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Article

Exploring Parents' Violence Against School Teachers: Manifestation, Risk Factors, and Coping Strategies

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Abstract

Research and public attention on violence directed toward school teachers are increasing. Yet to date, our knowledge on violence against teachers is limited, because most research has focused on student-perpetrated violence, largely overlooking the aggression directed at teachers by parents. To fill this gap in knowledge, this study used a qualitative approach based on semistructured in-depth interviews with 46 teachers, school leaders and policy-level managers to explore the phenomenon of parents' violence against teachers, including manifestation of the problem, risk factors, and effective coping strategies. Following the principles of grounded theory, the results suggest that parents' violence toward teachers takes various forms, mostly rudeness, shouting, intimidation, and verbal threats. These behaviors create complex challenges that affect teachers both personally and professionally, requiring coping mechanisms at the societal, school, and individual levels. Effective strategies include enhancing the social and organizational climate of schools and offering mentoring, support, and conflict management training for educators. Implications for research and policy are discussed.

Keywords: violence against teachers; parental aggression; teacher safety; school climate; qualitative study; grounded theory; coping strategies; education policy; teacher well-being; conflict management

1. Introduction

School violence is a continuous and serious public health concern. Decades of research have primarily focused on student victimization, but the past 15 years have seen increasing attention to violence directed toward teachers (e.g., Espelage et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2014; Reddy et al., 2018). Recent findings underscore a troubling global trend of high rates of violence against teachers (e.g., Irwin et al., 2024; Longobardi et al., 2019; Mallory et al., 2024). This issue has significant repercussions, adversely affecting teachers' health and well-being (Chirico et al., 2021; Olivier et al., 2021; Reddy et al., 2024), exacerbating challenges related to teacher job retention and turnover (e.g., McMahon et al., 2024; Moon et al., 2020; Peist et al., 2024) and consequently posing serious challenges for students and schools. Yet to date, our knowledge on violence against teachers is limited, because most research has focused on student-perpetrated violence, largely overlooking the aggression directed at teachers by parents (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2022). Still, parents interact regularly with schools and teachers, making them vital partners in education. Their engagement can sometimes escalate into aggression due to conflict, high expectations, misunderstandings, and stress (Attanucci, 2004). To address this gap in knowledge, the current research used semistructured in-depth interviews with 46 educators and policy-level managers to explore the phenomenon of parents' violence against teachers, including manifestation of the problem, risk factors, and effective coping strategies. By understanding the contexts in which parental aggression occurs and how it manifests, identifying common risk factors, and documenting effective coping mechanisms used by teachers and schools, this research aimed to contribute valuable insights to mitigate these incidents. The findings can foster

the development of targeted prevention programs and interventions that support a safer and more supportive educational environment for teachers, parents, and students alike.

1.1. Violence against Teachers

The American Educational Research Association's (2013) Task Force on the Prevention of Bullying in Schools, Colleges, and Universities characterizes school violence as any behavior aimed at causing harm to individuals or their property in the school environment or to the school's property. This comprehensive definition encompasses face-to-face and electronic media-related verbal and social violence, physical violence, theft and property damage, weapon use, and sexual violence.

Although any member of the school community can be a perpetrator or victim of violence, research has predominantly concentrated on peer victimization (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019). Only during the past decade and a half has teachers' victimization gained recognition as an important and growing public concern. Researchers and practitioners in education recognize that similar to other service professionals such as healthcare providers or social workers, school teachers are also vulnerable to serious violence in the workplace (e.g., McMahon et al., 2024). Teachers may experience various forms of violence in the school setting, with verbal aggression and threatening behavior being the most common and physical or sexual violence and property-related victimization occurring less frequently (e.g., Irwin et al., 2024; Longobardi et al., 2019).

To illustrate, a national survey conducted by the American Psychological Association Task Force on Violence Against Educators and School Personnel involving more than 11,000 U.S. educators and school staff members found that following the removal of COVID-19 restrictions in 2022, between 22% and 80% of respondents reported experiencing verbal or threatening aggression, whereas 2% to 56% reported experiencing physical violence at least once during the year. Students and parents were the most frequent aggressors against teachers, followed by colleagues and administrators (McMahon et al., 2024). However, most research has focused on student perpetrators, leaving a gap in understanding how teachers experience violence from parents. As a result, knowledge of effective ways to support teachers in these situations remains limited.

1.2. Factors Associated with Violence against Teachers

Building on the socioecological framework of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), educational researchers have suggested that school violence is most accurately conceptualized as the product of dynamic, interconnected contexts that are continually adapting over time. In particular, external factors influencing the school environment interact with internal school dynamics, collectively affecting various facets of school violence and overall safety (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019; Espelage, 2014). Prior research employing a socioecological lens to explore violence against school teachers highlighted factors associated with teachers' victimization at the individual, school, community, and societal levels (McMahon et al., 2017).

At the individual level, research has suggested that younger teachers and those with less experience in the profession have greater risk of teacher-directed violence (Martinez et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2014). Teachers' classroom management abilities have also been highlighted in the literature as critical for preventing teachers' victimization. Evidence indicates that effective classroom management and the establishment of clear boundaries by teachers reduce students' misbehavior and aggressive interactions with educators (Gage et al., 2016), while also preventing conflict and mitigating the risk of violence from students (McMahon et al., 2020). Less experienced teachers often struggle to articulate their classroom management techniques effectively, because these skills typically require time and practical experience to cultivate; furthermore, students tend to exhibit diminished respect toward teachers who appear younger, less confident, and lacking in experience (Berkowitz et al., 2022).

