

**Understanding and Preventing Violence Directed Against Teachers:
Recommendations for a National Research, Practice and Policy Agenda**

A Report by the American Psychological Association
Board of Educational Affairs Task Force
on Classroom Violence Directed Against Teachers

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Foreword

In March 2007, the Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) of the American Psychological Association (APA) identified violence directed against teachers as an important issue for APA's Center for Psychology in Schools and Education to address. In response, BEA supported the creation of a task force whose goal would be to create a resource aimed at raising awareness about violence directed against teachers, and helping K-12 teachers to cope with and prevent the occurrence and threat of violent incidents in their classrooms. The task force was appointed by the BEA Executive Committee and was comprised of the following seven members, plus a liaison from a national teacher organization: Dorothy Espelage, Ph.D., University of Illinois (Chair); Eric Anderman, Ph.D., The Ohio State University; Veda Brown, Ph.D., consultant; Kathleen Lane, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University; Susan D. McMahon, Ph.D., DePaul University; Linda Reddy, Ph.D., Rutgers University; Cecil Reynolds, Ph.D., Texas A&M University (Emeritus); and Abraham Jones, Ed.D., National Education Association. Task force members were selected by the BEA Executive Committee based on their expertise in one or more of the following areas: (1) preventing classroom violence, (2) coping with the occurrence and threat of violent incidents in schools, and (3) translating psychological science into accessible materials and practical solutions for teachers.

The task force met September 25-26, 2008 to gather the extant literature on the prevalence of violence, intimidation and bullying directed toward elementary and secondary teachers in the United States, and to develop a set of recommendations for teachers based on the literature review. They discovered a severe shortage of empirical research available on the topic. Drawing upon scholarship that has documented associations between school engagement, academically engaged time, and aggressive behaviors in the classrooms, the task force began by operating under the assumption that classroom practices and school-wide policies that foster academic engagement and achievement will minimize the incidence of violence directed against teachers. During the task force's second meeting, May 27-28, 2009, participants designed a survey to collect data from teachers who have experienced incidents or threats of violence. This survey was distributed to teachers by way of national and state teacher associations to collect prevalence data on the types (and frequency) of violence directed toward teachers, to understand the attributions that teachers make about these experiences, and to highlight how teachers react emotionally and behaviorally to these experiences. Survey completers were provided with a Web-based brochure, created by this taskforce, outlining prevention and intervention strategies for educators. Results from the survey will further the research agenda on violence directed against teachers, and education policy with regard to school management and safety; parent and community involvement; classroom climate; and teaching and learning.

Statement of the Problem

Today's teachers are faced with a number of challenges. For example, they are expected to teach a population that is increasingly diverse not only in terms of unique cultural backgrounds, but also in terms of academic, behavioral, and social skill sets (Lane et al., 2009). Further, teachers are expected to achieve high academic standards for all students (e.g., NCLB,

2001); accommodate students with exceptionalities in inclusive settings; and serve students who exhibit violent behavior that stem from the growing incivility of our society. And in many communities, teachers are attempting to meet these goals within communities with increasing rates of poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and reduced budgets for public education. At schools, violence is directed not only from student-to-student, but also student-to-teacher and student-to-administrator. In this paper, we adhere to the notion that violence manifests from an atmosphere of stress and conflict that contributes to a lack of collective self-efficacy (Sampson, 1997; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Violence Defined. To capture the idea that school violence takes on several forms and not just the school shootings prevalent in the media, the Center for the Prevention of School Violence (2002) defines school violence as "...any behavior that violates a school's educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions, and disorder" (p.1). In addition, Volokh and Snell (1998) indicate that school violence includes gang activity, locker thefts, bullying and intimidation, gun use, assault---just about anything that produces a victim. School violence incorporates a range of behaviors from intentional vendettas to accidental or non accidental killings of innocent citizens or bystanders. Other forms of violence include insults, acts of racism, bias-based hate crimes, racial profiling, assaults, theft, and racketeering.

"Schools now report over a quarter of a million students per month are being physically attacked during the school day, 950,000 students across the United States bring weapons to school every month, and 160,000 kids miss school everyday due to bullying and school violence"

(www.stoppingschoolviolence.com). Although the media image of a school shooting incident is what typically comes to mind with regard to school violence, school violence is multifaceted

including pupil-on-pupil violence; damage and destruction to school premises; or attacks on teachers.

Although violence directed against teachers is rarely discussed or defined except in the case of occasional incidents disseminated widely in the media, it remains a national crisis with far-reaching consequences. Such violence ranges from disrespectful behavior, bullying or intimidation, verbal threats or gestures, theft, property damage and – in extreme cases, physical assault (<http://www.apa.org/ed/schools/cpse/activities/violence-against-teachers.pdf>). The magnitude of this problem is greater than one might imagine. In America's public schools, the reality of violence directed against teachers and educational support personnel (ESP) is an unfortunate occurrence for many who work in education systems. Yet there is a paucity of research in this area. As a first step to fill this void, the American Psychological Association (APA), through its Classroom Violence Against Teachers Task Force, offers teachers, administrators, researchers, and those individuals who coordinate teacher training programs evidence-based strategies, practices, policies and procedures through this report and the brochure.

This present report has several goals: (1) to present the magnitude of the violence currently directed against K-12 teachers; (2) to highlight what is known about potential predictors of violence directed against K-12 teachers; (3) to propose some potential strategies designed to promote safe classrooms and schools; and (4) to encourage a national research agenda for guiding future policy.

