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| Author(s): | Byongook Moon, Ph.D., Roger Enriquez, J.D., Antonio John McCluskey, Ph.D. |
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# Teacher Victimization:
## Understanding Prevalence, Causation, and Negative Consequences

## Final Report

Report submitted to the National Institute of Justice

Byongook Moon, Ph.D., University of Texas San Antonio

Roger Enriquez, J.D., University of Texas San Antonio

John McCluskey, Ph.D., Rochester Institute of Technology

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## Overview

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the research project *Teacher Victimization: Understanding Prevalence, Causation, and Negative Consequences*, funded under Award No. 2015-CK-BX-0019.  Below we introduce the initial rationale for the project, namely the extent and knowledge gaps regarding teacher victimization in the U.S. and the goals and objectives of the research.  Next we discuss the data collection as proposed and executed across two waves of data collection.

Multivariate results presented in the report body primarily focus on predictors of physical assault and sexual harassment across the first two waves of data collection.  Next we explore teachers' reports regarding negative impacts from various types of victimizations on job performance, student distrust, overall concerns with school safety, and thoughts about exiting the teaching career.  Conclusions and policy implications from the research are then briefly explored.

Finally, results from four peer-reviewed articles that are accepted or under review at journals are summarized and the complete manuscripts are included as appendices.  These four manuscripts represent much more in-depth exploration of the key questions addressed under this award.

## Primary goals and objectives of the project

A limited but growing number of empirical studies have investigated student violence within school systems that is directed against teachers (Huang, Eddy, & Camp, forthcoming; Martinez, McMahon, Espelage, & Anderman, 2016; Moon & McCluskey, 2018). Preliminary findings indicate that violence against teachers is ubiquitous in schools and has detrimental negative consequences to those who are victimized (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Moon, Morash, Jang, & Jeong, 2015; Wilson, Douglas, & Lyon, 2011). Considering the seriousness and importance of the issue in the context of developing and maintaining a safer school environment for students as well as teachers, we argue that further research is necessary to better understand the scope and predictors of teacher victimization and negative consequences in the United States. The proposed research, using a two-year longitudinal sample of approximately 1,600 teachers in a large metropolitan area in Texas aimed to address three gaps in the current knowledge on teacher victimization. First, we explored a broad variety of teacher victimization including theft, physical assault, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, non-physical contact aggressive behaviors, online and conventional bullying. Second, the study examined predictors of teacher victimization by focusing on 1) teachers' socio-demographic factors (e.g., gender, race, age, years of teaching experience), 2) teachers' classroom behaviors (e.g., student oriented approach), and 3) school climate and environmental factors (e.g., grade level and disadvantaged student population). Third, we investigated the negative consequences of teachers' victimization by examining whether victimization is significantly related to victimized teachers' job performance, teachers' trust of students, concern with school safety, and thoughts about turnover.

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## Research Design and Methods

**Data collection and sample**

To investigate the prevalence of teacher victimization and negative consequences, a large

metropolitan area in Texas was selected as a research site.  We employed a stratified multistage

cluster sampling design to select a representative sample of middle and high school teachers in

the region.  The sampling frame was derived and collected from a list provided by school

districts or from teacher websites in schools.  Approximately 10 to 30 teachers in each school

were randomly selected from the sampling frame, depending on the number of teachers in the

school.  In spring 2016, an electronic invitation letter with a description of the research, study

subjects, voluntary participation/confidentiality, and an individualized link to a secure web-based

survey (Qualtrics), which took approximately 30 minutes to complete, was emailed to randomly

sampled teachers.  Reminder emails were sent to sampled teachers at least three times to

encourage their voluntary participation and then replaced with another randomly selected

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the sample (N = 1,628)

| Gender | Percentage | Number |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 30 % | 481 |
| Female | 71 % | 1,147 |
| **Race** | | |
| White | 50 % | 811 |
| Hispanic | 42 % | 679 |
| Black | 5 % | 81 |
| Other | 4 % | 57 |
| **Duration of Career** | | |
| 0 – 5 years | 27 % | 437 |
| 5.5 – 10 years | 26 % | 423 |
| 10.5 – 45 years | 47 % | 768 |
| **School Level** | | |
| Middle School | 52 % | 842 |
| High School | 48 % | 786 |

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teacher from the school until at least 7 to 10 teachers per school completed the survey. For each wave, an e-gift card ($30) was given to participants who completed the survey to compensate their participation in the research outside of work hours.

Overall, invitation letters were emailed to 7,083 middle and high school teachers in 14 school districts and the tracking record of Qualtrics showed that 3,102 teachers actually opened the invitation emails. Of the 3,102 confirmed recipients, 1,628 teachers from 130 middle and high schools in 14 school districts completed the wave 1 web-based survey, yielding a response rate of 52% (see Table 1 for socio-demographic characteristics of participants at wave I).

In spring 2017, wave II data collection was implemented with follow-up of the 1,628 wave I respondents. Of those wave I participants, 1,317 continued to complete the wave II web-based survey, yielding a retention rate of 81%. Regarding the mobility of the wave II participants (See Figure 1), 1,126 teachers (stayers) stayed at the same school and 113 teachers (movers) moved to another school from wave I to wave II. Seventy-eight participants (leavers) left the teaching profession after the wave I survey in 2016.

