Teacher-Directed Violence and School Culture in Urban, Southeastern Schools: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Teacher-directed violence (TDV) remains an underreported and understudied issue in K–12 education, particularly in urban public schools where student trauma, behavioral challenges, and staffing instability intersect. This qualitative phenomenological study explored how school culture influenced the occurrence and handling of teacher-directed violence (TDV) through the lived experiences of eight teachers in Southeastern urban public schools. Guided by Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology and Schein's Organizational Culture Model, the study examined teachers' perceptions of intervention strategies and policies within school cultures responding to TDV. Teachers reported repeated incidents of verbal abuse, physical aggression, and intimidation, often met with minimal administrative support or consequences for offenders. Inconsistent disciplinary responses, limited awareness of formal policies, and the absence of trauma-informed systems contributed to emotional exhaustion and attrition. While teachers expressed empathy for students with disabilities or mental health concerns, they also stressed the need for boundaries, protection, and clear consequences. Recommendations for practice include strengthening documentation processes, providing trauma-informed training for staff, integrating MTSS frameworks, creating flexible placement options for offenders, and establishing structured reentry protocols. Recommendations for future research include examining leadership responses to extreme incidents, analyzing offender characteristics, and exploring long-term impacts on teacher retention and school climate.

Keywords: K–12 education, organizational culture, phenomenology, school culture, school safety, teacher-directed violence, teacher retention, trauma-informed practices, urban education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Teacher-directed violence (TDV) includes verbal threats, physical assaults, and psychological harassment by students. However, school violence is most often discussed in terms of student victimization, leaving TDV relatively unaddressed. Even as awareness grows, little is known about how these experiences shape teachers' decisions in their professional lives. Recent studies show that many educators encounter verbal or physical aggression from students each year (Moon et al., 2019). Although awareness of teacher-directed violence is growing, research remains limited on how these experiences influence educators' professional decisions. This gap leaves policymakers without clear strategies for addressing its impact (Palma-Vasquez et al., 2022). Teacher-directed violence not only affects the individuals involved but also disrupts the entire school environment (Payne et al., 2003; Payne et al., 2019; Gottfredson et al., 2005). Schools struggling with high rates of teacher victimization often experience increased staff burnout, absenteeism, and higher turnover rates, as teachers who face persistent victimization report heightened job dissatisfaction, emotional distress, and a weakened connection to their school environment (Yang et al., 2022). When teachers leave due to safety concerns, schools face staffing shortages, lower instructional quality, and disruptions in student learning (Jensen, 2021; Yang et al., 2022). Furthermore, teacher-directed violence negatively impacts school culture, disciplinary consistency, and administrative morale, creating an unstable workplace that undermines efforts to foster positive learning environments (Ly et al., 2021).

Although research on teacher retention and school climate is extensive, few studies have specifically examined teacher-directed violence within the framework of organizational culture and its role in shaping teacher decisions to stay or leave. Research has shown that positive working conditions, including strong leadership, supportive school culture, and manageable

workloads, are directly linked to increased teacher retention, particularly in high-need schools (Berry et al., 2021).

The Organizational Culture Model provides a theoretical lens to understand how school values, assumptions, and leadership responses influence teachers' experiences of violence (Schein, 1990). This study addressed the critical gap in the literature by exploring teacher-directed violence concerning school culture (Jensen, 2021). It aimed to provide recommendations for reducing violence, improving administrative responses, and fostering safer school environments.

Given the increasing prevalence of teacher-directed violence and its significant impact on teacher retention and school functioning, this study sought to explore how teachers perceive their experiences with violence and how school culture influences their responses and career decisions (Moon & McClusky, 2020a). Through qualitative inquiry, this research will illuminate how educators interpret teacher-directed violence, how schools handle incidents, and how these factors collectively influence teacher satisfaction and retention. By addressing these issues, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of teacher-directed violence, its systemic effects, and the policies necessary to create safer school environments for educators and students.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was that teacher-directed violence pervades K-12 schools, posing a significant yet understudied concern for educator well-being and school functioning (Curran et al., 2019). While discussions on school violence typically revolved around student experiences, a substantial knowledge gap remained regarding the dynamics, consequences, and underlying factors of violence directed at teachers (Peist et al., 2023; McMahon et al., 2024b; Moon et al., 2019).

Although school violence encompasses various forms of aggression affecting both students and staff, researchers have largely overlooked the unique challenges teachers face in navigating violent encounters within their professional environments (Turanovick & Siennick, 2022). This lack of research fails to capture teachers' nuanced experiences with violence, hindering efforts to develop targeted interventions and sustainable support mechanisms (Peist et al., 2020; Zinter et al., 2023).

Although teacher-directed violence is increasingly acknowledged in educational literature, some school environments have developed a tolerance for aggression toward teachers, contributing to its normalization. Researchers have noted that inconsistent policy enforcement and institutional reluctance to act on violent incidents reinforce a culture where violence is minimized or accepted as part of the teaching profession (Moon & McCluskey, 2020a; Espelage et al., 2014). This normalization not only reduces the likelihood of reporting but also perpetuates unsafe working conditions for educators, further impacting retention and morale (Yang et al., 2022).

Teacher-directed violence affects various stakeholders within educational settings. Teachers endure physical, verbal, and psychological harm, which influences their well-being, job satisfaction, and decisions to remain in the profession (Montgomery, 2019). Indirectly, students experience disruptions to the learning environment, compromised academic achievement, and negative school climates (Peist et al., 2023). School administrators are tasked with maintaining a safe environment but often struggle to address incidents of violence and provide adequate support to affected teachers due to limited resources (Espelage et al., 2014). Schools and districts are responsible for ensuring the safety of both staff and students; however, unchecked teacher-directed violence undermines school culture, weakens staff morale, and diminishes overall

school effectiveness (Mayer et al., 2021). Moreover, education policymakers lack comprehensive data and evidence-based strategies to address teacher-directed violence effectively (Espelage et al., 2014).

The lack of empirical evidence on teacher-directed violence continues to hinder efforts to cultivate safe and supportive school environments that promote effective teaching and learning (Yang et al., 2021). Without a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to teacher victimization and its lasting impact, stakeholders remain ill-equipped to implement research-based policies and practices aimed at prevention and intervention (Peist et al., 2023; Peist et al., 2020).

Therefore, research is needed to explore teachers' experiences of violence, examine contextual and cultural factors, and identify effective strategies for fostering safer school environments (Farrell, 2020). Addressing this gap can contribute to informed policies and practices that support teacher well-being and enhance school safety and functioning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 teachers who had been subjected to teacher-directed violence by students within school environments located in the southeastern United States. Specifically, this study sought to understand the impact of school culture on teachers' experiences with violence, their coping mechanisms, and their professional decisions, including retention. This study addressed a significant gap in the literature by examining the nuanced dynamics, consequences, and underlying factors that contributed to teacher-directed violence.

In addition to understanding teachers' lived experiences, this study investigated how school culture and existing policies influenced incidents of teacher-directed violence. The study

aimed to uncover how teachers perceived the effectiveness of administrative support, disciplinary policies, and school climate in mitigating or exacerbating violence. The literature suggests that teachers are often excluded from the development of school safety policies, despite being directly impacted by violent incidents in the classroom (Moon & McCluskey, 2020a). Exploring their lived experiences can help illuminate how existing approaches align or misalign with the realities of daily school life.

The research was conducted in urban schools in the southeastern United States, using semi-structured interviews with eight teacher participants who had experienced violence from students. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, guided by Schein's Organizational Culture Model, to explore the interplay between school culture and teacher victimization. Ultimately, this study aspired to inform the development of evidence-based interventions, policies, and practices that foster safer and more supportive school environments. By addressing the research gap surrounding teacher-directed violence, the findings provided educational stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, and policymakers, with actionable insights to improve teacher well-being, job satisfaction, and overall school climate.

Introduction to the Theoretical Framework

Schein's Organizational Culture Model (1983) served as the theoretical framework for this study. Originally developed in the business sector, Schein's theory has been widely applied in education research both globally and within the United States, including studies on K–12 school environments (Rickwood, 2013; Nutov & Hasan, 2014; Yu & Chen, 2018; Gan & Alkaher, 2021). The model explains how organizational culture develops through shared responses among group members when addressing problem-solving and group survival

challenges. Schein's model identifies three levels of culture: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions.

To better understand how school culture influences teacher-directed violence (TDV), it is helpful to examine the three distinct levels of organizational culture defined in Schein's model. Each level offers insight into how group values and behaviors are developed and sustained over time, particularly in response to challenges such as violence against teachers. Schein's Organizational Culture Model identifies three interrelated levels that help explain how schools function and respond to issues like TDV. At the most visible level are artifacts, which include the tangible elements of school culture such as written policies, discipline protocols, and safety procedures. While artifacts reflect what is formally established, they do not always capture how situations are handled in practice.

The second level consists of espoused values, which represent the stated beliefs and philosophies that guide an organization's actions. These are often reflected in school mission statements, behavioral expectations, and administrative policies designed to address incidents of violence. Espoused values reflect what the school claims to prioritize, although there may be inconsistencies between these values and how they are enacted.

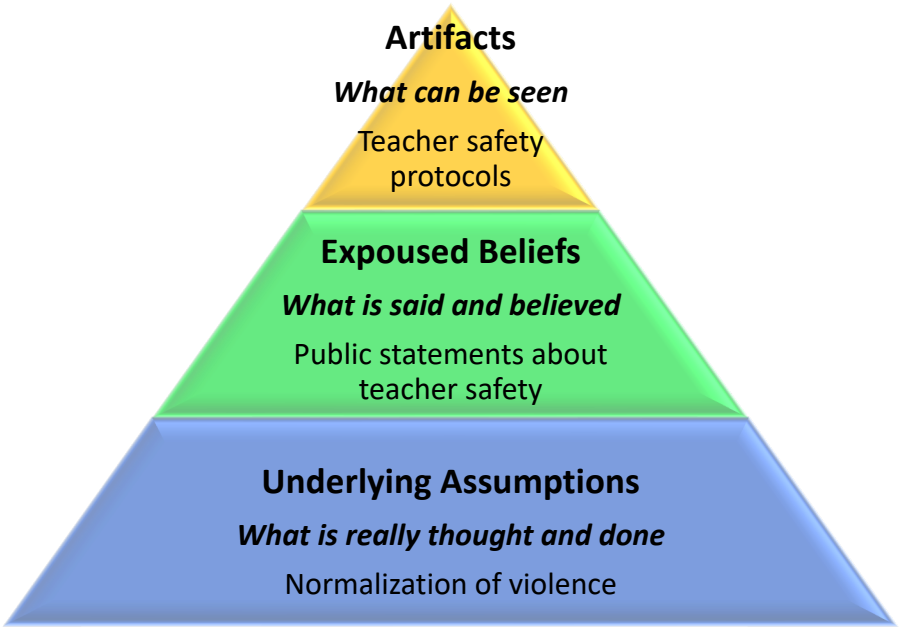
At the deepest level are underlying assumptions, or the unspoken beliefs and norms that influence everyday behavior and decision-making. These assumptions shape perceptions of teacher authority, inform disciplinary practices, and reveal whether teacher safety is truly valued within the school culture.

In this study, Schein's Organizational Culture Model provided a useful lens for examining how school culture influenced both the occurrence and the handling of teacher-directed violence. As schools operate within a complex network of policies, leadership

expectations, and staff dynamics, each layer of culture contributes to how violence is interpreted and addressed. Analyzing the relationship between artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions helped identify gaps between formal policy and lived experience. These insights offered a deeper understanding of how school environments either reinforce or challenge harmful norms related to TDV. Figure 1 illustrates how this model applies to the issue of teacher-directed violence within school environments. This figure was adapted by the author to illustrate how Schein's model applies to teacher-directed violence in school environments.

Figure 1

Application of Organizational Culture Model to TDV



Note. Adapted from *Organizational Culture and Leadership* by E.H. Schein, 1983.

Introduction to Research Methodology and Design

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was utilized to investigate teachers' experiences of being targeted by students within a specific school district in the southeastern United States. This approach was used to capture teacher participants' personal and collective experiences regarding teacher-directed violence. Creswell (2014) described qualitative research

as exploring how individuals construct meaning around societal issues, utilizing data collection in natural settings, conducting inductive analysis, and interpreting findings to develop thematic understandings.

This study employed a phenomenological research design, which sought to document and interpret the lived experiences of teachers who had encountered violence from students. Moustakas (1994) emphasized that phenomenology was rooted in philosophy and psychology and aimed to uncover the essence of an experience through participants' narratives, independent of researcher bias. Giorgi (2015) further refined phenomenology as a systematic approach that structured and analyzed participant experiences while maintaining the integrity of their perspectives.

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with eight teachers who shared common experiences of teacher-directed violence. Participants were selected based on criteria ensuring relevance to the study's focus. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing, recorded with participant consent, and transcribed for analysis. A brief demographic questionnaire was administered prior to the interviews to gather background information. Data were analyzed through thematic coding and interpretation, allowing for the identification of key themes emerging from teachers' narratives.

This methodology aligned with the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions by providing an in-depth understanding of the emotional, physical, and psychological dimensions of teacher-directed violence. By centering the voices of teachers, this study contributed to a deeper understanding of how school culture influenced teacher victimization and retention decisions. It also honored the lived realities of educators, allowing them to name their experiences in their own words, something often absent in quantitative studies. This approach

made space for patterns to emerge organically, grounded in the meaning participants assigned to their experiences.

Research Questions

In qualitative research, an overarching central question may contain sub-questions that restate the purpose of the study, explore the phenomenon, and are open-ended (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This study examined the relationship between teacher-directed violence and school culture, ensuring alignment with the problem statement and purpose statement. The research questions were crafted to capture descriptive data that aligned with the study's objectives while allowing for an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences within the given timeframe and location.

The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1:

What were the lived experiences of teachers who had been targets of teacher-directed violence by students within urban schools in the southeastern United States?

RQ2:

What perceptions did K-12 teachers have about the effectiveness of existing policies and protocols in mitigating and preventing violence directed at them by students within the school's culture in the southeastern United States?

Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to address a critical yet often overlooked issue: teacher-directed violence (TDV) in K–12 schools. By centering on the lived experiences of educators who have been targeted by student aggression, this research sheds light on the emotional, physical, and psychological toll of such incidents.

In addition, it highlights how school culture and existing policies either help reduce or unintentionally sustain patterns of violence. These insights bring attention to the real-world factors that influence how TDV is managed in schools, grounding future solutions in practice, not just theory.

This applied study was created to help school leaders, policymakers, and education advocates respond more effectively to teacher-directed violence. The findings point to ways schools can improve discipline practices, strengthen staff support, and build a culture where teacher safety is not only acknowledged but actively protected. By examining TDV through the lens of Schein's Organizational Culture Model, this study also reveals how underlying assumptions, daily practices, and institutional norms influence the way violence is interpreted and addressed in school settings.

Definition of Key Terms

Administrative Response

Actions taken by school leaders, including principals and district administrators, to address teacher-directed violence, implement policies, and provide support to affected teachers (Peist et al., 2023).

Burnout

A state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged exposure to stressors, including teacher-directed violence, lack of administrative support, and challenging school climates (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Disciplinary Policies

School and district-level policies were established to address student behavior, enforce consequences, and maintain a safe and orderly learning environment (Irwin et al., 2023).

Job Satisfaction

The degree to which teachers feel fulfilled and supported in their roles is influenced by school culture, administrative support, and experiences with student behavior, including teacher-directed violence (Ortan et al., 2021).

Lived Experience

This concept refers to the personal and subjective meaning individuals assign to events like teacher-directed violence as they are lived, felt, and interpreted in the moment. It is foundational to phenomenological research, which centers participants' voices and meaning-making processes (Farrell, 2020).

Organizational Culture

Schein (1983) defined organizational culture as the shared beliefs, values, and practices that emerge over time within an organization as its members respond to challenges and establish norms for interaction, decision-making, and overall functioning.

Psychological Impact

The emotional and mental effects of teacher-directed violence, including stress, anxiety, fear, and feelings of isolation, may contribute to burnout and attrition (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018).

Retention

The ability of schools to keep teachers employed in their positions is often influenced by factors such as school safety, administrative support, and exposure to teacher-directed violence (Nguyen & Springer, 2021).

School Climate

The collective perceptions and experiences of students, teachers, administrators, and staff regarding social relationships, safety, support structures, and the emotional atmosphere within a

school. Unlike school culture, which focuses on deeply ingrained norms and values, school climate reflects the day-to-day experience of the school environment (Rudasill et al., 2018).

School Culture

The shared beliefs, traditions, and behaviors that shape how school community members respond to challenges and interact with one another. When these beliefs are effective and widely accepted, they become embedded in the organization and influence how new members are socialized in the school (Schein, 1990).

School Violence

School violence refers to any act of physical, verbal, or psychological aggression occurring on school property, during school commutes, or at school-related events. This includes peer-to-peer violence, student-directed violence, and teacher-directed violence, all of which impact school safety, academic performance, and staff well-being (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Support Systems

Resources and structures were implemented to help teachers cope with the effects of teacher-directed violence, such as counseling services, professional development, and administrative interventions (Reddy & Herman, 2024).

Teacher-Directed Violence (TDV)

Aggressive behaviors specifically targeted at educators include verbal harassment, intimidation, bullying, threats, property damage, and physical assault. TDV, sometimes referred to as teacher victimization, has significant consequences for educators' mental health, job satisfaction, and retention (Espelage et al., 2014).

Teacher Victimization

Occurs when educators experience verbal, physical, relational, or cyber aggression from students. These incidents include threats, physical attacks, property damage, and sexual harassment, all of which contribute to increased stress, burnout, and decisions to leave the profession (Peist et al., 2023).

Summary

Teacher-directed violence remains an underexplored yet pervasive issue in K–12 schools, significantly affecting educators' well-being, job performance, and retention (McMahon et al., 2022; Moon et al., 2019). Despite its prevalence, research on teacher-directed violence is limited, leaving gaps in understanding how school culture shapes these experiences and how existing policies respond to them.

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of teachers who had been targets of student-perpetrated violence within a large, urban school district in the southeastern United States. The problem addressed was that teacher-directed violence persists as a critical yet understudied issue impacting school climate and educator retention (Curran et al., 2019). This research examined how teachers perceived the role of school culture in either mitigating or exacerbating violent incidents and the broader implications for retention and school functioning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2019).

Through qualitative inquiry and phenomenological analysis, this study sheds light on how teachers experience and make sense of violence directed toward them. These findings offer practical takeaways for improving school culture, shaping discipline practices, and supporting teachers through thoughtful leadership and policy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of K-12 teachers who have been subjected to teacher-directed violence by students in school environments located in the southeastern United States. By examining teachers' perceptions of these incidents and their school cultures, this study sought to contribute to the growing body of literature on TDV and inform strategies for improving teacher safety, well-being, and retention. The problem addressed in this study is that teacher-directed violence pervades K-12 schools, posing a significant yet understudied concern for educator well-being and school functioning (Curran et al., 2019).

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of literature relevant to the study's key variables: teacher-directed violence and school culture. It begins with an overview of the theoretical framework, followed by an examination of school violence to contextualize TDV within broader discussions of safety in educational settings. Subsequent sections explore teacher retention, burnout, and well-being, as these factors are deeply intertwined with teachers' experiences of violence. The chapter concludes with a discussion of gaps in existing research and the significance of this study in addressing those gaps.

To identify relevant literature, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and seminal works were accessed through search engines such as National University Library and Google Scholar. The primary databases used include Roadrunner, ERIC, ProQuest, and EBSCOhost. The majority of the sources reviewed were published within the past five years (2019–2024) to ensure contemporary relevance. Search terms included teacher victimization, teacher-directed violence, teacher violence, school violence, school climate, school culture, and school environment. A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted to identify

relevant studies on teacher-directed violence, school culture, and related policy issues. This review incorporated peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and seminal works to provide a broad yet thorough understanding of the topic. The goal was to map the existing body of knowledge, highlight gaps in research, and establish a foundation for this study's framework.

Theoretical Framework

Glasser's Choice Theory (1997) emphasizes individual motivation, positing that human behavior is driven by five basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun (Glasser, 1997). In the context of TDV, this framework could explain why students engage in aggressive behaviors, potentially as a response to unmet psychological needs. While useful for understanding student actions, this theory does not sufficiently address how school structures and leadership decisions influence the handling of violence directed at teachers. Choice Theory centers on student agency rather than institutional culture, making it an incomplete framework for this study.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) examines human development through multiple layers of influence, ranging from the immediate environment (microsystem) to broader societal factors (macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This perspective is valuable for exploring how external forces—such as family, community, and policy decisions—impact school safety. However, while it highlights external contributors to TDV, it does not focus on the internal cultural dynamics within schools that shape teachers' experiences and administrative responses. Because this study prioritizes teacher experiences over student-centered factors, Ecological Systems Theory does not provide the most effective framework.

Schein's Organizational Culture Model (1983) provides the most relevant framework for analyzing how schools function as institutions and how their deeply embedded beliefs, values,

and assumptions influence responses to TDV. Unlike the alternative theories considered, Schein's model allows for an in-depth examination of organizational culture as a determinant of school policies, teacher safety, and leadership practices.

Schein's model conceptualizes organizational culture through three levels. The first level, artifacts, refers to what can be seen. These include visible policies, procedures, and disciplinary measures that schools put in place to address teacher-directed violence (TDV). They represent the formal rules that schools claim to follow (Schein, 1990). The second level includes espoused values, which reflect what is said and believed. These values represent the school's official stance and what administrators, district leaders, and policymakers claim to prioritize regarding teacher safety and discipline enforcement (Schein, 1990). The third and deepest level involves underlying assumptions, which reflect what is truly thought and done. These are the hidden norms and unspoken beliefs that guide actual decision-making. In many cases, these assumptions influence whether teachers feel supported or abandoned during violent encounters (Gan & Alkaher, 2021; Nutov & Hazzan, 2014).

By analyzing the gap between what schools publicly claim to value and how policies are actually implemented, Schein's model offers deeper insight into why some teachers feel protected while others experience a lack of accountability and support (Liggett, 2023; Meek, 1988). Although many schools emphasize teacher safety in their public messaging, their internal culture may tolerate or dismiss TDV as an unavoidable part of the job. This disconnect between visible actions, stated beliefs, and underlying norms is central to understanding how institutions respond to TDV.

Schein's model is especially relevant to this study because it addresses how culture shapes administrative decisions. In contrast, Glasser's Choice Theory focuses more on individual

student behavior, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights broader social influences. Schein's framework centers on the internal structures, cultural patterns, and policy decisions within schools that influence how TDV is handled (Gan & Alkaher, 2021).

Ultimately, Schein's Organizational Culture Model provides a meaningful way to examine how school culture shapes the presence and handling of teacher-directed violence. It places teachers' experiences at the forefront while revealing the gaps between what is promised and what actually happens in practice.

School Violence

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024) defines school violence as any threat or use of force intended to cause harm, occurring on school property, during school events, or while traveling to and from school. While this definition encompasses various forms of violence, most discussions tend to focus on student victimization, overshadowing the realities of violence directed at educators.

