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Secondary School Teachers’ Experience and Perceptions of Violence in the Workplace, 2007-2008

USER GUIDE
Secondary School Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of Violence in the Workplace

Research into teachers’ personal experience and perceptions of work-related violence is sparse, the majority of investigations focusing on pupil-pupil violence. According to this study, however, as many as 91 per cent of secondary school teachers have personally experienced, or witnessed towards their colleagues, some form of violence in or near school premises. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research the study sought insights into the prevalence and effects of violence on their profession.

Key Findings

- work-related violence was regularly directly experienced, as well as witnessed in the case of colleagues, by a high percentage of secondary school teachers.
- although 73.4 per cent of participants say they have experienced some kind of violence in the previous 12 months (and 90 per cent during their career), serious incidents of violence are extremely rare
- violence can be categorised into two types: ‘direct’, experienced by 58.9 per cent of participants; and ‘indirect’, experienced by 11.6 per cent. Some teachers experienced both forms (29.5 per cent)
- while respondents have differing views on the precise definition of ‘violence’, 92 per cent report having personally been the victim of ‘verbal abuse’; 68.3 per cent of physical assault; 59 per cent of non-verbal intimidation and 58 per cent of threats against them
- although 79 per cent of the incidents reported were committed by current pupils, previous pupils (40 per cent) and parents (15 per cent) were also responsible incidents of violence
- the way this is dealt with by management has a significant influence on how the victims cope with their experience
- the majority of incidents take place within the school premises and hours
- emotional response to incidents vary: 15.4 per cent saying they experienced ‘anger’ and 13.6 per cent ‘shock’; 11.6 per cent felt ‘unsupported’; 10.3 per cent ‘upset’ and 9.6 per cent ‘fear’. Others felt that their experiences went with the territory of being a teacher. 45 per cent of respondents stated that their experience made them consider leaving the profession. 60 per cent of victims reported having received support from a variety of sources and, of these, 60 per cent felt the support had been good or adequate
- only 36 per cent of participants had received training in dealing with violent or aggressive behaviour and 87 per cent said they would have liked to receive some such guidance
- the qualitative research suggests that it not a common problem across all schools and there are a number of factors that need to be considered in understanding and addressing the issue
About the Study

Dr Denise Martin University of Brighton and Dr Nicola Mackenzie and Ms Jane Healy from the University of Middlesex followed up an analysis of existing literature with a combination of qualitative and quantitative research in three stages:

• a semi-structured postal questionnaire, distributed to 2100 secondary school teachers, all members of the National Union of Teachers, in North London, Hertfordshire and Essex. This yielded a 13 per cent response rate (a total of 275 completed questionnaires). The demographic profiles of the respondents was comparable to that of NUT membership at large
• after analysis of the issues raised by the questionnaire, 24 semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers and four senior managers in four schools
• four focus groups with 17 teachers in two of these schools

The main objectives of the research were to:

• examine the nature and extent of violence experiences by secondary school teachers
• identify teachers’ concerns about risks associated with their profession and the effect this has on their working lives
• inform schools policy on reporting, training and supporting processes within schools
• examine teachers’ perceptions of current government policies on violence in schools
• contribute to filling a gap in academic literature on workplace violence

Key Words

Violence, secondary schools, support, abuse
1. Non-Technical Summary

A 1000 word (maximum) summary of the main research results, in non-technical language, should be provided below. The summary might be used by ESRC to publicise the research. It should cover the aims and objectives of the project, main research results and significant academic achievements, dissemination activities and potential or actual impacts on policy and practice.

Research has identified occupations that are at a higher risk of victimisation, for example teachers, social workers, and healthcare professionals (e.g. Chappell & Di Martino, 1998, 2000). Teachers have also been highlighted as being at a higher risk of repeat victimisation (Budd, 1999) and as having a higher prevalence of both work-related stress and mental health issues (e.g. Health & Safety Executive (HSE), 2004, 2005). However, research into teachers’ personal experiences and perceptions of work-related violence is sparse. Furthermore, research that has examined school violence has consistently focused on pupils’ perspectives and on pupil-pupil violence. The project therefore examined secondary school teachers’ experiences of the violence they face in relation to their work on a daily basis. The definition of workplace violence used was “Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work as a secondary school teacher, that was perpetrated by pupils, colleagues or members of the public.”

The main objectives of the proposed research were to examine the nature and extent of violence faced by secondary school teachers in the course of their work, in North London and Hertfordshire. To identify teachers' concerns about risks they feel are associated with their job, and the impact and affect this has on their working lives. Explore formal and informal reporting, training, and supporting processes within schools and their effectiveness, leading to recommendations and examples of good practice. Examine teachers’ thoughts on current Government discipline policies. Contribute to a gap in the academic literature on workplace violence in schools. In order to achieve these aims, data was collected through postal questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with teachers and senior managers.

Most questionnaire respondents had experienced some form of violence (91%), with 92% also stating colleagues had experienced such incidents. All interviewee’s had either personally experienced or witnessed some form of violence, as described in our definition. The most common type of violence experienced was verbal abuse (92%), followed by physical abuse such as being pushed, kicked, punched, or bitten (68%), non-verbal intimidation (59%), and threats against the person (58%). The frequency with which incidents occurred range from daily through to one-off incidents, with 73% of questionnaire respondents citing at least one incident in the last 12 months. The type of incident ranged from minor such as verbal abuse, through to more serious, for example sustained harassment and stalking, although major incidents were relatively rare.

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed different forms of violence. These could be categorised as direct and indirect. Direct violence refers to incidents where the action was
aimed specifically at the teacher, as seen in this quote “I was pushed and told to **f*** off by a Year 9 boy. When I didn’t move out of his way he pushed me again - then walked off in the opposite direction!”. Indirect violence was not necessarily directed at the teacher but where a teacher got ‘caught in the cross-fire’ intervening in confrontations mainly between pupils, for example “Got kicked in stomach while trying to stop two pupils who were going to begin fighting after an argument”.

