include appropriate stakeholders who can facilitate the proposed intervention strategies (Cornell, 2020). Law enforcement officials utilize Step 4 to look for evidence of planning or preparation, examine prior interactions with law enforcement or criminal histories, and evaluate access to weapons and means of carrying out communicated threats. After completing Step 4, the team members should move to Step 5 with the understanding that the incident might require further planning and regression to previous steps.

During Step 5, the threat assessment team members monitor the response of the subject of concern to the implemented plan through continued follow-up and case management (Cornell, 2020). No timeline exists for any threat assessment case, and certain subjects of concern may require comprehensive case management and intervention strategies. Threat assessment team members must stand ready to evaluate the plans for effectiveness continually and modify any plans where appropriate.

Training for Threat Assessment Team Members

Education-based threat assessment team members must strive to serve their institutions effectively by maintaining ongoing efforts to design, implement, and evaluate training programs. A study by the Association for Student Conduct Administration found that 96.7% of surveyed institutions had campus-based threat assessment teams; however, only 67% of those teams received any form of specialized, continued training (Mardis et al., 2013). Threat assessment team members must participate in regular meetings, training sessions, and other simulated

learning experiences to ensure the efficient functioning of the team during responses to active threats and dynamic cases.

Designing and implementing training programs for educational-based threat assessment teams has many challenges due to the unique context of multidisciplinary teams (Stohlman et al., 2020). A multidisciplinary threat assessment team must include stakeholders from various units: law enforcement, mental health, student conduct, student affairs, and academic affairs. Threat assessment training for multidisciplinary teams must be a means of engaging members from diverse backgrounds and with various subject matter knowledge. An additional challenge of threat assessment team training in an education environment is the need for continuous updates on the evolution of best practices; changes in local, state, and federal laws; and dynamic institutional policies and procedures. Threat assessment team training presents challenges in an education environment and requires continuous training and evaluation for effectiveness.

In a 2008 study, researchers examined two threat assessment trainings for 351 educational-based threat assessment team personnel. They found that after one day-long training, team members showed a "substantial increase in threat assessment knowledge from pretest to posttest as well as a higher degree of threat classification accuracy" (Stohlman et al., 2020). A second study conducted in 2008 found that the threat assessment team members who participated in training demonstrated increased knowledge of threat assessment and had an increased ability to distinguish between transient and exigent threats (Stohlman et al., 2020). Additionally, the results from the previously cited study showed that the schools where the team members trained in threat assessment had lower rates of long-term suspensions and enhanced use of counseling and mental health referrals and case management than those who did not engage in threat assessment training.

Training and continuous education for education-based threat assessment teams are necessities for the overall success of the threat assessment process; however, training must extend beyond team members. Gomez (2015) argued that training on the policies and procedures of threat assessment teams should include the organization's students, faculty, and staff. The effectiveness of threat assessment teams requires that community members and educational stakeholders understand the importance of reporting concerning behaviors and trust and value the threat assessment process. Cultivating a positive reporting environment is one of the most valuable methods for enhancing educational threat assessment teams.

The Unique Role of Law Enforcement

The role of law enforcement in threat management and instances of targeted violence has tended to have a reactive rather than proactive approach (Jones & Gray, 2020). Police officers throughout the country receive training on how to respond to active threats, investigate threats after the fact, and prepare for criminal charges. The presence of law enforcement in threat management and violence prevention continues to increase as more specialized law enforcement units emerge with the goals of prevention, mitigation, and ongoing case management. The field of threat assessment undergoes ongoing changes, such as direct law enforcement involvement; thus, numerous real-world legal and systemic conflicts continue to occur.

Existing general statutes, case laws, and other legal proceedings specific to the duties of law enforcement officers are written around an outcome of criminal charges, sanctions, or legal proceedings. The existing frameworks were not focused on violence prevention and ongoing case management (Jones & Gray, 2020). With this, a growing need exists for continuous law enforcement-based training on information-sharing and privacy protection laws, such as HIPAA, FERPA, and other public records laws. The optimal performance of law enforcement threat

assessment units requires continuous exploration of liability, ethical, and legal concerns. A deeper understanding of the role of law enforcement agencies on threat assessment teams is a way to protect the rights of the public and promote overall public safety.

Conclusion

Threat assessment and management teams have become necessities on college and university campuses after the 2007 massacre at Virginia Tech. The field of threat assessment in an educational context has shown promising development over the past decade; however, the role of law enforcement agencies within threat assessment teams varies by institution and often lacks a clear vision, policy, or procedure. Law enforcement agencies can provide their best service on higher education threat assessment teams if the members have a clear understanding of their role and mission within the multidisciplinary setting and receive ongoing training and continuing education for legal, ethical, and privacy protection concerns within the field.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the research design and methodology used to collect and analyze the data in this study. Chapter 3 includes a brief overview of the case study methodology and the benefits and limitations of this methodology in the context of the study. This chapter provides a step-by-step outline of the data collection, analysis, protection, and disposal.

Research Design

This chapter includes the study's research design and an overview of the case study methodology used to answer the research questions. This research followed the approach of Merriam (1998), who defined a qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon, such as a program, an institution, a person, or a social unit" (p. 26). The case study methodology was used for this research study as it allowed the researcher to carefully examine the structures and functions of UNC Police Departments within the context of the larger UNC System.

Characteristics of a Case Study

Merriam (1998) outlined the elements of a case as "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). In this explanation of the case study design, Merriam focused heavily on the bounded context elements of a case study and suggested that scholars can call their research case studies if they can specify their phenomena and "fence in" the research objectives. Merriam provided a complete definition of a case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (p. 27).

Case Study Procedure

According to Merriam (1998), designing a case study has five main steps: (a) conducting a literature review, (b) constructing a theoretical framework, (c) identifying a research problem, (d) crafting and sharpening research questions, and (e) selecting the sample, or purposive sampling.

Conducting a Literature Review

A literature review provides a foundation for a researcher to contribute to a knowledge base (Merriam, 1998). No conflict exists in isolation; therefore, a scholar must ground any study in existing theories, findings, and frameworks to position the study to contribute to or be a means of refining the existing knowledge and findings. The literature review step of case study preparation also is an essential part of formulating specific research questions, defining key terms, and outlining data collection techniques.

Constructing the Theoretical Framework

Merriam (1998) defined a theoretical framework as the "underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame of [a] study" (p. 28). Scholars use the framework of the study to build on the concepts, terms, theories, and data found during the literature review. A researcher can use the framework to guide the research questions, data collection, and analysis techniques.

Identifying a Research Problem

Every study has a research problem, a "why" that causes the researcher to design and implement the study (Merriam, 1998). A scholar must identify the research problem early and use the problem to shape the steps in case study development. A research problem can change at any stage, requiring a scholar to adapt the other steps as needed.

Crafting and Sharpening Research Questions

Crafting research questions is the process by which the researcher reflects on the most significant factors of the study (Merriam, 1998). A scholar uses the research questions to explain what the study will find and provide the broader categories for data collection and analysis. Research questions can and should evolve as the data collection and analysis steps cause the research to shift focus.

Purposive Sampling

Lastly, Merriam (1998) suggested that researchers should work intentionally when seeking sources of data sampling. They should intentionally select individuals or groups with specific knowledge or experience of the studied phenomenon or problem. In the context of this study, purposive sampling involved distributing the invitation to participate to individuals who worked threat assessment cases within the respective police department.

Limitations and Benefits of Case Study Design

Limitations. The case study design has multiple limitations. Limitations include data that provide little basis for the generalization of the results to the wider population, data difficult to replicate, and the time and resources devoted to the design (Merriam, 1998). This approach requires respondents from specific populations and contexts (in this study, police departments within the UNC System). The results of data analysis in this study presented the climate of the UNC System; therefore, this study might not have had findings helpful to other university school systems. Additionally, scholars might struggle to replicate this case study due to the evolution of the respondents, questions, and context, which could have impacted the responses. Finally, while the case study design enables a researcher to gain insight into a specific context or organization

and approach problems from a diverse perspective, the approach requires extensive time, planning, and resources.

Benefits. The main benefits of the case study design include the ability to conduct research remotely, its affordability, its relevance to involved parties, and the ability of the opinions and lived experiences of the participants to have an influence on the research outcomes (Merriam, 1998). This research method did not have a financial cost and provided the opportunity to connect with the subject matter experts in the field and produce outcomes and results directly related to the participants' field of work.

Participants

Sampling Method

The sampling method for this study was purposive sampling. Purposive participant selection requires the intentional inclusion of participants who speak to the context of the research questions under study (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, this study included both a survey and individual interviews for the sampling method. According to Creswell (2014), a survey design enables the "description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (p. 155). In this study, there was a survey administered to sworn police officers throughout the UNC System as a means of drawing direct conclusions from the participants' lived experiences and applying the results to the study's population and research questions. The purposefully selected respondents completed an online survey through Qualtrics. The use of an online survey enabled the survey participants to respond promptly in a comfortable setting without the influence of other participants. Additionally, the convenience of online data collection increases the response volume and quality of the participants. Online surveys are a way to reduce monetary costs, eliminate the need for travel or face-to-face interactions, and

allow the participants to respond in a confidential manner.

The second phase of data collection consisted of Zoom-based, semi-structured interviews with the participants who completed the initial survey. Upon completing the survey, each respondent had the opportunity to schedule an approximately 15-minute interview. This method provided the participants with the opportunity to expand upon their survey responses. The interviews were the means used to capture the lived experiences, needs, and future desires of the participants for university law enforcement threat assessment units.

Structured interviews were a method chosen for this study because they were a controlled, preplanned means of obtaining information grounded in the context of the research topic (Creswell, 2014). Critics have suggested that the semi-structured interview approach provides a limited ability to obtain in-depth data; however, Dörnyei (2007) considered semi-structured interviews "suitable for researchers who know exactly what kind of information they are seeking". In this study, the goal was to collect data related to the specific needs, experiences, and outcomes of threat assessment teams within the UNC System—semi-structured interviews were the most efficient means of data collection for this topic.

