



Addressing violence against educators through measurement and research

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ABSTRACT

Violence against educators is a significant understudied phenomenon that has been largely ignored by policy makers and funders. The primary goal of this paper is to advance measurement and research on educator safety and victimization. We conducted a comprehensive systematic review of the extant literature (1988 to 2016). Although the number of studies has increased dramatically over the past decade, this review revealed only 37 studies in 28 journals (49,581 educators and 91,099 students). On the basis of this review, we highlight key findings, propose a conceptual framework for measurement development, outline key variables for the design of educator safety registries, and identify research priorities. Multidimensional teacher safety assessment systems and registries for educator safety and victimization are crucial to the advancement of the field and the safety of our schools.

This paper addresses an understudied phenomenon that has reached a significant level – violence directed toward Kindergarten through 12th grade (K–12) educators and paraprofessionals. The 2014 Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report indicated that in one year (2011–2012), approximately 9% of educators (352,900) in the United States had been threatened by students, an increase from 2003 to 2004 (252,800) and 2007–2008 (289,900; Robers, Zhang, Morgan, & Musu-Gillette, 2015). Further, more than 5% of educators (209,800) were physically attacked. Risk factors included both personal characteristics (i.e., gender, race) and school characteristics (e.g., level of school, type of school). Violence perpetrated against educators is prevalent in other nations as well, including Taiwan (Chen & Astor, 2009), Turkey (Cemaloglu, 2007), Canada (Wilson, Douglas, & Lyon, 2011), and numerous others. These data illustrate a public health crisis that needs to be addressed. Thus, current prevalence rates worldwide underscore the magnitude and negative impact violence toward teachers may have on the health, mental health and stability of the educator workforce. Moreover, this understudied area has detrimental, long-term consequences on the lives of students, teachers, and school communities at large.

Most scholars view school violence in general, and teacher victimization specifically, as a systematic phenomenon (e.g., Anderman et al., 2018; Espelage et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2014; Reddy et al.,

2013). System frameworks, such as interactional and social-ecological, recognize that school personnel safety is influenced by unique interactions and conditions (school structures, supports) that involve students, school personnel (teachers, school leaders), families, community agencies and society at large (McMahon, Reaves, et al., 2017). Specifically, interactional perspectives focus on the temporal ordering of events that lead to violence; thus, from this perspective, we are concerned with events that precede the violent act (antecedents), the occurrence of the act of violence (behavior), and subsequent events (consequences). Additionally, from a social-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1976), we acknowledge that violence against teachers must be viewed from a multi-determined and systemic perspective. Specifically, multiple systems interact in teachers' lives (e.g., interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, school- and district-level policies), and it is the complex interaction of these systems (e.g., teacher characteristics, school structures and supports) that can be used to explain violence. Thus, these theories offer evidence-based frameworks to guide research and school practitioners to facilitate understanding and addressing violence against teachers (McMahon, Reaves et al., 2017; Reddy et al., 2013).

An important first step for the field was the creation of the American Psychological Association (APA) Violence Directed Against Teachers Task Force in 2008 to examine the state of research on and prevalence

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of violence against educators. In collaboration with the National Education Association (NEA), the Task Force conducted a large-scale assessment of violence against educators in the nation. About 3000 educators participated, and results indicated that 80% reported at least one form of victimization in the workplace in the current or past year (Espelage et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2014; Reddy et al., 2013). Detailed findings based on the work of the Task Force are presented elsewhere (e.g., Espelage et al., 2013; Anderman et al., 2018; Espelage et al., 2013; Martinez et al., 2015; McMahon et al., 2014; McMahon, Martinez, Reddy, Espelage, & Anderman, 2017; McMahon, Reaves et al., 2017; Reddy et al., 2013). Although much was learned from this national US study, research in this field is in its infancy. An in-depth analysis of existing research and informed guidance based on the literature is needed to facilitate rigorous scholarship in this area.

The primary goal of this article is to advance measurement and research on educator safety and victimization to inform school practice and policy. To accomplish this, we critically examine and summarize patterns within the extant literature on violence against educators on variables that assess: sample and context characteristics, methodological components and reported predictors and outcomes in the extant literature. Based on this body of work, we aim to propose recommendations for practice and research. Taken together, these aims will build understanding and capacity to address violence against educators, which is an understudied phenomenon that has been largely ignored by policymakers and federal funders.