A prominent school-level factor consistently associated with reduced violence and greater safety is positive school climate (Thapa et al., 2013). Higher rates of violence directed toward teachers are associated with negative school climates (Espelage et al., 2013; Martinez et al., 2016). In particular,

fostering positive teacher–student relationships, consistently reinforced through the school’s values, vision, and philosophy, plays a crucial role in enhancing teachers’ safety and reducing their risk of victimization (Berkowitz et al., 2022; McMahon et al., 2020). In addition, the school’s organizational climate is especially relevant to teachers’ victimization. Previous research indicated that a lack of collegial, managerial, and administrative support and backing, along with negative workplace relationships, significantly contributes to increased violence directed at teachers (Berkowitz et al., 2022; McMahon et al., 2020).

At the community level, parents are vital stakeholders. Parental involvement in schools has been linked to greater student success (Boonk et al., 2018), a more positive school climate (Berkowitz et al., 2021), and a decrease in school violence (Lesneskie & Block, 2017). Although diminished parental authority over children has been associated with increased teacher-directed violence (McMahon et al., 2020), excessive parental school involvement and interference in teachers’ educational efforts may similarly heighten the risk of parents’ violence against teachers (Tiesman et al., 2014). School disciplinary practices are a key area of friction between parents and teachers, because concerns over perceived unfairness in the enforcement of discipline may lead some parents to act aggressively toward educators (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2022).

Finally, society-level factors have also been associated with violence against teachers. A lack of respect and low societal value assigned to the teaching profession can foster negative perceptions, hostility, and violence directed at teachers (McMahon et al., 2020).

1.3. Strategies for Addressing and Coping with Violence Against Teachers

A significant gap in research persists regarding interventions designed to address and reduce violence against teachers. To address school violence not specifically related to incidents against teachers, educators and schools may implement various strategies, including exclusionary disciplinary measures such as suspending involved students (Skiba et al., 2022). Although schools frequently use suspensions in response to violence, research evidence suggests that such exclusionary practices can be harmful (Skiba et al., 2014). Security measures such as the use of police officers, security guards, metal detectors and electronic monitoring systems are also common strategies. Nonetheless, students and educators have expressed that such measures are relatively ineffective in preventing school violence (Astor et al., 1999). In contrast, approaches that incorporate proactive relational strategies, such as prevention initiatives and school climate improvements, have demonstrated positive effects in reducing school violence (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Previous research exploring teachers’ perspectives indicated that educators consider such prevention practices to be the most effective in reducing violence against teachers (Perry et al., 2023).

Given that certain school safety practices have been demonstrated to be ineffective in mitigating overall violence, particularly violence against teachers, there is an urgent need for research to document safety measures implemented by schools and educators. Such research is essential to inform and guide the development of more effective, evidence-based school intervention strategies aimed at reducing parental violence against teachers.

In summary, the present study aimed to explore how parental violence against school teachers manifests, the risk factors associated with this phenomenon, and the common strategies used to address it, as perceived and understood by educators and policy-level decision-makers.

2. Method

2.1. Study Design and Procedure

This study drew from broader mixed-methods research examining the incidence, extent, underlying causes, and outcomes of violence against school teachers in Israel. Specifically, the data analyzed in this study came from the initial phase of the broader project, during which we used qualitative methods to explore the perceptions and interpretations of school violence—particularly violence against teachers—among teachers, school principals, and policy-level managers, such as

directors of educational psychological services and representatives of teachers unions. Given the paucity of research on parents’ violence toward teachers, a qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth exploration of professionals’ insights surrounding this problem. This approach enabled participants to express their observations and insights with depth and contextual detail.

2.2. Sampling and Participants

Theoretical sampling was used to achieve the most varied sample possible of school principals and subject and homeroom teachers working in postprimary public schools from both the Hebrew and Arabic language sectors in the official Israeli school system. Participants were identified using informal networking and the assistance of professionals working in schools across Israel. We first reached out to school principals and presented the project. Principals who agreed to participate in the research introduced it to their teachers. All teachers and school principals who agreed to participate and were available at the appointed time were recruited for the study. Additionally, purposeful sampling was employed to include individuals in policy-level managerial positions and an academic scholar. We further engaged policy-level managers from educational psychological services and a teachers union, inviting them to participate in the study.

The sample featured 46 individuals, including 36 teachers and four school principals from 11 public postsecondary schools in Israel, representing both Hebrew and Arabic language sectors. Additionally, the sample included three managers from educational psychological services and the chair and two coordinators from the teachers union. Most participants were women ($n = 36$, 78.2%), with average professional experience of 14.11 years ($SD = 9.19$). Among those who reported their educational attainment, more than half ($n = 37$, 56.7%) held a master’s degree, approximately one fifth ($n = 8$, 21.6%) held a bachelor’s degree, about one tenth ($n = 4$, 10.8%) possessed a PhD, and two participants (5.2%) were certified teachers. For a comprehensive demographic overview, refer to Table 1.

Table 1. Participants’ Demographic and Professional Characteristics (N=46).

	Sex	Position	Education	Years of experience	School	Hebrew or Arabic
1	F	Homeroom and biology teacher	MA	27	High school	Hebrew
2	F	Homeroom teacher	MA	21	High school	Hebrew
3	M	History teacher	MA	7	High school	Hebrew
4	M	Physics teacher	MA	4	High school	Hebrew
5	F	Homeroom teacher and class coordinator	BA	20	High school	Hebrew
6	F	Civics teacher	BA	30	High school	Hebrew
7	F	Homeroom and English teacher	BA	10	High school	Hebrew
8	F	Homeroom and special education teacher	BA	10	High school	Hebrew
9	F	Teacher	BA	1	High school	Hebrew
10	M	Physical education teacher	N/A	12	High school	Hebrew
11	F	Homeroom teacher and counselor	MA	8	High school	Hebrew
12	F	Homeroom and literature teacher	N/A	18	High school	Hebrew
13	M	Physical education teacher	Teaching certificate	6	High school	Hebrew
14	M	Biology teacher	PhD	5	High school	Hebrew
15	F	Teacher and vice principal	N/A	15	High school	Hebrew
16	F	Teacher	Teaching certificate	6	High school	Hebrew
17	F	Mathematics teacher	MA	3	High school	Hebrew
18	F	Homeroom and special education teacher	MA	30	High school	Hebrew