Respondents

Professionals from 15 police departments received invitations to participate in the study as subject matter experts in law enforcement threat assessment units. The response rate was n=8 (53.3%). Participant selection occurred based on their roles within their police departments within the UNC System. This study did not include one institution within the System, The North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, as the research focused on law enforcement threat assessment teams within university settings. Additionally, this study excluded North Carolina State University, where the researcher works and directly manages and oversees the NC State

University Police Department's Threat Assessment Unit. All of the 15 invited institutions in the UNC System were public universities.

Instrumentation

The measurement of the key variables in this study commenced with a self-report questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The first part of the survey, as seen in Appendix B, included demographics characteristics, such as the respondents' institutions of employment and roles therein. The remainder of the survey addressed the various components of the study's research questions.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was qualified to conduct this study due to a knowledge of threat assessment and management processes within university settings, an understanding of current threat assessment literature, and professional experiences with both university and law enforcement threat assessment and management. The researcher has over 4 years of experience as a sworn law enforcement officer within the UNC System and serves as the Sergeant of the Criminal Investigations Division of the North Carolina State University Police Department. The researcher is the supervisor of the North Carolina State University Police Department's Threat Assessment Unit and sits on the NC State University Employee and Student Behavioral Assessment Teams. Additionally, the researcher has completed multiple threat assessment and management training programs, including training from the FBI, the U.S. Secret Service, and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigations Behavioral Assessment Team. Lastly, the researcher has been an active member of the ATAP for over 2 years.

The researcher had close connections with the study's subject matter and data; therefore, it was necessary to address areas of potential bias and positionality. To limit personal and

professional bias, the researcher ensured that data analysis occurred via the predetermined coding protocol presented in the study's methods section. Line-by-line examination of the data and coding commenced based on the data present without adding to the participants' narratives. Coding consisted of analyzing the text without the interjection of previous experiences or assumptions.

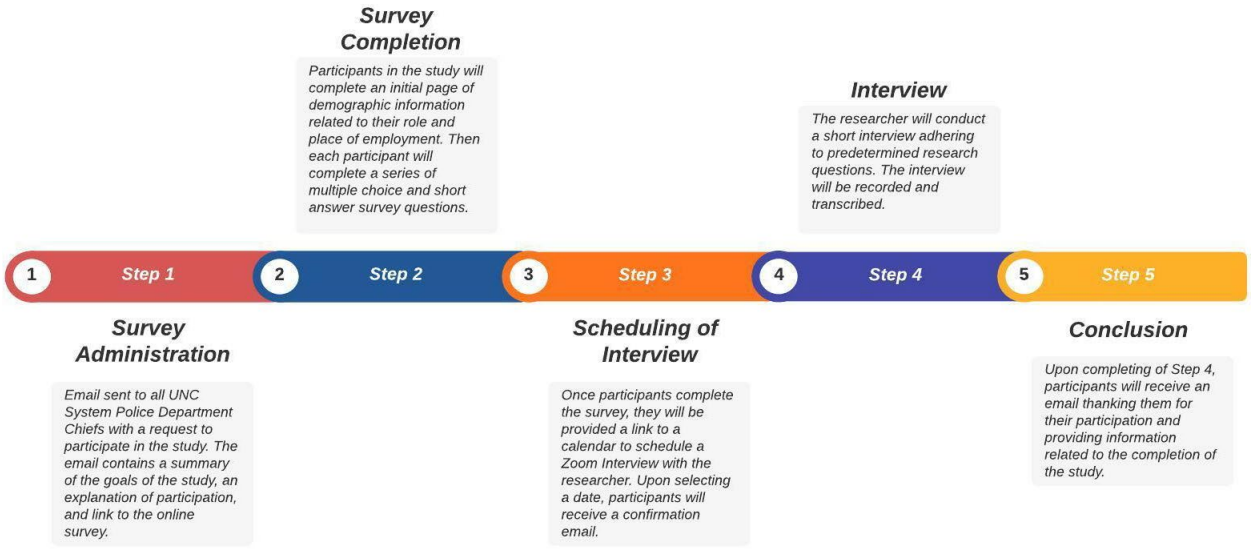
Despite the potential for researcher bias, a need exists to highlight the benefits associated with the researcher's positionality. The researcher had familiarity with the context, culture, and technical terminology under study. This familiarity minimized interruptions during the interviews, as the participants knew the researcher understood their narratives.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred via the following five steps presented in Figure 3.1: survey administration, survey completion, interview scheduling, interview completion, and conclusion of data collection. Figure 3.1 shows the details related to each step of the data collection and the means of guiding the participants throughout the study. The data collection section also presents the role of the UNC System in the administration of the survey to the participants.

Figure 3.1

Steps of Data Collection.



Step 1 of Data Collection: Survey Administration

A representative from the UNC System office agreed to serve as a gatekeeper and administer the survey on behalf of the researcher. The gatekeeper emailed the chiefs of police at each UNC System police department to provide them with an introductory letter from the researcher with a request to participate in the survey, an explanation of the voluntary participation and confidentiality of the study's reporting, and a link to the online survey. The survey included an explanation of the research goals and an informed consent document. The invited individuals received a reminder phone call one week after the initial invitation to participate. The UNC System will receive a copy of the study's findings after the final electronic thesis and dissertation submission.

Step 2 of Data Collection: Survey Completion

Upon clicking the survey link, the participants accessed the first page of the survey, which contained demographic questions related to their roles, places of employment, and contact

information. After providing this information, the participants completed a series of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The survey used for this study is provided in Appendix B.

Step 3 of Data Collection: Scheduling the Interviews

Upon completing the survey, the participants scheduled brief Zoom interviews via a provided link. After selecting a date and time for the interview, each participant received a confirmation email and a Zoom link for the meeting.

Step 4 of Data Collection: Conducting the Interviews

In the second round of the study, the participants engaged in 15 minute semi-structured interviews via Zoom. Each interview followed the same protocol and began with an introduction of the study, a summary of the research goals, and an explanation of the voluntary and confidential nature of participation and responses. Although the participants had the option to activate or disable video recording on Zoom before the interview, all consented to having the interview video recorded for transcription. The responses underwent transcription and were saved in a secure manner for data analysis. The interviews occurred in accordance with the following predetermined research questions:

Research Question 1 was, **What is the makeup of threat assessment teams within police departments within the University of North Carolina System?** The data collection to address this question entailed asking participants the following questions:

1. Which UNC System police department do you work for?
2. How many sworn officers does your department have?
3. Does your university have a multidisciplinary threat assessment or behavioral assessment team?

4. Does your department have a representative on your university's behavioral/threat assessment team?
5. Does your department have an officer(s) specifically assigned to threat assessment-related investigations?
6. External to university teams that exist, does your department have a specifically identified threat assessment unit?
7. How many sworn officers are assigned to your department's threat assessment unit (if any)?
8. Does your department have active members of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals?

Research Question 2 was, **What are the existing policies, procedures, mission statements, and vision statements concerning the roles and responsibilities of university police threat assessment units?** Data collection commenced to answer the research question by asking the participants the following questions:

1. Does your department have a policy for the mission, vision, and operation of a threat assessment unit?
2. Does your department have articulated roles and responsibilities for the role of law enforcement officers on threat assessment teams?
3. What is the current role of your department in the university-wide threat assessment process?

Research Question 3 was, **How have police threat assessment units evolved within each respective sample university police department?** Data collection commenced to address the research questions by asking the participants the following questions:

1. Does your department have a specific threat assessment unit?
    - If yes, how long has your department had a threat assessment unit?
    - If not, does your department have plans for developing a threat assessment unit?
2. How many threat assessment cases would you estimate that your department has direct involvement with in each academic year?
3. What changes would you make to your department's threat assessment unit, if any?
4. What changes (if any) have you noticed in the volume and intensity of threat assessment cases at your institution over the last 5 years?

Research Question 4 was, **What are the projected future needs of university police threat assessment teams?** Data collection commenced to address the research questions by asking the participants the following questions:

1. Do you feel that your department's threat assessment unit receives sufficient training?
2. What additional training topics do you think could have a positive impact on your department?
3. What do you expect your department's threat assessment unit to look like in the next 5 years?

Step 5 of Data Collection: Conclusion

To conclude data collection, the recorded interviews were downloaded and stored in accordance with this study's listed data storage protocol. Each participant was thanked for their participation and was provided an explanation of how to view results upon publication. Lastly, participants were emailed a copy of the consent document and reminded of how they could contact the researcher if they wished to withdraw participation at any time prior to publication.

