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# Violence Against Teachers Among the 50 Largest U.S. School Districts: Predictors, Consequences, and School Responses

Final Report to National Institute of Justice

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#### **Overview**

This report provides an overview of the research project titled "Violence against Teachers in the 50 Largest U.S. School Districts: Predictors, Consequences, and School Responses," funded under 2020-CK-BX-0004. Below, the main goals and objectives of the current research, along with the sample and data collection are provided. The results section explores the prevalence of seven distinct types of teacher victimization during Waves I and II as well as negative impacts experienced by victimized teachers, including emotional distress, distrust in students and thoughts about quitting. Additionally, the report examines how school administrators respond to incidents of teacher victimization and the (dis)satisfaction of victimized teachers regarding these school responses. Furthermore, the report investigates whether experiences of teacher victimization, schools' responses to teacher victimization, and/or school safety issues are related to former teachers' decisions to exit their teaching careers. It also examines school policies on violence against teachers and whether prevention and/or intervention programs have been implemented to address teacher victimization. Conclusions and policy implications are briefly discussed.

The appendices contain four manuscripts that have been either accepted or are under review for publication in academic journals. These papers provide in-depth examinations of the primary goals addressed under this award with their key findings are briefly summarized.

#### Primary goals and objectives of the project

Teacher victimization in schools is becoming a growing concern in the national dialogue and empirical studies on teacher victimization (see Curran, Viano, & Fisher,2019; Huang, Eddy, & Camp, 2020; Longobardi et al., 2019; Moon & McCluskey, 2020; Moon, Morash, & McCluskey, 2021) indicate that teacher victimization by students is highly prevalent. The findings of a meta-analysis, which examined 24 empirical studies on teacher victimization, suggest that the occurrence of any form of teacher victimization, such as verbal abuse and physical assault), ranged between 20% and 75% over a two-year period (Longobardi et al., 2019).

Also, limited empirical studies (see Curran et al., 2019; Moon & McCluskey, 2020; Moon, Saw, & McCluskey, 2020; Wilson et al., 2011) have investigated the negative effects of teacher victimization, and these findings indicate an increased likelihood of victimized teachers reporting heightened levels of physical/emotional distress, disengagement/distrust of students, burnout, and intentions to leave their teaching careers. Victimized teachers report higher levels of fear of victimization while at school, which can negatively impact their job performance and student learning (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Wilson, Douglas, & Lyon, 2011). Additionally, limited research (see McCluskey, Moon, & Saw, 2024; McMahon et al., 2017; Moon et al., 2021) has shown that a substantial proportion of victimized teachers who reported their victimization incidents to school authorities disapproved of how their victimization was handled by school administrators. A recent study by Moon et al., (2020) found that nearly 20 percent of former teachers citied school administrators' indifference, lack of support, and ineffective intervention in response to their victimization incidents as a very important reason for leaving their teaching careers. While extant studies have enhanced our understanding of the prevalence and negative effects of teacher

victimization, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive examination of predictors and negative consequences of teacher victimization, as well as school responses to such incidents across the United States. To achieve this objective, the present research analyzed a random sample of 4,005 middle and high school teachers to investigate dynamic aspects of teacher victimization within urban school settings across 19 states nationwide. We examined seven different types of teacher victimization and explored factors at individual and school levels that either predict victimization or moderate its effects on negative outcomes for victimized teachers. In addition, the present study investigated previously underexplored area regarding variations in administrative responses to teacher victimization and whether victimized teachers are satisfied or dissatisfied with schools' handing of their victimization incidents. Overall, we believe that the research can offer informative evidence on promising (and problematic) interventions to aid in creating safer and more effective school environments for both teachers and students; whether any substantial differences between schools exist in their handling of teacher victimization, and whether victimized teachers are satisfied or dissatisfied with the outcome due to identifiable elements of the administrative intervention particularly within the context of procedural justice.

#### **Research Design and Methods**

#### **Data collection and sample**

The present two-wave longitudinal research project (2022 and 2023) utilized a stratified multistage cluster sampling design to collect a random sample of middle and high school teachers among 50 largest school districts across the nation. First, all public middle and high schools in each school district were collected and categorized into 9 different groups, based on

each school's academic performance and proportion of students receiving subsidized lunches. Second, approximately 10 to 130 schools from each group were randomly selected, with the number determined by the number of schools within each group. Third, the names of teachers and their email addresses from the randomly selected schools were gathered. These were obtained from the websites of public schools and/or their respective school districts.