Federal efforts to address school violence have similarly emphasized student safety, particularly incidents involving weapons. The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA), enacted in 1994, requires schools receiving federal funds to expel for at least one year any student found bringing a firearm to school, with allowances for case-by-case modifications. According to Gray-Adams et al. (2006), over 100,000 expulsions were reported under the GFSA between 1996 and 2003, most involving firearms. These data reflect the urgency placed on protecting students but largely overlook violence against teachers, including verbal abuse, threats, and physical aggression. This oversight has significant consequences.

Randall and Marandos (2019) emphasize that every member of the school community is entitled to a safe working and learning environment. Yet, many teachers report feeling

unsupported or ignored when they experience violence in the classroom. In addition to individual and policy level contributors to school violence, scholars have also examined the role of subcultural values that influence student behavior.

Hughes, Botchkovar, Antonaccio, and Timmer (2022) explored how the "code of the street," a set of informal norms emphasizing respect, toughness, and retaliation, shaped violence among youth in school settings. Their study, conducted across three U.S. cities, found that students who adhered more strongly to these subcultural values were significantly more likely to engage in violent behavior. These findings suggest that school violence is not solely the result of poor supervision or inadequate discipline but may also reflect broader cultural norms within peer groups. When these norms go unchallenged, they can contribute to environments where violence is normalized and even expected, complicating efforts to foster safe and respectful school climates. Such environments may not only increase student on student aggression but also make teachers more vulnerable to threats and violence, particularly when their authority is challenged.

Research has shown that failing to explicitly include teacher-directed violence (TDV) in broader school safety discussions contributes to underreporting and policy inaction (McMahon et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2020). Recognizing TDV as a legitimate component of school violence is essential for developing meaningful prevention strategies and ensuring teacher well-being.

Background and Definitions

Ensuring a safe school environment involves everyone: federal, state, and local governments, school staff, students, parents, and the community. Randall and Marandos (2019) emphasize that everyone in the school community is entitled to a safe space to work and learn. Turanovic and Siennick (2022) offer a definition of school violence as any deliberate act or threat aimed at causing harm, particularly during school-related activities. This definition

emphasizes that school violence can also disrupt the learning environment, affecting students, teachers, and the entire community.

Though school violence is often defined within the context of student victimization, it's crucial to recognize that it includes incidents beyond school grounds, such as bullying, verbal and physical aggression, and weapon-related threats. These incidents may occur on the way to or from school and during school events.

Schools are typically seen as safe havens where students are protected not just from physical harm but also from emotional and psychological trauma. Yet, negative interactions with students and peers can still leave lasting emotional scars. Cohen (2021) highlights that school environments must address both physical safety and the mental well-being of all involved. Afkinich and Klumppner (2018) reported that approximately 800,000 incidents of nonfatal school violence occur each year in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), one in five high school students reported being bullied at school. The survey also found that 8% of high school students had engaged in physical fights on school grounds in the past year. Over 7% were threatened or injured by a weapon, and 9% were absent from school at least once because they felt unsafe.

Types of School Violence

School violence comes in various forms, from verbal abuse to life-threatening physical attacks. While the most common focus has been on student-to-student aggression, it's essential to understand that TDV is a distinct and interconnected issue.

Violence Leading to Death. The School-Associated Violent Death Surveillance System (SAVVD-SS) tracks school-related deaths, including homicides, suicides, and incidents involving law enforcement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). These rare events

shape public perceptions of school safety and often influence policy decisions. While violence against teachers is less likely to result in death, the physical and psychological consequences can still be severe (McMahon et al., 2024b).

Bullying and Harassment. Bullying remains one of the dominant forms of school violence. It includes verbal abuse, physical intimidation, and cyber harassment. While bullying research has mostly focused on students, educators, too, report experiencing threats, intimidation, and harassment from both students and parents (Slattery et al., 2019). Unlike peer bullying, TDV often involves power imbalances, with teachers hesitant to report incidents due to fear of professional consequences (Peist et al., 2020).

- **Weapons and Threats.** The presence of weapons in schools continues to be a major concern. Laws such as the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 prohibit firearms on school property, yet teachers still face threats from students armed with weapons, especially in high-risk environments where gang activity and community violence spill into schools (Yang et al., 2022).
- **Vandalism and Property Destruction:** Property damage is another form of TDV. Students may destroy or deface teachers' belongings, vandalize classrooms, or damage instructional materials as an act of retaliation or defiance. This can add to teachers' frustration, as they are often required to replace the damaged materials at their own expense (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

Although school violence continues to be a central concern in educational policy and research, much of the attention remains centered on student safety, particularly in relation to weapons and peer conflict. This narrow focus has contributed to the under recognition of teachers as victims of school-based violence. When violence against educators is not explicitly

addressed in policy, research, and prevention strategies, it limits schools' ability to respond effectively and equitably. To fully understand the scope of school violence, it is necessary to examine how teacher-directed violence manifests, how it is perceived within school environments, and how it impacts both individuals and institutional culture. The following section explores the existing literature on TDV, highlighting its prevalence, forms, and the systemic challenges associated with addressing it.

Teacher-Directed Violence

Although this study centers on TDV in southeastern U.S. schools, the phenomenon is not unique to the American educational landscape. International studies reveal that teachers in countries such as Italy and Israel also report verbal abuse, physical threats, and emotional strain caused by student and parent aggression (Berlanda et al., 2019; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Ben-Hayun & Zysberg, 2023). In South Africa, Venketsamy (2024) found that teachers in Gauteng schools frequently encountered violence, leading to emotional distress and breakdowns in classroom discipline. These global findings point to a shared need for systemic responses that prioritize teacher well-being across diverse educational contexts.

While verbal aggression is the most frequently reported form of TDV, physical assaults remain a serious concern, accounting for approximately 10% of all school-related assaults (McMahon et al., 2018). Despite these alarming statistics, the full extent of TDV is likely underreported. Many incidents are never documented due to fears of administrative inaction or possible retaliation (Espelage et al., 2014). This reluctance contributes to a cycle in which violence is normalized, and teacher safety is deprioritized within school culture.

Globally, teacher attrition presents a similar challenge. Countries around the world report concerns related to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and staff turnover. In England, for instance,

Menzies (2023) examined the persistent "churn" in school staffing and its negative impact on trust, continuity, and student outcomes. He argued for strategies such as "looping," keeping teachers with the same group of students across grade levels, as a means to mitigate disruption and strengthen relationships within school communities.

School Violence Prevention: Addressing TDV

Addressing teacher-directed violence (TDV) is an essential component of the broader conversation on school violence prevention. While much of the focus has historically been on student victimization, more attention is now being paid to the safety and well-being of educators. Addressing teacher-directed violence (TDV) is an essential component of broader school violence prevention strategies. While much of the focus has historically been on student victimization, there is increasing recognition of the need for strategies that also safeguard educators. Restorative justice programs have gained traction as effective tools for promoting school safety. These programs prioritize repairing harm and building relationships, emphasizing empathy and mutual respect within the school community, which is a proactive way to manage TDV (Sandwick et al., 2019). This perspective aligns with existing research, highlighting the importance of fostering a school culture that values reconciliation and accountability in addressing violence.

Crawford and Burns (2022) highlighted school culture's significant role in reducing violence. Their research found that schools with a supportive, positive culture report fewer violent incidents, including TDV. These schools strongly emphasize respect, collaboration, and mutual support, which helps reduce violent behaviors. This suggests that promoting kindness, respect, and inclusivity is essential for school violence prevention.

Similarly, Pivnick and Hassinger (2021) advocate for restorative justice programs. They believe these programs are more effective than punitive actions in reducing violence, like suspension or expulsion. Their study shows that restorative practices, which center on community-building and accountability, improve the overall school climate and reduce aggression. These findings emphasize the importance of long-term solutions that benefit both students and teachers.

In addition to restorative practices and crisis intervention strategies, many schools have adopted systemic frameworks to address student needs more comprehensively. The Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework has been widely implemented in schools to organize proactive, tiered interventions for academic, behavioral, and social emotional development (Sugai & Horner, 2020). MTSS emphasizes early identification of needs, universal supports for all students, and increasingly intensive interventions based on the severity of student behaviors. While traditionally used to support student success, MTSS structures have been recognized as a potential tool for improving overall school climate, promoting safety, and addressing behavioral risks before they escalate. Although research on applying MTSS specifically to teacher-directed violence remains limited, the framework's emphasis on proactive, system-wide supports suggests it could be adapted to strengthen teacher protection and response efforts.

Cuellar (2018) highlighted the importance of comprehensive violence prevention programs, which include conflict resolution and mental health support. These programs help create safer school environments, benefiting students and teachers by reducing incidents of violence, including teacher-directed violence (TDV). When schools implement these programs, they create a more secure environment, decreasing student aggression and teacher turnover.

Poling et al. (2022) emphasized the role of teacher professional development (PD) in addressing TDV. Their study found that strengthening teacher-student relationships through PD can reduce classroom aggressive behavior. PD programs emphasizing de-escalation techniques, effective communication, and social-emotional learning help teachers manage challenging situations better. The likelihood of TDV decreases when teachers are prepared to deal with difficult behaviors.

Finally, addressing TDV requires collaboration beyond educators. Partnerships between schools, families, and communities play a vital role in preventing violence. McMahon et al. (2024b) highlight that when schools work closely with families and local organizations, they build a support network that can intervene before violence escalates. These collaborations provide essential resources that enhance school safety and reduce violent incidents.

Taken together, these findings advocate for a multifaceted approach to addressing TDV. By combining restorative justice, a supportive school culture, teacher training, and community involvement, schools can create safer and more nurturing environments for educators, improving safety, retention, and school climate.

Impact on Educators and School Climate

Research indicates that teacher-directed violence (TDV) significantly contributes to teacher burnout, stress, and turnover, particularly in schools where administrative responses to violence are inconsistent or ineffective (Brady et al., 2023; Guise, 2024). Educators who experience violent incidents often report heightened anxiety and job dissatisfaction, which can erode their sense of professional fulfillment and commitment to the field (McMahon et al., 2024a). The emotional toll of repeated exposure to violence leads to exhaustion and professional disengagement, making it increasingly difficult for teachers to maintain their instructional

effectiveness and classroom management (Camacho et al., 2021). As a result, many educators experiencing ongoing violence and lack of institutional support contemplate leaving the profession, which only worsens teacher shortages and disrupts the stability of schools (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018). These findings resonate with broader concerns about teacher retention, as violence against teachers adds to the existing pressures of workload, student behavior, and administrative demands (Oberg et al., 2024).

Prevalence of TDV

TDV is a widespread and persistent issue in K-12 education (Moon et al., 2020b). Research indicates that violence against teachers has increased in severity since the COVID-19 pandemic (Peist et al., 2023). Notably, TDV does not solely originate from students, as administrators, parents, and colleagues have also been identified as perpetrators (McMahon et al., 2018).

A national survey found that 80% of teachers reported experiencing at least one form of violence at work (Etchells et al., 2017). Among the 37,319 teachers surveyed, 21% had been threatened with injury, and 8.6% had experienced physical aggression (Etchells et al., 2017). Additional national safety reports indicate that 9.7% of teachers in traditional public schools were threatened with violence, and 5.7% were physically attacked (Irwin et al., 2023).

Research further suggests that certain teacher demographics are more vulnerable to TDV. For example, female, White, older, or high school-level teachers report higher rates of violence (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018). However, African American teachers have been found less likely to report TDV incidents, raising concerns about underreporting among educators of color (McMahon et al., 2014).

While reported physical attacks against teachers have slightly decreased in recent years, verbal aggression and cyberbullying have escalated. The 2023 National School Violence Report found that cyberbullying by students doubled from 8% to 16% between 2010 and 2020. Verbal abuse of teachers increased from 5% to 10%, while disrespectful student behavior, excluding verbal abuse, rose from 9% to 15%. Additionally, widespread classroom disorder increased from 3% to 4% during this period (Irwin et al., 2023). These findings suggest that while physical aggression may have declined, other non-physical forms of TDV, such as verbal threats and online harassment are on the rise.

In the United States, many teachers report facing violence, but previous studies have only looked at certain types of victimization and the students' causing problems. A recent national study, led by the American Psychological Association, explored violence targeted at teachers (McMahon et al., 2014). They surveyed 2,998 teachers from 48 states and found that 80% reported experiencing mistreatment, with most incidents involving students (McMahon et al., 2014). The study revealed that nearly three-fourths of teachers experienced harassment, over half experienced property damage, and 44% reported physical attacks (McMahon et al., 2014). The findings also suggest that certain teacher and community characteristics, such as being male and working in urban settings, were associated with a higher likelihood of victimization, while African American teachers were less likely to report mistreatment (McMahon et al., 2014).

McMahon et al. (2024b) found that a notable percentage of teachers experienced different types of violence in their workplaces. Specifically, 33% of teachers reported verbal or threatening violence from students, 29% from parents, 14% from colleagues, and 18% from administrators. Furthermore, about 14% of teachers reported experiencing physical aggression by students (McMahon et al., 2024b).

A 2023 national report on school violence, which provided annual updates, shed light on trends related to violence directed at teachers. In the 2020–21 school year, fewer public-school teachers reported being threatened with injury by students, with the rate decreasing to 6 percent compared to 10 percent in 2011–12 (Irwin et al., 2023). Similarly, the percentage of teachers reporting physical attacks by students declined from 4 percent to 3 percent (Irwin et al., 2023). Despite these reductions, the report also revealed troubling increases in other forms of school-based disruption and teacher mistreatment.

In the 2019–20 school year, more public schools reported experiencing certain issues at least once a week compared to the 2009–10 school year. Reports of cyberbullying by students doubled, rising from 8 percent to 16 percent. Verbal abuse of teachers increased from 5 percent to 10 percent. Disrespectful behavior toward teachers, excluding verbal abuse, rose from 9 percent to 15 percent. Reports of widespread disorder in classrooms increased from 3 percent to 4 percent (Irwin et al., 2023).

Types of TDV

TDV Teacher-directed violence (TDV) manifests in multiple forms, ranging from verbal aggression to severe physical attacks. While school violence is often discussed in terms of student-on-student incidents, TDV remains an underexamined but critical issue affecting educators' well-being and job performance. Understanding the different types of TDV helps contextualize teachers' challenges and informs policy recommendations for prevention and intervention strategies.

Verbal Aggression and Threats. Verbal aggression is one of the most common forms of TDV, often involving students using derogatory language, intimidation, or explicit threats against teachers (McMahon et al., 2024a). This type of violence can escalate over time,

contributing to increased stress, anxiety, and job dissatisfaction among educators (Brady et al., 2023). Some teachers report that verbal aggression includes personal attacks on their race, gender, or appearance, as well as threats of physical harm (Espelage et al., 2014).

Physical Violence. Physical aggression toward teachers can range from minor altercations, such as students throwing objects, to direct physical assaults involving hitting, pushing, or other forms of bodily harm (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018). Studies indicate that while severe physical attacks are less common, even isolated incidents can have long-term psychological and professional consequences, leading to absenteeism, post-traumatic stress symptoms, or decisions to leave the profession entirely (McMahon et al., 2018).

Property Destruction and Vandalism. Another form of teacher-directed violence includes the destruction of personal or classroom property. Students engaging in this behavior may target teachers by defacing their belongings, damaging instructional materials, or vandalizing classrooms as a means of retaliation or defiance (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). This type of violence contributes to feelings of insecurity and frustration, as teachers must frequently replace materials at their own expense while also managing the emotional toll of a hostile work environment (Oberg et al., 2024).

Sexual Harassment and Misconduct. Though often overlooked, sexual harassment directed at teachers is an emerging area of concern. Some educators report being subjected to inappropriate comments, gestures, or even physical contact by students (Camacho et al., 2024). This form of violence can be particularly challenging to address due to power dynamics, reluctance to report, and inconsistent policy enforcement across school districts (Guise, 2024).

Cyber Harassment and Social Media-Based Attacks. In the digital age, teacher-directed violence has extended beyond the classroom. Cyber harassment includes students

posting defamatory content, creating fake social media profiles to ridicule teachers, or even engaging in doxxing—publicly sharing private information to encourage harassment (Slattery et al., 2019). This form of violence is particularly harmful as it can spread quickly and persist indefinitely, affecting a teacher's professional reputation and mental well-being.

By categorizing TDV into these distinct forms, it becomes evident that violence against teachers is not a singular issue but a multifaceted challenge requiring tailored interventions. Addressing TDV effectively requires school leaders to recognize its varied manifestations and implement policies that ensure educators feel supported and protected in their professional environments.

Impact of School Culture on TDV

TDV is heavily influenced by school culture and administrative responses. Research suggests that certain school environments normalize violence against teachers, making it difficult for educators to report incidents or seek disciplinary action (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018). The way schools respond to violent incidents largely determines whether TDV is viewed as an isolated event or as a recurring systemic issue.

A study by McMahon et al. (2022) examined the prevalence of TDV across different school levels and found notable differences. Elementary school teachers reported the highest rates of physical aggression, whereas middle school teachers faced more frequent harassment and threats. High school teachers, in contrast, reported lower rates of physical aggression but higher levels of sustained verbal abuse. Notably, urban teachers were more likely to experience TDV than their suburban or rural counterparts, highlighting the need for context-specific interventions (McMahon et al., 2022).

Moon and McClusky (2020a) found that teachers subjected to verbal or physical aggression often experienced job dissatisfaction, emotional distress, and reduced trust in students. These findings underscore school leadership's critical role in mitigating or exacerbating TDV through policy enforcement and cultural norms.

Outcomes for TDV

Teacher-directed violence and teacher turnover can significantly impact school communities. A study by McMahon et al. (2024b) explored how school characteristics contribute to TDV and its link to turnover. The study involved qualitative experiences from 403 teachers, many of whom indicated that their most distressing encounters with violence influenced their decisions to leave the profession, transfer schools, or retire. Teachers shared concerns about safety, including the dynamics of parent-teacher relationships and community violence. Teachers also expressed frustration with administrative support, pointing to ineffective leadership and issues with both school and government policies. Improving the overall school climate may help reduce teacher-directed violence and prevent turnover.

Moon et al. (2023) conducted a study exploring whether there are distinct patterns in how teachers experience victimization over time and how these patterns relate to their job satisfaction, sense of connection to the school, and emotional well-being. Their study utilized longitudinal data from middle and high school teachers in a metropolitan area in Texas to investigate whether there were unique patterns in the trajectories of teacher victimization and how these trajectories are associated with negative outcomes. The results revealed that a considerable number of teachers experience ongoing victimization, and those who endure persistent victimization are more likely to feel disconnected from their school, report job dissatisfaction, and experience emotional distress.

Maring and Kablinsky (2013) investigated how community violence impacts teachers' effectiveness, student learning, and emotional well-being in urban schools. Their study explored the challenges teachers encounter, their strategies, and the support they need in schools facing high levels of community violence. Interviews were conducted with twenty teachers from three urban middle schools serving predominantly low-income African American students. These schools were chosen based on their location in areas with high levels of violent crime. The researchers found that teachers encountered challenges and utilized coping strategies at multiple levels: individual, family, school, and community. Teachers showed resilience by relying on support from family and colleagues, but they also resorted to avoidant behaviors, such as withdrawing emotionally and distancing themselves from challenging students. The study emphasizes the need for interventions that improve school safety and address the stress caused by violence.

Impact of TDV on Teacher Well-being

Teacher-directed violence (TDV) is not just an occupational hazard but a significant workplace health concern with long-term psychological, emotional, and physical consequences for educators. Repeated exposure to violence, whether verbal threats, physical aggression, or emotional intimidation, can erode teacher well-being, leading to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and even career abandonment (Reddy & Herman, 2024).

Psychological and Emotional Toll. Teachers who experience chronic victimization report increased anxiety, stress, depression, and post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSD), which impact their teaching effectiveness and personal well-being (Yang et al., 2022). TDV contributes to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, all key dimensions of teacher burnout (Berkowitz et al., 2022). As burnout intensifies, educators

develop negative attitudes toward their work, struggle with motivation, and, in extreme cases, detach emotionally from their students (McMahon et al., 2018). Zhao (2024) expanded on these findings by examining how teacher victimization contributes not only to burnout but also to strained relationships and a greater risk of leaving the profession. Zhao's study highlighted how personal factors such as race, gender, and teaching role, along with school climate and peer support, shape how teachers experience and respond to violence. These findings suggest that the emotional impact of teacher-directed violence is not limited to individual incidents but reflects broader patterns that wear teachers down over time.

Physical Health Consequences. Beyond the psychological toll, TDV has physical repercussions that extend beyond the classroom. Teachers subjected to ongoing aggression, whether verbal harassment, threats, or physical assault, report heightened stress-related illnesses, such as chronic fatigue, headaches, and increased cardiovascular risks (McMahon et al., 2018). Stress related cortisol spikes resulting from TDV can lead to weakened immune function, increased absenteeism, and long-term physical exhaustion (Reddy & Herman, 2024).

Impact on Retention and School Climate. TDV does not only affect individual teachers but also contributes to teacher attrition and school instability. Reddy & Herman (2024) found that nearly half of educators who experienced workplace violence considered transferring schools or leaving the profession altogether. Similarly, Grant et al. (2022) identified school climate as a key moderating factor, where teachers in unsupportive environments experienced higher stress, lower morale, and increased turnover rates. A positive school climate, where teachers feel safe and supported by administrators, can mitigate some of these effects, but schools with weak TDV policies often see declining teacher retention and rising workplace dissatisfaction (Grant et al., 2022).

The Need for Systemic Interventions. Without targeted policy interventions, the ongoing impact of TDV will continue to undermine teacher well-being, professional engagement, and retention rates. Addressing these challenges requires recognizing TDV as both a workplace safety issue and a mental health concern. Schools must implement structured support systems that prioritize teacher safety, provide access to psychosocial resources, and ensure administrative accountability (Reddy & Herman, 2024). Integrating teacher well-being into school policies can help mitigate the adverse effects of TDV by fostering environments where educators feel valued, protected, and supported in sustaining long-term careers in education.

The evidence highlights the profound impact of TDV on teacher well-being, demonstrating its psychological, physical, and professional consequences. Without effective interventions, these challenges will continue to erode teacher morale, diminish instructional quality, and contribute to workforce instability. Addressing TDV requires a systemic approach that prioritizes teacher safety, mental health resources, and supportive school policies. Schools that implement proactive strategies to mitigate TDV and support teacher well-being will foster a more stable, engaged, and resilient teaching workforce.

Coping Strategies for Teachers Facing TDV

Teachers employ various strategies to cope with the challenges associated with teacher directed violence (TDV), relying on both personal resilience and institutional support.
One essential approach involves seeking social support, as engaging with colleagues, administrators, or mental health professionals provides both emotional reassurance and practical guidance. Research suggests that teachers frequently turn to their peers for encouragement and

shared strategies, highlighting the significance of a cohesive and supportive work environment (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018).