Figure 1: Wave 2 Participants by mobility (N=1,317)
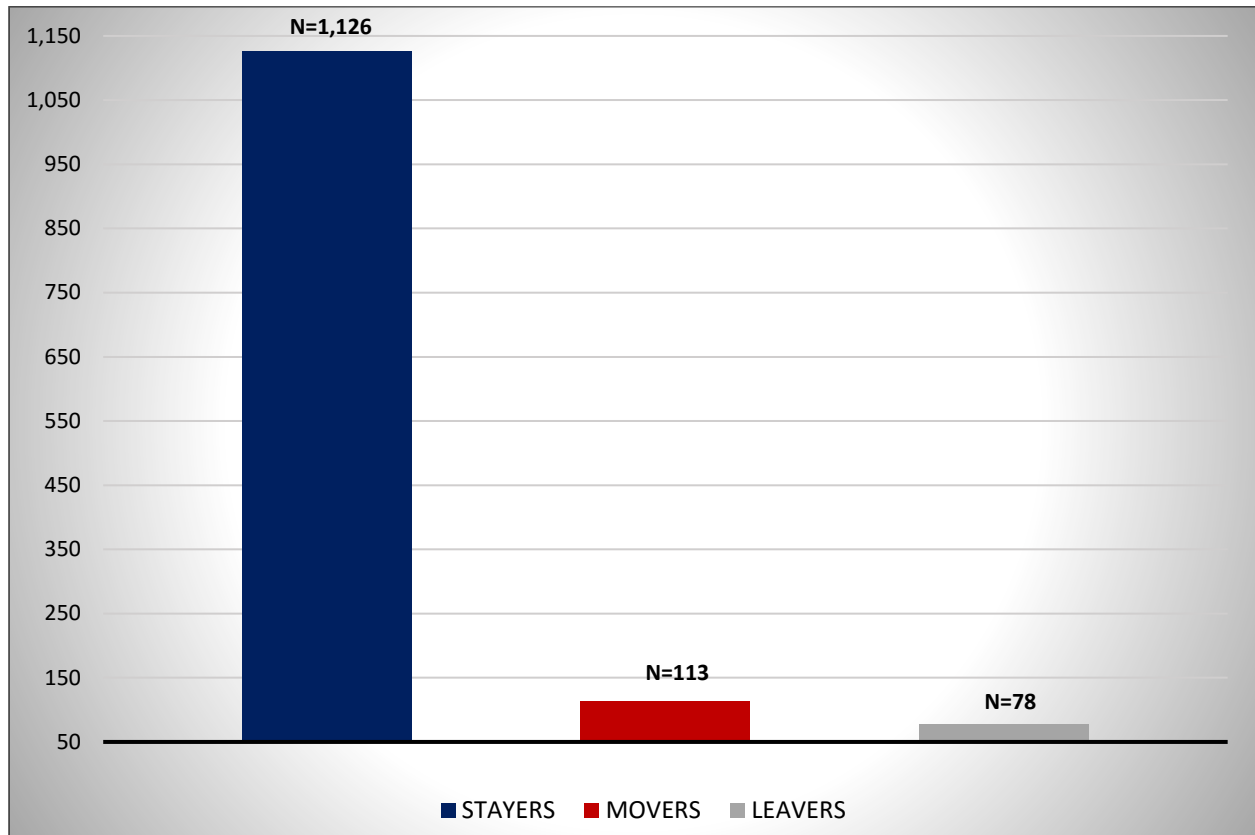


**Key Results**

**Prevalence of teacher victimization**

Figure 2 shows the prevalence of each of seven types of teacher victimization at both waves. The findings indicate that relatively less intrusive and serious victimization such as verbal abuse (44% at both waves) and non-physical contact aggression (34% at wave I and 35% at wave II) (e.g., throwing, kicking, and/or destroying items in front of teacher) were most common, while relatively more serious victimization such as physical assault (8% at wave I and 5% at wave II) and sexual harassment (11% at wave I and 8% at wave II) were less prevalent. The findings also show that 6% and 14% of wave II participants reported victimization by cyber-bullying and in-person bullying during the last 12 months respectively.