In the spring of 2022, following university IRB approval, a letter detailing the research and data collection effort was sent via email to randomly selected teachers<sup>1</sup>. Approximately one week later, these teachers were invited to voluntarily participate in the web-based survey. To encourage and compensate teachers for their time and effort for the research participation, each participant received a \$20 e-gift card from a private party upon completion of the survey at each wave. In total, 4,005 teachers from 609 middle and high schools participated in the Wave I online survey (see Table 1 for socio-demographic characteristics of participants in Wave I).

The findings in Table 1 show that 68 percent of teachers (N=2,724) are female, while 31 percent (N=1,251) are male. Less than one percent of teachers (N=30) in the sample reported that they are transgender or identify as non-binary. Regarding the distribution of race/ethnicity in the sample, 64 percent of teachers (N=2,556) are White, followed by Black (16%, N=632), Hispanic (11%, N=459), Asian (5%, N=185), and those reporting other race/ethnic categories (4%, N=173). Also, the findings indicate that a quarter of teachers (N=989) in the sample have five or

Note 1: As described, the research design anticipated sampling teachers from all 50 of the largest school districts. This became impossible, however, due to several technological barriers, which we strongly surmise to be Independent School Districts' email firewall systems blocking emails from Qualtrics, or survey emails being directed to teachers' junk folders. Thus, no or extremely small numbers of teachers in 12 out of the 50 largest independent school districts participated in the wave I survey. Due to covid-19 travel restrictions, our ability to ascertain or obtain alternative electronic access was severely curtailed.

fewer years of teaching experience as teachers, while 53 percent (N=2,231) of the participants reported teaching experience in excess of 10 years. Regarding the levels of schools, 39 percent of teachers (N=1,546) teach at middle schools, while 56 percent of participants (N=2,251) in the sample are high school teachers. Five percent of teachers (N=208) in the sample teach at middle/high mixed schools.

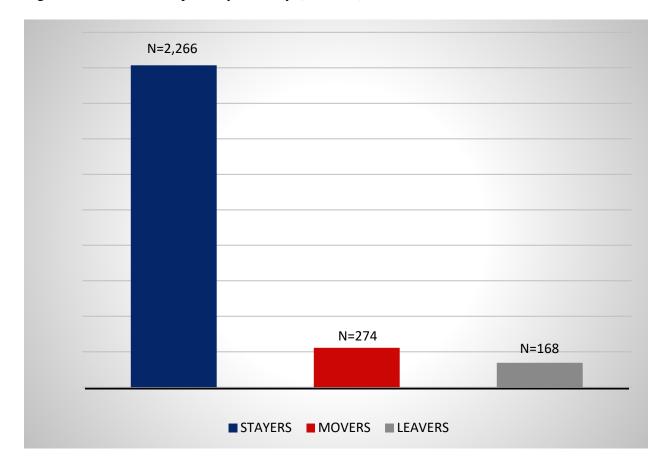
Table 1: Social and demographic characteristics (N = 4,005)

Gender	Percentage	Number
Male	31 %	1,251
Female	68 %	2,724
Transgender/Non-binary	0.7%	30
Race/Ethnicity		
White	64%	2,556
Black	16%	632
Hispanic	11%	459
Asian	5%	185
Other	4%	173
<b>Duration of Career</b>		
0-5 years	25%	989
5.1 - 10 years	22%	885
10.1 – 45 years	53%	2,231
School Level		
Middle School	39%	1,546
Middle-High Mixed School	5%	208
High School	56%	2,251

In the spring of 2023, approximately one year later, Wave II data collection was implemented, involving a follow-up with the 4,005 participants from Wave I. Among the invited participants, 2,708 continued participations in the second wave of the survey, yielding a retention rate of 68% from Wave I to Wave II. Regarding the mobility of the wave II participants (See

Figure 1), 2,266 teachers (stayers) continued teaching at the same school, while 274 teachers (movers) transferred to another school between Wave I to Wave II. Furthermore, one hundred sixty-eight participants (leavers) left their teaching career after the Wave I survey in 2022.