Another critical factor in mitigating the effects of TDV is professional development. Participating in training sessions on conflict resolution, classroom management, and de-escalation techniques equips teachers with the necessary tools to navigate potentially violent encounters. The American Psychological Association underscores the importance of implementing evidence-based strategies to reduce aggression in educational settings, emphasizing the role of ongoing professional learning in enhancing teacher preparedness (Espelage et al., 2014).

In addition to individual skill-building, preventive programs have proven effective in addressing violence within schools. Initiatives such as the NETWASS Prevention Model provide educators with strategies to recognize early warning signs of violent behavior and apply appropriate interventions. Research suggests that school-wide prevention efforts enhance teachers' ability to manage psychosocial crises, fostering a safer and more structured learning environment (Stilwell et al., 2025).

Beyond proactive prevention, utilizing support services is crucial for educators who have experienced violence. Access to counseling and psychological services enables teachers to process traumatic events and build resilience. Schools that offer in-house psychological support systems contribute positively to teachers’ mental well-being, helping to mitigate the long-term emotional toll of TDV (Eddy et al., 2024).

At a broader level, advocating for policy changes remains essential in establishing safer school environments. Teachers can collaborate with unions and professional organizations to push for policies that prioritize educator safety, such as zero-tolerance policies for violence and

comprehensive support systems for affected staff. Institutional commitment to addressing TDV through structured policies is a necessary component of improving workplace safety for educators (Eddy et al., 2024).

Ultimately, addressing TDV requires a comprehensive approach that integrates individual coping mechanisms with systemic interventions. While personal resilience strategies, such as professional development and peer support, empower teachers to navigate violent encounters, sustainable change depends on institutional efforts to implement preventive programs and enforce policies that prioritize teacher safety. Recognizing the prevalence of TDV and taking proactive steps to mitigate its impact is essential to fostering a secure and supportive educational environment (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018).

While these coping strategies help teachers manage the effects of violence, they do not replace the need for structured, school-wide interventions. Stilwell et al. (2025) emphasized that most school violence prevention programs focus on student safety rather than teacher protection. Their review identified only two direct intervention models aimed at reducing teacher victimization, underscoring the need for comprehensive, proactive policies rather than relying solely on teachers' individual coping mechanisms.

Interventions to Address TDV

Research suggests that proactive administrative, policy, and classroom interventions can help mitigate teacher-directed violence (TDV) (McMahon et al., 2018). One critical approach is strengthening administrative support by ensuring school leaders enforce consistent disciplinary actions against student violence. Additionally, implementing trauma-informed practices that train teachers in de-escalation techniques and classroom management strategies can improve their ability to handle aggressive behaviors effectively (Bradshaw et al., 2014).

Enhancing school security measures, such as increasing the presence of school resource officers and security personnel, has also been suggested as a means to deter violent incidents (McMahon et al., 2022). Schools that expand mental health resources for both students and teachers see better outcomes in managing violent behaviors, as these programs provide counseling services and peer support networks (Maring & Kablinsky, 2013). Creating clear and enforceable policies for reporting violent incidents is essential to protect teachers who report TDV from retaliation and administrative neglect (McMahon et al., 2022).

Beyond addressing teacher victimization, it's also vital to acknowledge the key role school administrators play in reducing violence against teachers. McMahon et al. (2018) underscore the significance of administrative support in shaping the school climate and safety, which can significantly influence the impact of violence against teachers. Their study, analyzing qualitative responses from 237 teachers, highlights how a lack of support from administrators adversely affects teachers on various levels: individually, in their interactions with students, parents, and other perpetrators, and in terms of school systems and policies.

More research is needed to understand student aggression toward teachers, including studies that follow patterns over time and test how effective interventions are (McMahon et al., 2022). Teacher training should be aimed at the specific needs of educators at different grade levels, focusing on de-escalation, communication, and developing students' socio-emotional skills. Policies should focus on evidence-based solutions that create a safe and supportive environment for everyone. McMahon et al. (2018) stress the importance of addressing teacher victimization and creating safer schools through a comprehensive, evidence-based approach. Teachers play a crucial role in educational institutions, and their experiences should be central to efforts aimed at preventing and addressing violence in schools.

Bradshaw et al. (2014) suggest several ways to support teachers and students in schools affected by community violence. Teachers need training on managing student behavior, stronger leadership from school administrators, better security, peer mediation programs, more mental health resources, and active involvement from parents. These actions help create a safer and more supportive school environment, which can reduce violence.

Studies on teacher-directed violence emphasize the critical need for reform in how these incidents are addressed. Consistent evidence links TDV to increased teacher turnover, burnout, and heightened concerns about school safety. Schools must implement measures to ensure educators are respected, protected, and supported in their work environments.

Administrative Response to TDV

Administrative responses to safety play a critical role in shaping how violence is addressed. Teachers working in schools with strong leadership and clear disciplinary procedures report feeling safer and more supported (Encina et al., 2023). McCluskey, Moon, and Saw (2024) examined how perceptions of procedural justice influenced teachers' satisfaction with school responses to student violence. Their findings showed that respectful, transparent, and inclusive decision-making by administrators played a more significant role in teacher satisfaction than the actual disciplinary outcomes. This aligns with studies highlighting that many teachers value consistency, voice, and fairness in how incidents are addressed (Moon & McClusky, 2020a). These findings reinforce the importance of school culture and leadership behavior in shaping teacher perceptions of safety and support. In contrast, schools with inconsistent enforcement of policies contribute to environments where TDV is normalized and overlooked (Moon & McCluskey, 2020a).

While school violence prevention efforts have made strides in reducing student victimization, teacher-directed violence remains an overlooked and pressing issue. TDV affects teacher well-being, job retention, and overall school climate, yet many school policies fail to explicitly address it. A more integrated approach to school safety, one that prioritizes both student and educator protection, is essential to fostering truly safe and supportive learning environments.

By recognizing TDV as a legitimate and pressing issue within the broader context of school violence, educators, policymakers, and administrators can take meaningful steps toward creating safer, more sustainable teaching environments.

TDV in Relation to School Safety Policies. The existing school safety policies primarily focus on protecting students from harm, with little formalized structure addressing violence against teachers (Nance & Heise, 2022). This lack of a policy bridge between state-level protections for school staff and actual school district enforcement leaves many teachers feeling unsupported (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018).

Furthermore, school violence policies often treat TDV as a student discipline issue rather than a school safety issue, which influences how incidents are handled. Many schools prioritize reducing student suspensions and expulsions, which may result in inconsistent responses to teacher victimization (McMahon et al., 2020; Rajan, 2021).

Recognizing teacher-directed violence (TDV) as a key issue in the broader conversation on school violence is crucial for developing more comprehensive safety policies. While there has been progress in addressing student-focused violence, there is still a pressing need to improve reporting systems, ensure greater administrative accountability, and strengthen teacher protections in current frameworks. The next section will explore how school culture impacts

TDV, focusing on how institutional norms and administrative practices shape teachers' experiences with safety and support.

Educational research uses several terms to describe violence targeting teachers, including teacher-directed violence, teacher victimization, and violence against teachers (Anderman, 2018). This study primarily adopts the term teacher-directed violence (TDV), though these terms are often used interchangeably depending on the context. There is no universally accepted definition of TDV, but most scholars agree it involves aggressive, threatening, or violent behaviors specifically targeting teachers (Espelage et al., 2014; Longobardi et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2022). Espelage et al. (2017) define TDV as acts of aggression aimed at educators, including behaviors such as disrespect, bullying, verbal threats, property damage, and physical assault. Other scholars describe it as actual, attempted, or threatened harm toward educators (Wilson et al., 2011) or any behavior that violates a school's mission, disrupts the learning environment, or endangers faculty safety (Wilson et al., 2011).

Although specific definitions vary, a common theme across the literature is that TDV targets educators directly and disrupts their ability to perform their professional duties (Zinter et al., 2023).

The occurrence of teacher-directed violence is widespread (Moon et al., 2020b) and has worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic (Peist et al., 2023). Perpetrators of violence against teachers include not just students, but also administrators, parents, and colleagues (McMahon et al., 2018). Approximately 80% of teachers have reported at least one incident of violence in the workplace. In a study conducted on 37,319 teacher participants, 21% reported being threatened with injury and 8.6% reported physical aggression enacted (Etchells et al., 2017). A national safety report stated that 9.7% of teachers in traditional public schools were threatened with

violence and 5.7% of teachers were physically attacked. Teachers' characteristics that are more susceptible to violence are white, female, homosexual, religious, older, or those teaching high school (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018).

Responses play a critical role in shaping how violence is addressed. Teachers working in schools with strong leadership and clear disciplinary procedures report feeling safer and more supported (Encina et al., 2023). In contrast, schools with inconsistent enforcement of policies contribute to environments where TDV is normalized and overlooked, ultimately eroding trust and exacerbating teacher burnout (Moon & McCluskey, 2020a).

While school violence prevention efforts have made strides in reducing student victimization, teacher-directed violence remains an overlooked and pressing issue. TDV affects teacher well-being, job retention, and overall school climate, yet many school policies fail to explicitly address it. A more integrated approach to school safety, one that prioritizes both student and educator protection, is essential to fostering truly safe and supportive learning environments. By recognizing TDV as a legitimate and pressing issue within the broader context of school violence, educators, policymakers, and administrators can take meaningful steps toward creating safer, more sustainable teaching environments.

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handled. Many schools prioritize reducing student suspensions and expulsions, which may result in inconsistent responses to teacher victimization (McMahon et al., 2020; Rajan, 2021).

Recognizing teacher-directed violence (TDV) as a legitimate and urgent concern within the broader conversation on school safety is essential for shaping more effective policies. While efforts to reduce student-focused violence have gained momentum, there remains a critical need to improve reporting systems, strengthen administrative accountability, and expand protections for educators. The next section examines how school culture contributes to TDV, emphasizing how institutional norms and leadership practices influence teachers' perceptions of safety and support. In the literature, various terms are used to describe violence against educators, including teacher-directed violence, teacher victimization, and violence against teachers (Anderman, 2018). Although this study primarily uses the term teacher-directed violence, these phrases are often applied interchangeably depending on context.

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Administrative Support

While Wang et al. (2020) argue that enforceable safety policies and strong administrative backing are key to reducing school violence, the presence of policies alone is not sufficient. This study revealed that even in schools with written safety measures, inconsistent enforcement and lack of administrative follow-through left teachers feeling unprotected. Leadership matters—but only when it translates into visible action, accountability, and a clear message that teacher safety is non-negotiable. Policies must be more than documents; they must be actively upheld in ways that foster trust and reinforce a culture of safety.

Patterns of Student Aggression Over Grade Levels

While teacher-directed violence occurred across grade levels, participants reported that physical aggression was more frequent in elementary classrooms, likely due to younger students' challenges with emotional regulation and impulse control. This finding aligns with research indicating that elementary-aged children often struggle with self-regulation, resulting in more frequent incidents of hitting, throwing objects, and destroying property (Akman, 2021). In contrast, middle school students engaged in physical aggression less frequently but with greater

intent (Schiff & Lee, 2025). As students mature, aggression tends to shift from impulsive acts to more calculated forms, including relational aggression. Crapanzano, Frick, and Terranova (2010) found that students in grades 4 through 7 exhibited two primary patterns of physical aggression: one involving mild reactive aggression and another involving high levels of both reactive and proactive aggression. Students in both groups showed difficulties with anger regulation, impulsivity, and bullying behaviors, though the combined group also displayed elevated callous-unemotional traits. These findings underscore how older students may express aggression in more intentional and emotionally detached ways, presenting unique challenges for classroom management and teacher safety.

TDV and the Need for Early Intervention

Teacher-directed violence (TDV) encompasses a range of behaviors, from verbal threats and intimidation to physical aggression. While many instances of TDV do not result in immediate injury, research suggests that tolerating lower levels of aggression can create an environment where more severe violence becomes possible. Schools that dismiss or minimize threats against educators may unknowingly contribute to a climate where violence escalates unchecked.

A stark example of this reality is the Newport News, Virginia, school shooting in January 2023, where a six-year-old student shot his teacher (Bibeau et al., 2023). The incident raised urgent questions about school safety policies, early intervention strategies, and administrative accountability in preventing TDV. Reports indicated that school officials were warned multiple times about the student's behavioral issues and the potential risk he posed to teachers, yet no decisive action was taken. This case underscores the failure of many school systems to recognize and respond to escalating behavioral patterns before they culminate in severe harm.

The Newport News shooting highlights the broader issue of how TDV is often managed within schools. When threats and lower-level aggression are categorized strictly as disciplinary infractions rather than serious safety concerns, the potential for escalation increases. Research suggests that effective intervention at the earliest signs of violence, such as verbal aggression or classroom disruptions, can significantly reduce the likelihood of more severe incidents (McMahon et al., 2022). Schools must adopt policies that do not merely react to violent incidents but instead proactively identify and address the warning signs of TDV before they reach a crisis point.

School Culture and Teacher-Directed Violence

Exploring school culture is multifaceted and intersects with various aspects of educational research. School culture shapes the values, behaviors, and expectations that define the school environment, influencing both student and teacher experiences (Taajamo et al., 2023). Utilizing Schein's Organizational Culture Model, Taajamo et al. (2023) examined school leadership, climate, innovation, teacher feedback, and job satisfaction using the TALIS 2018 survey, highlighting how underlying assumptions and values shape school culture.

One of the most critical aspects of school culture is school climate, which encompasses social interactions, relationships, safety, values, and beliefs within a school environment (Rudasill et al., 2018). Within Schein’s model, teacher-student interactions serve as artifacts of school culture, providing insight into how schools function at both visible and underlying levels. The impact of school climate on violence against teachers has been widely studied, with findings indicating that schools with strong, positive climates experience lower levels of TDV, while schools with weaker climates report higher incidents of violence against educators (Etchells et al., 2017).

Research on teacher turnover underscores the significant role that school climate, including the safety of the work environment, plays in teacher retention. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) explored the impact of school poverty on teacher turnover, finding that schools in high-poverty areas experience higher turnover rates. Schools in high-poverty, high-violence areas struggle to maintain teacher quality due to frequent turnover and the need to fill vacancies with less experienced educators. McMahon et al. (2022) and other studies highlight the link between teacher-directed violence (TDV) and this issue, as teachers in these environments face higher levels of aggression, leading many to leave the profession. When administrative support is lacking, these incidents contribute to a difficult work environment that leads to teacher turnover. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) point out that high turnover negatively affects student achievement, especially in schools already grappling with violence and instability. Teachers who feel unsafe because of TDV are more likely to leave, which can harm student outcomes. Schools should focus on strategies that address both the causes of TDV and the factors contributing to teacher turnover, improving the overall work environment.

Authoritative and Communal School Climates

Research identifies two primary school climates that influence teacher-directed violence (TDV). Authoritative climates balance structure and support by enforcing clear rules while fostering positive relationships. Schools with an authoritative climate experience fewer incidents of TDV because students understand behavioral expectations and consequences (Mayworm et al., 2023; Kapa et al., 2018). Communal climates, on the other hand, emphasize supportive relationships and shared responsibility among teachers, students, and administrators. Communal school environments contribute to higher teacher efficacy, lower teacher victimization, and stronger student engagement (Payne & Gottfredson, 2019; Payne, 2012). While both climate

models promote teacher safety and well-being, not all school environments align with these frameworks. Many schools operate in climates where disciplinary inconsistencies, weak administrative support, and external societal influences shape how violence is addressed (Pivnick & Hassinger, 2021).

Critiques of Traditional School Culture Approaches

Pivnick and Hassinger (2021) critique traditional school safety interventions, arguing that they often focus too narrowly on individual student behavior rather than the broader school and community dynamics. They advocate for a community psychoanalytic model, recognizing that school violence, including teacher-directed violence, is shaped by systemic and societal factors rather than isolated student misbehavior. Their perspective aligns with broader initiatives like President Obama's "Now Is the Time" plan and Jonathan Cohen's school climate paradigm, which emphasize holistic, systemic solutions rather than strict punitive measures.

Teacher Victimization and the Workplace Culture of Schools

Schools are often discussed as learning environments, but they are also workplaces for educators. However, the workplace culture of schools has received less attention in discussions about teacher-directed violence. Berkowitz et al. (2022) argue that schools should be examined as workplaces where teachers, like employees in other fields, are susceptible to workplace violence. Unlike other professions, teachers often lack the same level of workplace protections, leading to increased stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction when violence occurs (McMahon et al., 2024b). This gap in research highlights the urgent need to frame TDV not only as a disciplinary issue but also as a workplace safety concern requiring systemic intervention and policy reform.

School Culture and Teacher Training

Teacher training is crucial in tackling teacher-directed violence (TDV) and enhancing school culture. Programs that emphasize de-escalation, communication, and socio-emotional learning equip educators with the skills needed to manage difficult situations and reduce the risk of violent incidents (Rojan, 2021). Moreover, well-trained teachers are more likely to foster positive relationships with students, creating a supportive and respectful school environment, which contributes to a positive school culture (Cuellar, 2018).

Schools with a strong focus on teacher training and professional development tend to experience fewer incidents of TDV, as teachers are better prepared to respond to aggression and defuse tense situations before they escalate (McMahon et al., 2022). Pivnick and Hassinger (2021) highlight that when teachers are involved in violence prevention programs and receive professional development, it helps improve school climate and reduces incidents of victimization for both students and teachers. It's also crucial to incorporate teacher training into the wider school culture to ensure lasting success. Schools that prioritize creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment are more likely to foster positive teacher-student relationships, which ultimately reduces TDV. Rojan (2021) stresses the importance of a holistic approach to violence prevention, where teachers, students, and administrators collaborate to foster a positive school culture that reduces violence, including TDV.

Teacher Retention and Attrition

This section explores how teacher-directed violence (TDV) affects teacher retention, with a focus on safety concerns, emotional stress, and administrative response. Student behavior is a well-documented factor in teacher dissatisfaction and attrition. Recent national data underscore the urgency of addressing teacher turnover. According to the 2021–22 Teacher

Follow-up Survey, approximately 8% of public school teachers left the profession within a single academic year, with many citing personal life demands, burnout, or dissatisfaction with school or district support (Taie & Lewis, 2023). These findings reinforce the importance of understanding the lived experiences of educators, particularly those working in under-resourced or high-stress environments.

In a five-year study on teacher retention, Harrell, Thompson, and Brooks (2018) found that teachers were 45 times more likely to transfer schools when the schoolwide discipline environment was poor. Although the study did not focus explicitly on TDV, it highlighted student conduct as a major factor in teacher turnover and recommended further research in this area. These findings helped shape the present study's focus on TDV as a potential driver of attrition in high-need schools.

Ramos and Hughes (2020) conducted a case study in a high-poverty urban district and found that student discipline and poor classroom climate were primary concerns among teachers who chose to leave. Their findings supported the idea that financial compensation, while important, often came third to issues like time constraints and school culture. These results further validate the need to address non-financial stressors, particularly classroom discipline, when examining teacher retention.

In addition to violence, national surveys highlight burnout and chronic job-related stress as key contributors to teacher attrition. Steiner and Woo (2021) reported that nearly one in four teachers considered leaving their jobs by the end of the 2020–21 school year, largely due to increased stress and declining morale. Diliberti and Schwartz (2021) similarly found that teachers were more likely than other working adults to experience frequent job-related stress and symptoms of depression. Similarly, Erskine, Ferguson, and Ayre (2023) found that TDV had a

significant psychological impact, prompting some educators to avoid returning to work altogether. These findings reflect the perspectives of participants in this study, many of whom described emotional exhaustion, heightened anxiety, and feelings of helplessness, particularly when incidents of student aggression were ignored or minimized. For many, teacher-directed violence was not an isolated issue but an added layer to an already emotionally taxing profession.

Mentorship is another factor that can influence teacher retention. Maready, Cheng, and Bunch (2021) found that structured and sustained mentoring programs contributed meaningfully to retaining early-career teachers. Their analysis of national longitudinal data revealed that mentoring support extended beyond basic induction processes helped new teachers navigate professional challenges, build confidence, and remain in the profession. These findings align with broader efforts to improve retention through intentional relationship-building and professional guidance.

Teacher-directed violence is one of several compounding stressors that may influence a teacher's decision to leave the profession. Research shows that inadequate administrative support, poor working conditions, and lack of safety significantly contribute to teacher attrition. Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016) identified working conditions, including school leadership and safety, as primary factors in the nation's growing teacher shortage. Their national analysis found that nearly two-thirds of teachers who left the profession cited dissatisfaction with their working conditions, including concerns about student behavior and administrative response. These findings underscore the urgent need to address systemic issues within school environments, particularly those that directly affect teachers' sense of safety, support, and long-term sustainability in the field.

While these factors impact teachers across all settings, special education (SPED) teachers often face even greater risks. Educators working with students who have cognitive, emotional, or behavioral impairments are more vulnerable to aggression and physical altercations in the classroom (Anderson, 2020; DeRubeis et al., 2024). The following section explores how TDV and limited institutional support contribute to high turnover rates among SPED teachers.

Prevalence of TDV in Special Education

Studies indicate that special education teachers experience higher verbal and physical aggression rates than general education teachers (Espelage et al., 2014; McMahon et al., 2024a). Many of these incidents stem from students struggling with emotional regulation, impulse control, or cognitive disabilities that affect their ability to process frustration appropriately. Research by Oberg et al. (2024) found that SPED teachers were more likely to report being hit, bitten, or otherwise physically assaulted by students, with many describing these incidents as regular occurrences rather than isolated events.

Notably, certain student populations, such as those with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBDs), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), or intellectual disabilities, may exhibit aggressive behaviors that result in teacher injury (Reddy & Herman, 2024). These findings underscore the unique risks associated with working in specialized educational settings, where managing extreme behaviors is a daily reality.

TDV and Administrative Support

Research suggests that leadership instability contributes to teacher turnover, particularly in high-poverty, urban schools where administrative support is often inconsistent (DeMatthews et al., 2021). In schools experiencing frequent leadership changes, teacher turnover tends to be especially high when staff already have limited experience or when schools face chronic

principal turnover. These conditions can create unstable learning environments that leave teachers feeling unsupported, particularly when it comes to managing student behavior or responding to violent incidents.

Administrative and Legal Complexities

One of the most significant challenges in addressing TDV in special education is the legal framework surrounding student discipline. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act protect students with disabilities from punitive disciplinary measures that could exclude them from accessing an appropriate education. While these protections are necessary to uphold students' rights, they can sometimes limit a school's ability to impose consequences on students who engage in violent behavior (McMahon et al., 2024a).

SPED teachers often find themselves in difficult positions, where administrative policies prioritize compliance with legal mandates over teacher safety (Moon et al., 2023). Many educators report feeling unsupported when incidents occur, as administrators may be reluctant to act due to concerns about violating federal regulations (Huang et al., 2020). This dynamic contributes to a cycle where violent behaviors persist without meaningful intervention, leaving teachers feeling powerless to address safety concerns.

Impact on Special Education Teachers

The frequent exposure to violence has profound effects on special education teachers' emotional well-being and job satisfaction. Research suggests that repeated incidents of aggression contribute to chronic stress, anxiety, and even symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Brady et al., 2023). A study by Guise (2024) found that SPED teachers experiencing high levels of violence were significantly more likely to consider leaving the

profession, further exacerbating the national teacher shortage. Notably, the emotional toll of working with students who struggle with behavioral challenges can lead to feelings of helplessness and burnout. Many teachers enter special education out of a desire to support vulnerable students, but the lack of institutional safeguards often leaves them questioning their ability to continue in the field (Peist et al., 2020).

