Understanding and Preventing Violence Directed Against Teachers

Recommendations for a National Research, Practice, and Policy Agenda

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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. Surprisingly, little research has been conducted on this growing problem despite the broad impact teacher victimization can have on schooling, recruitment, and retention of highly effective teachers and on student academic and behavioral outcomes. Psychologists should play a leadership role in mitigating school violence, including violence directed toward teachers. There is a need for psychologists to conduct research accurately assessing the types and scope of violence that teachers experience; to comprehensively evaluate the individual, classroom, school, community, institutional, and cultural contextual factors that might predict and/or explain types of teacher violence; and to examine the effectiveness and sustainability of classroom, school, and district-wide prevention and intervention strategies that target teacher violence in school systems. Collectively, the work of psychologists in this area could have a substantial impact on schooling, teacher experience and retention, and overall student performance.

Keywords: violence, school violence, teacher education, K–12 teachers, violence prevention

School violence such as student-to-student victimization and bullying remains a national concern for schools and communities across the country (e.g., Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003; Kondrasuk, Greene, Waggoner, Edwards, & Nayak-Rhodes, 2005). Whereas some research indicates that extreme forms of school violence are decreasing in prevalence (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2010), school violence in general and its aftermath continue to be significant problems for students, teachers, staff, and schools. Most scholars agree that school violence is a multisystemic problem that manifests from community, school, school personnel, and student characteristics and processes. As a result, school violence, as it relates to students, has received significant media, research, and policy attention.

An important component of school violence that has received surprisingly limited attention is educators' perceived threats and/or actual experience of violence in school systems (McMahon, Martinez, et al., 2012; Reddy et al., 2012). Violence directed toward teachers has been understudied and has received limited media and policy attention in the United States and internationally. Information on the rate and scope of teacher victimization is critical for increasing awareness, developing effective supports and interventions, and promoting positive school/classroom climate, student learning, and recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers into the education profession.

In this article, we outline four broad yet distinct aspects of the issue of violence against teachers. First, we define and describe the magnitude of violence currently

directed against kindergarten through Grade 12 (K–12) teachers. Second, we briefly review the current knowledge about potential predictors of student violence directed against K–12 teachers. Third, we identify several evidence-based behavioral management strategies to promote safe classrooms and schools. Finally, we offer recommendations to guide a national research agenda for advocacy and policy efforts.

Defining and Describing School Violence and Teacher Victimization

School violence takes on several forms and can include bullying, intimidation, gang activity, locker theft, weapon use, assault—just about anything that results in a victim (Espelage & Horne, 2008; Volokh & Snell, 1998). The North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Center for the Prevention of School Violence (2002) defined 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" (para. 3). Other forms of violence include malicious insults, acts of racism, bias-based hate crimes, racial profiling, assaults, theft, and racketeering.

Most psychological definitions and studies of school violence acknowledge that violent acts occur within social contexts (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, social media) and involve complex social interactions between and among individuals; however, educators are often overlooked as victims. In most of America's public schools, the reality of violence directed against educators is an unfortunate occurrence for many who work in education systems. Such violence ranges from disrespectful behavior to bullying or intimidation, verbal threats or gestures, theft, property damage, and in some cases, physical assault (American Psychological Association, Center for Psychology in Schools and Education, n.d.). Despite the fact that violence directed against teachers is a national crisis with far-reaching implications and deserves inclusion in the school violence equation (Dinkes, Cataldi, Lin-Kelly, & Snyder, 2007), it is rarely defined, empirically studied, or meaningfully discussed within academic circles. Thus, we propose that any comprehensive examination of school violence must consider schools as multilevel systems with complex dynamics that affect teachers and other school personnel as well as students, parents, and the entire community. Focusing solely on student victimization to the exclusion of teacher victimization not only results in an inadequate representation of the issues but also restricts an array of possible solutions to the complex problem.

Research on Teacher Victimization

Prevalence. The *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* report (issued annually by the National Center for Education Statistics) indicated that 253,100 teachers (7% of the teaching force) surveyed in 2003–2004 were threatened and/or assaulted by students (Dinkes et al., 2007).

Moreover, other reports pointed out that 7% of primary education teachers and 8% of secondary education teachers were threatened with injury, and approximately 6% of K–12 teachers were attacked physically in schools (Dinkes et al., 2007). According to the 2009 Institute of Education Sciences (IES) School Survey on Crime and Safety (see IES, n.d.), approximately 11% of school principals reported that students were verbally abusive to their middle and high school teachers.