Statistics on the Magnitude of the Problem. Violence directed towards teachers has reached unprecedented levels that impact communities, schools, school personnel, and students. For example, in the Indicators of School Crime and Safety report (National Center for Education

Statistics, 2008), 253,100 teachers (7% of the teaching force) were threatened and/or assaulted by students (Dinkes, Cataldi, Lin-Kelly, & Synder, 2008). Moreover, reports indicate that 7% of primary education teachers and 8% of secondary education teachers have been victims of violence in schools (Dinkes et al., 2008). As reported in the 2009 Institute of Education Science (IES) School Principal Survey on Crime and Safety, approximately 11% of school principals reported that students were verbally abusive to their middle and high school teachers. Lack of safety in some schools and communities is a key factor in teachers' decisions not to enter and/or to leave the profession. Other costs associated with teacher victimization include lost wages on the part of victims, increased workman's compensation payments due to acute psychological distress, trauma and/or injury; lost instructional time/productivity; litigation costs; negative publicity for the school, and negative student behavioral and academic outcomes (Levin, Belfield, Muenning, & Rouse, 2006; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). Given that some 76 percent of public school teachers were female in 2007-08 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), we have to consider violence directed toward teachers a gendered violence.

The consequences of school violence affect not only students, teachers, and administrators, but society as a whole – particularly when the violence is extreme as in the cases of school shootings (Lane, Kalberg, & Menzies, 2009). The shocking instances of violence that have occurred in our nation's schools during recent years are beyond tragic and have left behind untold emotional, financial and other costs (Kauffman, 2005; Kauffman & Brigham, 2009). Although many educators did not imagine they would have to address violent and antisocial behavior when they entered the profession, these issues have become facts of life that must be attended to by our schools. Teachers who are working in schools that are characterized by violence are likely to leave the field; others may elect not to enter the teaching profession at all.

Not surprisingly, resulting teacher attrition leads to negative effects on students school engagement and achievement (National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research [CALDER], 2009; Rockoff, 2004). Ultimately, we must promote teacher recruitment and retention efforts to provide safe, positive environments where teachers and students can attend to teaching and learning thus preparing our nation's children for productive lives— including those who have or are at risk for antisocial behavior patterns (Lane, Robertson, & Graham-Bailey, 2006).

Potential Predictors of Teacher Victimization. Many theories of youth violence have been posited during this century. Social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1932) attributed deviant behavior to socially disorganized cities, with impoverished economic and social conditions that limit a community's ability to control or supervise adolescent behavior. Aggression becomes more probable as a youth's bond to the systems of society weakens (Hirschi, 1969). More specifically, aggression can be linked to a weakening in attachment to one's school (Eitle & Eitle, 2004), community (Duncan et al., 1994), and involvement in positive, prosocial activities (Eccles & Gottman, 2001), and a belief in one's position in a community (Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999). From these theories, it is evident that violence directed toward teachers is a complex, multi-determined issue that can be attributed to individual, community, familial, and societal factors, along with the interactions between them.

In one of the only comprehensive examination of predictors of victimization among US teachers Payne, Gottfredson, and Gottfredson (2003) attempted to draw upon individual, school, and community factors. This study included a nationally representative sample of 254 middle and high school teachers and students. Drawing upon social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) and social disorganization theory (Sampson & Groves, 1989), study measures assessed a wide range

of potential influences of teacher victimization, including communal school organization, student bonding, and neighborhood characteristics. Results indicated that greater frequency of teacher victimization was found in schools with lower communal school organization (defined as supportive and collaborative relations where teachers and students share common goals and norms). In addition, greater frequency of teacher victimization was found in schools that were situated in poor communities, those with the greatest concentration of African-Americans, and those with a high index of residential crowding.

It is important to recognize that school climate factors set the stage for violence directed against teachers (Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, & Johnson, 2004; Kasen, Cohen, & Brook, 1998; Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990). Teacher-student interactions, classroom organization and school climate appear to have an impact on incidents of aggression and violence within schools. Classroom practices and teachers' attitudes are salient components of school climate that contribute to aggression levels. Levels of aggression in elementary school significantly differ across classrooms (e.g., Henry et al., 2000; Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998), which suggests that both teacher characteristics and classroom structures play important roles. Aggression tends to be less prevalent in classrooms in which most students are included in activities (Newman, Murray, & Lussier, 2001); teachers display warmth and responsiveness to students (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999); and teachers respond quickly and effectively to bullying incidents (Olweus, 1993).

In several studies, Richard Shores and his associates explored the reciprocal relationship between teachers and students with severe emotional disturbance (e.g., Gunter, Denny, Jack, Shores, & Nelson, 1993; Gunter, Jack, Depaepe, Reed, & Harrison, 1994; Shores et al., 1993; Wehby, Symons, & Shores, 1995). Shores et al.'s work supports previous research by Emerson

and Howard (1992) suggesting that aggressive student behavior is more likely in classrooms where there is no programmed reinforcement schedule (Wehby et al.). Teacher-student relationships that are characterized by conflict (conflictual relationships) are also predictive of aggression. For example, Stipek and Miles (2008) examined associations among student aggression, teacher-student relations and academic achievement among 403 children who were followed from kindergarten or first grade (6 to 7 years) through fifth grade (10 to 11 years). In their findings, the effect of student aggression on student achievement was partially mediated by teacher-student conflictual relationships, suggesting that student aggression was associated with less achievement only when the aggression was met with conflict between the teacher and student.

