

Encounters and Ordeals on Violent Incidents and School Safety: Their Status and Relationship

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ABSTRACT

Exposure to violent incidents and safety issues at school remains a significant problem for both teachers and their learners. Communities around the globe are experiencing various forms of violence and most of the victims are the youths and the vulnerable groups. This study used a descriptive correlation approach to address issues on violent incidents and school safety in schools particularly in Davao Oriental. It examined the status of violent incidents and safety in schools and the extent on violent incidents' influence to the level of school safety. Results reveal that violent incidents moderately occur with an overall mean of 3.29 and overall standard deviation of 0.67 which explains that the respondents' impressions of violent incidents are the same and means that violent incidents happen regularly. Among the violent incidents happened are gang violence ($X= 3.80$, $SD= 1.20$) and arguments among students ($X= 3.77$ and $SD= 0.99$). Also, there is a high status of school safety with an overall mean of 3.52 and overall standard deviation of 0.78 which explains that school safety is evident in most occasions. Among the impressions of school safety are I feel safe in my classroom ($X= 3.75$, $SD= 1.00$) and I am happy with the way my school is dealing with violence ($X= 3.53$, $SD= 1.23$). However, the belief that violent incidents do not occur at their school is described as moderate ($X= 2.92$, $SD= 1.14$). Moreover, results also reveal that the magnitude relationship of violent incidents to school safety generated an r -value of -0.312 which means that there is a moderate negative relationship between violent incidents and school safety. This means that if there is high occurrence of violent incident, then school safety is low and vice versa.

Keywords— violence, school safety, descriptive correlation, Davao Oriental, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The school environment is traditionally considered the safest place for children. Unfortunately, crimes also exist in school and may come from different sources, forms and involves many actors (Pitso et. al, 2014). Like bullying that eventually became a more serious form of aggression, students may have learned it outside the school but have perpetuated inside the school because the school ignores it or is implementing ineffective disciplinary practices. School violence places students and teachers in constant fear, and retards the educational process (Mestry, 2015).

In the City of Mati, Davao Oriental, Philippines, the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) recorded a total of more than a hundred children involved in gangs. These children are referred as Children at Risk (CAR) and Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL). They are also learners enrolled in different levels in elementary, high school and alternative learning system and may have perpetuated their school environment who could possibly be the cause of school violence. In the City of Mati, violent incidents in schools are observed and there has been no study conducted in relation to the school safety and violent incidents among secondary schools in the city. It is necessary that the people who experienced and endured the effects of violence, directly or indirectly, should be given attention. Public school teachers have also expressed their sentiments on the presence of gang-affiliated students in their schools despite DepEd Order no. 18, s. 2015's provision the guidelines and procedures on the management of CAR and CICL. Its goal is

to facilitate the reintegration to the school and community of CAR and CICL and prevent them from re-offending.

Based on the data presented by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for Plan Philippines 2009 on their "Towards A Child –Friendly Education Environment" on the violence experienced by children inflicted by their peers wherein 73.58% of children in Grades 4-6 and 78.36% in high school in urban areas suffered verbal abuse violence from their peers. There was also 30.17% of children in Grades 4-6 and 37.57% in high school in rural areas experienced physical abuse or violence committed by their peers; 26.74% of children in Grades 4-6 and 43.71% in high school in urban areas experienced verbal sexual abuse committed by their peers and 9.65% of Grades 4-6 and 17.71% of high school students experienced inappropriate touching.

The related studies and results above tell that the communities around the globe are experiencing various forms of violence and most of the victims are the youths and the vulnerable groups. Educators have good reasons to concern themselves with violence. The fear of violence penetrates on the business of teaching and learning. With this, there is an urgent call for educators to assess school contexts and to explore all the various conditions in mitigating violent incidents in their learning environments.