Studies that go beyond prevalence estimates of teacher victimization are limited. To date, 14 published studies have examined violence directed at teachers in school systems (see Reddy et al., 2012). Five studies (totaling 3,627 teachers) have been conducted in the United States, and nine studies (totaling 9,720 teachers) have been conducted internationally (i.e., in Belgium, Canada, Israel, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain, and Turkey). Across the 14 investigations, student verbal aggression was most frequently reported by teachers. However, the vast majority of the research examined teachers as victims or witnesses of school violence, and only one study actually surveyed teachers on their perceived role as perpetrators of violence in schools (Mooij, 2011). In general, higher rates of violence directed toward teachers were associated with disorganized school structures, negative school climates, lack of administrative and collegial social supports, and high residential crowding. Further, lower rates were associated with balanced school organizational structures and support systems, clear school disciplinary policies/rules, and positive school relationships (e.g., Dworkin, Haney, & Telschow, 1988; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2012; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005).

The American Psychological Association Task Force on Violence Directed Against Teachers (2011) conducted one of the few national studies that directly examined violence directed at teachers (McMahon, Martinez, et al., 2012). Responding to an anonymous web-based survey, 2,998 K–12 teachers from 48 states reported their victimization experiences during the current or past year. On average, teachers were 46.4 ($SD = 11.3$) years old, were female (83.5%), and taught for 16.9 ($SD = 10.5$) years. The majority of teachers were White (81.2%), followed by Black (9.3%), Latino (4.4%), and Other/multiracial (5%). Participating teachers worked in the following types of community settings: 44.5% urban, 36.8% suburban, and 18.7% rural.

Results revealed that 80% of teachers reported at least one victimization experience in the current or past year, and of those who experienced an offense, 94% reported being victimized by students. Interestingly, nearly half of victimized teachers reported that they had experienced offenses by two or more different types of perpetrators (e.g., students and parents). The percentage of teachers who reported having experienced at least one harassment offense was 72.5%, followed by over 50% experiencing property offenses (e.g., theft of or damage to property), and 44% reporting physical attacks. Findings suggested that being male or working in an urban setting were associated with a higher likelihood of victimization (McMahon, Mar-

tinez, et al., 2012). In sum, violence against teachers seems to be a universally prevalent component of the 21st century global education paradigm; thus, strategies to address and prevent victimization of teachers should be included as a critical element of comprehensive school safety plans.

Impact. Educators' perceived victimization has been found to be associated with fear, physical and emotional symptoms, impaired personal relationships, and impaired work performance (e.g., Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Kondrasuk et al., 2005; Reddy et al., 2012; Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf, & Spencer, 2011; Wilson, Douglas, & Lyon, 2011). Teacher reports of anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms (as a result of experiencing violence at school) were related to lower professional functioning, lower efficacy in the classroom, and lower emotional and/or physical well-being (e.g., Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Galand, Lecocq, & Philippot, 2007; Wilson et al., 2011). Among several investigations, teachers reported a lack of support services and training for preventing and managing school violence (e.g., Daniels, Bradley, & Hays, 2007; Dominguez Alonso, López-Castedo, & Pino Juste, 2009; Shernoff et al., 2011). Whenever teachers are unprepared to manage potential classroom violence effectively, not only does the quality of student achievement deteriorate, but the occurrence of violence against teachers in schools can also lead to a multiplicity of harmful emotional and physical effects (Reddy et al., 2012). For example, the general teacher research literature indicates that job-related stress can lead to dissatisfaction with the profession for teachers and lowered commitments to the profession (Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Klassen, Usher, & Bong, 2010). On the other hand, teachers who are well equipped with evidence-based techniques to mitigate and manage potentially violent behaviors may experience not only an enhanced sense of self-empowerment but reduced levels of job-related stress. 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; greater use of substitute teachers; lost instructional time/productivity; litigation costs; negative publicity for the school; and negative student behavioral and academic outcomes (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2006; Wilson et al., 2011).

Teacher preparation. It is likely that violence directed toward teachers within teacher preparation programs is not a prioritized area of professional development training. However, given the global prevalence of teacher victimization, it is possible that many preservice teacher preparation programs do not prepare teachers adequately as effective classroom managers and offer little training in applied behavior analysis principles (e.g., positive reinforcement). Therefore, many educators have insufficient expertise and skills to prevent challenging behavior from occurring and to respond effectively when undesirable behaviors do 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. Such acts of violence have gone beyond tragic and have left behind untold educational, emotional,

financial and other costs (Kauffman, 2005; Kauffman & Brigham, 2009). It is likely that violence toward teachers has an impact on teacher recruitment and retention by discouraging potential educators from entering the field of education (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004). Not surprisingly, resulting teacher attrition leads to negative effects on students, their school engagement, and their achievement (National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, 2009; Rockoff, 2004).

Summary. Taken together, the research to date highlights high rates of violence against teachers and suggests that community and school system factors may be associated with higher rates of teacher violence. The literature points to the need for comprehensive systemic school changes that include administrator awareness of staff safety issues and policies that support and train school personnel. Furthermore, much more research needs to be conducted to assess predictors and consequences of violence directed toward teachers.