Need for Institutional Support and Training

Given the unique challenges faced by SPED teachers, schools must provide adequate training, resources, and support to help educators navigate violent incidents effectively. Studies suggest that many special education teachers do not receive sufficient training in crisis intervention, de-escalation techniques, or behavioral management strategies (DeRubeis et al., 2024). Implementing structured behavioral intervention plans (BIPs) and providing regular professional development opportunities can help teachers feel more equipped to manage student aggression.

Furthermore, administrative support plays a critical role in mitigating the effects of TDV. Schools that implement clear protocols for reporting violent incidents and provide consistent follow-up tend to have lower rates of teacher burnout and higher levels of job satisfaction (Espelage et al., 2014). Investing in mental health resources and peer support networks can also help SPED teachers process their experiences and build resilience against the emotional strain of working in high-risk environments (Oberg et al., 2024).

Teacher-directed violence is a significant yet underrecognized challenge in special education. The combination of student behavioral challenges, legal constraints, and insufficient administrative support creates an environment where SPED teachers are at an increased risk for aggression. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes teacher safety

while maintaining the integrity of legal protections for students with disabilities. Schools must take proactive steps to ensure that special education teachers have the tools, training, and institutional backing necessary to navigate these challenges effectively.

In addition to emotional and professional consequences, teacher attrition also carries hidden financial and academic costs. Sorensen and Ladd (2020) found that turnover disrupts instructional continuity and imposes significant burdens on school systems, especially in high-need areas. These losses compound the challenges already faced by under-resourced schools, reinforcing the importance of retaining experienced teachers wherever possible.

Policy and Teacher-Directed Violence (TDV)

Teacher-directed violence (TDV) exists within a complex policy landscape shaped by federal and state laws, district-level regulations, and individual school practices. While numerous policies address student behavior and school safety, there is a lack of clear, cohesive policies specifically designed to protect teachers from violence. This section explores the policy gaps surrounding TDV, examining the ways in which existing laws, district policies, and school-level enforcement impact the prevalence and response to teacher victimization.

State and Federal Laws on School Violence

Legislation addressing school violence in the United States primarily focuses on student safety, with limited direct attention given to teacher-directed violence. The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994 and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) include provisions related to school safety, but their primary emphasis is on student protection rather than ensuring a safe working environment for teachers (Cuellar, 2018). Some states have implemented specific legislation addressing violence against school employees. For example, certain jurisdictions classify assaults on teachers as enhanced criminal offenses, imposing stricter legal consequences

for students who physically attack educators (Reddy & Herman, 2024). However, enforcement of these laws varies widely, and many educators report that violent incidents are often treated as disciplinary issues rather than legal violations (Moon et al., 2023).

In addition, some states have enacted policies such as mandatory reporting laws, assault leave provisions, and school safety planning requirements designed to support teacher safety. In the southeastern United States, for instance, states like Tennessee, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina have implemented a range of measures that include arming teachers, requiring safety training, or offering legal protections for educators who experience violence (Chokshi, 2023; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2022). These policies, however, are not consistently adopted or enforced. Little is known about how familiar teachers are with these laws, whether districts are upholding them, or how effective they are in supporting affected staff. This presents a clear opportunity for future research to examine the scope, implementation, and impact of teacher protection laws across states. Such research could inform more equitable and effective policy development at the district, state, and national levels. Despite these legal frameworks, there is no federal policy that mandates a standardized approach to handling teacher-directed violence. As a result, responses to TDV continue to vary by state and district, often leaving teachers vulnerable to inconsistent protections and enforcement (McMahon et al., 2024a).

District Policies and Administrative Enforcement

At the district level, policies governing student discipline and school safety significantly influence how TDV is addressed. Many school districts operate under a restorative justice framework, which prioritizes rehabilitation over punitive measures (Yang et al., 2022). While restorative practices can be effective in certain contexts, teachers often express frustration that these approaches fail to deter repeat offenders and do not provide sufficient protection for

educators who experience violence (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018; Seo & Kruis, 2022). Some participants questioned the effectiveness of restorative practices, particularly when violent students repeatedly received the benefit of the doubt. While these practices promote reflection and dialogue, participants felt they were sometimes applied without accountability, leading to repeated offenses. Gregory et al. (2016) emphasized the potential of restorative practices to transform teacher–student relationships and promote equity in school discipline, but their success depends on consistent implementation and sustained commitment across all levels of the school system. Lustick (2020) similarly highlighted that culturally responsive restorative discipline requires structural support and cultural competence; otherwise, even well-intended practices may fall short or unintentionally reproduce inequities.

Inconsistent enforcement of discipline policies further complicates the issue. Research indicates that administrative responses to TDV often lack transparency, leaving teachers uncertain about whether incidents will be taken seriously or dismissed (Peist et al., 2020). Many educators report that school leaders are reluctant to document violent incidents due to pressure to maintain favorable disciplinary data and avoid negative public perception (Huang et al., 2020). This underreporting creates a cycle in which violent behaviors persist without meaningful intervention.

Furthermore, disparities exist in how schools handle teacher-directed violence depending on the demographic and socio-economic makeup of the student population. Studies show that schools serving high-poverty communities often experience higher rates of TDV but have fewer resources to address behavioral challenges effectively (Brady et al., 2023). The lack of funding for mental health services, security personnel, and behavior intervention programs exacerbates the issue, leaving teachers with minimal institutional support (Guise, 2024).

Challenges in Policy Implementation

Even when policies exist, their implementation is often inconsistent, leading to significant gaps in teacher protection. One key challenge is the lack of clear reporting procedures. Many schools do not have a standardized process for reporting TDV incidents, leading to underreporting and inconsistent documentation (Espelage et al., 2014). Teachers who do report incidents often face bureaucratic obstacles or fear retaliation from administrators (McMahon et al., 2024b).

Another challenge stems from the emphasis on student rights over teacher safety. While policies are essential in ensuring student protections, they sometimes create barriers to holding students accountable for violent behavior. Legal frameworks such as IDEA and Section 504 place restrictions on how students with disabilities can be disciplined, leaving teachers feeling unsupported when violent incidents occur (DeRubeis et al., 2024).

Administrative discretion in disciplinary actions further complicates policy enforcement. School leaders often have broad discretion in determining disciplinary responses to student violence, which can lead to disparities in enforcement. Some incidents result in serious consequences, while others are dismissed or minimized, depending on the school's leadership approach (Huang et al., 2020).

Notably, insufficient teacher training on policy awareness contributes to the issue. Many educators lack training on how to navigate school policies related to TDV. Research suggests that teachers are often unaware of their rights or the procedures for seeking protection when violence occurs, further exacerbating their vulnerability (Peist et al., 2020).

Recommendations for Policy Reform

Policy changes are needed at multiple levels to better protect educators from teacher-directed violence (TDV). One essential reform is the development of clear, standardized reporting protocols. Schools should implement confidential and accessible systems for documenting violent incidents, allowing teachers to report safely without fear of retaliation (McMahon et al., 2024a). Disciplinary policies are often the main mechanism for addressing TDV, but they can fall short when incidents involve students with disabilities. Schools must walk a fine line between ensuring teacher safety and upholding legal protections under IDEA and Section 504. This has led to uneven enforcement and, at times, inconsistent consequences.

Skiba et al. (2016) found that students with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by school discipline, frequently receiving punitive responses in place of appropriate behavioral interventions. These findings raise concerns about whether existing TDV policies properly distinguish between misconduct and violence, especially when teacher safety is at stake. Similarly, Cornell et al. (2025) reported that students with disabilities make up 41% of all school threat assessment referrals, suggesting potential bias and underscoring the need for clearer, more equitable policies.

To address these gaps, schools should adopt policy frameworks that support both teacher safety and student rights. This includes implementing structured threat assessment protocols that distinguish between behavioral challenges and actual safety threats. Schools should also provide clear guidance on interventions for students with disabilities who are repeatedly involved in violent incidents. Integrating behavior intervention plans (BIPs) and functional behavior assessments (FBAs) into TDV response efforts can help shift the focus from reactive punishment to proactive support.

Balancing student rights with teacher safety must be a priority in both state and federal policies. This could involve revisiting aspects of IDEA and Section 504 to allow for appropriate responses in situations involving repeated violence toward educators (Reddy & Herman, 2024).

Administrative accountability is critical. School leaders should be required to enforce policies that safeguard teachers and receive training on how to handle TDV incidents. Transparent disciplinary practices can help ensure that policies are applied consistently (Moon et al., 2023). In addition, expanding mental health and behavioral support is key. Increased funding for school-based services and interventions can help address the root causes of student aggression, ultimately reducing the likelihood of TDV (Yang et al., 2022). Ongoing training for educators on how to navigate school policies is also essential. Teachers should be familiar with their rights, reporting protocols, and available support systems. When teachers understand the policies in place, they are better equipped to advocate for themselves and help shape a safer school environment (Peist et al., 2020).

Despite broader laws focused on school violence, TDV remains overlooked in most policies. Federal and state legislation tends to prioritize student safety without offering clear guidance on protecting teachers. At the district level, inconsistent enforcement creates frustration and burnout. Addressing these gaps will require collaboration across all levels of education to ensure policies are clearly defined, consistently applied, and prioritize teacher well-being.

Finally, understanding the full scope of TDV is difficult without strong tools to measure it. Reddy et al. (2018) noted that the field lacks reliable instruments to capture the range of aggression teachers face. Without consistent definitions and data collection methods, it is difficult to assess the true scale and impact of TDV. Longobardi et al. (2019) echoed these concerns, pointing out that inconsistent methods can lead to unreliable findings. Together, these

studies make a strong case for the development of better tools that can support local decision-making and inform policy at a broader level.

Gaps in the Literature Addressed by This Study

Despite increasing research on teacher-directed violence (TDV), significant gaps remain in both the literature and the policies designed to address this issue. Much of the existing research relies on quantitative data, which provides insights into the prevalence of TDV but lacks the depth needed to understand the lived experiences of educators (Moon et al., 2023). There is a clear need for more qualitative studies that explore the emotional, psychological, and professional impacts of TDV on teachers (Espelage et al., 2014). Additionally, while some research examines the connection between TDV and teacher retention, fewer studies focus on how TDV affects overall school culture, particularly within high-risk schools (Huang et al., 2020). Understanding these experiences through qualitative research, such as phenomenological studies, could provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of TDV on educators and school environments.

One of the most pressing gaps in literature is the way teacher-directed violence (TDV) is framed within school policies and institutional responses. Rather than being addressed as a school safety issue, TDV is often treated as a student discipline problem, leading to inconsistent enforcement and inadequate support for affected educators. McMahon et al. (2018) found that administrative support is a critical factor in teachers' experiences with school violence, yet many teachers reported that incidents of TDV were either ignored or minimized by school administrators. This perspective minimizes the seriousness of TDV and contributes to underreporting, as teachers may feel that administrative responses prioritize student behavioral management over their personal safety. Moon et al. (2023) also highlighted that chronic

victimization of teachers leads to decreased job satisfaction, emotional distress, and a weakened connection to their school environment. Schools tend to implement disciplinary measures for student misbehavior rather than recognizing TDV as part of a broader workplace safety concern that warrants stronger intervention policies. A shift in how TDV is categorized would require school systems to acknowledge it as a form of workplace violence, which could lead to clearer policies, improved enforcement, and better protections for teachers. Furthermore, distinguishing between lower-level behavioral infractions and serious violent incidents would ensure that responses are appropriate, preventing minor classroom disruptions from being conflated with acts of violence (McMahon et al., 2018; Moon et al., 2023).

Teacher-directed violence (TDV) remains an underrecognized workplace safety issue, often overshadowed by broader school safety concerns that focus primarily on student victimization (Berkowitz et al., 2021). In their socioecological analysis, Berkowitz et al. (2021) highlight how institutional responses to teacher victimization are often inconsistent, with administrative decision-making playing a critical role in determining whether teachers feel supported or vulnerable after violent incidents. Their findings emphasize that without clear policies and consistent enforcement, teachers may be reluctant to report TDV incidents due to fear of retaliation or administrative inaction. This aligns with broader concerns about policy gaps in TDV prevention, underreporting, and the need for systematic reforms to address teacher safety.

Another gap in the literature involves the absence of clear, standardized policies that specifically address TDV. While schools have protocols for handling student aggression, these measures often lack structured frameworks for protecting teachers. Current policies frequently fail to provide teacher-specific protections, leaving educators to navigate violent incidents

without clear guidelines on reporting, administrative response, or follow-up support (McMahon et al., 2024b). Research suggests that effective prevention efforts should include comprehensive policies that hold students accountable for violence against teachers while also ensuring fair and equitable discipline practices (Mayer et al., 2021). Establishing mandatory reporting policies is critical to ensuring that TDV incidents are consistently documented and addressed rather than overlooked (Zinter et al., 2023). Additionally, teacher safety training should incorporate de-escalation techniques and crisis response strategies to better equip educators in high-risk situations (McMahon et al., 2022).

There is also limited research on the long-term effects of TDV on teachers' mental and physical health and how these experiences influence their decisions about staying in or leaving the profession. While some studies focus on immediate responses to violent incidents, fewer explore how repeated exposure to TDV over time alters teachers' well-being and career trajectories. Educators who experience chronic violence often report high levels of stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction, yet there is insufficient research on the cumulative impact of these experiences on their professional retention.

In addition, much of the current literature overlooks the systemic and organizational factors that contribute to TDV. Most studies focus on individual incidents without considering how broader issues, such as school policies, leadership practices, and institutional culture, shape the prevalence and response to TDV. A more comprehensive approach is needed to examine how administrative support, school climate, and teacher training interact to create or reduce violent environments. Schools with strong administrative backing and clear safety protocols often report fewer incidents of TDV, suggesting that systemic changes are necessary to improve teacher protection.

Further, the relationship between TDV and teacher attrition in high-poverty, high-violence schools remains underexplored. Studies indicate that teachers in these environments face disproportionately high levels of TDV, yet there is little research on how these experiences influence their decisions to leave the profession. Understanding the compounded effects of TDV and teacher turnover in these schools is critical for developing targeted interventions that promote teacher retention and school stability.

Also, more research is needed on post-incident support for teachers who experience TDV. While some studies highlight the role of professional development and peer support, few examine the effectiveness of structured interventions aimed at helping teachers recover from violent encounters. Identifying best practices for supporting educators after an incident would help ensure that they feel safe and valued in their roles, reducing the likelihood of professional disengagement.

In addition to its direct impact on teachers, TDV has broader implications for student outcomes and overall school climate. While research has extensively documented the effects of school violence on student well-being, there is a lack of studies examining how TDV influences classroom environments, instructional quality, and student engagement. Teachers who feel unsafe or unsupported may struggle to maintain classroom order, which can negatively affect student learning. Future research should explore the indirect consequences of TDV on student achievement, further underscoring the importance of teacher safety within the broader school safety conversation.

Addressing these gaps requires a shift in how TDV is conceptualized, studied, and managed within schools. By reframing TDV as a school safety issue rather than a discipline problem, developing policies that prioritize teacher protection, and expanding research on the

long-term impact of violence on educators, schools can take meaningful steps toward fostering safer, more supportive environments for both teachers and students.

Summary

This chapter explores how school culture, shaped by leadership and shared values, affects teacher-directed violence (TDV). Using Schein's Organizational Culture Model, it examined how the school environment influences responses to TDV. Research shows that schools with clear rules, strong leadership, and a supportive culture tend to have fewer incidents of TDV, while inconsistent enforcement and weak leadership contribute to higher rates.

The chapter also addressed the effects of TDV on teacher retention. Teachers who experience violence, especially without meaningful administrative support, are at greater risk of emotional exhaustion, burnout, and leaving the profession. This is particularly concerning in urban schools, where high turnover disrupts continuity and student outcomes. Special education teachers face even greater challenges due to frequent exposure to student aggression and limited institutional support. These conditions contribute to higher attrition rates and reflect systemic issues in teacher retention.

Beyond the personal and professional toll, turnover also creates a significant financial burden for school districts. García and Weiss (2019) estimated that replacing a single teacher costs an average of $21,000, with national turnover costing more than $8 billion each year. Addressing TDV and improving school culture is essential not only for supporting teachers but also for reducing the economic strain on the education system.

The chapter concluded with a review of policy gaps. Inconsistencies between state, district, and school policies often lead to underreporting and inconsistent enforcement, making it

difficult to address TDV effectively. These findings highlight the need for clearer guidelines, aligned policies, and stronger leadership to create safe and supportive environments for teachers.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Teacher-directed violence (TDV) pervades K-12 schools, posing a significant yet understudied concern for educator well-being and school functioning (Curran et al., 2019). While research on school violence has historically focused on student victimization, there was a critical gap in understanding the impact of violence directed at teachers. Educators who experienced TDV often endured psychological distress, job dissatisfaction, and diminished professional efficacy, yet their experiences were rarely prioritized in policy discussions or school safety initiatives.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 teachers who had been subjected to teacher-directed violence by students within school environments located in the southeastern United States. Through an in-depth examination of teachers' narratives, this study sought to provide insight into how school culture influenced TDV, how educators perceived institutional responses to violence, and how these experiences impacted their professional decisions.

This chapter outlines the methodology and research design used to investigate teacher-directed violence. It begins by identifying qualitative research as the selected methodology and phenomenology as the chosen design. The rationale for phenomenology is discussed, including its alignment with the study's research questions and its ability to capture teachers' subjective experiences. A justification is also provided for rejecting alternative qualitative methodologies.

The chapter then describes the study's population and sample selection criteria, including participant recruitment strategies and the rationale for sample size determination. The data collection process is detailed, focusing on semi-structured interviews as the primary method for gathering rich, first-hand accounts of teacher-directed violence. The data analysis process

follows Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, ensuring a rigorous thematic exploration of participants' experiences. The chapter concludes with discussions on assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and ethical assurances, emphasizing measures taken to uphold participant confidentiality, informed consent, and research integrity.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of K-12 public school teachers working in traditional public schools across the southeastern United States who had experienced teacher-directed violence (TDV) by students. Traditional public schools are government-funded educational institutions that operate under the oversight of local school districts or state education agencies and are open to all students regardless of socioeconomic background or academic ability (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). This population was appropriate because it included educators with direct, personal experiences of TDV, allowing them to share their perspectives on how violence impacted their well-being, teaching environment, and career decisions.

This population obtained a sample of eight teachers, aligning with qualitative research standards for phenomenological studies, which emphasize depth of lived experiences over large sample sizes. The final sample included one male and seven female participants from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds: one Hispanic, two White, one biracial, and four African American teachers.

According to Guest et al. (2006), saturation in phenomenological studies typically reaches six participants, while Saunders et al. (2017) emphasized that saturation occurs when no new data emerges that expands understanding of the phenomenon. While the initial target was

nine to twelve participants, saturation was achieved with eight, as no additional themes or insights emerged from the final two interviews.

This aligns with prior qualitative research, which suggests that six to twelve participants are often sufficient when data is rich and themes are well developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Addressing Secondary Teacher Participation and Saturation

Recruitment efforts included elementary, middle, and high school teachers, ensuring a range of grade-level experiences were captured. However, secondary teachers (grades six through twelve) displayed a consistent pattern of reluctance to participate despite multiple recruitment attempts. Several initially expressed interest but later withdrew or ceased responding. One middle school teacher explicitly declined participation despite thanking the researcher for the invitation, without offering an explanation.

This pattern of avoidance is an important finding because it suggests that teachers in secondary settings may perceive greater risks in discussing teacher-directed violence due to professional repercussions, administrative oversight, or school culture norms. While additional secondary teacher voices may have provided more variation, their absence did not hinder saturation.

By the sixth interview, clear patterns had emerged, and subsequent interviews only reinforced the same core themes. The final sample was sufficient given that saturation rather than participant count is the gold standard for qualitative rigor. The consistency of findings across grade levels reinforces the trustworthiness of the data and supports the validity of the study's conclusions.

Instrumentation

This study utilized researcher-developed materials to support participant selection and data collection, including an inclusionary screener, semi-structured interview questions, an interview protocol, and a secure video conferencing platform for remote interviews. These materials were designed to identify eligible participants, facilitate data collection, and ensure alignment with the research questions and theoretical framework.

The inclusionary screener served as the initial instrument for participant selection (see Appendix A). It included demographic items and questions designed to determine whether prospective participants had experienced a student-initiated violent encounter. This instrument ensured that only participants who met the established inclusion criteria were selected for the study. Once participants were identified, consent forms were distributed via email, and participants were required to print, sign, scan, and return the form before participating in an interview.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided a flexible yet structured approach to gathering participants' lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews follow a structured format while allowing for open-ended responses, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences in depth (Stokes, 2011). The interview protocol included 11 main open-ended questions, supplemented by two standard probing questions (see Appendix B). Additional probing questions were asked as needed to encourage deeper reflection and richer data. The interview questions were designed to capture the lived experiences of teacher-directed violence while also exploring teachers' perceptions of school culture, particularly in relation to artifacts and underlying assumptions aligned with Schein's Organizational Culture Model (Schein, 1990).

Because this study did not use pre-existing instruments developed by another researcher, no permission was required. All researcher-developed instruments were carefully constructed and revised through expert feedback to ensure validity and alignment with the study's purpose. To strengthen content validity and clarity, the instruments underwent a multi-step review process that included expert evaluation, field testing, and Institutional Review Board approval. First, a licensed mental health counselor specializing in educator well-being reviewed the interview questions to identify any phrasing that might be overly triggering or emotionally distressing. In addition, a professor with experience mentoring doctoral students and serving as a dissertation chair reviewed both the inclusionary screener and interview protocol for clarity, alignment with research objectives, and theoretical grounding. Based on this feedback, the wording of several questions was refined to improve clarity and sensitivity, and the screener was revised to strengthen participant selection criteria.

Following these refinements, the instruments were approved by the dissertation chair and submitted for Institutional Review Board approval. To further assess usability and effectiveness, a small-scale field test was conducted with two urban teachers who met the study's eligibility criteria but did not participate in the final research. These teachers completed a mock interview and provided feedback on question clarity, interview flow, and overall experience. Participants reported that the virtual interview format was convenient and appreciated the option to turn off their cameras, which reduced potential discomfort when discussing sensitive experiences. They also indicated that the questions covered a comprehensive range of topics. Based on their feedback, one minor modification was made: interview questions were displayed on the screen during virtual interviews to improve participant engagement and recall. This process confirmed

that the interview protocol was effective, well-structured, and conducive to eliciting rich, detailed responses.

The study's interviews were conducted using a secure video conferencing platform, which supported privacy, accessibility, and participant convenience. This method allowed participants to engage from a location of their choosing, minimizing potential discomfort associated with discussing sensitive experiences in person. With expert feedback incorporated, field testing completed, and institutional approval secured, the final instruments were judged appropriate for use in this study. The inclusionary screener supported proper participant selection, and the semi-structured interview protocol was optimized for depth, clarity, and participant comfort.