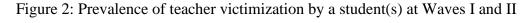
Figure 1: Wave 2 Participants by mobility (N=2,708)

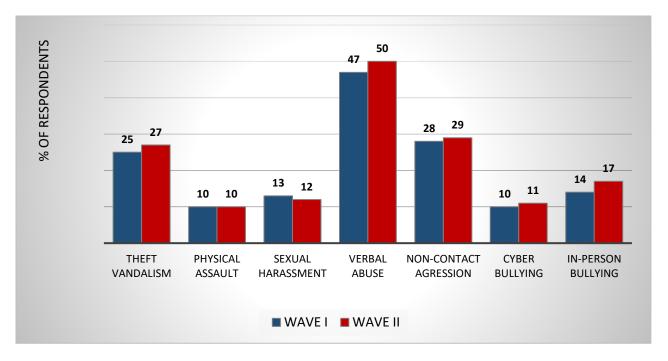


#### **Key Findings**

#### Prevalence of teacher victimization at Waves I and II

The results in Figure 2 show the prevalence of seven different types of victimization (including theft/vandalism, physical assault, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse) by a student(s) at Waves I and II. The findings indicate that 10 percent of the participants in the survey reported being the victim of physical assault by a student(s) at Waves I and II respectively. Nearly half (47% in Wave I and 50% in Wave III) of the teachers in the sample reported experiencing verbal abuse by a student(s).





Ten percent at Wave I and 11 percent of the participants at Wave II in the sample reported their victimization of cyberbullying by a student(s) respectively. For in-person bullying victimization, 14 percent and 17 percent of teachers reported their victimization by students at Waves I and II respectively. Overall, the findings indicate that verbal abuse and non-contact physical aggression (e.g., throwing, kicking, destroying items in front of teachers) are the most common types of teacher victimization by a student(s). While serious victimization (e.g., physical assault, sexual harassment) is less prevalent, it remains alarming high, indicating the high prevalence of teacher victimization, consistent with prior findings (citations) and more contemporary samples (see Reddy et al., 2023).



#### **Severity of teacher victimization**

For each of the seven different types of victimization at each wave, victimized teachers were asked to rate the seriousness of their most recent victimization by students. As expected, physical assault victimization was rated as the most serious event of victimization, compared to other types of victimization by students (see Figure 3). Forty-eight percent of physical assault

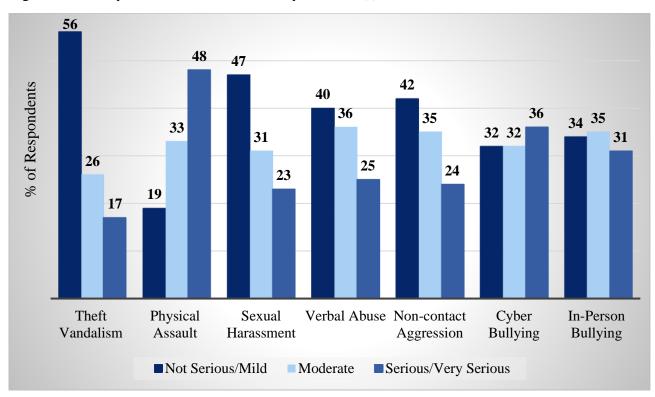


Figure 3: Severity of teacher victimization by a student(s) at Wave I

Note1: Due to rounding, numbers may not add to 100%.

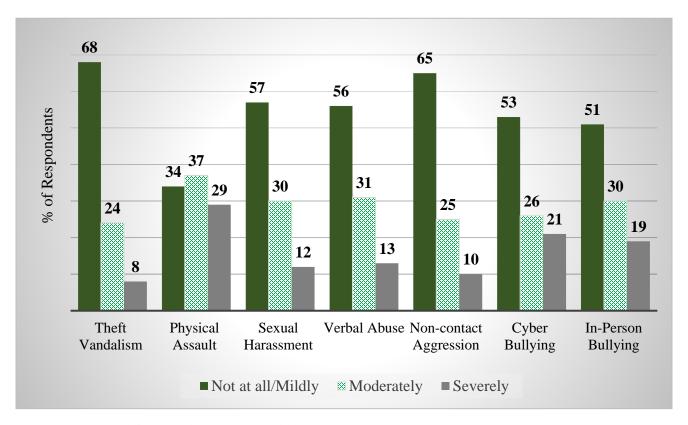
victims rated their victimization as serious or very serious, while 17 percent of victims of theft/vandalism reported their victimization as serious or very serious. Approximately one-fourth of teachers who experienced sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and non-physical contact aggression rated their most recent victimization as serious or very serious respectively.