Predictors of Violence: Interactional and Social-Ecological Theories

Psychology is well suited to provide teacher preparation programs and policymakers with evidence-based findings that address the complex social-interactional bases of violent behaviors and reduce the prevalence of teacher victimization. Within this perspective, it is important to recognize that teachers can be victims of, witnesses to, and perpetrators of violence in schools. It may be helpful to consider how teacher victimization can be understood better through the lenses of interactional and social-ecological theories.

Interactional perspective. Despite the complexity of factors often associated with violence directed at teachers, conceptualization from an interactional perspective could capture the stream of behavioral processes as they occur and allow for directed intervention. From a pragmatic perspective, human behavior may not always seem predictable; however, the ABC (antecedent-behavior-consequence) model provides a structured process-oriented mechanism to better understand and prevent violence directed toward teachers (see LaVan & Martin, 2008). The ABC model posits that knowing and understanding the antecedent-behavior-consequence contingency allows identification of specific response triggers on the basis of repeated observation and evaluation of data for immediate intervention. Specifically, factors in a person's internal or external environment that precede and trigger violent behavior are considered antecedents, or A. Behaviors, B, are the reactions of that person in response to internal or external stimuli, which lead to consequences, C, actions or series of events that flow from responsive behaviors. The ABC model empowers teachers to uncover predictable patterns in student behavior for expedited effective intervention.

From a prevention standpoint, it is necessary to identify the contextual and individual factors that allow violence directed toward teachers to occur in the first place. On the basis of findings from several studies, the effectiveness of teachers' classroom management skills is a strong

indicator of the extent to which student violence is directed toward teachers. For example, Shore and colleagues, in a series of investigations, have examined the reciprocal relationships between teachers and students with severe emotional disturbance (e.g., Gunter, Denny, Jack, Shores, & Nelson, 1993; Gunter, Jack, DePaepe, Reed, & Harrison, 1994; Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993; Wehby, Symons, & Shores, 1995). Their findings support 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., 1995).

Teacher–student relationships that are characterized by conflict are also predictive of aggression. For example, Stipek and Miles (2008) examined associations among student aggression, teacher–student relationships, and academic achievement among 403 children who were followed from kindergarten or first grade (ages 6 to 7 years) through fifth grade (ages 10 to 11 years). In their findings, the effect of general 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.

The interactional perspective was particularly evident in a recent large-scale study of violence against teachers conducted in Canada. Wilson and her colleagues (Wilson et al., 2011) examined violence against teachers using a large sample of Canadian teachers. Results indicated that consequences for teachers (as measured by reports of physical symptoms, emotional symptoms, and negative effects on teaching) were strongly predicted by threatening behaviors that occurred in school settings. These researchers distinguished between covert violence (e.g., being called names, having one's reputation tarnished, experiencing student behavior aimed at intimidating teachers) and overt violence (e.g., being threatened with a weapon, personal damage to property). The strongest predictor of physical symptomology, emotional symptomology, and negative impact on teaching was the number of covert experiences of violence; overt violence was a significant, albeit weaker, predictor of negative teacher impact and physical symptoms and was unrelated to emotional symptoms. These findings suggest that one important component of future research is the need to examine both covert and overt violence experiences when assessing the impact of violence on teachers' functioning.

Social-ecological theory. A dominant theory in violence research that may shed light on violence directed toward teachers is the social-ecological framework. This theoretical framework of human development posits that individual attitudes and behaviors are shaped by a range of nested contextual systems including family, friends, school, work, community, and social environments (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979; Espelage, Low, & De La Rue, 2012). These family, friend, and work contexts with which individuals have direct contact are referred to as the *microsystem*. The interaction between components of the microsystem is referred to as the *mesosystem*. Teacher–

student relationships and teacher–parent conferences are examples of mesosystems. The *exosystem* is the social context with which the individual does not have direct contact but which affects him or her indirectly through the microsystem. Examples related to the study of violence directed toward teachers might include school policies related to student conduct, such as zero tolerance policies. The *macrosystem* may be considered the outermost layer in an individual's environment. This layer comprises abstract influences such as cultural values, customs, and laws. The macrosystem impacts the individual through its indirect influence on the exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem. Finally, the dimension of time or the historical context included in this framework is the *chronosystem*. This system can impact the individual through external events (e.g., promotion or pregnancy) or internal events (e.g., teacher stress or burnout). It also can impact the individual through social and cultural trends.

