

Chapter 40

Educator Experiences as Victims of School Violence: Emerging Perspectives and Research

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ABSTRACT

Educator experiences with violence and aggression have traditionally been overlooked. However, growing research has found these professionals are at risk of frequent victimization in the workplace. This chapter synthesizes literature from the past two decades to provide readers an overview of violence against educators, including prevalence and types of aggression, school climate, demographic, and other precipitating factors, as well as common outcomes. Since these aggressive incidents often do not involve the criminal justice system, the potential applicability of restorative justice practices is discussed. An overview of a new APA task force to study into this phenomenon will be provided, along with a discussion of the perceived impacts of COVID-19 on teacher safety. Theory, research, practice, and policy implications for further understanding teacher experiences, reducing risk of aggression, and ensuring safe school environments are outlined.

INTRODUCTION

School violence is an area of increasing concern given the rise of school shootings in the United States (Lee, 2013). The search terms “school violence” yield over 100,000 articles on Google Scholar, demonstrating this is a popular area of study. Although we have learned a great deal, one notable criticism is that most existing research focuses exclusively on students. While the emphasis on students is valuable, excluding educator perspectives and experiences prevents schools and researchers from having a

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complete picture of the problem and limits the effectiveness of interventions and proposed solutions. As greater awareness spreads regarding safety risks for educators, more researchers have shifted their focus to investigate educator-directed aggression. Although educators have been invisible victims of school violence, we want to ensure their perspectives and experiences are taken into account in theory, research, practice, and policy moving forward.

This chapter introduces readers to the violent realities faced by many educators in the United States (U.S.) by summarizing literature from the past two decades. These findings suggest violence against educators is a societal issue that harms the health and safety of all members of the school system. An overview of the most updated research related to violence against educators, including prevalence rates, types of aggression, aggressors, contributing conditions and correlates, and personal and organizational outcomes are provided. This chapter highlights educator voices by incorporating quotes detailing teachers' most upsetting experiences with aggression and violence and their suggestions for improving school safety. Additionally, this chapter outlines the role of school climate in understanding and preventing school violence and victimization. We preview an emerging large, national study of school stakeholder experiences with violence prior to and since COVID-19. We present theory, practice, and policy recommendations for addressing educator-directed violence. Finally, we identify future directions to move forward with a comprehensive research agenda that includes educator experiences and perspectives.

Chapter Objectives

- Understand prevalence rates of aggressive experiences reported by educators, types of violence they report, and the various people who aggress against educators.
- Explore factors associated with educator victimization, including demographic characteristics, triggering events, and common consequences.
- Identify harmful consequences of educator victimization for individuals and schools.
- Examine the influence of school climate on educator victimization.
- Introduce new research on educator experiences with violence and aggression that takes into account COVID-19 school closures.
- Identify future research directions and recommendations for preventing and addressing violence and aggression against educators.

BACKGROUND

There is a tremendous amount of research and work dedicated to preventing and responding to violence in schools. Research to date has centered primarily on understanding and promoting school safety for students. Although this approach is extremely important, focusing solely on student perspectives and experiences limits our understanding of its far-reaching effects on others and our ability to effectively address school violence. Over the past two decades, research has revealed that teachers and other school staff members (referred to collectively in this chapter as educators) experience alarmingly high rates of violence in the workplace. There are 8.5 million primary and secondary educators in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018) whose experiences with violence have traditionally been underrecognized in research, interventions, and national conversations about school violence and aggression. The voices of these professionals deserve to be heard, and their physical, emotional, and occupational

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