Teachers provided a variety of responses as to how they felt about their experiences. This ranged from strong negative feelings of anger, abuse, violation, to feelings of self-doubt and embarrassment. Some teachers felt tired and saddened by the whole thing whereas others felt upset and actually fearful. On the other hand some respondents admitted little affect, and it was suggested on a number of occasions that this was because in the main they felt supported in what they were doing. The most common emotions expressed were shock, unsupported, upset and fear. Just over half of teachers (56%) indicated that their perceptions of their job altered as a consequence of their experience, whilst 14% actually changed schools. In addition, 44% of teachers had considered leaving the profession.

Nearly 60% of teachers reported having received support from a variety of sources including management, colleagues, and outside agencies. Of these, 60% reported the support was good or adequate, and over 30% said this was poor or mixed. Comments regarding management responses varied, ranging from commendations about policies, appropriate sanctions and student support, to inconsistent application of policies, and lack of communication and debriefing. Furthermore, some teachers felt that management questioned their professional integrity.

Recommendations from the research cover a range of issues, including better communication, more consistent application of policy across all staff, immediacy of response, feeling valued, and training. Teachers also felt that they would like further clarification of Government policies such as ‘stop and search’ and the legal right to restrain pupils using reasonable force.

The research has been disseminated to a variety of academic audiences both in the UK and abroad, including the British Society of Criminology Conference (2007) and the Nordic Conference of Victimology in Helsinki (2008). Dr Martin was also invited to be a keynote speaker at Anglia Ruskin University Conference on Managing Anti-Social Behaviour in Schools and Colleges.

The findings from the research have been widely reported both to academic audiences and other interested parties such as participating schools, the National Union of Teachers and other teaching unions, Local Education Authorities (LEA), and local government officials. This has taken the form of advisory groups, presentations, and an executive summary.

There are a range of potential impacts including the adaptation of existing individual school policies and approaches, raising awareness of the concerns teachers have about violence in schools and how it is dealt with, informing LEA’s about the necessity of more stringent data collection from school on behavioural problems of this nature, and improving support strategies for teachers.
ESRC Research Report; Secondary School Teachers’ Experiences and Perceptions of Violence in the Workplace

Dr Denise Martin, Dr Nicola Mackenzie and Ms Jane Healy

Background

There have been increasing concerns about the levels of violence in schools over the past decade (Smith 2003). Recent reports have identified increasing levels of violence against teachers for example, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that violent assaults by pupils on school staff had increased by a third in 2004 (The Times Education Supplement 29/07/05). Violence is a concern not just because of the physical and psychological effects it can have but also due to the environment in which it is situated. As Munn, Johnstone, Sharp and Brown (2007) argue, the purpose of schools is to promote learning and in order to achieve this, an effective learning environment is required. There is also a general expectation that schools will promote a level of tolerance and respect among pupils. Indiscipline and aggressive behaviour may be seen as compromising these aspects of school life.

Research conducted on school violence has consistently focused on pupil’s perspectives and on pupil-pupil violence (for example Astor, Behre, Fravil and Wallace 1997; Blaya 2003). Less attention has been paid to the violence teachers themselves face. Of those studies that have explored this aspect, they have focussed on the extent and types of violence rather than explored the teacher’s perceptions and individual experiences (although see Munn et al 2007, Neill 2001 for exceptions.) In addition, much of the research has failed to acknowledge the relationship of workplace literature on violence. This growing body of material (see Bowie, Fisher and Cooper 2005, Gill, Fisher and Bowie 2002, Waddington, Badger and Bull 2006) raises some key issues when considering teachers’ experiences. It incorporates the threat of everyday risks and fear, particularly those faced on a daily basis. O’Beirne, Denny and Gabe (2004) in their research with probation officers, examined the notion of fear of violence as an indicator of risk in probation work, and found that gaining an understanding of how workers perceive violence can be critical to understanding their experience and perceptions of it.

Furthermore, as with other areas of research into violence, there is a debate in terms of how ‘violence’ is defined. In order to allow teachers the opportunity to communicate a wide range of experiences, the definition used in the research was inclusive. The definition provided was;

“Any incident, in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work as a secondary school teacher, that was perpetrated by pupils, colleagues or members of the public”.

Moreover, as noted in school based research ‘in a broader context, the types of interpersonal relationships, the managerial style, the level at which responsibilities are
decentralised and the general culture of the workplace must also be taken into consideration’ (Di Martino 2005:15). This too was incorporated into the research.

Objectives

The first objective of the research was to examine the nature and extent of violence faced by secondary school teachers. This objective was achieved and details of this are outlined in the results section below, where the types of incidents, location, perpetrators and number of incidents are also discussed.

The second objective was to identify teachers’ concerns about risks they feel are associated with their job, and the impact and affect this has on their working lives. This was also achieved and again is discussed in the results section.

A further objective was to inform policy through making recommendations and providing examples of good practice on post-incident processes. This was achieved by comparing teachers’ knowledge and experiences of reporting procedures, formal and informal support networks, and managerial responses within schools, with existing school policies and practices. Again teachers were questioned on these issues and an executive summary has been provided to all schools involved in the research and the National Union of Teachers (NUT).

A final aim was to contribute to a gap in the academic literature on workplace violence. This objective is partly achieved through a number of presentations at academic and practitioner-based conferences. It will be fully met in the coming months through academic publications (see output section).

Methods

The research utilised a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, with the emphasis on the latter. There were three stages to the project: postal questionnaires to NUT members in North London, Hertfordshire, and Essex; and interviews and focus groups in a selection of schools. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participating teachers and schools was assured and maintained.

Questionnaire

A semi-structured questionnaire (in appendix) was devised and piloted, which consisted of:

- Basic demographics
- Career details
- Describing an incident of workplace violence, including injuries incurred, location, time and perpetrator(s) details
- Post-incident responses
- Teachers’ feelings about their job
Teachers’ views on Government policies such as searching pupils and the use of reasonable force to restrain pupils.

