

Workplace Violence Against Primary and Secondary School Teachers in Al-Najaf City/Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Background: Violence against teachers is a significant yet under-investigated problem in Iraq that has profound implications for schooling, teacher retention and overall student performance.

Objectives: The study aims to shed light on the prevalence of Workplace violence against primary and secondary schools teachers in Al-Najaf Al- Ashraf city and to identify some associated factors.

Subject and method: A cross-sectional study was performed during the period of 1st of April 2017 to 1st of February 2018 covering 308 teachers from 21 governmental schools aged 20-75 years of both genders; both teachers and schools were randomly selected. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire designed especially for this study.

Results: Of the 308 teachers, 79 (25.6%) admitted exposure to violence in the last 12 months, 67(21.8%) of the teachers verbally abused, 17 (5.5%) exposed to physical violence and 20 (6.5%) exposed to property damage. No significant differences found between the exposure to the violence and gender, age, academic degree, years of practice of the teachers, location, type of schools and number of students in the classroom as ($p=0.975, 0.8, 0.2, 0.9, 0.8, 0.5$ and 0.3 respectively). The students were the aggressors in about two-thirds of the cases ($n=53, 67.1\%$) while the parents were the aggressors in the remaining third ($n=26, 32.9\%$).

Conclusions: The violence against teachers is a significant problem in Iraqi schools as 25.6% of the teachers reported violence in the past 12 months. It is affecting teachers regardless of their gender, age, academic degree, their years of practice, the location of the school and number of students in the class.

Keywords: Workplace violence; School violence; Gun violence

Introduction

The violence is defined as, the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, group, or community, that either causing, or has a high probability of resulting in, injury, death, and/or psychological or developmental harm or deprivation [1]. Workplace violence (WPV) takes two main types: Physical and Non-physical violence. Physical violence includes hitting, slapping, kicking, pushing, choking, grabbing, sexual assault, and other forms of physical contact intended to injure or harm. In contrast, non-physical violence includes threats, sexual harassment, bullying, and verbal abuse and may be perpetrated by various types of people [2]. Workplace violence results in great harm as it can affect the physical and mental health of victims [1]. Prevention and control of occupational injuries is one of the most important priorities in the field of public health [3].

There was an increasing amount of research has conducted in-depth studies with nurse and doctors populations, including an examination of WPV frequency, causes, influencing factors, and preventive measures [4-7]. The WPV against teachers was investigated in Canada, the USA, Brazil and in many European countries But there are little pieces of information about workplace violence against teachers in Iraq. So with increasing such events noticed lately in our country we aimed to determine the prevalence, types of workplace violence (WPV) against teachers and to explore some associated factors [8-18].

Aim of the study

The study aims to shed light on the prevalence, types of Workplace violence against primary and secondary schools teachers in Al-Najaf Al- Ashraf city and to identify some associated factors.

Methods

Study design, setting and time

A cross-sectional descriptive analytic study covering 308 teachers working in 21 schools (14 primary and 7 secondary) in the general educational directorate in Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf governorate/ Iraq beginning from 1st of April 2017 to 1st of February 2018.

Sampling design: A multistage random sampling method was used. The number of primary schools is about double the number of secondary so a proportional stratified sample was taken according to this, then schools were selected by simple random sampling and all teachers in the selected schools taken as a cluster.

Sample size calculation: The sample size estimation was according to the following equation [19].

$$N = N = Z1 - \alpha / 22P(1 - P) / d^2$$

Where N is the sample size, Z is the statistic corresponding to a level of confidence, P is the expected prevalence, and d is precision. The prevalence considered as 27.6% according to the findings of previous

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studies [8] level of confidence interval equal to 95%, and precision equal to 5%, the sample size was calculated as 307.

The study instrument and data collection: To assess the workplace violence against teachers, the authors used a self-administered questionnaire designed especially for this study which was constructed after a thorough review of the violence against teachers literatures. Content validity was assessed by a panel of seven experts with an experience of at least 5 years and moreover, a preparatory draft was designed and submitted to them, their proposals were taken into account, yet changes were used in the finalized copy. The final draft includes:

Part 1: demographic data that consisted of 10 items including age, marital status, gender, level of education, school's name, the type of school, a subject they taught, years of experience, the numbers of students in the class and geographical location of the school.

