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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it investigated preservice and inservice teachers' observed and experienced violence at various educational levels. Second, the study determined by gender, these individuals' knowledge and awareness of violence factors. The subjects consisted of 26 university preservice and four inservice teachers in two sections of an introductory special education class at a small southeastern university. The preservice teachers consisted of elementary, secondary, and K-12 special education majors. The inservice teachers consisted of 2 males and 2 females. A survey questionnaire was developed, validated, and administered. Participants indicated their school safety-violence observations and experiences from grade school through college, and their agreement or disagreement to a minimum of 10 statements listed under five safety-violence factors. The results indicated that subjects had differences in violence experienced in schools. The results also suggested that subjects had similar gender perceptions of school violence, but differences occurred in their perceptions of acts of school violence. Limitations and implications for future research and school safety-violence prevention programs are presented. (Contains 7 tables.) (Author/JDM)



**School Safety-
Observations and Perceptions
by Gender: A Pilot Study**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it investigated preservice and in-service teachers' observed and experienced violence at various educational levels. Second, the study determined by gender, these individuals' knowledge and awareness of violence factors (e.g., types, causes, effects, and safety programs).

The subjects in this sample consisted of 26 university preservice and four inservice teachers in two sections of an introductory special education class at a small southeastern university. The preservice teachers consisted of elementary, secondary and K-12 special education majors (8 males and 18 females, 58 % Caucasian and 42% African American). The inservice teachers, including paraprofessionals, consisted of two males and two females (50 % Caucasian and 50 % African American). Subjects' ages ranged from less than 25 years to over 55 years.

A survey questionnaire was developed, validated, and administered. Participants indicated their school safety-violence observations and experiences from grade school through college/university and their agreement or disagreement to a minimum of 10 statements listed under five safety-violence factors.

The data were analyzed using SPSS/PC+ 7.5 descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. The independent variable was gender. The dependent variables included violence observed and experienced and perceptions about school safety-violence factors (e.g., awareness).

The results indicated that subjects had differences in violence experienced in schools. The results also suggested that subjects had similar gender perceptions of school violence, but differences occurred in their perceptions of acts of school violence. Limitations and Implications for future research and school safety-violence prevention programs will be presented at the session.

Research Questions

Five research questions were investigated in this pilot study. These questions were as follows:

1. Have male and female preservice and professional teachers observed or experienced acts of violence at their various levels of schooling?
2. Do male and female preservice and professional teachers perceive types of violence differently?
3. Do male and female preservice and professional teachers perceive causes of violence differently?
4. Do male and female preservice and professional teachers perceive the effects of violence differently?
5. Do male and female preservice and professional teachers perceive the effectiveness of different types of school safety programs differently?

Method

Subjects:

The subjects in this sample consisted of 26 university preservice and four inservice teachers in two evening sections of a Survey of Special Education class at a small university in southeastern U.S. Twenty female and 10 males agreed to participate and completed the questionnaire. Seventeen subjects were White and 12 subjects were Black. The majority of the subjects (n = 22) were less than 25 years old. The majority of the subjects were sophomores (6), juniors (9), and seniors (9). Table 1 presents the subjects' ranks and majors.

Research Design and Analyses:

A validated questionnaire was given to existing subjects in two class sections of the course. The 30 subjects' general demographic data was secured as part of the questionnaire. Since there was an insufficient number of in-service teachers to determine a valid and reliable analysis of two professional sections regarding school security climate and security concerns, these parts were not analyzed. The questionnaire was analyzed in terms of gender as the independent variable. The dependent variables related to violence: experiences, awareness levels, and perceptions of school violence- causes, effects, and safety programs. It was hypothesized that differences existed between genders on the dependent variables. Descriptive analysis was completed using SPSS PC + 7.5. descriptive and inferential modules. Percentages were manually calculated.