19	F	Homeroom and language arts teacher	N/A	3	High school	Hebrew
20	F	History and civics teacher	N/A	15	High school	Hebrew
21	F	Teacher and class coordinator	N/A	18	High school	Hebrew
22	F	Homeroom and mathematics teacher	MA	16	High school	Hebrew
23	F	English teacher	MA	4	High school	Hebrew
24	F	Language arts teacher	BA	7	High school	Hebrew
25	F	English teacher	BA	40	High school	Hebrew
26	F	Special education teacher	MA	30	High school	Hebrew
27	M	English teacher	MA	3	High school	Hebrew
28	F	Homeroom and Hebrew teacher	MA	25	High school	Hebrew
29	F	Homeroom and biology teacher	N/A	16	High school	Hebrew
30	F	Teacher and counselor	MA	22	High school	Hebrew
31	F	Electronics teacher and counselor	MA	17	High school	Arabic
32	F	Arabic language and homeroom teacher	BA	6	High school	Arabic
33	F	English teacher	MA	6	Middle school	Hebrew
34	F	Homeroom teacher	N/A	4	Middle school	Hebrew
35	F	English teacher	PhD	23	Middle school	Hebrew
36	F	Mathematics teacher	MA	14	High school	Arabic
37	F	School principal	N/A	30	Middle school	Hebrew
38	M	School principal	High school	20	High school	Arabic
39	M	School principal	PhD	15	High school	Hebrew
40	F	School principal	MA	17	High school	Hebrew
41	F	Director	PhD	12	Counseling psychological services	N/A
42	F	Director of programs and prevention division	MA	9	Counseling psychological services	N/A
43	F	Director of unit for promoting positive school climate and reducing violence	MA	7	Counseling psychological services	N/A
44	M	Chair	MA	22	Teachers union	N/A
45	F	Pedagogical coordinator	PhD	7	Teachers union	N/A
46	M	Pedagogical coordinator	MA	8	Teachers union	N/A

2.3. Process and Data Analysis

This research employed in-depth semistructured interviews to explore participants' personal experiences and perceptions concerning the studied phenomenon. The interview protocol was carefully crafted by the research team through an iterative process, involving collaboration with experts in school violence, educators, and policymakers. The project principal investigators have conducted the interviews. The project principal investigators conducted the interviews. Interviews started with a broad, open-ended question, encouraging participants to share their views, understanding, and firsthand experiences related to violence against teachers. When needed, this initial question was followed by targeted inquiries regarding risk factors, antecedents of violence against teachers, outcomes of incidents, coping strategies, school policies, and responses. Most interviews ranged from 1 to 2 hours in length. All sessions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to enable detailed cross-sectional analysis.

Data analysis was conducted following the principles of grounded theory, as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), which emphasize researcher engagement and active participation in the analysis process, guided by a preliminary understanding of the research area. The analysis proceeded through four distinct phases. Initially, two researchers carefully reviewed the transcripts multiple times to develop a comprehensive understanding of the dataset, allowing preliminary insights to emerge. In the second phase, meaningful segments of the text, or units of meaning, were identified to align with the study's objectives. The third stage involved grouping similar units of meaning through axial coding, which revealed relationships between categories and subcategories related to both context and content (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti software (version 8.4.25), which facilitated the extraction of meaningful segments and organized the data into thematic categories (Frieze, 2019). Finally, thematic connections were made to synthesize a holistic representation of the data, culminating in the development of typologies and substantive insights rooted in participants' narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2015).

2.4. Trustworthiness and Credibility

To uphold the principles of trustworthiness and methodological integrity, the study conformed to the qualitative research standards established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Shenton (2004). Credibility was secured through comprehensive data triangulation, incorporating diverse perspectives from educators and other professionals operating in schools, policy-level managers, along with an independent review process in which an external researcher validated the coding and thematic categorization. Transferability was strengthened by providing detailed descriptions of participant demographics, recruitment strategies, and interview procedures, ensuring the findings are relevant to other settings. Dependability was ensured via continuous discussions in the research team, which facilitated critical reflection on potential biases and maintained consistency in coding practices across the dataset. Finally, confirmability was attained by thoroughly documenting all analytic decisions, engaging in peer debriefing, and ensuring that themes were directly derived from the data, minimizing influence from preexisting researcher assumptions.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and they were free to discuss or refrain from discussing any issues they wished. They could also withdraw from the interview at any point. All personal identifying information was kept confidential; results are presented using pseudonyms.

3. Results

Following the principles of grounded theory, the analysis of participant interviews suggests that teachers engage with various stakeholders in the school community, including colleagues, students and students' parents. Although typically viewed as external stakeholders, parents are also capable of perpetrating violence against educators. The results suggest that this aggression takes various forms, from rudeness to shouting, intimidation, and verbal threats. Such behavior presents complex challenges that affect teachers both personally and professionally, necessitating coping mechanisms at both institutional and individual levels. The following themes explore how parents' violence toward teachers manifests, associated factors, and the strategies teachers employ to manage such encounters.

3.1. Many Faces of Parental Violence Against Teachers

The findings indicate that verbal victimization by parents was the most common form of aggression experienced by teachers. Teachers frequently described encounters characterized by rude, contemptuous, and hostile communication. These incidents frequently stemmed from disciplinary actions directed at students, which escalated into confrontations with parents. For instance, Amira (English teacher) recalled a confrontation marked by aggression that occurred following the removal of a disruptive student from her class:

Last year marked the first time I encountered verbal and almost physical aggression from a parent. The mother is well-known for her aggressive behavior. After I asked her son to leave the classroom for misbehavior, she immediately called her mother. She then came to the school, shouting and cursing at me.