Study Procedures

This study aimed to ascertain teachers' lived experiences regarding teacher-directed violence, their perceptions of school culture, and their career decisions following these experiences. The research focused on K-12 educators from public schools in the southeastern United States.

Approval and Recruitment Process

Before initiating data collection, the study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from National University to ensure that ethical guidelines were met. Initially, approval was sought from a large southern school district to recruit participants; however, due to a lack of district approval, participants were instead recruited individually from the southeastern United States. Prospective participants were contacted via email through professional networks, social media, and teacher organizations. Prospective participants received a recruitment flyer that provided an overview of the study, eligibility criteria, and contact details. Teachers who

expressed interest were sent a link to an inclusionary screener designed to collect demographic information and eligibility criteria.

The screener determined whether participants met the study's selection criteria, ensuring that only teachers who had experienced teacher-directed violence within the last five years were included. Once a minimum of nine eligible participants were identified, including representation from elementary, middle, and high school teachers, they were invited to participate in the study. However, eight participants ultimately completed the study, as data saturation was reached.

Consent Process

Upon confirmation of eligibility, participants received informed consent forms via email, which outlined the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and permission for audio recording. Participants were required to print, sign, scan, and return the consent form before scheduling their interviews. Prior to the start of each interview, the researcher reviewed the consent form with participants and obtained verbal consent to ensure they fully understood their rights, including the voluntary nature of their participation.

Interview Process

Interviews were conducted one-on-one via Zoom, a secure video conferencing platform. While the school district where participants worked used Microsoft Teams, Zoom was chosen to ensure confidentiality by preventing participants from using their work-based video conferencing system. This decision helped maintain privacy and reduce the risk of professional oversight.

Each interview was scheduled for approximately 60 minutes, though some lasted up to 75 minutes, depending on the depth of participants' responses. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed for open-ended discussions, enabling participants to provide detailed accounts

of their experiences with teacher-directed violence, their perceptions of school culture, and how these experiences influenced their professional decisions.

Participants were informed in advance that all interviews would be video recorded and transcribed automatically using Zoom's transcription feature. In addition to the signed consent form, the researcher reiterated consent at the beginning of each interview, and participants verbally acknowledged their agreement to proceed with recording.

Transcription and Member Checking

Following each interview, a transcript was generated from the video conferencing platform. To ensure accuracy and trustworthiness of the data, a member-checking process was conducted (Gall et al., 2007). Participants received a copy of their interview transcription via email and were asked to review their responses for accuracy, clarity, and any necessary corrections. This step allowed participants to clarify their statements or remove any content they no longer wished to be included in the final dataset.

To maintain confidentiality, all transcripts were de-identified, ensuring that no personally identifiable information, including participant names or school affiliations, was included. If participants requested edits or clarifications, their feedback was incorporated into the final transcript before coding and analysis. In cases where additional clarification was necessary, a follow-up interview was discussed as an option.

Data Security and Confidentiality

All collected data, including interview recordings and transcriptions, were securely stored on an encrypted, password-protected device accessible only to the researcher. To maintain confidentiality, all email communications with participants were conducted through a private, non-work email address. By following this systematic data collection process, this study ensured

ethical integrity, participant privacy, and methodological rigor, enabling a trustworthy and replicable exploration of teacher-directed violence and its impact on educators.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative methodology to examine the victimization experiences of K-12 teachers subjected to teacher-directed violence (TDV) by students in urban schools in the southeastern United States. A qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of complex human experiences, enabling the researcher to understand and interpret the meanings that teachers attributed to their experiences (Creswell, 2014). Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research prioritizes personal narratives and the contextual factors that shape individuals' realities. This approach was essential for capturing the nuanced emotional, psychological, and professional impact of teacher-directed violence.

A phenomenological research design was selected to provide a detailed examination of teachers' experiences with violence, school culture, and institutional responses. Phenomenological research, grounded in philosophy and psychology, is centered on describing lived experiences rather than testing hypotheses (Moustakas, 1994). This study relied on participants' first-hand accounts, ensuring that their voices and perspectives were at the forefront of the analysis. As Creswell (2014) explained, phenomenology sought to "describe the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 14). By using this approach, the study provided insight into how teachers experienced TDV, how they perceived school culture as influencing those experiences, and how they responded personally and professionally to violence in the workplace.

Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology was used as the guiding framework, emphasizing the importance of bracketing, a process in which the researcher sets aside personal biases and assumptions to focus solely on participants' accounts. The goal was to allow the phenomenon to emerge as described by those who lived it, without researcher interpretation shaping the findings prematurely. Through semi-structured interviews, the study captured rich, descriptive narratives, revealing patterns in how teachers navigated TDV, how school culture shaped their experiences, and how administrative responses influenced their well-being and career decisions.

The phenomenological research design was particularly suited for this study because it aligned with the research's focus on meaning-making. Teachers who experience violence in schools do not merely recount factual events; they assign meaning to these experiences, interpreting them through personal, cultural, and institutional lenses. This study sought to understand those interpretations and to explore how teachers' perspectives on violence and school culture influenced their decision-making, professional resilience, and job satisfaction. A phenomenological approach ensured that the depth and complexity of these experiences were captured authentically, rather than being reduced to general categories or statistical measures. Several alternative qualitative methodologies were considered but ultimately deemed less appropriate for this research. A case study approach was not selected because it typically involves an in-depth analysis of a single bounded system, such as a particular school or district (Yin, 2018). Since this study sought to examine teachers' experiences across multiple schools, a case study would have been too narrow in scope. Similarly, an ethnographic approach was ruled out because ethnography requires long-term immersion in a cultural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Given that TDV is a deeply personal and often internalized experience, observing

teachers in their natural work environment would not have effectively captured the emotional and psychological dimensions of their encounters with violence.

Grounded theory, another common qualitative approach, was also considered but was ultimately not selected because its primary objective is to generate new theoretical frameworks from data (Charmaz, 2017). While this can be valuable, this study was not designed to develop a new theory but rather to describe and interpret teachers' lived experiences within an existing theoretical framework: Schein's Organizational Culture Model. A grounded theory approach would have shifted the study's focus away from deep personal narratives toward abstract theoretical development, which was not the primary goal.

Similarly, narrative inquiry was not chosen because it typically centers on individual life stories, focusing on the chronology of events (Riessman, 2008). While narrative inquiry would have captured compelling personal stories, this study sought to identify shared themes and patterns across multiple participants, rather than constructing individual case histories. Phenomenology, by contrast, allowed for a holistic yet thematic exploration of teachers' experiences, making it the most effective choice.

By selecting phenomenology, this study prioritized the voices of teachers while maintaining a structured analytical approach to identifying commonalities across their experiences. The research design ensured that teachers' perspectives were central, while also allowing for systematic data analysis that provided meaningful insights into the relationship between teacher-directed violence and school culture.

Limitations

This study had three primary limitations that may have influenced the interpretation of the findings. The first was the small sample size. Although the study aimed to include 9 to 12

participants, the final sample consisted of eight teachers from urban schools in the Southeastern United States. This smaller group allowed for in-depth exploration of lived experiences, but it may not capture the full range of perspectives that exist among teachers in other school settings or regions.

The second limitation was the lack of high school representation. Although the study sought input from elementary, middle, and high school teachers, no high school educators responded to the recruitment efforts. As a result, the findings may not reflect the experiences of teachers working with older students, who may face different challenges related to teacher-directed violence. The third limitation was the reliance on self-reported data. Participants shared their personal experiences through interviews. While this approach aligned with the goals of phenomenological research, recall bias or unintentional filtering of events is always a possibility. Open-ended questions and member checking were used to support the accuracy and credibility of participants' accounts.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to K–12 public school teachers in the Southeastern United States who had experienced teacher-directed violence (TDV) within the last five years. Although most participants came from traditional public schools, charter school teachers were eligible if they met the study's criteria. Private school teachers were not included.

The study was also bound by its sample size and qualitative research design. The initial goal was to recruit between 9 and 12 teachers across elementary, middle, and high school levels. The final sample included eight participants, one male and seven female educators who represented a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. This small, purposefully selected group

aligned with the goals of phenomenological research, which prioritizes depth over breadth to explore participants' lived experiences in greater detail (Moustakas, 1994).

Since a phenomenological design was used, the purpose was not to produce generalizable findings but to explore how teachers made meaning of their experiences. A smaller sample allowed for more focused interviews and greater attention to each participant's unique perspectives. This approach is consistent with the goals of qualitative research, which often favors smaller groups to support rich, descriptive engagement (Creswell, 2014).

The study was further delimited to teacher perceptions only. While school leaders and students influence the broader dynamics of TDV, their perspectives were not included. The focus remained on teachers' experiences, coping strategies, and views about how TDV shaped their well-being, professional decisions, and perceptions of school climate.

Schein's Organizational Culture Model (1990) was the guiding framework and informed the study's boundaries. The research focused on how teachers interpreted their school's culture in the context of TDV, including how leadership practices, daily routines, and shared values influenced their experiences and decisions about whether to remain in the profession.

These boundaries were established to align with the study's purpose, research questions, and qualitative approach.

Data Analysis

Interviews Data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research that involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Naeem et al., 2023). The goal of thematic analysis in this study was to capture implicit and explicit meanings within

participants' accounts of teacher-directed violence and school culture while ensuring alignment with Schein's Organizational Culture Model.

Delve qualitative analysis software was used to facilitate the coding process. Each interview transcription was uploaded into Delve, where an initial round of coding was performed using vivo coding, which preserved participants' exact words to ensure their experiences were represented authentically (Martin, 2017). This inductive approach allowed for descriptive, participant-driven categorization of data. In addition to in vivo coding, a priori coding was incorporated to identify key themes related to Schein's Organizational Culture Model, ensuring that codes aligned with the study's theoretical framework. The researcher then examined relationships between codes and combined similar codes into broader categories through axial coding, an approach that organizes data into higher-level patterns and connections (Mishra & Dey, 2022).

As categories were refined, themes began to emerge. The researcher systematically merged overlapping categories until four primary themes were established. The first theme, inconsistencies in administrative responses, captured participants' concerns about varying reactions from school leadership when addressing teacher-directed violence. The second theme, lack of meaningful consequences, reflected the perceived inadequacy of disciplinary measures following incidents of student violence. The third theme, culture and policy implementation, highlighted discrepancies between official school policies and the lived experiences of educators navigating violent encounters. The final theme, discrepancies in disciplinary consequences, addressed inconsistencies in how students were disciplined for acts of aggression toward teachers.

To further validate these themes, transcripts were re-read manually while detailed notes were taken and direct participant quotes that supported each thematic category extracted. These quotes were organized into an Excel spreadsheet to ensure that thematic findings were clearly linked to participants' own words. The final phase of analysis involved selective coding, in which the researcher reviewed data segments that directly addressed the research questions and refined themes to align with the study's purpose.

This systematic process ensured that the analysis remained grounded in participants' lived experiences while addressing the study's central research questions on TDV and school culture. By applying multiple coding techniques and utilizing Delve, a qualitative analysis software, the study maintained analytical rigor and transparency. Delve was used to organize transcripts, apply initial and axial coding, and track emerging themes across participants' responses. This approach ensured that findings were accurate, credible, and aligned with the research problem.

Assumptions

Assumptions are ubiquitous in research, representing beliefs that are generally accepted within a research community. Scates (1940) argued that the central assumption in any study is that the data collected are accurate. Nkwake (2019) identified three key functions of assumptions: they guide argumentation and conclusions, influence methodological choices, and shape theoretical frameworks. He further emphasized that clarifying assumptions helps refine research questions and ensures that findings are precise and relevant (Nkwake, 2019, p. 99).

Several key assumptions underpinned this study. One assumption was that teacher participants responded candidly and honestly to the interview questions, providing authentic accounts of their experiences with teacher-directed violence (TDV) and perceptions of school

culture. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, the study relied on the assumption that participants felt comfortable enough to share their perspectives truthfully without fear of repercussions. Research indicates that teachers often feel compelled to disclose their experiences of violence when they are provided with a safe space for expression. For example, McMahon et al. (2022) found that teachers are more likely to report incidents of TDV when they feel supported and when there is a focus on their mental well-being.

Another assumption in this study was that teachers bear primary responsibility for managing student behavior, including incidents of TDV. This assumption stemmed from the prevailing cultural and institutional expectations within schools, where educators are often required to handle disciplinary issues as part of their role. It was further assumed that all teachers within their respective school cultures faced similar expectations regarding the management of TDV. Research supports this assumption, with Mayworm et al. (2021) suggesting that an authoritative school climate, characterized by clear rules and structures, reduces TDV because it enhances teacher efficacy in managing classroom behavior and maintains a supportive environment.

Notably, it was assumed that teachers may not always have access to adequate resources or institutional support to mitigate incidents of TDV. This assumption was grounded in existing literature, which suggests that many educators lack sufficient training, policies, or administrative backing to effectively address violent encounters with students. Peist et al. (2023) emphasize that a lack of administrative support is a critical factor that exacerbates the problem of TDV, as teachers report feeling unsupported when managing aggression from students, parents, and even colleagues.

The study also operated under the assumption that principals were fully aware or acknowledged that TDV could impact the overall school culture and climate. This assumption was relevant in interpreting the extent to which school leadership played a role in shaping teachers' experiences and institutional responses to TDV. Zinter et al. (2023) suggest that when principals recognize and address the impact of TDV, the school climate improves, and teachers experience less victimization and burnout.

These assumptions were necessary to frame the study and guide its methodological approach. Recognizing these underlying assumptions helped ensure that the research remained focused on exploring teachers' lived experiences while acknowledging the potential limitations inherent in qualitative inquiry. This approach ensures that the findings are relevant and grounded in the real-world experiences of educators dealing with TDV.

Ethical Assurances

This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the National University before data collection commenced. Data collection began only after IRB approval was obtained, confirming that the study met ethical research standards. Another fundamental requirement for conducting research involving human subjects is securing a Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification, which confirms the researcher's understanding of ethical research principles and compliance with federal research guidelines. Lastly, another fundamental requirement for conducting research involving human subjects is compliance with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The three core principles of the Belmont Report, which include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, were central to the ethical considerations of this study. The principle of respect for people was

upheld by ensuring that all participants engaged voluntarily and with full informed consent. Each participant received an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, potential risks, and confidentiality protections. They were given the opportunity to ask questions before signing, and they were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary. Furthermore, participants had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

The principle of beneficence, which requires researchers to minimize harm and maximize potential benefits, was adhered to through careful research design. Given the sensitive nature of teacher-directed violence, several measures were taken to mitigate psychological distress. Prospective participants whose cases were under active investigation were excluded to protect individuals facing ongoing legal, administrative, or emotional challenges related to their violent encounters. Additionally, throughout the interview process, participants were informed that they could pause for breaks or terminate the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable recounting their experiences. The researcher also provided resources for counseling services to support participants who may have needed emotional assistance.

The principle of justice was upheld by ensuring fair and equitable participant selection. Recruitment efforts targeted a diverse sample of K-12 teachers across various public-school settings in the southeastern United States. The study did not exclude participants based on gender, race, or socioeconomic background, ensuring that findings reflected a range of teacher experiences with teacher-directed violence. Additionally, the research design ensured that no group was unfairly burdened or excluded from the potential benefits of the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity were carefully maintained throughout the research process. While approval was initially sought from a specific school district, participants were ultimately recruited independently from public schools across the southeastern United States. To

ensure anonymity, all identifiable information was removed from transcripts, and participants were assigned unique pseudonyms rather than using their real names. Schools were not identified by name but were instead referred to as "the targeted school district" or by the general geographic region of "urban schools in the southeastern United States."

To further safeguard privacy, several additional measures were implemented. Participants were asked to use personal devices such as a laptop or phone not provided by their school district when participating in interviews. The video conferencing platform, Zoom, which was not associated with participants' school districts, was used to prevent any digital tracking or association with their professional accounts. All communication between the researcher and participants occurred through personal email accounts or private phone numbers rather than work issued contact information.

The secure storage of research data was a top priority. Digital transcripts were stored in a password-protected vault on the researcher’s personal laptop, which was not affiliated with any school district. Hard copies of transcripts, including signed consent forms, were secured in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. These data protection measures ensured that confidentiality was upheld in accordance with IRB guidelines.

The researcher's role in this phenomenological study was to capture and describe the lived experiences of teachers who had encountered teacher-directed violence (Creswell, 2014). Acknowledging the potential for research bias is particularly important in qualitative research, where subjectivity can influence data interpretation. The researcher had firsthand experience with teacher-directed violence as a K-12 educator, which provided valuable insight into the study topic but also posed a risk of personal biases shaping the analysis.

To mitigate potential bias, the researcher used bracketing, a process that involves setting aside personal experiences to focus solely on participants' narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2024). By consciously compartmentalizing prior encounters with teacher-directed violence, the researcher worked to ensure that participants' voices remained the central focus of the study and that findings were not unduly influenced by personal perspectives. Adhering to a structured coding process, maintaining a reflexive journal, and engaging in continuous self-reflection further helped to reduce researcher bias and enhance the credibility of the findings.

This study adhered to all ethical research standards, ensuring that participants were treated with dignity, confidentiality, and respect throughout the research process.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology used to explore teachers' lived experiences with teacher-directed violence (TDV) and their perceptions of school policies designed to address such incidents. A qualitative phenomenological approach was selected to capture the depth and complexity of teachers' experiences, focusing on the meaning they ascribe to violent encounters in their professional environments. This methodology was appropriate for uncovering the nuances of TDV that may not be fully captured through quantitative methods or policy reviews alone.

A phenomenological design was chosen to center the study on teacher perspectives, allowing for an in-depth examination of how TDV influences their well-being, job satisfaction, and perceptions of school culture. This approach emphasized the lived experiences of educators rather than relying on numerical data, enabling the researcher to explore not only what happened but also how participants interpreted and responded to those experiences.

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling to ensure that they met the study's specific criteria. All participants were K-12 teachers who had experienced teacher-directed violence within the past five years while working in urban, southeastern schools. These teachers represented various grade levels, subject areas, and years of experience. The study prioritized confidentiality by assigning pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, allowing teachers to describe their encounters with TDV in their own words. The interviews followed a flexible guide with open-ended questions, ensuring consistency while also allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences. The researcher also took detailed field notes to capture contextual details and personal reflections, adding depth to the interview data.

Data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method, which involved several key steps. First, interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. The researcher then coded the transcripts using NVivo software to identify emerging themes. Codes were systematically grouped into broader patterns that reflected key aspects of TDV, including teacher coping mechanisms and policy effectiveness. To ensure credibility and rigor, strategies such as member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail were implemented.

The study adhered to institutional review board (IRB) protocols to protect participant rights and maintain ethical integrity. Participants were provided with informed consent documents outlining the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity was ensured using pseudonyms, and given the sensitive nature of TDV, participants were provided with referrals for counseling resources if needed.

This chapter detailed the study's methodological framework, emphasizing the qualitative phenomenological approach, rigorous data collection and analysis, and ethical safeguards

implemented to ensure participant well-being. By employing semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study captured the complex realities of teacher-directed violence from those who experience it firsthand. These methods ensured that teachers' voices were authentically represented, providing a solid foundation for the study's findings. The next chapter presents the results, highlighting key themes that emerged from participants' experiences.

Chapter 4: Findings

The problem addressed in this study was that teacher-directed violence pervades K-12 schools, posing a significant yet understudied concern for educator well-being and school performance (Curran et al., 2019). While discussions on school violence typically revolve around student experiences, there remains a substantial knowledge gap regarding the dynamics, consequences, and underlying factors of violence directed at teachers (Peist et al., 2023; McMahon et al., 2024b; Moon et al., 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of K-12 teachers who have been subjected to violence by students within school environments. The study sought to understand the nuanced dynamics, consequences, and underlying factors of teacher-directed violence, aiming to fill the significant knowledge gap. By delving into teachers' lived experiences, perceptions, and coping mechanisms regarding violence, the research shed light on the multifaceted impacts of such incidents on educators' well-being, job satisfaction, and professional decisions.

This chapter presents the findings from interviews conducted with teachers in urban schools in the southeastern United States. The study's research questions, which examine the teachers' violent interactions with their students, guided the data analysis. The chapter also examines perceptions of the effectiveness of existing school policies and procedures in reducing incidents of TDV.

The chapter begins with an overview of the data collection process and participant demographic information, followed by a presentation of the findings. Themes about the teachers' experiences are discussed, and direct quotes from participant interviews are included to illustrate

key patterns. The chapter concludes by evaluating the findings and considering their implications within the broader context of school culture and existing literature.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is crucial for establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This study used several strategies to ensure the integrity of the findings, which accurately reflect the experiences of participants who encountered teacher-directed violence (TDV).

Credibility was established through triangulation, member checking, and regular data verification. Triangulation compared participant stories across multiple interviews and cross-checked survey responses with interview transcripts. This helped confirm the consistency of initial answers with later reflections. Member checking allowed participants to review and verify their transcribed interviews for accuracy. They could also clarify, expand, or amend their responses. Consultation with a qualitative expert further ensured that findings reflected participant voices while minimizing potential researcher bias.

Transferability was supported by providing descriptions and context, helping readers determine whether the findings apply to their own educational settings. The study included participant narratives, excerpts from interviews, and details on school demographics, teacher backgrounds, and the teachers' work environments, such as the schools' cultures and available resources. While qualitative research does not focus on statistical generalizability, the depth of participant descriptions offers insight into TDV’s broader implications.

Dependability was supported by an audit trail documenting the research process, including decisions, coding, and data analysis steps. A systematic approach to coding and thematic analysis ensured that findings could be traced back to the original data. Researcher

memos recorded choices, adjustments, and justifications throughout the study. Confirmability was achieved by using a reflexivity journal, which helped identify potential biases during data collection and analysis. Direct quotes from participants were used to ground the findings in their own words, and intercoder agreement checks confirmed that the themes were not shaped by individual bias. Direct participant quotes were used extensively to support findings, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in participants' own words. Coding consistency was maintained through intercoder agreement checks, where emerging themes were cross-verified to ensure they were not shaped by individual bias.

By implementing triangulation, member checking, thick description, audit trails, peer debriefing, and researcher reflexivity, this study ensured credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These measures strengthen the study's reliability and provide a solid foundation for interpreting teacher-directed violence (TDV) within school settings.

Participant Demographics

Participants in this study were K-12 educators from urban, southeastern schools, all of whom met the eligibility criteria of experiencing teacher-directed violence (TDV) within the past five years, holding the required credentials, and maintaining an active teaching license. The sample included early-career teachers with five years or less of experience and veteran educators with over 20 years in the field. Participants represented both elementary and secondary education, with backgrounds in general education, special education, and elective courses, teaching in high-poverty Title I schools and neighborhood public schools serving diverse student populations.

