

# School Psychology Students' Beliefs About Their Preparation and Concern With Ethical Issues

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This study investigated school psychology doctoral students' beliefs concerning their preparation for, and concern about, dealing with 12 ethical issues based on year in graduate school and whether they had taken an ethics course. Two hundred thirty-three doctoral students from 18 of the 44 American Psychological Association accredited programs in school psychology listed in the December 1996 issue of the *American Psychologist* completed ethical issues surveys. Results showed that students who had taken an ethics course and those with more years of graduate education said they felt more prepared to deal with ethical issues than students who had not taken an ethics course and who had fewer years of graduate education. Participants believed they were least prepared to deal with ethical issues involving child custody cases, possible ethical violations by colleagues, and potentially violent clients. Participants' concern about dealing with ethical issues was negatively related to their number of internship hours.

Key words: graduate students, graduate training, ethical decision making

There is widespread literature support for ethics education for graduate students in psychology (Nagel, 1987; Welfel & Kitchener, 1992). Ethics must be covered in the curricula of all doctoral programs accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA, 1996b). Ethics may be taught in a separate course or addressed in classes covering other subjects (e.g., assessment, consultation, and intervention).

Several models for teaching ethics to psychology graduate students exist in the literature (Abeles, 1980; Eberlein, 1987; Plante, 1995), but all indicate that it is important to solicit extensive student participation in relation to in-class examples of ethical dilemmas. To assist students to engage in consistent, thorough consideration of all aspects of ethical dilemmas, the use of decision-making models is strongly advocated (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998; Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998).

It is also anticipated that students will receive exposure to, and education about, ethical issues arising in actual practice during fieldwork and internships (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998). Faculty are expected to model ethical behavior. Kitchener (1992) indicated that faculty behavior toward students “communicates as much as course content about being ethical” (p. 190). Tabachnick, Keith-Spiegel, and Pope (1991) found that although more than 90% of 482 APA members teaching psychologists stated that they communicated ethics and values to their students, they did not always practice ethical behavior in their teaching or behavior toward students.

There is little research on the effectiveness of ethics education and results have been mixed. For example, Welfel (1992) found that 101 directors of APA-accredited predoctoral internships rated interns’ general ethical knowledge and ethical competency regarding 16 specific ethical issues highly. The directors believed, however, that graduate programs should provide more training on clinical application of ethical principles. An earlier survey of clinical psychology graduate students from APA programs found that the majority of the sample did not believe they were well prepared in professional ethics (Tymchuk, 1985). On the other hand, a more recent survey of counseling psychology doctoral students found that 96% of the 50 respondents believed they were prepared to deal with ethical issues in professional situations (Wilson & Ranft, 1993).

Thus far, ethics research has focused largely on graduate students in clinical or counseling psychology (e.g., Baldick, 1980; Bernard & Jara, 1986; Fly, van Bark, Weinman, Kitchener, & Lang, 1997; Mearns & Allen, 1991; Morrison & Teta, 1979; Wilson & Ranft, 1993). Because they frequently assess and treat children and adolescents in school settings, school psychologists encounter ethical dilemmas that psychologists working with older populations in other settings do not (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998). This research represented an initial exploration of the following issues in ethics education of school psychologists.

Practicing school psychologists often encounter requests to violate child and adolescent confidentiality (Jacob-Timm, 1999), and a recent critical incidents survey by Tryon (2000) found that confidentiality violations were among the most frequently reported ethical transgressions by school psychology graduate students. School psychologists should discuss the limits of confidentiality with the students they assist as soon as possible in the professional relationship. This discussion must balance students’ confidentiality considerations with legal considerations to protect students and others from harm as well as teachers’ and parents’ need to

know certain information about students (Taylor & Adelman, 1989). As part of their duty to protect students, school psychologists are ethically and legally obligated to report suspected child abuse (Kalichman, 1993) and must increasingly deal with concerns about potentially violent students (Gorin & Bower, 1998; Schloss & Smith, 1987) and crisis situations (Poland & Pitcher, 1990).

School psychologists also must deal with requests by unauthorized individuals to examine test-item content. Sometimes these unauthorized individuals are parents who may simply be curious about the tests their children were administered or who may be seeking advantages for their children in future testing. School psychologists are obligated to both uphold the law granting parents access to tests in school records (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998) and protect test validity by not disclosing item content (Committee on Psychological Tests and Assessment, 1996). Some school psychologist respondents to Jacob-Timm's (1999) survey listed requests to falsify test results (Gardner, 1996) among the ethically challenging dilemmas they encountered. Parents also may pressure school psychologists to falsify test results or misclassify their children (Gardner, 1996; Jacob-Timm, 1999) and sometimes involve school psychologists in child custody issues (Knapp & VandeCreek, 1985).