Figure 2: Prevalence of victimization at waves I and II
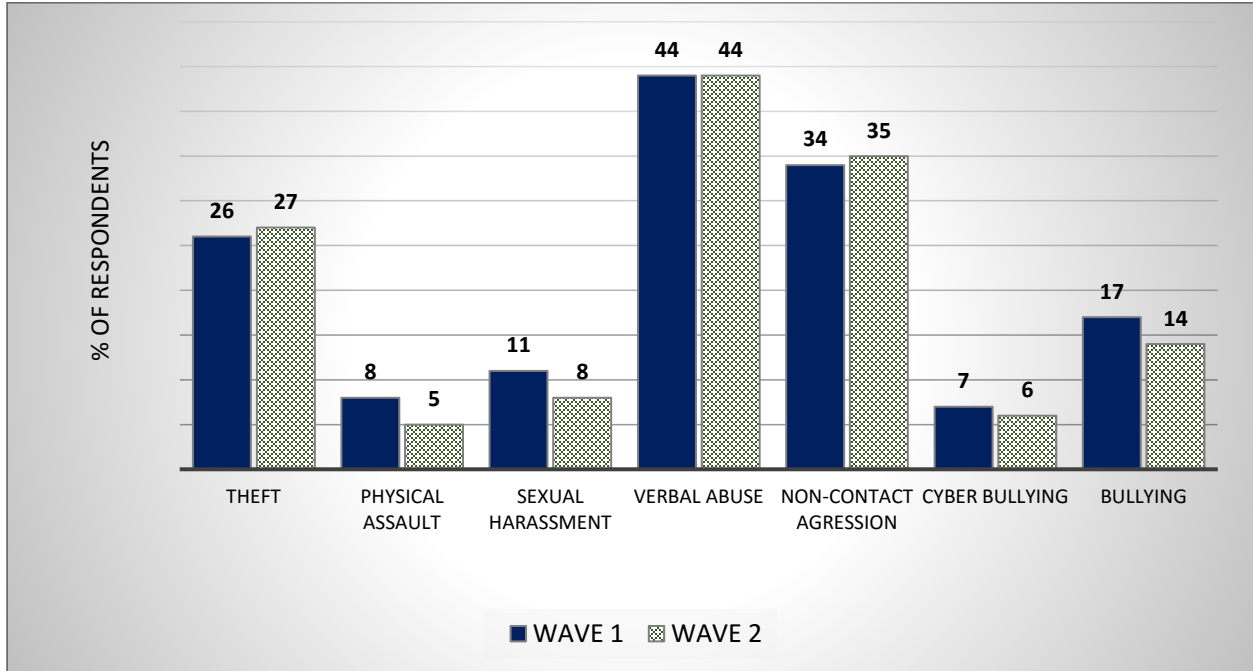


## Predictors of teacher victimization

To investigate predictors of teacher victimization, we measured and included four categories of variables, which have been found to be significantly related to victimization in prior research. These are teachers' socio-demographic factors (gender, race/ethnicity, level of education, years of teaching experience, and teaching subject), teacher interaction with students in class (teacher's uncertain and helping behavior toward students), teacher perceptions toward school (administrative support, student disengagement, school discipline, and student weapon-carrying at school), and school-level characteristics (middle/high school and disadvantaged student population constructed by combining economic disadvantage, proportion of minority, and academic performance at school level).

For the present report, we specifically focused on victimization through physical assault and sexual harassment as they are relatively more intrusive and severe forms of victimization.

We also analyzed data from teachers who stayed in the same school at both waves (N=1,126) to better understand the impacts of teacher perception towards the school and school characteristics measured at wave I on the wave II victimization outcomes.

Given that multi-level variables were measured and included, the preferred method of analysis for dependent measures involves hierarchical linear modeling. However, the examination of intraclass correlation coefficients indicated very little school-level variability for victimization through physical assault and sexual harassment. Furthermore, a substantial number of cases were dropped from analyses when school fixed effects were used to account for unobserved teacher and school characteristics. Therefore, a series of logistic regression analyses were performed to examine predictors of teacher victimization through physical assault and sexual harassment, both measured as binary outcomes (1=experienced victimization; 0=did not).

Given strong correlations between waves I and II victimization, paired analyses with and without a lagged wave I dependent variable as a control are presented for each victimization (see Table 2) and compared and contrasted. For example, findings in both Models 1 and 2 show that none of teachers' socio-demographic factors are significantly related to physical assault victimization, except that special education teachers are more likely to report victimization through physical assault, compared to general subject area teachers (e.g., English and science), even after controlling for the effects of teacher perceptions toward school, and school characteristics in the model. Teachers' uncertain behavior toward students is positively related to physical assault victimization (see Model 2), while teacher perception toward student disengagement is a marginally significant predictor of physical assault victimization in Model 1. The results in Model 1 indicate there is a marginally significant relationship between school level and physical assault victimization in that teachers at middle school are more likely to report

experiencing physical assault, compared to their counterparts at high schools. Disadvantaged student population is significantly related to teacher's physical assault victimization. The effect of those variables are no longer statistically significant with the introduction of the lagged dependent measure in Model 2.

Consistent with prior research (see Huang et al., forthcoming), special education teachers reported substantially higher likelihood of physical assault victimization than general education teachers, primarily because they educate and interact with students with special needs, some of whom may engage in disruptive behaviors at school. Since teachers' victimization through physical assault by students with special needs might be significantly different from physical assault by students with no special needs, we further analyzed the data after excluding special education teachers. The results in Model 4 show that none of teachers' socio-demographic factors (except years of teaching experience) are significantly related to physical assault victimization. Interestingly, teachers' uncertain behavior which was found to be a significant predictor of physical assault victimization in Model 2 is not significantly related to victimization, while student weapon-carrying at school is marginally significantly related to physical assault victimization (see Model 3). Consistent with the findings in Model 1, student disengagement and disadvantaged student population are significant predictors of physical assault victimization in the expected direction.

