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Effects of Teacher Avoidance of School Policies on Student Victimization

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Abstract

The present inquiry examines relations between school policy, teacher responses to violence, and students' victimization outcomes as reported by teachers in a nationally representative sample of schools in Israel. Data were analyzed using structural equations modeling for the full sample of teachers, as well as group comparisons by school level, gender, and ethnic groups. Across all models, violence prevention as a school priority was significantly related to less staff/teacher avoidance of dealing with violence. In turn, teacher avoidance of student violence related strongly to elevated rates of reported student victimization. The findings indicate that School Violence Prevention (as a policy on its own), does *not* necessarily translate to less student victimization. It is through the indirect impact on staff/teacher response that student victimization was less likely. This study highlights the importance of school policy in its relation to teachers' actions and student behavior.

Introduction

Many current school violence interventions place the core of the responsibility to *change* on students (Bosworth, Espelage, DuBay, & Daytner, 2000; Carroll, Hebert, & Roy, 1999; Farrell, Meyer, & Dahlberg, 1996; Grossman et al., 1997; Hilton, Harris, Rice, Krans, & Lavigne, 1998; Hudley et al., 1998). These programs (which reflect much of the youth violence literature) have been designed with the assumption that students are somehow deficient, need to be taught appropriate social skills, informed of the dangers of violence, and “re-trained” in how to interpret situations. While it is important to address violence prevention at the student level, there may also be systemic problems within the school culture that contribute to the likelihood of student violence. Though teachers and administrators are an integral part of the school life, and play critical roles in ensuring the safety of students, their views and actions are rarely considered in research on school violence (Astor, Meyer, & Behre, 1999; Astor, Meyer, & Pitner, 1999). Adelman and colleagues (1998; 2000) emphasize the importance of involving teachers in efforts to improve student learning and behavior. Teachers play a key role in preventing violence in schools and can provide valuable information about the effectiveness of violence prevention efforts. The present study is one of the first to investigate teachers’ perceptions of school policy, teacher action, and student victimization in a large scale, nationally representative sample in the Middle East.

Researchers who have studied effects of teaching beliefs on teaching behavior and student outcomes emphasize the importance of attending to characteristics of teachers’ work environments and beliefs about their responsibilities (Roeser, Marachi, & Gehlbach, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Several studies that have considered teachers’ perspectives on school violence highlight the complex intersection of social conventional, moral,

and personal factors that relate to teachers' conceptualizations of violence in school settings (Behre et al., 2001; Meyer, Astor, & Behre, 2002; Williams, Winfree, & Clinton, 1989).

Interviews conducted with teachers in middle and high school settings indicate that teachers often fear risking their own safety when faced with the choice to intervene in violence between students. There are also differences in patterns of reasons given by male and female teachers for why they would choose not to intervene in school fights.

In a study investigating social dynamics and physical space in schools, Astor and colleagues (1999) found that unsupervised areas or areas considered *unowned* by school personnel and students were more likely to be the sites of violence and victimization. Their study highlights the important role that teachers hold by their presence and assistance in monitoring student behavior and intervening in violence among students. While many schools emphasize in their school missions and philosophies that "violence prevention is a priority," it is unclear whether this emphasis on prevention necessarily translates into a) active prevention (by teachers and staff) of violence in their schools or b) reduced rates of student violence.

Central to the effective translation of policy into action is the process by which the policy is interpreted by the teachers and students. And while qualitative studies have examined teacher interviews of school violence and violence prevention (Astor & Meyer, 2001; Astor, Meyer, & Behre, 1999; Behre et al., 2001), large scale quantitative studies of these issues have been rare. Research interviews of middle and high school teachers have revealed that teachers often feel hesitant to intervene with student violence out of fear for their own safety in escalating violence, and/or fear of legal repercussions that might result from their involvement. Interviews conducted with these teachers revealed school level and gender differences in responses and views

regarding their likelihood to intervene. The following quote reflects the complexity of issues that factor into a teachers' decision about whether or not to act in response to violence:

"I can't tell you how many fights I see right outside the school gate here (he points to school gates), students beating the crap out of each other, just in front of my office. So what am I supposed to do? If I decide to go out there and break it up, will the vice principal and principal support me, or will they (the students) be back out there 15 minutes after I bring them to the office? If I'm hit when I'm stopping a fight off of school grounds, are they (the administrators) going to tell me that I shouldn't be getting into it because it's happening after school or are they going to support me? If a fight happens in the gym, I'd pull the kids apart in two seconds and they'd be suspended. But am I supposed to do it all the time? Even when it's outside the school? Maybe? If I could depend on the principal, I'd be out there every day. Personally, I think the students can't do it without the teachers and the teachers can't do it without the support of the principal." (Male High School Physical Education Teacher), (Astor, 1998).

The above quote illustrates the embedded, connected nature of how policy from an administrative level can impact a teachers' decision to intervene in response to student violence.

With a focus on teachers' perceptions of the school goals, it becomes important to examine previous research (though limited) on teachers' views of the school environment. In a study that examined teachers' perceptions of the motivational climate in the school, researchers found gender and school level differences in teachers' beliefs about values in the larger school environment as well as their own beliefs and approaches to instruction (Marachi, Gheen, & Midgley, 2000; Roeser et al., 2002). Male and female teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools perceived varying degrees of competitiveness emphasized within the broader school climates. Men were more likely to perceive a competitive climate than were their female colleagues. One of the interesting findings in these studies was the strong relation between teachers' perceptions of the goals emphasized in the broader school climate with how they reported their own approaches to teaching. The perceived school goals were also related to teacher's beliefs about their role in caring for their students' emotional well-being. In similar work by Marachi and colleagues (2000), school level differences emerged between teachers in elementary, middle, and junior high schools regarding the degree to which they perceived school

goals (as emphasizing competition or learning) as well as their own approaches to instruction and beliefs about their role in the mental health of students.