Dual-relationship issues (Canter, Bennett, Jones, & Nagy, 1994) are another troubling issue for school psychologists. Jacob-Timm (1999) cited concerns about being both a student advocate and school employee as one example of this type of relationship. If a psychologist wants to do research in the schools, he or she must obtain both consent from parents and assent from students (Sieber, 1994). Finally, school psychologists as well as members of other psychology specialties should be prepared to deal with possible ethical violations by colleagues (Mearns & Allen, 1991; Tryon, 2000).

This study used a questionnaire to determine how prepared school psychology doctoral students from a selected sample of APA-accredited programs believe they were to deal with ethical issues. This study also examined how concerned they were about having to deal with these issues. One way to prepare students to manage ethical issues is to offer an ethics course. Thus, it was hypothesized that students who had taken an ethics course would feel more prepared to deal with ethical issues (i.e., score higher on the prepared part of the questionnaire) than those who had not. Another way training programs prepare students to approach ethical issues is to address ethics in several courses and during practica and internships. Thus, as students proceed through graduate school, they should, by virtue of these experiences, become progressively more prepared to deal with ethical issues. Therefore, it also was hypothesized that students with more years of graduate education would believe they were more prepared to manage ethical dilemmas than students with fewer years of graduate education. It also was hypothesized that students who had an ethics course and students who had completed more years of graduate school would score lower on the concerned part of the questionnaire (i.e., be less concerned about dealing with the various ethical issues).

Having book knowledge of ethical issues is important, but applying that knowledge in practical situations is also important. Thus, it was hypothesized that students with more practical experience (i.e., greater numbers of practicum and internship hours) would indicate that they were more prepared and less concerned about dealing with the previous ethical issues. Finally, it was hypothesized that using a decision-making model would facilitate ethical preparation and decrease concerns about dealing with ethical dilemmas.

The obvious nature of these hypotheses does not detract from their importance. The absence of prior empirical work prompted this study. Support for these hypotheses would provide an indication that the ethics education afforded school psychology graduate students in APA-accredited doctoral programs is achieving the desired effects. Failure to confirm these hypotheses, however, may lead to further investigation of or changes in ethics education practices.

## METHOD

### Participants

Two hundred thirty-three doctoral students from 18 APA-accredited programs in school psychology completed an ethical issues questionnaire. Participant characteristics are presented in Table 1. Participants' mean age was 27.94 ( $SD = 5.83$ ). Just over half ( $n = 120$ ; 51.5%) had taken an ethics course. Because of colleagues' suggestions to revise the study by collecting data on additional students from more APA-accredited programs (see Procedure section), questionnaires were completed by participants at two different times. In Fall 1997, 163 participants (70% of the total sample) completed questionnaires, and in Spring 2000, an additional 70 participants (30%) completed questionnaires.

At the beginning of the Fall 1997 semester, 163 of the 354 questionnaires sent to students from 11 school psychology programs listed in the December 1996 issue of the *American Psychologist* (APA, 1996a) were returned completed, a return rate of 46%. At the beginning of the Spring 2000 semester, 70 of the 132 (53%) questionnaires sent to students from an additional 7 school psychology programs listed in the December 1996 issue of the *American Psychologist* were returned completed. For both practical and logistical reasons, there was no second mailing at either time.

There were some differences in the samples. Members of the later sample were more likely to have taken an ethics course ( $n = 52$ ; 74% of later sample) than were members of the earlier sample ( $n = 68$ ; 42% of earlier sample),  $\chi^2(1, 233) = 20.80$ ,  $p < .001$ . Members of the later sample also had more years of graduate study than did members of the earlier sample,  $\chi^2(4, 232) = 15.61$ ,  $p < .005$ . For example, in

TABLE 1  
Characteristics of Participants

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Men	41	18
Women	192	82
Year in graduate school		
1st year	37	16
2nd year	43	19
3rd year	44	19
4th year	53	23
5th year and beyond	55	24
Race or ethnicity		
American Indian	3	1
Latino	6	3
Asian American	5	2
African American	17	7
White (non-Latino)	192	82
Other	9	4
Geographic location		
Northeast	90	39
Northwest	7	3
Midwest	42	18
Southeast	69	30
Southwest	20	9
Other	4	2
Area		
Urban	134	57
Suburban	85	37
Rural	13	6

*Note.* Data are from responses of 233 school psychology doctoral students. Characteristic totals of less than 233 reflect missing data.

the later sample, 28 students (40%) were in their 5th year and beyond of graduate study, but in the earlier sample, only 27 students (17%) were 5th-year students and beyond.