The questionnaire was distributed to 2,100 teachers through the NUT’s postal records. The research team was not privy to the details of those the questionnaire was posted to, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. The process was completed by contacts at the NUT.

A total of 275 completed questionnaires were returned, representing a 13% response rate.

Comparisons between respondents’ demographics with NUT membership records, for April 2008, highlight the similarity between the two groups, as can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1 Demographics of Questionnaire Respondents and NUT Members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>NUT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews and Focus Groups**

The issues raised through analysis of the questionnaire were then examined in more detail in the second phase of the research. In total, the research team conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers and four senior managers in four schools. Four focus groups were held with 17 teachers in two of these secondary schools. Interviews and focus groups allowed teachers to examine in more depth their personal experiences of violence, post-incident responses, perceptions of the job and current government policies.

**Difficulties in Conducting Research**

Difficulties experienced by the research team included a series of nationwide postal strikes occurring during 2007; also the academic use of ‘violence’, which potential respondents may not have considered to include non-physical incidents such as verbal abuse and the length of the questionnaire may have been off-putting for participants.
The main difficulty was gaining access into schools. It was a lengthy process and involved careful negotiation and relationship building. Contacts were initially provided by the NUT but most of those schools did not want to participate or did not respond to letters, calls and e-mails. Therefore the approach was altered and the majority of schools within the research areas were contacted. This proved a time consuming process but cooperation was eventually ascertained with nine schools across the research areas. Subsequently, three schools stated there was no further staff interest to participate in the research, despite the use of posters and letters sent to them. Another two schools were unable to finalise dates within the time scale of the project.

Analysis

The quantitative data elicited by the questionnaire was summarised through the use of descriptive statistics and frequencies using SPSS. This provided a picture of the extent and nature of the violence teachers’ faced in schools. In order to identify whether relationships existed between certain categories, crosstabulations were also conducted. These included exploring issues such as gender, age and levels of violence and their significance. Findings are discussed further in the result section.

The questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and focus groups also elicited a large amount of qualitative information from participants, covering a broad range of conceptualisations. The data generated was examined at the end of data collection at each stage, thus enabling findings to be fed into the following stages of the research.

The first stage of analysing the qualitative data generated by the questionnaire was to organise the information into more manageable related construct categories (Wilson and Hammond 2000). Content analysis was chosen as this “allow[s] the researcher to utilize data that [is] gathered without imposing too much structure” (Krippendorff 1980: 18). This involves categorising data consisting of single words, phrases, or sentences, according to “particular themes or strands of meaning” (Millward 2000: 319) using sound theoretical ideas as a basis (Wilson & Hammond 2000).

Initial categorisation of the raw data was undertaken by members of the research team in order to identify commonly reoccurring themes within each question. The content of each theme was then summarised using a simple description, generating a coding framework for classifying the raw data (Millward 2000). Each phrase or ‘unit of text’ was then classified according to the constructs defined within the framework. The reliability of this classification scheme was ensured by independent analysis cross-checking across the research team. Reliability was then measured by calculating the degree of agreement between both sets of analysis (Wilson & Hammond 2000). Any disagreements between research staff were discussed until full agreement was reached. Overall, agreement on assignment of units of text to the construct categories produced a reliability score of 0.94.

Interviews and focus groups were analysed by identifying the key aims of the project and categorizing these into existing key themes. These included exploring perspectives on the definition of violence, views on internal management of behavioural issues and personal and colleagues’ experience of violence. Other themes included wider issues such as economic and social factors that can have an impact on young people and how they interact within the school environment. Each interview
and focus group was coded using a colour coded scheme, and then each relevant piece of information was inserted into a separate document relating to each theme.

**Results**

**Defining Violence**

As stated previously, one of the key considerations with regards to the issue of violence is defining it. The focus groups and interviews elicited views from teachers and senior managers about their perspectives on the definition provided. Some participants were accepting of the definition and stressed that they agreed with its inclusive nature and that they felt violence did relate to more than just the physical actions. There was also a general consensus that the inclusion of members of the public was essential, as a number of incidents involved people not directly related to the school. Some participants felt the definition needed to specify parents as perpetrators and also include other members of staff as victims as they to could experience abuse, although this project was related specifically to teachers.

Some participants were concerned about the use of the word ‘violence’ and felt that the term may at times be too severe to use in relation to some behaviours. Many stated that some incidents could be considered as disruptive behaviour or low-level abuse rather than violent. A few teachers suggested it depended on personal subjectivity and that behaviour would be interpreted in different ways depending on the individual involved. The following quote sums up these thoughts:

**Interview 2** – ‘Yes, I mean I think it’s also whether you perceive it to be abuse, threaten, or I mean obviously assaulted, you’ve been assaulted, but in terms of threatened or abused, students might say something to one member of staff and it’s not taken as abuse, and another member of staff it might be, so I think it’s obviously as a perception of the person as they see it, as they see the situation.’

**Types and Frequency of Incidents**

As specified above the first objective was to examine the nature and extent of teachers’ experiences of violence. Teachers were therefore asked about recent incidents of violence and whether they had ever experienced violence in their careers. As Table 2 shows nearly three quarters (73.4%) of the respondents said that they had experienced an incident of violence in the last 12 months.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience in last 12 months</th>
<th>Teacher’s Own Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Number of Respondents 274)

Teachers were also asked whether they had ever experienced violence (Table 3). A high percentage of those that responded had, probably due to the fact
that the questionnaire was primarily concerning teacher’s experience of violence. Those that had no experience reported incidents of violence that had occurred to colleagues.

Table 3 Teachers’ Experience of Violence in their Career

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experienced Violence</th>
<th>Teacher’s Own Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>90.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Number of Respondents 275)

In order to establish a broader picture Teachers were also asked about their colleagues’ experience. There is not room to discuss this here but the experiences reported were similar.