In general, school violence research has revealed some ethnic and cultural variations in students' experiences of violence on schools grounds (Hammond & Yung, 1993; Hammond & Yung, 1991; Kachur et al., 1996; Kann et al., 2000; Kaufman et al., 2000). The majority of research on youth violence in schools has been conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries with predominantly European models of schooling. This study draws from a national sample of schools in Israel and is among the first to examine teachers' views of school climate and victimization in the Middle East (Zeira, Astor, & Benbenishty, in press).

Teachers in the present study are from two culturally diverse groups within the same country – Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews. Schools within the Israeli educational system are organized across ethnic and religious lines. Jewish and Arab students attend separate schools and are taught in separate languages (Hebrew and Arabic). The research literature on schools in Israel describes Jewish schools and culture as similar to industrialized European cultures with relatively liberal views regarding gender roles. In contrast, the Israeli Arab schools and culture have been described as more conservative, hierarchically oriented, and patriarchal (Amir et al., 1976; Haj-Yahia, 1998a, 1998b; Pitner et al., in press-a, in press-b; Zeira et al., 2002; Ziv et al., 1978). There are also substantial differences in socioeconomic status between Jewish and Arab families as a whole within the country. Arab families in Israel in general are considerably more disadvantaged than Jewish families on a broad array of socioeconomic indicators. This economic disparity may have important effects on neighborhood violence as well as violence that may carry over into the schools.

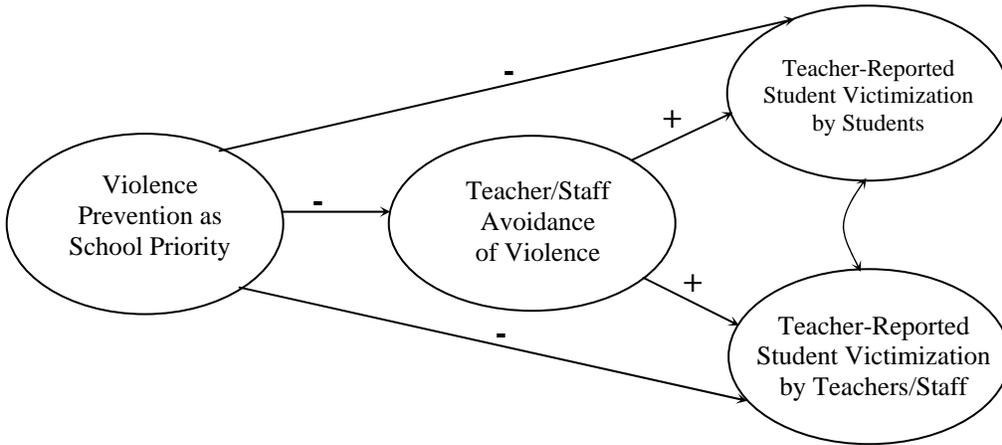
Prior research studies in Israel have indicated differences between Arab and Jewish students in rates and severity of violence and victimization in schools (Benbenishty et al., 2000). Results from the first national survey on school violence indicate that Arab students report higher rates of victimization with severe acts of violence (e.g. threats with a weapon), whereas Jewish students reported higher rates of less severe violent behavior (such as being cursed at, mocked, or insulted) (Benbenishty et al., 2000). Researchers also found that Arab students report more staff maltreatment than do Jewish students. It is unclear whether patterns of school climate and victimization reported by teachers follow these trends as well. From a developmental perspective, one might contend that although rates of violence may differ between cultures, the *relations* between contextual elements and victimization may reveal similar patterns. With these school level, gender, and cultural variations in mind, the present study has been designed to examine teacher reports of school context and student victimization comparatively across each demographic group. The methods section will outline in more detail the specific analyses to further examine questions regarding school level, gender, and culture.

Research Hypotheses

Please refer to Figure 1 below for the initial model indicating the following hypotheses for the teacher-reported study:

- 1. Teachers' perceptions of a school-wide emphasis on "Violence Prevention as a Priority" will result in less "Staff Avoidance of Violence" and lowered reports of student victimization.*
- 2. Teacher reports of "Staff Avoidance of Violence" will relate to higher levels of student victimization.*

Figure 1. Theoretical model of teacher reported school context variables and student victimization.



Method

Background of the study

The dataset for this study is drawn from a subset of a large national survey of school violence in Israel that includes data from students, teachers, and principals from a random sample of 232 schools representing the public school system under the supervision of the Israeli Ministry of Education (Benbenishty et al., 2000). The probability sampling method employed in the larger study was a two-stage stratified cluster sample. The strata were: Jewish/Arab, Religious/Secular, and Primary/Secondary/High schools. In the first stage, schools were randomly selected from the sampling frame according to their appropriate strata. In the second stage, within each of the selected schools, one class was randomly selected from each of the grade levels. In the larger study, all students in each class were surveyed. For the present study, homeroom teachers of the students in the selected schools were asked to respond to teacher surveys addressing issues of school climate and violence.

Procedure

The questionnaires were sent by mail to each of the selected schools where principals were asked to distribute them to all homeroom teachers in their school. After completing the questionnaire, teachers were asked to return them in a sealed envelope to their school's secretary. A research team member collected these envelopes from each school. The overall response rate was 61.2% and considered quite good when compared with other surveys of teacher and school professional populations (Astor, Behre, Fravil, & Wallace, 1997 & Wallace, 1997; Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998 & Farris, 1998). Overall, 1521 elementary, middle, and high school teachers responded to the surveys.

The sample in the present study consists of 898 teachers who taught in 83 junior high and 81 high schools (58% and 42% of the combined sample, respectively). Of these teachers, sixty-five percent were in Jewish schools, and thirty-five percent were teachers in Arabic schools. In the Jewish schools, 76% of the teachers in the sample were female, while in Arabic schools, 31% of the teachers were female. The mean number of years that teachers had taught was 14.4 years (SD = 9.4). The mean number of years that teachers worked for the current school was seven.