## Instrument

I developed the Ethical Issues Questionnaire (see Appendix) for this study. The first part of the questionnaire asks for the following background information: age, gender, geographic area, race or ethnicity, number of years of school psychology graduate study, and ethics course completion status. The next part of the question-

naire defines the term *prepared* to indicate “the extent to which you believe your graduate training has positioned you to effectively deal with the following situations.” The term *concerned* is defined as “the extent to which you are bothered or worried about dealing with the following situations.”

The questionnaire then presents 12 ethical issues for rating on 5-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all prepared or concerned*) to 5 (*very prepared or concerned*). I selected the ethical issues from topics covered in the Jacob-Timm and Hartshorne (1998) text used in the school psychology ethics course I taught and from recent ethics literature. The items ask about the following: requests to violate child and adolescent confidentiality (Fly et al., 1997; Jacob-Timm, 1999; Tryon, 2000), requests by unauthorized individuals to examine test item content (Committee on Psychological Tests and Assessment, 1996), mandated reporting of child abuse (Kalichman, 1993), possible ethical violations by colleagues (Mearns & Allen, 1991), requests to falsify test results (Gardner, 1996; Jacob-Timm, 1999), discussions with clients about the limits of confidentiality (Taylor & Adelman, 1989), obtaining consent and assent for research (Sieber, 1994), parental pressure to misclassify children (Gardner, 1996), dual-relationship issues (Canter et al., 1994), child custody issues (Knapp & VandeCreek, 1985), crisis situations (Poland & Pitcher, 1990), and potentially violent clients (Busse & Larson, 1997; Schloss & Smith, 1987).

Each of the 12 ethical issues is rated by participants on both the Prepared and the Concerned scales. Possible scores on both the Prepared and Concerned scales range from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating greater preparation and concern. The items are not meant to be exhaustive of ethical issues that school psychologists may face, and they are not meant to address specific situations.

As part of revisions before the Spring 2000 mailing, items asking for the number of practicum and internship hours that participants had and whether participants used a problem-solving model to make ethical decisions were added. Only the later sample of 70 participants completed the revised questionnaire with these items.

Internal consistency coefficient alphas were .89 for the 12 Prepared items and .89 for the 12 Concerned items, indicating that the items formed coherent scales. Table 2 presents the item–total correlations for the Prepared and the Concerned scales. For the Prepared scale, item–total correlations ranged from a low of .50 (*dealing with child custody cases*) to a high of .77 (*dealing with requests to misclassify children*). For the Concerned scale, item–total correlations ranged from a low of .57 (*dealing with possible ethical violations by colleagues*) to a high of .78 (*dealing with setting limits on confidentiality*). The Prepared and Concerned scales were significantly, negatively correlated,  $r(231) = -.45, p < .001$ . One-week test–retest reliability correlation coefficients using an independent sample of 24 school psychology doctoral students from three different programs who were not part of the survey sample were .88 for the Prepared scale and .83 for the Concerned scale.

TABLE 2  
Item–Total Correlations for the Prepared and the Concerned Scales

Item	Correlation With	
	Prepared Total	Concerned Total
Requests to violate confidentiality	.74*	.67
Requests by unqualified persons to examine intelligence and achievement test items	.70	.70
Child abuse	.63	.70
Possible colleague ethical violations	.63	.57
Requests to falsify test results	.64	.70
Setting limits on confidentiality	.76	.78
Informed consent for research	.72	.71
Parental pressure to misclassify children	.77	.64
Dual-relationship issues	.69	.68
Child custody cases	.50	.59
Crisis situations	.70	.70
Dealing with potentially violent clients	.59	.62

Note.  $n = 232$  (2 participants had missing data for each scale). For the Prepared scale, the items were prefaced, “How prepared are you to deal with [report]?” For the Concerned scale, the items were prefaced, “How concerned are you about dealing with [reporting]?”

\* $p < .01$  in all cases.

### Procedure

Starting at a random place in the list of the 44 APA-accredited programs provided in the December 1996 issue of the *American Psychologist* (APA, 1996a), every fourth program thereafter was selected throughout the entire list. This systematic sampling procedure provided a sample of doctoral participants from 11 of the 44 APA-accredited doctoral programs in school psychology. Before the beginning of the Fall 1997 semester, school psychology program directors were contacted by telephone and asked to distribute the Ethical Issues Questionnaire to their doctoral students. All program directors contacted gave permission for their students to participate in the study. Program directors estimated the number of questionnaires they needed, and some estimates were more accurate than others.