Teachers also reported experiencing harassment and threats, often intended to undermine their authority or pressure them into altering professional decisions, especially concerning student misbehavior and disciplinary issues. Sharon (special education teacher) shared:

At my previous school, I received terrifying threats, parents yelling over the phone: "If you don't let my son in, I don't know what I'll do to you! I'll bring whoever I need!" One father, with a known history of aggression, shouted, "Don't talk to my son like that! I'll mess you up."

These threats frequently extended beyond the school context, affecting teachers' personal lives as well. Ravit (math teacher) recalled being pursued beyond school grounds by a mother whose son had been suspended for fighting, highlighting the emotional toll and heightened sense of insecurity that such confrontations can impose on educators. "One mother stalked me, kept calling, threatened to get me fired, said she'd take revenge. She waited for me at the school gate. I felt incredibly unsafe."

The analysis revealed that one of the most prevalent threats that teachers encounter involves parents bypassing their authority, often threatening to escalate issues to the school principal when dissatisfied, thereby undermining trust between teachers and families. For example, Sarit (teacher) recalled a mother who reacted this way after her request for extended exam time for her son was denied: "One mother insisted that her son needed extra time on an exam, even though there were other reasons for his declining performance. When I didn't agree, she said, 'If you won't handle this, I'll go straight to the principal.'"

Parental threats frequently involve external entities such as legal representatives, representatives from the Ministry of Education, district officials, or even the media when dissatisfied. These tactics are employed to intimidate teachers, interfere, and influence their professional decisions. Noga (class coordinator) described instances in which parents sent legal warning letters as a means of exerting pressure; these threatening letters significantly undermined teachers' professional authority: "Sometimes we receive letters from lawyers meant to intimidate us. It's their way of pressuring us to change our decisions. ... It's paralyzing, you can't educate children when you're being legally harassed."

Bypassing teachers' authority erodes trust and strains the relationships between teachers and parents. Dana (pedagogical coordinator from the teachers union) shared her perspective on this concerning trend:

A significant flaw in our system is the tendency of some parents to bypass direct communication with teachers or school staff and instead escalate their concerns directly to the Ministry of Education. The complaint then travels from the minister to the director-general, to the district superintendent, to the school supervisor, and ultimately to the principal, who often remains unaware of the issue due to a lack of initial direct communication with the school.

These findings highlight the dual challenges that teachers face: Parental threats toward teachers directly undermine their professional functioning, while fear of retaliation further discourages them from addressing students' misconduct. Shirin (special education teacher) noted: "I'm afraid to call parents and tell them what their child did. My students misbehave, but I hesitate to report it to their parents."

Not only do teachers face verbal aggression and threats from parents, but they also encounter intimidating disruptive behavior. Natalie, a school principal, shared instances in which parents barged into classrooms and interrupted lessons without restraint in front of the entire class.

In the past 6 years, there's been a noticeable rise in parents' audacity. We've had parents barging into classrooms. There is a noticeable decline in restraint, as parents now often interrupt lessons directly to speak with teachers rather than waiting for an appropriate time.

The findings show that teacher-directed aggressiveness also manifests through digital spaces, particularly via WhatsApp. Ravit (math teacher) observed that parents frequently send messages during inappropriate hours, expecting an instant response:

There's a lot of harassment on WhatsApp. Parents feel free to message you whenever it suits them, 6 in the morning, 6:20, 11 at night. There are no boundaries at all. They expect immediate answers and don't care that the timing is completely inappropriate.

Several interviewees observed that conflicts with parents tend to escalate more intensely than those with students, largely because of parents' heightened emotional investment and overprotectiveness. Rina (director of counseling psychological services) explained that parental anger often escalates at school, driven by distress or a sense of injustice:

It also affects people on a very personal level. Parents have expectations about how their children should be treated. ... We see intense parental anger at school, often sparked by a perceived injustice toward their child. It's usually directed at teachers and principals and stems from distress, insult, or a sense of unfairness.

3.2. Factors Associated with Parental Violence Against Teachers

Following the discussion of various forms of aggression faced by teachers, the analysis demonstrated that these incidents do not occur in isolation from factors both inside and outside the school. The findings indicate multiple risk and protective factors across individual, school, community, and societal levels that facilitate the emergence and escalation of conflicts and violence from parents toward teachers. These factors influence the interactions among teachers, parents, and students, potentially eroding teachers' professional authority and compromising their sense of safety at school.

3.2.1. Individual Factors

Teachers' Ability to Establish Boundaries with Parents. Ella (teacher) reflected on her ability to set boundaries and maintain composure in challenging interactions with parents. She said this is an important individual characteristic that helps her navigate difficult situations:

I have no problem speaking with parents. I'm responsible for every word I say. But if a parent yells, I say, "Goodbye, call back when you're calm," and I hang up. I never raise my voice.

Number of Years in the Profession. The findings suggest that more experience and seniority can enhance teachers' capacity to set firm boundaries with parents, especially in situations involving aggression or escalating conflicts. This capacity depends not only on individual personality traits but also on confidence and practical knowledge accumulated through years of experience. Sigalit (vice principal) recounted an incident in which she successfully intervened to deescalate a conversation, noting that younger teachers often find these situations challenging due to their limited experience:

Just before you came in, I spoke with a student's mother, and the conversation got intense. I told her, "I'm stopping this conversation. You can't speak to me like that." It's not easy to do that, especially for young teachers. Today, parents feel entitled to speak aggressively and disrespectfully, but they are more reluctant to do so with experienced teachers.

3.2.2. School Factors

Insufficient Systemic Support and Lack of Effective Tools. A recurring risk factor noted by interviewees is the sense of helplessness that teachers experience when confronting parental aggression. Unlike conflicts with students, for which established disciplinary measures provide guidance, teachers lack effective tools to manage encounters with parents. Shay (biology teacher) reflected on this challenge:

At my previous school, a student pushed a desk at me. When the mother was called in, she began yelling. While the principal supported me, he admitted, "There's really nothing we can do." When a

parent yells at you, you can't remove them from the school or send them out of the classroom—there are no effective options available to address such behavior.