Measures

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from the work of Astor and his colleagues (Astor et al., 1997) on perceptions of school social workers on violence in their schools. The original items were translated from English to Hebrew and Arabic. Some items were adapted to the Jewish-Israeli and Arab-Israeli culture and language. A standard back-translation procedure was employed in order to ensure translation accuracy. Multiple translations and re-translations were made and compared.

The survey has several areas of focus: Assessment of the severity of violence as a problem in their schools, victimization (by students to students, staff to students, and students to staff), worries about personal safety, measures taken for self-defense, and school violence training. Prior to administration of the questionnaire for the national study, the questionnaire was piloted on a sample of 240 Jewish and Arab teachers and thereafter was improved to enhance reliability and validity. The questionnaires, procedures, and informed consent forms/instructions were reviewed extensively through the Israeli Ministry of Education Human Subject Protection protocols and were also implemented in accordance with the ethical and human subject review/guidelines at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Confidentiality was assured to all participants and their participation was voluntary.

Teacher Model - Outcome Variables

Teacher-reported Student-to-Student Victimization (Moderate and Severe). Teachers were asked to report whether or not students in their class engaged in various types of violence on school grounds within the previous month. Initially, responses were scored from 0 to 4 (0 = Not at all, 1 = Less than once a week, 2 = Once or twice a week, 3 = More than twice a week). Responses were dichotomized into presence or absence of events. Similar to the student-reported dataset, student victimization items in the teacher dataset separated out into moderate and severe forms. Moderate forms included threats, destruction of property, kicking, punching, insulting, or humiliating, and seizing and shoving another student. Severe forms include teachers' reports of students coming to school with weapons, gang threats towards students, blackmail, and group beatings of students.

Teacher Victimization by Students (Not used in final analyses). Teachers responded to the experience of being personally victimized by students on school grounds during the month

prior to survey administration. The four items were scored dichotomously with 0 = non-occurrence of the event, and 1 = occurrence of the event. The teacher victimization items include experiences such as being cursed at, intentionally shoved, threatened, or having property destroyed by a student. With the entire teacher sample (of elementary, middle and high school teachers), this factor yielded strong fit measures. However upon conducting the confirmatory factor analysis with the junior high and high school teacher samples, the factor did not meet sufficient fit specifications to be included in the final model and was subsequently dropped from further analyses.

Teacher Model - School Climate Variables

Violence Prevention as a Priority. Teachers were asked their perceptions of the extent to which violence prevention was a priority in their schools. This factor was measured on a 4-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly agree) and consists of 6 indicators with a Cronbach reliability of .82. Examples of indicators for this factor include, “The principal supports teachers who deal with violence,” and “In my school there is a strong awareness towards violence prevention in school.” For the full set of all indicators and factors, please refer to Appendix C.

Staff Avoidance of Violence as a Problem. Teachers responded to questions that asked about the degree to which teachers, staff, and school management tend to “ignore” or “avoid” violent events at school. Examples of these questions include, “Most of the teachers choose to ignore violent acts that are not under their immediate responsibility,” and “The teachers tend to ignore “low level” of violence (e.g. shoves, threats, and verbal abuse).” The Staff Avoidance factor was measured on a 4-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 = Agree,

and 4 = Strongly agree) and consists of four indicators with an overall Cronbach reliability coefficient of .73.

Analytic Method

The primary method of analysis for the present study is Structural Equations Modeling with maximum likelihood estimation (Bentler, 1995; Klem, 2000). As an analytic technique, SEM is especially well-suited for data in the social and behavioral sciences because it allows one to test a theoretical model by describing relationships among several endogenous factors simultaneously and it accounts for the relative unreliability of latent factors (Klem, 2000). Several important steps are necessary to follow prior to conducting a full structural equations model analysis. It is important first to verify a sound measurement model with satisfactory fit measures. Prior to running the measurement models for both teacher datasets, Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs) were conducted for each latent variable to ensure adequate factor loadings ($\geq .5$) for each factor indicator as well as strong fit measures for the overall factor. The Appendix lists the survey items that create each latent factor, with corresponding fit indices for each separate Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

There are various indicators of the goodness of fit for a specified model. The Chi-square coefficient is used to assess the size of the discrepancies between the relationships in the original data matrix from those implied by the model. Ideally, this Chi-square measure would be low, to reveal non-significant findings, so that one could conclude that the data “fit” the theoretical model. However, because of the sensitivity of the chi-square coefficient to sample size, it is not a preferred fit index for large samples such as those in the present study. More commonly used fit indices include the Bentler-Bonnett’s Normed Fit Index (NFI), the Non-Normed Index (NNFI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (Bentler, 1990). Typically, these three fit indices are

considered adequate when above .90 and good when they exceed .95. A common misfit measure (the Root Mean Square Error (RMSEA) is also reported in the SEM analyses. The RMSEA is considered acceptable when below .10 and good if it is below .05 or .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Following the confirmatory factor analysis of the latent factors, and an examination of the fit for the measurement model, the final model was tested using structural equations modeling (Bentler, 1995). For the first structural equations model, the full dataset was run without any group comparisons. Next, a comparative analysis was conducted to determine if differences existed between the junior high and high school teachers' reports of climate/student victimization. Initially, the analytic design was to conduct gender and ethnicity analyses in each of the junior high and high school teacher datasets separately. However, because of the similarity in the models of junior high and high school teachers, the final gender and ethnic group comparisons were run on the combined sample of teachers.