After reviewing the article resulting from these questionnaire data received in October 1999, colleagues suggested collecting more data from students in more programs, and asking about students’ field experiences as well as whether they used decision-making models to address ethical dilemmas. Using the systematic sampling procedure described previously, 11 additional APA-accredited school psychology doctoral programs were selected. In January 2000, directors of each of these programs were contacted by e-mail. Seven of the 11 directors gave permission for their students to be surveyed.

Each questionnaire was introduced by a cover letter describing the study. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes for questionnaire return and results request forms that could be sent under separate cover were provided to participants. The results request forms stated, "I would like a copy of the results of the School Psychology Ethics Survey," gave spaces for the participant's name and address, and instructed the participant to return the form to me at the address I provided. Surveys were anonymous.

Questionnaires were sent at the beginning of semesters to reach students before their coursework became so heavy that they would not have time to respond. In all, questionnaires were sent to 18 of the 22 (82%) APA-accredited school psychology programs selected from the December 1996 issue of the *American Psychologist* (APA, 1996a). This represented 41% (18 of 44) of the programs listed in that issue. Two hundred thirty-three of 486 (48%) questionnaires were returned completed.

## RESULTS

To control for experiment-wide error (Bray & Maxwell, 1985), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with two between-groups variables (ethics course or no ethics course, year in graduate school) was used to analyze participants' answers to the Prepared and Concerned scales. When significant MANOVA effects were found, univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to clarify the source of the effect.

There was a significant MANOVA main effect for course,  $F(2, 219) = 7.21, p < .002$ . ANOVAs found a significant course effect for the Prepared scale,  $F(1, 220) = 13.42, p < .001$ , but not for the Concerned scale,  $F(1, 220) = .20, p = .655$ . Thus, the hypothesis that participants who had taken an ethics course would be less concerned about dealing with the surveyed ethical issues was not confirmed. As hypothesized, however, participants who had taken an ethics course believed they were more prepared to deal with the various ethical issues ( $M = 44.04, SD = 6.36$ ) than did participants who had not taken an ethics course ( $M = 35.08, SD = 9.63$ ).

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for the individual prepared items for the total sample and the percentages of participants who had taken and not taken an ethics course who endorsed the more prepared responses (answered with a rating of 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale). Table 3 shows that more than half of the participants who had taken an ethics course believed they were prepared to deal with 8 of the 12 items. This was true for only 4 of the 12 items for those who had not taken an ethics course. The majority of participants in both groups, however, did not feel prepared to deal with possible ethical violations by colleagues, child custody cases, crisis situations, and potentially violent clients.

There was a significant MANOVA main effect for year in graduate school,  $F(8, 440) = 2.75, p < .007$ . ANOVAs found a significant effect for year in graduate

TABLE 3  
 Sample Mean and Standard Deviation and Number and Percentage of Students Who Responded That They Were More Prepared<sup>a</sup> by Having Taken or Not Taken an Ethics Course

Item	M	SD	Course		No Course	
			n	%	n	%
Requests to violate confidentiality	3.66	1.00	96	80.0	51	45.1
Requests by unqualified persons to examine intelligence and achievement test items	3.71	1.15	94	78.3	57	50.9
Child abuse	3.75	1.18	92	76.7	59	52.7
Possible colleague ethical violations	2.91	1.04	49	40.8	21	18.6
Requests to falsify test results	3.46	1.45	82	68.3	50	44.2
Limits on confidentiality	4.02	1.10	99	82.5	63	55.8
Informed consent for research	4.16	1.08	100	83.3	76	67.3
Parental pressure to misclassify children	3.25	1.13	68	56.7	33	29.2
Dual-relationship issues	3.38	1.22	80	66.7	31	27.4
Child custody cases	1.86	1.02	12	10.0	8	7.1
Crisis situations	3.06	1.14	58	48.3	28	25.0
Potentially violent clients	2.50	1.23	36	30.0	19	17.0

<sup>a</sup>Gave a 4 or a 5 rating on the 5-point scale, where higher numbers mean more preparation.

school for the Prepared scale,  $F(4, 220) = 4.49, p < .003$ , but not for the Concerned scale,  $F(4, 220) = 1.71, p = .149$ . Thus, the hypothesis that participants in the later years of graduate study would be less concerned about dealing with the ethical issues than those in the earlier years of graduate study was not confirmed. The hypothesis that students in the later years of graduate study would believe themselves to be more prepared than those in the earlier years of graduate study to deal with the various ethical issues was confirmed.

Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations for the Prepared scale scores obtained by participants in different years of graduate school. Post hoc Tukey honestly significant difference tests were used to make pairwise comparisons while maintaining the experimentwise alpha level at  $p < .05$  (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1994). First-year students scored significantly lower than participants in their 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th years and beyond. Students in their 2nd year of school psychology graduate study scored significantly lower than students in their 4th and 5th years and beyond. Students in their 3rd year scored significantly lower on the Prepared scale than did students in their 5th year and beyond.

Table 5 presents the percentages of participants in each year of graduate study who believed they were prepared (scored a 4 or a 5) to deal with each ethical issue. The majority of 1st-year students did not believe they were prepared to deal with any of the 12 issues. In Years 2 and 3, the majority of participants believed they were prepared to deal with half of the issues. The majority of 4th-year students be-

TABLE 4  
Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Scores on the Prepared Scale by Year in Graduate School

<i>Year in School</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1st	37	28.67	8.63
2nd	43	37.49	9.05
3rd	44	39.98	6.89
4th	51	43.35	7.39
5th and beyond	55	45.31	5.41

*Note.* Of the 230 participants, 1 did not indicate year in graduate school, and 2 did not complete all the prepared scale items.

TABLE 5  
Percentages of Students by Year in Graduate School Who Rated Themselves as Prepared<sup>a</sup> to Deal With Each Item

<i>Ethical Issues Prepared Item</i>	<i>Year in Graduate School</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>5th &amp; &gt;</i>	
Requests to violate confidentiality	21.6	53.4	59.1	77.4	89.1	63.4
Requests by unqualified persons to examine intelligence and achievement test items	21.6	62.3	68.2	73.1	87.3	65.4
Reporting child abuse	24.3	62.8	72.7	71.2	81.2	64.9
Possible colleague ethical violations	16.2	27.9	27.3	31.5	41.8	30.2
Requests to falsify test results	27.0	53.5	52.3	69.8	70.9	56.9
Setting limits on confidentiality	24.3	60.5	77.3	77.4	94.5	69.8
Getting informed consent for research	40.5	74.4	77.3	83.0	87.3	75.4
Parental pressure to misclassify children	10.8	37.2	31.8	62.3	61.8	43.5
Dual-relationship issues	16.2	27.9	38.6	37.7	76.4	47.8
Child custody cases	8.1	9.3	6.8	9.4	9.1	8.6
Crisis situations	10.8	20.9	36.4	44.2	61.8	37.2
Potentially violent clients	8.1	14.0	22.7	36.5	30.9	23.8

<sup>a</sup>Responded with a 4 or a 5 on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all prepared*) to 5 (*very prepared*).

lieved they were prepared to deal with 7 of the issues, and the majority of 5th-year students and beyond believed they were prepared to deal with 9 of the 12 ethical issues. Fewer than half of the 5th-year and beyond participants believed they were prepared to deal with potential ethical violations by colleagues, child custody cases, and potentially violent clients.

There was a significant MANOVA Course  $\times$  Year interaction,  $F(8, 440) = 2.32$ ,  $p < .02$ . This showed that the difference in the weighted combination of Prepared and Concerned scores of students who took an ethics course and those who did not

varied according to participants' year in graduate school, indicating that the impact of an ethics course on ratings of being prepared or concerned is not the same during all years of graduate study. Table 6 presents means and standard deviations for the Prepared and Concerned scales according to year in graduate school and ethics course taken or not taken. The table shows that Prepared scores were higher for participants in all years of graduate study who had taken an ethics course. Relative to participants who had not taken an ethics course, Concerned scores were higher for 1st- and 3rd-year students who had taken an ethics course and lower for 2nd-, 4th-, and 5th-year and beyond students who had taken an ethics course. ANOVAs found no significant Course  $\times$  Year interactions for the Prepared,  $F(4, 220) = 1.52$ ,  $p = .199$ , and Concerned,  $F(4, 220) = 2.00$ ,  $p = .096$ , scales.

As stated in the Procedure section, the revised questionnaire asking for the numbers of participants' practicum and internship hours as well as whether they used a problem-solving model to make ethical decisions was completed by 70 participants. Practicum hours ranged from 0 to 2,600 ( $M = 475$ ,  $SD = 509$ ), and internship hours ranged from 0 to 3,000 ( $M = 496$ ,  $SD = 858$ ). Prepared scale scores correlated significantly positively with number of practicum hours,  $r(60) = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not with number of internship hours,  $r(66) = .16$ ,  $p = .19$ . Concerned scale scores correlated significantly negatively with both the number of internship hours,  $r(66) = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the number of practicum hours,  $r(60) = -.31$ ,  $p < .02$ .