Further, Kasen and colleagues (1990) found that students (6 to 16 years) who went to schools with high rates of student-student and teacher-student conflict experienced significantly greater increases in problems regarding opposition, attention and conduct than students from schools that had less conflict and more focus on learning. In their six year follow-up study, students from schools with high levels of conflict were at an increased risk for alcohol abuse and a criminal conviction (Kasen et al., 1998). Kasen and colleagues' (2004) conducted arguably the most comprehensive examination of the impact of school climate on student verbal and physical aggression, anger and school-related problems. In this study, 500 middle and high school students (and their mothers) across 250 schools were surveyed across a 2.5 year interval. The 45-item school climate survey included multiple scales assessing social and emotional features of the school environment such as conflict (classroom control, teacher-student conflict), learning focus, social facilitation, and authority (how students react to authority) as predictors. Outcome measures included a wide range of scales, including school problems, deviance, rebelliousness,

anger, physical and verbal aggression, bullying, and achievement. School context can influence student engagement in bullying or more positive social interactions. Results indicated that after controlling for initial levels of aggression, students in high conflict schools exhibited increased verbal and physical aggression. In contrast, attendance at schools that emphasized learning and academic achievement was associated with a decrease in aggression and disruptive behaviors. Of particular interest was the finding that schools high in informal relations (e.g., students call teachers by their first name, teachers engage in conversations with students about family problems) had *increases* in student aggression over the 2 ½ year interval, and schools with both high conflict *and* informal relations had the highest increase in student aggression over time. These findings suggest that teachers need to maintain boundaries and convey to students that safety and learning are priorities by establishing consistent expectations for behavior and implementing consistent consequences for disruptive behavior.

The physical environment of school must also be considered when studying violence directed toward teachers. Astor and colleagues (2001) offer additional insights into how students and teachers in both elementary and middle schools perceive some public spaces in their schools as violence-prone locations. In this study, the authors drew upon theories of territoriality and undefined public spaces to argue that bullying and other violent acts are more likely to occur in undefined public spaces (e.g., hallways, stairwells) than those places that are assigned territory (e.g., classrooms). Students in five elementary schools and two middle schools in grades 2, 4, 6, and 8 were presented with maps of their school and asked to identify places that they feel are unsafe or dangerous. Results from qualitative and quantitative analyses supported previous research, as well as offered new information that can guide prevention efforts for school administrators. It was not surprising that students in all schools perceived places lacking in adult

supervision and monitoring as unsafe. Crowding and bullying were consistently mentioned as reasons for feeling unsafe. Middle school students reported feeling less safe than elementary school students and were not certain which adults they could turn to for help. Similarly, middle school teachers reported that they encountered conflicts with students when monitoring public spaces. Although middle school students reported feeling unsafe in most undefined public spaces, elementary school students reported feeling less safe on playgrounds than middle school students. These results suggest that bullying could be decreased in schools by first understanding where bullying is happening through Astor and colleagues' mapping procedure. These data could then be used to increase monitoring of frequently mentioned areas.

In summary, the extant research literature suggests that student aggression and violence are related to teacher, classroom, school, and community level variables. Clearly, schools are complex systems. To prevent the development of student aggression and violence, the current knowledge base suggests the following. First, administrators, teachers, parents and students need to recognize that the problem of school-based violence is everyone's problem and responsibility. Aggression and violence in communities surrounding schools need to be addressed in order to prevent these behaviors from playing out in the classrooms and hallways. Second, it is essential that we recruit and retain teachers who are prepared to address violent and antisocial behavior when they enter the profession. Third, teachers' attitudes and classroom practices are variables that can impact the general aggression in a classroom, which – in turn – predicts aggression towards teachers. Therefore, we encourage teacher preparation programs to consider the importance of providing teachers with the knowledge, classroom management skills, and confidence to establish engaging classroom environments. Concurrently, preparation programs need to reinforce behaviors and skills of novice teachers to respond both with warmth and with

confidence in their abilities to intervene effectively. Fourth, the nature of student-teacher interactions is highly influential in academic and behavioral performance, given that students' behavior influences teachers' behavior and visa versa, with conflictual relationships predictive of aggressive tendencies on either part. Fifth, school climate factors are highly influential in creating a context that facilitates or inhibits violence against teachers. Finally, the role of undefined public spaces plays an important role in prompting specific behavior patterns with those that are undefined (e.g., hallways) increasing the likelihood of violence relative to other spaces that are defined (e.g., classrooms). Consequently, school-site teams need to: (a) create an environment that emphasizes instructional priorities such as academic achievement; (b) involve community stakeholders in creating safe zones inside and outside of schools; and (c) ensure that adults have the skill sets to take ownership of all spaces within a school setting. In the section that follows, we address these and other considerations for practice.

Considerations for Practice

Despite the lack of empirical evidence informing variables specifically associated with violence directed against teachers, there is a knowledge base regarding how we can prevent and address school-related violence in general. The violence prevention research promotes taking a multi-systemic, multi-level approach that considers influences at the community/neighborhood, school, classroom, and individual levels. Adopting broadened conceptions of violence prevention that emphasizes positive development, community engagement, and decision-making across a wide variety of settings is warranted (Zeldin, 2004).

Community Level. Community leaders and organizers need to engage youth in positive activities. If youth are regarded as experts in their own neighborhood cultures, practices and belief systems, and they are involved in solving problems and making decisions, they may be

less likely to engage in violence. Further, building coalitions and social networks may work to address structural disadvantages (e.g., poverty, unemployment, homelessness) through strengthening the social organization of the community and improving neighborhood and family environments (Bennett & Fraser, 2000). More generally, community economic development, employment programs, and parent training may strengthen communities and reduce violence among youth. Psychologists play an important role in collaborating and consulting with community youth-focused organizations (e.g., YMCA, YWCA, Boys and Girls Club of America) in order to provide youth with positive experiences after school.