Teachers were also asked about the number of incidents they had experienced both within the last 12 months (see Table 4) and in their careers. Again there was a variety of responses with some teachers only ever experiencing one minor incident, whilst others indicated that they had experienced a number of incidents throughout their career. Some respondents admitted that they experienced events frequently, as evidenced by the comments below;

P128 ‘Numerous times over the year’

P183 ‘Too numerous to mention if include verbal abuse’

P206 ‘Once a month’

Other teachers emphasised how infrequent incidents of violence were;

P258 ‘The only issues I have experienced in our school have been teachers being verbally abused and a student slapped a teacher. This is not a frequent occurrence. It has happened 3-4 times in our school over the last 18 months’

Table 4 Number of Incidents experienced in the last 12 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Incidents</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 incident</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 incidents</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 incidents</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 incidents</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-50 incidents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numerous</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Number of respondents 275)
Another key issue within the research was the type of violence experienced. A range of incidents were reported in the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups (see Table 5).

### Table 5 Types of Incidents Experienced by Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Incident</th>
<th>Teacher's own Experiences</th>
<th>Colleagues’ Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats against them</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats against property</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-verbal intimidation</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other violence</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Number of Respondents 250, Colleagues 239)

Verbal abuse was the most common type of violence experienced with 92% of participants reporting it. Examples included being sworn at, being called derogatory names or the use of racial and homophobic language. Actual physical assault was also experienced by a large number of participants (68.3%). Physical assault included a range of behaviours such as being bitten, pushed, having items such as chairs thrown, having doors slammed in their faces. Serious incidents of physical assault were rare. Threatening behaviour from pupils was also common, with pupils facing up to teachers or threatening to carry out some form of physical action. The following quotes provide an indication of some of the experiences recounted;

P1 ‘Physical assault - grabbed by the neck and pushed against a wall. I was about to be punched in the face but colleagues restrained the pupil. Verbal abuse on a regular basis’.

P107 ‘Apart from being rude and not to follow any instructions, the most common experiences are -pushing, shoving -verbal abuse -threats to sort us out outside school -using 'F’ word’.

In the interviews, experiences ranged from verbal to physical abuse and from one incident to frequent occurrences. One particular incident involved the stalking and intimidation of a teacher over a sustained period of time and another who was directly ‘headbutted’ by a pupil.

In relation to gender and the types of violence experienced, men were significantly more likely to have threats made against them than women ($\chi^2=13.292$, df=1, $p=0.000$) and they were more likely to have threats made against their property than women ($\chi^2=4.110$, df=1, $p=0.031$). Data from the focus groups and some of the interviews seemed to suggest that younger teachers who lacked experience were more likely to experience incidents of violence, but this was not supported by the quantitative data. Overall, issues such as gender, age and length of service were not
statistically significant in terms of types of violence experienced or the number of incidents experienced. Analysis relating to ethnic background was not possible due to categorisation difficulties.

What was apparent from the results was the variety of behaviours encountered by teachers, ranging from one-off’s to frequent incidents and from minor to more serious. Serious incidents were rare and some teachers stressed that their experience was dependent on the school they had worked in and how issues were dealt with.

**Direct and Indirect Violence**

In terms of conceptualising types of violence, the research team distinguished between two types of incident. These were categorised as ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ violence. Direct violence (experienced by nearly 60% of participants) was behaviour aimed specifically at a teacher. Indirect violence (experienced by 11.6%) involved incidents where respondents were injured breaking up a fight, protecting pupils or intervening in an incident generally involving pupils. Some teachers described both direct and indirect incidents (29.5%).

**Perpetrators**

The majority of the incidents reported were committed by pupils (79%) although a number of teachers also encountered incidents by past or previous pupils (40%). An additional 15% of incidents committed by parents were also reported. This was a concern for some teachers, as it was more unexpected and seen as unacceptable. A common reason for parental violence was of a parent being annoyed with or aggressive to teachers because of a discipline or sanction that was handed out to their child.

**Location of Incidents**

The majority of the incidents reported occurred during the school day in areas such as the classroom, playground or corridor. Some incidents did occur outside of school hours (22%) and occurred in areas of the local community or in the close vicinity of the school. Other examples were incidents that utilised alternative media such as the internet and mobile phones. One example was where abusive language and a video were placed on Youtube about a teacher.

**Consequences of Violence**

A key objective of the research was to establish how teachers’ experiences had affected them personally and whether it had altered their perception of their job. Teachers provided qualitative responses on these issues in the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups, which were then analysed using content analysis. The results of this can be seen below in Table 6. A wide range of emotions was reported including anger, fear, shock, upset, feeling sad and frustrated.
Verbal abuse is so common at my school, it normally washes over me. Sometimes I write it up, sometimes I don't. On a bad day, I feel angry, upset, frustrated - at not working in a school where there is more 'respect' etc. I also feel such verbal abuse is symptomatic of negative changes in society.'

Table 6 Emotions Expressed by Teachers and How They Felt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotions and Feelings expressed by teachers</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demoralised</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little effect</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical response</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shock</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tired</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsupported</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upset</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions of the Job

There was a difference of opinion in whether teachers changed their perceptions of their job. Just over half of the teachers stated that their experience did not make them consider leaving teaching (55.7%). Slightly less (45%) stated that their experience did make them consider leaving the profession. A small proportion (14%) had left previous schools because of incidents of violence as a teacher there. It is suggested teachers’ experiences can influence their perceptions of risk. In their research with probation officers, O’Beirne et al (2004) found feelings of fear were often rationalised as the risk of violence was seen as part of the job by some. This was also reflected in the research findings where a number of comments were made about low level abuse and intimidation are almost expected in one’s role as a secondary school teacher.

Often, teachers were reluctant to place the blame on pupils. In a number of the interviews and comments, there was an appreciation that behaviour was influenced by a number of factors including home life, and as teenagers, pupils faced a number of challenges in their daily lives. On the other hand, other teachers believed behaviour
had escalated to a level that was unacceptable and beyond their role as teachers and was more like crowd control. These opposing viewpoints could determine how teachers saw their profession and how they felt about the risks they faced.