Twenty-four participants said they used a problem-solving model to make ethical decisions; 43 participants did not use a model. There was a significant relation between having an ethics course and using a decision-making model,  $\chi^2(1, 67) = 3.93$ ,  $p < .05$ . Only 21 of 49 students (43%) who had taken an ethics course, and presumably been taught a decision-making model, used a model for making ethical decisions. The relation between year in graduate study and using a decision-making model approached but did not reach significance,  $\chi^2(4, 67) =$

TABLE 6  
Means and Standard Deviations of Prepared and Concerned Scores by Year in Graduate School and Ethics Course

Year	Prepared Scores				Concerned Scores			
	Course		No Course		Course		No Course	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1st	39.50	2.12	28.06	8.45	48.00	12.73	40.69	9.69
2nd	44.11	5.60	35.74	9.03	35.88	8.77	38.41	9.41
3rd	41.52	6.56	38.29	7.01	36.61	8.71	33.90	7.11
4th	43.89	7.19	41.93	7.99	34.14	9.64	37.36	9.99
5th & >	45.54	5.48	35.08	9.63	31.73	8.85	40.14	9.58

7.97,  $p = .10$ . A MANOVA with decision-making model versus no decision-making model as the between-groups variable was used to analyze participants' answers to the Prepared and Concerned scales. It was not significant,  $F(2, 63) = 2.73$ ,  $p = .08$ .

## DISCUSSION

Results are best generalized to doctoral school psychology students similar to those in this sample. The reader is cautioned that participants were from only 41% of APA-accredited school psychology programs and that just 48% of the questionnaires sent were returned completed. The sample may not be representative of all school psychology doctoral students or programs. Sample data were also collected at different times of the year and in different years. The effect of having part of the data obtained in the late 1997 and part in early 2000 is not known, but it is possible that the ethics education provided the two groups of participants may have been discrepant because of differences in the ethics literature or pedagogical approaches used. For example, some of the ethics texts available to students in the fall of 1997 were revised before the second sample was collected in 2000, so students in the two samples were likely exposed to different ethics education literature. Sampling at different times of the year yielded responses from participants in different years in graduate school. The fall sampling drew more 1st-year students, and the spring sampling drew more students from later years. Results should be examined with these caveats in mind.

Surveyed school psychology doctoral students believed that they were more prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas if they had taken an ethics course than if they had not. In addition, graduate students in the later years of graduate study believed they were more prepared to deal with ethical issues than students in earlier years. APA (1996b) did not require accredited programs to offer a course dealing exclusively with ethics but required that ethics receive adequate course coverage during doctoral education. These results suggest, however, that it may be beneficial to students for programs to consider presenting an ethics course. In a separate course, ethics is the exclusive focus. Courses that deal with other subjects and integrate ethics into the subject material provide a more piecemeal approach to ethics education. It appears to be helpful to students to provide them with the "big picture" as well as emphasizing ethics when teaching other courses such as assessment, counseling, consultation, and research. Because 1st- and 2nd-year doctoral students may not have taken an ethics course, even if one was required by their departments, future study of the value of a required ethics course should focus on more advanced (3rd- and 4th-year) students.

These results provide support for the assumption that as doctoral students advance through their education, they become progressively more prepared to deal

with ethical dilemmas. This may be due to the integration of ethics education into courses covering other topics and to the practical experience students obtain in fieldwork placements. This latter point is emphasized by the finding that students' belief in their preparation to deal with ethical issues was positively related to their hours of practicum experience. Thus, to prepare students to deal with ethical issues, it appears beneficial to require more time in supervised practical settings.