Instruments:

The developed and validated questionnaire consisted of seven sections. Section 1 consisted of basic demographic data (gender, ethnicity, age, rank, and major). Section 2 consisted of violence experienced at levels of schooling ranging from elementary to college/university. Section 3 consisted of 10 statements about subjects' perceived avenue of awareness to which the subjects had to respond with their level of agreement or disagreement; 16 statements in section 4 described types of violence utilizing a response mode of: not an act, minor act, or major act; Subsequent sections had the following: 24 statements re: perceived causes, 10 statements re: effects, and 10 statements re: safety program types (sections 5 through 7) utilizing a Likert-type scale of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree.

General Procedures:

Four general procedures were used in this investigation. First, the questionnaire was developed and validated. Second, permission was secured from existing class subjects at a small Alabama university. Third, the questionnaires were completed. Fourth, the data set was developed and entered into the SPSS PC+ 7.5 descriptive statistical and inferential modules with subsequent analysis including manually calculated percentages.

Results

Subjects School Violence-Safety Experiences:

The subjects' school safety experiences results are presented in Table 2. Females experienced more minor violent incidents at elementary school but both males and females felt either equally safe (males = 56%; females = 59%) or very safe (males = 44%; females = 41%). Males observed (males = 75%; females = 50%) and experienced more minor incidents (males = 75%; females = 17%) at the middle school than females. Both genders generally felt either safe or very safe at both the middle and high schools. Males and females observed a similar amount of minor violent incidents at the high school level as at the middle school level but males experienced more incidents at both the high school (males = 56%) and at the middle school level (males = 75%) than females (21% & 17%). At the college or university level, both males and females responded similarly that they had observed minor violent incidents (males = 43%; females = 44%). Most males but a higher percentage of females responded that they had experienced no violence at college or university (males = 71% and females = 94%). A small percentage of males had observed (29%) and experienced major violence (14%) at college or university vs. females (0% and 0%).

Subjects' Perceived Avenue of Awareness:

The overall results of subjects' perceptions of their avenue of awareness are presented in Table 3. Both males and females agreed that television was a factor in becoming aware of violence. (males = 80%; females = 90%) while males more strongly disagreed than females that university courses were an avenue of awareness (males = 80%; females = 60%). Although both males and females disagreed that their own acts of violence and their own experiences as victims of violence were an avenue of awareness, more males disagreed than females that their own acts of student violence (males = 100%; females = 75%) or their experiences they had as a victim of school violence (males = 100%; females = 70%) were a way of becoming aware of violence. More males agreed that newspapers, magazines, or printed materials (60%) than females (45%) were an avenue of violence awareness. A slightly higher percentage of females agreed that people in the community (females = 65%; males = 40%) and family or non-school friends told them (females = 65%; males = 50%) were avenues of awareness.

School Violence Behavior:

The overall results of the Subjects' perceptions of school violence behavior are presented in Table 4. More males agreed that neither alcohol nor substance abuse were acts of violence than females (males = 50%; females = 10%). The majority of males and females responded that rape was a major act of violence (males = 90%; females = 75%) as was gang membership (males = 70%; females = 80%). An equal and high percentage of males and females responded that carrying or use of a weapon was a major act of violence (males=80%; females =80%) while a little lower but equal percentage of males and females considered physical aggression resulting in injury constituted a major act of violence (males = 60%; females =60%). Robbery without a weapon was considered by approximately one half of both males and females a major act of violence (males =50%; females =52%). A much larger percentage of males than females responded that verbal confrontation or threatening a fellow student was a minor act of violence (males = 90%; females = 30%) while females considered these a major act of violence (males = 20%; females = 70%). Most males and females responded that homicide was a major act of violence (males = 90%; females=75%). A similar percentage of both males and females considered physical aggression not resulting in injury a minor act of violence (males = 56%; females = 60%) and an almost equivalent high number of males and females responded that sexual harassment was a major act of violence (males = 70%; females = 78%). Kidnapping was considered by more males to be a major act of violence than females (males = 80%; females = 63%) while a larger but still small percentage of females considered kidnapping not to be an act of violence in contrast to males (males = 10%; females = 32%).