Results

Overall Teacher Analyses

The overall teacher model analyses provided a good fit to the data [χ^2 (70, N= 898) = 232, $p < .001$, NFI = .95, NNFI = .95, CFI = .96, RMSEA =.05]. The model explained 10 percent of the variance in teachers' reports of Moderate Student Victimization and 15 percent of Severe Student Victimization. Violence Prevention as a priority had a very strong negative association ($\beta = -.58$) with Staff Avoidance of Violence and explained 34% of the variance in the Avoidance measure. In turn, Staff Avoidance of Violence had a strong positive relation to the teachers' reports of Moderate and Severe Victimization of their students by other students and staff ($\beta = .34$ for both victimization outcomes). On its own, Violence Prevention as a Priority was not related significantly to the victimization measures, however, it did have an indirect effect

on student victimization through the staff avoidance of violence. This pattern is evident in all group analyses described below as well.

School Level Comparison Analyses

The results of the structural equation analysis for the comparison model examining school level differences between Junior High and High School students' reports of school climate and victimization also revealed a good fit to the data [χ^2 (158, N= 898) = 337, $p < .001$, NFI = .93, NNFI = .95, CFI = .96, RMSEA =.04]. These findings suggest that the same theoretical model fits the data from both school levels quite well (See Figure 3). In the initial comparison, the structural equations analyses were conducted with constraints on all factor loadings, paths, and covariances to be equal. After testing whether the fit could be improved by releasing equality constraints on each path, there were no significant changes in the chi-square index, so each constraint was retained for the final model. Because of the similarity in models for the junior high and high school teachers, the remainder of the group comparisons (by ethnicity and by gender) are conducted on the full junior high and high school teacher dataset. The percent of variance explained by the model for Staff Avoidance of Violence (.34 and .29), teacher reports of Moderate Student Victimization (.10 and .15), and teacher reports of Severe Victimization (.15 and .18) are all high and similar across school levels.

The beta path coefficients are also similar at .33 and .38 for the relation of Staff Avoidance to Moderate Student Victimization and .31 and .36 to Severe Student Victimization (by Junior High and High School teachers, respectively). No direct relation was found between the Violence Prevention as a Priority with the Victimization measures. However, the Prevention as Priority was very strongly and negatively related to Staff Avoidance of Violence, which in turn was strongly related to student victimization.

Gender Comparison Analysis

Similar to the process for the school level analyses, Structural Equation Modeling was applied to datasets of the male and female students using the same estimation procedure and by constraining all the factor loadings, paths, and covariances to be equal (See Figure 4). This comparison model examining gender differences between male and female teachers' reports of school climate and victimization revealed a good fit to the data [χ^2 (158, N= 898) = 329, $p < .001$, NFI = .93, NNFI = .96, CFI = .96, RMSEA =.04]. The model was tested for improvement by releasing equality constraints on the paths. When each beta constraint was freed (separately), there was not a significant decrease in the chi-square, so the final gender comparison model is run with all the constraints. The model similarities between the male and female teachers are striking. Nearly every beta coefficient is identical, with the exception of the betas linking Violence Prevention Priority to Staff Avoidance (these are very close at -.56 and -.59 for male and female teachers, respectively). The betas linking Staff Avoidance of Violence and both types of Student Victimization are nearly identical with both male and female betas for Moderate Student Victimization at .36 and betas for Severe Student Victimization at .34 for males and .33 for females.

Cultural Group Analyses

The same procedure used for school level and gender analyses was applied to the cultural group comparison. An SEM analysis was conducted comparing Jewish and Arab teachers with equality constraints on all factor loadings, paths, and covariances. Overall, the analysis produced a good fit to the data, [χ^2 (158, N= 898) = 365, $p < .001$, NFI = .93, NNFI = .95, CFI = .96, RMSEA =.04]. However, after releasing path constraints one at a time, it was determined that the release of the constraint between Violence Prevention as Priority and Staff Avoidance of

Violence would yield a significantly better fit to the model. Thus, when this first restraint was released, the analysis produced a better fit to the model [χ^2 (158, N= 898) = 360, $p < .001$, NFI = .92, NNFI = .95, CFI = .96, RMSEA =.04]. Figure 5 illustrates the final results for the cultural group analysis.

While the beta coefficients in the models for both Jewish and Arab teachers are very similar, the model appears to be better suited to explain the variance in reports of Avoidance and Student Victimization for Jewish teachers than for Arab teachers in the sample. The variance explained for the Staff Avoidance of Violence is .44 for Jewish teachers and .19 for Arab teachers.

Figure 2. Overall Structural Equations Model of Teacher Reports of School Context and Student Victimization.
 $\chi^2(70, N = 898) = 232, (p < .001), NFI=.95, NNFI=.95, CFI=.96, RMSEA=.05$.
 Significant paths are indicated with asterisks, $** = p < .001$.