Participants discussed how school culture, administrative responses, and available support systems influenced their experiences with TDV. They also shared how training,

resilience, and school policies shaped their responses to classroom aggression. These insights are central to the study's findings. Table 1 summarizes participant demographics, including years of experience, educational background, grade levels taught, and types of violent incidents encountered. Pseudonyms have been assigned to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1

Participant Background Information

Participant ID	Years of Experience	Education	Grade Tiers	Race	Type of Violent Experience
P1	7	Master's	Elementary	African American	Verbal Aggression, Physical Aggression, Theft, Vandalism
P2	10	Master's	Elementary	White	Physical Aggression
P3	4	Bachelor's	Elementary	Biracial	Verbal Aggression, Physical Aggression, Theft, Vandalism, Weapon Offense
P4	13	Master's	Elementary	African American	Verbal Aggression, Physical Aggression, Theft
P5	5	Master's	Elementary	African American	Verbal Aggression
P6	7	Master's	Elementary	White	Verbal Aggression, Physical Aggression, Theft, Vandalism
P7	25	Education Specialist	Middle and Elementary	African American	Verbal Aggression, Physical Aggression
P8	16	Doctorate	Elementary	African American	Physical Aggression

Note. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to maintain confidentiality.

Participant Vignettes

The vignettes feature the participants' diverse backgrounds and how their experiences shape their views and responses to teacher-directed violence. Each story illustrates how their personal histories influence their understanding and reaction to TDV, providing depth to the overall narrative. These stories help humanize the data, showing the realities behind the statistics and how administrative responses, or the lack of them, affect teachers' job satisfaction, well-being, and sense of security in the school environment.

Sheila

Sheila, a 62-year-old elementary school teacher with seven years of experience, has encountered multiple violent incidents involving verbal and physical aggression, theft, and vandalism. Unlike some of her colleagues, she entered the teaching profession later in life after working in another field, though she did not specify which during her interview. This career transition gave Sheila a unique perspective on student behavior and school culture, especially regarding discipline and administrative support.

During the interview, Sheila showed a strong understanding of the trauma many of her students, particularly those who engaged in violent behavior, had experienced. She understood that her students' actions often were attributed to traumatic experiences rather than defiance. She felt frustrated by inconsistent discipline, which left teachers with little support when dealing with repeated aggression.

Sheila pushed for more interventions and support, believing that suspensions didn't resolve the problem of aggression. Despite her efforts, she often felt ignored and had to handle safety challenges on her own.

Sheila reflected, saying, "I understand that some of these children have been through things no child should. But at the same time, I have a right to feel safe in my own classroom."

Her account showed the emotional toll of working in an environment where she didn't always feel safe. While compassionate toward her students, Sheila's tone revealed growing exhaustion, especially when discussing administrative inaction. Her body language showed an internal struggle as she tried to balance helping students with the frustration of feeling unheard and unprotected by school leadership.

Miguel

Miguel, a 33-year-old band teacher with ten years of experience, entered education after working in retail in the automotive industry. His background in customer service shaped his teaching approach, emphasizing patience, relationship building, and de-escalation strategies.

During his interview, Miguel recalled an incident that made him reflect on how schools define and respond to teacher-directed aggression. It occurred in the hallway between classes when a student, known for his playful demeanor, bopped him on the head as they passed. While Miguel immediately understood that the student was joking and had no harmful intent, he also recognized that the action crossed a professional boundary.

At first, Miguel wasn't sure if this experience counted as teacher-directed violence, which led him to hesitate about participating in the study. He questioned how teachers should handle situations where student behavior might not be intended as aggression but still violates professional boundaries. He reflected, "I knew he was just being a clown, but at the same time, I had to ask myself, where do we draw the line? If I let this slide, does that mean next time it's okay for a student to push a little further?"

The school administration took a thoughtful approach to the situation, choosing to have a conversation with the student rather than applying punitive measures. They talked about boundaries, respect, and the importance of appropriate interactions between students and teachers. The student ultimately apologized, and the matter was resolved without further incident.

Miguel's experience highlights the complexity of defining teacher-directed violence, especially when aggression is perceived rather than intended. His uncertainty about whether the incident "counted" as violence suggests that similar events might go unreported, as teachers may overlook or downplay behaviors that fall into ambiguous categories. This case underscores the need for clearer policies and professional development to help educators navigate such gray areas while maintaining authority and fostering positive classroom relationships.

Madison

Madison, a 27-year-old 5th-grade English Language Arts and Social Studies teacher, always knew she wanted to be an educator. Since childhood, she dreamed of inspiring students and making a difference in their lives. However, her passion for teaching was tested when she found herself in a challenging situation that eventually led her to transfer schools.

During her interview, Madison described multiple violent encounters involving a single student with a history of disruptive and aggressive behavior. These incidents included verbal and physical aggression, theft, vandalism, and a weapon offense. Despite repeated requests for intervention, she felt abandoned by school administrators. "I kept reporting what was happening, and nothing changed. Eventually, I stopped asking for help because I knew I wouldn't get it."

One of the most troubling aspects of Madison's experience was learning that the administration had placed the student in her classroom with the hope she could help reintegrate

him into a more suitable grade-level setting. She wasn't informed of an administrative decision beforehand, nor was she given the training or resources needed to manage the student's serious and complex behavioral needs. As Madison thought deeper, she recounted,

"I was set up for failure. They knew this student had serious behavioral issues, but instead of placing him in a setting where he'd get the support he needed, they put him in my class, expecting me to 'fix' him. And when things went wrong, I was the one left picking up the pieces."

The emotional toll of these challenges became too much for Madison, leading her to transfer to another school in search of a more supportive environment. Although still committed to teaching, her experience left her disillusioned with how some schools prioritize placement decisions over the well-being of teachers and students.

Madison spoke about her experience with a mix of frustration and sadness. At times, she seemed resigned to the reality that teachers are often put in tough situations. Her story reveals a bigger issue: administrators making placement decisions without fully considering the long-term impact on both students and teachers. It also raises important questions about how schools balance the need to rehabilitate struggling students with the responsibility to ensure teachers have the support they need to maintain a safe and effective classroom.

Gabrielle

Gabrielle, 33 years old with 12 years of teaching experience, currently teaches 5th-grade English Language Arts but has also worked in self-contained elementary classrooms. Throughout her career, Gabrielle has experienced multiple violent incidents, including verbal and physical aggression and theft.

Gabrielle shared her concerns about how teacher-directed violence is handled. She particularly expressed concerns that teachers are often left out of conversations about school safety. "We talk a lot about helping students, but what about the teachers? We are human beings, too, and this system is failing us."

She believes her school administration focuses more on avoiding disciplinary actions than on supporting teachers, which has left her emotionally and physically drained. Her frustration is clear. Gabrielle no longer expects any meaningful change from the district or administration. She felt their approach to TDV was ineffective and unable to meet the needs of both teachers and students. While she recognizes that the student offenders in this study come from troubled backgrounds, she remains firm in her stance that the current system is failing to provide both the necessary support for teachers and the appropriate interventions for students.

Jasmine

Jasmine, a 39-year-old physical education teacher, has five years of teaching experience but has worked in education in various support roles before earning her credentials. Unlike classroom teachers, she interacts with all students in the school, which means she has repeated encounters with certain students over multiple years. This unique position presents both an opportunity to build long-term relationships with students and a challenge when dealing with repeat offenders of teacher-directed violence (TDV).

Though she has not experienced physical violence, she has endured multiple instances of verbal aggression and witnessed repeated violent incidents against colleagues. Her experience highlights the cumulative impact of ongoing exposure to violence, even when direct physical aggression is not involved. "Sometimes it feels like we're expected to just accept this as part of the job. But it shouldn’t be normal for teachers to feel unsafe at work."

Jasmine also raised a critical point regarding the wide spectrum of behaviors that fall under TDV. Because she is the only physical education teacher at her school, there are no alternative placements for students with whom she has had violent encounters. Unlike classroom teachers who may have a disruptive student reassigned, Jasmine continues to see these students year after year. Additionally, given the frequency of disciplinary infractions, she admitted that if she referred every student to the office for TDV-related behaviors, she would overwhelm the administration. As a result, she chooses to handle most situations on her own unless she truly feels a sense of threat or the behavior is so egregious that it must be reported.

Her experience underscores the challenges of enforcing discipline consistently in schools where resources and alternative placements are limited. It also raises concerns about the normalization of teacher-directed violence in school cultures that prioritize minimizing office referrals over ensuring teacher safety.

Susan

Susan, 62 years old with seven years of teaching experience, transitioned into education after a career in interior design. Despite encountering at least seven violent incidents in five years, Susan approaches her work with deep empathy, resilience, and a sincere desire to help students. This point was exemplified when she stated, "I know they're hurting. That's why they lash out. It's not about me. It's about what they don't know how to handle."

Susan's most severe encounters include physical aggression, verbal threats, theft, and vandalism. One of her most frustrating moments came when a fifth-grade student destroyed her belongings, an act that administrators failed to address effectively.

Another disturbing incident involved a student with gang affiliations who threatened to have family members harm her after she intervened in a classroom dispute. Susan stated, "They

told me they would have their family shoot me. And I got no support at all once I filed the report."

Unlike some teachers who become disillusioned, Susan remains steadfast in her belief that students need emotional support rather than just disciplinary action. She expressed frustration that schools often lack the resources to provide students with the interventions they truly need. Susan said, "I wanted to see them get help, not just get suspended. But when there's no accountability, no structure in place to support them—or me—it's exhausting."

While she remains passionate about education, Susan is increasingly questioning whether she can continue in the profession without better protections for teachers.

Jacqueline

Jacqueline, a special education teacher with 25 years of experience, has worked with students from pre-kindergarten to high school. Her experiences with teacher-directed violence have been shaped by her work with students with disabilities, many of whom struggle with emotional regulation and impulsive behaviors that sometimes escalate into violent outbursts. Over the past five years, Jacqueline has experienced at least five significant incidents of teacher-directed violence involving multiple student offenders. While she acknowledges that some of these behaviors stem from disabilities, she also expressed frustration at the lack of clear policies to protect teachers from repeated aggression. She shared, "I understand that students with disabilities need protection, but where's my protection?"

As one of the most candid participants, Jacqueline spoke openly about the challenges of managing student aggression while working within a system that often prioritizes student rights over teacher safety. Her insights provide a critical lens on the realities of teacher-directed

violence in special education settings, highlighting both the compassion and frustration that come with the profession.

Nicole

Nicole, 49 years old with 16 years of teaching experience across multiple states and school districts, has taught Pre-K through 3rd grade as well as 6th grade. She is currently a pre-kindergarten teacher in the Southeastern United States, where her two recorded violent encounters have occurred.

Nicole holds a doctorate and has 16 years of teaching experience, primarily within Pre-K and elementary school settings.

Throughout her career, Nicole has encountered multiple incidents involving verbal and physical aggression. Nicole felt frustrated by the lack of meaningful consequences for these behaviors. In many cases, the response from administration seemed insufficient. Reflecting on her experience, she shared, "I stopped reporting because nothing ever gets done. You just learn to deal with it."

One incident involved a kindergarten student who bit Nicole, leading to a formal report and administrative intervention. While the immediate response followed procedures, the long-term resolution did not meet her expectations. In another case, a different student showed verbal and physical aggression, leaving Nicole frustrated by the lack of follow-through.

Nicole has worked in multiple school systems, offering her a unique perspective on how districts handle teacher-directed violence and student behavior. Her experience has made her aware of the inconsistencies in how these issues are addressed. She believes they contribute to teacher burnout and distrust in administrative support. Despite her commitment to teaching, repeated exposure to violence and inadequate responses has made her question the sustainability

of her career. Despite her commitment to teaching, repeated exposure to violence and ineffective responses has made her question the sustainability of her career.

Results

This chapter presents the findings from interviews conducted with teachers in urban schools in the southeastern United States who have experienced teacher-directed violence (TDV). The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of TDV, its impact on educators, and the role school culture plays in either mitigating or exacerbating such incidents. The findings are organized around the research questions, and the data are presented objectively, without interpretation or speculation.

Key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis include student offenders and behavioral patterns, descriptions of teachers' violent encounters, coping mechanisms used by teachers experiencing TDV, uncertainty and lack of clarity in policies, discrepancies in disciplinary consequences, and challenges related to students with disabilities and insufficient resources. Each theme is discussed in relation to the research questions that guided this study, providing insight into the teachers' experiences with TDV and their perceptions of the factors contributing to and mitigating such violence.

Findings for RQ1: Lived Experiences of Teachers

The first research question explored teachers' lived experiences with teacher-directed violence (TDV) in urban schools in the southeastern United States. Participants described a range of violent encounters, including verbal aggression, physical assaults, threats, intimidation, theft, and vandalism. The emotional toll of these experiences was evident as teachers expressed feelings of frustration, exhaustion, and, in some cases, a profound sense of vulnerability. While some teachers demonstrated resilience and commitment to their profession, others considered

transferring schools or leaving education entirely due to the persistent exposure to violence and the perceived lack of administrative support.

Student Offenders and Behavioral Patterns. Teachers reported that the students involved in violent incidents varied in age, academic background, and behavioral history. Some students were known for chronic behavioral issues, while others displayed aggression unexpectedly, often in response to disciplinary interventions or academic struggles. Many participants believed that external factors such as childhood trauma, unstable home environments, or undiagnosed mental health conditions contributed to students' aggressive behaviors. Although some student offenders had documented behavioral intervention plans (BIPs), others had never been flagged for disciplinary concerns before engaging in violence. These factors made it difficult for teachers to predict which students might become aggressive or how incidents would escalate.

Description of Teachers' Violent Encounters. Participants described a pattern in how teacher-directed violence unfolded, with most incidents progressing through five phases: trigger, escalation, pinnacle, intervention, and resolution. The initial trigger often stemmed from a teacher's attempt to enforce classroom rules, redirect student behavior, or administer consequences for misconduct. For some, even a simple request led to an immediate aggressive response. Sheila, for example, described a moment when she asked a student to move to another seat. Rather than complying, the student hurled a book across the room and shouted that she had no authority over him.

Once triggered, situations often escalated as students expressed defiance through increased verbal aggression, hostile body language, or destruction of classroom materials. Teachers noted that in some instances, their efforts to de-escalate the conflict only aggravated the

student's frustration, leading to more severe outbursts. Madison recalled a situation where she calmly attempted to redirect a student's behavior, only for the student to slam his desk, push over a chair, and shout that she had no right to correct him.

In cases where violence reached its pinnacle, teachers endured direct physical aggression, explicit threats, or intimidation. Gabrielle recounted an incident in which a student threw a stapler at her head, missing her by mere inches. Similarly, Susan shared that a student with known gang affiliations threatened to involve family members in harming her after she intervened in a classroom dispute. These experiences reinforced a growing fear among participants that teacher-directed violence was not only an occupational hazard but a risk they were forced to manage without adequate institutional support.

The way schools responded to these incidents varied widely. Some participants received immediate assistance from administrators or security personnel, while others were left to handle the crisis alone. Several teachers expressed frustration at pressing emergency buttons or calling for help, only to receive no immediate response. Sheila recalled feeling completely abandoned when she called for assistance after a student threw a chair in her classroom. The lack of swift intervention left many teachers questioning their personal safety and the school's commitment to enforcing disciplinary measures.

After an incident, teachers expected clear consequences for student aggression. However, many reported that disciplinary actions were inconsistent and often insufficient. Madison described an instance in which a student physically attacked her, yet the only administrative response was a phone call home. She was told the issue had been addressed, but no suspension or meaningful consequence was given. The failure to enforce discipline left teachers feeling

vulnerable, as repeat offenders frequently returned to class without any interventions that might prevent future aggression.

The emotional and psychological toll of these experiences required teachers to develop coping mechanisms to navigate the persistent threat of violence in their work environments. Many turned to trusted colleagues for emotional support, often finding more solace in peer conversations than in administrative intervention. Susan shared that after a particularly stressful encounter with a student, another student approached her quietly to ask if she was okay, demonstrating that even students recognized the strain their teachers were under.

Some teachers sought professional counseling services, though access to mental health support varied depending on the school district. Others modified their instructional and behavioral management strategies to reduce the likelihood of future conflicts. To prevent further violent encounters, some educators avoided direct confrontations with known aggressive students, carefully phrased their redirections, and even lowered their classroom expectations to prevent outbursts. Jasmine admitted that she refrained from writing referrals unless absolutely necessary, explaining that escalating a situation often did little to resolve the issue. In response to repeated exposure to teacher-directed violence, participants described developing both immediate and long-term coping strategies to remain functional in their classrooms despite ongoing exposure to violence.

In addition to adjusting their teaching practices, some participants adopted a more concerning response: emotional detachment. Several teachers described becoming numb to the violence, distancing themselves from their students, or withdrawing from meaningful engagement in their work. Sheila acknowledged that after repeated incidents, she simply went through the motions of her job, emotionally disconnected from her students and her role as an

educator. Madison, who ultimately transferred schools, explained that she spent her final months at her previous school in a constant state of anxiety, waiting for the next outburst to occur.

For some teachers, the emotional distress led them to use personal or sick leave as a means of recovering from traumatic incidents. Jacqueline, a veteran special education teacher, explained that there were days she simply could not face the reality of returning to work after an aggressive encounter. Gabrielle also admitted that on particularly difficult days, she took personal leave preemptively to avoid interacting with students who had previously been violent toward her. While taking time off provided temporary relief, many teachers worried about exhausting their leave balances or being perceived as uncommitted by their administrators.

Findings from this study suggest that while teachers developed personal coping mechanisms, a lack of administrative intervention and inconsistent enforcement of disciplinary policies exacerbated their stress. Many educators were forced to rely on their own resilience to manage violent encounters, rather than receiving structured institutional support. These findings underscore the urgent need for clearer policies, stronger administrative accountability, crisis intervention training, and accessible mental health resources. Without systemic change, teachers will continue to shoulder the burden of teacher-directed violence on their own, increasing the risk of burnout, emotional exhaustion, and eventual departure from the profession.

Emotional and Psychological Toll on Teacher Well-Being. Participants described significant emotional distress, physical exhaustion, and professional dissatisfaction due to their experiences with teacher-directed violence (TDV). Many expressed frustration with inconsistent administrative responses, which exacerbated feelings of powerlessness and stress. Gabrielle described how repeated incidents led her to question her commitment to teaching:

At the time, I didn't have administration that kept me safe or felt the need to protect me in

those moments. Job satisfaction-wise, I was just ready to leave and would have left if something had come open. I was definitely more on edge just because I was given an environment where my safety wasn't prioritized.

Madison highlighted the cumulative impact of stress and fear following repeated incidents as she stated, “You never know when it will happen again. Every day, I walk into my classroom expecting the worst, and it's exhausting.”

Many participants described experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, aligning with findings from Yang et al. (2022), who found that teacher victimization significantly contributes to burnout and depersonalization. Some participants mentioned sleeplessness, hypervigilance, and a reluctance to engage with students due to past violent encounters. McMahon et al. (2018) further supports this, noting that prolonged exposure to school violence lowers teacher morale and job satisfaction. Sheila shared how TDV impacted her mental state when she said, “I was always on guard. I was always in a fight-or-flight mode, and I didn't realize that… There was no real support from administration”.

Physical Consequences of TDV. Beyond emotional distress, some participants reported stress-related health conditions, including chronic headaches, fatigue, and muscle tension. This aligns with research by Reddy & Herman (2024), who found that educators experiencing TDV often suffer from long-term stress-related ailments, weakened immune function, and increased absenteeism. Gabrielle described how stress manifested physically as she stated, "The stress doesn’t just stay in the classroom. I go home with headaches, my shoulders are always tense, and I feel like I can never fully relax."

Impact on Teacher Retention and School Functioning

Several participants indicated that TDV negatively affected their commitment to the profession, with some actively considering leaving their schools or the field entirely. Jasmine shared her concerns about longevity in the field:

> I really wanted to quit teaching like a lot. I cried every single day, and would basically beg my husband to let me quit. […] And so, then I ended up changing schools, and that was the best thing we ever did, because a lot of the concerns I had were based on administration and their lack of handling things.

Jasmine's account reflected the cumulative emotional strain that led some participants to reconsider their long-term commitment to the profession.

This sentiment was consistent with patterns described by multiple participants and aligns with Grant et al. (2022), who found that teachers in violent or unsupportive environments have higher turnover rates and lower job satisfaction. Many participants believed that school climate played a critical role in either mitigating or exacerbating the effects of TDV. Those who felt supported by administration and colleagues reported higher resilience, whereas those in hostile or dismissive school environments expressed a stronger desire to leave.

School Climate as a Moderating Factor. A key finding of this study is that school climate significantly influences how teachers experience and respond to TDV. Participants who worked in schools with strong administrative support and clear safety protocols reported feeling more secure, even in challenging environments. In contrast, those in schools with inconsistent disciplinary responses and weak leadership expressed frustration and a sense of abandonment.

Nicole noted the difference administrative support makes she said, "I stopped reporting because nothing ever gets done. You just learn to deal with it." Nicole's experience reflected

how inconsistent administrative responses influenced not only reporting behaviors but also teachers' perceptions of institutional support.

Grant et al. (2022) and Darling-Hammond & DePaoli (2020) highlight that positive school climates contribute to higher teacher morale and retention, while weak or indifferent administrative responses intensify stress and dissatisfaction.

Findings from this study reinforce that TDV is a serious issue with widespread implications for teacher well-being, school climate, and retention. Emotional exhaustion, physical stress, and frustration with administrative inaction were common themes across participant narratives. While some educators demonstrated resilience, those in unsupportive environments expressed greater disillusionment and a higher likelihood of leaving the profession. These findings highlight the urgent need for structural changes that prioritize teacher safety, administrative accountability, and comprehensive support systems.

Coping Mechanisms of Teachers Experiencing Teacher-Directed Violence. The impact of teacher-directed violence (TDV) extends beyond the immediate incident, affecting teachers' emotional well-being, job satisfaction, and overall mental health. In response, participants employed various coping mechanisms to manage the stress and emotional toll of these experiences. Their strategies primarily involved seeking support systems, modifying classroom practices, and, in some cases, emotionally detaching or avoiding further conflict.

Many teachers turned to informal and formal support systems to process their experiences with TDV. Several participants reported that confiding in trusted colleagues provided an essential emotional outlet. Susan, for example, described the importance of peer support, recalling how a student had thrown a book at her. In the aftermath, another student approached her and quietly asked, "Are you okay?" She noted that the concern shown by her students

revealed their awareness of the emotional weight she carried. In addition to peer connections, some teachers sought professional mental health services, either through therapy or stress management programs provided by their school districts. However, access to such resources varied, with some teachers needing to seek external support independently.

To prevent future violent encounters, several teachers adapted their instructional and behavioral management techniques. These modifications often included avoiding direct confrontation with students known for aggression, carefully phrasing redirections to minimize conflict, and reducing disciplinary referrals unless absolutely necessary. Jasmine, for example, acknowledged that she assessed each situation carefully before escalating an issue. “I could write a referral every day, but what good would that do?” she reflected. “I only escalate situations when I truly feel threatened.” While these strategies helped teachers maintain control in the classroom, they placed an increasing burden on educators, who were forced to manage violent behaviors without consistent institutional support.