Causes of School Violence:

The overall results of Subjects' perceived causes of violence are presented in Table 5. A high percentage of both males and females agreed that the breakdown of the family structure (males = 100%, females = 90%), lack of family rules and structure (males = 100%; females = 100%), parental violence acted in the home (males = 100%; females = 95%), and parental drug/substance abuse (males = 90%; females = 95%) were causes of school violence. Although males were equally divided in their agreement/disagreement in considering violence in television programs as causes of school violence (disagree = 50%, agree = 50%), females contrasted with males in that females agreed that violence in movies (males = 50%; females = 75%) and violence in television programs (males = 50%; females = 70%) were major causes of violence. A high number of both males and females responses indicated agreement that the availability of weapons (males = 80%; females = 79%), boredom (males = 80%; females = 80%), student drug abuse (males = 90%; females = 80%), and lack of trust (males = 70%; females = 80%), were causes of school violence. In contrast, a

high but near equal number of both males and females disagreed that student poor self-concept or emotional behavioral disorders were causes of school violence (males = 80%; females = 70%). About one half of the males and females agreed that gang and gang-related activities were causes of school violence (males = 40%; females = 55%).

Perceived Effects of School Violence:

The Subjects' perceived effects of school violence are presented in Table 6. More females agreed than males that lower graduation rates were an effect of school violence (males = 20%; females = 50%). A higher number of males than females agreed that a less conducive learning environment was an effect of school violence (males = 90%; females = 70%). More females than males agreed that school violence effected teachers in spending less time on instruction (males = 50%; females = 70%). A near equal percentage of males and females agreed that student disrespect for teachers (males = 80%; females = 90%), students spending less time on academic tasks (both males and females = 70%), teachers concerned about personal safety (both males and females = 70%), and teachers not motivated to teach (both males and females = 80%) were effects of violence.

School Safety Violence programs-Perceived by Subjects to Reduce Violence:

Subjects' perceptions of school safety violence programs to reduce violence are presented in Table 7. A high percentage of both males and females agreed that staff monitors and security guards were excellent as a school safety violence program (males = 90%; females = 90%). A response difference between males and females occurred for school safety programs. All females agreed that tutoring and mentors or curricular revisions would help to reduce violence in contrast to males (males = 70%; females = 100%). Females more strongly agreed that crisis centers would assist in school safety violence programs to reduce violence (males = 70%; females = 95%). Similar percentages are presented in Table 7 also for e.g., positive role models, academic and behavioral expectations, and classroom climate.

Discussion

The findings in this study resulted in differences and similarities between males and females depending on their experiences and perceptions. Although females experienced more minor violent incidents at the elementary school level, more than one half of the males and females felt safe at both elementary and middle school levels (elementary-safe: males=56%, females = 59%; very safe (males =44%, females = 41%). However, more males responded that they had observed (males = 75%, females = 50%)and experienced (males = 75%, females = 17%) more violence at the middle school and high school levels. These findings suggest that males may be becoming more aware of violence around them as a result of copying models from their environment. Females may tend to avoid violence and therefore avoid seeking or be willing to observe violence at this school level. The findings suggest that strong nonviolent models may effect a significant decrease in violence at these levels.

Both males and females agreed that television is a major factor of violence awareness (males = 80%; females = 90%). A smaller percentage of males and females (males = 60%; females = 45%) agreed that newspapers, magazines, or printed materials were avenues of violence awareness. These findings suggest that the television and news media definitely may have a strong influence in the increasing levels of violence. This suggests that the media may have a tremendous influence in modeling violence for students. A higher percentage of males disagreed that their own acts of student violence or their experiences that they had as a victim of school violence (100% & 100%) were ways of becoming aware of violence in contrast to females (75% & 70%). This suggests that males already may have been too strongly influenced by other means of violence awareness and were implementing the violence that had been modeled. A slightly higher percentage of females (females =65%; males = 40%) agreed that people in the community or family or non-school friends (females = 65%); males = 50%) were a means of becoming aware of violence. This finding suggests that females may be more socially and language oriented than males. Furthermore, it may suggest that the occupations that males hold may not be as conducive to socializing and therefore may not have the language opportunities to become more aware of violence via this means of communication.