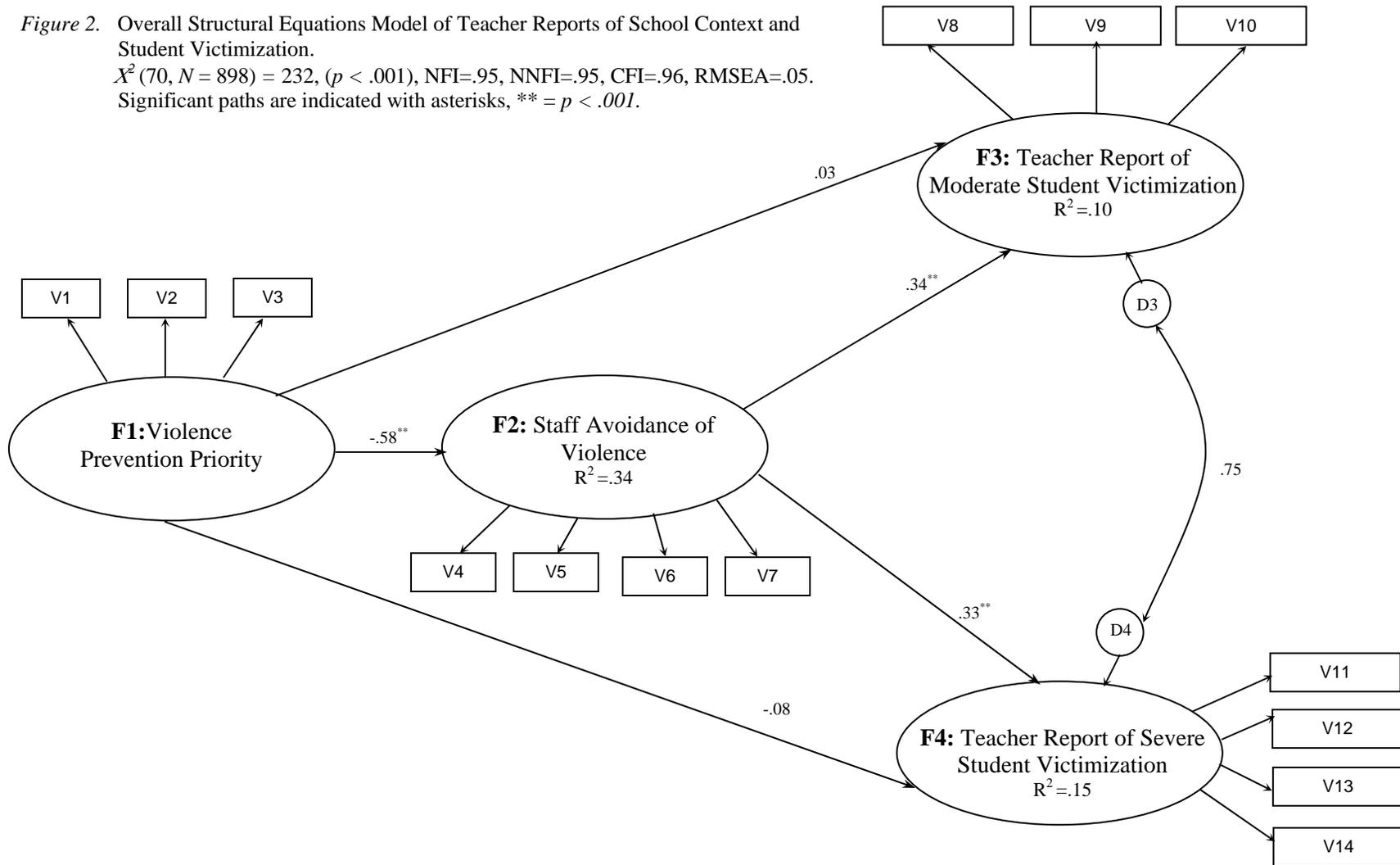


Figure 3. School Level Comparison Structural Equation Modeling of Junior High and High School Teachers' Reports of School Context and Student Victimization
 $\chi^2(158, N = 898) = 337, (p < .001), NFI=.93, NNFI=.95, CFI=.96, RMSEA=.04$.
 Junior High coefficients are indicated in regular type, High School in bold.
 Significant paths are indicated with asterisks, ** = $p < .001$.