**Reporting Procedures**

Teachers were also asked about reporting procedures and who they reported incidents to. A high percentage of incidents were reported to expected groups such as colleagues, Senior Management Team (SMT), Heads of Departments and Heads of Year (Table 7). Others included partner or spouse, family and friends, the NUT and other external support agencies. In some cases formal agencies such as the police were included.

**Table 7 Groups Incidents Were Reported To**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Incident Reported to</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleague</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Management Team</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner/Spouse</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/Family</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Incident Reporting Process</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Rep</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Number of Respondents 229)

**Issue of Support**

When asked whether they received support following an incident, a high number of teachers said they had (60%). Around a third of teachers stated that they had received no support (33%) while a small proportion (7%) stated that they had received support for some incidents but not all. Support came from different groups most commonly from colleagues, but also from the SMT, Heads of Year and Heads of Department with about a fifth of participants citing each group. Who provided support depended on the level of seriousness and it became apparent that minor behavioural issues were dealt with by Heads of Department, while more serious issues were dealt with by the Head.

There were a number of reasons given by teachers for feeling unsupported including an incident not being taken seriously or dealt with effectively, by SMT. Also, inconsistency in the application of policies was an issue for some teachers who believed that incidents were dealt with unfairly and unjustly. Similar issues arose when participants were asked whether their employer had dealt with the incident appropriately. Again participants were asked how their employer’ response had made
them feel, resulting in a range of emotions from little effect to those that felt unsupported, angered or demoralised.

Training Issues

Participants were also asked whether they had received training. Just over a third of participants (36%) had received some form of training in dealing with violent or aggressive behaviour. This included courses as part of a PGCE or in-house training. Types of training included personal safety, conflict resolution and behaviour management. The majority of participants would have liked to receive some form of training (87%)

Management

A key aspect in responding to disruptive behaviour in the school is how this behaviour is dealt with and managed. All of the schools in the second stage of the research had behaviour policies in place (see confidential annex for an example). However, what was apparent from the research was that polices are not always applied consistently and this was a major factor in how teachers viewed their experiences. What was also apparent was that those in Senior Management were keen to stress that at their school policies and procedures worked well, although this was not always reflected in the interviews. While the four schools involved in the research did appear to have very strong management teams that generally offered support to the staff, there was a variety of responses and this could depend on who was on duty and which senior staff member the incident was reported to.

Communication was another major factor in the management of the school in that some staff felt that if polices and the progress of incidents and sanctions were effectively communicated, then the incident was dealt with more effectively. When communication was less apparent or weak this made participants feel that they were not taken seriously or that management were responding to the issues inadequately.

Precautionary Tools

Teachers were also asked whether they took any precautionary measures to reduce the risk of experiencing violence. Responses included, carrying a mobile phone, leaving the door ajar in the classroom, trying to avoid confrontational situations or adapting their own attitude towards students. It was apparent that precautionary measures had been taken in some schools. An example was a ‘lock down’ policy were after a certain time of day, sliding doors separating corridors could only be accessed by staff carrying a secure swipe card. These types of approaches are consistent with risk-reducing behaviours that are seen as a key feature of contemporary society (Hudson 2003).

Recent Initiatives and Government Policy

Teachers and senior managers were asked about recent government attempts to deal with disruptive and potentially violent behaviour, such as the power for teachers to
stop and search pupils. There was a mixed response, suggesting that for some it did make teachers feel safer (47%). Reasons cited included reducing the likelihood of weapons being brought into schools. For those who felt it made them feel less safe (21%) they feared they would lose the trust of the pupils and it could actually lead to greater conflict. There was also concern that students were far too aware of their rights and teachers were reluctant to ‘touch’ pupils in any way. Other felt these policies made no difference at all (32%). A high proportion reported using reasonable force (64%), however most respondents (70%) did not believe that the use of reasonable force could actually reduce the risks of teachers experiencing violence. Reasons given for this included students becoming more disrespectful due to wider social changes and students not always thinking about circumstances and tending to be reactive, meaning the threat of reasonable force would not prevent their actions. Others made comments about how they should not be expected to use reasonable force as they were not police, nor bouncers and felt it was not within their remit as a teacher.

In the interviews and focus groups there were concerns about the introduction of metal detectors and most participants keen to point out that on the whole most schools and pupils are safe and worried this level of security was too extreme. Other participants felt that increased security such as CCTV was needed in places to protect both staff and pupils.

Concluding Comments

Over all the key findings were that teachers had experienced a range of incidents including verbal abuse, threatening behaviour and physical actions but serious incidents of violence were extremely rare. The frequency of incidents also varied with some teachers reporting just one, while others faced more frequent incidents. It was found that experiences like those uncovered in the research can lead to negative emotions for teachers and they do impact upon how they view their profession. Wider issues such as training and management response also impact upon how teachers feel about their experiences. Areas of good practice were found in the schools involved, as were areas in need of improvement. Finally there was a general feeling that more Government initiatives were needed to clarify teachers’ legal rights and roles in dealing with behaviour as they are currently open to interpretation.

Activities

Activities included a number of conference presentations at key events. Including the British Society of Criminology conference at the London School of Economics 2007 and the Nordic Conference of Victimology in March 2008 in Helsinki. A keynote speech was given at a recent conference at Anglia Ruskin University in Chelmsford in July 2008 on Managing Anti-Social Behaviour in Schools. A workshop on definitions held as part of an ESRC seminar series on Anti-Social Behaviour at University of Brighton. An advisory group was also held six months into the project, which included two experienced academics Professor Vincenzo Ruggiero and Professor Kevin Stenson, a member of the NUT Ms Amanda Brown and two other NUT representatives, one from North London and one from South London. The final
activity was a presentation of findings at Hendon campus with users, academics and invited guests.

**Outputs**

There is a publication plan for three articles and for some of the material to be used in an edited book exploring the issues of crime and schools. An executive summary, which is attached is being distributed to participating schools and other interested parties.