Collaborations between community-based organizations (e.g., after-school programs, social services, neighborhood associations, faith-based organizations) and schools can facilitate an integrative continuum of behavioral and mental health care (e.g., Huang et al., 2005). Partnerships can yield more integrated efforts to provide prevention, early identification, intervention, and treatment of problems among youth. These types of partnerships have been implemented effectively and have had positive effects (e.g., Massey, Boroughs, & Armstrong, 2007). Many in the field of mental health services have argued that a paradigm shift from independent research studies to community-based participatory research projects are needed in order to maximize integration and sustainability of programs (Kataoka, Rowan, & Hogwood, 2009).

Once school-based violence has occurred, a variety of people at multiple levels may be involved in addressing the problem. Speedy, effective intervention may prevent further problems from occurring. For example, first responders (e.g., school staff, security, police, ambulance, firefighters) need appropriate training in developmental considerations for youth, behavioral principles, and school policies. Appropriate responses can increase the safety of the

school and reduce the likelihood of further violent incidents. Unfortunately, there is little empirical research available regarding the effectiveness of crisis intervention in schools.

Morrison (2007) examined school-based crisis intervention and found positive changes from teacher and staff perspectives regarding service delivery components, but not from students. This is clearly an area that requires further research.

School Level. In terms of school-wide primary prevention efforts, we recommend schools design a comprehensive three-tiered model of prevention that encompasses academic, behavioral, and social components (Lane, Kalberg et al., 2009). The primary prevention component of this approach provides guide posts for faculty, staff, student, and parents. In brief, faculty and staff establish behavioral expectations (e.g., respect, responsibility, and best effort), providing specific illustrations for all key settings in a school (e.g., classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, and playgrounds; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Ideally, these would be formulated with input from the parent community, with a goal of establishing culturally responsive expectations that are clearly understood by all parties. These expectations are then taught to all students and staff, providing students opportunities to practice and to be reinforced for meeting these expectations. According to the Lane et al. approach, when a student demonstrates that he or she has met a given expectation, an adult will intermittently reinforce the student by handing them a positive behavior support (PBS) ticket paired with behavior specific praise. Students deposit the PBS tickets they receive into boxes strategically located throughout the school (e.g., in classrooms, the library, hallways) for access to drawings, assemblies, and other reinforcing activities, tangibles, and sensory experiences.

In addition to these proactive components, schools also need to have a clearly articulated plan for responding to students who violate behavioral expectations. Specifically, faculty and

staff need to establish and to implement consequences consistently for students who demonstrate major and minor rule infractions. The established consequences should be reasonable, feasible, and proportional. Teachers need to deliver the consequences – which need to be appropriate to the magnitude of the infraction – easily, without unnecessary interruption of instructional activities (Lane, Menzies, Bruhn, & Crnabori, 2009). Minor and major infractions need to be delineated and operationally defined so that all parties are clear as to what constitutes each type of infraction. Then, the faculty and staff need to specify the procedures for responding to the various violations. The key is consistency – making sure consequences are allocated uniformly (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004).

Clearly, it will be essential to provide adequate professional development in school-wide primary prevention efforts. Such training should focus on the design, implementation and evaluation of such models. As part of their professional development activities, it is important to assist schools in implementing models that draw accurate conclusions regarding outcomes (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2002), such as: (a) treatment integrity measures to gauge the extent to which the intervention was implemented as intended (Gresham, 1989); (b) social validity measures to measure the social significance of the goals, the social acceptability of the procedures, and the social importance of the outcomes (Kazdin, 1977; Wolf, 1978) from multiple perspectives (faculty, staff, parents, students, and administrators); and (c) reliable outcome and screening measures (e.g., Behavior and Emotional Screening System [BESS], Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2007; Student Risk Screening Scale [SRSS], Drummond, 1994).

Classroom Level. Ideally, programs, policies, and expectations are implemented at the school level to promote academic engagement, positive behavior, and appropriate consequences. Classroom and school norms affect beliefs and behaviors (Henry et al., 2000), and violence

prevention programs are more effective in changing aggressive behavior when there is a focus on changing the school environment (Howard, Flora, & Griffin, 1999). Further, increasing school resources, decreasing class sizes, and providing continual support, training, and guidance for teachers may facilitate more positive classroom environments to create more supportive student-teacher relationships (Benhorin & McMahon, 2008). We recognize that the direction of public education in many states is going in the opposite direction by increasing class sizes and providing less and less support for new teachers. Unfortunately, to make these recommendations a reality, there would have to be major shifts in the way in which public education is funded and how resources are allocated across communities. Until then, we as a taskforce and community of psychologists, are working to increase awareness around violence directed at teachers and to promote a national commitment to the study of violence directed at teachers.

Even when no effective school-wide policies are in place, or if policies are applied inconsistently, teachers can establish effective policies and practices to promote positive behavior and reduce violence and aggression in the classroom. Teachers may implement social/behavioral programs (e.g., violence prevention, anti-bullying, conflict resolution, classroom management programs) at the classroom level, and perhaps work toward school-wide implementation, to provide students with clear expectations and appropriate social and behavioral skills to manage anger and resolve conflict. In a recent meta-analysis of over 200 research studies (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007), school violence prevention programs were found to be generally effective at reducing the more common types of aggressive behavior seen in schools, including fighting, name-calling, intimidation, and other negative interpersonal behaviors, especially among higher risk students.