For some, repeated exposure to violence led to emotional detachment. Teachers described becoming numb to these incidents, shifting from active engagement to a survival mentality. Sheila reflected on how repeated aggression had shaped her response, stating, “At some point, you just stop feeling. You get through the day, and that’s it.” Others, like Madison, eventually transferred schools after ongoing incidents and a lack of administrative support. She described the emotional exhaustion that led to her decision, saying, “I couldn’t do it anymore. I was always on edge, waiting for the next outburst.”

When teachers felt emotionally overwhelmed or physically unsafe, some resorted to taking personal or sick leave to recover. Jacqueline, a veteran special education teacher, shared that she frequently used her sick days to take breaks when she felt unsupported. “There were

days when I just couldn't face it," she admitted. "I used my sick days because I knew I wouldn't get any real support if something happened again." Gabrielle similarly used personal days not only to recover from violent encounters but as a preemptive measure. "If I knew a certain student was going to be in class that day and I just couldn't deal with it, I'd take a personal day," she explained. "It was the only way to protect my sanity."

While taking time off offered temporary relief, many teachers worried about the long-term consequences of frequent absences, including falling behind in their work, depleting their leave, or being perceived as uncommitted. For those with limited leave or concerns about administrative retaliation, staying home was not always an option, forcing them to continue working under unsafe conditions.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that while teachers have developed individual coping strategies, the absence of consistent administrative intervention exacerbates their stress. The reliance on personal resilience rather than structured institutional support highlights the urgent need for clearer policies, crisis intervention training, and accessible mental health resources. Without systemic change, teachers will continue to bear the burden of TDV largely on their own, increasing the risk of burnout and attrition.

The experiences shared by participants highlight the complexity of TDV and its long-term effects on educators' professional and personal well-being. Teachers consistently emphasized that violence in schools is not an isolated issue but rather a systemic problem that requires coordinated efforts from school administrators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. The lack of clear policies, inconsistencies in disciplinary enforcement, and limited mental health resources have contributed to a culture where many teachers feel unsupported and vulnerable.

Findings for RQ2: Teacher's Perceptions of Effectiveness of Policies

The second research question examined teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of existing policies and protocols in mitigating and preventing teacher-directed violence. Participants described widespread inconsistencies in how policies were implemented, highlighting concerns about administrative responses, the lack of meaningful consequences for student aggression, and gaps in school safety measures. Many teachers expressed uncertainty about the specific policies in place to protect them from violence, stating that although they assumed policies existed, they had never received formal training on the procedures to follow after a violent incident. Collectively, these experiences shaped teachers' perceptions that existing policies were inconsistently applied and often insufficient to prevent or respond effectively to teacher-directed violence.

Uncertainty and Lack of Policy Awareness. One of the most prominent themes among participants was the lack of clear and accessible policies addressing teacher-directed violence. Sheila, an elementary school teacher, remarked, "I think there's something written down somewhere, but no one has ever gone over it with us." This sentiment was echoed by other participants, who described a reactive rather than proactive approach to violence prevention. Policies were often referenced only after an incident occurred rather than being reinforced through training and administrative discussions.

The absence of well-communicated procedures left many teachers unsure about how to respond when violent incidents happened. Some participants noted that even when they reported incidents, administrative responses varied significantly, leading to uncertainty about whether any meaningful action would be taken.

Inconsistencies in Administrative Responses. The lack of clear and standardized protocols contributed to significant inconsistencies in how violent incidents were handled across schools. Some participants reported swift intervention and support from administrators, while others described being left to manage dangerous situations alone. Nicole, a veteran teacher, captured this inconsistency, stating, *"It depends on who's in charge that day. One AP might suspend the student, and the next day, a different one lets it go. It's exhausting."* Her reflection highlights the arbitrary nature of administrative responses that left many teachers feeling unsupported and confused.

Miguel, a middle school teacher, recounted an incident in which he was physically assaulted by a student but received little follow-up from school leadership beyond a verbal acknowledgment of the event. In contrast, another participant noted that when a similar incident occurred at a neighboring school, the student was immediately suspended, and the teacher received a formal debriefing and safety plan. These disparities reinforced the perception that administrative responses were largely discretionary rather than guided by a well-defined policy framework.

Some teachers believed that school administrators were reluctant to take decisive action against violent students due to pressure to reduce disciplinary referrals. In several cases, participants reported that administrators discouraged formal reports of violence to maintain favorable school climate metrics. One teacher recalled being advised not to document a severe incident because the school was "trying to keep discipline numbers down." The inconsistency in administrative responses often correlated with leadership turnover.

These findings align with research by DeMatthews et al. (2021), which highlights how instability in school leadership contributes to teacher turnover, particularly in high-poverty and

urban schools. While the current study did not directly examine principal turnover, participants' decisions to leave their schools reflect a broader pattern of teacher attrition linked to dysfunctional leadership, lack of administrative support, and unsafe school climates. This underscores the need for stronger leadership accountability in enforcing policies that protect teachers from violence and ensure a safe teaching environment.

Lack of Meaningful Consequences for Student Violence. A major frustration among participants was the failure to impose consistent and meaningful consequences for student aggression. Many teachers reported that students who engaged in violent behavior were often allowed to return to class with little or no intervention, reinforcing a cycle of repeated offenses.

Madison, a fifth-grade teacher, described an ongoing issue with a student who had repeatedly lashed out at teachers and classmates. Despite multiple referrals, the student faced minimal disciplinary action. "Every time this student hit someone, he was sent out, and within an hour, he was back. And I knew it would happen again," she explained. The absence of structured intervention plans left teachers feeling helpless and unsupported, increasing stress and diminishing their sense of security in the workplace.

Challenges in Addressing Student Disabilities and Mental Health Needs. Many student offenders had disabilities or mental health conditions that schools were not adequately equipped to support. Teachers described struggling to manage students with significant behavioral challenges, particularly when adequate staffing, specialized training, and mental health resources were lacking.

Gabrielle, an elementary school teacher, recalled multiple violent encounters with students who had been diagnosed with severe emotional disturbances but were placed in general education classrooms without appropriate support. "We had students with IEPs for severe

emotional and behavioral challenges, but there were no extra supports in place. We were expected to handle extreme behaviors with no real training," she explained.

Special education teachers reported additional challenges in enforcing disciplinary measures for students with IEPs and behavior intervention plans. While they recognized the need for accommodations, many felt that the lack of structured consequences made it difficult to manage repeat aggression.

School Safety Concerns and the Richneck Elementary School Shooting. Concerns about school safety were a recurring theme among participants, particularly regarding administrators' failure to intervene before violent incidents escalated. This issue gained national attention in January 2023 when a six-year-old student at Richneck Elementary School in Virginia shot his first-grade teacher, Abigail Zwerner (Bibeau et al., 2023). The incident underscored the devastating consequences of administrative inaction, as it was later revealed that school officials had received multiple warnings about the students' violent behavior but failed to take adequate preventive measures.

Although none of the participants in this study had encountered violence of that magnitude, several drew parallels between their experiences and the failures that led to the Richneck shooting. Many teachers felt that early warning signs of aggressive behavior were often ignored, increasing the risk of severe incidents. One participant remarked, "We always talk about what to do after an incident happens, but why aren't we doing more to prevent it in the first place?"

These concerns highlight the need for schools to adopt proactive safety measures, including structured intervention plans for students with a history of violence and better communication between teachers and administrators about potential threats.

Intervention Strategies and Their Limitations. Participants shared mixed perceptions regarding intervention strategies used by schools to address teacher-directed violence. Some schools implemented restorative practices, which focus on rebuilding relationships after incidents of aggression. While a few educators found this approach beneficial, others felt it lacked enforcement and did little to prevent repeat offenses. Jacqueline, a special education teacher, noted that students with severe behavioral issues were often placed in restorative circles but faced no real accountability for their actions, leading her to question the effectiveness of the approach.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS was another widely used strategy, designed to reinforce positive behaviors through incentives and structured interventions. However, several teachers reported that inconsistent implementation reduced its effectiveness. “PBIS works great when it’s done right, but too often, we’re told to just give students more rewards instead of actually addressing their behavior,” one teacher observed.

Participants in this study were K-12 educators from urban, southeastern schools, all of whom met the eligibility criteria of experiencing teacher-directed violence (TDV) within the past five years, holding the required credentials, and maintaining an active teaching license. The sample included early-career teachers with five years or less of experience and veteran educators with over 20 years in the field. Participants represented both elementary and secondary education, with backgrounds in general education, special education, and elective courses, teaching in high-poverty Title I schools and neighborhood public schools serving diverse student populations.

Participants discussed how school culture, administrative responses, and available support systems influenced their experiences with TDV. They also described how training,

resilience, and school policies shaped their responses to classroom aggression. These insights are central to the study's findings.

Some schools relied on school resource officers (SROs) or security personnel to manage violent incidents, particularly when aggression escalated beyond teacher intervention. While some teachers found SROs helpful in de-escalating conflicts, others felt their presence did little to prevent recurring violence. Overall, findings suggest that although schools employ a range of intervention strategies, inconsistent application limits their effectiveness in preventing teacher-directed violence. Teachers in schools with strong leadership and a culture of accountability reported fewer violent incidents, whereas those in schools with weak administrative enforcement felt unsupported and vulnerable. The lack of clear policies, inconsistent disciplinary measures, and administrative reluctance to take decisive action contributed to an environment in which teacher-directed violence remained an ongoing and largely unaddressed issue.

Participants were K–12 educators from southern and southeastern schools who met eligibility criteria for teacher-directed violence (TDV) within the past five years. The sample included early-career and veteran teachers from elementary and secondary settings across general education, special education, and elective courses in Title I and neighborhood public schools. Their insights offer a grounded view of how institutional conditions shape teacher well-being and safety and set the stage for understanding broader school dynamics surrounding violence.

Table 2 provides an overview of intervention strategies used in participants' schools, highlighting perceived effectiveness of approaches such as SRO involvement, restorative justice practices, trauma-informed care, and school-wide discipline policies.

Table 2

Summary of Findings

Research Questions	Key Finding	Summary of Findings
RQ1: What are the lived experiences of teachers who have been targets of teacher-directed violence (TDV) in urban schools?	Overall Experience	Teachers experienced a range of violent encounters, including verbal and physical aggression, threats, and intimidation. Many described feeling unsupported, citing inconsistent administrative responses and a lack of clear disciplinary actions. The emotional and psychological toll included anxiety, burnout, and job dissatisfaction.
	Triggers of Violence	Violent incidents were often initiated by disciplinary actions, classroom management interventions, or enforcing rules. Many participants indicated that student defiance escalated to aggression due to a lack of intervention strategies, administrative inaction, and inadequate behavioral support.
	Disciplinary Consequences	Teachers noted a lack of consistent consequences for violent behavior. In several cases, students who engaged in violence were allowed to return to class with minimal or no disciplinary action, reinforcing a pattern of continued aggression.
	Coping Strategies	To manage the emotional toll of TDV, some teachers sought therapy, confided in colleagues, or took mental health days. Others modified their classroom management, avoiding certain students or lowering expectations to prevent further incidents.
RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of existing policies and protocols in mitigating TDV?	Overall Perceptions	Many teachers expressed uncertainty about policies related to TDV. They reported a lack of clear guidance on reporting procedures and inconsistent enforcement of disciplinary actions, which often left them feeling unprotected.
	Students with Disabilities and Mental Health Needs	A significant number of student offenders had disabilities or mental health challenges that exceeded available resources. Teachers often lacked training to manage these students effectively, leading to an increased risk of violent incidents.
	School Culture and Leadership	Schools with strong leadership and a culture of accountability reported fewer violent incidents. In contrast, schools with weak administrative enforcement struggled with discipline and teacher safety, leading to a higher prevalence of teacher-directed violence.

Evaluation of the Findings

This section evaluates the study's findings by analyzing how teacher-directed violence (TDV) in urban, southeastern schools aligns with or diverges from existing research. The discussion is structured around the study's research questions and the application of Schein's Organizational Culture Model. It highlights key themes, their significance in the educational landscape, and implications for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers. The findings are contextualized within the literature on teacher victimization, school culture, and administrative responses.

Findings in Relation to Research Questions, Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of teachers who have been targets of teacher-directed violence by students within urban schools in the southeastern United States?

Participants described a range of experiences related to TDV, including verbal aggression, physical assaults, and intimidation. The emotional toll of these incidents was evident in participants' reports of stress, anxiety, and diminished job satisfaction. These findings align with prior studies indicating that TDV contributes to teacher burnout and decreased professional efficacy (Montgomery, 2019; Peist et al., 2023). The data revealed the following major themes:

The Five Phases of Violent Encounters. Teachers described TDV incidents as following five phases. In the trigger phase, a disciplinary action, classroom directive, or perceived slight triggered the student's aggressive response. Participants noted that violence often escalated as teachers tried to enforce rules.

In the escalation phase, teachers attempted to redirect or discipline the student, which often increased verbal aggression. At the peak, students displayed physical aggression, property damage, or explicit threats, like throwing objects or having violent outbursts. In the intervention

phase, teachers either tried to de-escalate or asked administrators for help. Responses varied. Some got immediate support, while others handled the crisis alone. In the resolution phase, teachers expected disciplinary action but often faced frustration over the lack of meaningful consequences.

These findings reinforce prior research suggesting that aggression among younger students is often impulsive, whereas older students tend to engage in more deliberate and calculated forms of violence (Schiff & Lee, 2025). The escalation of violent encounters often follows a predictable pattern, beginning with minor conflicts and, in some cases, progressing into more severe aggression. Additionally, research on adolescent aggression has demonstrated that different types of victimization, relational versus physical, predict distinct patterns of future aggression, underscoring the importance of addressing aggression subtypes within school settings (Schiff & Lee, 2025).

Furthermore, instability in school leadership has been associated with increased teacher turnover and weakened organizational structures that could otherwise support effective discipline and school safety measures (DeMatthews et al., 2022). When leadership lacks stability, inconsistent policy enforcement may contribute to environments where teacher-directed violence persists unchecked. These findings highlight the need for interventions tailored to students' age and aggression patterns, ensuring that school policies and support structures account for the developmental nuances of violent behavior.

Coping Mechanisms for Teacher-Directed Violence. The findings revealed three. Teachers developed primary coping strategies. Many sought emotional support from trusted colleagues. Some turned to professional mental health services, though access to these resources varied across schools. Others adjusted their classroom practices to avoid conflict with aggressive

students, rephrasing redirections carefully and minimizing disciplinary referrals due to ineffective administrative follow-through.

Additionally, some teachers engaged in emotional detachment by disengaging from their work or avoiding interactions with students they perceived as threatening. Some even took the extreme step of transferring schools to escape the emotional burden. These findings align with McMahon et al. (2024b), who noted that teachers experiencing chronic violence often make career-altering decisions.

Research Question 2: What perceptions do K-12 teachers provide about the effectiveness of existing policies and protocols in mitigating and preventing violence directed at them by students?

Participants described inconsistent awareness and implementation of current policies designed to address teacher-directed violence (TDV), revealing both confusion and concern about their effectiveness.

Uncertainty and Lack of Clarity in Policies. Many teachers mentioned that while policies theoretically existed, they had never received formal training on handling violent incidents. Some only learned about the policies after incidents, rather than through proactive training. This supports Zinter et al. (2023), who noted that policy ambiguity contributes to underreporting of TDV.

Inconsistencies in Administrative Responses. Participants described significant differences in how school administrators handled violent incidents. Some enforced policies strictly, while others minimized disciplinary actions to maintain favorable school climate metrics. This aligns with Mayer et al. (2021), who found that administrators sometimes avoid formal discipline due to pressure from school performance ratings.

Lack of Meaningful Consequences. Teachers frequently reported that students who engaged in violent behavior faced minimal consequences. Some returned to class immediately after serious offenses, reinforcing a culture of impunity. Participants noted that restorative justice practices, though well-intended, often lacked enforcement. This is consistent with Montgomery (2019), who found that ineffective policy implementation reduces the deterrent effect of discipline.

The Role of School Culture in Policy Implementation. Teachers in schools with strong leadership and clear accountability measures reported fewer violent incidents. In contrast, teachers in schools with weak administrative oversight felt unsafe and unsupported. This echoes Turanovick and Siennick (2022), who argued that school culture influences teachers' perceptions of their working conditions more than policies alone.

Students with Disabilities and Insufficient Resources. Many student offenders had disabilities or mental health conditions that schools lacked the resources to properly support. Teachers felt ill-equipped to manage extreme behaviors without appropriate training or behavioral interventions. These findings align with Moon et al. (2019), who emphasized the need for increased mental health services to reduce violent behaviors.

Findings in Relation to Schein's Organizational Culture Model. The study's findings align with the three levels of Schein's Organizational Culture Model. At the artifact level, which includes visible policies and practices, schools often had written protocols on violence prevention. However, inconsistent enforcement contributed to teacher mistrust. This reflects the work of Mayer et al. (2021), who found that written policies frequently fail to translate into meaningful action. At the level of espoused values, which includes the stated beliefs about teacher safety, schools publicly emphasized their commitment to protecting educators. Despite

these statements, many participants reported feeling unsupported when violent incidents occurred. This disconnect aligns with findings from McMahon et al. (2024b), who noted that institutional rhetoric rarely matches the lived experiences of teachers.

Underlying Assumptions (Unspoken Beliefs and Norms). Some administrators tolerated TDV, seeing it as part of teaching. This cultural norm discourages reporting and intervention (Espelage et al., 2014). The findings show that while TDV remains a serious issue, its impact is shaped by school culture, administrative responses, and available support. A lack of clear policies, inconsistent discipline, and limited mental health resources allow TDV to persist. Strong leadership and accountability measures improve teacher safety and retention.

By linking these findings to existing research, this study supports the call for systemic changes in how schools address TDV. The study provides evidence that TDV is shaped by school culture and administrative practices. While policies exist, inconsistent implementation creates a culture where teachers feel unsupported and unsafe. These findings align with Schein's Organizational Culture Model and existing research on school discipline and teacher well-being. A key takeaway from this study is the gap between formal policies and the administrative actions that follow, which significantly shapes teachers' perceptions of safety and support. Previous research, including McMahon et al. (2022), shows that when teachers feel unsupported by school leadership, they are more likely to experience chronic stress and consider leaving the profession.

The emotional toll of teacher-directed violence (TDV) is also well documented in the literature, and this study reinforces findings that burnout and attrition are strongly linked to violent encounters. Participants described ongoing anxiety, fear, and emotional exhaustion stemming from repeated exposure to violence. These experiences mirror findings by Payne and Gottfredson (2019), who reported that schools with weak disciplinary enforcement experience

higher rates of teacher turnover due to job-related stress. The emotional distress expressed by participants in this study highlights the urgent need for stronger, more proactive interventions to address TDV.

These findings show that addressing TDV requires more than just creating policies. It calls for a cultural shift within schools. When teachers feel that violence is tolerated or ignored, it damages their trust in leadership and leads to greater professional dissatisfaction. The next section discusses the broader implications of these findings for educational policy, teacher training, and administrative accountability.

Summary

This chapter examined the lived experiences of teachers who have encountered teacher-directed violence (TDV) in K-12 schools and their perceptions of the effectiveness of school policies in mitigating such incidents. The findings revealed that while formal policies and disciplinary frameworks exist, their inconsistent implementation, lack of resources, and administrative discretion create gaps that allow violence to persist.

The study highlights that TDV remains a significant issue due to systemic failures in policy enforcement and administrative accountability. When policies are inconsistently applied, teachers become more vulnerable to repeated incidents, leading to emotional distress, burnout, and increased job dissatisfaction. Inadequate administrative responses not only weaken disciplinary structures but also reinforce the perception that teacher safety is not a priority. Without structured support systems, these challenges further deteriorate school environments, making it difficult for teachers to maintain a secure and productive classroom.

These findings emphasize the urgent need for systemic change. Schools must implement clear, enforceable policies with structured guidelines to ensure consistency in handling violent

incidents. Strengthening administrative accountability is critical in ensuring fair discipline, preventing repeat offenses, and fostering teacher confidence in school leadership. A supportive school culture, coupled with strong leadership that prioritizes teacher safety and well-being, is essential to reducing TDV and improving overall school climate.

These findings will be explored further in Chapter 5, where the implications for educational policy, school leadership, and teacher well-being will be examined. Additionally, specific recommendations will be provided to address TDV and enhance institutional support systems, ensuring a safer and more sustainable teaching environment.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This chapter interprets the key findings presented in Chapter 4, highlighting their broader implications for educators, administrators, and policymakers. It also outlines recommendations for practice and future research, followed by concluding remarks that reflect on the significance of teacher-directed violence in K–12 education.

Introduction

Teacher-directed violence remains a significant concern in K-12 schools, affecting teacher well-being, job satisfaction, and overall school culture. The problem addressed in this study is that teacher-directed violence pervades K-12 schools, posing a significant yet understudied concern for educator well-being and school performance (Curran et al., 2019). Even with policies intended to improve school safety, educators often encounter violent incidents that go unresolved or are managed inadequately, leaving them exposed and without support. To truly grasp the scope of teacher-directed violence, it is essential to deeply investigate how educators interpret and experience these occurrences within their schools. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore teachers' lived experiences with teacher-directed violence and how these experiences influence their perceptions of school culture.

This study employed a phenomenological research design to capture the personal experiences of eight educators who have encountered teacher-directed violence within the past five years. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and a thematic analysis identified key patterns in participant responses. Although there are policies meant to reduce student violence, the lack of consistent enforcement and unclear responses from administrators have left teachers feeling frustrated and burned out. Participants mentioned that the delay in administrative action and the unclear nature of school policies have taken an emotional toll as they continue to face

violent incidents. Many expressed feelings of helplessness and exhaustion, noting how these unresolved issues contribute to a deteriorating work environment. From these experiences, several key themes emerged, including the behaviors of student offenders, the escalation of violent encounters, the impact on teachers, the role of accountability within the school system, and the broader consequences for the overall school culture.

Implications

The findings of this study offer critical insights into the ongoing issue of teacher-directed violence (TDV), with significant implications for policy development, leadership practices, educator preparation programs, and school-wide support structures. While TDV is often addressed as a disciplinary or behavioral concern, the findings underscore that it is also a cultural, systemic, and occupational health issue, requiring intentional, layered responses that go beyond responding to one incident at a time.

Research Question 1: Lived Experiences of Teacher-Directed Violence

Participants described a wide range of TDV incidents, from verbal aggression to physical violence and intimidation. These incidents often escalated due to ineffective administrative responses, lack of support systems, and inconsistent policy enforcement. Teachers expressed feelings of frustration, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion due to their repeated exposure to violence.

One key implication is that TDV is not a one-time event for many teachers but a chronic, cumulative experience. Participants, particularly special education and related arts teachers (for example, physical education, music, art), reported managing violent behaviors frequently, often with little support or formal resolution. The long-term exposure to aggression contributes to a steady erosion of professional motivation, self-efficacy, and trust in leadership. This kind of

workplace trauma can result in burnout, absenteeism, presenteeism (meaning being physically present but emotionally disengaged), and premature departure from the profession.