Interestingly, approximately one-third of victims of cyberbullying (36%) and traditional bullying (31%) by students reported that their victimization was serious or very serious incidents, higher than all other types of victimization except physical assault victimizations.

#### **Negative consequences of teacher victimization**

At each wave, victimized teachers were asked if they experienced any negative effects such as emotional distress or diminished distrust in students) as a result of each of seven different types

Figure 4: Negative impact of victimization on the level of victimized teachers' emotional distress at Wave I



Note1: Due to rounding, numbers may not add to 100%.

of victimization. Regarding the impact of teacher victimization on emotional distress, the findings in Figure 4 show that 29 percent of physical assault victims rated the incidents severely distressing, while 37 percent of them rated their victimization moderately distressing. For sexual harassment and verbal abuse victimization, 12 percent and 13 percent of victimized teachers rated their victimization experience severely distressing respectively. Fifty-seven percent of sexual harassment victims and 56 percent of verbal abuse victims reported that their victimization was not distressing at all or mildly distressing respectively. Interestingly, 21 percent of cyber-bullying victims and 19 percent of in-person bullying victims reported that their experiences of victimization had a severe impact on their emotional distress, ranking as the second and third highest levels respectively, following physical assault victimization.

Regarding the impact of victimization on teachers' distrust in students, the findings in Figure 5 indicate that 34 percent of physical assault victims reported often or almost always feeling unable to trust students after the incident, while 31 percent of them sometimes experienced distrust of students following the incident. Among victims of sexual harassment, 29 percent often or almost always felt their distrustful of students, while 34 percent sometimes experienced such feelings after the incident. Also, 29 percent of victims of verbal abuse reported that they could not trust students often/almost always, while 35 percent sometimes felt distrust of students following the incident. Moreover, a substantial percentage of theft/vandalism victims (44 percent) and cyber-bullying victims (41 percent) reported they often/almost always could not trust students after each incident. These findings underscore the significant impact of theft/vandalism and cyberbullying victimization on teachers' trust in students, primarily influenced by factors such as the anonymity of perpetrating students.

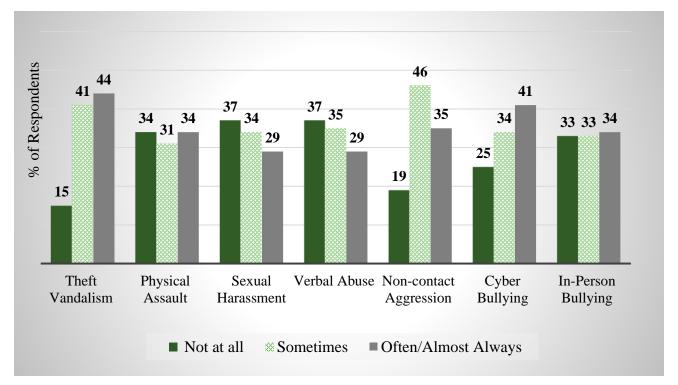


Figure 5: Impact of victimization on victimized teachers' distrust in students (Wave I only)

Figure 6 shows the impact of victimization on victimized teachers' concerns about school safety following each incident. The findings show that around half of physical assault victims (46 percent) reported often or always feeling unsafe in their schools after the incident, while 34 percent of them sometimes experienced feelings of being unsafe in schools. After experiencing sexual harassment, 22 percent of victims often or always felt unsafe, while 21 percent of verbal abuse victims reported often or always feeling unsafe in their schools after the incident. Among the victims of in-person bullying, 27 percent often or always felt concerns about school safety as a result of the victimization.

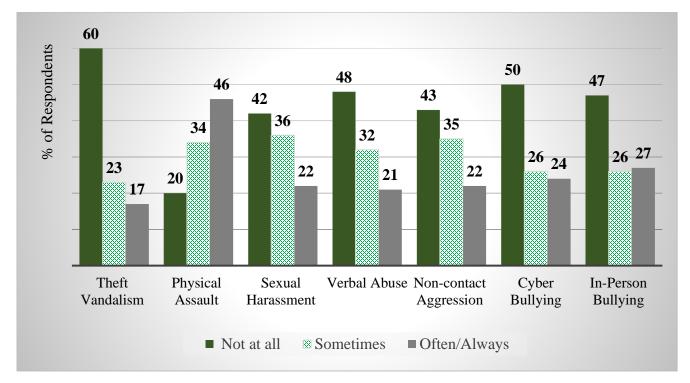


Figure 6: Impact of victimization on school safety concern (Wave I only)