There are many resources that can assist with classroom management and violence prevention. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) has developed a free online resource for teachers to illustrate school-wide and individual classroom management skills and interventions for classroom disruption (www.apa.org/ed/schools/cpse/activities/class-management.aspx). In addition, other Web sites offer helpful insights to teachers and schools about the effectiveness of various programs so they can make informed choices about which program/s to implement. CASEL (<http://casel.org>) provides indicators of program design, social and emotional instructional practices, program effectiveness, implementation supports, and safe and sound learning environments. The Iris Center (<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/>) supplies many helpful modules to assess, address, and enhance positive behavior and learning, as well as case studies that offer strategies to establish norms and expectations, foster accountability, and work with students with disabilities. The Iris Center website also includes a wealth of activities, information briefs, podcasts and other teacher resources. The U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (IES) also provides helpful information regarding academics, character education, and dropout prevention (www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc).

As demonstrated in the resources listed above, there are a variety of classroom management practices that teachers can use. For example, clearly stating classroom and school rules, being consistent, modeling and rewarding positive behavior, and picking one's battles carefully are strategies that can improve student behavior. Teachers may also note variances in student mood and behavior, avoid public confrontations, and not make assumptions about the causes of student problems. Using advance organizers in the course of presenting lessons, reducing uncertainties about what is expected from an assignment or class session, and being flexible can assist with minimizing transition times and academic challenges. Building on

student strengths, such as ethnic identity, rather than focusing exclusively on weaknesses or using punitive methods, can also have a variety of benefits (e.g., McMahon & Watts, 2002).

Programs that facilitate effective classroom management as well as social and emotional learning can enhance academic engagement and achievement (e.g., Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004), reducing violence and aggression in the classroom (e.g., Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Academic engagement is vital to youth success in school (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Parks, 2004) and can serve as a protective factor against engagement in risky behaviors (O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003). In general, structure (i.e., clear rules and consequences), involvement (i.e., showing care and interest in students without being too informal) and autonomy support (i.e., giving students choices) contribute to student engagement in education (Connell, 1991). In addition, linking daily lessons to students' lives and needs, setting expectations of success for all students, maximizing instructional time and giving students specific feedback about what they did right can be useful strategies for enhancing student engagement.

School belonging is an important component of engagement, because students who feel accepted, included and are active as members in their school communities are more likely to be engaged in school (Osterman, 2000). School belonging has been linked with positive academic and behavioral outcomes (e.g., Anderman, 2002) and fewer negative psychological symptoms (e.g., McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008). Thus, using appropriate classroom management strategies, teaching social and emotional skills and nurturing positive relationships may enhance academic engagement, school belonging and behavioral outcomes.

Although characteristics of classroom management programs and practices must be adapted to meet school, classroom and teacher contexts, teacher sensitivity to fluctuations in student behavior patterns is critically important. Therefore, systematic training that reinforces

positive teacher-student and peer-peer relationships and encourages mutual respect should be a part of educators' on-going professional development.

Classroom prevention strategies are not always enough, however. Educators should be prepared to identify early warning signs of aggressive and violent threats (see <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/warning-signs.aspx>), reacting from an effective response repertoire. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has compiled a list of resources at http://www.fbi.gov/page2/april07/addtn_resources.htm that is a great resource for schools.

When equipped with best practices training, empathic caring and a supportive administrative staff, a proactive and knowledgeable teacher is his or her own best protection against threats of student violence. Just as school districts design intervention policies and procedures to circumvent such occurrences, districts must equally prepare to manage the aftermath of such incidents as they occur (e.g., establishing crisis response teams). By attending to teachers' psychological needs as well as the needs of all impacted by violence against teachers, school administrators will demonstrate the care and support where psychological healing begins.

Although many variations of school wide and classroom management practices mentioned here provide evidence-based practices for defensive threat responses, general guidelines for treatment are scarce. Depending upon the level of violence with which a teacher may be involved, the top priority should be reporting the incident and then seeking professional treatment according to district-wide policy. One excellent information source for post-trauma guidelines for both teachers and administration is the U. S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) website, http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/resilience_resources/support_documents/supervisorintra/intradeployment_supervisors.html. Generally, most school districts

adhere to OSHA's safety policies; however, teachers may find the recommendations on handling the aftermath of workplace violence helpful in planning and executing their own post-trauma help. Another rich source of information from the National Education Association (NEA) is the guide *Preventing and Addressing Violent Behavior: Taking Proactive Steps for School Safety* found at <http://www.neahin.org/crisisguide/before/index.html>. In this resource, NEA explains proactive prevention approaches used to make the working and learning environment safe and violence free for all educators and students. The guide provides effective classroom management strategies, evidence-based whole school positive behavior support approaches, and guidance when educators are involved in an incident. To this end, as with any workplace incident of violence, teachers must resist the fear of stigma associated with victimization and earnestly seek adequate debriefing and counseling.

Individual-Level. Effective programs to curb youth violence and behavior problems need to include primary, secondary and tertiary systems of intervention (Walker & Shinn, 2002). In this three-tier approach, primary prevention strategies (e.g., skills training) focus on 80% of students of a school population that do not have serious behavior problems. Secondary intervention strategies such as mentoring programs target the 5-15% of students in a school that are at-risk for behavior problems. Tertiary strategies (e.g., wraparound services) are directed at the 1-7% of the student population that has intense and chronic problems. Even when school site teams design and implement strong primary prevention programs with high fidelity, some students will require additional supports in the form of secondary- or tertiary-level prevention efforts. One type of tertiary intervention that has been particularly effective in decreasing undesirable behaviors such as disruptive or aggressive behavior is functional assessment-based

interventions (Conroy, Dunlap, Clarke, & Alter, 2005; Kern, Hilt, & Gresham, 2004; Lane, Umbreit, & Beebe-Frankenberger, 1999; Lane, Walker, et al., 2009).