Models 5 and 6 show the results of multivariate models of victimization through sexual harassment and the results indicate that gender, ethnicity, and level of education are significantly related to sexual harassment victimization. Female teachers are more likely to report

Table 2. Multivariate models of victimization regressed on socio-demographic characteristics, teacher interaction with students, teacher perception toward school, and school characteristics

| | Victimization by Physical Assault | | Victimization by Physical Assault (Exclusion of Special Ed. Teachers) | | Victimization by Sexual Harassment | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 |
| | OR (SE) | OR (SE) | OR (SE) | OR (SE) | OR (SE) | OR (SE) |
| **Individual Level** | | | | | | |
| *Socio-demographic Characteristics* | | | | | | |
| Female | 1.04(.35) | 1.15(.40) | 1.40(.53) | 1.41(.54) | 1.77(.54)[+] | 1.62(.50) |
| Hispanic | .66(.19) | .69(.21) | .75(.27) | .71(.26) | .67(.18) | .56(.15)* |
| Black | .16(.18) | .20(.23) | .37(.40) | .38(.41) | .50(.28) | .57(.35) |
| Other | 1.10(.84) | 1.22(.87) | 1.33(1.01) | 1.34(.99) | .73(.45) | .54(.39) |
| Level of Education | 1.11(.36) | 1.08(.37) | .97(.36) | .91(.36) | 1.64(.38)* | 1.89(.44)* |
| Years of Teaching Experience | 1.01(.02) | 1.02(.02) | 1.03(.02) | 1.04(.02)[+] | .98(.02) | .98(.02) |
| Special Education | 5.31(1.58)* | 3.85(1.18)* | - | - | .80(.30) | .79(.30) |
| Sports Education | 1.70(.87) | 1.57(.81) | 2.09(1.18) | 1.98(1.12) | 1.54(.74) | 1.92(1.03) |
| *Teacher interaction with students* | | | | | | |
| Helping/Friendly | 1.04(.06) | 1.05(.07) | 1.07(.07) | 1.08(.08) | .97(.05) | .98(.05) |
| Uncertain Behavior | 1.09(.07) | 1.12(.07)[+] | 1.05(.08) | 1.08(.09) | 1.09(.06)[+] | 1.06(.06) |
| *Teacher perception toward school* | | | | | | |
| Administrative Support | .99(.03) | 1.01(.04) | 1.02(.05) | 1.04(.05) | .97(.03) | .97(.03) |
| Student Disengagement | 1.09(.05)[+] | 1.07(.05) | 1.15(.07)* | 1.14(.07)* | 1.10(.04)* | 1.09(.04)* |
| Rule Enforcement | .95(.08) | .97(.08) | .98(.09) | .97(.10) | .99(.06) | .99(.06) |
| Student Weapon Carry | 1.27(.19) | 1.23(.19) | 1.40(.24)[+] | 1.31(.24) | 1.34(.13)* | 1.17(.12) |
| **School level** | | | | | | |
| Middle school | 2.07(.67)[+] | 1.65(.55) | 1.63(.53) | 1.45(.48) | 1.13(.31) | 1.04(.29) |
| Disadvantaged Student Population | 1.01(.00)* | 1.01(.00) | 1.01(.00)[+] | 1.01(.01)[+] | 1.01(.00)* | 1.01(.00)* |
| | | | | | | |
| Wave 1 Victimization | | 6.77(2.25)* | | 4.34(2.14)* | | 5.48(1.38)* |
| | | | | | | |
| *Pseudo R²* | .14 | .20 | .11 | .14 | .13 | .19 |

Note 1: + < .10, * < .05
Note 2: Wave 1 Victimization indicates a lagged effect of each dependent variable

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victimization through sexual harassment, and teachers with a graduate degree or higher is more likely than his/her counterpart with a bachelor degree to report higher levels of sexual harassment victimization.  Hispanic teachers and those with more years of teaching experience are less likely to report victimization through sexual harassment. Consistent with the findings with physical assault victimization, the findings show that uncertain teachers and those who perceive higher levels of student disengagement and student weapon-carrying at school are more likely to report sexual harassment victimization.  Similar to physical assault, teachers at schools with more highly disadvantaged student populations report more sexual harassment victimization.

**Negative consequences of teacher victimization**

At wave I, victimized teachers of each of seven types of victimization were asked whether they experienced negative consequences from that event, especially focusing on the impact on job performance, student distrust, feeling unsafe at school, and thoughts of quitting the teaching career.  Regarding the impact of the victimization experience on job performance at wave I, 44% of physical assault victims reported that their most recent victimization through physical assault had a negative impact on job performance, while 18% of theft victims reported a negative impact (See Figure 3).   The findings show strong negative impacts of both cyberbullying and in-person bullying victimization on job performance; 38% and 50% of victims of cyberbullying and in-person bullying, respectively, reported such negative impacts.

Victims reported experiencing distrust of students (See Figure 4) as a result of the victimization including 46% victims through theft and 31% victims through physical assault.