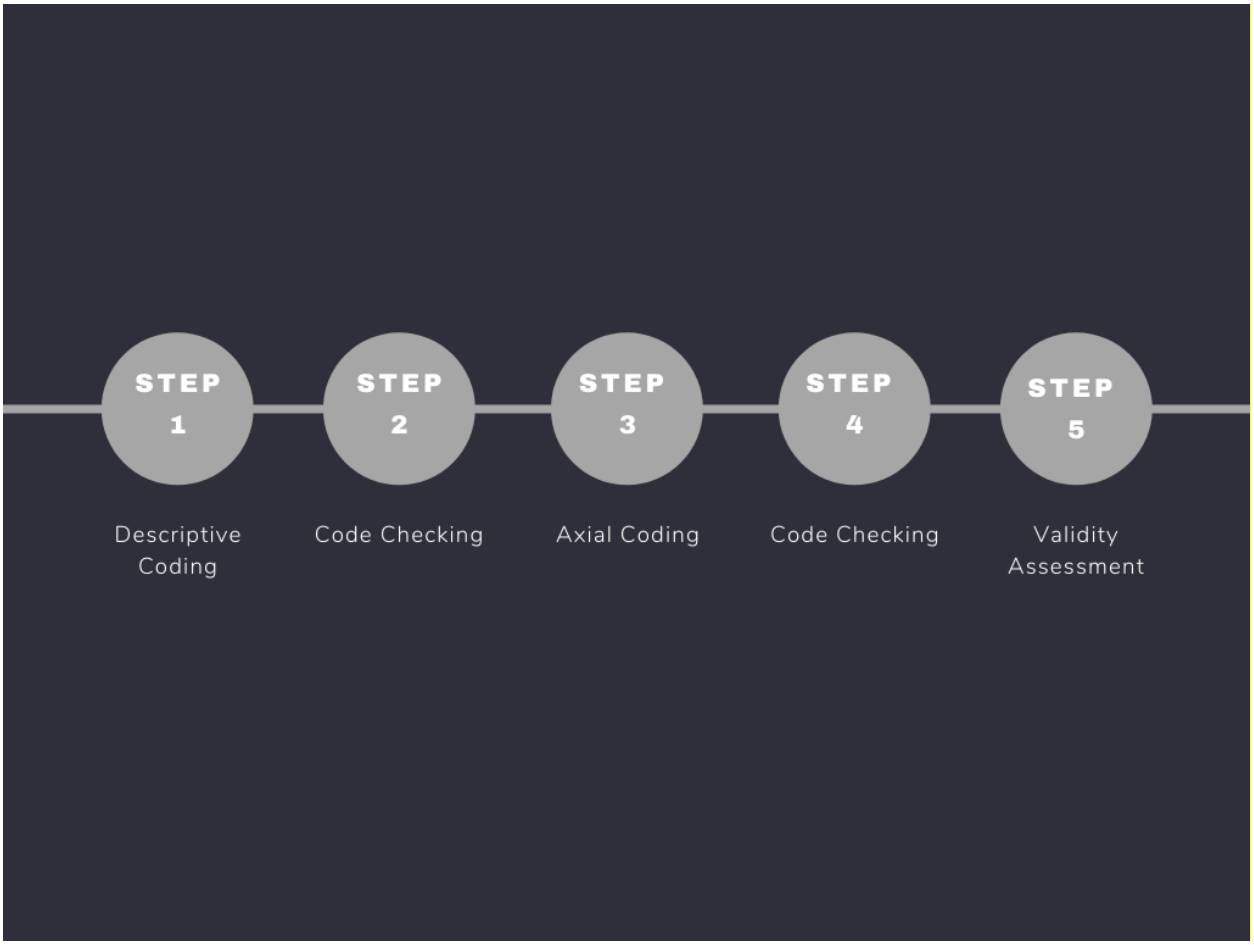
Data Analysis

In this study, narrative analysis was the analytic frame used to address the research questions. Narrative analysis consists of interpreting participants' stories and responses within the context of the research. Four forms of narrative analysis exist: structural, functional, thematic, and performance (Allen, 2017). In this study, thematic narrative analysis was used to develop themes from the content of the participant narratives deemed noteworthy or meaningful. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for identifying, reporting, and analyzing data to identify the meanings produced by the respondents and their lived experiences and life events (Aronson, 1994). According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is a way of seeing, making sense of reported events and experiences, analyzing qualitative information, and converting qualitative data into tangible quantitative data.

For this study, narrative analysis focused on coding the responses of the participants to highlight themes and trends within the data. Due to the fact that participants were asked to speak to areas for improvement within their organizations, the decision was made not to publish or highlight direct quotes from any participants in the data presentation process. While providing direct quotes from participants could allow for insight into the voices of law enforcement officers within the UNC System, it could have limited the quality and authenticity of responses. By assuring participants that no identifying information or direct quotes would be published from this study, participants were given the ability to communicate openly without any concern of being identified based on unique words, phrases, or examples that they provided in their responses. The strengths and limitations of not publishing direct quotes for this study are further discussed in Chapter 5.

Figure 3.2

Data Analysis Steps.



Step 1 of Data Analysis: Descriptive Coding

In this study, the first step of analysis began with descriptive coding of the narrative data. Descriptive coding served as the first cycle of the coding process where the researcher worked line-by-line to derive codes from the data itself. This step of coding allowed the researcher to reflect on the perspectives and lived experience of the participants by highlighting the trends and themes within each line of text.

Transcripts of interviews were initially analyzed through descriptive coding. The process involved reading each narrative document one line at a time and assigning codes to phrases and

sentences throughout the collected data. There were a total of 25 codes assigned during this process. The codes at this stage of data analysis were:

Code 1: Lack of Leadership

Code 2: Lack of Authority

Code 3: Sergeant or Lieutenant Rank

Code 4: Unwritten Policy

Code 5: Role within the Team

Code 6: System-wide Policy

Code 7: Need for Clear Procedures

Code 8: Increase in Cases

Code 9: Decrease in Cases

Code 10: Lack of Data

Code 11: Case Disposition

Code 12: Case Type

Code 13: COVID-19

Code 14: Mental Health Volume

Code 15: Need for Training

Code 16: Depression

Code 17: Anxiety

Code 18: Clinical Support

Code 19: Medication Management

Code 20: Patrol Officer Involvement

Code 21: Lack of Information Sharing

Code 22: UNC System Training

Code 23: Budget Issues

Code 24: Non-affiliated Cases

Code 25: Lack of Follow-Up

Step 2 of Data Analysis: Code Checking

Once the descriptive coding process was completed, the research re-read each participant's narrative response three times. The re-reading process focused on ensuring that assigned codes accurately reflected the themes or trends from the corresponding data. During this step, no changes were made to the list of codes from Step 1. With this, the research moved into Step 3 of data analysis.

Step 3 of Data Analysis: Axial Coding

After descriptive coding, axial coding was a means to group the descriptive codes into abstract codes (axial codes) based on the patterns or themes found in the narratives. The axial coding process involved examining descriptive codes from each participant's narrative data and determining how codes could be grouped into broader categories. Axial coding allowed for drawing connections between the codes and highlighting abstract themes within collected data. During this step, a total of 8 axial codes were derived from the list of descriptive codes.

After the completion of Step 3, the list of axial codes were:

Code 1: Case Volume

Code 2: Mental Health-based Cases

Code 3: Use of Digital Platforms

Code 4: Shared Responsibility

Code 5: Standardization

Code 6: Team Funding

Code 7: Team Leadership

Code 8: External Case Management

Step 4 of Data Analysis: Code Checking

Once the axial coding process was completed, the research re-read each axial code and the corresponding encompassed descriptive codes three times. The re-reading process focused on ensuring that assigned axial code accurately reflected the abstract concept created via the collection of corresponding descriptive codes. During this step, no changes were made to the list of codes created during the axial coding process. With this, the research moved into the final step of data analysis.

Step 5 of Data Analysis: Validity Assessment

The last step of data analysis included a validity assessment. The validity assessment of the final narrative dataset consisted of double-checking the consistency of the codes across all the interviews, checking to ensure the grounding of the codes accurately under thematic categories, and checking for the accurate grouping and highlighting of themes under the axial codes. Upon completion of the validity assessment the final list of codes were:

Code 1: Case Volume

Code 2: Mental Health-based Cases

Code 3: Use of Digital Platforms

Code 4: Shared Responsibility

Code 5: Standardization

Code 6: Team Funding

Code 7: Team Leadership

Code 8: External Case Management

In this study, narrative analysis was the approach used to examine the data grounded in the context of the participants. The goals of the data analysis in this study were to gain insight into the structures of the UNC System Police Department's threat assessment units and highlight where and how to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the broader higher education threat assessment process. The purpose of the four research questions was to collect data related to the participants' experiences and needs at their agencies. Examination of the data occurred to draw conclusions applicable to the larger UNC System via data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study commenced after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from North Carolina State University. Before participation, each individual learned the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw, and the reporting method. The reporting of the findings occurred confidentially and did not provide identifying information of the participants employed at UNC System institutions. In order to enhance confidentiality, the decision was made not to include direct quote in data presentation as direct quotes could be used to identify participants and their employing organizations. The data remained confidential due to the use of an assigned pseudonym for each respondent. The goal of the pseudonyms was to ensure that the digitally recorded results did not include identifying information connected to the respondents or their agencies of employment. The handwritten document with the original identities of each participant remained securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. A password-protected, NC State University-owned computer with two-factor authentication protocols was the storage site all digital data. After study completion, the handwritten roster of

participants was destroyed. Disposal of the digital data was per NC State University archivist policies and procedures.

Conclusion

A researcher can only address the study's proposed research questions effectively by having defined protocols for data collection and analysis. The case study methodology of this study was the means used to focus on the subject matter experts for the qualitative data analysis. The goal of each survey and interview question was to elicit data to addresses the research questions. This chapter presented each step of the study to provide transparency and guidance for future research connected to the same subject matter.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of this mixed methods case study on the structure, function, and anticipated needs of law enforcement-based threat assessment and management units at the police departments within the UNC System. The results of this study emerged from a thematic analysis of the data collected from a survey and semi-structured interviews with sworn members of eight participating UNC System police departments.

Research Questions

The goal of this study was to determine the role and needs of university police department officials on university-wide threats assessment teams. A Qualtrics survey and Zoom interviews with a panel of eight sworn law enforcement officers from the UNC System commenced to address the study's overarching research objective and the following research questions:

R1: What is the makeup of threat assessment units within police departments within the University of North Carolina System?

R2: What are the existing policies, procedures, mission statements, and vision statements concerning the roles and responsibilities of university police threat assessment teams?

R3: How have police threat assessment teams evolved within each respective sample university police department?

R4: What are the projected future needs of university police threat assessment teams?

