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Moderating Effects of Social Support on the Association Between Teacher-Directed Violence and Stress

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Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in School Psychology at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

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Moderating Effects of Social Support on the Association between Teacher-Directed Violence and Stress

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Violence found in a school setting directed toward teachers, or teacher-directed violence, is considerably understudied, particularly in the United States, with only a handful of studies having been conducted (Espelage et al., 2013; Bounds & Jenkins, 2016). There is limited information about teacher-directed violence in regard to frequency, type, and who is impacted most. In order for policy to be created, researchers need to understand who is being affected and what type of violence teachers experience (Espelage et al., 2013). Additionally, there has been no research in the United States examining how teachers cope with teacher-directed violence. Little is known about to whom teachers reach out for social support and if that social support is effective in moderating teacher stress. Past research demonstrates that teaching is a high-stress occupation (Fimian, 1988), and some of this stress could be related to experiences of violence. The current study examined type and frequency of teacher-directed violence, to whom teachers go for social support, and teachers’ perceived effectiveness of social support. The study also examined the potential moderating effect of social support on the relation between teacher-directed violence and stress. Results showed that the most common type of teacher-directed violence was obscene remarks. Follow-up found that female teachers experienced more teacher directed violence than male teachers. Results also found that teacher directed violence was not associated with stress, nor did social support have a buffering effect on teacher-directed violence. Follow-up did not find that any type of social support from different individuals buffered teacher directed violence.
Moderating Effects of Social Support on the Association between Teacher-Directed Violence and Stress

Teacher-directed violence has been in the backdrop of public education for more than a decade. Most research on violence in schools has been dedicated to students being educated in the safest environment possible, rather than on the educators themselves (Espelage et al., 2011). Because teachers have been understudied, particularly on violence perpetrated against them, relatively little is known about teacher-directed violence. Espelage et al. (2011) defined teacher-directed violence as violence within a school setting in which teachers are the victims. In previous research, teacher-directed violence has involved 11 different types of violence, including obscene gestures, obscene remarks, intimidation and others (McMahon et al., 2014). Teacher-directed violence can be perpetrated by many individuals including parents, students, colleagues, administrators, and others within the school setting (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; McMahon et al., 2014). Studying and preventing teacher-directed violence is an important topic of investigation, because previous research has shown that teachers who experience victimization from students report lower self-efficacy and increased rates of stress (Espelage et al., 2011; Reddy et al., 2013).

Research on teacher-directed violence has been increasing in the past decade, but there is still too little known to help inform school policy. Additionally, researchers do not understand how teachers cope with victimization and what resources may be most beneficial them; for example, avenues for teachers to report victimization or increased access to supportive individuals at work. Researchers are not certain of teachers’ coping mechanisms for dealing with victimization and if access to social support, a commonly studied coping mechanism, is effective in combating potential stressors from the event (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; Martinez et
Moreover, most research on this topic has occurred outside of the United States, and therefore may not be applicable to teachers in the United States school systems (Espelage et al., 2011).

**Teacher-Directed Violence**

Teacher-Directed violence (TDV) is violence perpetrated in a school setting in which teachers are the victims (Espelage et al., 2011). Educators may be aware of the occurrence of teacher-directed violence, but may not be aware of its extent. Other teachers may focus on the violence and victimization that occurs against their students, and ignore occurrences directed toward themselves or other teachers. Most researchers focus on student-to-student victimization and violence, rather than student-to-teacher violence which can have an impact on classroom management, classroom climate, and teacher effectiveness (Kauppi & Porhola 2012; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012).

**International Research.** Teacher-directed violence has been examined more thoroughly by researchers outside of the United States. Türküm (2011) examined teacher-directed violence in school systems in Turkey. The focus of the study was to determine if teacher-directed violence was occurring, teacher opinions regarding victimization, and their opinion on school precautions preventing violence toward teachers. The study examined 360 participants (49.7% female) from all socioeconomic areas in Turkish schools.

Türküm found that teachers experience both verbal and emotional victimization more than physical violence from students. Verbal violence was reported more often than other types of violence. Türküm examined backbiting (i.e., malicious talk about someone who is not present), deriding (i.e., expressing contempt towards another), and slandering (i.e., making false,
damaging statements about another). He also discovered that teachers experience violence from both their students and their administrative staff.