Functional assessment-based interventions are highly individualized interventions targeting the reasons *why* problem behaviors occur (Umbreit, Ferro, Liaupsin, & Lane, 2007). Rather than focusing on reductive procedures that stop behavior problems from occurring, teachers determine what is motivating a student to behave in an unsafe or undesirable manner. In brief, behavior serves one of two main functions: (1) to *obtain* (positive reinforcement) or (2) avoid (negative reinforcement) attention, activities or tasks, or tangible or sensory conditions (Umbreit et al., 2007).

The process begins by using descriptive (e.g., interviews, direct observations of behavior, rating scales) and experimental (e.g., functional analysis) procedures to determine both the (a) antecedent conditions that prompt the occurrence of target behavior (e.g., aggression) and (b) to maintain consistent consequences. Data collected using these tools and procedures can be analyzed and a hypothesis statement regarding the function of the behavior generated. Experimental procedures can be used to test the hypothesis statement by manipulating environmental conditions systematically to identify or confirm maintaining consequences. Then, an intervention is designed and predicated on the function of the target behavior. The intent is to teach students a functionally-equivalent method of accessing or avoiding a given condition. The resulting interventions generally involve three components: (a) antecedent adjustments to prompt the more desirable replacement behavior, (b) increased reinforcement rates for this replacement behavior and (c) extinction of the target behavior.

A current review of the literature regarding the utility of functional assessment-based interventions to decrease disruptive behaviors that often lead to aggressive acts suggests that

such approaches are highly effective in decreasing aggressive, disruptive behaviors (Lane, Walker, et al., 2009). Yet, some researchers contend that mandating functional assessment-based interventions may not be entirely appropriate until the efficacy of functional assessment-based interventions is established for the full range of students served in the educational system (e.g., Fox, Conroy, & Heckaman, 1998; Gresham, 2004; Kern et al., 2004; Quinn et al., 2001; Sasso, Conroy, Stichter, & Fox, 2001). As a task force, we recommend functional assessment-based interventions as a promising practice for addressing behaviors that are precursors to aggression. It would also be important to continue to implement violence prevention at the classroom and school-level to reduce student-student aggression.

Considerations for Personnel Preparation. Because it is a challenge to include new courses in teacher preparation programs, we believe that pre-service and in-service programs should infuse the discussion of violence directed toward K-12 teachers throughout their coursework. However, we do not believe that programs should frighten teacher candidates into thinking that they will experience violence, but should understand that violence in schools emerges from individual, school, community, and institutional risk factors. We do believe that teachers need to study the history of U.S. educational policy, to understand the funding of public education in the U.S., to become consumers of the research on racism, hate, and bias within schools and communities, and to be able to identify how their own race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and class/SES influence their perceptions and behaviors in the classroom.

Novice teachers should be informed about the potential of experiencing violence in their classrooms, and then equipped with preventative methods to minimize the probability. Teacher preparation programs need to include child and adolescent development courses where behavioral, neural and development principles are discussed. Classroom

management/engagement should be included throughout the program and revisited when students are doing their student-teaching and practicum. Teacher candidates should learn the integrated three-tiered models of prevention and understand the importance of intervening at the primary, secondary and tertiary level. They should be encouraged to view each student individually and tailor instruction appropriately. Pre-service teachers and teachers who are currently practicing need to understand how some of their own responses to students could promote the conditions for violence in the classroom. Through professional development and in-service programming, current teachers could learn strategies to diffuse conflicts in order to prevent escalation such as techniques for interrupting the acting out cycle (Colvin, 2004).

Recommendations for Future Inquiry

(IES) structure (goals 1-5). Several years ago, the United States government reconstituted the national administration of education programs under the U.S. Department of Education/Institute of Education Sciences (IES). IES supports 14 long-term investigations into the effectiveness of general education programs and 10 long-term special education programs. These programs focus on content areas (e.g., mathematics and science education, reading and writing), social and behavioral contexts for academic learning, policy and leadership issues, technology, early childhood/intervention programs, teacher quality and a variety of other domains (IES, 2009).

Further, IES supports research for each of these programs under five broad organizational categories. These categories, referred to as “Goals” within the IES organizational structure, represent five distinct types of research that are funded through IES. The five goals include:

- *Goal One Projects.* These projects are “exploratory” projects that usually consist of small-scale investigative studies, or secondary analyses of large-scale data sets.

- *Goal Two Projects.* These projects, which represent 53% of recently funded grant proposals through IES, are “development and innovation” projects. Within this program, researchers develop interventions aimed at improving education. There is no requirement for these projects to be tested within experimental designs; rather, an iterative process is generally used, wherein products are developed, then tested and evaluated on a small-scale basis, and then refined and re-tested.
- *Goal-Three Projects.* These projects consist of rigorous evaluation of well-developed interventions. The researchers who developed these interventions usually are involved with these efficacy trials, which often are experimental or (to a lesser extent) quasi-experimental in nature.
- *Goal Four Projects.* These projects are referred to as “scale-up evaluations.” These are similar to Goal Three projects; however, the developers are not heavily involved in the implementation or evaluation of the project’s efficacy. In addition, these evaluations are conducted in settings that would be typical for school districts within the U.S. that are attempting to implement the project locally.
- *Goal Five Projects.* These projects focus on the development and validation of measurement instruments.