Results by Research Questions

Research Question 1

The first research question was, ***What is the makeup of threat assessment units in police departments within the University of North Carolina System?*** Addressing this research question consisted of analyzing the data from the survey and semi-structured interviews. The data analysis showed that none of the participating agencies had specific threat assessment units; however, each responding agency had at least one individual assigned to threat assessments and working threat-based cases. In addition, the individuals assigned to conduct threat assessments within the participating agencies had supervisory rank (i.e., designation as Sergeant or higher) and worked within their departments' criminal investigations division. Each participating department indicated that their respective universities had multidisciplinary threat assessment or management teams in which their police departments had assigned members. Among the survey participants, only two reported having individuals with active ATAP memberships.

Research Question 2

The second research question was, ***What are the existing policies, procedures, mission statements, and vision statements concerning the roles and responsibilities of university police threat assessment teams?*** Addressing this research question consisted of analyzing the data from the survey and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis showed that only one participating agency had a specific department policy for threat assessment. In addition, each respondent expressed a desire for the development and implementation of a standardized policy for threat assessment investigations throughout the UNC System police departments. Regarding the roles of the participants in the university-wide threat assessment process, the participants noted that their departments were the primary investigating agencies for threat assessment cases with

criminal elements. All the participants noted that they served as active members of their universities' multidisciplinary threat assessment or management teams. In addition, all participants stated that the role of law enforcement within their respective universities' assessment teams remained largely undefined and varied on a case-by-case basis.

Research Question 3

The third research question was, ***How have police threat assessment units evolved within each respective sample university police department?*** Addressing this research question commenced by analyzing data from the semi-structured interviews. The results from the data analysis showed that respondents consistently addressed three areas: increased case volume, increased mental health-related cases, and the use of digital platforms in threat assessment cases.

Case Volume. The participants reported seeing a consistent increase in the volume and intensity of cases over the last 5 years. Each participant clarified that the data for threat assessment cases did not go undergo auditing or tracking in their departments; they described the judgments of case volume as broad estimates. One area of interest in the data related to this question was the reoccurring mention of the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants explained that the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly reduced their typical threat assessment case volume and broader calls for service. The respondents noted that the pandemic had caused their campuses to remain largely unoccupied for an extended time; thus, a decrease in on-campus population size led to decreased case volume. The participants stated that the reopening of their campuses for on-campus attendance in the Fall 2021 semester had resulted in a continuous increase of threat assessment cases.

Mental Health-Based Cases. When discussing the case volume and noticeable changes in the intensity of investigations, the participants reported a remarkable increase in the impact of

mental health on threat assessment investigations. The participants noted that they had to adapt to address continuous issues with medication management and a lack of ongoing clinician management for students, faculty, and staff with diagnosed mental health conditions. All the participants cited the increase of mental health-related calls as the most noticeable change in their threat assessment units within the past 5 years. The respondents focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of on-campus stakeholders. They reported a significant increase in instances of isolation, depression, and anxiety among their campus populations as a result of the pandemic.

Use of Digital Platforms. The last theme found in the data analysis focused on the growing influence of digital platforms in law enforcement-based threat assessment cases. The respondents noted a historically high case volume involving the use of digital and social media platforms, such as Discord and Yik Yak. The participants reported that digital platforms were the basis of the initiation of threats, as well as tools vital to the investigation process. The participants explained that they had to modify their existing face-to-face threat assessment methodologies and conduct investigations using cyber intelligence-based methods via various digital platforms.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was, ***What are the projected future needs of university police threat assessment teams?*** Addressing this research question commenced by analyzing the data from the semi-structured interviews. The respondents consistently addressed five areas: the shared responsibility of threat assessment investigations, the standardization of threat assessment throughout the UNC System, funding for university-wide threat assessment teams, the leadership of university-wide threat assessment teams, and the case management outside the UNC System.

Shared Responsibility. The first area that emerged from the data analysis focused on the need to evolve threat assessment within law enforcement agencies in the UNC System to make it a shared responsibility. Each officer in the department should have a role in the reporting, investigation, and mitigation of threats. According to the participants, the trends in case volume suggest that the threat assessment cases within the UNC System will extend past the capabilities of specialized units at each institution and that threat assessment investigations will need to be a regular function of the law enforcement role. The participants described the need for foundational knowledge of threat assessment investigations at each level of law enforcement agencies. In addition, the participants noted that patrol officers are the pillars of any law enforcement agency. They also described the growing demand to include patrol officers in the advancement of the best practices of threat assessment.

Standardization Throughout the UNC System. The second area that emerged from the data analysis was the idea that threat assessment within law enforcement agencies in the UNC System must include standardized policies, procedures, and training. The participants noted the potential benefits of designing and implementing a uniform training program for law enforcement threat assessment investigations at each UNC System police department. In addition, the participants suggested not restricting training to specialized positions or units; instead, foundational training should be a requirement for all officers. All officers tasked with threat assessment investigations as their primary job responsibilities should also receive further training. An additional consistent theme throughout the interviews was the need for a shared database so that law enforcement officers could access information related to active threats throughout the UNC System. Only law enforcement would have access to such a database to track individuals of concern as they move throughout UNC System institutions.

Funding for University-Wide Threat Assessment Teams. The third recurring concept was the funding of participating agencies' multidisciplinary threat assessment teams. The data analysis showed a variation in the funding of university-wide threat assessment teams. The participants expressed concerns about the availability of the training and resources for university-wide teams and emphasized funding as the primary limitation. In addition, the participants explained that most teams received funds as components of larger student affairs budgets and expressed concerns about the lack of independent funding for teams. The participants described the availability of funding as dynamic and limited by other emerging priorities within the larger Student Affairs division. The respondents called for independent budgets for multidisciplinary teams and explained that university-wide threat assessment teams must have independent financing for optimal effectiveness.

Leadership of University-Wide Threat Assessment Teams. An additional theme of the data analysis was the lack of clear leadership for the multidisciplinary threat assessment teams at the participants' universities. The participants noted that many teams lacked clear, independent leaders with authority to make decisions about the best practices and outcomes of each case. They also reported that the leadership on threat assessment teams was dependent on the nature of the case. For example, law enforcement representatives led cases with criminal components, and legal representatives led noncriminal cases. Ultimately, the participants advocated for third-party case managers or directors to lead the university-wide threat assessment process.

Management of Cases Outside the University Setting. Last, the participants noted the need to focus on the case management of non-active cases or cases with individuals directly connected with the university. The participants stated that, in some cases, the subjects of concern were individuals separated from the campus community, primarily due to termination, voluntary

withdrawal, or expulsions. Upon separation from the university, the members of university police departments were unable to continue their investigative efforts or monitor the subjects of concern. According to the participants, external case management and follow-up occurred for exigent cases via the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigations or local law enforcement agencies; however, the participants described the need to continue monitoring cases that no longer have an active impact on university communities.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the findings of this mixed methods case study. The goal of the research was to highlight the existing structure and practices of law enforcement-based threat assessment units within the UNC System and areas for further growth. A thematic analysis of the data commenced via a survey and semi-structured interviews. The data analysis found trends and themes within the UNC System police threat assessment teams, as well as areas for growth.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of the study's guiding research questions, a synopsis of the contents of Chapters one through five, conclusions, and further discussion of the results of each research question. This chapter also includes the study's limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Research Questions

This study focused on the role of university police departments in university-wide threat assessment teams and the needs of police threat assessment teams. The study addressed the overarching research question with four specific research questions. The first research question focused on the existing makeup of threat assessment units with police departments throughout the UNC System. The second question addressed the existing policies, procedures, mission statements, and vision statements for the roles and responsibilities of university police threat assessment teams. The third question addressed the evolution of police threat assessment teams within each university police department. Finally, the fourth question focused on the projected future needs of university police threat assessment units.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 provided a foundation for the study by presenting the topic of threat assessment and management teams within the law enforcement context, the problem and purpose statements, and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study. Chapter 1 also presented the research questions, significance, limitations and delimitations, key terms, and an outline of the study.

Chapter 2 included an in-depth literature review of threat assessment in the higher

education context and the unique role of law enforcement agencies in the threat assessment process. The literature review began with a history of threat assessment in educational settings and the role of various federal law enforcement agencies in threat assessment policies and procedures. Next, Chapter 2 presented the composition of higher education threat assessment teams and the steps that team members take for threat assessment and case management. This chapter included the training programs for threat assessment teams and the areas of need for further training for law enforcement in threat assessment.

Chapter 3 presented the study's mixed methods methodology. This chapter included the elements of the case study design, such as the characteristics, procedures, critiques, and benefits of a case study. Finally, Chapter 3 presented the sampling method, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 4 included the results of the study's survey and semi-structured interviews. This chapter had a summary and the results of each of the four research questions. The presented data included the results from the thematic analysis of the narrative data provided by the participants.

Chapter 5 provides a review of the research questions and an overview of the content of each chapter of the study. The final chapter also presents the conclusions of the study, a discussion of the results, the study limitations, implications for practice and research, and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions and Discussions

The objective of this study was to show the role of university police departments on university-wide threat assessment teams and the needs of police threat assessment teams. Answering the overarching research question consisted of addressing the study's four research questions. This study included a survey and semi-structured interviews with law enforcement

officers throughout the UNC System. The participants provided responses related to the structure, function, and anticipated needs of their departments' threat assessment processes.

Research Question 1

What is the makeup of threat assessment units within police departments within the University of North Carolina System?

Addressing this research question required analyzing the data from the survey and the semi-structured interviews. The data analysis showed that none of the participating agencies had specific threat assessment units; however, each responding agency had at least one individual explicitly assigned to threat assessments and work cases. In addition, the individuals assigned to conduct threat assessments within the participating agencies all had supervisory rank (i.e., designation of Sergeant or higher) and worked within their departments' criminal investigations divisions. Each participating department indicated that their respective universities had multidisciplinary threat assessment or management teams in which their police departments had assigned members. Among the survey participants, only two agencies had individuals with active ATAP memberships.