Part 2: This section consists of 3 domains containing questions about verbal violence (including verbal insults and abuse, libel, verbal threats to the teachers and their families), physical (including hitting with and without weapon both for the teachers and their families) and property damage (including car and house) during the last 12 months. Practically, prior to distribution of the questionnaire, the teachers have interviewed them in their school to explain the aim of the research, how to fill out the questionnaire and to respond to any question from them. Then the questionnaire forms were distributed to them and recollected one day later. For calculation of the overall violence, the teacher that exposed to any type of violence was considered as exposed.

Pilot study: This begun two weeks prior to data collection in Saydat Alnisa'a secondary school starting from 15th March 2017 to test for any modification required and to detect the time needed for data collection. The pilot sample included 25 teachers and they were excluded from the final study sample.

Ethical consideration: The official agreements were taken from the general educational directorate in Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf governorate, verbal consent from the school's managers and teachers, the questionnaire forms distributed to the teachers and recollected anonymously.

Statistical analysis: Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 20. Categorical Data expressed as number and percentage, mean and SD for continuous data. Pearson chi-square test used for Categorical variables and independent t-test for comparison of 2 means. P value ≤ 0.05 considered as statistically significant.

Results

The study includes 308 teachers. Their mean age was 40.4 ± 9.9 years, the mean number of students in the class was 35 ± 9.6 , and the mean years of practice were 15 ± 10 years.

Table 1 shows that 57.5% were primary school teachers, 2/3 from urban, about 70% were female, 54.2% were Bachelor certificate and 79.2% were married.

Of the sample, 67 (21.8%) exposed to verbal insult, 17 (5.5%) to physical violence and 20 (6.5%) to property damaged as shown in Figure 1.

The most common type of verbal violence was Insults and verbal abuse where 51 (76.1%) of those exposed to verbal violence reported it followed by Libel (n=37, 55.2%), Verbal threat (n=15, 22.4%), and the verbal threat to the teacher's family (n=4, 6%). While for the physical violence 14 (82.4%) were hit without a weapon (where pushing was the commonest represent n=10, 71.5%, followed by slapping and spitting

Variable	No.	%	
Type of school	Primary	177	57.5
	Secondary	131	42.5
Location of school	Rural	110	35.7
	Urban	198	64.3
Gender	Male	94	30.5
	Female	214	69.5
Education level	Diploma	136	44.2
	Bachelor	167	54.2
	M.Sc.	5	1.6
Marital status	Married	244	79.2
	Single	46	14.9
	Divorced	5	1.6
	Widow	13	4.2
Total	308	100%	

Table 1: Demographic and school's information of teachers.

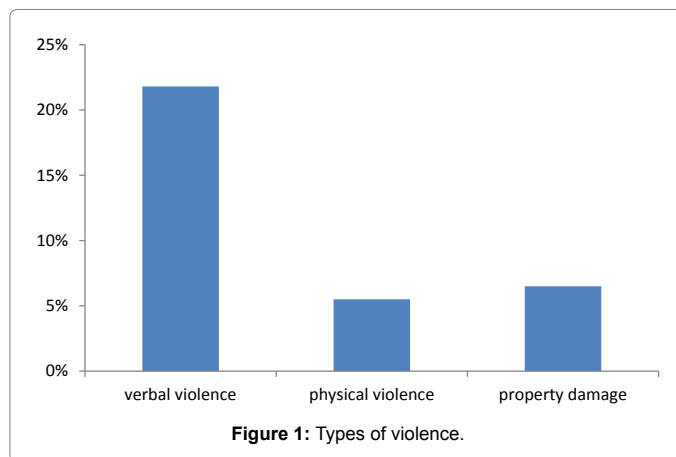


Figure 1: Types of violence.

(n=3, 21.4% and n=1, 7.1% respectively), 6(35.3%) were hit with a weapon and in 4 (66.6%) the hitting was by a pistol, 1(16.7%) by a stick and 1(16.7%) by a knife. Only one teacher reported that one of her family members was beating.