A large response percentage difference occurred between males vs. females regarding alcohol or substance abuse as an act of violence. More males disagreed that alcohol or substance abuse was an act of violence than females (males =50%; females =10%). This suggests that males, as individuals who utilize more of these substances may consider themselves in complete

control or do not realize the actual effects of substance use during use. This finding also could suggest that males and females may physically and emotionally react differently to alcohol and substance abuse.

A similar percentage of male and female responses considered the following major acts of violence: rape, gang membership, carrying or use of weapon, physical aggression resulting in injury, and robbery without a weapon. A large percentage difference occurred between males and females who agreed that verbal confrontation or threatening was a minor act of violence (males = 90%; females = 30%). Females considered this to be a major act of violence. This finding suggests that males may be more physical in their perception of violence and will express themselves more so in this manner. Sensitivity to language may also be a factor to substantiate this research finding. Kidnapping was considered by more males to be a major act of violence than females (males = 80%; females = 63%) while more females (32%) considered kidnapping not an act of violence in contrast to males (10%). This finding also suggests that the physical nature of violence may play a dominant role in distinguishing between genders.

A very high percentage of both males and females agreed that the breakdown of the home, parental structures, parental violence, and parental drug abuse were major causes of school violence (ranges = 100% - 90%). A higher percentage of females agreed that violence in movies (males = 50%; females = 75%) and violence in television programs (males = 50%; females = 70%) were major causes of school violence. The finding could be related to the prior finding that television was a strong influence on awareness of violence. A high percentage (ranges = 70% - 80%) of males and females agreed that the availability of weapons, boredom, students' drug abuse, and lack of trust were causes of school violence. Poor self-concept or emotional behavioral disorders were not considered factors of school violence for the majority of males and females (males = 80%; females = 70%). The findings suggest that motivation, work, individual respect, and subsequent achievement may help to alleviate some of the causes of violence. Concentrating on work without the availability of weapons may significantly impact the amount of violence in the subjects' geographical area.

More female than male subjects agreed that lower graduation rates were an effect of school violence (males = 20%; females = 50%). This finding suggests that females may be more academically oriented and focused and that learning about violence within programs may increase graduation rates. Both males and females, but a slightly larger percentage of males than females, agreed that a

less conducive learning environment was an effect of school violence (males = 90%; females = 70%). Thus, violence interrupts effective class time on task. This may occur due to a higher general distractibility or interest level on part of males. This finding then also suggests that male achievement would be lower than that of females. A high percentage of both males and females (range = 70% - 90%) indicated that disrespect, less time on task, teacher personal safety concerns and lack of motivation to teach were considered to be effects of violence. This finding suggests that both genders are very concerned about the effects of school violence and that violence needs to be stopped as a top priority since it affects both teachers and students.

Subjects had high agreement percentages in their perceptions of the utilization of various school safety programs to reduce violence (range = 70%- 90%). Both genders agreed that school safety guards and staff monitors were excellent (males = 90%; females = 90%). Some differences occurred for the incorporation of tutors and mentors, curriculum revisions, and crisis centers in school programs (males = 70%; females = 100%). These findings suggest again that the visibility of support people within schools and working directly with the students may have a greater effect in school reduction of violence. Different means of learning may cause the gender differences for the other safety programs noted. Therefore, it may be best for schools to have people guarding safety in the school with additional curricular revisions and crisis centers to assist or provide the students with ways to cope with the violence occurring in the schools.

Limitations to the Study:

This study had a number of limitations. The major limitations were:

1. The study was limited to 26 preservice and four inservice or professional teachers. Thus, two sections of the questionnaire could not be used.
2. The sample was limited to $n=30$. This was in a large part due to those subjects who had not filled in sufficient number of data to be analyzed or completed their permission form.
3. The study was limited to an existing sample in a particular institution. Therefore, the study cannot be validly or reliably generalized to other institutions or states even though the sample consisted of subjects coming from throughout the state of Alabama.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The following recommendations are made for future studies:

1. Research the findings of gender differences that alcohol and substance abuse is not considered an act of violence.
2. Investigate the relationship between television as a means to become violence aware of violence and television as a cause of violence.
3. Investigate the relationship among gender, language and violence.
4. Increase the sample size by randomly sampling students utilizing other required educational classes.
5. Increase the sampling size by randomly selecting students from various universities throughout the state to improve generalization.
6. Monitor questionnaire replies to increase responses from all subjects.
7. Use day classes as well as night classes to improve generalization. Subjects in this study consisted of two sections of night classes.
8. Include more inservice teachers within the sample.