The findings from this research question showed that the supervisors of the participating law enforcement agencies received assignments for threat assessment investigations. In addition, the management of threat assessment investigations occurred in a manner similar to extensive criminal investigations. The results suggest a potential disconnect in the sharing of information and knowledge for threat assessment investigations. The data showed that the maintenances of the threat assessment cases tended to occur in isolation. Threat assessment cases, immediately routed to a specialized position and investigative efforts and follow-up, rarely included patrol officers or other law enforcement roles within the department. The participants noted that the

individuals assigned to conduct threat assessment investigations performed in efficiently and effectively; however, most participating agencies did not have cross-trained individuals to assist with investigations when needed.

The data indicated that threat assessment cases throughout the UNC System will continue to increase in volume and intensity over the coming years and will extend beyond the capacities of specialized units or individual investigators. With this, department leaders throughout the UNC System should work to ensure that the members of their organization, in addition to the already-identified threat assessment investigators, have foundational knowledge and experience of threat assessment investigations. Ultimately, these findings indicate the need for further training for nonsupervisory law enforcement officers for threat assessment investigations and to evolve threat assessment within the UNC System into a shared responsibility at law enforcement agencies.

The results for Research Question 1 provided data previously absent from higher education literature by showing the structures and functions of threat assessment units within law enforcement agencies throughout the UNC System. The participants noted that their agencies did not have specific law enforcement threat assessment units; however, each agency had assigned specific individuals to conduct assessments. The data analysis also suggested a gap in the distribution of knowledge, skills, and abilities for threat assessment investigations within UNC System police departments. Ultimately, the results indicate the need to enhance departments' abilities to mitigate instances of violence within their respective jurisdictions.

Research Question 2

What are the existing policies, procedures, mission statements, and vision statements concerning the roles and responsibilities of university police threat assessment teams?

Answering this research question commenced by analyzing the data from the survey and semi-structured interviews. Only one participant reported working for an agency with a specific department policy for threat assessment. The participants reported that they were the primary investigating agencies for threat assessment cases with criminal elements were present. All participants reported that they served as participating members of their universities' multidisciplinary threat assessment or management teams. In addition, the participants noted that the role of law enforcement within their respective universities' assessment teams remained undefined and varied on a case-by-case basis. These findings aligned with previous research from the Association of Student Conduct Administration, as each participating university had an active multidisciplinary threat assessment team and law enforcement officers assigned to participate in those teams (Mardis et al., 2013).

During the interview portion of the study, a common recurring theme was the need to develop and implement a uniform law enforcement-based threat assessment policy across the UNC System. The participants expressed a desire for standardized policies throughout the UNC System police departments, especially in high-liability areas, such as threat assessment. A standardized threat assessment policy throughout the UNC System could contribute to the design and implementation of centralized law enforcement-based threat assessment training for officers in the UNC System police departments, a theme addressed in the discussion of Research Question 4. This finding aligned with Jones and Gray (2020), who urged further research on the best practices and written policies for law enforcement-based threat assessment teams. Designing and implementing a system-wide threat assessment policy could be a project for the UNC System and law enforcement agencies responsible for conducting threat assessment investigations in educational settings.

The study also focused on the defined role of university police departments on their institutions' threat assessment or management teams. The data showed that the role of law enforcement remained largely undefined. The participants noted having either heavy involvement in cases as the primary investigating agency or serving minimal roles as consultants and members of their multidisciplinary teams. A lack of defined roles and responsibilities on multidisciplinary teams presents concerns for the ownership and primary responsibility of involved parties during university-wide threat assessment investigations. A need exists for a shared understanding of which team members could most effectively manage certain cases. For example, some cases require a student-centered approach best facilitated and managed by Student Affairs representatives. In contrast, cases that present immediate concerns for safety and well-being require direct intervention and oversight from university law enforcement agencies. The data in this study suggested a significant need to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement investigators who assist with cases in police departments and throughout the broader campus community.

Research Question 3

How have police threat assessment teams evolved within each respective sample university police department?

Answering the third research question commenced by analyzing the data from the semi-structured interviews. The data analysis showed that the respondents focused on three areas: increased case volume, increased mental-health-related cases, and the use of digital platforms in threat assessment cases.

Case Data Tracking. The participants expressed significant concern about having insufficient data on case volume, nature, and disposition. An analysis of the participants'

responses showed that they lacked data on the number of threat assessment cases investigated in each department during the semesters or academic years—the participants described the judgments of case volume as broad estimates. This finding is an area for continued improvement; a vital need exists to maintain the data of the number of cases investigated via police departments in the UNC System. Data on the volume of encountered cases are vital for individual police departments and the broader UNC System to address staffing needs, highlight times with historically high case volume, and examine the impact of preventative manners or implementations on case frequency.

An additional area for further data tracking is the nature of investigated cases. The participants in this study did not have information on the case types. Examples of the type of cases worked could include those with verbal threats, physical threats, weapon usage, or the use of digital platforms. Departments must have access to accurate data related to the encountered case types to find patterns within their campus communities, highlight areas for improvement in response and mitigation, and aid in the potential design and implementation strategies. Departments with an understanding of the exigent threat assessment needs within their university communities can focus their efforts on the enhancement of training for identified areas and targeted responses for areas of concern.

The last area for the continuous enhancement of data tracking is the tracking of the dispositions of cases investigated at UNC System police departments. A need exists to understand the volume, type of cases, and case resolution of law enforcement-based threat assessment teams. Team members must understand the resolution status of cases to examine their effectiveness and highlight areas for success or continued improvement. Team members could benefit from having a breakdown of the number of criminal sanctions, referrals for continued

case management, educational interventions, unfounded cases, and unsuccessful investigation resolutions. Data on the final status of cases could provide law enforcement agency leaders and the broader university community with tangible examples of the impact of law enforcement-based threat assessment units.

The collection and maintenance of data of the volumes, types, and dispositions of law enforcement-based threat assessment teams could help with identifying trends, evaluating the effectiveness of imposed preventative measures, and reflecting the workload of law enforcement-based threat assessment teams. Advocating for further departmental funding requires evaluating existing policies and procedures and identifying patterns and trends within case investigations. Such evaluation requires up-to-date data on threat assessment cases within organizations.

Mental Health-Based Cases. The participants discussed case volume and noticeable changes in the intensity of investigations and described a remarkable increase in the impact of mental health on threat assessment investigations. The study's data suggest that the main reoccurring mental health-based incidents stem from conflicts with medication management and a lack of ongoing clinician management for students, faculty, and staff with diagnosed mental health conditions. The participants explained that most of their mental health-related cases included individuals with previously diagnosed conditions who struggled to maintain treatment outside of their local communities or without the support structures they had developed outside of the university setting. These findings aligned with recent reports on the significant increase in reported mental health concerns on higher education campuses (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2020; National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2021). The participants of this study noted the nonviolent nature of the majority of their mental health cases; however, they recognized a growing need to expand university services to include connecting individuals directly with

clinical assistance and focused, ongoing case management.

Another theme within the data was the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the mental health of stakeholders on the participants' campuses. The participants in this study highlighted the significant increase in instances of isolation, depression, and anxiety among their campus populations as a result of the pandemic. The participants explained that the members of university law enforcement agencies had to adapt to meet new demands for mental health-based calls. In addition, they reported that stakeholders throughout the university had begun modifying their existing resources and developing new services to address widespread mental health concerns. These findings are another area of interest for additional research due to the ongoing need for knowledge of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on institutions of higher learning.

The participants in this study also described the growing need for university law enforcement agencies to address mental health-based incidents and the need to evaluate the existing best policies and practices. The participants noted the high engagement of their departments in crisis intervention training and other mental health-based training within their respective jurisdictions; however, the evolving needs of the community exceeded the foundational knowledge provided in available trainings. The data suggest the need for further examination of the current law enforcement training for mental health-based calls and the potential overlap of mental health and the discipline of threat assessment.

Use of Digital Platforms. The last theme of data analysis was the growing influence of digital platforms in law enforcement-based threat assessment cases. The respondents in this study noted a historically high case volume with the involvement of digital platforms and social media platforms, such as Discord and Yik Yak. The participants reported that digital platforms were the foundation of threat initiation and the primary form of interpersonal communication

among the student population. The participants specifically noted the increased usage of anonymous social media platforms (e.g., Yik Yak) to communicate widespread threatening messages or direct threats to specific parties. The participants argued that the advancement of these online platforms presented new challenges for the field of threat assessment in departments nationwide.

A gap exists in the literature on the role and impact of digital technologies in law enforcement threat assessment processes. This study's data suggested a need for further training and exploration in digital threat assessment cases within the UNC System. UNC System police department officials continue to experience a shift from in-person investigations to cyber investigations; therefore, an immediate need exists for enhanced knowledge and skills for investigative efforts and the legal precedents of digital threat assessment cases.

Research Question 4

What are the projected future needs of university police threat assessment teams?

Answering this research question commenced by analyzing the data from the semi-structured interviews. The results from data analysis showed five needs reported by the respondents: the shared responsibility of threat assessment investigations, the standardization of threat assessment throughout the UNC System, funding for university-wide threat assessment teams, leadership for university-wide threat assessment teams, and case management outside of the UNC System.