The results in Figure 7 indicate the impact of victimization on teachers' consideration of leaving their teaching careers after such incidents. Among those subjected to physical assault from students, 46 percent reported they often/always thought about quitting teaching, while 26 percent sometimes considered departing their teaching career. Regarding sexual harassment victimization, 30 percent of victimized teachers often or always contemplated leaving their teaching career, while 42 percent did not think about leaving their teaching career after the incident. As for verbal abuse victimization, 36 percent and 26 percent of victimized teachers often/always and sometimes considered quitting their teaching career respectively, while 38 percent did not think about leaving. Among victims of cyberbullying, 40 percent - second

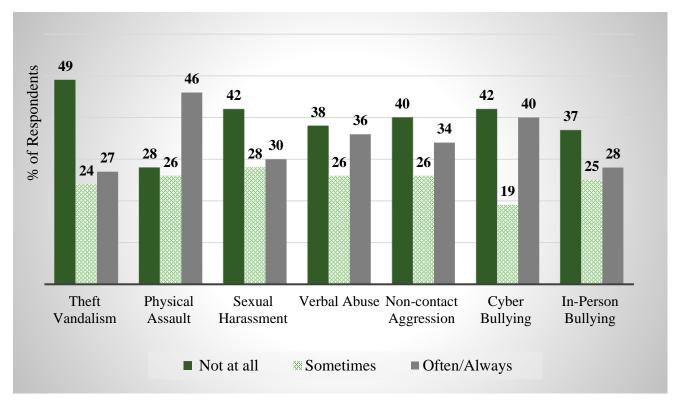


Figure 7: Impact of victimization on victimized teachers' thoughts about quitting (Wave I only)

highest only to those experiencing physical assault victimization - reported often/always thinking about leaving their teaching career after the incident.

#### Victimized teachers' reports to school administrators

Following each instance of victimization, teachers were asked whether they had reported their latest experience of victimization to school administrators (including school police officers).

The findings in Figure 8 show that the majority of teachers subjected to physical assault (83 percent) did report their victimizations to school officials, while 17 percent did not notify school administrators.

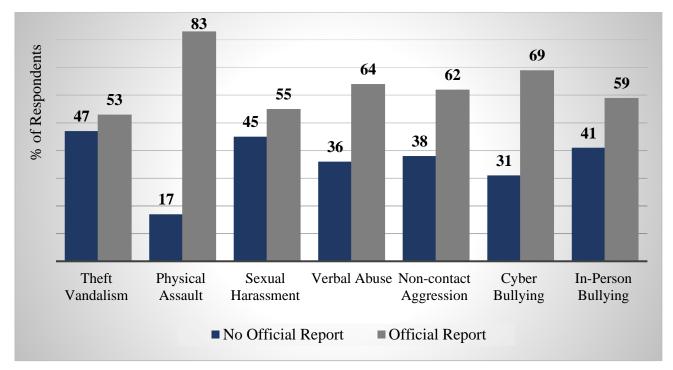


Figure 8: Teachers' reporting of their victimization to schools

The results also indicate that 55 percent of victims of sexual harassment and 64 percent of victims of verbal abuse reported their most recent victimization to schools. In cases of cyberbullying and in-person bullying victimization, 69 percent and 59 percent of victims reported their victimization experiences to school authorities, respectively.

#### **School responses to teacher victimization**

Teachers who reported their victimization to schools were asked about the actions taken by school administrators in response to the incident. The response choices included options such as "no action", "questioning offending students," "disciplining offending students," and "reporting the incident to police." Respondents were allowed to choose all applicable school responses.

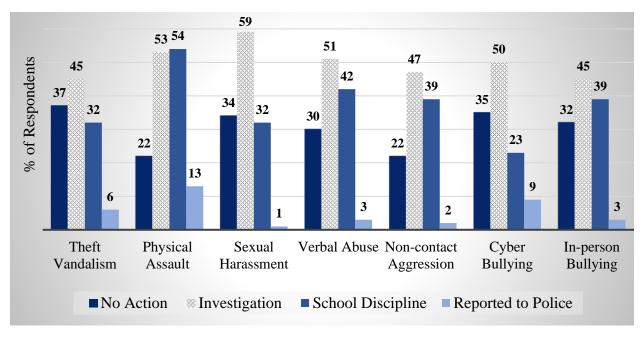


Figure 9: School responses to teacher victimization

Note 1: Respondents were allowed to select multiple school responses, if applicable

The findings in Figure 9 show that 22 percent of teachers who experienced physical assault reported that their schools took no action in response to the incident, while 34 percent of sexual harassment victims and 30 percent of verbal abuse victims indicate inaction from school administrators. In incidents of cyberbullying and in-person bullying victimization, 35 percent and 32 percent of victimized teachers, respectively, reported that school administrators took no action after the incident was reported.