When examining the antecedents of violence directed at teachers, investigators have largely focused on the characteristics of students who demonstrated violent behavior toward teachers, the characteristics of teachers who were targeted, and school- and community-level predictors of violence directed toward teachers. In the only comprehensive examination of predictors of victimization among U.S. teachers, Gottfredson et al. (2005) attempted to draw upon individual, school, and community factors. This study included a nationally representative sample of teachers and students from 254 middle and high schools. Drawing upon social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) and social disorganization theory (Sampson & Groves, 1989), the study assessed a wide range of potential influences of teacher victimization, including communal school organization, student bonding, and neighborhood characteristics. Bivariate analyses indicated that less teacher victimization was associated with consistent discipline management as perceived by students (i.e., fairness and clarity of rules; $r = -.21$) and positive psychosocial climate as perceived by teachers (i.e., organizational focus, morale, administrative leadership, and planning; $r = .41$). Results of multivariate analyses indicated that schools with a greater concentration of impoverished students, African American students, and African American teachers (these three variables formed a latent variable) reported less positive psychosocial climate, which in turn was associated with greater teacher victimization. These results indicate not only that teacher victimization was predictable but also that an overall climate of victimization was prevalent in schools. Further, schools in communities with high residential crowding yielded greater self-reported teacher victimization. Because African American children are often overrepresented in high-poverty urban areas, they may be vulnerable to exposure to suboptimal school discipline, which might increase the likelihood of teacher–student conflicts (Arum & Velez, 2012). This study points to the importance of examining and analyzing individual, school, and community-level predictors in explaining and understanding violence directed against teachers.

In sum, the extant research literature suggests that school violence and student aggression, including violence directed against teachers, are complex problems related to student, teacher, classroom, school, and community-level variables. Despite the lack of empirical evidence informing variables specifically associated with violence directed against teachers, there is a knowledge base describing how we can prevent and reduce overall school-related violence. Violence prevention research promotes taking a multisystemic, multilevel approach that considers influences at individual (student and teacher), classroom, school, and community/neighborhood levels. Likewise, violence prevention is fostered by providing comprehensive as well as targeted school personnel and student training. We recommend practitioners adopt a broad framework of violence prevention, informed by social-ecological theory, that emphasizes self-assessment, comprehensive teacher preparation training, positive development, community engagement, and informed decision making across settings (Zeldin, 2004). Specific recommendations for practice, research, and policy from the APA Task Force on Classroom Violence Directed Against Teachers (2011) are provided next.

Recommendations for Practice

Student aggression toward educators has been consistently reported among the 14 published studies on violence directed at teachers (Reddy et al., 2012). Further, most victimized teachers reported violent incidents by students (94%), followed by parents (37%) and colleagues (21%), which suggests that teacher-directed violence crosses multiple systems (McMahon, Martinez, et al., 2012). Thus, because of the complexity of all relevant factors involved in this phenomenon and the possible interactions, a multisystems approach is best suited for attaining a comprehensive understanding. Multisystem models are needed to effectively study the early detection and prevention of student disruptive and aggressive behaviors directed at educators and to target school-level contexts that focus on students, teachers, staff, and community. To this end, we offer a set of research-based recommendations for practitioners.

Student Level

Although teachers have limited control at the student level, there are several effective strategies they can implement in order to assuage the risk of violent outbreaks. Effective interventions can be tailored to reduce or eliminate individual youth aggressive behavior patterns directed toward teachers and other school personnel by using a three-tiered service delivery prevention model (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary systems of intervention; Walker & Shinn, 2002). In this three-tiered approach, primary prevention strategies (e.g., skills training) focus on the 80% of students of a school population who do not have serious behavior problems. Secondary intervention strategies, such as mentoring programs, target the 5%–15% of students in a school who are at risk for behavior problems because they are starting to display behavioral or academic problems. Tertiary strategies (e.g., wraparound services) are directed at the 1%–7% of the student population who have intense and chronic behavioral and/or academic 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 effective in decreasing undesirable student behaviors is functional assessment-based interventions (Conroy, Dunlap, Clarke, & Alter, 2005; Kern, Hilt, & Gresham, 2004; Lane, Oakes, & Menzies, 2010). Functional assessment-based interventions are highly individualized interventions targeting the reasons *why* problem behaviors occur. 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: (a) to obtain (positive reinforcement) or (b) avoid (negative reinforcement) attention, activities or tasks, or tangible or sensory conditions. The APA Task Force on Classroom Violence Directed Against Teachers (2011) recommended functional assessment-based interventions as a promising practice for addressing behaviors that are precursors to aggression against educators with targeted classroom and school-level interventions.

Teacher Level

Teachers, themselves, play a powerfully pivotal role in reducing school violence through teacher and classroom practices. Teachers should engage in deliberate evidence-based practices to reduce the likelihood of aggression or violence in their classrooms (Lane et al., 2010). These practices can be used for prevention of student violence and aggression against both fellow students and school personnel. For example, clearly stating classroom and school rules and being consistent in modeling and rewarding positive behavior are strategies that can improve student behavior. Teachers could play a more proactive role in mitigating variances in student mood and behavior, avoid public confrontations, and avoid unwarranted assumptions about the causes of student problems. For example, 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 that can undermine classroom management. Finally, 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).