Shared Responsibility. The first area that emerged from data analysis was the need to evolve threat assessment within law enforcement agencies in the UNC System into a shared responsibility. Each officer in the department should have a role in reporting, investigating, and mitigating threats. A shared belief among the participants was that threat assessment cases within

the UNC System will exceed the abilities of specialized units at institutions; therefore, threat assessment will be a regular function of the law enforcement role. The participants indicated the need for foundational knowledge of threat assessment investigations at each level of law enforcement, from patrol officers to senior-level administrators. The data showed that the law enforcement threat assessment units functioned as silos within the UNC System police departments—the threat assessment investigators handled nearly all threat assessment investigations. In the majority of cases, patrol officers and other department members did not get involved with threat assessment. Ultimately, patrol divisions have the responsibility of staffing UNC System police departments throughout the year, as patrol is the foundation of any law enforcement agency. Enhancing the ability of every officer within the department to conduct threat assessment investigations is a way to ensure the continuous staffing of law enforcement officers who can effectively address initial reports and mitigate violence. Additionally, specialized threat assessment units within law enforcement agencies could provide training for officers in various assigned divisions to increase quality and content of the reports routed to specially trained investigators. Department leaders should strive to mitigate instances of violence and address threat-based incidents effectively by ensuring that all members of their police departments have knowledge of threat assessment best practices. This finding mirrored existing concepts that indicated the need for a collaborative approach to multidisciplinary threat assessment teams for the mitigation of instances of violence.

Standardization throughout the UNC System. Contributing to the theme that threat assessment is a shared responsibility within law enforcement agencies, the second area emerging from the data was that the UNC System must have standardized training, policies, and databases for threat assessment investigations. The participants in this study indicated the need to design

and implement a uniform training program for law enforcement threat assessment investigations for individuals at each UNC System police department. Standardized training should be a requirement for all officers, and the individuals charged with threat assessment investigations as their primary job responsibility should receive further training. Foundational knowledge of the importance of threat assessment investigations throughout law enforcement agencies could enable department leaders to improve their response to reported incidents and position themselves to mitigate instances of violence within their communities successfully.

Data analysis showed the shared desire for a standardized threat assessment policy throughout the UNC System. The current data suggested a lack of written, clearly defined threat assessment policies within the UNC System. The participants advocated for a system-wide policy for each institution as a way to ensure the consistency of investigative practices and provide a framework for reducing errors within the threat assessment process. The parameters of a system-wide policy is a topic further discussed in the practical implications section of this chapter.

Finally, data analysis indicated the need for a shared database so that law enforcement officers can access the information related to active threats throughout the UNC System. A centralized database presents challenges to protecting student information, as indicated in FERPA; however, a shared law enforcement database within the UNC System could enable the tracking of individuals of concern as they move through UNC System institutions. A shared database could also be a means of reducing the errors in prevention associated with communication and information-sharing. Information-sharing in the law enforcement context is a necessity for reducing incidents of violence and preventing possible escalation.

Funding for University-Wide Threat Assessment Teams. The third recurring concept from data analysis was the need to fund multidisciplinary threat assessment teams. The participants noted that their campus-wide threat assessment teams often lacked specific budgets and received funding allocations from larger budgets within the Student Affairs division. The participants reported that the Student Affairs budgets often underwent change based on shifts in leadership, new institutional focuses, and other external factors. The data suggested that changes in student affairs budgets often have a negative impact on the ability of multidisciplinary team members to attend training sessions, conferences, and workshops. Providing university-wide threat assessment teams with standardized budgets could be a way to increase the chance of successfully training and equipping threat assessment team members to mitigate instances of violence on their respective campuses.

Leadership of University-Wide Threat Assessment Teams. An additional theme from data analysis was the lack of clear leadership for the multidisciplinary threat assessment teams at the participants' universities. The participants noted that many of their teams lacked independent leadership, leading to problems in scheduling and conducting team-wide meetings. The data indicated a need for an independent case manager who schedules meetings, develops and hosts training, and guides the threat assessment process in a uniform, systematic manner. Having defined leaders of multidisciplinary teams could provide the members with better chances of working efficiently and maximizing the value of the collection of knowledge, skills, and abilities on their teams.

Management of Cases Outside the University Setting. A crucial area for improvement that emerged from data analysis was the investigation and management of non-active cases or cases with individuals not directly connected with the university. The participants noted frequent

occurrences when the subjects of concern separated from the campus community via termination, voluntary withdrawal, or expulsion. This separation meant the university police department could no longer continue its investigative efforts or monitor the subjects of concern. The participants asserted that cases of removal from the university setting required further training and an understanding of the short- and long-term implications of expulsion or termination. The participants also noted that although the most logical choice appeared to be to remove a student of concern from campus, this was not always the case. Isolating the individual of concern could result in the university threat assessment teams and law enforcement agencies losing the flow of information and knowledge of the possible threat. In such situations, threat assessment teams and law enforcement agencies lose the locations of the subjects of concern, information about the subjects' well-being, and in many cases, the ability to communicate.

In some instances, external case management and follow-up have occurred via the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigations or local law enforcement agencies; however, a growing need exists for UNC System law enforcement agency leaders to adopt a proactive approach to threat assessment cases not directly on campus. Using a macroscopic lens for law enforcement threat assessment investigations could contribute to the ability of the UNC System police department officials to intervene in threat-based incidents early, highlight persons of concern, preventatively restrict access to UNC System campuses, and assist local jurisdictions with case management for currently or formerly affiliated members of the UNC System.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The first limitation is the use of the case study design. The case study approach was appropriate to purposefully select the participants, enabling a close exploration of the bounded context of the study. The personalized focus of a case study could

contribute to finding areas for meaningful growth; however, it could also obstruct the generalizability of the study. All eight participants were subject matter experts for threat assessments within their departments; however, they could have had limited responses, opinions, and viewpoints. The scope of the study required a small sample; therefore, the collected data could lack diversity of knowledge and experiences outside of the UNC System.

An additional limitation came with the decision to not publish any direct quotes from participants' narrative responses. Publishing direct quotes could allow for a deeper understanding of the content that was used to assign codes throughout the data analysis process. Additionally, direct quotes could provide a deeper understanding of the lived experience of participants at their respective police departments. With this, the decision to not include direct quotes in publication also had numerous benefits. Participants responded positively to the explanation that their responses would not be published and even verbally noted that the extra step to ensure anonymity encouraged a free flowing, honest dialogue. While there are some limitations connected with the absence of direct quotes, lack of publishing direct quotes in this study likely enhanced the honesty and quality of responses and allowed the researcher to more readily highlight areas of improvement throughout the UNC System.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework for this study was systems theory, in which every entity consists of "systems that interact" in ways examinable to determine "holistic concepts" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Systems theory was used to view university police threat assessment units as separate entities from a holistic, multidisciplinary perspective. Systems theory further enabled the analysis of each UNC System police department's threat assessment

unit and the impacts of their interactions on the discipline of law enforcement-based threat assessment throughout the larger UNC System.

University Police Threat Assessment Units and the UNC System

This study focused on the numerous functions of UNC System police department threat assessment units as separate entities within a larger bounded context. The data showed the variation within each UNC System police department for elements such as the structure and function of law enforcement threat assessment units, the training of law enforcement threat assessment units, and the relationship between law enforcement threat assessment units and their larger university-wide threat assessment teams. The data provided insight into the operations of each police department and the similarities and differences between each participating unit's structures and functions.

The data provided specific insight into the UNC System police departments' threat assessment units and the contexts of their respective environments; however, the data also showed the interactions of each police department with the larger UNC System. Findings, such as the need for standardized training, policies, and databases within police departments throughout the UNC System, are shared areas for further growth and development. The presented findings and areas for further growth aligned with the core element of systems theory described by Greenwood and Levin (2007) and were examples of the impact and evolution of a collection of separate entities in whole-system functions.

Each participant in this study came from a unique background, with personalized structures and functions for threat assessment units; however, the manners in which the participants interacted or did not interact with other police departments are areas for change on a broader UNC System level. This finding aligned with the exploration of systems theory by

Greenwood and Levin (2007), indicating the importance of examining systems as singular entities before comparing the interactions of the observed systems for the formation of holistic structures.

A review of the academic literature showed that systems theory is a common theoretical framework for studies on organizations' financial performance, leadership development, and organizational culture; however, a gap in the literature remained surrounding the use of systems theory to address law enforcement organizations (Duffield & Whitty, 2016; Duffield, 2017; Söderhjelm, 2018). In each of the abovementioned studies, scholars used the systems theory to analyze the effects of different organizational components on each other through interactions that ultimately impacted the structure and function of the larger organizations under study. With this, the value of employing systems theory in a law enforcement context has remained grossly overlooked.

The continuous evolution of the fields of law enforcement and law enforcement-based threat assessment indicates the vital need for systems theory. Systems theory is an appropriate framework for examining the interactions of university police department threat assessment units within a shared geography and the impact of law enforcement agencies throughout the United States on the broader profession. This study provided a novel approach to using systems theory within law enforcement-based research. The findings suggest the need for continued research on improving the field of law enforcement-based threat assessment as a whole.

Implications for Practice

This study had numerous implications for practice for the UNC System and individual institutions. The data collection and analysis presented two implications for practice for the UNC

System and each specific university police department threat assessment unit throughout the broader system.

Implications for the UNC System

The findings had implications for police departments throughout the UNC System for training, policies, and best practices for case management. Each department has unique needs grounded in the context of the university community; however, the implications on the system level are areas for continued growth and improvement, regardless of external context.

The first system-wide implication is the potential adaptation of standardized training. The UNC System is the owner and operator of a training facility that provides a variety of training for UNC System police officers, such as crisis intervention, firearms, and other tactical trainings. There is an infrastructure in place for developing and implementing threat assessment training throughout the UNC System. The training courses should include a foundational look at the field of threat assessment for the officers not directly responsible for investigations. A need also exists for higher-level or follow-up training to contribute to the existing knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals in higher education threat assessment. The design and implementation of system-wide threat assessment training should be a collaborative process in which UNC System police departments provide insight and indicate the areas of need within their jurisdictions. Standardizing training throughout the system could enable police departments to conduct threat assessments within their jurisdictions in a consistent manner across UNC System police departments. Standardized training is a way to increase the likelihood of department members adhering to best practices and upholding exceptional standards for investigative efforts and ongoing management.