Sarit (teacher) observed that because of the lack of effective tools to manage parental aggression, teachers often resort to avoiding direct confrontations with aggressive parents as a coping strategy. "Conversations with parents can turn unpleasant, and there's often aggression with no consequences. Teachers just try to avoid dealing with such parents again. You can't call a parent in for discipline."

Negative Organizational Climate and Insufficient Collegial Support. An additional critical risk factor for parental violence against teachers is a negative organizational climate, characterized by a lack of systemic support and inadequate backing for educators dealing with parental aggression. Interviewees noted limited support from school leaders and the Ministry of Education, with a tendency to prioritize maintaining "industrial silence" over addressing issues. Oshrat (English teacher) described school management as frequently hesitant and fearful of parental repercussions, often unwilling to intervene: "There are many situations where you feel unsupported. When I see news about teachers being slapped or punched by parents, I get it. Sometimes, the school leadership is simply afraid of parents. It happens often."

Yuliya (English teacher) provided a telling example: After a student was not promoted to an honors group due to academic criteria, the parents appealed to the principal, who ultimately overruled the teacher's decision.

After meeting with me, the parents went straight to the principal. Five minutes later, I was called in and told, in front of them, "Move her to the honors group." It was bullying. I was furious. That incident is one of the reasons I stepped down as coordinator.

Negative organizational climate extends beyond the school environment, encompassing the policy level. Interviewees criticized the Ministry of Education for its inadequate support, contributing to the failure to protect teachers adequately. Nadav (school principal) expressed his frustration: "If parents exert enough pressure, the Ministry of Education often sides with them, even in cases of severe violence, because they fear parents and media exposure. That leaves teachers unprotected."

To uphold a culture of industrial silence, Dana (coordinator with the teachers union) observed that the Ministry of Education frequently ignores teachers' professional opinions and offers insufficient support, ultimately undermining their status and authority in the eyes of students and parents.

If a student wants to study advanced math, even if you think they're not suited for it, the ministry says, "Do what the student wants." Where is the teacher's voice? What about teachers' professional experience? If the ministry disrespects teachers, why wouldn't parents? Everyone's just trying to avoid conflict.

3.2.3. Community Factors

Overprotective parenting. Interviewees largely attributed the increase in school aggression to a shift toward protective parenting, characterized by overreach, persistent interference, and attempts to influence internal school decisions. Ella, a history teacher, recalled a parent's aggressive demand for accommodations following a didactic diagnosis, exemplifying how protective parenting frequently encroaches on school decision-making processes:

In recent years, parental intervention has increased significantly. For example, when a child is diagnosed [with learning or attention deficit disorders], parents immediately demand all recommended accommodations. This often leads to arguments and shouting. Parents today are highly aggressive, believe they and their children are entitled to everything, and rarely let their children cope independently—what we call helicopter parenting.

Tamar (director at psychological counseling services) described this parenting style as one in which parents prevent their children from independently navigating the education system, instead stepping in and taking control of their interactions with the school.

Today, parents are very protective of their children. They give them fewer chances to deal with things independently and intervene more. ... Teachers are threatened by parents who say they'll

bring a lawyer. There is much more intimidation today. ... Parents, no less than children, are opinionated toward schools, less respectful.

Declining Parental Authority. Although interviewees noted that some parents overprotect their children and interfere with teachers' educational efforts, they also highlighted a decline in parental authority over children as a significant risk factor.

This trend is characterized by blurred boundaries, diminished parental control, and an attempt to shift educational responsibilities to the school. The weakening of parental limit-setting increases the school's burden and can contribute to more frequent conflicts with parents. Hagit (teacher in a special class) described this dynamic:

Over the years, I see that parents are losing their authority over their children. ... Parents tell me, "You tell them," as if passing the responsibility. I say, "With all due respect, I'm only the teacher. I didn't give birth to the child. I'm not their mother or father." You see that the parent cannot set firm boundaries for the child.

Parents struggling to manage their children's behavior often become frustrated and tend to support their children unconditionally. This phenomenon was elucidated by

Galit (English teacher):

Two years ago, a mother yelled at me, and at some point, I said, "I'm not willing to be yelled at," and ended the call. She exploded, saying, "You ruined my child, you deal with him!" This comes from her frustration because her child is not what she wants him to be, so it's very easy to blame the teachers.

3.2.4. Societal Factors

Diminished Appraisal of the Teaching Profession. Interviewees highlighted a decline in the social perception of teaching, which reduces respect for teachers and sometimes fosters aggression. Sarit (teacher) explained: "Everyone has been to school and knows teachers. There's a lack of respect for teachers. This stems from society's view that teaching isn't a big deal. It's seen as a job for those who didn't succeed elsewhere."

Oshrat (English teacher) described how parents convey this low regard to their children:

Parents today belittle teachers a lot. You hear parents tell their kids, "Anyone can be a teacher these days; it's not special like before." This message is passed on to children, teaching them that teaching is not a respected profession.

Several interviewees noted a historical decline in teachers' authority, leaving them vulnerable to disrespect. Parents sometimes side with their children against teachers. Arie (teachers union) illustrated this point:

My parents saw teachers as almost godlike. The teacher was always right, no matter what. Today's parents are educated and know the system. They dare to say, "What does this teacher know? I know my child, and they're right." They fully support their child. Then the parents tell the child, "Don't worry, I'll solve your problem."

3.3. Effective Coping Strategies

Considering the identified risk factors, teachers often find themselves vulnerable and insufficiently protected in the face of parental aggression. In response to these challenges, the interviewees developed strategies aimed at helping them navigate and cope with such confrontations more effectively.