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Figure 3: Negative impact of the most recent victimization on job performance, Wave I only
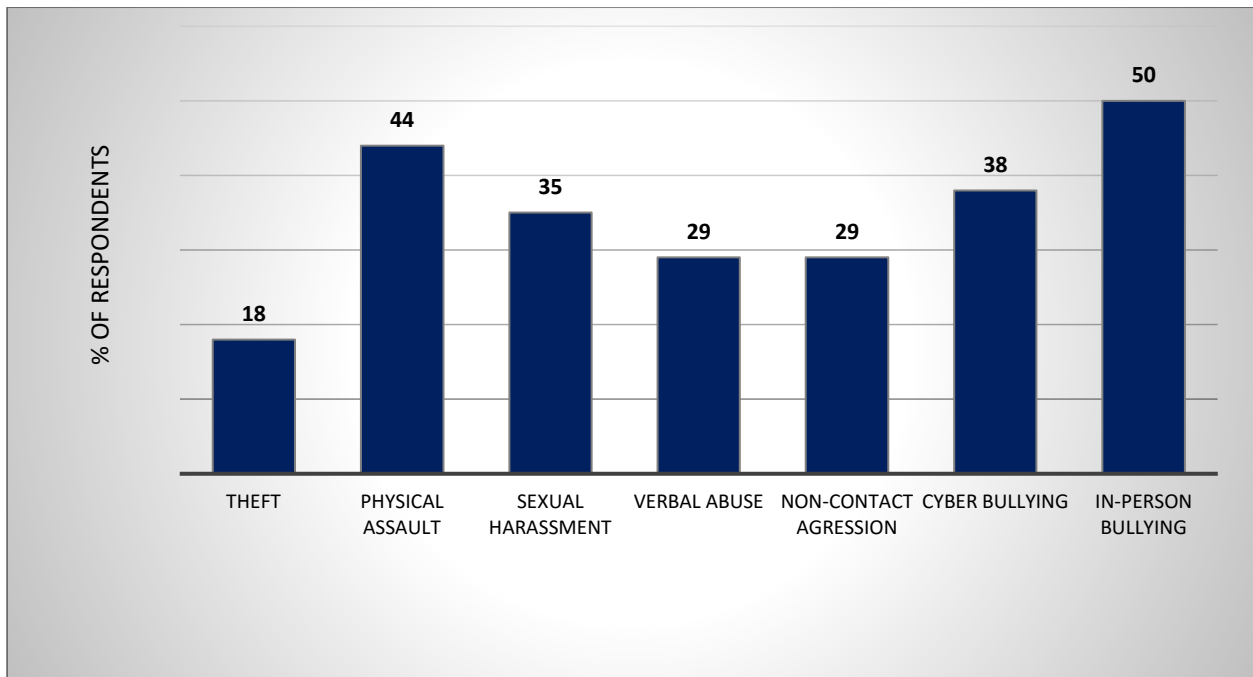


Also, 33% of victims through cyberbullying reported its negative impact on student trust.  A relatively lower percentage of victims of non-contact aggression (11%) and in-person bullying (13%) reported that their victimization experience resulted in student distrust.

Figure 5 shows the results of negative impact of type of most recent victimization at wave I on victimized teachers' concerns about overall school safety.  The results show that 37% of victims through physical assault reported school safety concerns, followed by 15% of victims through verbal abuse, and 13% of victims through sexual harassment.  Approximately 10% of victims through theft, non-contact aggression, and bullying indicate that they had concerns about school safety as a result of their most recent victimization of those types.

Figure 4: Negative impact of the most recent victimization on student distrust, Wave I only
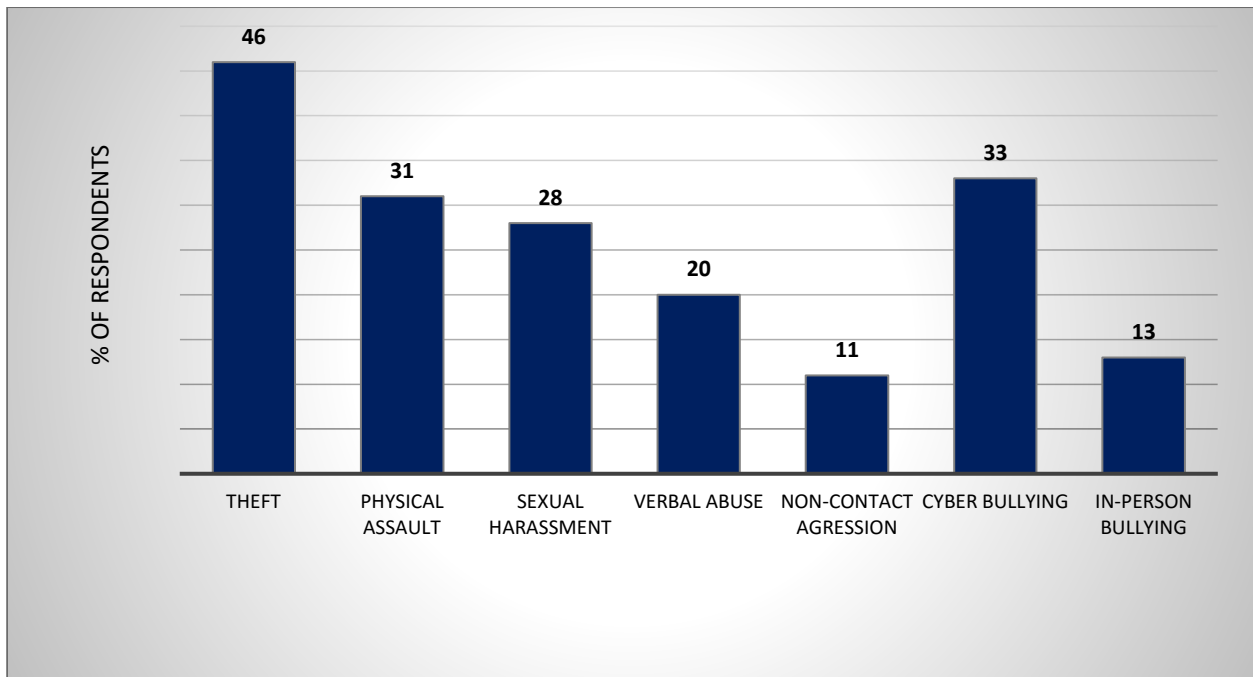