**Impacts**

So far the research has generated much debate wherever it has been presented. Potential impacts are that schools involved in the process examine their policies to ensure that these are coherent and consistent in dealing with behaviour management. Through publication it is also hoped that the research will add to debates about teachers’ experiences of workplace violence and encourage further research and analysis.

**Future Research Priorities**

*These include further research into the area of schools and security, for example expanding on strategies currently utilised in schools such as the use of police officers.*

The relationship between schools and other agencies would also be explored particularly with regards to dealing with anti-social behaviour and the schools and teachers roles within this.

**Ethics**

Ethical approval for the project was sought and obtained from the Middlesex University Social Science Ethics Sub-Committee prior to conducting the research. As was outlined in the original proposal, the research team complied with the ESRC Research Ethics Framework throughout.

In designing and carrying out this research, the British Society of Criminology’s Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology (2006) (see appendix) was used as a guide. In addition, Middlesex University’s Code of Practice for Research (2004) was followed.

**References**


\(^1\) The Number of Respondents represents the number of people who gave full answers to that particular question. Not all of the respondents completed every question fully. The percentage figures take that number into account.
Consent Form

Project: Examination of Secondary School Teacher’s Experiences and Perceptions of Violence at Work

Please mark the following boxes with X if you agree with each statement, and date the form.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above project.

__________________
Date
Examination of Secondary School Teacher’s Experiences and Perceptions of Violence at Work

School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University

Please read the information contained as it is important that you make an informed decision before participating in the research. If there is anything that is unclear, or if you would like further information, please contact us. Thank you for reading this.

This questionnaire forms part of research being conducted by Middlesex University and funded by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), with support from the National Union of Teachers (NUT). The results of this questionnaire will be disseminated to the NUT and may be published in academic journals and presented at conferences.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine secondary school teacher’s personal experiences and perceptions of violent incidents that occurred to them whilst they were working. For the purposes of this research, violence at work is defined as:

“Any incident, in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work as a secondary school teacher that was perpetrated by pupils, colleagues or members of the public”.

Within this definition, the term violence covers incidents such as:

Verbal abuse; threats made to or against you or others; threats to damage property; non-verbal intimidation; physical assaults, for example pushing, shoving, punching, kicking; and sexual assaults.
Confidentiality and Anonymity

If you have ever experienced any aspect of violence at work and would be willing to spare a few minutes of your time, please date the consent form, complete the questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided. Your time and assistance is very much appreciated. All of the information you provide will be kept in the strictest confidence.

Ethical Approval

This research has been reviewed by the Social Sciences Academic Group Ethics Sub-Committee, School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University.

Contact Details:

Dr Nicola Mackenzie, Dr Denise Martin, and Ms Jane Healy
School of Health and Social Sciences,
Middlesex University, Queensway,
Enfield, Middlesex, EN3 4SA.

Tel: 020 xxxx xxxx (Dr Martin)
     020 xxxx xxxx (Dr Mackenzie)
     020 xxxx xxxx (Ms Healy)

Email:
x.xxxxxx@xxxxx.ac.uk
x.xxxxxx@xxxxx.ac.uk
x.xxxxxx@xxxxx.ac.uk
Examination of Secondary School Teacher’s Experiences and Perceptions of Violence at Work

Demographic Details

1. How old are you? ……………………………

2. How long have you worked in the teaching profession? ………………………

3. What gender are you? Male ☐ Female ☐

4. What ethnicity would you describe yourself as? …………………………………….
   (For example, Black Caribbean.)

5. From the list below, please select your type of school. Please tick all those that apply.
   - Local authority community school ☐
   - Aided or foundation school ☐
   - Academy ☐
   - Single sex school ☐

Experience of Violence at Work

6. In the last 12 months, have you experienced any type of violence in your role as a secondary school teacher? Please refer to the definition stated on the first page.
   Yes ☐ No ☐

   If more than one incident has occurred, how many times has this happened? ………

7. Have you ever experienced any type of violence in your role as a secondary school teacher? Please refer to the definition stated on the first page.
   Yes ☐ No ☐

   If more than one incident has occurred, how many times has this happened? ………

   If you answered “Yes” to Questions 6 or 7, how long had you worked in your role when the incident(s) occurred?
   ………………………………………………………………………………………..
8. Are you aware of any colleagues who have experienced any type of violence in their role as a secondary school teacher? Please refer to the definition stated on the first page.

Yes ☐ No ☐

If more than one incident has occurred, how many times has this happened? …….

If you answered “No” to all of Questions 6, 7 and 8, please go directly to Question 34.

Your Personal Experiences of Violence

9. Please describe the incident(s) in your own words. If you need additional space, please continue at the end of this questionnaire.

10. From the list below, please select all forms of violence that you have experience.

   Verbal abuse ☐
   Threats made against you ☐
   Threats to damage property ☐
   Non-verbal intimidation ☐
   Physical assault ☐
   For example, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking
   Sexual assault ☐
   Other ☐
   Please specify ………………………………………
11. Did you receive any physical injuries?  Yes ☐  No ☐
   If “Yes”, please state injuries. ..............................................................

12. How did you feel after the incident(s)?

13. Where did the incident(s) occur? For example, did the incident(s) occur in the
    classroom, the car park, playground, school corridor or elsewhere?

   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................

14. When did the incident(s) occur?
   Please select all that apply.
   During school hours ☐
   Outside of school hours ☐
   Whilst travelling to/from school ☐
   Other ☐
   Please specify ........................................
15. Who committed the incident(s)?
   Please select all that apply.
   - Current pupil(s)  
   - Previous/past pupil(s)  
   - Parent(s) of pupil(s)  
   - Both parent(s) and pupil(s)  
   - Other  
   Please specify ………………………………..

16. Please indicate the gender of those involved.
   Male  Female  Both  

17. What was the approximate age of the perpetrators involved?..............................
   If there is anything else you would like to add about the perpetrator, please do so:
   ……………………………………………………………………………………………….
   ……………………………………………………………………………………………….