Although many variations in teacher pedagogy mentioned here provide evidence-based practices for proactive threat responses, general guidelines for intervention after an incident has occurred 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. Most of the research and clinical literature on the impact of school violence have focused on the short- and

long-term impact on school personnel following school shootings (for a review, see Daniels et al., 2007). Interventions have focused on implementation of trauma-related intervention models that treat symptoms of posttraumatic stress (Newman et al., 2004) and acute stress disorder (Daniels et al., 2007). One excellent information source for posttrauma 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/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 posttrauma plans. 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* (NEA & NEA Health Information Network, 2009). This resource describes proactive prevention approaches used to make the working and learning environments safe and violence free for all educators and students. 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.

Classroom Level

At the classroom level more specifically, implementation of effective classroom instructional and management strategies not only allows the teacher to have direct control at the "teacher-level" but also puts the teacher in a strategic position for control at the classroom level. Teachers may implement social/behavioral programs (e.g., violence prevention, antibullying, conflict resolution, and classroom management programs) at the classroom level to provide students with clear expectations and appropriate social and behavioral skills to manage anger, resolve conflict, and improve classroom norms and environment (Henry et al., 2000). Indeed, greater student-reported violence prevention knowledge and skills are associated with fewer aggressive and more prosocial teacher-reported behaviors over time (McMahon, Todd, et al., 2012). 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) and reduce violence and aggression in the classroom (e.g., Reddy, Newman, DeThomas, & Chun, 2009; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

Academic engagement is vital to youth success in school (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) and can serve as a protective factor against engagement in risky behaviors (O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003). Teachers are encouraged to consistently review literature on student motivation and implement strategies that lead to improved behavior, because students who are motivated and engaged with academic tasks may be less likely to become distracted and act out in aggressive ways (E. M. Anderman & Patrick, 2012; Kaplan & Maehr, 1999). In general, structure (i.e., clear rules and consequences), involvement (i.e.,

showing care and interest in students on a professional level without being too informal), and autonomy support (i.e., giving students choices) contribute to student engagement in education (Connell, 1991). Professional development that focuses on pedagogy and how instruction can be designed to engage all students (and not just high-achieving students) may lead all students to become more engaged with academics and to be less likely to engage in violent behaviors (Scott, Nelson, & Liaupsin, 2001). In addition, there is a need to help students feel accepted and included and to encourage them to be active in their schools, as these students are more likely to be engaged in learning (L. H. Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Osterman, 2000). Classroom-level strategies for enhancing academic motivation (e.g., see Vannest, Stroud, & Reynolds, 2011) may be effective in reducing violence among students as well.

There are many evidence-based resources that can assist teachers with classroom instruction and management, violence prevention, development of tools and strategies, and selection of effective programs. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) has developed a free online resource for teachers (APA Classroom Management Modules) to illustrate schoolwide and individual classroom management skills and interventions for classroom disruption (www.apa.org/ed/schools/cpse/activities/class-management.aspx). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (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 teacher resources, podcasts, and 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 What Works Clearinghouse of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences also provides helpful information regarding academics, character education, and dropout prevention (www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc). Prevention strategies at the classroom level may not always be sufficient for reducing violence. 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. Finally, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has compiled a list of helpful school resources at http://www.fbi.gov/page2/april07/addtn_resources.htm.

School Level

Ideally, the policies and practices that are implemented at the classroom level are also supported by parallel policies at the school level (Maehr & Midgley, 1991, 1996). In terms of schoolwide primary prevention efforts, we recommend that schools design comprehensive, integrated, multitiered service delivery models of prevention that promote academic and social success through clear expectations for behavior (Lane et al., 2010). 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. However, none of these programs directly address violence directed toward teachers.

Primary prevention efforts. Universal or primary efforts focus on faculty and staff establishing behavioral expectations (e.g., respect, responsibility, and best effort) through specific illustrations for all key settings in a school (e.g., classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, and playgrounds; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Ideally, these expectations would be formulated with input from the parent community, with a goal of establishing culturally responsive expectations that are clearly understood by all parties. Expectations are then taught to all students and staff, providing students opportunities to practice and to be reinforced for meeting these expectations.

Primary prevention efforts also need to focus on improving school norms, school environment, and positive student connections with school. Violence prevention programs are more effective in changing aggressive behavior when there is a focus on changing the classroom and school environments (Espelage & De La Rue, 2011; Howard, Flora, & Griffin, 1999). School belonging has been linked with positive academic and behavioral outcomes (e.g., E. M. Anderman, 2002; L. H. Anderman & Freeman, 2004) and fewer negative psychological symptoms among students with and without disabilities (e.g., McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008). Further, more frequent organizational inclusion of best practices, lower aggression, and higher school belonging were found to be the strongest predictors of academic achievement across six time-points over three years (McMahon, Keys, Berardi, & Crouch, 2011). Thus, creating a positive school culture will likely reduce teacher and student victimization as well as improve overall student experiences and achievement in school.