Another study outside of the United States was conducted in Finnish schools by Kauppi and Pörhölä (2012). The study included 215 participants (83.9% female) from school systems across Finland, including teachers, principals, and specialist teachers. Participants reported the frequency with which they experienced teacher-directed violence in the past week. A majority of teachers, 67.4%, reported bullying from students as occurring “hardly ever,” 25.6% reported bullying as “occasionally,” 3.3% of teachers reported bullying as “almost every week” 3.7% of teachers reported “almost daily”. Thirty-seven percent (37.5%) of teachers attributed their victimization to student-related characteristics, 29.5% of teachers attributed victimization to institutional problems, 13.1% attributed victimization to problems with themselves as teachers, and 9.8% of teachers attributed their victimization due to multiple reasons/factors.

There were several limitations in the Kauppi and Pörhölä (2012) study. First, the sample size was small, with a very low response rate. Over 2,000 teachers and school system employees were emailed about completing the survey, 215 individuals responded, with only 70 participants completing the entire survey. A third limitation to Kauppi and Pörhölä’s (2012) study was disproportionate number of female to male respondents, which may not adequately represent the school system. Although not a limitation of the study, but a limitation to the application of results in the United States, the study was conducted in Finland, which does not mean that the responses are relatable to the school systems in the United States, and therefore teacher-directed violence within the United States.

**Research in the United States.** Many of the studies on teacher-directed violence have been conducted outside of the U.S. Though these studies are informative, it is important to also
study teacher-directed violence in the U.S. for several reasons. First, school systems in other countries can be different than those in the U.S. in terms of teacher education and preparation, how grade levels are grouped together, school management and administrative systems, teacher union participation, and differences in curriculum. Studies on teacher victimization conducted outside of the U.S. tend to examine broader categories of violence (e.g., physical, verbal, and emotional) than those conducted in the U.S. (Duzka & Dalbert, 2007; Türküm, 2011).

A national study conducted by McMahon et al. (2014) was one of the first studies on teacher-directed violence in the U.S. The study included 2,998 teachers in all areas of the U.S. (i.e., Northeast, Midwest, South, and West). The average age was 46.5 years, 83.5% were women, and 81.2% were Caucasian. A majority of the teachers surveyed worked in a traditional public school setting (94.1%), with the rest divided between charter schools and private schools. Most teachers surveyed taught kindergarten through eighth grade (67.8%), 22.5% taught high school, and 9.7% taught elementary through high school.

McMahon and colleagues (2014) examined three major forms of teacher-directed violence: physical attack, harassment, and property offenses. These three major forms were broken down into eleven different potential forms of teacher-directed violence. Physical attacks included physical attack resulting in a visit to a physician, physical attack not resulting in a visit to a physician, weapon pulled, and objects thrown. Harassment included obscene remarks, obscene gestures, verbally threatened, intimidated, and internet victim. Property offenses included theft of property and damage to personal property. The researchers found that overall 80% of the teachers experienced victimization at least once that school year. Forty-four percent of the teachers reported experiencing physical attacks. Thirty-one percent of the surveyed teachers reported experiencing at least one of all three forms of teacher-directed violence.
McMahon et al. (2014) found that 2,175 of 2,998 (73%) participants reported experiencing harassment or obscene gestures, obscene remarks, verbal threats, and intimidation by a student, parent, or colleague. These results are consistent with findings from previous research showing that verbal violence is the most common type of teacher-directed violence (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Martínez et al., 2016; Türküm, 2011).

McMahon et al. (2014) found that teachers reported students as the most common perpetrator, with 94% of teachers reporting victimization by students. Other perpetrators include parents (37%), colleagues (21%), and others/strangers (17%). The study also found that male teachers in urban settings report victimization more than female teachers; however, female teachers experience more verbal victimization than male teachers. McMahon et al. (2014) research is consistent with other studies (Espelage et al., 2013; Türküm, 2011).

Martinez et al. (2016), conducted a more recent study on teacher-directed violence conducted in the United States in which they examined multiple victimization. They surveyed 2,324 teachers from across the U.S. The average age of those surveyed was 46.6 years, with 83.2% women. A majority of the participants identified as Caucasian (81.8%) and most of them worked in the public education system (94.9%). Of the teachers surveyed, 46.8% worked in urban settings, 36.1% in suburban settings, and 17.1% in rural settings.