The second area of implications is the adaptation of a UNC System-wide policy for threat assessment units within police departments. Similar to the recommended standardization of training, a system-wide policy could be a way to ensure that all departments have the same knowledge, outlined roles and responsibilities, and guidance for addressing threat-based incidents effectively. An effectively designed and implemented system-wide policy would include representatives from each police department and guidance from subject matter experts of threat assessment. A system-wide policy must include the most up-to-date legal practices, research-backed methods for conducting threat assessments, and guidelines for documenting and managing cases per industry standards. A standardized policy must also address the variety in staffing, resources, and funding in each UNC System police department. The system office should provide guidance and support for establishing and maintaining compliance with newly outlined policies for agencies.

The last implication is the suggestion to design and implement a shared database to enable the tracking and case management of threat assessment investigations throughout the UNC System. The data from this study suggested the need to improve the management of threat assessment cases beyond the direct involvement of the original investigating UNC System Police department. A centralized database could enable police department officials throughout the UNC System to learn from cases at other institutions, gain insight and awareness about subjects of concern moving within their jurisdictions, and provide more effective continued case management focused on the mitigation of violence in and outside of UNC System institutions. A shared database must have properly stored, maintained, and protected data (Jones & Gray, 2020).

All sworn officers in UNC System police departments should have access to the shared database. Therefore, the database should include demographic information for the subjects of

concern, risk assessments, justifications for the levels of risk, and any relevant information helpful for other UNC System police department officials who may encounter the listed individuals of concern. Pertinent information in the shared UNC System police department threat assessment database could include known mental health concerns, histories of known and documented violence, expressed grievances or concerning beliefs, access to weapons, and areas useful for de-escalation, such as known hobbies or close family members and friends.

Implications for Individual Institutions

This study has numerous implications for the delineation of the responsibilities of law enforcement threat assessment units with their multidisciplinary threat assessment teams. Each respective law enforcement agency and UNC System institution has unique needs influenced by the context of the university community; however, the implications for how law enforcement agency officials and multidisciplinary team members work together extend to all institutions within the UNC System, regardless of the climate or context.

This study has numerous implications for each university and the collaboration of multidisciplinary university threat management teams with law enforcement agencies. Data analysis showed that the role of law enforcement agencies within multidisciplinary university threat management teams remained largely undefined. The findings of this study could be an impetus for institutional leaders throughout the UNC System to examine the role of university police departments within university threat management teams. Each UNC System police department should have a written, clearly understood explanation of the department's role and function within the broader university threat assessment process. The needs of each university may differ; however, the members of every institution's multidisciplinary threat assessment team must collaborate to examine the resources that each stakeholder brings to the team and craft job

descriptions and responsibilities based on the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the team members. The themes from this study indicated the overarching need for a defined policy for the mission, vision, and functions of law enforcement officers within multidisciplinary threat assessment teams.

An additional area for enhanced collaboration is the appointment of defined leaders of multidisciplinary threat assessment teams. Each team should have a director or leader authorized to guide the threat assessment process, develop and implement team training, manage a team-specific budget, and oversee case management. Team leaders should not have conflicting roles within their multidisciplinary teams. In addition, team leaders must remain unbiased and have the sole mission of managing their threat assessment or management teams. The optimal performance of teams can only occur if team members and leaders have clearly defined and understood roles and designations.

Implications for Research

This study provided numerous implications that included both UNC System-wide implications as well as broader educational research implications. Specifically, data collection and analysis allowed for two implications for research. The two main implications from this study were implications for research within the UNC System and implications for research in the field of law enforcement-based threat assessment in broader educational settings.

Research Within the UNC System

This study focused on the structures, functions, policies, practices, and procedures of law enforcement-based threat assessment units within the UNC System. The findings filled the gaps in the existing literature surrounding the topic of law enforcement-based threat assessment units in the context of educational settings. The goal of this study was to explore the structure,

training, case investigation, data collection, collaboration with university partners, and mitigation of instances of on-campus violence of UNC System police department threat assessment units. Some literature has addressed the function, structure, and importance of multidisciplinary threat management teams on university campuses; however, the findings of this study showed the growing need to examine the role of UNC System law enforcement in the threat management process. This study gave insight into the knowledge, skills, and abilities of university law enforcement agencies for threat assessment investigations within the UNC System. In addition, the findings provided a roadmap for continued research in the field of law enforcement-based threat assessment processes.

Education-Based Threat Assessment

This study showed how to apply the case study methodology to law enforcement-based threat assessment units within a higher education context. The findings also indicated how to use the theoretical framework of systems theory to address the interactions and impacts of a collection of law enforcement agencies within a larger law enforcement system. The results of this study could be the foundation for filling the gap in the literature on the role of law enforcement in higher education-based threat assessment. This study focused on UNC System law enforcement threat assessment units from an exploratory lens; however, the need to research the role of law enforcement in broader education-based threat assessment teams remains.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a growing need for further research to contribute to the existing body of literature related to higher education threat assessment. This study addressed the current role of law enforcement agencies in the UNC System threat assessment processes; however, few researchers have focused on law enforcement's role in educational threat assessment proceedings

throughout the United States. The recommendations for further research include studies on threat assessment in educational settings, law enforcement threat assessment training curricula, and the impact of mental health on higher education threat assessment units.

Threat Assessment in Educational Settings

This research focused specifically on police departments at public institutions within the UNC System. Future scholars could replicate this study on a larger scale to include other university systems in additional states, as well as private educational institutions, community college systems, and K–12 educational systems. The findings from this study could apply to other educational institutions; however, a need exists to account for the diversity of needs and experiences on each educational campus.

Continued research should focus on university systems that share the same local and state government in order to ensure the broader legal precedents and law enforcement best practices are consistent across studied institutions. Such research could include a case study methodology to focus on examining various university police departments within a larger university system to address the structure and function of their law enforcement-based threat assessment teams and anticipated future needs. Future researchers could conduct cross-case comparisons of broader university systems to identify shared areas of improvement or success that could contribute to the effectiveness of law enforcement-based threat assessment units throughout the United States.

In addition to further research on police departments within university systems, there is a need to examine law enforcement-based threat assessment units within private educational settings. Many private universities have fully sworn police departments with jurisdiction on their campuses; however, private campuses have a variety of unique needs for policies, practices, and legal mandates. Future researchers in the private university setting could examine the structure

and function of law enforcement threat assessment units to compare and contrast data with the existing findings of public institutions.

Future research on threat assessment in educational settings must include research within community college settings. Community college systems present unique challenges for threat assessment investigations as they are often open campus environments with a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff. While some community college systems have their own police departments, there is a need for further research into how systems without individual law enforcement agencies utilize surrounding jurisdictions within the community college threat assessment process.

Finally, law enforcement-based threat assessment is not a field restricted to institutions of higher learning. A growing need exists for similar research in elementary, middle, and high school settings. The majority of K–12 institutions do not have their own law enforcement agencies; therefore, research in these settings could focus on the roles of local and state law enforcement agencies in conducting threat assessment and mitigating instances of violence within K–12 settings. Additionally, researchers should examine the collaboration between law enforcement agencies in the K–12 and university settings for threat assessment.

The field of threat assessment continues to expand as a common practice within educational settings; therefore, further research must provide guidance for the development and implementation of new policies and best practices. Professionals in the threat assessment field can better serve educational institutions by examining the plethora of diverse thoughts and experiences via studies on law enforcement-based threat assessment units in public, private, community college, and K–12 settings.

Threat Assessment Training Curriculum

One additional area for research is the training of threat assessment units within law enforcement agencies. Future researchers should examine the policies and procedures of law enforcement agencies throughout the country for educational threat assessment unit training. Insight into the curricula of law enforcement-based threat assessment training programs could minimize the substantial gap in knowledge on best practices for law enforcement threat assessment units. A specific need exists for continued research into how law enforcement-based threat assessment teachers incorporate legal elements into their training curricula.

Law enforcement officers in the field of educational threat assessment must remain knowledgeable of the statutes, regulations, and case laws relevant to threat assessment investigations. Educational threat assessment teams have foundational legal guidance, but many local and state settings lack regulatory guidelines and standards for the role of law enforcement in threat assessment investigations. Without specific legal guidance, legal standards for law enforcement-based threat assessment originate from the various civil rights laws in the U.S. Constitutional Amendments. Therefore, an immediate need exists for further research into the constantly changing legal precedents, statutes, and procedures with a direct impact on the assessment and intervention of threat assessment teams in educational settings. Research in this area should include focused case studies of the specific needs of each law enforcement agency.

Local and state governments have varying laws and restrictions with an impact on educational threat assessment proceedings. Therefore, scholars must conduct research on legal training grounded in the context of the organizations or agencies in question. Further evolutions in the field require that threat assessment teams remain current with local, state, and federal legal standards that affect the educational threat assessment process.

Lastly, there is a need for further research into how law enforcement-based threat assessment units are trained to account for the role that various identities, cultures, and lived experiences play in the threat assessment process. Threat assessment training programs must adapt a diversity and equity encompassing lens. If law enforcement threat assessment teams are to effectively serve their respective communities, then training surrounding the lived experiences, identities, and needs of the community must be ongoing.

The Impact of Mental Health on Threat Assessment Units

Data from this study aligned with literature from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (2021) and the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (2020) showing a rapidly increasing rate of diagnosed mental health conditions within higher education settings. A mental health diagnosis is not an automatic cause for concern; however, the data from this study showed an increase in documented mental health conditions among subjects of concern. The impact of mental health in the field of higher education threat assessment remains under researched and largely unknown.