Figure 5: Negative impact of the most recent victimization on school safety concern, Wave I only
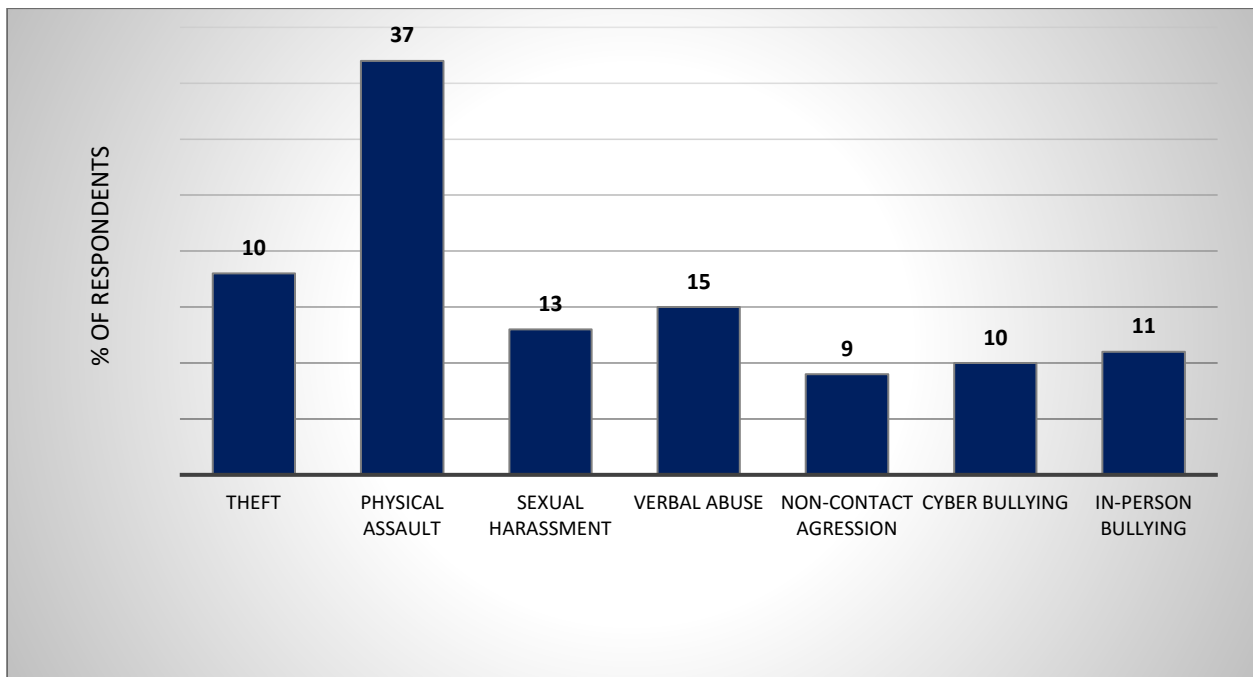
Figure 6 shows the impact of victimization on thoughts about exiting the teaching career among victimized teachers at wave I. The results show that 27% of victims through physical assault reported thinking about quitting teaching, while 21% of cyberbullying victims reported thoughts about quitting. Approximately 15% of victims through sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and in-person bullying reported the event impacting thoughts of quitting the teaching profession.

Figure 6: Negative impact of the most recent victimization on thought about quitting, Wave I only
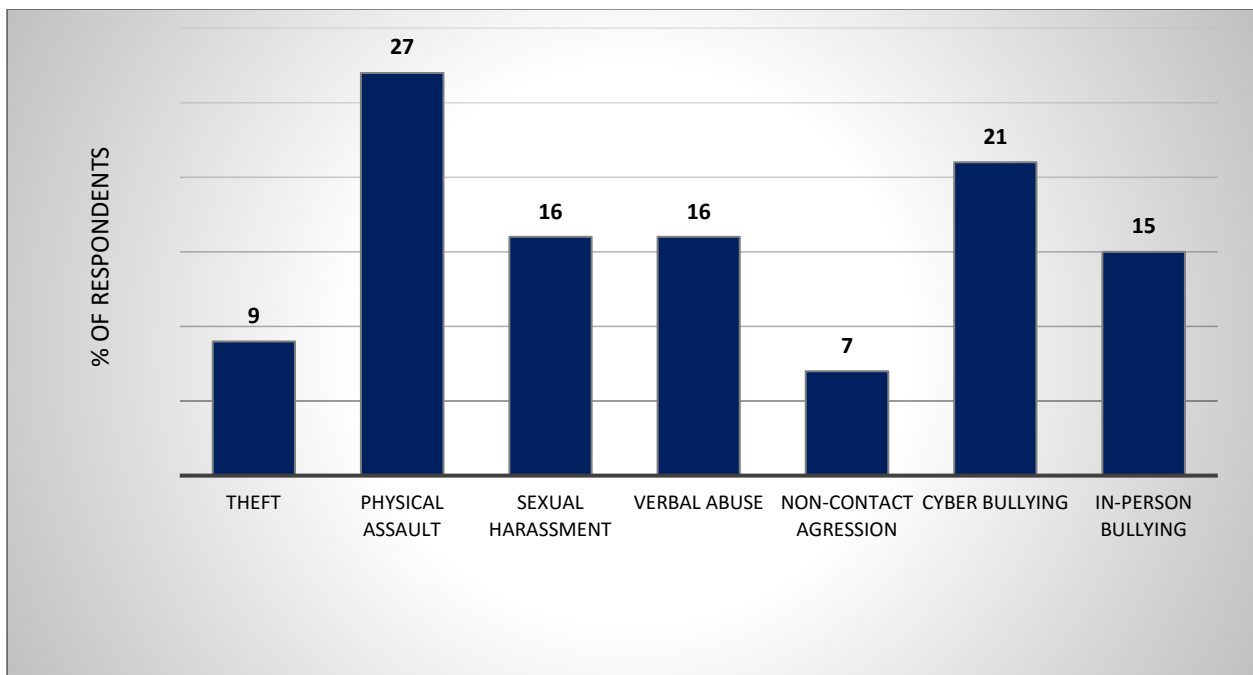