Martinez et al. (2016) examined multiple victimization, as opposed to teacher-directed violence alone from one source. Multiple victimization is defined as violence or victimization against a teacher in multiple different forms (e.g., physical attack, theft, intimidation). Examining multiple victimization, rather than teacher-directed victimization, allows for the interpretation of more than one type of victimization directed toward a teacher from the same or multiple sources.
In this particular study, Martinez et al. examined 11 different types of teacher-directed violence found in McMahon (2014).

They examined teacher characteristics, self-blame characteristics, and administration support in relation to multiple victimization. The findings shown that teachers with more teaching experience reported less victimization than teachers with less teaching experience. Additionally, study also revealed that greater administrator support was related to less victimization from both students and colleagues. Male teachers were more likely to report multiple victimization than female teachers. Teachers who reported multiple victimization by students and colleagues also had higher levels of self-blame than those who did not report multiple victimization. Rural teachers reported less multiple victimization by students than those teachers who worked in urban and suburban school systems. Urban school teachers reported more multiple victimization than those who worked in suburban school settings. Teachers who self-identified as Caucasian and worked in urban school settings had the highest reporting of victimization by parents. Teachers who self-identified as African American had the lowest rate of victimization by parents.

Bounds and Jenkins (2016) examined teacher-directed violence in relation to social support and teacher stress. They examined 11 different types of teacher-directed violence (i.e., obscene remarks, obscene gestures, verbally threatened, intimidated, theft of property, damage to personal property, physical attack resulting in a visit to physician, physical attack not resulting in a visit to a physician, weapon pulled, object thrown, and internet victim). These 11 types of violence were taken directly from McMahon et al. (2014). The study included 134 teachers from across the state of Illinois with 85 female and 49 male participants, with 114 fully completing the survey. The study revealed that 52% of participants reported experiencing teacher-directed
violence at least once within the past 3-6 months of their school year. The most frequently reported type of teacher-directed violence was verbal. A total of 30% of teachers reported experiencing verbal violence at least once within the past 1-2 months of their school year. This finding is consistent with those from other studies conducted in the U.S. (Martinez et al. 2016; McMahon et al., 2014). The researchers used the Teacher Stress Inventory to measure the stress teachers experience both at work and from the victimization they may have experienced. Teachers who reported experiencing teacher-directed violence did not report higher levels of stress. This finding was different from other studies that measured teacher victimization in relation to stress, which typically found that teachers who experience violence at work report higher levels of stress (Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012).

Research on teacher-directed violence has been limited, but becoming more frequent in the United States. Much of the research has produced similar findings. Teachers tend to experience verbal violence more often than other types of teacher-directed violence (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; McMahon et al., 2014; Türküm, 2011). Teachers may experience differing rates of teacher-directed violence based on their own characteristics (McMahon et al., 2014; Mooji, 2011). Although there have been some limitations in studying teacher-directed violence (e.g., small sample sizes, research outside of the US), the studies that have been conducted are revealing the nature of teacher-directed violence (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; Martinez et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2014). An area that needs more study is the negative impact that teacher-directed violence may have on those who experience it (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; Martinez et al., 2016).
Outcomes Associated with Teacher-Directed Violence

Teacher-directed violence has been understudied, which means researchers can make little inference about the detrimental effects it has on teachers. Research has revealed that teaching is a high-stress profession (Travers & Cooper, 1996), and teacher-directed violence may increase that stress (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012). Other than potentially increasing stress, other negative effects such as difficulty with classroom management, teacher efficacy, classroom atmosphere, and higher rates of burnout are related to teachers' experience of violence (Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012).

Ozkilic and Kartal (2012) conducted a study in Turkey that focused on understanding the negative effects of victimization perpetuated by students toward their teachers. The study included 221 teachers (80.2% women, 20.7% men). Participants worked in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade (44.8%), or high school (55.3%). The researchers found that 33.5% of teachers were not affected by students bullying or victimizing them, 33.9% had been affected only “a little,” 16.7% were influenced, and 15.8% had been influenced “a lot”. A limitation of this study was that there was no direct measure of frequency of teacher-directed violence. Rather, the researchers asked teachers if victimization influenced their profession or life in any way.