Studying Violence Directed Against Teachers within the IES Organizational Structure

There are numerous opportunities for developing research projects that examine both prevalence and prevention of violence directed against teachers through IES. Both the general education and special education research programs address issues of violence. Within the extant IES research programs, the program focusing on “Social and Behavioral Contexts” for academic learning and for the support of learning are probably the most appropriate venues for research

proposals. However, possibilities also exist within other programs, including (a) Educational Leadership and (b) Teacher Quality.

Upon review of the five IES goals, there are opportunities for studies to be conducted within each of the five goals. First, as we have noted elsewhere in this report, it is difficult to know the precise prevalence of violence against teachers. Thus exploratory studies (Goal 1) and the development of appropriate measures (Goal 5) fit well within the IES rubric. Further, in terms of developing programs to prevent or decrease violence against teachers, numerous opportunities exist for the development of novel programs and interventions (Goal 2). These ultimately could be tested within efficacy trials (Goal 3) and across larger contexts (Goal 4).

Measurement Development Initiatives. IES recognizes the vital importance of developing highly reliable and valid measurement approaches that further the science and practice of education. Under Goal 5 (Measurement Project), projects may include (a) the development and validation of new assessments; (b) validation of existing assessments; (c) adaptation and validation of assessments originally designed and used for research purposes for broader use in educational settings; (d) development and validation of new techniques for assessment or analysis of assessment data in the context of state accountability standards and systems; and (e) development of assessments used to certify or assess education professionals (e.g., teachers, education leaders, related service providers) and validate these assessments or existing assessments against student outcomes. Projects that promote educational service delivery (prevention and intervention efforts) that are linked to important school system, school personnel and/or student outcomes are desired. Additionally, projects should be developed in collaboration and cooperation with schools and key school personnel (e.g., teachers, principals) that yield highly practical and easily adoptable measurement approaches for schools (IES, 2009).

Violence directed against teachers has thus far received little research inquiry and the field of education has no practical measurement approaches for identifying and tracking risk of and incidents of violence towards teachers in America. Goal Five (Measurement Projects) offers researchers and school personnel many opportunities to collaborate on innovative measurement development, refinement, and/or validation projects for this important under investigated area. Examples of measurement development and/or validation projects may include instruments that (a) assess administrators', teachers', and students' threat of violence in schools; (b) measure antecedents and consequences of the incidents of violence towards teachers; (c) track school policies and practices related to violence towards teachers; (d) assess fidelity of implementation of policies and practices (primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of support); (e) measure the nature of teacher-students interactions; and (f) assess outcomes associated with specific interventions to prevent and/or reduce violence towards teachers.

Recommendations for Pushing the Field Forward

Establish a National Registry of Incidents of Violence Directed Against Teachers.

Despite interest and concerns over violence in schools, we have been unable to identify a reliable source of information regarding the incidence and prevalence of acts of violence committed against teachers by students, parents and other school staff. This knowledge is imperative for estimating the human, as well as the financial costs of such acts to society and to establish a method for monitoring and investigating the nature and extent of this problem for prevention and intervention efforts. We argue that these acts also discourage teachers from entering the field of education (recruitment rates) and remaining (retention rates) in the profession. Thus, barriers to recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers have profound negative consequences for the general public as well as the education community. Without reliable data on incidence and

prevalence of this problem, much of what we think we know and as well as the level of response that might be required remains clouded by speculation.

We find the issue of violence against teachers to be of sufficient import to society at large, that the establishment of a reliable registry to track violence against teachers is warranted. This registry should be established by a government agency with the authority to require reporting of incidents. The U.S. Department of Education would be a logical agency to establish and maintain this registry. We believe the following information should be reported for each act of violence against a teacher:

- zip code where the act occurred,
- date and time the act occurred,
- where the act took place (i.e., during regular school hours on school grounds, at a school-sponsored function after regular class hours, and if the latter, what type of function—sports, social gathering, parent-teacher conference, etc., off school grounds but at a school sponsored function, off school grounds during any activity not sponsored by the school), type of class (general or special education), subject matter being taught if act occurs during class,
- type of actor (student, parent, other school personnel, or other),
- age, gender, SES, and ethnicity of the actor,
- age, gender, and ethnicity of the teacher,
- number of years of experience of the teacher,
- content area and type of teacher's degree

- type of violence (verbal or physical threat, bodily injury), severity of violence, whether violence was bias-related (e.g., sexual orientation, race, disability status, immigration status),
- actions taken (e. g., police were called, an arrest was made, incident handled internally by school administration, student suspended, etc.).

The collection of names or other data that would link the event to a specific teacher or actor should be meticulously avoided to encourage accurate reporting, maintenance of individual privacy rights, and so that all information in the registry can be available to the public and to qualified researchers for analysis. We realize collecting information on ethnicity/SES of the involved parties is a sensitive issue to many, but we view it as necessary because analyses failing to consider the concordance and discordance of ethnicity/SES among the involved parties may fail to reveal concerns related to cultural competence in the educational setting, tolerance, and any discriminatory patterns or profiling that may be evident. Where such issues are revealed, plans to alleviate these concerns as well as educational programs targeted to the issues can be developed—without this information, the development of effective interventions may be hampered.

Once the detailed information noted above is made available to researchers and the public we can proceed more accurately in estimating the true magnitude of the problems associated with violence toward teachers and develop appropriately targeted prevention as well as follow-up programs related to violence directed against teachers.