## Conclusion and Policy Implications

Research findings indicate that teacher victimization at middle and high schools is widespread with negative consequences. Several important findings and policy implications emerged and are suggested from the research. First, special education teachers are at highly elevated risk to experience physical assault victimization as they mainly interact with students who need special

care (Huang et al., forthcoming). Schools need to implement measures and secure supportive resources aimed to reduce aversive interactions between teachers and students with special needs. Second, teachers who are uncertain or tentative in dealing with students in the classroom are more likely to report victimization through both physical assault and sexual harassment. This finding suggests the importance of implementing programs to improve both teacher confidence and teacher skills within classrooms for dealing with students and managing students' misbehaviors. This may also be considered as a possible response in the aforementioned special education setting. Third, teacher perceptions toward school, especially student disengagement and weapon-carrying at school, were significantly related to teacher victimization. Also, teachers teaching at schools with higher levels of disadvantaged student populations (a combination of poverty, proportion of minority students, and lower academic achievement at a school level) are more likely to report being victims through physical assault and sexual harassment. Though it is practically difficult to modify school composition factors (Huang et al., forthcoming), these findings indicate that schools could benefit from implementation of intervention programs specifically designed to reduce student disengagement and prevent students' weapon-carrying at school in order to prevent teacher victimization. Finally, teacher victimization has a detrimental negative impact on those who experience it, as a substantial proportion of victimized teachers reported higher levels of student distrust, school safety concerns, and thoughts about quitting the profession as consequences of victimization. The results clearly indicate that school administrators and policy makers should take teacher victimization seriously and work diligently to establish a safer school environment for students as well as teachers.

**List of Peer-Reviewed Articles in press and under review (see Appendices)**

**1. Moon, B., & McCluskey, J. (in press). An Exploratory Study of Violence and Aggression against Teachers in Middle and High Schools: Prevalence, Predictors, and Negative Consequences. Journal of School Violence.**

Summary of findings: The results indicate a high prevalence of violence and aggression directed against teachers within schools as compared, for example, with ambient risk captured in the NCVS. Verbal abuse/threat and non-contact aggression were most frequently occurring victimizations among teachers during the year prior to the wave I survey. Victimization by physical assault and sexual harassment were least common, but still approximately 1 out of 10 teachers in the sample reported a physical assault or experiencing sexual harassment in the last year. The research provides partial support of the applicability of target congruence theory in explaining the etiology of teacher victimization. First, teachers' uncertain behavior toward students was hypothesized to be positively related to teacher victimization. The findings indicate that teachers who engaged in uncertain behaviors toward students in the classroom were more likely to experience various types of victimization by students, while teachers' helping/friendly behavior toward students as a measure of target antagonism was found to be a significant predictor of victimization of sexual harassment and verbal abuse in the hypothesized direction. For target gratifiability, the findings show that there were no significant differences between male and female teachers in the prevalence of victimization, with the exception of victimization by sexual harassment. Regarding the effect of each of five victimizations on four outcomes, several interesting patterns emerged from the findings. First, the results indicate that physical assault victimization had strong negative effects on job performance, perceptions of school safety, and thoughts about quitting. Second, a high percentage of victims of theft/property damage indicated negative impacts of their victimization on student trust, as compared to other

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types of victimization. It is plausible that victims of theft/property damage could show lowered

student trust because offenders may be anonymous and victims can be suspicious of many

students around them at school. Overall, the findings clearly indicate detrimental negative

consequences of teacher victimization on teachers' job performance, the relationship between

teachers and students, safety concerns, and potential teacher turnover and suggest the importance

of preventing students' aggressive behaviors toward teachers and providing supportive services

to victimized teachers.


**2. Moon, B., Morash, M., & McCluskey, J. (under review). Student Violence Directed Against Teachers: Victimized Teachers' Reports to School Officials and Satisfaction with School Responses.**

Summary: The findings indicate that teachers who have been physically assaulted are almost two

times as likely to report their victimization to school officials as teachers who experience theft or

damage of personal property. Overall, the extent of teacher reporting of victimizations to school

officials is quite high, considering that less than 50 percent of violent victimization (Truman &

Morgan, 2016) were found to be reported to police. The findings revealed that slightly more

than half of victimized teachers whose incidents were reported to school officials were either

dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with school responses. These results are consistent with prior

research (McMahon et al., 2017) that discovered that many teachers disapproved of and were

frustrated by school administrators' responses to their victimization. These findings raise serious

questions about the effectiveness of administrators' responses to teacher victimization and

administrative support of victimized teachers. Regarding the predictors of victimized teachers'

satisfaction with school responses, except for years of teaching experience, none of teachers'

socio-demographic factors were significantly related to satisfaction with school responses.