Regarding schools' disciplinary measures, 54 percent of teachers who experienced physical assault reported that their schools disciplined offending students, which could involve actions like suspension, detention, or expulsion. In comparison, 32 percent of sexual harassment victims and 42 percent of verbal abuse victims indicated that their school disciplined the

offending student(s). In the case of cyberbullying, only 23 percent of victims reported that their schools took disciplinary action, marking the lowest proportion compared to other types of victimization, possibly because of anonymity of offending students. For in-person bullying, 39 percent indicated that their school disciplined the offending students.

For incidents reported to police, the findings show that 13 percent of victims of physical assault reported that their cases were reported to police by school administrators. In contrast, one percent of sexual harassment victims and three percent of verbal abuse victims indicated that their victimization cases were reported to police, respectively. Nine percent of cyberbullying victims and three percent of in-person bullying victims reported that their cases were reported to police by school administrators.

#### Victimized teachers' satisfaction with school responses

For each victimization reported to school administrators, victimized teachers were asked to rate their satisfaction with the school's response to their incident. A four category Likert-type scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree was collapsed to reflect agreement or disagreement with being satisfied with the school response. The findings in Figure 10 show that 58 percent of victims of physical assault reported their dissatisfaction with schools' responses to their victimization, while 42 percent reported being satisfied with the school handling of their physical assault victimization. Similarly, 63 percent of sexual harassment victims and 59 percent of verbal abuse victims indicated dissatisfaction with schools' intervention with their victimization incidents, respectively, while 37 percent of victims of sexual harassment and 41 percent of verbal abuse reported their satisfaction with schools' handling of the incident. Regarding cyberbullying and in-person bullying, 67 percent (the highest level of dissatisfaction with school responses

among seven types of victimization) and 60 percent reported their dissatisfaction with schools' handling of their incidents.

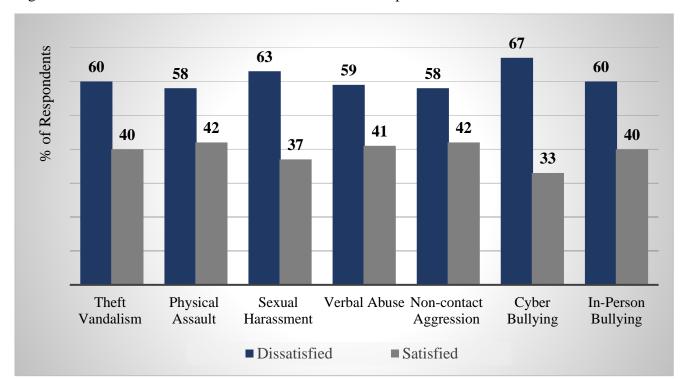


Figure 10: Victimized teachers' satisfaction with school responses

#### Effects of victimization and school responses on former teachers' decision to leave

At Wave II, 168 former teachers who had chosen to exit the teaching profession since Wave I were surveyed regarding the significance of their victimization experiences and their respective schools' responses to victimization incidents in influencing their decisions. The results in Figure 11 show that 26 percent of former teachers regarded the experience of victimization by students as a very/extremely important factor in their decision to leave the teaching profession, while 46

percent indicated that their decision to leave the teaching career was not influenced at all by teacher victimization. Regarding the impact of school responses to victimization on their decision to leave, approximately one in three (32%) teachers indicated that school administrators' indifference, lack of support, and ineffective intervention were very/extremely important reasons