Your Colleague’s Experiences of Violence

   If you answered “No” to Question 8, please go directly to Question 26.
   If you do not know answers to some of the questions in this Section, please leave them blank.

18. If you answered “Yes” to Question 8, please describe your colleague’s experience of violence as much as possible below. If you need additional space, please continue at the end of this questionnaire.
19. From the list below, please select all those forms of violence that occurred.

Verbal abuse

Threats made against you

Threats to damage property

Non-verbal intimidation

Physical assault
For example, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking

Sexual assault

Other

Please specify ............................................

20. Did your colleague receive any physical injuries?  Yes ☐  No ☐

If “Yes”, please state injuries .................................................................

21. How did your colleague feel after the incident(s)?

22. Where did the incident(s) occur? For example, did the incident(s) occur in the classroom, the car park, playground, school corridor or elsewhere?

23. When did the incident(s) occur?
Please select all that apply.

During school hours

Outside school hours

Whilst travelling to/from school

Other

Please specify .............................................
24. Who committed the incident(s)?
   Please select all that apply.
   - Current pupil(s)
   - Previous/past pupil(s)
   - Parent(s) of pupil(s)
   - Both parent(s) and pupil(s)
   - Other

   Please specify ..................................

25. Has your colleague’s experience of violence effected how you see your job?
   Yes  No

   If “Yes”, please explain.

**Reporting Mechanisms**

26. With regards to your experiences of violence, have you reported the incident(s) to anyone?
   Yes  No

   If “Yes”, who did you report it to?
   Please tick all those that apply.
   - My colleagues
   - School Incident Reporting Process
   - Senior management team
   - Your Union Rep
   - My Head
   - Police
   - Partner/Spouse
   - Friends/Family
   - Other

   Please specify .................................
If “No”, are there any specific reasons why you chose not to report the incident? Please describe.

27. Is there a clear, official reporting mechanism at your school?

   Yes  □     No  □

28. Did you receive support after the incident? Yes  □     No  □

   If “Yes”, from whom?

   If “Yes”, how do you feel about the support you received?

   If “No”, would you have liked support? How do you feel it could have helped you?

29. How did your employer deal with the incident(s)?

30. How did that make you feel?
31. Did your experience(s) make you consider leaving your job as a school teacher? 
   Yes ☐ No ☐

32. Did you change schools as a result of the incident(s)?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

33. Did the incident(s) change your perception of your job? Yes ☐ No ☐
   Please explain.

**The Employers Responsibilities**

34. Within your role as a secondary school teacher, have you ever received training about dealing with potentially violent or abusive incidents?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
   If “Yes”, please state if this training was before or after the incident.

   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

   Please state what training you received.

   What do you think of the training you received?

   If “No”, would you have liked to receive training?
35. Do you take any precautionary measures to decrease the possibility of violence occurring? For example, carrying a mobile phone. Please describe.

36. Within your school, are there working practices in place that reduce the risk of you experiencing violence? Please describe.

37. Does the introduction of new powers to search pupils make you feel more or less safe at school?

- More Safe □
- Less Safe □

Can you give a reason for your answer?

**Education and Inspections Act 2006**

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 states that a person:

“may use force as is reasonable in the circumstances for the purpose of preventing a pupil from doing (or continuing to do) any of the following, namely:

(a) committing any offence,
(b) causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself), or
(c) prejudicing the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any pupils receiving education at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.”

38. Have you ever used “reasonable force” in your role as a school teacher?

- Yes □
- No □
39. If you have never used “reasonable force”, have you ever felt the need to use it in your role as a school teacher?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]

40. Do you think that use of “reasonable force” will reduce secondary school teachers’ experience of violence?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]
   Please explain your response.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your feedback is most welcome.

If you have any further comments to add, please do so here:
Violence at Work Questionnaire

(Please detach this page and keep for your records)

Contact Details:
Dr Denise Martin   x.xxxxxxx@xxxx.ac.uk  020 xxxx xxxx
Ms Jane Healy     x.xxxxxxx@xxxx.ac.uk  020 xxxx xxxx
Dr Nicola Mackenzie x.xxxxxxx@xxxx.ac.uk  020 xxxx xxxx
School of Health and Social Sciences,
Middlesex University,
Queensway, Enfield,
Middlesex, EN3 4SA.

If you have been affected by violence at work and would like some support:

NUT Regional Offices
London East Regional Office
103 Cranbrook Road
Ilford
Essex
IG1 4PU
0208 477 1234

Eastern Regional Office for those in Hertfordshire:
Elm House
Kennett Park
Moulton Road
Kentford
Nr Newmarket
CB8 8GF
01638 555300

Teacher Support Network:
Telephone: 08000 562 561
Website: http://www.teachersupport.info/

The Samaritans: Telephone 24 hours a day: 08457 90 90 90
Website: http://www.samaritans.org.uk/
Email: JO@SAMARITANS.ORG

SupportLine: Telephone, not 24 hrs a day: 020 8554 9004
Website: http://www.supportline.org.uk
Email: info@supportline.org.uk

Victim Support: Telephone, not 24 hrs a day: 0845 30 30 900
Website: http://www.victimsupport.org/
Email: supportline@victimsupport.org.uk

If you would like further information about preventative measures and information on what to do if an incident occurs:

Suzy Lamplugh Trust:
Telephone, not 24 hrs a day: 020 8876 0305
Website: http://www.suzylamplugh.org/home/index.shtml
Email (general enquiries): info@suzylamplugh.org
Interview Schedule for Interviews with Teachers

For Researcher to state prior to commencement of the interview

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine secondary school teacher’s personal experiences and perceptions of violent incidents that occurred to them whilst they were working. The definition of violence that we have applied within the research is (shown on the consent form).

Today I would like to ask you about your experiences these will be kept confidential and your details anonymous. Please can you complete this consent form to confirm that you are willing to participate in this project and for us to use the information that you provide today.

Do you think that this definition fully accounts for what you would consider to be violence against Teachers?

How long you have been teaching?