1. Method

1.1. Literature search and selection criteria

Rigorous methods were utilized to ensure a complete review of studies that included empirical findings related to violence directed against educators in schools in the US and internationally. First, a comprehensive literature search was conducted using the key words *teacher stress*, *school violence*, *teacher violence*, *teacher victimization*, *teacher well-being*, *teacher effectiveness*, *survey*, *school climate*, *delinquency*, and *school disorder* through two online databases (ERIC and PsycINFO) as well as one online search engine (Google Scholar). The review included peer-reviewed journal publications, in-press publications, and unpublished dissertations from 1988 to 2016. The authors of this article independently conducted the literature search with the same search terms and search engines. Duplicate studies were removed and consensus was obtained among the authors for the final set of studies included in this review. As a result of the initial search, 93 studies were identified. Second, the initial pool of articles was reduced by systematically reviewing the title, abstract, and methods sections of each article to confirm that all studies met the required inclusion criteria. Third, reference harvesting was used to identify any additional studies that might meet the inclusion criteria. Finally, a hand search was conducted of major journals that were considered especially relevant to this body of work, including the *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, and *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*.

The literature search resulted in a total of 37 US and international studies from 28 different journals and three dissertations. Out of the 37 studies, 19 were conducted in the US (including three dissertations) and 18 were conducted internationally (see Tables 1 and 2 for study characteristics). International studies were conducted in 11 countries (Belgium, Canada, Israel, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Nigeria, Slovakia, Spain, Taiwan, and Turkey).

1.2. Coding system

A structured coding system employed in other published meta-analytic and critical reviews (e.g., Reddy, Cleary, Alperin, & Verdesco,

2018; Reddy, Newman, De Thomas, & Chun, 2009) was modified to systematically review and code the literature on three dimensions: (a) sample and context characteristics (27 variables); (b) methodology (9 variables); and (c) predictors and outcomes (2 variables). The dimensions and nested variables were also chosen based on collaborative work conducted by the APA Task Force on Violence Against Teachers and NEA. A total of 38 variables were coded across the three dimensions. For the first dimension, 20 sample variables and seven context variables were coded. Sample characteristics included 14 variables describing educators and seven variables describing students. Educator sample descriptors included sample size, age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, sexual preference, native language, religion, education level, job title, other certifications, other personal information, and type of class taught. Student sample variables included sample size, age, gender, ethnicity, race, native language, services received, and other student information. School context information consisted of six variables: the level, location, type of school, number of students enrolled, socioeconomic status (SES), and percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch. For the second dimension (methodology), six variables for data collection procedures and three variables for data analyses were coded. Data collection variables included response rate, measures used, recruitment procedures, time of data collection, method of data collection, and data sources, while data analysis variables included descriptive statistics provided, parametric or nonparametric tests used, and effect sizes reported. Finally, for the third dimension (two variables), reported outcomes and predictors were coded.

Studies were independently coded by six doctoral students who were trained on the coding system. Each coder independently reviewed 30% of the studies (11/37). Inter-rater reliability was computed across variables to assess the reliability of the coding system. The overall percentage of agreement had means that ranged from 85% to 100%, and ranges of agreement from 63% to 100%. The percentage of agreement was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of agreements and disagreements.

2. Results

2.1. Dimension 1: sample and context characteristics

For educator characteristics, a total of 13 variables were coded among the 37 studies, which included: (a) sample size, (b) age, (c) gender, (d) ethnicity, (e) marital status, (f) sexual preference, (g) native language, (h) religious information, (i) education level, (j) job title, (k) other certifications, (l) other personal information, and (m) type of class taught. Descriptions of the samples of teachers used in these studies are compared to national data for US educators in Table 3. A total of 49,581 educators were included in 32 studies in 31 articles (5 studies included students only). For educator age, 17 out of the 32 studies reported an overall age range of 20 to 79 years old. Twelve studies reported the means or medians for educators' ages, which ranged from 33 to 47 years old. Gender was reported in 87.5% of studies (28/32), with 69.3% of educators in these studies being female. Only 14 studies (46.7%) included ethnicity, with the majority of educators being White (86.3%), followed by African American (8.1%), Hispanic (3.0%), and "other" (2.6%). Marital status was reported in only six studies (20%), with the majority being married (76.8%). One study (Mooij, 2011) included reports of educators' sexual preference (97.2% heterosexual). Mooij (2011) was also the only study to include general information on educators' religion, as 47.3% of teachers reported that they attended "church." Native language spoken was reported in only two studies (Galand, Lecocq, & Philippot, 2007; Zeira, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2004). Further, 25% of studies (8/32) included education level, with the majority of educators holding a master's degree (34.3%), followed by a bachelor's degree (30.7%), master's or doctorate (26.4%), Education Specialist degree (4.0%), associate degree (3.5%), and doctoral degree (1.1%). Six of the 32 studies included the educators' job titles. The titles

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