Secondary and tertiary prevention efforts. Schools also need to have a clearly articulated plan for responding to students who are showing signs of behavior issues (secondary) as well as a plan for students who have violated behavioral expectations (tertiary). Specifically, faculty and staff need to establish and implement distinguishable consequences for students who demonstrate major and minor rule infractions. The established consequences should be reasonable with respect to the student peculiarities, feasible with respect to the intent to deter recidivism, and proportional with respect to the infraction level. Teachers need to deliver the consequences easily, without unnecessary interruption of instructional activities (Lane et al., 2010). 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 should specify the procedures for responding to the various violations and ensure that consequences are allocated uniformly (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). However, unduly rigid policies, such as the oft-touted "zero tolerance" approach to discipline in the schools, have not only proven to be counterproductive but most often result in racial and gender discrimination, especially with African American males, and denigrate the overall school environment (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

School leadership. Overarching and undergirding each of the levels of efforts already described is the particularly important, yet often overlooked and understudied, school leadership factor. School leaders (e.g., principals, assistant principals, superintendents, school board members) should, first of all, institute a thorough and inclusive investigation into the facts surrounding the allegations of violence directed toward educators. School leaders should take all necessary steps to respond privately and publicly in a supportive fashion to the affected teachers and should address larger school and community needs when violence is perpetrated against educators. The types of decisions and responses that these administrators make are pivotal in preventive efforts and far-reaching with respect to teacher recruitment and retention. Research clearly indicates that teachers' perceptions of support from their school administrators are strong predictors of whether teachers choose to stay in their present school of employment or seek to move to another site (Boyd et al., 2011). Given the high rates of both teacher and administrator turnover in urban and low-performing schools (Battle & Gruber, 2010; Guin, 2004), both small and large-scale changes in the ways in which individual schools prevent and react to incidences of violence against teachers are likely to be less stable and less effective when there is greater administrative mobility. Indeed, data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicated that in the 2008–2009 academic year, 12% of public and 16% of private school principals left their jobs in schools where student acts of disrespect or violence against teachers occurred at least once per month (Battle & Gruber, 2010). Therefore, deliberate efforts must be taken to consistently stabilize, review, and reteach district policies and procedures on violence against educators.

In order to ensure stabilized policies and procedures, it is essential for school leaders to provide adequate ongoing district-wide professional development specially designed to prevent violence against educators. Such training should focus on the design, implementation, and evaluation of evidence-based models that suit the particular demographic features and specific needs of the district. As part of their professional development activities, it is important for researchers to assist schools in tailoring and implementing models that draw accurate conclusions regarding relevant processes and outcomes (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). Researchers should collaborate closely with school leaders in order to identify and implement models that address the following three essential attributes of effective models: (a) treatment integrity measures to gauge the extent to which the intervention was implemented as intended (Gresham, 2004); (b) social validity measures to assess the social significance of the goals, acceptability of the procedures, and importance of the outcomes (Kazdin, 1977; Wolf, 1978) from multiple perspectives (faculty, staff, par-

ents, students, and administrators); and (c) reliable outcome and screening measures (e.g., the BASC-2™ Behavior and Emotional Screening System [BESS], Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2007; the Student Risk Screening Scale [SRSS], Drummond, 1994).

Finally, there has been much concern over the past decade regarding the practices of schools that consistently fail to demonstrate gains in student achievement. Not only are school leaders, psychologists, and researchers in a unique position to impact and help shape school academic policy, but the recent large-scale movements to create "turnaround schools" have opened up opportunities for collaborations that will produce evidence-based school safety policies (Murphy, 2006). School leaders are decidedly responsible for the outcome of such reform efforts (Murphy, 2006). Therefore, collaborative efforts that systematically link academic and behavioral achievement would be theoretically and pragmatically ideal.

In summary, when teachers are equipped with best practices, training, and supportive administrative staff, they are their own best first line of protection against threats of student violence. Just as school districts strategically design intervention policies and procedures to circumvent such occurrences, districts must equally prepare to manage the aftermath of such occurrences (e.g., by 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.

School personnel preparation/training.
Using a developmental approach, violence prevention and intervention strategies should be infused throughout the curriculum for in-service and pre-service programs for K–12 teachers—taking into account both student- and teacher-directed violence. However, teacher candidates should not be frightened into thinking they will experience violence but should understand that violence in schools emerges most likely from individual, school, and community risk factors. Teachers need to study the history of U.S. educational policy; understand the funding of public education in the United States; become consumers of the research on racism, hate, and bias within schools and communities; and be able to identify how their own race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and class/socioeconomic status influence their perceptions and behaviors in the classroom.