Hence, this study investigated the teacher and student perceptions on the current state of violence and the nature and frequency of violent acts in their schools and to test the theory that predicts that violent incidents will negatively influence school safety for the teachers and students at the DepEd Secondary Schools of the Mati Central District in the City Division of Mati.

OBJECTIVES

This study primarily aimed to determine the status of violent incidents and safety at schools. Specifically, this study had the following objectives:

1. identify the status of violent incidents and safety in schools as observed by the teachers and students; and
2. determine the extent of relationship between violent incidents and the level of school safety.

METHODS

This study utilized a quantitative research design. Creswell (2014) defined quantitative research as an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true. In order to generate the quantitative data of this study, a descriptive correlation approach was applied using survey questionnaire to investigate teacher and student perceptions on the current state of violence and the nature and frequency of violent acts in their schools and to test the theory that predicts that violent incidents will negatively influence school safety for the teachers and students at the DepEd Secondary Schools of the Mati Central District in the City Division of Mati.

The participants of this study were the teachers and students of the secondary schools in the Mati Central District of the DepEd-City Division of Mati. There were three (3) public secondary schools involved in the study which belong to the said district. The study employed a survey questionnaire to one-hundred (100) teachers and one-hundred (100) students from the secondary schools. This is considered a quota sampling that is defined as a procedure which enables one to draw a sample with controls, ensuring that specified numbers referred as quotas are obtained from each specified population subgroup but with essentially no randomization of unit selection within the subgroups (Elder, 2009). Expectedly, public schools cater the

greatest number of school-going children. The number of participants identified was just enough to represent the population of the study since it is already large enough to gather the sufficient information to derive expected findings of the study. To achieve the objectives of this study, the teachers and students were the best respondents since they were the ones directly involved in the violence and safety issues at schools.

The data that were derived from the survey questionnaire were analyzed using a descriptive correlation analysis to test if violent incidents influence school safety. In this kind of analysis, the investigators use the correlational statistic to describe and measure the degree or association (or relationship) between two or more variables or sets of scores (Creswell, 2014). To determine the relationships among the variables in the study, a Pearson correlation coefficient measure also referred to as Pearson's *r* or Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was utilized. According to Samuels (2014), Pearson correlation measures the existence and strength of a linear relationship between two variables. It is used once the underlying assumptions are satisfied and if the outcome is significant, a correlation exists.

The proponent submitted this study to the University of the Immaculate Conception-Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC) for the assessment of the ethical aspects by the members of the Committee. The specific guidelines strictly observed by the researcher included many but not limited to Belmont Report of 1976, Declaration of Helsinki of 2013, and National Ethical Guidelines of Health and Health-Related Research of 2017.

Below is the matrix of interpretation for school safety and violent incidents.

Range of Mean	Description	Interpretation
4.20-5.00	Very High	School safety/Violent incidents is/are evident at all times.
3.40-4.19	High	School Safety/Violent incidents is/are evident in most occasions.
2.6-3.39	Moderate	School safety/Violent incidents is/are evident regularly.
1.80-2.59	Low	School safety/Violent incidents is/are evident on very limited occasions.
1-1.79	Very Low	School safety/Violent incidents is/are never evident.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Status of Violent Incidents and School Safety

Table 1 shows the status of violent incidents while Table 2 shows the status of safety of the secondary schools.

Status of Violent Incidents. Table I shows that violent incidents moderately occur with an overall mean of 3.29 and overall standard deviation of 0.67 which explains that the respondents' impressions of violent incidents are the same and means that violent incidents happen regularly. Among the violent incidents happened are gang violence is a problem at this school with a mean of 3.80 and a standard deviation of 1.20, and arguments among students with a mean of 3.77 and a standard deviation of 0.99. These incidents explain that school safety is evident in most occasions. However, there is a low incidence of drug sales on school grounds ($X=1.96$, $SD=1.15$). Moreover, the SD which ranges from .97 to 1.31 explains that the data points are spread out over a large range of values.