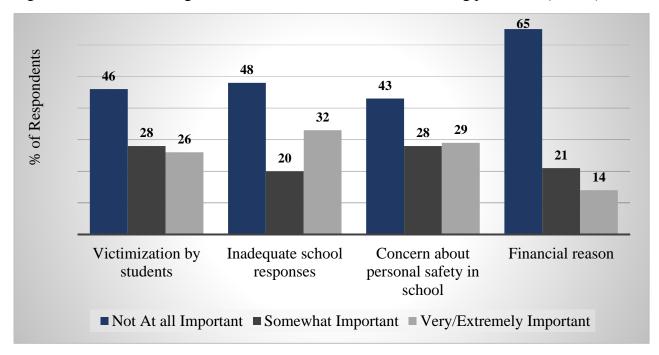


Figure 11: Factors affecting former teachers' decision to leave teaching profession (N=168)

contributing to their exit. Overall, 52 percent of former teachers stated that inadequate school responses and interventions had at least some impact on their decision to leave the profession. Former teachers were also asked about whether their concern regarding personal safety in schools influenced their decision to exit the teaching profession. The results indicate that 29 percent of them considered their concerns about personal safety in schools as very or extremely

important factors in their decision, while 43 percent stated that it had no impact at all. Regarding the influence of financial reasons on the decision of those who left, the findings indicate that 14 percent of former teachers regarded it as a very or extremely important factor for exiting the teaching profession, while approximately two-thirds of them (65 percent) said it had no impact at all. Overall, these findings suggest that experiences of victimization, inadequate school responses, and concerns about personal safety in school exert a more substantial influence on former teachers' decisions to leave their teaching career compared to financial reasons.

#### School policies on violence directed against teachers

In the Wave I survey, all participants were asked about their school's policies regarding violence aimed at teachers, as well as whether their schools have implemented prevention and/or intervention programs to address teacher victimization. The findings in Figure 12 show that 70 percent of participants indicate the presence of school policies addressing violence directed against teachers by students, with 30 percent indicating the absence of such polices at their schools.

However, the results suggest that only 20 percent of survey participants reported the actual implementation of a program(s) in their school to address teacher victimization, whereas 80 percent indicated the absence of such a program. In terms of intervention programs implemented in their schools, 47 percent of teachers reported the existence of intervention programs focused on teacher victimization, while 53 percent stated the absence of such programs.

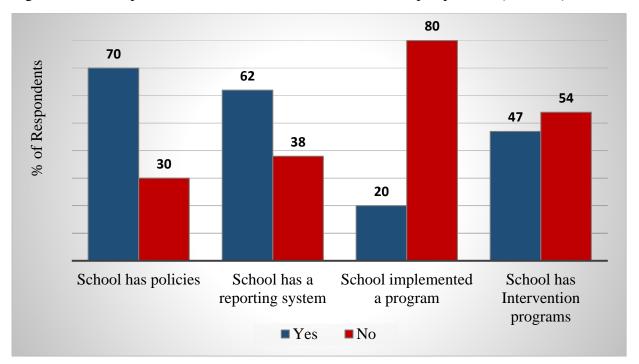


Figure 12: School policies on teacher victimization – teachers' perspectives (N=4,005)

#### **Conclusion and policy implications**

The present research found that students' aggression directed toward middle and high school teachers among 50 largest school districts across the nation is highly prevalent with detrimental negative consequences to victimized teachers. Several key findings and policy implications that emerged from the research need to be discussed. First, the prevalence of seven different types of teacher victimization is alarmingly high, ranging from 47% for verbal abuse to 10% for cyberbullying. Particularly concerning is that 10% of teachers in the sample reported their victimization of physical assaults, and 13% experienced sexual harassment from students, which are relatively severe forms of victimization. Furthermore, the findings show that 10% and 17% of teachers reported experiencing cyberbullying and in-person bullying victimization

respectively. These types of victimization have been relatively underexplored in prior research, highlighting areas in need of additional examination. Second, the research underscores that teacher victimization has profound negative effects on victimized teachers. A substantial portion of victimized teachers report experiencing challenges with their emotional health, harboring distrust toward students, expressing their safety concerns at schools, and contemplating quitting following the victimization incidents. These findings highlight the dual importance of both preventing teachers' victimization and providing support and services to victimized teachers (see Wilson et al., 2011). Third, the findings suggest that approximately 60 percent of victimized teachers who reported their victimization to schools were dissatisfied with the school's responses, a relatively consistent pattern across the seven different types of victimization. Additionally, among former teachers who left the teaching profession after the Wave I survey, 32 percent cited school administrators' indifference, lack of support, and ineffective intervention as a very important reason for their departure. This percentage is higher than those who cited their experience of victimization (26%) or financial reasons (14%) as their primary motivation for leaving. These results are consistent with a prior study (see Moon et al., 2020), indicating that inadequate interventions by school administrators constitute problematic aspects of response. Fourth, the results show that although 70 percent of participants in the sample reported that their schools have general school policies addressing teacher victimization, only 20 percent indicated that their schools have implemented any specific programs aimed at educating students about teacher victimization and its adverse consequences. These findings suggest that while many schools may have policies on teacher victimization, there is a lack of concrete efforts to prevent and effectively reduce such incidents.