Conduct Research to Understand Violence towards other Adults in School Settings. Some data on violence against teachers do exist, but are inadequate to address the myriad of questions regarding this crucial issue. However, teachers are not the only school employees who

experience acts of violence. Educational support staff such as bus drivers and cafeteria workers, coaches, physical plant support staff, and even school security staff are also assaulted by students, family members of students, and other school employees. Research on the incidence, prevalence, and cause of these other acts of violence within the school system is also necessary. It is possible such data collection could be incorporated into the registry of violence against teachers by broadening the scope of the registry to include all school employees. At the present time, information on violence against non-teaching school employees is inadequate for any reasonable examination of this issue.

Conduct Treatment-Outcome Studies to Identify a Series of Best Practices for Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary prevention. We agree that prevention is the key strategy to employ with regard to all aspects of school violence. However, there are severely limited data on which to build prevention programs or to make recommendations regarding best practices in the prevention of violence against teachers in particular. Likewise, secondary prevention and tertiary prevention practices in this domain are poorly researched and recommendations for best practices are taken from generalizations based on research conducted on other populations in other settings, and the extent to which these recommendations exceed a threshold of speculation is simply not known.

We have concluded from current data that the issue of violence against teachers is of a sufficient magnitude and importance to warrant carefully designed, longitudinal studies of prevention strategies at all three levels. These efforts will need to be multi-year in nature and follow cohorts of students from elementary grades into high school, along with matched control schools of similar demographic composition. Careful operational definitions of violence and aggression against teachers will also need to be established so that research outcomes can be

compared across research teams and sites. This would help to develop best practice approaches. Measures of fidelity of the prevention programs should be mandatory for all such studies, and data on fidelity of implementation collected by third parties (who are independent of the implementation of the prevention efforts) should likewise be required in such studies.

We believe there is reason for both IES and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Injury and Prevention program to sponsor research on prevention of school violence directed at teachers. To this end, this taskforce has created a Web-based survey and has solicited participation from a subsample of teachers about their experiences of violence in their classrooms and schools. These survey results will provide a starting point for subsequent research that will focus on reducing the prevalence of violence directed at teachers and providing more support for early career teachers in order to prevent attrition.

Implement large-scale studies of evidence-based (Scaling up studies)

Once effective strategies and interventions have been identified by researchers, it will be particularly important to propose and implement large-scale studies to examine the utilization of these strategies in authentic settings. Although it may be possible to identify practices that work in one specific setting or another, we strongly believe that such interventions need to be studied in research settings that are both tightly controlled and as authentic as possible. Such studies should involve experimental designs, although given the nature of schools and the difficulties often encountered with random assignment in school settings, some quasi-experimental designs may also be necessary.

As interventions and strategies are implemented in school settings, it will be important to examine several aspects of the effectiveness of such interventions. First and foremost, it will be important to examine whether or not these interventions actually yield meaningful results when

implemented across a diverse array of settings. If research indicates that some interventions are more effective in some settings (e.g., in rural schools) than in other settings (e.g., in urban schools), then adaptations to these strategies may be necessary.

In addition, feasibility of implementation also must be addressed in these studies.

Whereas reduction of violence is an important research outcome, we must also carefully examine how easy or difficult it is for teachers, administrators, parents, students, and other school personnel to *implement* interventions and strategies across diverse school contexts. Although it would be wonderful if violence prevention programs could be implemented with ease at all schools, it is likely that different types of schools will experience unique issues with the implementation of these programs; thus, these differences need to be documented and carefully studied.

Finally, the social validity of these interventions also must be examined. Although it would be efficacious to develop “one size fits all” programs, it is likely that violence prevention programs will convey different meanings to different populations. For example, programs aimed at sixth graders may be interpreted differently by sixth graders in K-8 school settings, compared to sixth graders in more traditional 6-8 schools. Or, programs that are initially developed in urban settings may not work in their intended ways in suburban or rural settings.

Longitudinal studies of student actors and teacher behavior patterns. Finally, it will be important to conduct longitudinal studies that examine changes in teacher and student behaviors over time and within and across contexts. There has been much research on violence from a developmental perspective (e.g., Ma, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009). However, developmental studies of teacher violence have not been conducted. There is a need for both studies of how

teachers' experiences with violence change over time, as well as studies of how students who exhibit violent and abusive behaviors change over time.

Further development of sophisticated statistical techniques such as hierarchical linear modeling (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), growth-curve modeling (Collins & Sayer, 2001; Raudenbush & Chan, 1992), and latent growth-curve analysis (Rosel & Plewis, 2008) will be particularly useful in these studies. Specifically, these techniques allow researchers to examine complex systems, wherein multiple measures of students or teachers can be nested within the individual, as well as within the school and even neighborhood. Such studies will yield important insights into the relations between school and neighborhood contexts and the development of violent behaviors directed against teachers.

Summary

In summary, violence directed against K-12 teachers is a serious problem that demands the immediate attention of researchers, providers of teacher pre-service and in-service training, school administrators, community leaders, and policymakers. Psychologists can play a significant role in improving conditions of violence in schools through their expertise in research and curriculum development, interpersonal relationships, prevention science, multicultural competences, stress management etc.

First and foremost, there must be a research agenda designed to focus on accurate assessment of the types of violence teachers' experience. Next, research should comprehensively evaluate the individual, classroom, school, community, institutional, and cultural factors that are predictive of the prevalence of teacher violence. It is imperative that violence directed toward teachers be considered as a gendered violence given that 75% of US teachers are women. Finally it follows that school-wide and classroom prevention and intervention strategies must be implemented at multiple levels.

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