TABLE I. Status of Violent Incidents

DESCRIPTIONS OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS	MEAN	SD	DESCRIPTION
Arguments among students	3.77	0.99	High
Name-calling, insults and teasing	3.58	1.14	High
Physical fighting at this school	3.60	0.97	High
Threats by student against another	3.39	1.12	Moderate
Sexual comments by one against another	3.10	1.12	Moderate
Inappropriate touch by one against another	2.89	1.13	Moderate
Students are hassled by other students.	3.60	1.08	High
(I saw) students being beaten up.	3.14	1.28	Moderate
Racial comments by one against another	3.25	1.18	Moderate
Drug sales on school grounds	1.96	1.15	Low
Intruders caused problems at this school.	3.53	1.20	High
Gang violence is a problem at this school.	3.80	1.20	High
Robbery or theft over money from (me) student	3.51	1.14	High
I heard that someone was threaten with weapon.	3.00	1.31	Moderate
(I) Student has been bullied by other students.	3.46	1.29	High
Student was assaulted with a knife or sharp objects.	3.10	1.29	Moderate
OVERALL	3.29	0.67	Moderate

Violent incidents occur moderately based on the findings of the study. Results also explain that the respondents' impressions of violent incidents are the same and that violent incidents happen regularly. Among the violent incidents with high occurrence include arguments among students; name-calling, insults and teasing; physical fighting; students are hassled by other students; gang violence; robbery or theft over money; and bullying among students. The violent incidents with moderate occurrence are threats by student against another; sexual comments by one against another; inappropriate touch by one against another; students being beaten up; and racial comments by one against another. However, the violent incident with low occurrence includes drug sale on school grounds.

The result is closely related with the study of Joong and Ridler (2006) which found that most incidents described by the participants involved bullying, fights, assaults, and sexual harassments and about half of these involved a gang of two to six students. However, in the United States' setting, the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics reported on 2016 that for the School Year 2015-2016, seventy-nine percent (79%) of public schools recorded those one or more incidents of violence, theft, or other crimes had taken place, amounting to 1.4 million crimes which translates to a rate of 28 crimes per 1,000 students enrolled in said school year.

Status of School Safety. Table II shows the high status of school safety with an overall mean of 3.52 and overall standard deviation of 0.78 which explains that school safety is evident in most occasions. Among the impressions of school safety are I feel safe in my classroom with a mean of 3.75 and a standard deviation 1.00 and I am happy with the way my school is dealing with violence with a mean of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 1.23. However, the belief that violent incidents do not occur at their school is described as moderate with a mean of 2.92 and a standard deviation of 1.14. Moreover, the SD which ranges from 1.00 to 1.23 explains that the data points are spread out over a large range of values.

TABLE II. Status of School Safety

DESCRIPTIONS OF SCHOOL SAFETY	MEAN	SD	DESCRIPTION
I feel safe before and after school in school building.	3.58	1.15	High
I (Students) feel safe before and after school on school grounds.	3.59	1.01	High
I feel safe on my way to and from school.	3.62	1.14	High
I (Students) feel safe in the canteen/food court.	3.78	1.03	High
I (Students) feel safe in my classroom.	3.75	1.00	High
I believe that violent incidents do not occur at my school.	2.92	1.14	Moderate
I feel that this is a safe school.	3.40	1.08	High
I am happy with the way my school is dealing with violence.	3.53	1.23	High
OVERALL	3.52	0.78	High

This study reveals an overall finding that there is a high status of school safety which explains that school safety is evident in most occasions. The participants’ feeling of being safe in the classroom, in the school building, in the school grounds, in the canteen/food court and on their way to and from the school which is described as high affirms to the study of Boulton et.al (2009), Vargas et.al (2009), and Perumean-Chaney et.al (2013) which found that students generally felt safer in their classroom and less safe in bathrooms and school hallways. As to Eisenbraun (2007) and Perumean-Chaney & Sutton (2013), the consistent differences in feelings of safety suggest that there is a sizable and stable population of students experiencing regular fear about safety that extends beyond just one or two worrisome locales. Moreover, the participants’ expression on their happiness with the way their school is dealing with violence is describe also as high. However, the belief that violent incidents do not occur at their school is described as moderate. Given the findings that unsafe students also experienced more types and intensity of violence and felt less connected to school, these results support the strong link between increased victimization and students’ decreased feelings about school on the whole (Eisenbraun, 2007 & Perumean-Chaney & Sutton 2013).