The next generation of educators would benefit from understanding the potential for experiencing violence in their classrooms and receive training on specific preventative methods to minimize the probability. Teacher preparation programs that have the following components would offer teachers the knowledge and skills to prevent violence: (a) child and adolescent development courses in which behavioral, neural, and development principles are discussed; (b) classroom management strategies, which are integrated and reinforced across multiple courses, to support instruction and engagement; (c) material on integrated, three-tiered models of prevention (primary, secondary, and

tertiary levels); (d) self-reflection opportunities to explore how their own ways of interacting with others might promote aggressive reactions; and (e) community psychology theory and research that illustrate ecology, person–environment fit, empowerment, and effective strategies at multiple levels. 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).

Community Level

Community leaders and organizers need to engage youth in positive activities. When youth are respected as contributors to the advancement of their own neighborhood cultures, practices, and belief systems, their sense of personal value and self-worth may be enhanced. Adolescents who are involved in local problem solving and decision making tend to take a healthier perception of responsibility, which may make them less likely to engage in violent behavior. Because most school district policymakers are elected and/or appointed from the local community, they are strategically situated to receive first-hand input from the local community that helps shape school policy according to the particular needs of local youth. School board members, as well as other community leaders and organizers, should use their influence to engage youth in positive activities. Further, informed responsible community leaders should build coalitions and institute social networks that address structural disadvantages (e.g., poverty, unemployment, homelessness) through community-supported initiatives that strengthen the social organization of the community and improve 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 and other researchers play important roles in collaborating and consulting with community youth-focused organizations (e.g., YMCA, YWCA, Boys and Girls Clubs of America), in order to provide youth with positive experiences after school. We can facilitate capacity building within organizations through education, training, and assistance with grant writing, evaluation, and use of evidence-based best practices. Establishing partnerships among community-based organizations may also benefit victimized teachers by creating social support networks, alliances, and a collaborative mission to promote positive youth development. Further, we can promote effective collaborations between community-based organizations (e.g., after-school programs, social services, neighborhood associations, faith-based organizations) and schools, which have the potential to facilitate an integrative continuum of behavioral and mental health care (e.g., Huang et al., 2005). Partnerships can yield more integrated efforts that provide prevention, early identification, intervention, and treatment of a wide range of behavioral and academic problems among youth. Additionally, the forging of effective partnerships can have positive effects on reshaping behaviors

of troubled youth and the overall school climate (e.g., Massey, Boroughs, & Armstrong, 2007).

Once school-based violence has occurred, stakeholders at multiple levels may be involved in addressing the problems. Speedy, effective intervention may prevent further problems from occurring. For example, first responders (e.g., school staff, security, police, ambulance workers, firefighters) need appropriate training in developmental considerations for youth, behavioral principles, and school policies and should be invited and encouraged to participate with educators in school-sponsored professional development. 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' perspective. This area of research warrants further investigation.

Recommendations for Research and Policy

There are numerous opportunities for research focusing on the prevalence and prevention of violence directed against teachers. We recommend the following areas of priority for research efforts: (a) It is difficult to know the precise prevalence of violence against teachers; thus, measurement approaches should be developed and validated to examine prevalence, correlates, and outcomes associated with violence directed at teachers, and these studies should be conducted with nationally representative samples. (b) As U.S. schools are implementing schoolwide positive behavior support frameworks and other targeted violence prevention programs, we suggest that these efforts not only assess violence among students but also include violence directed at teachers as an outcome measure. A comprehensive integrative approach is needed given the cyclical nature of violence and its effects at multiple levels.

Establish a National Registry of Incidents of Violence Directed Against Teachers

Despite interest in 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 necessary for estimating the human as well as financial costs of such acts to society and for establishing a method for monitoring and investigating the nature and extent of this problem for prevention and intervention efforts. We argue that school violence discourages teachers from entering the field of education and prompts teachers to leave the profession prematurely; indeed, research indicates that job-related stress (e.g., the type that can be caused by experiences of violence) leads to job dissatisfaction and lower levels of commitment to teaching (Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Klassen et al., 2010). 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 the incidence and prevalence of this problem, much of what we think we know, 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. We are aware that local and state school agencies already maintain general records of all violent acts on each campus, but we believe that 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. Information collected might include zip code where the act occurred, date and time the act occurred, where and when the act took place, type and subject of class, demographic information of offender and teacher, type and severity of violence, and actions taken. The collection of names or other data that would link the event to a specific teacher or offender should be avoided in order to encourage accurate reporting, to maintain individual privacy rights, and to make it so that the registry can be made available to the public and to researchers for analysis. This information will help us to more accurately estimate the true magnitude of the problems associated with violence toward teachers and to develop appropriately targeted prevention as well as follow-up programs related to violence directed against teachers.