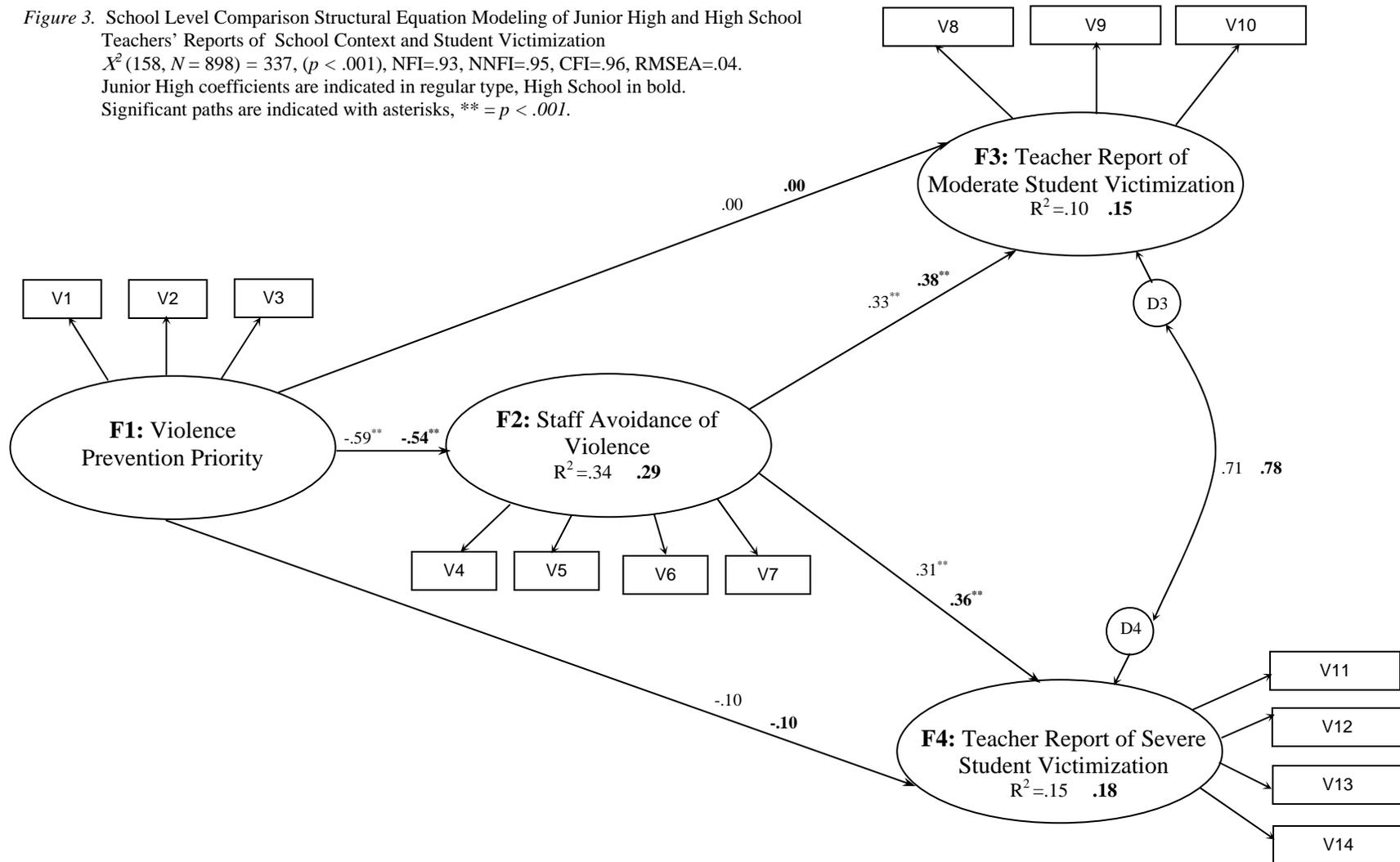


Figure 4. Gender Comparison Structural Equation Modeling of Male and Female Teacher' Reports of School Context and Student Victimization
 $\chi^2(158, N = 898) = 329, (p < .001), NFI=.93, NNFI=.96, CFI=.96, RMSEA=.04.$
 Male Teacher coefficients are indicated in regular type, Female Teachers are in bold.
 Significant paths are indicated with asterisks, $** = p < .001.$

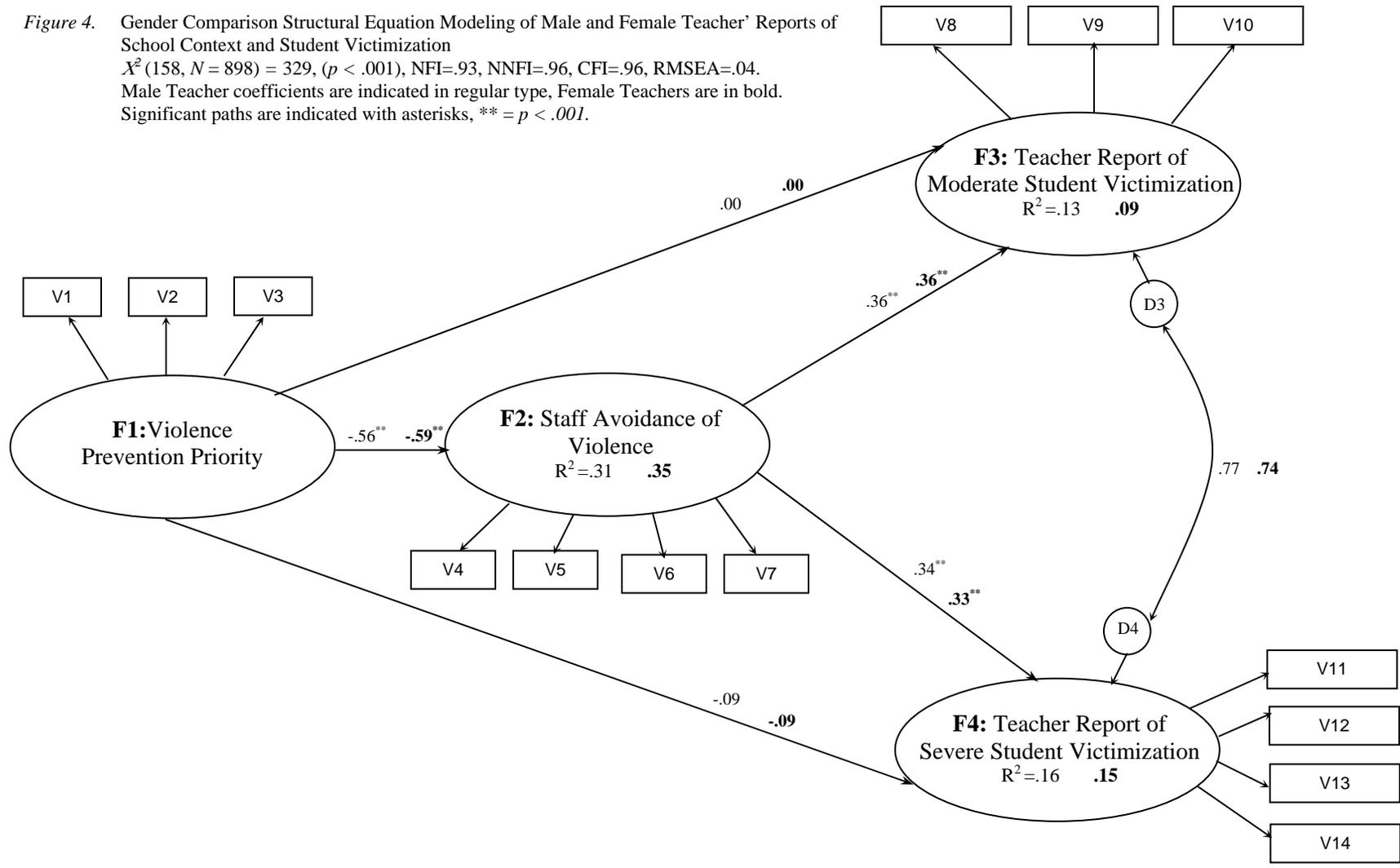
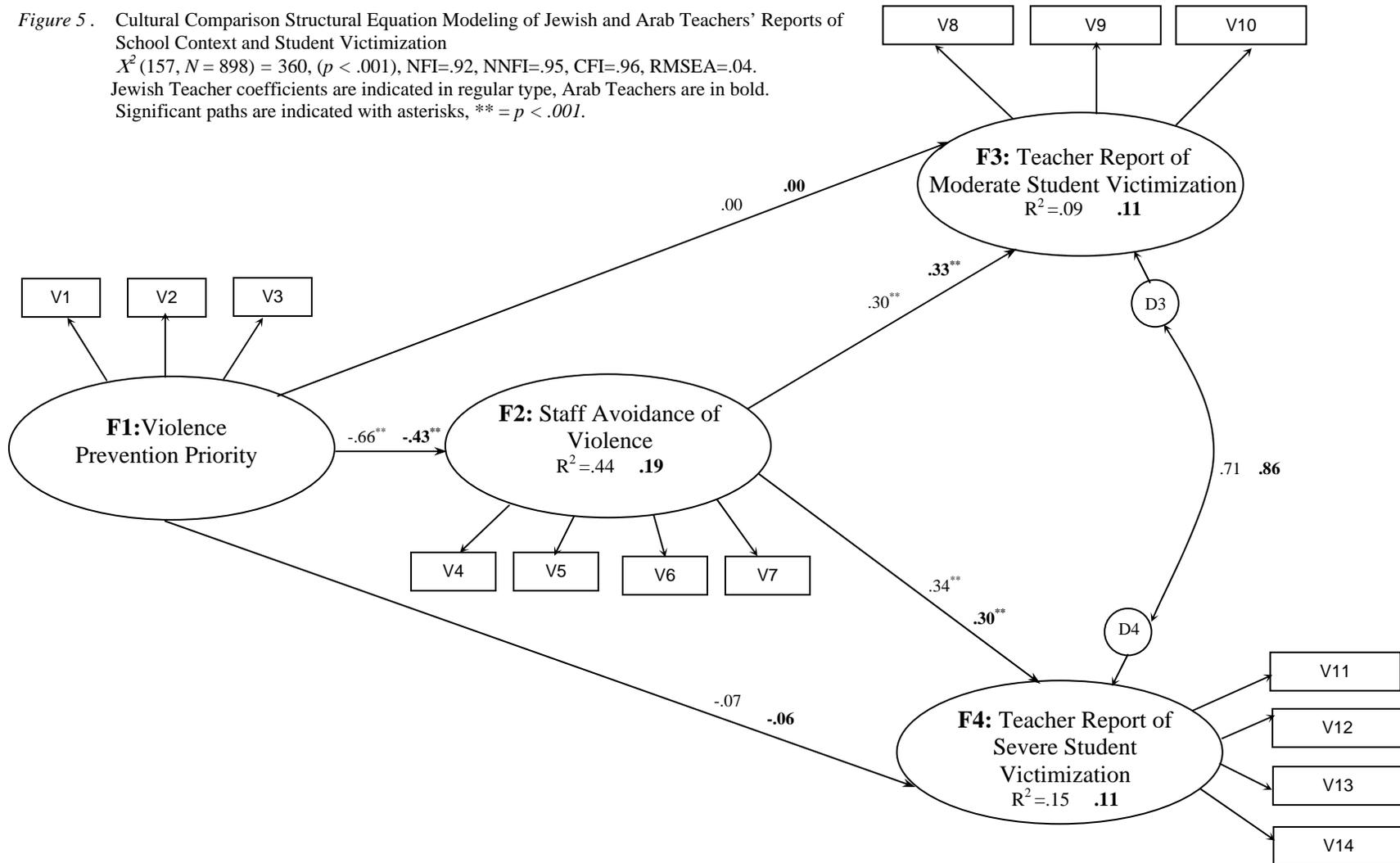