Teachers with longer teaching experience are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with school response to their victimization. Possibly more experienced teachers are familiar with school administrative processes and are therefore better able to obtain needed assistance.

Findings also show that victimized teachers were less likely to be satisfied with school handling of the incidents when victimization is more serious, multiple students are involved as perpetrators, and/or victimization is perpetrated by student(s) well known to victimized teachers. Regarding the school response, the study supported the hypotheses that victimized teachers are more likely to report satisfaction with school responses to incidents if offending students were questioned or disciplined, and/or apologized to them.

**3. Moon, B., McCluskey, J., & Morash, M. (under review). Violence against Middle and High School Teachers: Duration of Victimization and Its Negative Impacts**

The findings indicate that much of the victimization of theft and sexual harassment is transitory; however, a sizeable group of teachers experienced victimization through verbal abuse and non-physical contact aggression over at least two years. A small group of teachers (3%) reported multi-year sexual harassment. In contrast, higher proportions of teachers (20% and 31%) indicated their repeated experience of non-physical contact aggression and of verbal abuse over two years. The results from multivariate analyses revealed significant relationships between the timing/duration of victimization and teachers' well-being and job satisfaction. Consistent with prior findings in the victimization literature, compared to non-victims, multi-year victims of three different types of victimization (theft/vandalism, verbal abuse, and non-physical contact aggression) reported significantly reduced levels of connectedness to school/students, job satisfaction, or intentions to continue one's teaching career. Interestingly, victimization only at

wave II (except theft/vandalism) was significantly related to negative consequences, whereas teachers whose victimization was limited to wave I did not significantly differ from non-victims on these dimensions. These results may indicate that negative effects of victimization are contemporaneous and are less likely to persist after the occurrence of victimization, unless victimization recurs (Bowes et al., 2013). The findings also suggest that interventions to stop teacher victimization may mitigate negative effects that are found when victimization is repeated over more than a year.

With the exception of the relationship between gender and job dissatisfaction, gender and length of teaching career had significant effects on all dependent variables, even after controlling for the experience of each type of victimization and the wave I lagged dependent variable. Female teachers were more likely than their male counterparts to report lower levels of intentions to continue in the career. Though more research is required on the relationship between gender and thoughts about quitting the teaching profession, it is possible that female teachers are more likely than male teachers to experience higher levels of stress (e.g., having more negative reaction to students' behavior problems, workload stress) (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), which might in turn lead an increased consideration of quitting. Consistent with previous findings, teachers with more years of experience are less likely to report job dissatisfaction and thoughts about quitting, in part because experienced teachers are more likely to develop better classroom management and interpersonal skills and use effective instructional techniques (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

**4. Moon, B., Saw, G., & McCluskey, J. (under review). Teacher Victimization and Turnover: Impact of Different Types and Multiple Victimization**

The results indicate that almost all types of victimization measured in the present research, except sexual harassment and cyber-bullying, were significant predictors of teachers' transfer and exit attrition. Extending the study by Curran et al. (2019), our data documents that not only serious victimization such as physical assault, but also relatively less intensive student aggression toward teachers such as verbal abuse and non-physical contact aggression (the two most prevalent forms of teacher victimization) were significantly related to teacher turnover. Second, the results reveal that teachers' reported experience of multiple victimization measured by either prevalence or frequency counts was significantly and positively related to teacher turnover. The results show that teacher victimization has a stronger effect on teacher turnover for male teachers (as opposed to female teachers) and those who hold a graduate degree (as opposed to those who hold a Bachelor's degree). Victimized male teachers, especially in response to students' aggression toward them including physical assault, verbal abuse, and in-person bullying, were more likely than their female counterparts to leave the teaching career. Overall results indicate that teacher victimization is a significant contributor of teacher turnover, including both teachers' migration to other schools and exit from the career.

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**Appendices**

**Appendices**

The original report, as submitted by the grantee, included the draft text of the following four articles, which have now been published in journals. The citations for the published works appear below.

1.  Moon, B., & McCluskey, J. (2020). An exploratory study of violence and aggression against teachers in middle and high schools: Prevalence, predictors, and negative consequences. Journal of school violence, 19(2), 122-137. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2018.1540010

2.  Moon, B., Morash, M., & McCluskey, J. (2021). Student violence directed against teachers: Victimized teachers' reports to school officials and satisfaction with school responses. Journal of interpersonal violence, 36(13-14), NP7264-NP7283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519825883

3.  Moon, B., McCluskey, J., & Morash, M. (2019). Aggression against middle and high school teachers: Duration of victimization and its negative impacts. Aggressive behavior, 45(5), 517-526. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21840

4.  Moon, B., Saw, G., & McCluskey, J. (2020). Teacher victimization and turnover: Focusing on different types and multiple victimization. Journal of school violence, 19(3), 406-420. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2020.1725529