Research to Understand Violence Toward Other Adults in School Settings

Whereas some research on violence against teachers does exist, it remains limited in its ability to address the myriad of questions regarding this crucial issue. However, teachers are not the only school employees who experience acts of violence (Astor, Behre, Wallace, & Fravil, 1998). Educational support staff such as bus drivers and cafeteria workers, coaches, physical plant support staff, and even school security staff are also likely to be 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. Again, it will be particularly important to examine the types of interactions among individuals that are precursors to and aftereffects of these acts of violence. It is possible that 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 nonteaching school employees is inadequate for any reasonable examination of this issue.

Identify 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. Carefully designed, longitudinal studies of prevention strategies at all three levels of prevention (primary, secondary, and tertiary) are needed. These efforts will need to be multiyear in nature and follow cohorts of students from the 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.

Implement Large-Scale Studies of Evidence-Based Practices

Once effective strategies and interventions have been identified by researchers, large-scale studies will be needed to examine the application of these strategies in authentic settings. Although it may be possible to identify practices that work in one specific setting or another, 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 be necessary. It will also be important to examine the larger social contexts within which violence against teachers occurs; for example, the relations between exposure to community violence and behaviors may help to explain how violent acts against teachers are manifested (e.g., Chen, 2010).

As interventions and strategies are developed and implemented, several aspects of the effectiveness of such interventions can be more closely examined. First, we need to assess whether these interventions actually yield meaningful results when implemented across a diverse array of settings and populations. 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. 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. Second, developmental and environmental considerations need to be considered from at least two different angles. First, developmental and environmental considerations of teachers, students, school leaders, parents, and neighborhoods within the socioecological framework must be unraveled and examined to determine multilevel, multidimensional effects and interactions. For example, inner-city youth not only face contextual risk factors different from those faced by urban or suburban youth, but they may also employ different strategies to deal with common risk fac-

tors. Thus, programs need to address the contextual realities that students in various communities face. Second, the depth and breadth of researchers' perspectives must evolve with respect to the multidimensional components of the socioecological framework specific to the myriad of cultures, ethnicities, personal belief systems, and so forth peculiar to violence against teachers. Researchers who have extensive exposure and familiarity with all types of diversity—including gender, racial, ethnic, ability, and sexual orientation—that seem to permeate most of the existing research will also be well equipped to structure more meaningful intervention strategies.

Whereas reduction of violence is an important research outcome, we must also carefully examine feasibility—how easy or difficult it is for teachers, administrators, parents, students, and other school personnel to *implement* intervention strategies across diverse school contexts. 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.

Longitudinal Studies of Student 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. A plethora of research has been conducted 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, 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. These techniques allow researchers to examine complex systems wherein multiple measures of factors from multiple perspectives, such as student achievement, violence and aggression directed toward teachers and others, knowledge and skills, classroom management, school environment, and community violence exposure can be nested within classroom, school, and neighborhood contexts. Additionally, such models could be instrumental in addressing prevention and intervention strategies by enabling researchers to determine the extent to which each of the relative factors impact various levels of outcome across time and context. Such studies will yield insights into the relations between school and neighborhood contexts and the development of violent behaviors against teachers.

Conclusion

Violence against teachers is a significant yet underinvestigated problem in the United States that has profound implications for schooling, teacher retention, and overall student performance. This article serves as an urgent call for

a national research, practice, and policy agenda for this important area. To prevent the development of student aggression and violence toward teachers, the following broad agenda is suggested by the current knowledge base: 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 to prevent these behaviors from playing out in the classrooms and hallways. Thus, strategies should be developed and implemented to foster collegiality among key stakeholders so that responsibility is shared equitably. Second, teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities need to address a broad array of theory and practice in classroom management strategies and to support realistic opportunities for field experiences in the classrooms throughout their programs, not just during student teaching. An acceptable strategy is to implement state-by-state consistency in licensure requirements such that all educators must master classroom management requirements before a license for teaching is issued.

Third, teachers' attitudes and classroom practices are variables that may impact some levels of aggression in the classroom, which—in turn—predict aggression toward teachers. As mentioned, research that examines the role of teachers as perpetrators of school violence is urgently needed to identify key factors and processes in this area. Nevertheless, we strongly encourage teacher preparation programs to provide the next generation of educators with the knowledge, classroom management skills, and confidence to establish engaging and supportive classroom environments. Fourth, the nature of student–teacher interactions is highly influential in academic and behavioral performance, and conflictual relationships are predictive of aggressive tendencies on the part of both students and teachers. Fifth, school climate factors are highly influential in creating a context that facilitates or inhibits violence against teachers. Finally, undefined public spaces increase 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.

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 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 are working to increase awareness around violence directed at teachers and to promote a national commitment to the study of this phenomenon.

Professional psychologists can play critical roles in the identification, prevention, and intervention of violence directed against teachers. Several recommendations have been offered here to stimulate future thinking and action. It is our hope that this article will serve as a springboard for future scholarly debate, research, advocacy, and policy initiatives.

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