Figure 5. Cultural Comparison Structural Equation Modeling of Jewish and Arab Teachers' Reports of School Context and Student Victimization
 $\chi^2(157, N = 898) = 360, (p < .001), NFI=.92, NNFI=.95, CFI=.96, RMSEA=.04.$
 Jewish Teacher coefficients are indicated in regular type, Arab Teachers are in bold.
 Significant paths are indicated with asterisks, $** = p < .001.$



Discussion

This research study examined the relations between teachers' perceptions of a school-wide emphasis on violence prevention, staff/teacher action (or rather, inaction) in prevention efforts, and teachers' reports of student victimization. The structural equations models revealed similar patterns across all group comparisons, suggesting that there is a great deal of consistency among all teachers in the sample with respect to how they view these dynamics. For every analysis conducted, there was a strong negative association between the perceived Violence Prevention as a School Priority with Staff Avoidance of Violence. As well, there was no *direct* association of the Prevention Priority Variable with Student Victimization, however, there was a strong positive association between Staff Avoidance of Violence and Teacher's reports of Student Victimization.

From an intuitive standpoint, these findings are logical and make sense. When teachers report a strong emphasis towards violence prevention in the school, they are more likely to follow through in attending to violent events and attempting to minimize harm to students. However, it is important to note the critical role of *action or inaction* in this process. Violence Prevention on its own as a school emphasis or policy does *not* necessarily translate to less student victimization. It is through the indirect lowering of Staff Avoidance of Violence that student victimization would be less likely.

These findings have important implications for school policy. While many schools might proclaim the strong emphasis on violence prevention as a key mission and goal, without plans to enact staff-action on these goals, they would likely not result in lower levels of student victimization. The patterns that have been revealed in these models highlight the potential dangers of staff avoidance of violence, "sweeping it under the rug" and not dealing with it, as

these inactions are related to increased levels of student victimization. This research supports work done by Astor and colleagues (1999) who find that areas where there is little supervision have the most concentrated rates of violence. If teachers or staff ignore student violence or do not demonstrate some degree of disapproval or intention to change the situation when violence occurs, it is understandable why it would continue.

The ethnic and gender differences that did emerge were subtle and not pronounced to the degree that would warrant explanations for differential models. The most striking difference, however, was perhaps in the variance explained in Staff Avoidance of Violence by the Prevention as Priority variable. For Jewish teachers, the Prevention policy explained twice as much of the variance in Staff Avoidance than for Arab teachers (44% vs. 19%, respectively). There may be important cultural aspects of the school environments that might contribute to the greater explained variance in this Staff Avoidance measure. Current trends in national educational policies in Israel may be focusing more on Jewish issues and schools and there may be resulting variability in the degree to which teachers *believe in* and implement policies. Additionally, cultural differences surrounding norms of violence may also account for some of the variability in these different patterns.