Table I
Subjects' General and Academic Characteristics (N = 30)

Variable	Condition	Number	
		N	%
Gender	Female	20	67
	Male	10	33
Ethnicity	White	17	57
	Black	12	40
	(No response)	1	3
Age in years	<25	22	74
	26-40	4	13
	41-55	1	3
	Over 55	1	3
	(No response)	2	7
Rank	Freshmen	1	3
	Sophomore	6	20
	Junior	9	30
	Senior	9	30
	Graduate	3	10
Major	Elementary Education	14	47
	Secondary Education	7	23
	Special Education	3	10
	(No response)	6	20

Table 2 (Cont'd.)

Subjects' School Safety-Violence Experiences Responses*

College/University				N=None Mi=Minor Ma=Major Vs=Very Safe S=Safe V=Violent Vv=Very violent																		
Violence Observed				Violence Experienced				School Safety Climate														
N	Mi	Ma		N	Mi	Ma		Vs	S	V	Vv											
m f	m f	m f		m f	m f	m f		m f	m f	m f	m f											
2	10	3	8	2	-	-		5	17	1	1	1	-	1	8	5	8	-	1	-	-	
28	55	43	44	29	-	-	-%-	71	94	14	06	14	-	-%-	17	47	83	47	-	06	-	-
(Males:		n= 7)		(Males:		n= 7)		(Males:		n= 6)												
(Females:		n= 18)		(Females:		n= 18)		(Females:		n= 17)												

- Of those subjects who responded

Table 3**Subjects' Perceived Avenue of Awareness (N=30)**

Medium	% Disagreement		% Agreement	
	(SD+D)		(SA+A)	
(Males: n=10) (Females: n=20)	M	F	M	F
Television	20	10	80	90
Newspapers, magazines, or printed materials	40	15	60	45
University courses I have taken.	80	60	20	40
In-service(s), workshops, or meeting(s) I have attended.	70	55	30	45
What community person(s) have told me.	60	35	40	65
What family or non-school friends have told me.	50	35	50	65
What school personnel have told me.	60	55	40	45
The acts of violence I committed as a student.	100	75	00	25
The acts of school violence I have observed.	50	60	50	40
Experience(s) I have had as a victim of school violence.	100	70	00	30

Table 4

Subjects' Perceived Level of School Violence Behavior (N=30)

Level	Not an Act		Minor Act		Major Act	
	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %
(Males: n=10) (Females: n=20)						
Alcohol/substance abuse.	5 50	2 10	3 30	5 25	2 20	13 65
Rape.	1 10	4 20	0 0	1 25	9 90	15 75
Verbally confronting or threatening a school employee.	1 10	2 10	4 40	6 30	5 50	12 60
Gang membership.	0 0	0 0	3 30	4 20	7 70	16 80
Physical aggression resulting in injury (e.g., push, shove).	1 10	0 0	3 30	8 40	6 60	12 60
Carrying/use of weapon.	1 0	1 5	1 10	3 15	8 80	16 80
Robbery without a weapon.	1 10	2 10	4 40	5 25	5 50	13 52
Verbally confronting or threatening a fellow student.	0 0	0 0	9 90	6 30	1 10	14 70
Homicide.	1 10	3 15	0 0	2 10	9 90	15 75
Attacking a fellow student and not causing injury.	0 0	2 10	5 50	10 50	5 50	8 40
Theft(stealing).	1 10	2 10	7 70	7 35	2 20	11 55
Fighting.	0 0	0 0	5 50	11 55	5 50	9 45
Robbery with a weapon.	1 10	1 5	2 20	1 5	8 80	12 60
Physical aggression not resulting in injury (e.g., push, shove). *	1 11	1 5	5 56	12 60	3 33	7 35
Kidnapping. **	1 10	6 32	1 10	1 5	8 80	12 63
Sexual harassment. **	0 0	2 11	3 30	2 11	7 70	15 78