3.3.1. Establishing Clear Boundaries

The interviews revealed that teachers who effectively manage parental aggression are those who assertively set and maintain clear boundaries. This involves an immediate response to inappropriate behavior, particularly verbal aggression. Sigalit (deputy principal) recounted a recent incident with

a parent whose tone became aggressive during a phone call. She responded by firmly ending the conversation:

A few minutes ago, I spoke with a student's mother, and the conversation escalated. There was no aggression, but the tone was unacceptable. I told her, "I'm ending the conversation." Once I said that, her tone changed. But not everyone is capable of doing that.

Interviewees also underscored the principal's crucial role in setting boundaries with parents. Ilana (school counselor) described how her principal confidently reasserts the school's authority: "Our principal is very experienced. He knows how to reset them. He says, 'You chose to enroll your child here, trust us to do what's best.'"

Nadav (school principal) outlined his clear policy against verbal aggression, demonstrating how such behavior is addressed swiftly and firmly:

In my four years as principal, there have been few incidents where teachers felt threatened. Early on, some parents yelled at a teacher, and I made it clear: That's unacceptable. I told them they could find another school. The district supervisor came and facilitated mediation, but ultimately backed us up: We don't accept that kind of language.

Dorit (school counselor) highlighted the importance of signaling to parents that teacher safety is nonnegotiable: "Protecting teachers means drawing a line. We [tell parents that we] educate your children, but we won't allow harm to a teacher. That's a powerful message from the school."

3.3.2. Establishing a Positive Organizational Climate

A central factor in preventing aggression and fostering teacher resilience is strong organizational backing. When school leaders and staff members stand firmly behind teachers, it reinforces clear boundaries against aggressive behavior. Sigalit (deputy principal) underscored the school's commitment to addressing aggression promptly and thoroughly:

Any teacher experiencing aggression receives full support from the educators, the school principal, and the leadership team. We don't let these things slide; every incident is addressed in detail. As a coordinator, there's no such thing as an unresolved violent event. It's handled immediately.

Principals also established procedures to protect their staff. Nadav (school principal) required that teachers never meet parents alone, ensuring shared responsibility and support: "I insist that teachers hold conversations with parents in pairs, never alone. Even if the meeting seems harmless, it's better to have two people present, so the teacher doesn't feel isolated."

When teachers confront instances of aggression during school day, it is crucial to maintain a unified front. Sarit (teacher) stressed the emotional impact of collective support in difficult moments:

There will always be challenging students and parents, but what matters is knowing the school is united and has your back. That you're not the scapegoat. The students and parents come and go, but the team stays, and that support makes all the difference.

3.3.3. Establishing a Positive Social Climate: Enhancing Parental Involvement, Creating a Shared Discourse, and Building Trust

Interviewees also suggested establishing a positive social climate as means of addressing parental violence. In particular, they suggested building trust and fostering collaboration with parents. Trust, open communication, and involving parents in collaborative dialogue are seen as effective ways to support the child's best interests. Hagit (teacher) explained her approach to viewing parents as partners:

My relationship with parents has generally been good. I've been teaching long enough to know it's no secret that parents are gradually losing authority over their children. When I contact a parent, it's never to complain, I approach them as a partner so we can work together to help the child.

Building trust requires ongoing effort and investment. Tamar (counseling psychological services) emphasized the importance of maintaining this relationship: "Parents are a challenging reality. It's about continuously building and maintaining relationships. The more actively involved

parents are in the education system, and the more the school manages that partnership intentionally, the fewer problems you'll face."

Nadav (school principal) detailed his practice of inviting parents to engage in the resolution process and mediating disputes among them:

I strongly believe in dialogue, especially in education. It sets an example for resolving disagreements. We invest a lot of time in building trust with parents, inviting them to speak, listening to them, and being flexible. Allowing different ways to solve problems helps build mutual trust.

3.3.4. Conflict Management Training for Teachers

The findings highlight conflict management training as a key strategy in helping teachers handle aggression and prevent escalation. These trainings, often aimed at newer teachers, equip staff members with communication tools and emotional support to navigate difficult encounters with students and parents, fostering a sense of belonging and safety. Mona (school counselor) illustrated how new teachers receive support and participate in joint workshops with the staff:

We provide mentoring for new teachers, sometimes even entering classrooms to run workshops and hear about their difficulties. These workshops include both new and experienced teachers. The veteran teachers share their experience. ... This also helps the new teacher feel accepted, supported, and included.

Ravit (math teacher) described a designated staff member who supports new teachers through regular conversations: "At our school, there's a teacher whose job is to meet weekly with new staff [members]. ... They have a debriefing conversation, discuss their difficulties, including challenges with others in the system, and she helps them."

Some schools have developed practical tools to help teachers manage such situations. Rina (counseling psychological services) explained her work: "As part of our training on school climate, I talked about conflict management tools, how to manage conflict, and prevent escalation. Everyone brings their own stress, frustrations, and emotional thresholds, and that crashes with the other side's limitations." She emphasized two key dimensions in coping: personal support for the affected teacher and a systemic response to restore trust and stability:

When an incident occurs, the teacher is often deeply hurt, there's real emotional damage. The system must support her personally, whether through the counselor, psychologist, superintendent, or principal. If she feels seen and backed, recovery is more likely. On a systemic level, we must restore trust and safety to the entire school community. The focus is on creating processes of dialogue, conflict management, and organizational resilience.

Natalie (school principal) emphasized the importance of empathy and communication in preventing conflict:

Sometimes, we need to put ourselves in the parents' shoes, and that resolves many conflicts. When the teacher understands the other side, it doesn't escalate into aggression. You need to bring them to your side. We're not at war; we're all working for the [sake of the] child.

4. Discussion

Although violence directed at teachers has gained increasing research, policy, and public attention during the past decade and a half, very limited research has considered parental violence against teachers. To address this gap, this study used in-depth interviews with 46 participants, including teachers, school principals, and policymakers in Israel, to explore how parents' violence toward school teachers manifests and in which contexts, associated factors, and strategies that teachers and schools use to manage these encounters.