There is a need for further research on the policies and procedures of the UNC System and other educational settings for the presence of mental health conditions in threat assessment cases. An evaluation of current practices and in-depth analyses of the data related to the prevalence of mental health-related calls on various campuses could enable institutional leaders to advocate for further training, resources, and staffing to better serve members of the university community. The types of threat assessment cases continue to shift to include a narrower focus on mental health concerns. Therefore, it is a necessity that law enforcement-based threat assessment units have the training, skills, and best practices to effectively provide for their communities.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included an overview of the research questions and summaries of the previous chapters. The chapter provided conclusions and discussions of the results of this study and the limitations of the study as a whole. Finally, the chapter presented the implications for practice and research and recommendations for future research within the field.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Dissertation Email

From: Frederick E Sellers <fesellers@northcarolina.edu>
Date: Friday, September 3, 2021 11:56 AM
Subject: [External] Fwd: Hartis Dissertation Email
To: chiefs@lists.northcarolina.edu
Cc: Conner Hartis <bchartis@ncsu.edu>, Frederick E Sellers <fesellers@northcarolina.edu>, Michael R. Delafield <mrdelafield@northcarolina.edu>

Chiefs,
Good morning. Please see the below survey and research Sgt. Conner Hartis is working on that was discussed during yesterday's Chief's call. Please have your staff complete prior to the deadline date of Sunday, September 19, 2021. Also, as outlined yesterday, the System Office General Counsel was briefed on this important project and supports the work Sgt. Hartis is compiling.

Thanks, and please have a great three-day weekend.
Fred Sellers

From: Daniel House <dlhouse@ncsu.edu>
Sent: Friday, September 3, 2021 11:48 AM
To: Frederick E Sellers <fesellers@northcarolina.edu>
Subject: [External] Fwd: Hartis Dissertation Email

[CAUTION: External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless verified. Send all suspicious email as an attachment to spam@northcarolina.edu]
Fred,
See the attached from Sergeant Conner Hartis.
Dan

Daniel L. House Jr.
Chief of Police
NC State University Police Department
Office: 919-515-4211
Cell: 984-297-1701
FBI National Academy Session 243
2019 President, North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Conner Hartis** <bchartis@ncsu.edu>
Date: Fri, Sep 3, 2021 at 11:40 AM
Subject: Hartis Dissertation Email
To: Daniel House <dlhouse@ncsu.edu>

Chief,

Below is the narrative that we discussed sending out to the UNC System chiefs. The narrative provides a brief overview of the study and directions on how to complete the two steps of the survey and the interview. The combined time for completion is expected to be around 30 minutes.

The goal is for this to go to each chief, and then the chiefs will distribute it to their identified threat assessment officers. The survey and interview scheduling platforms will be live **until September 19,** at which time individuals will no longer be able to participate in the study.

Thank you for your assistance during this process!

Narrative for email:

Hello,

My name is Conner Hartis. I am a doctoral student at North Carolina State University and currently serve as the Criminal Investigations Sergeant at the NC State University Police. I am requesting your participation in my doctoral research study entitled, *Threat Assessment in Higher Education: The Role of University Law Enforcement.*

I have identified you as a participant based on your role as your department's threat assessment investigator and/or a member of your institution's multidisciplinary threat assessment team. This study will focus on the existing structures of threat assessment units within UNC System police departments and the areas for further growth and training throughout the UNC System.

The study requires completing one short online survey and a Zoom-based interview. Both the survey and interview will take around 15 minutes each to complete.

Please note, participation in this study is not a requirement of employment, and participation or lack thereof, will not have an effect on your job. You may withdraw from the study at any time. All responses and data will remain confidential.

If you choose to participate in the study, please follow the steps below **before September 19th**:

Step One: Please CLICK HERE and complete the survey.
Step Two: After completing the survey, please CLICK HERE to schedule a brief Zoom interview. Each slot allows for 30 minutes but the anticipated completion time is 15 minutes.

Thank you for your consideration and all you do for the students, faculty, and staff throughout the UNC System!

Please contact me (bchartis@ncsu.edu) or Dr. Michelle Bartlett (michelle_bartlett@ncsu.edu), Dissertation Chair, with any questions you may have.

Thank you,
Conner Hartis

--

Conner Hartis, M.Ed. | Sergeant

Criminal Investigations Division

North Carolina State University Police Department

Work: (919) 513-0385

Mobile: (919) 864-0290

Box 7220 | 2610 Wolf Village Way

Raleigh, NC 27695-7220

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Threat Assessment in Higher Education: The Role of University Law Enforcement
IRB Protocol: 24337

Principal Investigator: Conner Hartis (bchartis@ncsu.edu)
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michelle Bartlett (mebartle@ncsu.edu)

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this study will be a completely voluntary choice. You have the right to be part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study will be to gain a better understanding of the role of UNC Police departments on threat assessment and management teams within the University of North Carolina (UNC) System.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may present risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because the results will contribute to the knowledge base of law enforcement's role in threat assessment and management teams for improved service of the UNC System.

In this consent form, you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand any information in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. You will receive a copy of this consent form. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) above of the NC State IRB office (contact information is noted below).

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to examine the structures of threat assessment teams within UNC System Police Departments and the role of UNC System Police Departments on threat assessment and management teams within the University of North Carolina System.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?
In order to be a participant in this study, you must be a sworn law enforcement officer within the UNC System and serve as a member of your institution's threat assessment and management team or function as your department's threat assessment investigator.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will complete one electronic survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. Additionally, you will participate in a recorded, Zoom-based interview that will take approximately 15 minutes.

Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment, and your participation, or lack thereof, will not have an impact on your job.

Risks and Benefits
There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. Indirect benefits include the use of results to improve the UNC System Police Department's threat assessment and management units.

Confidentiality
All information recorded in this study will remain confidential to the full extent of the law. The data will remain stored on a password-protected NC-State-managed computer. Unless you give explicit permission to the contrary, the study will include no reference in oral or written reports that could link you to the study. Individual data with identifiable details removed could be data made available to the public as required by a professional association, journal, or funding agency. Any identifiable information collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research purposes without consent.

What if you have questions about this study?
If, at any time, you have questions about the study or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the research, Conner Hartis, at bchartis@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you may not have received treatment according to the description in this form or that your rights as a participant in this research have been violated during this course of this study, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via telephone at (919) 515- 8754. You can also find out more information about the research, why you would or would not want to be a research participant, questions to ask as a research participant, and more information about your rights by going to this website: http://go.ncsu.edu/research-participant

1. I have read and understood the above information. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty.
    a. I do consent to participate in this study
    b. I do not consent to participate in this study

Appendix C: Qualtrics Informed Consent

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Q1
Informed Consent
Threat Assessment in Higher Education: The Role of University Law Enforcement
IRB Protocol: 24337

Principal Investigator: Conner Hartis (bchartis@ncsu.edu)
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michelle Bartlett (mebartle@ncsu.edu)

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this study is a completely voluntary choice. You have the right to be part of this study, choose not to participate, or stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the role of UNC police departments on threat assessment and management teams within the University of North Carolina (UNC) System.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from participating in this study. Research studies may also present risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because the results will contribute to the knowledge base of law enforcement's role in threat assessment and management teams to better serve the UNC System.

In this consent form, you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand any information in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. You will receive a copy of this consent form. If, at any time, you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) above of the NC State IRB office (contact information is noted below).

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to examine the structures of threat assessment teams within UNC System police departments and the role of UNC System Police Departments on threat assessment and management teams within the University of North Carolina System.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?
Participating in this study requires you to be a sworn law enforcement officer within the UNC System who serves as a member of your institution's threat assessment and management team or as your department's threat assessment investigator.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will complete one electronic survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. Additionally, you will participate in a recorded, Zoom interview that will take approximately 15 minutes.

Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment, and your participation, or lack thereof, will not have an impact on your job.

Risks and Benefits
There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. Indirect benefits include the use of the study's results to improve the UNC System police department's threat assessment and management units.

Confidentiality
All information recorded in this study will remain confidential to the full extent of the law. Data will remain securely stored on a password-protected NC-State-managed computer. Unless you give explicit permission to the contrary, no study reports will contain references in oral or written reports that could link you to the study. Individual data with identifiable details removed may be made available to the public as required by a professional association, journal, or funding agency. Any identifiable information collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research purposes without consent.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the research, Conner Hartis at bchartis@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you may not have been treated according to the description in this form, or that your rights as a participant in this research have been violated during this course of this study, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at (919) 515- 8754. You can also find out more information about research, why you would or would not want to be a research participant, questions to ask as a research participant, and more information about your rights by going to this website: http://go.ncsu.edu/research-participant

- o I consent, begin the study
- o I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Demographics

What is your name?

_____

What is your work email address?

_____

What is the name of the UNC System police department where you work?

_____

What is your role/title at your agency of employment?

_____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: RQ1

Which UNC System police department do you work for?

_____

How many sworn officers does your department have?

_____

Does your university have a multidisciplinary threat assessment or behavioral assessment team?

_____

Does your department have a representative on your university's behavioral/threat assessment team?

_____

Does your department have officers specifically assigned to conduct threat assessment investigations?

_____

Does your department have a specifically identified threat assessment unit?

_____

How many sworn officers are assigned to your department's threat Assessment unit (if any)?

_____

Does your department have active members of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals? If so, how many?

_____

End of Block: RQ1

Start of Block: RQ2

Does your department have a specific policy for the mission, vision, and operation of a threat assessment unit? If so, what are they?

_____

Does your department have specific roles and responsibilities for the role of law enforcement officers in threat assessment units? If so, what are they?

_____

What is the current role of your department in the university-wide threat assessment process?

_____

End of Block: RQ2

Start of Block: Block 4

This concludes the survey portion of the study. Please use the link included in the participation invitation email to schedule a Zoom interview. Each interview slot provides for 30 minutes, but the anticipated interview completion time is 15 minutes.