* (Males: n= 9)

** (Females: n=19)

Table 5

Subjects' Perceived Causes of School Violence (N=30)

Causes	% Disagreement % Agreement			
	(SD+D)		(A+SA)	
(Males: n=10) (Females: n=20)	M	F	M	F
Poverty	40	45	60	55
Community deterioration	30	37	70	63
Racial discrimination accompanied by few economic, social, and educational opportunities.	10	16	90	84
Change or breakdown in traditional family structure	00	10	100	90
Lack of family rules or structures.	00	00	100	100
Lack of family involvement in moral/religious activities.	30	45	70	55
Lack of family involvement in the schools.	50	40	50	60
Violence acted out by parents.	00	05	100	95
Parental drug/ substance abuse	10	05	90	95
Overcrowding in the schools.	50	45	50	55
Poor physical school plant (building and grounds).	70	60	30	40
School climate to learn and activities.	60	45	40	55
Lack of proper supervision at school.	20	30	80	70
Violence in movies.	50	25	50	75
Violence in television programs.	50	30	50	70

Table 5 (Cont'd.)

Subjects' Perceived Causes of School Violence (N=30)

Causes	% Disagreement		% Agreement	
	(SD+D)		(A+SA)	
(Males: n=10) (Females: n=20)	M	F	M	F
Violence in music.	40	35	60	65
Lack of positive role models.	33*	05	67	95
Gang membership and activities.	60	45	40	55
Availability of weapons.	20	21	80	79
Boredom/lack of motivation to learn.	20	20	80	80
Drug substance abuse by students.	10	20	90	80
Student poor self-concept or emotional/behavioral disorders.	80	70	20	30
Student lack of trust/credibility in authority figures (real or portrayed).	30	20	70	80
Rumors among peers or peer escalation.	20	30	80	70

*(Males: n=9)

Table 6

Subjects' Perceived Effects of School Violence (N=30)

Effects	% Disagreement		% Agreement	
	(SD+D)		(A+SA)	
(Males: n=10) (Females n=20)	M	F	M	F
Increased suspension of students.	20	15	80	85
Lower graduation rates.	20	50	80	50
Lower scores on district or state assessments/.tests	30	30	70	70
Environment(s) less conducive to learning.	10	30	90	70
Students' absenteeism.	20	30	80	70
Students' lack of motivation to learn.	30	20	70	80
Student apathy.	30	25	70	75
Student disrespect for teachers.	20	10	80	90
Student tardiness.	30	37*	70	63*
Students spend less time on academic tasks.	30	30	70	70

***(Females: n=19)**

Table 6 (Cont'd.)

Subjects' Perceived Effects of School Violence (N=30)

Effects	% Disagreement		% Agreement	
	(SD+D)		(A+SA)	
(Males: n=10) (Females: n=20)	M	F	M	F
Students concerned about personal safety.	20	30	80	70
Teachers experiencing job-related stress.	30	42*	70	58*
Negative teacher emotions.	70	65	30	35
Teachers spending less time on instruction.	50	30	50	70
Teachers change profession.	40	35	60	65
Teacher absenteeism.	50	35	50	65
Teachers concerned about personal safety.	30	30	70	70
Teachers not motivated to teach.	20	20	80	80
Teacher apathy.	30	25	70	75

* (Females: n=19)

Table 7

**School Safety Violence Programs-
Perceived by Subjects To Reduce Violence (N=30)**

Program Type	% Disagreement		% Agreement	
	(SD+D)		(A+SA)	
(Males: n=10) (Females: n=19)	M	F	M	F
Staff monitors and security guards.	10	10	90	90
Discipline and dress codes.	20	22**	80	78**
Counseling programs.	30	05	70	95
Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs.	20	05	80	95
Crisis centers.	30	05	70	95
Positive role models.	10	00	90	100
Academic and behavioral expectations.	10	00	90	100
Classroom climate.	00	05	100	95
Tutors and mentors.	30	00	70	100
Curriculum revisions.	30	00	70	100

** (Females: n=18)



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