Of those 20 teachers who were exposed to property damage, 18 teachers (90%) were reported that their cars had been harmed in form of scratch in 13(72.2%), dumping tires in 3(16.7%) and breaking windows in 2(11.1%). 5 teachers (25%) reported that their houses had been subjected to harm.

From all teachers, 74 (24%) had been heard about physical, verbal or materialistic violence while 56 (18.2%) were witnesses of such violence.

Of the total sample, 79 (25.6%) teachers were exposed to violence during the last 12 months regardless of the type of the violence.

Although the reported violence is more in urban than rural, females more than males, primary more than secondary schools and in bachelor than other degrees, there was no significant statistical association as shown in the Table 2.

There was no significant statistical difference in the mean age, number of students in the class and years of practice among those exposed to violence and not as p = 0.8, 0.3 and 0.9 respectively as shown in Figure 2.

Four teachers (5.1%) of those exposed to violence reported that they had been stopped working after the accidents, 7 (8.9%) admitted complaining of somatic and psychological symptoms.

About half of cases the problem was resolved by the law (n= 46, 58.2%) followed by reconciliation and clannish (n= 21, 26.6% and n=12, 15.2%) respectively.

The students were the aggressors in about two-thirds of the cases (n=53, 67.1%) while the parents were the aggressors in the remaining third (n=26, 32.9%).

When asking the teachers about the causes of the violence against them, the lack of legislation that protect the educational staff was the commonest cause where 252 (81.1%) mentioned it, followed by the inefficiency of the Ministry of Education (n=191, 62%), family and socio-family breeding (n= 160, 51.9%) and breakdown of social relations between teachers and parents (n=100, 32.5%) as shown in Figure 3.

Variable	Violence		Total	X ² , P	
	Yes (n=97) No. (%)	No (n=229) No. (%)			
Location of school	Rural	29 (36.7)	81(35.4)	110(35.7)	0.05, 0.8
	Urban	50(63.3)	148(64.6)	198(64.3)	
Gender	Male	24(30.4)	70(30.6)	94(30.5)	0.001, 0.975
	Female	55(69.6)	159(69.4)	214(69.5)	
Type of school	Primary	43(54.4)	134(58.5)	117(57.5)	0.4, 0.5
	Secondary	36(45.6)	95(41.5)	131(42.5)	
Education level	Bachelor	50(63.3)	117(51.1)	167(54.2)	3.5, 0.2
	Diploma	28(35.4)	108(47.2)	136(44.2)	
	M.Sc.	1(1.3)	4(1.7)	5(1.6)	

Table 2: Relation between violence and Variable.

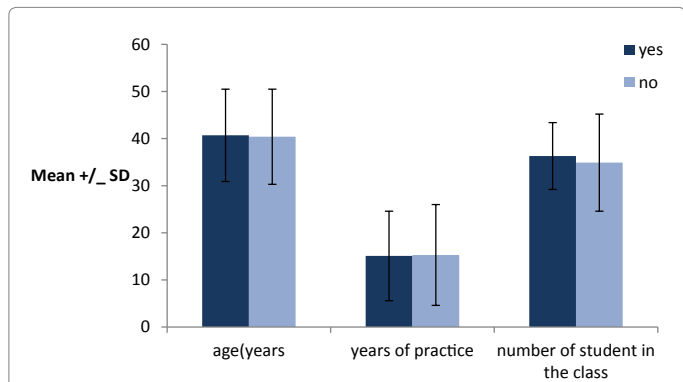


Figure 2: Relationship between the violence and (age of teachers, the years of practice, the number of students).

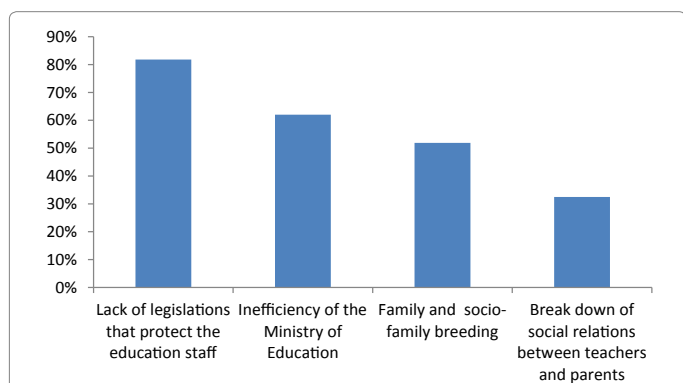


Figure 3: Distribution by percentage according to the causes of violence against the teachers by the opinion of the interviewees.