Additionally, repeated exposure to violence may shift teachers' instructional strategies, often in ways that reduce student engagement. Participants in this study described “walking on eggshells” around certain students or lowering classroom expectations to avoid triggering aggression. This behavioral shift is not just an individual coping mechanism; it becomes an instructional equity issue, as it may unintentionally lower the quality of instruction for entire groups of students. Over time, these compromises learning outcomes and undermines school improvement efforts.

These findings also have implications for teacher preparation programs. Institutions that prepare future educators must include training on conflict de-escalation, trauma-informed instruction, and navigating ambiguous safety scenarios. Equipping educators with practical tools before they enter the workforce can better prepare them to respond with confidence and minimize risk to themselves and their students.

Finally, this study challenges school systems to acknowledge TDV not only as a behavioral issue but also as a teacher wellness issue with direct implications for recruitment, retention, and school culture. A teacher workforce consistently exposed to violence, without systems of care and accountability in place, is unlikely to remain stable or motivated to engage in long-term school transformation work.

Research Question 2: Perceptions of Policy Effectiveness

A central issue uncovered in this study is that many teachers were uncertain about their school’s policies on TDV. While most participants assumed policies existed, they had received little to no formal training on them. Some only became aware of policies after experiencing

violence and seeking administrative intervention. Others, like Miguel, were unsure whether their experiences even qualified as violence under school policy. He stated:

"I don't know if you'd call it violent, but it was definitely inappropriate. He slapped the back of my head in front of the class like it was a joke, but it didn't feel like a joke to me. I didn't even know if I should report it."

This lack of policy clarity contributes to both underreporting and overreporting of TDV incidents. Some teachers hesitate to report incidents, fearing that administrators will dismiss or downplay their concerns. Others may classify behaviors as violent when they do not meet official criteria, leading to confusion, inconsistent consequences, and flawed data. Inaccurate or incomplete reporting inhibits schools and districts from understanding the full scope of the problem and undermines strategic planning for school safety improvements.

Furthermore, when teachers are not explicitly included in policy development or training, they are less likely to view those policies as protective or responsive. One implication is the need for policies to be co-developed or reviewed with teacher input, particularly from those who have experienced TDV. Doing so enhances policy relevance, increases awareness, and builds trust in institutional response systems.

Policy Enforcement and School Culture. The study found that policies intended to protect teachers are inconsistently enforced, particularly in schools where administrators prioritize optics, such as reducing suspension rates, over teacher protection. This inconsistency erodes trust in leadership and contributes to an environment where TDV becomes normalized or tolerated. In the most extreme cases, this tolerance can lead to public safety crises, such as the widely publicized 2023 incident at Richneck Elementary School in Newport News, Virginia, where a six-year-old student shot his teacher after prior violent warnings went unaddressed.

While extreme, this case illustrates what can happen when early warning signs are ignored and accountability structures fail. Findings from this study suggest that when smaller incidents are consistently minimized or overlooked, schools may unknowingly create conditions where more serious acts of violence are likely to occur. The implication here is that school culture, and not just policy, determines how seriously TDV is addressed. Policies without a culture of enforcement, transparency, and care are ineffective.

The Role of School Leadership. Administrative responses to TDV varied widely across participants' schools. Some received immediate support, while others were left to manage dangerous situations alone. Research consistently links effective school leadership with teacher satisfaction, student outcomes, and safe school climates (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Yet, this study reinforces that when leadership is inconsistent or absent, policies lose their power and teacher safety is compromised.

The implications of this pattern are significant. Unstable leadership contributes to shifting priorities, weakened follow-through, and a lack of institutional memory regarding safety practices. Additionally, high turnover in leadership can lead to mixed messages around what behaviors are tolerated and how violence should be addressed. This inconsistency results in confusion not only among teachers but also among students and families, contributing to a climate of uncertainty and reduced accountability.

Investing in stable, well-trained, and empathetic school leadership is essential. Leaders who demonstrate consistent support, follow through on safety commitments, and communicate clearly during and after incidents foster trust and help reduce the emotional toll of TDV. Leadership development programs should integrate modules on trauma-informed practices, educator wellness, and ethical decision-making in disciplinary situations. When school leaders

model calm, protective, and proactive behavior, it signals to the entire school community that teacher safety is non-negotiable.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers who have been targets of teacher-directed violence by students in urban schools in the southeastern United States?
2. What do K-12 teachers think about the effectiveness of current policies and protocols in addressing and preventing violence directed at them by students within the school culture in the southeastern United States?

These questions helped shape the study's design, analysis, and discussion, ensuring the findings reflect the real-world challenges faced by educators in different school settings.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the study's findings, several key recommendations emerged that could help mitigate teacher-directed violence (TDV), support teacher well-being, and foster safer, more equitable school environments. These recommendations respond directly to the challenges described by participants and reflect both immediate needs and systemic opportunities for change.

Strengthen Administrative Training on TDV. A key finding of this study is that many teachers felt unsupported due to inconsistent administrative responses to violent incidents. These lapses contributed to a breakdown in trust and a perception that teacher safety was not prioritized. Annual, mandated training for administrators is essential to shift this pattern. This training should include guidelines for documentation, de-escalation strategies, legal protections

(e.g., IDEA, Section 504), and post-incident support. Without targeted professional learning, administrators may unintentionally perpetuate harm by failing to respond appropriately.

Clarify and Standardize TDV Policies. Participants frequently cited confusion about what constitutes TDV and how to respond when it occurs. Many district policies failed to clearly define teacher-directed violence, leaving enforcement to interpretation. A standardized framework should include teacher rights, mandatory reporting procedures, and intervention protocols aligned with legal requirements. Policies must be communicated to all stakeholders, including teachers, students, families, and district leaders, to ensure shared understanding and transparency. When teachers know what protections exist and how to access them, they may feel more confident in reporting incidents and remaining engaged in their roles.

Develop Fluid Alternative School Programs. Schools and districts should implement flexible, non-punitive alternative programs for students who engage in serious acts of teacher-directed violence. These programs must move beyond traditional exclusionary discipline and instead offer structured environments that support behavioral change, address trauma, and provide academic continuity. The goal is not simply removal, but rehabilitation and readiness for reintegration into the school community.

Gregory et al. (2016) emphasized that restorative practices and alternative interventions, when properly implemented, can transform teacher–student relationships and reduce exclusionary discipline disparities, particularly for students of color and those with behavioral or emotional challenges. Similarly, Skiba et al. (2016) cautioned against oversimplified disciplinary responses and advocated for context-sensitive, equity-oriented approaches to school discipline, especially for students with disabilities or trauma histories. These scholars underscore the need for adaptive systems that preserve school safety while addressing root causes of violent behavior.

Establish Formal Reentry Protocols. In addition to alternative placements, schools should develop clear and intentional reentry plans for students returning to campus following incidents of teacher-directed violence. These reentry protocols should include a collaborative meeting involving school leadership, the teacher (when appropriate), the student, and their caregiver to set expectations, acknowledge harm, and establish supports for success.

While some restorative models promote reintegration, research shows that inconsistent implementation often leaves teachers feeling unprotected or caught off guard. Gregory et al. (2016) noted that meaningful dialogue and restorative reintegration strategies can rebuild trust, but only when schools commit to systemic follow-through. Without structured reentry, teacher safety and morale may further erode which reinforces the findings in this study that many teachers feel isolated and unsupported after a violent incident.

Implement Mental Health Supports for Teachers. The emotional and psychological impact of TDV was evident throughout participant responses. Teachers described symptoms of chronic stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion. Prior research (e.g., Yang et al., 2022; Zhao, 2024) confirms that frequent victimization is associated with diminished morale and higher attrition rates. To counter these effects, schools should provide confidential counseling services, peer support groups, and employee assistance programs specifically designed for educators. Trauma-informed training and recovery time following incidents should also be prioritized. Recognizing burnout as a systemic issue rather than a personal failing may be critical to supporting teacher retention and well-being.

Strengthen Reporting and Data Collection. This study highlighted significant underreporting of TDV due to fear of retaliation and lack of administrative follow-through. A standardized and confidential reporting mechanism would encourage accurate documentation

and signal institutional commitment to teacher safety. Reliable data would allow schools and districts to identify patterns, allocate resources, and evaluate the effectiveness of current interventions. Without such data, TDV remains an invisible threat with widespread consequences.

Develop Schoolwide Interventions for TDV. Teachers emphasized the limitations of reactive, isolated disciplinary actions. Addressing TDV effectively requires a comprehensive, schoolwide approach that includes crisis response teams, safety protocols, restorative justice practices, and community partnerships. These interventions must treat TDV as a workplace safety concern rather than merely a behavioral infraction. Reframing the issue in this way supports the development of clear policies and promotes proactive, systemic responses.

Ensure Equitable and Legally Sound Responses to TDV Involving Students with Disabilities. Teachers expressed uncertainty about how to navigate violent behavior from students protected under IDEA and Section 504. Schools must balance safety with legal compliance by implementing structured behavior intervention plans, providing relevant training, and developing crisis response protocols. Cornell et al. (2025) noted the overrepresentation of students with disabilities in school threat assessments, underscoring the need for fair and differentiated procedures. Clear guidance would help ensure both teacher protection and equitable treatment of students.

Expand Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to Mandate Response to TDV. While Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) frameworks have been traditionally used to address academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs (Sugai & Horner, 2020), the experiences of participants in this study demonstrate that teacher-directed violence (TDV) requires a significant adaptation of this model. As discussed in Chapter 2, MTSS offers a foundation for proactive,

tiered interventions; however, TDV must be treated not as a standard behavioral concern, but as a workplace safety threat demanding coordinated, institution-wide responses.

School districts should require that any confirmed incidents of TDV trigger a formal MTSS process, with clear documentation, tiered interventions, and ongoing monitoring. TDV must not be normalized within standard disciplinary practices or left vulnerable to inconsistent administrative responses. Embedding TDV response within the MTSS framework ensures that teacher safety is addressed proactively, consistently, and with institutional backing.

Recognizing that frequent TDV may overwhelm individual schools, districts should provide additional support such as district level crisis teams, designated facilitators for TDV related MTSS meetings, or access to external consultants to ease the burden on campus administrators. Embedding systemic support would allow schools to uphold safety standards without further straining staff already managing complex behavioral needs.

By requiring MTSS integration for TDV incidents and equipping schools with district level assistance, districts can demonstrate a tangible commitment to protecting teachers and sustaining positive school environments. Addressing TDV through mandated MTSS structures moves teacher protection from reactive crisis management to proactive institutional care. To truly sustain positive school environments, schools must invest as intentionally in safeguarding educators as they do in protecting and supporting students.

Together, these recommendations highlight the urgent need for responsive, equitable, and trauma-informed systems that prioritize both teacher protection and student support, laying the foundation for school environments where safety, stability, and shared accountability can truly thrive.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study deepened understanding of TDV in urban elementary and middle schools, it also raised new questions and highlighted important areas for further investigation. Future research should consider the following directions to broaden the knowledge base and improve responses to TDV:

TDV in High Schools and Rural Schools. TDV in High Schools and Rural Schools. This study focused on urban elementary and middle school teachers, but teacher-directed violence is not limited to these environments. High schools may present different challenges, including more severe incidents or involvement of older students, while rural schools may lack access to the same resources and support systems available in larger districts. Future research should examine whether similar patterns of administrative inaction, emotional exhaustion, and teacher attrition emerge in these settings, and if so, how they are experienced and managed.

It is especially important to explore whether school size, staffing limitations, or community dynamics affect the recognition and handling of TDV. Gaining insight into these factors could help clarify whether existing strategies can be effectively applied in new contexts or whether they must be adapted to reflect local realities. Research in these areas would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of TDV and ensure that support systems and interventions are both equitable and responsive to setting-specific needs.

Effects of Chronic Exposure to TDV. Several participants shared that the violence they experienced was not just a one-time incident but something that happened again and again over the years. This ongoing exposure took a toll, not just physically or emotionally, but in the way they saw themselves and their ability to keep going in the profession. While there is growing

awareness about stress and burnout, we still do not fully understand what it means to carry the weight of repeated violence while trying to show up for students every day.

Future research should take a closer look at what this kind of chronic exposure does to teachers over time, how it affects their health, their job satisfaction, and their decision to stay or leave. These insights could help schools design better support systems that are not just about short-term recovery, but about helping teachers hold on to their sense of purpose and well-being in the long run.

Legal and Policy Analysis. Confusion around legal protections and district policy was a recurring concern among participants in this study. Several teachers admitted they were unsure of their rights or the extent to which current policies offered any real protection. Some questioned whether certain behaviors, especially those that appeared playful or involved parent influence, met the threshold for violence, while others encountered situations where families exploited system loopholes to undermine teacher authority. These experiences underscore the need for policies that clearly define what constitutes teacher-directed violence, including nuances that fall outside of traditional disciplinary frameworks.

There is an urgent need for policies that are not only clearly written but also consistently interpreted and enforced across school communities. Policies should be developed and communicated in ways that ensure shared understanding among district personnel, site administrators, staff, students, and families. Further research should examine how state and federal laws define and address TDV, and more importantly, how those laws are implemented in practice. Many policies may appear strong on paper but fall apart in application due to vague language, misinterpretation, or lack of follow-through. A comparative legal analysis could help

surface these gaps, highlight model policies, and guide advocacy efforts to ensure educators are both informed and protected.

Comparative Research on Administrative Responses. Teacher accounts in this study varied widely in how administrators handled incidents, with some reporting prompt, empathetic action while others described being dismissed, blamed, or even gaslit after experiencing violence. These stark contrasts raise important questions about how school leadership practices shape not only policy enforcement but also the psychological safety of teachers in the aftermath of TDV.

Future research should explore how administrative leadership styles, district-level priorities, and school culture influence the ways in which TDV incidents are addressed. For example, do transformational leaders respond differently than transactional or authoritative leaders? Does a district's focus on student retention or performance outcomes affect the extent to which teacher safety is prioritized? These are the kinds of nuanced questions that need attention.

By examining these dynamics through qualitative or mixed methods approaches, researchers could identify patterns that are often obscured by broad policy statements or incident reports. Findings could help inform more responsive leadership training, performance evaluation metrics, and accountability systems that prioritize both student equity and staff safety. Ultimately, understanding the connection between leadership practice and the lived experiences of teachers can support more consistent and compassionate responses to TDV.

Violence Directed at Principals. While this study focused on teachers, participants acknowledged that principals also face aggression, whether through verbal threats, intimidation, or physical altercations. Investigating the prevalence and impact of violence aimed at school leaders presents a valuable opportunity to examine how TDV manifests across different roles

within the school environment. A deeper understanding of principal experiences with violence could reveal how administrative responsibilities, authority, and positionality influence both the perception of threat and the responses to it.

Qualitative or mixed methods research would be especially useful in capturing the complexities of these encounters, allowing principals to describe how they experience and interpret acts of aggression. Just as this study highlighted the language teachers used to make sense of TDV, exploring how principals give voice to their own experiences could provide critical insight into school climate, leadership stability, and safety culture. Additionally, comparing how principals respond to threats directed at themselves versus those aimed at teachers may uncover internal inconsistencies in how schools prioritize and address safety concerns. This area of inquiry is essential to developing a more comprehensive understanding of violence in schools and strengthening support systems for all educators

These research areas can collectively advance the field by centering educator experiences and generating practical insights for policy and practice. To build safer, more supportive schools, future research must remain anchored in the real-world experiences of those who face these challenges every day.

Recommendation for Future Research: Addressing Severe Incidents of Teacher-Directed Violence. While this study focused primarily on recurring patterns of teacher-directed violence (TDV) and school-based responses, an important area that warrants further investigation is how schools handle extreme incidents of intentional physical harm or fatal violence perpetrated by students. These rare but deeply traumatic events present significant challenges for school communities and often fall outside the scope of restorative or behavior intervention models.

Existing literature (e.g., Skiba et al., 2006; Losen & Martinez, 2013) acknowledges that most serious incidents lead to immediate exclusion or expulsion, yet few studies examine what happens afterward, particularly regarding teacher healing, student reintegration (if any), or schoolwide policy shifts. Future research should explore how districts navigate post-crisis decision-making, the emotional and professional impact on teachers, and whether there are established reentry or recovery protocols. Additionally, attention should be given to how these decisions intersect with race, disability status, and perceptions of safety and justice.

Given the heightened visibility of incidents such as the Richneck Elementary School shooting, this line of inquiry is critical to understanding how schools balance safety, legal mandates, and the dignity and protection of their staff.

Conclusions

This study explored the lived experiences of teachers who have encountered TDV and their perceptions of school policies meant to mitigate such incidents. The findings reveal that while schools have policies on paper, their inconsistent enforcement, lack of clarity, and administrative discretion create gaps that allow violence to persist.

A key takeaway is that TDV is often viewed through the lens of student discipline rather than school violence. This perspective contributes to inconsistent responses, underreporting, and a failure to implement comprehensive prevention strategies. The study highlights the urgent need for clear policies, stronger administrative accountability, and mental health support for teachers.

Ultimately, addressing TDV requires a cultural shift within schools. When teachers feel that violence is tolerated or ignored, it damages their trust in leadership and contributes to burnout and attrition. By prioritizing teacher safety, enforcing consistent policies, and supporting

educators emotionally, schools can create a healthier, more sustainable work environment that benefits both teachers and students.

This research contributes to the growing conversation on teacher-directed violence, calling for systemic changes to ensure that schools remain safe, supportive environments for all educators.

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Appendix A: Inclusion Screener

Demographic Information

My name is Sonya Laster. I am a teacher in Tennessee and a doctoral student at National University. I am working on a study entitled "Teacher-Directed Violence and School Culture in an Urban, Southeastern School District: A Phenomenological Study."

The purpose of my study is to explore the experiences of K-12 teachers who have encountered violence from students within school environments. The study aims to understand its impact on educators and provide insight on how those educators can be supported.

I am seeking to interview teachers who have experienced violence in their teaching career within the last five years. Participation will be voluntary. All interview data will be confidential and used solely for research purposes, approved by the Institutional Review Board at National University.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete this brief survey, and I will follow-up with you. The survey should take less than 5 minutes to complete.

1. Select your age range.
   - ◯ 18-24
   - ◯ 25-34
   - ◯ 35-44
   - ◯ 45-54
   - ◯ 55+

2. Gender: How do you identify?
   - ◯ Male
   - ◯ Female
   - ◯ Transgender
   - ◯ Non-binary
   - ◯ Prefer not to say

3. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?

- ◯ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ◯ Asian / Pacific Islander
- ◯ Black or African American
- ◯ Hispanic
- ◯ White / Caucasian
- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

5. Select your years of teaching experience.

- ◯ 1-5 years
- ◯ 6-10 years
- ◯ 11-19 years
- ◯ 20-29 years
- ◯ 30+ years

6. What grade level do you currently teach?

- ◯ Elementary (PK-5)
- ◯ Middle (6-8)
- ◯ High (9-12)

7. Which best describes the type of school you are currently working?

- ◯ Charter
- ◯ Private
- ◯ Public

8. Describe the type(s) of violence you experienced. (check all that apply)

- ☐ Verbal aggression (bullying, harassment, etc.)
- ☐ Physical aggression
- ☐ Theft
- ☐ Vandalism
- ☐ Cyberbullying
- ☐ Sexual assault
- ☐ Weapons offense

Please select the following statements to attest that you meet the criteria to participate in this study.

9. You currently hold a valid Tennessee teaching license.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

10. You are currently employed as a teacher at an urban school district in Tennessee.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

11. You experienced violence from a student in the workplace, causing harm to you or your belongings within the past five years within an urban school district in Tennessee.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

12. Please provide your name.

13. Please provide the best phone number to contact you.

14. Please provide the best email address to contact you that is not a work or school address.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

RQ1*: What are the lived experiences of teachers who have been victims of teacher-directed violence?*

1. Can you describe a specific incident within the past 5 years where you experienced violence from a student?
2. How many violent encounters with students have you directly experienced?
    a. How long ago did each occur?
3. Please describe, to the best of your ability, the details of the act(s) of violence you encountered with your student(s)?
    a. Follow-up question: If there were multiple encounters, did the incidents occur at the same school or different schools?
4. How did you feel during and after the violent encounter?
5. How has the experience of being a victim of teacher-directed violence affected your overall well-being and job satisfaction?
6. Have you sought any support or assistance following the violent incident? If so, what resources have you found helpful?
7. How do you perceive the impact of violent encounters on your relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators?
8. In what ways, if any, has the experience influenced your approach to classroom management and student interactions?
9. Can you share any strategies or coping mechanisms you have used to deal with the aftermath of the violence?

RQ2: *What perceptions do K-12 teachers provide about the effectiveness of existing policies and protocols in mitigating and preventing instances of violence directed at them by students, within the broader context of the school's culture?*

1. How familiar are you with the school's policies and protocols regarding instances of violence directed at teachers by students?
2. Based on your experiences, how do you assess how well the existing policies and protocols address instances of violence directed at teachers within that school environment?
3. Have you ever had to report an incident of violence to school administrators or other authorities? If so, how was the situation handled, and do you feel the outcome was satisfactory?
4. How do you perceive the role of school culture in either exacerbating or mitigating instances of violence directed at teachers?
5. Are there any specific changes or improvements you would suggest to the school's policies or protocols to better address instances of violence directed at teachers?
6. In your opinion, what additional support or resources could be provided to teachers to help prevent and address instances of violence in the school environment?
7. How do you believe the attitudes and behaviors of students, colleagues, and administrators influence the effectiveness of existing policies and protocols in preventing violence directed at teachers?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. Introduction

The researcher will:

-Introduce and clarify role in the interview process.

-Explain the purpose of the interview and how the information will be used.

-Establish rapport and build a comfortable atmosphere.

2. **Informed Consent**

The researcher will:

- Clearly explain to the participants that their participation is voluntary

- Describe the confidentiality measures in place and any potential risks or benefits.

  - All identifying information will be removed from your responses
  - You will have an opportunity to review your responses for clarification and accuracy
  - At any point you may take a break or skip any question that makes you uncomfortable
  - You are free to discontinue your participation in the study at any time.

- Confirm written consent from the participant to proceed with the interview.

3. **Transition RECORD**

The researcher will:

- Start with a few specific demographic questions to ease into the interview.

  - What grade/subject do you teach?
  - Have you taught other grades/subjects?
  - How many violent encounters have you experienced within the past 5 years?
  - Which school district(s) did your experience(s) occur?

- Ask about their background or any non-sensitive topic related to the interview subject.

-Explain how the interview will flow and encourage the participant to share their thoughts openly.

4. **Main Questions**

The researcher will:

- Ask the participant open-ended interview questions created to answer the research questions.

- Allow the participant to elaborate on their responses without interruption.

- Use probing questions to delve deeper into their experiences or to clarify ambiguous responses.
- Ask follow-up questions to explore relevant details or viewpoints based on the participant's responses.
- Encourage the participant to provide examples or anecdotes to illustrate their points.

5. **Closing**

The researcher will:

- Invite the participant to add any additional thoughts or comments they may have.
- Offer the participant an opportunity to ask questions or seek clarification, if necessary.
- Reiterate the confidentiality of the interview and any next steps in the research process.
- Thank the participants for their time and participation.