The majority of participants in all years of graduate study did not feel well prepared to deal with three of the ethical issues presented: potential ethical violations by colleagues, potentially violent clients, and child custody cases. To the extent that these results reflect the beliefs of most school psychology doctoral students and because most school psychologists will likely have to deal with these issues over the course of their careers, school psychology training programs should place more emphasis on these topics in their preparation of students. Several studies (Bernard & Jara, 1986; Betan & Stanton, 1997; Mearns & Allen, 1991; Pope, Tabachnick, & Keith-Spiegel, 1987) found that, even though they know a colleague is behaving unethically, some graduate students and practicing psychologists would not confront the colleague or report his or her behavior to superiors. To deal appropriately with colleagues' ethical violations, one must not only be aware of ethics codes, but also must consider ethical behavior of paramount importance. Bernard and Jara (1986) concluded from their study, "[The] problem is not how to communicate the ethical principles to students more effectively, but rather how to motivate them to implement principles that they apparently understand quite well" (p. 315). To protect clients, school psychologists must not only behave ethically themselves, but ensure that other school psychologists also behave ethically—even at the expense of collegial friendships. Sensitizing graduate students to this issue may be facilitated by reviewing the literature (i.e., Bernard & Jara, 1986) cited in this paragraph, using examples from students' experiences, role-playing confronting colleges, and exploring outcomes arising from reporting or not reporting colleagues' ethical transgressions.

Dealing with potentially violent clients requires psychologists to assess the situation and act quickly. Developing, knowing, and consistently following guidelines such as those provided by Jacob-Timm and Hartshorne (1998) will help to prepare school psychologists to deal with these clients. School psychologists also may fear for their own personal safety, and, for some, a course in self-defense may be prudent.

Jacob-Timm's (1999) survey of practicing school psychologists found that they sometimes become involved in child custody dilemmas. A recent survey (Short & Rosenthal, 1995) found that doctoral-level school psychologists are increasingly employed in nonschool settings such as clinics and independent practice. These school psychologists in particular are likely to be asked to perform evaluations for child custody. The APA Ethics Committee (1998) reported that

11% of new ethics complaint cases opened in 1997 involved child custody evaluations. Training in issues involving child custody seems particularly advisable. In this regard, doctoral students should be educated about APA guidelines for child custody evaluations (APA, 1994) and evaluations in child protection cases (APA, 1999). These guidelines provide important information about conducting evaluations for these purposes and address ethical issues such as avoiding multiple-role relationships, gaining specialized training, and conducting unbiased evaluations.

In contrast to participants' belief about their preparation to deal with ethical issues, their concern about dealing with ethical issues was not significantly related to having or not having an ethics course or to students' years in graduate study. Thus, academic presentation and class discussion of ethical issues appears not to decrease students' concerns about having to deal with these issues in the future. Greater numbers of both practicum and internship hours were associated with less concern about dealing with ethical issues. During these fieldwork experiences, students function under supervision as school psychologists. They frequently gain firsthand experience with a number of ethical dilemmas. For participants in this study, this practical experience appears to have decreased their concerns about dealing with the ethical issues surveyed. As mentioned previously, however, this study sampled students during all years of graduate study. First- and 2nd-year students had little, if any, practicum experience. Conclusions about the value of increased supervised practicum hours with regard to perceptions of concern about dealing with ethical issues would have been facilitated had the study been conducted exclusively with more advanced students.

Finally, ethics texts (i.e., Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998; Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998) emphasize the importance of using an ethical decision-making procedure. In this study, use of a decision-making model was not related to preparation or concern beliefs, but it was related to having an ethics course. Only the later subsample of participants was asked to respond to the decision-making model question, and results may have been different had the entire sample responded. In the later subsample, although students who had taken an ethics course were generally more likely than those who had not to use a decision-making model, the majority of students who had taken an ethics course did not use a decision-making model to guide their ethical decisions. One assumes that they learned such procedures in their ethics course but chose not to employ them. Ethical decision-making models and the procedures they have spawned focus school psychologists' attention on the systematic consideration of all aspects of ethical dilemmas. Decisions made after these considerations are generally thoughtful, not haphazard, and in clients' best interests. Taking a little time to go through decision-making steps ultimately may save considerable time and anguish. Thus, students should be strongly encouraged to both know and apply ethical decision-making models.

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APPENDIX

Ethical Issues Questionnaire

**Background Information:**

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Gender:** \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Male

**Geographic Area:** \_\_\_ Northeast \_\_\_ Northwest \_\_\_ Midwest \_\_\_ Southeast  
 \_\_\_ Southwest \_\_\_ Other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)

**Location:** \_\_\_ Urban \_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_ Rural

**Ethnicity:** \_\_\_ American Indian or Alaskan native \_\_\_ Latino \_\_\_ Asian American  
 \_\_\_ African American \_\_\_ Caucasian (non-Latino) \_\_\_ Other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Have you taken an **ethics course** in graduate school? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

Number of years of **graduate study** in school psychology: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Number of hours of **practicum** experience: \_\_\_\_\_ hours; **internship** experience: \_\_\_\_\_ hours

Do you regularly use an explicit **problem-solving model** to make ethical decision? \_\_\_ Yes  
 (specify model used: \_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_ No

**Ethical Issues:** For each item, please circle the number that most describes your feelings about the following ethical situations that you may encounter in the future.

