

Violence against teachers spurs urgent call to action

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Teachers across the United States report alarmingly high rates of personally experiencing student violence and harassment while at school, according to an article published by the American Psychological Association that presents comprehensive recommendations to make schools safer for school personnel as well as students.

"Understanding and Preventing Violence Directed Against [Teachers](#): Recommendations for a National Research, Practice, and Policy Agenda," was published online Jan. 7 in the APA's flagship journal, [American Psychologist](#).

"Violence directed against teachers is a national crisis with far-reaching implications and deserves inclusion in the [school violence](#) equation," said the article's lead author, Dorothy Espelage, PhD, of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "We are proposing that any comprehensive examination of [school](#) violence must consider the complex dynamics that affect teachers and other school personnel as well as students, parents and the entire community." Espelage was chair of APA's Task Force on Classroom Violence Directed Against Teachers, which issued a report in 2011.

Educators' perceived threats and experiencing violence at school are important components of a problem that has received surprisingly limited attention, the article states. To date, only 14 published studies have examined violence directed at teachers in schools, according to the authors. Five of the studies involved a total of 3,627 teachers in the

United States and nine were conducted internationally with 9,720 teachers.

The APA task force conducted one of the national studies, which found that 80 percent of the teachers surveyed reported being victimized at school at least once in the then-current or prior year. Of those, 94 percent said they had been victimized by students—44 percent reported being physically attacked and 72 percent reported harassment, while 50 percent said they experienced theft or property damage at school. The findings were based on survey responses from almost 3,000 K-12 teachers in 48 states.

The article provides detailed recommendations aimed at preventing violence against teachers, including the creation of a national registry maintained by the U.S. Department of Education to track such incidents. While local and state school agencies keep general records of violent acts at schools, a national agency with the authority to require reporting is necessary to estimate the magnitude of the problem more accurately and develop targeted prevention, according to the article. The authors recommend avoiding collection of students' or teachers' names to encourage accurate reporting, to maintain individual privacy and so that the registry can be made available to the public and researchers.

The article also suggests implementing state-by-state consistency in licensure requirements so that all educators are required to master classroom management training before they are licensed to teach.

"Because professional training typically does not prepare teachers to deal with violence at school, most lack the skills to prevent challenging behavior from occurring and to respond effectively when it does occur. As such, many teachers have been shocked by frequent violent occurrences in our nation's schools during recent years and the far-reaching implications of violence," Espelage said.

To address student behavior that can lead to violence against teachers, the recommendations include methods tailored to individual students, focusing on reasons why problem behaviors occur rather than on ways to stop the behavior once it happens.

Psychologists can promote collaboration among community-based organizations, such as after-school programs, social service agencies and neighborhood associations, to create more integrated efforts that provide prevention, early identification, intervention and treatment for a wide range of behavioral and academic problems among youth, the article states.

"Professional psychologists can play a critical role in helping prevent [violence](#) against teachers, which in turn can make school a safer place for all concerned," Espelage said. "This is a significant yet under-investigated problem in the United States that has profound implications for schooling, teacher retention and over all student performance."

More information: "Understanding and Preventing Violence Directed Against Teachers: Recommendations for a National Research, Practice, and Policy Agenda," *American Psychologist*, online Jan. 7

Provided by American Psychological Association

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