In your teaching career have you ever experienced an incident of violence as stated in the definition and can you describe the most recent incident or types of incidents you have experienced?

Did you experience any injuries during this incident?

Where did the incident occur?

How did it make you feel about your job?

Did it make you feel at risk in any way?

If no, do you know any colleagues who have experience any incidents of violence?
In terms of your experience/colleagues experience of violence- was this incident reported to anyone?

Who?

What do you feel about the response you got?

What type of support did you receive and how did you feel about this?

What school processes are in place to deal with these types of incidents (and if no experience)?

How do you think that the school deal with these issues?

Have you/Do staff received training to deal with violence or aggressive behaviour

Was this formal or informal?

What were your feelings about this/Do you think this is necessary?

What are you views about recent government policies on discipline and restraining policies? Including the right to search pupils?

Do you have any other comments you would like to add?
RES-000-22-1962 - SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Research into teachers' personal experience and perceptions of work-related violence is sparse, the majority of investigations focusing on pupil-pupil violence. According to this study, however, as many as 91 per cent of secondary school teachers have personally experienced, or witnessed towards their colleagues, some form of violence in or near school premises. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research the study sought insights into the prevalence and effects of violence on their profession.

KEY FINDINGS

- work-related violence was regularly directly experienced, as well as witnessed in the case of colleagues, by a high percentage of secondary school teachers.
- although 73.4 per cent of participants say they have experienced some kind of violence in the previous 12 months (and 90 per cent during their career), serious incidents of violence are extremely rare
- violence can be categorised into two types: 'direct', experienced by 58.9 per cent of participants; and 'indirect', experienced by 11.6 per cent. Some teachers experienced both forms (29.5 per cent)
- while respondents have differing views on the precise definition of 'violence'; 92 per cent report having personally been the victim of 'verbal abuse'; 68.3 per cent of physical assault; 59 per cent of non-verbal intimidation and 58 per cent of threats against them
- although 79 per cent of the incidents reported were committed by current pupils, previous pupils (40 per cent) and parents (15 per cent) were also responsible incidents of violence
- the way this is dealt with by management has a significant influence on how the victims cope with their experience
- the majority of incidents take place within the school premises and hours
- emotional response to incidents vary: 15.4 per cent saying they experienced 'anger' and 13.6 per cent 'shock'; 11.6 per cent felt 'unsupported'; 10.3 per cent 'upset' and 9.6 per cent 'fear'. Others felt that their experiences went with the territory of being a teacher. 45 per cent of respondents stated that their experience made them consider leaving the profession. 60 per cent of victims reported having received support from a variety of sources and, of these, 60 per cent felt the support had been good or adequate
- only 36 per cent of participants had received training in dealing with violent or aggressive behaviour and 87 per cent said they would have liked to receive some such guidance
- the qualitative research suggests that it not a common problem across all schools and there are a number of factors that need to be considered in understanding and addressing the issue

ABOUT THE STUDY

Dr Denise Martin University of Brighton and Dr Nicola Mackenzie and Ms Jane Healy from the University of Middlesex followed up an analysis of existing literature with a combination of qualitative and quantitative research in three stages:

- a semi-structured postal questionnaire, distributed to 2100 secondary school teachers, all members of the National Union of Teachers, in North London, Hertfordshire and Essex. This yielded a 13 per cent response rate (a total of 275 completed questionnaires). The demographic profiles of the respondents was comparable to that of NUT membership at large
- after analysis of the issues raised by the questionnaire, 24 semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers and four senior managers in four schools
- four focus groups with 17 teachers in two of these schools

The main objectives of the research were to:

- examine the nature and extent of violence experiences by secondary school teachers
- identify teachers' concerns about risks associated with their profession and the effect this has on their working lives
- inform schools policy on reporting, training and supporting processes within schools
- examine teachers' perceptions of current government policies on violence in schools
- contribute to filling a gap in academic literature on workplace violence
Teacher’s experience of workplace violence has received relatively little attention both in the workplace violence literature and other research related to school violence most of which focuses on pupil to pupil violence. Quantitative data suggests that levels of violence against teachers are on the increase but little is known about the affect that this violence is having on the daily work life of teachers.

The research plans to fulfil a number of aims, such as establishing the extent of violence occurring among teachers and examining what types of ‘violent’ incidents they experience including verbal and physical attacks. It will identify the concerns that teachers have about the risks they face in the day to day role and how it affects them. It will also examine how schools and dealing with these issues. What polices and strategies are in place to help teachers who experience violence and examine teachers views about recent attempts by the government to change discipline policies within education. This will be achieved using, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups in schools in North London and Hertfordshire.
List of commonly used abbreviations in SN 6430

ABC: Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
ABH: Actual Bodily Harm
ADHD: Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASBO: Anti-Social Behaviour Order
ASD Special Schools: Autistic Spectrum Disorders Special Schools
AST: Advanced Skills Teacher
CC: County Council
CPD: Continuing Professional Development
CSF: Critical Success Factors
EBD: Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
GTC: General Teaching Council
HT: Head teacher
INSET training: IN-SERVICE Training days for teachers in the United Kingdom, also known as Baker days, where staff are required to attend training or complete administration tasks
LEA: Local Education Authority
LSU: Learning and support unit
MLD: Moderate learning difficulties
NASUWT: National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
NQT: Newly Qualified Teacher
NUT: National Union of Teachers
NVC: On Violent Communication
PCSO: Police Community Support Officer
PDC: Professional Development Conference
PGCE: Postgraduate/Professional Certificate in Education (UK)
PMLD: Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties
PRC: Premiers’ Reading Challenge
PSE: Personal and Social Education
PSHE: Personal, Social and Health Education (aka Citizenship; English National Curriculum subject)
PSO: police support officer?
PSP: Pastoral support plan
SEBD: Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SEN: Special education needs (or S Special needs education)
SENCO: Special Educational Needs Co Ordinator
SLD Special Schools: Special Learning Difficulties Special schools
SMT: Senior Management Team
TA: Teaching Assistants
YISP: Youth inclusion support panels