4.1. Common Forms of Parental Violence Toward Teachers

Consistent with prior research (e.g., McMahon et al., 2024), the present findings suggest that parental violence against teachers predominantly manifests through verbal abuse. Interviewees

recounted numerous instances in which parents employed abrasive, condescending, and aggressive language, often in response to disciplinary actions taken by teachers due to student misbehavior. These results underscore the potential volatility of disciplinary practices, which can provoke parental interference and escalate to aggressive behavior toward educators. Teachers' efforts to educate children, establish boundaries regarding appropriate behavior, and address issues related to students' grades often result in violence in the form of threats and stalking—either in person or via electronic platforms, particularly WhatsApp—with the intent to undermine their professional authority.

These findings corroborate previous research indicating that disciplinary issues with students are the primary catalyst for parental violence directed at teachers (Tiesman et al., 2013). They echo prior evidence that parents' concerns about perceived unfairness or inconsistent enforcement of school discipline practices were identified as the most significant factor contributing to conflicts with teachers, which can escalate into violence against them (May et al., 2010).

The current findings underscore threats as a significant concern that teachers face from parents. Such threats not only undermine teachers' professional effectiveness but also hinder their ability to perform their duties, discouraging them from addressing student misconduct. Parents often threaten teachers with escalation to the school principal, Ministry of Education, or even the media to exert influence or intimidate. Such threats circumvent teachers' authority, further eroding trust and intensifying tensions in the already fragile relationships between educators and parents, ultimately hindering effective parent-teacher communication.

Consistent with prior research (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2022), physical violence by parents was the least reported form of aggression among teachers. Although physical violence is typically considered more severe than verbal abuse or threats, teachers tend to report victimization primarily when it involves physical harm and are less likely to report incidents of nonphysical victimization (Moon et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the current results suggest that verbal abuse and threats also have significant negative consequences for teachers, including emotional distress and an increased sense of insecurity, undermining the teachers' ability to educate and nurture students effectively.

This research enhances our understanding of how parental violence against teachers manifests, emphasizing that teachers frequently identify parental interruptions as a common form of disruptive and aggressive behavior. This includes parents barging into classrooms or interrupting lessons, which is particularly troubling, disruptive, and humiliating for educators. Consistent with prior evidence (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2022), such intrusive acts of violence by parents represent particularly severe forms of teacher-directed aggression that require targeted prevention and intervention efforts.

4.2. Multiple Factors Contributing to Parental Violence Against Teachers in the School Ecology

Consistent with prior research (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019; McMahon et al., 2017), the current findings indicate factors across multiple levels in the school ecology that are associated with teachers' victimization. At the individual level, teachers' personal characteristics may affect their vulnerability to parental aggression. Specifically, resembling prior research (Martinez et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2014), teachers with more experience and seniority were found to be less susceptible to parental hostility. It is possible that parents hold greater respect for veteran teachers with extensive teaching experience. It is also likely that experienced teachers project a sense of confidence during interactions with parents, especially in challenging or potentially volatile situations. The findings also suggest that teachers who can establish boundaries with parents experience less violence from them. It appears that just as teachers need to set clear boundaries with students to avoid victimization by students (Berkowitz et al., 2022; McMahon et al., 2020), they should also employ explicit boundary-setting strategies when dealing with parents.

Beyond teachers' individual traits, the findings emphasize the role of the school as an organization in influencing the risk of parental violence. Teachers noted that although practical tools exist for managing student violence (e.g., sanctions against students), there are no comparable means

to address parental aggression. Teachers cannot punish parents, nor can they suspend students for their parents' violence, leaving teachers vulnerable and exposed without effective strategies to counteract parental misconduct. Thus, beyond sanctions, alternative strategies are necessary for effectively addressing parental aggression toward teachers.

Similar to prior research (e.g., Berkowitz et al., 2022; McMahon et al., 2020), the school's organizational climate has also been highlighted as important in predicting parental violence toward teachers. The findings underscore the critical importance of collegial, managerial, and administrative support in preventing and managing parental violence. Teachers emphasized that strong backing from school leaders is essential when parents become aggressive, and a lack of support can intensify the violence teachers face. Fostering a positive organizational climate—aligned with the school's core values, vision, and philosophy—is vital for improving safety and lowering violence (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019). Research on teachers' victimization has indicated that fostering a positive organizational climate should be an ongoing and integral process, rather than a sporadic effort. Consistently reinforcing a supportive collegial environment helps build trust, promote collaborative relationships, and establish clear norms for behavior, all of which are crucial for effectively preventing and addressing violence against teachers (Berkowitz et al., 2022; McMahon et al., 2020).

The organizational climate of a school transcends the school setting and extends to the policy level (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019). Interviewees criticizing the Ministry of Education for providing insufficient support, which hampers efforts to effectively protect teachers. The current findings reveal that in an organizational climate characterized by a culture of ignoring and not addressing problematic issues, where there is a lack of willingness or effective tools to confront parents and provide support from the school level to the Ministry of Education, the risk of parental violence toward teachers is markedly amplified.

The research findings further underscore the significance of the community as a factor linked to parental violence toward teachers. Specifically, the results reveal a complex pattern of parental attitudes and behaviors. On one hand, parents tend to exhibit a hovering, overprotective style characterized by intrusive involvement in teachers' educational and instructional work, meddling in their responsibilities and causing harm. On the other hand, interviewees highlighted that contemporary parenting is marked by a notable decline in parental authority, a blurring of intergenerational boundaries, and efforts to shift educational responsibilities onto schools and teachers. This shift diminishes parents' sense of accountability for their children's upbringing and intensifies conflicts between parents and teachers, ultimately exacerbating parental aggression toward educators. These results are in line with prior research evidence suggesting that reduced parental authority over children is linked to a rise in teacher-directed violence (Berkowitz et al., 2022; McMahon et al., 2020). Similarly, excessive parental involvement and interference in teachers' educational work may also elevate the likelihood of parental violence against educators (Tiesman et al., 2014).