Limitations

There are several noteworthy limitations of this study. While the response rate of 61% is comparable to other studies examining views of professionals in schools, it still leaves a large number of teachers' views untapped. Future research should make attempts to garner stronger response rates to gain a more accurate picture of the setting as well as greater generalizability for the findings. Also, the model did not control for some very important demographic variables such as SES that would likely also relate to climate and victimization. The present study was

intended as a first step to examine a simple model of relations between context variables and student victimization. While the nature of the structural equations model allows us to determine the relation of the latent variables with one another, it does not allow for simultaneous examination of base rates of differences between groups. It is also important to mention that the cross-sectional nature of the data do not allow true ‘prediction’ assumptions to prevail in conducting these models. Future work that examines climate/culture and violence at several time points may be able to map important trends that can more accurately determined causality in a similar model.

The avoidance variable might be expanded or supplemented by another measure indicating specific ways in which teachers actively work to prevent violence. This may reveal to a greater extent ways that the violence prevention policies would impact teachers’ decisions about violence prevention. In the broader research study, such measures were collected and should be examined in future analyses with more comprehensive models.

Areas for Future Research

An important aspect of this study is its attention to the victimization of students by staff. Elbedour and colleagues (1997) examined teachers’ violent behavior towards students as influenced by school climate and by the ideology of student control. They suggest that staff violence towards students is multi-faceted and interrelated with family, school, community, and cultural factors. Teachers’ attitudes concerning the legitimacy of use of verbal and physical violence as educational tools were particularly important links in their model. This relates again to issues of control and autonomy, with respect to teachers’ control over students. One might also consider these issues to relate to administrators’ control over teachers (by way of school policies). In what ways do teachers conceptualize school policies regarding violence prevention?

Future research may also consider effects of school organizational factors on school climate and violence. Research by Clark and Clark (1982) suggests that middle schools containing only 2 grade levels may have difficulty in providing a good learning climate for early adolescents due to the lack of program continuity and time to adjust to the new school. Their study examined not only learning and achievement, but also students' levels of self-esteem, preferred teacher characteristics, and perceived victimization. Their work suggests that temporal factors may also be important to consider in the creation and maintenance of supportive school climates.

In line with the examination of teacher practices that relate to student violence, there is perhaps a parallel need to examine principal's practices that would inspire school goals and culture. Schein (1997) argues that leaders shape the culture of the school by focusing their attention on key aspects of the organizational vision that promote core values. Recent research suggests the importance of leadership characteristics of principals in cultivating effective school climates (White, Martin, & Johnson, 2003). In their study, White and colleagues examined how gender and professional orientation of principals in schools influenced school cultures. They found important links between the principals' effectiveness in problem-solving and the creation of collaborative relationships with teachers and staff. These collaborative relationships in turn, had a positive impact on the culture of the school. The authors made recommendations for training programs to sustain or increase the principal's capacity to solve problems and enhance the professional development of his/her staff. Future work in research related to school violence may consider multiple layered models that examine relations between principals' beliefs and characteristics, school culture, and school violence.

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Appendix

Survey items, factor loadings, reliability coefficients, and fit indices for latent factors in teacher model.

Factor Loadings	Latent Factor Name and Relevant Indicators	
	Violence Prevention as School Priority	$\alpha = .82$
	<i>Please indicate, for each of the following claims, how well it describes your school. Use the following scale. (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree)</i>	
.72	There is a strong awareness towards violence prevention in school.	
.73	Treating violence is an important part of the school's mission.	
.68	Dealing with violence is one of the principal's priorities.	
.62	The principal supports teachers who deal with violence.	
.60	The school makes a real effort to involve students in efforts of preventing and dealing with violence.	
.58	There are clear and known rules of behavior and discipline, to students as well as teachers.	
	<i>Fit indices: NFI = .93, NNFI = .89, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .12</i>	

Teacher/Staff Avoidance of Dealing with Violence ($\alpha = .75$)

Please indicate, for each of the following claims, how well it describes your school. Use the following scale.

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree)

- .60 The teachers tend to ignore “low levels” of violence (e.g. shoves, threats, & verbal abuse).
- .68 Most of the teachers are afraid to break up fights among students.
- .60 The school management prefers not to reveal and seriously discuss school violence (“sweeps under the carpet”).
- .70 Most of the teachers choose to ignore violent acts that are not under their immediate responsibility.

Fit indices: NFI = .98, NNFI = .95, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .08

Moderate Student Victimization (Teacher-reported) ($\alpha = .90$)

We want to know about violent behaviors among students in your class in the last month. Please consider events that happened in school, or on the way to school, during recess, or classes. For each of the following, please estimate the # of times one of your students was involved in such an event during the last month.

(0 = Not at all, 1 = Less than once a week, 2 = Once or twice a week, 3 = More than twice a week)

- .77 A student seized and shoved another student.
- .58 A student used a rock or another object in order to hurt another student.
- .67 A student forcefully took things away from another student.
- .79 A student cursed another student.
- .82 A student insulted or humiliated another student (verbally).
- .83 A student threatened to hurt or hit another student.
- .69 A student destroyed/broke personal belongings of another student.
- .75 A student kicked or punched another student in order to hurt him.

Fit indices: NFI = .92, NNFI = .90, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .10

Severe Student Victimization (Teacher-Reported)

($\alpha = .71$)

(Same intro heading as above)

.64

A student blackmailed another student.

.51

A student came to school with a knife.

.74

Gang members threatened and pressured a student.

.62

A group of students jumped on a student and hurt him.

Fit indices: NFI = .99, NNFI = .98, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03