In the following questions, I use the term prepared to indicate the extent to which you believe your graduate training has positioned you to effectively deal with the following situations.

I use the term concerned to indicate the extent to which you are bothered or worried about dealing with the following situations.

1. a) How prepared are you to deal with requests by unauthorized individuals (parents, teachers, administrators) for information that may violate the **confidentiality** of your child or adolescent clients?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Not at all prepared                      Somewhat prepared                      Very prepared

- b) How concerned are you about dealing with requests by unauthorized individuals (parents, teachers, administrators) for information that may violate the **confidentiality** of your child or adolescent clients?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Not at all concerned                      Somewhat concerned                      Very concerned

(continued)

APPENDIX (*Continued*)

2. a) How prepared are you to deal with requests by **unqualified individuals** (parents, teachers, administrators) to examine the item content of **intelligence and achievement** tests?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all prepared		Somewhat prepared		Very prepared

- b) How concerned are you about dealing with requests by **unqualified individuals** (parents, teachers, administrators) to examine the item content of **intelligence and achievement** tests?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all concerned		Somewhat concerned		Very concerned

3. a) How prepared are you to deal with **mandated** reporting of suspected **child abuse**?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all prepared		Somewhat prepared		Very prepared

- b) How concerned are you about dealing with **mandated** reporting of suspected **child abuse**?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all concerned		Somewhat concerned		Very concerned

4. a) How prepared are you to deal with **possible ethical violations** by colleagues?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all prepared		Somewhat prepared		Very prepared

- b) How concerned are you about dealing with **possible ethical violations** by colleagues?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all concerned		Somewhat concerned		Very concerned

5. a) How prepared are you to deal with requests by employers, consultees, or clients to **falsify** test results?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all prepared		Somewhat prepared		Very prepared

- b) How concerned are you about dealing with requests by employers, consultees, or clients to **falsify** test results?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all concerned		Somewhat concerned		Very concerned

APPENDIX (*Continued*)

6. a) How prepared are you to discuss limits on **confidentiality** (duty to warn, to protect, to report child abuse) with child and adolescent clients?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Not at all prepared                      Somewhat prepared                      Very prepared

b) How concerned are you about discussing limits on **confidentiality** (duty to warn, to protect, to report child abuse) with child and adolescent clients?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Not at all concerned                      Somewhat concerned                      Very concerned

7. a) How prepared are you to obtain informed **consent and assent** from parent, adolescent and child participants for your dissertation and/or other research?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Not at all prepared                      Somewhat prepared                      Very prepared

b) How concerned are you about obtaining informed **consent and assent** from parent, adolescent and child participants for your dissertation and/or other research?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Not at all concerned                      Somewhat concerned                      Very concerned

8. a) How prepared are you to deal with **parental pressures** to classify children as disabled, when it is questionable that the children have disabilities, in order to obtain special considerations, such as having more time to take SAT or ACT exams?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Not at all prepared                      Somewhat prepared                      Very prepared

b) How concerned are you about dealing with **parental pressures** to classify children as disabled, when it is questionable that the children have disabilities, in order to obtain special considerations, such as having more time to take SAT or ACT exams?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Not at all concerned                      Somewhat concerned                      Very concerned

9. a) How prepared are you to deal with **dual-relationship** issues, such as requests by teacher or administrative consultees for counseling for their personal problems?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 Not at all prepared                      Somewhat prepared                      Very prepared

(*continued*)

APPENDIX (*Continued*)

b) How concerned are you about dealing with **dual-relationship** issues, such as requests by teacher or administrative consultees for counseling for their personal problems?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all concerned		Somewhat concerned		Very concerned

10. a) How prepared are you to deal with **child custody** cases?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all prepared		Somewhat prepared		Very prepared

b) How concerned are you about dealing with **child custody** cases?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all concerned		Somewhat concerned		Very concerned

11. a) How prepared are you to deal with **crisis situations** involving your clients or students in schools or agencies where you work?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all prepared		Somewhat prepared		Very prepared

b) How concerned are you about dealing with **crisis situations** involving your clients or students in schools or agencies where you work?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all concerned		Somewhat concerned		Very concerned

12. a) How prepared are you to control **potentially violent clients** or consultees?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all prepared		Somewhat prepared		Very prepared

b) How concerned are you about controlling **potentially violent clients** or consultees?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all concerned		Somewhat concerned		Very concerned

Comments:

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