Overall, these findings emphasize that teacher victimization is a serious school and social problem yielding a variety of detrimental negative consequences. There is an urgent need for a

comprehensive examination of school administrative policies on the prevention of teacher victimization. Additionally, it is important to design and implement school-based prevention programs to minimize the prevalence of teacher victimization and to understand the challenges faced by and support needed for school administrators to effectively prevent and address such incidents. Moreover, developing and implementing training programs aimed at enhancing school administrators' intervention strategies for teacher victimization and minimizing negative consequences for victimized teachers would appear to be an area where training and resource investment is crucial.

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#### **Appendices**

#### List of Manuscripts accepted or are under review for publication

## 1. McCluskey, J., Moon, B., & Saw, G. (Accepted for publication – Journal of School Violence). Victimized teachers' perceptions of procedural justice and the impact on satisfaction with school responses

**Abstract:** Victimization of teachers is an area of growing concern for administrators and policymakers. Recent research has increased the understanding of the prevalence and negative consequences of teacher victimization; however, one gap in the literature involves understanding the quality of treatment when victimizations are reported to school administrators. The present research attempts to fill the gap by applying procedural justice theory to understand how elements of school responses to victimization events affect teachers' satisfaction with the process. Data from teachers among 50 largest school districts across the nation were used to identify 636 theft, sexual harassment, and physical assault incidents reported to school administration. Teachers' satisfaction with the school response was modeled using measures derived from distributive and procedural justice theoretical frameworks applied to administrator actions. Results indicate that procedural justice is an important dimension of school response and influential on teachers' reported satisfaction with how victimization events were handled.

## 2. Moon, B., Saw, G., McCluskey, J., & Vasquez, H. (Under review). The Impact of cyberbullying victimization on teachers' work stress, job inefficacy, and turnover intentions

**Abstract:** The present research explores the occurrence of cyberbullying victimization among teachers from both students and their parents and assess the consequences of such victimization. The results indicate that 15.4 percent of teachers reported experiencing cyberbullying victimization by students and/or parents. The examination of the impact of cyberbullying on multiple outcomes shows a concerning pattern: victimized teachers are more likely to experience higher levels of work-related stress, diminished job effectiveness, and increased intend to leave their teaching career. There is a pressing need for school administrators to recognize the severity of the issue and implement policies and intervention strategies.

### 3. Moon, B., McCluskey, J., & Cardwell, S. (Under review). Offending students' apology and sincerity and its impact on victimized teachers' emotional and physical distress

**Abstract:** Extant empirical research indicates that teacher victimization is highly prevalent and has detrimental impacts to victimized teachers. Although existing empirical studies have provided valuable information into the prevalence and negative consequences of teacher victimization, to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical research investigating the impact of apologies from offending students and the perceived sincerity of those apologies by victimized teachers on the emotional and physical distress experienced by the victims. The current research is the first attempt to address the limitation. Overall, the present research found that victimized teachers often endure elevated levels of emotional and physical distress,

indicating the urgent need for effective intervention and measures to alleviate the distress experienced by victimized teachers. The results imply that sincere apologies from offending students and holding them accountable through appropriate punishment can play pivotal roles in alleviating distress endured by victimized teachers at school.

### 4. McCluskey, J., Saw, G., & Moon, B. (Under Review). Student violence against teachers in large U.S. school districts: Prevalence and risk factors

**Abstract:** The present study investigated the risk factors of teacher victimization using opportunity theories as a framework. A random sample of 2,266 teachers, surveyed across two waves of data collection, was used to explore victimization via physical assault, sexual harassment, and theft/vandalism. Consistent with previous research, we found a significant incidence of violence and aggression directed toward teachers by students. Approximately 1 out of 10 teachers in the sample reported a physical assault and sexual harassment victimization respectively in the 12 months prior to the survey, while more than a quarter of the sample reported incidents of theft/vandalism victimization. Multivariate analyses indicate that school context and environment have a strong impact on likelihood of victimization and suggests pathways for intervention.