Discussion

Violence in schools is a challenging problem for educational systems, societies, and governments and it has emerged as a significant public health crisis that warrants immediate attention [20].

The verbal violence is the commonest type of violence in the current study as 21.8% of the teachers exposed to a verbal insult, this finding appears consistent with study in Turkey, which reported that 14.7% of teachers exposed to a verbal violence and with study in Bavarian schools and the USA where the prevalences of the verbal insult were 19.4% and 20% respectively [14,21,22]. In contrast to this finding Egyptian, and Brazilian studies found much higher (52.6%, 85%) prevalence while the lowest prevalence was among Taiwanese teachers (6.5%) [12,23,24]. This difference could be attributed to the cultural definition of the verbal violence where some violent words are regarded as normal in some cultures and are not in another.

The present study shows that (6.5%) of teachers were victims of object damage and this in agreement with many studies such as in Luxembourg as 4.5% of teachers had been the victims of object damage the USA where 7% of teachers exposed to object damage and a study in Taiwanese [9,17,24]. But in contrast to Kassel (Germany) study in which 20% of the respondent indicated that private objects had been damaged by students [16]. This could be occurred due to different methodology used in the studies.

The physical violence involves any act which is intended to cause injury or harm with or without weapon such as hitting, slapping, pushing and other forms of physical violence. In the present study 5.5% of these teacher report that they are physical attached in the last 12 months which seems to be similar to many studies as Brazil, Luxembourg, Kassel, Marburg, Turkey, Egypt and Taiwan as the prevalence of physical violence in these studies were 7.9%, 4%, 7%, 4.2%, 6.3%, 9.2% and 5.7% respectively [13,15,16,17,21,23,24]. While much higher prevalence was reported in USA where 44% of the teachers reported physical attacks [22].

In the current study, the prevalence of workplace violence against teachers is 25.6% which is about the same in Canadian study in which 27.6% of teachers were exposed to violence and in Taiwanese studies in which the violence against teachers was 30.1% [8,24]. Although results from other studies determined a much higher prevalence of violence against teachers such as the USA, Brazil, and Zagreb(Croatia) where the prevalence in these studies were 80%, 43%, 47.3% and 49% respectively [10,12,18].

The low prevalence in our study may be attributed to that many teachers were afraid of admitting violence in spite of confidential character of the study and could be attributed also to the difference in sampling methods, sample sizes, and geographical area.

The reported violence is more in primary than secondary schools (54.4% vs. 45.6%) which appears in accordance with a result from a case-control study and in contrast to many studies which showed that the violence is more in secondary schools than primary schools. This might have occurred because the number of primary schools in Al-Najaf government is as double as the number of secondary schools. This finding necessitates the implementation of a prevention program against violence early in the student's life [8,18,21,24,25,26].

Although being a male teacher is associated with exposure to violence this is in contrast to the result of this study and other this might be attributed to the educational system in Iraq where boys and girls are taught separately and in the male schools there is a mixture of

male and female teachers whereas in the girl's schools the male teachers are rarely hired. So the females teachers are more than males teachers in the present study [15,18,24,25].

The reported violence is higher in urban than rural schools and less among teachers with an advanced academic degree. This is in agreement with. This might be attributed to the cultural values and respect of teachers are much in rural than an urban area. Teachers who have more working experience and teaching in overcrowded classes are protected against violence. This is in contrast to our finding where no significant difference was found. This might reflect a moral dilemma in the context of absence of law in our situation as neither the senior nor junior teachers are protected from violence [25].

The students were the aggressor in about two-thirds of accidents, and this is in agreement with Egyptian study while in the USA 90% and 94% of all violent incidents caused by students [10,11,23].

Conclusions

It is concluded that violence is present in the school setting since about a quarter of the respondents reported being a victim of violence with the verbal violence was the commonest type of violence. The results highlight the importance of improving teachers 'work conditions and implementing measures to prevent violence both in schools and in society as a whole.

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