Relationship of Violent Incidents to School Safety

Table III shows the significance on the influence of violent incidents to school safety. Results reveal that the magnitude relationship of violent incidents to school safety generated an r-value of -.312 which means that there is a significant relationship between violent incidents and school safety. This means that if there is high occurrence of violent incident, then school safety is low and vice versa.

TABLE III. Relationship of Violent Incidents to School Safety

School Safety	R	p value	Interpretation
Violent Incidents	-.312	.000	Significant

The findings of this study unveil that there is a significant relationship on the influence of violent incidents to school safety. Results reveal that the magnitude relationship of violent incidents to school safety generated a moderate negative relationship between violent incidents and school safety. This means that there is an inverse relationship which tells that if violent incidents increase, school safety decreases and vice versa. Flannery, D. J., Wester, K. L., & Singer, M. I. (2004) discussed in their study that those who suffer

are not just perpetrators and victims but the entire school also. They added that where violence is prevalent, the climate of the entire school can be affected and can contribute to the continuation of the cycle of violence exposure, victimization, and perpetration of violence on school grounds. Harper and Ibrahim(1999) also suggested violence by quiet and withdrawn youths might be driven by a constant feeling of psychological hurt or isolation, followed by an impulse to hurt the world or those that are believed to be responsible for the pain.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Violent incidents moderately occur in the secondary schools which implies that teachers and students' impressions about violent incidents are the same and means that violent incidents in their school happen regularly. On school safety, teachers and students affirmed that there is a high status of safety in their learning community which implies that school safety is evident in most occasions. However, the belief that violent incidents do not occur at their school is described as moderate. In other words, despite the declaration that they are safe in their school, the teachers and students also recognized that violent incidents and other school safety issues are evident.

On the extent of influence of violent incidents to the level of school safety, it can be concluded that there is a moderate negative relationship between the two. This means that if there is high occurrence of violent incident, then school safety is low and vice versa. Thus, the relationship is significant and inverse.

Recommendations

Since incidents of violence are present in the schools that result to negative school atmosphere, schools through the administrators shall necessarily conduct seminars/symposia on violence prevention strategies, implement trainings on anger management strategies, conduct capacity building programs for security personnel, and sustain religious education classes as part of the curriculum.

To mitigate the observed and reported physical and verbal Intimidations and episodes of disturbances, schools through the administrators shall necessarily revisit their existing policies and as much as possible craft clear policies on dealing behavior concerns. Conduct of capacity building programs for mediators or disciplinary implementers and implementation of comprehensive orientation about the revisited and crafted policies to the teachers, students, parents and guardians are also seen to be very significant.

School managers and administrators must take appropriate actions to resolve violence in schools. Various programs must be developed which include but not limited to physical surveillance, punishing those who perpetrate violence, curriculum-based programs designed to address the precursors of violence, and conflict mediation and resolution.

Classroom activities and mediation programs in conjunction with school-wide efforts can greatly enhance the safety and well-being of a school. Violence prevention is an ongoing process in which positive behaviors are modeled and reinforced. Administrators and teachers must be sincere in their efforts to prevent violence and to alleviate students' fears, and they need to implement a variety of thoughtful programs which aim to boost a feeling of physical safety and promote a psychologically safe school climate. The focus must be on proactive measures in trying to prevent the development of violent behaviors by resolving incidents and identifying problem of students.

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