Finally, the interviewees in this study observed that similar to broader societal trends, parents show a lack of respect for the teaching profession and teachers personally. They highlighted that the prevailing perception among both parents and students is that anyone can become a teacher, and this attitude reflects a dismissive view that diminishes the perceived value of educators. Consequently, such attitudes contribute to a heightened risk of parental violence against teachers, because this gap in respect often facilitates aggressive behaviors. These findings match prior evidence suggesting that diminished respect for and undervaluation of the teaching profession in society can cultivate adverse attitudes, hostility, and aggressive behaviors toward educators (McMahon et al., 2020).

11.3. Positive School Climates and Mentoring for Conflict Management Are Effective Coping Strategies

The results reveal coping mechanisms and strategies that may reduce parental violence toward teachers. Overall, these suggested approaches underscore the importance of fostering a positive social and organizational school climate as an effective means of addressing the issue. Similar to prior research indicating that suspensions are generally ineffective in reducing school violence (Skiba et

al., 2022), interviewees noted that suspension is impractical in teacher–parent conflicts. Instead, cultivating a positive school environment appears to yield more constructive outcomes. Consistent with prior research (Martinez et al., 2016; Payne et al., 2003), the findings suggest that cultivating a positive organizational climate—characterized by a unified stance among teachers and staff members, mutual support and solidarity, and the implementation of clear boundaries and behavioral expectations for both students and parents—offers a promising strategy for reducing parental violence toward teachers. A key strategy identified in the study was that, in any meeting with parents—regardless of how benign it may seem—an additional teacher would join, ensuring that no teacher faces parents alone. Conversely, a toxic organizational climate can not only intensify parental aggression due to inadequate response and poor management but also contribute to further victimization, because teachers endure additional harm and humiliation when colleagues and school leadership diminish or dismiss their experiences of victimization.

In line with McMahon and colleagues' (2017) findings, the current study underscores the pivotal role of the school principal in shaping a supportive organizational climate. The school leader establishes the tone for the entire school community, has the capacity to mobilize the staff toward fostering a culture of mutual support among colleagues (Astor et al., 2009), and thus possesses the greatest authority to mitigate incidents of parental violence against teachers. The school's social climate is also an important tool to tackle teachers' victimization. A prominent aspect of the school's social climate highlighted in this study is parental involvement, collaboration, and sustained positive communication with parents.

The findings indicate that engaging parents, through efforts to build trust, invite their participation, and integrate them into the school's coalition, requires an ongoing and sustained process. This continuous engagement serves as a vital strategy in mitigating parental violence, emphasizing that such involvement should not be sporadic or reactive but rather a consistent component of the school's relational framework. A key aspect of this positive collaboration with parents is recognizing that parental violence toward teachers often stems from underlying frustration. Interviewees emphasized that school staff members should respond with empathy to parents' concerns, because this approach is essential for sustaining a productive and constructive partnership.

Finally, the results suggest that to manage conflicts with parents effectively, particularly for newer teachers, mentoring, guidance, and ongoing support are crucial. Such interventions have been shown to reduce incidents of school violence, including violence directed at teachers (Berkowitz et al., 2022). New teachers often face significant challenges in isolation, having to navigate successes and setbacks without sufficient support (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Mentoring can enhance their ability to manage conflicts with parents, preventing escalation and thus reducing the risk of parental violence. Schools that provide structured, systematic support tend to offer more consistent assistance tailored to the specific challenges that teachers encounter. This organizational approach aims to improve overall school functioning and foster healthier parent–teacher interactions, ultimately reducing parental aggression. Providing these resources to novice and less experienced educators can strengthen their conflict management skills and contribute to a safer, more inclusive school environment.

4.3. Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study provided valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research relied exclusively on the perspectives of educators and policy-level managers regarding parental violence toward teachers, and future studies should incorporate viewpoints from parents and students to gain a more comprehensive understanding, because they may offer alternative explanations. Employing a mixed-methods design could garner deeper insights regarding this relatively underexplored phenomenon. Additionally, the sample primarily consisted of nonminority educators and policy makers. Because the nature and severity of violence against teachers can vary

across ethnic and cultural contexts, it is recommended that future research include a more diverse and representative sample to examine ethnocultural influences on parents' violence toward teachers.

4.4. Practice and Policy Implications

Our findings indicate that parental violence against teachers is a multifaceted issue rooted in various dynamics in the school environment and broader societal context. Therefore, addressing this problem requires interventions across multiple levels—individual, school, community, and society—because focusing solely on personal or school-based factors without considering prevailing community attitudes, values, and beliefs is unlikely to yield meaningful change. This research highlighted that parental aggression often reflects a broader decline in societal respect for the teaching profession. Effective solutions may involve efforts to enhance the status of educators, such as improving compensation and promoting cultural norms that honor and support teaching. Ultimately, resolving this complex challenge cannot be the sole responsibility of educators or schools. Instead, it demands a community-wide and societal approach—fostering a cultural shift that prioritizes school safety and recognizes the influence of societal norms and values that shape attitudes toward education and authority.

A more positive school climate is likely to enhance overall safety for teachers. It is essential for students, parents, and educators to establish and clearly communicate behavioral expectations and acceptable conduct collaboratively. Implementing transparent and equitable policies against all forms of violence, along with consistent enforcement, is crucial (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Although the importance of school climate is increasingly acknowledged in educational reform efforts, greater focus should be given to fostering the school's organizational structure, social cohesion, and emotional environment. Additionally, providing mentoring, guidance, and ongoing support to novice teachers is vital, because the findings indicate they are more vulnerable to experiencing parental violence.

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