Ozkilic and Kartal (2012) also examined teacher-directed violence and its impact on teachers' stress levels, classroom atmosphere, and relationships with students. Over half of the teachers (52.5%) reported that teacher-directed violence by their students increased their stress levels and 30.4% reported that teacher-directed violence from their students created a negative classroom environment. Teachers reported decreased satisfaction in the entire profession of teaching (25.8%) and decreased expectations for their students (26.2%). These findings suggest
higher rates of burnout due to teacher-directed violence, as well as teachers lowering their potentially high expectations of their students in academic settings. Teachers also reported that they do not want to teach their classes (8.6%) after experiencing teacher-directed violence. In other words, teachers experience feelings of burnout and respond negatively to their work environment.

Dzuka and Dalbert (2007) conducted two studies in Germany on frequency and type of teacher-directed violence. They defined teacher-directed violence as any violence perpetrated against a teacher both repeatedly and intentionally by a student in order to harm the teacher. The researchers considered teacher-directed violence as anything verbally or physically harmful, damaging to personal property, or coercive and manipulative behavior. The first study included 364 teachers from various types of schools. Teachers most frequently reported negative verbal behaviors from their students over the other types of teacher-directed violence (35.4%). Almost half of the teachers (49%) reported experiencing at least one type of teacher-directed violence in the last 30 days of their school year. Teachers who taught in urban school settings tended to report all types of teacher-directed violence (i.e., verbal, physical, property, coercive, and manipulative) more than teachers who worked in rural school settings.

Dzuka and Dalbert’s (2007) second study included 108 teachers from five different schools in Germany and examined teacher-directed violence and teachers’ belief in a just world. The researchers examined teacher-directed violence experienced within the past 15 days of work, rather than the past 30 days as they did in their first study. With this reduction in time frame, 55% of teachers reported experiencing one type of teacher-directed violence, with 44% reporting verbal violence. The teachers who reported experiencing teacher-directed violence also reported feeling less satisfied with life and did not endorse a high personal belief in a “just world”. Dzuka
and Dalbert’s (2007) findings are consistent with those from the United States and Turkey. Victimization found against teachers in a school setting is most often verbal violence in urban settings, which can lead to negative outcomes (e.g., high stress, high burnout rate).

**Teacher Characteristics and Teacher-Directed Violence**

Preliminary research on the victimization of teachers shows that teacher’s characteristics and traits are related to the amount of teacher-directed violence they experience. Mooij (2011) conducted research in the Netherlands on teacher’s characteristics and experiences with victimization. The researcher examined teacher characteristics and possible motivations that students would have against those characteristics. The study included of 5,148 secondary education teachers from 215 school sites and also included over 80,000 students who were also surveyed. Each site was representative of the population and diversity of the Dutch area.

Mooij examined 16 different teacher characteristics that may influence the amount of discrimination or teacher-directed violence the teachers experience. Of the 16, physical appearance, behavior, work outcomes, having a disability, being overtly religious, gender, homosexuality, and disciplinary behavior were highly correlated with being victimized. Mooij’s (2011) study revealed that the most susceptible type of teacher to teacher-directed violence in the Netherlands is an individual who has 3 specific characteristics (i.e., works in a low-attainment setting, identifies as homosexual, and who does not feel at home in the Netherlands). Mooji examined the type of violence based on the individual teacher characteristics. Those teachers who reported verbal violence committed against them also reported being younger, female, homosexual, disabled, or felt less at home in their area. Those teachers who reported experiencing social violence also reported having poor work outcomes related to their low-attainment school setting, being female, being non-religious, and being homosexual.
Türküm (2011) also examined different characteristics of teachers experiencing violence. The researcher revealed that female teachers experienced more teacher-directed violence than male teachers. He also found that women experienced more verbal violence than any other type of violence. Results indicated that female teachers tended to be victims of violence, while male teachers inserted themselves into risky situations involving students who were being violent, causing the teachers to be victimized (e.g., stepping in during a student fight and being assaulted themselves). This finding is consistent with other studies conducted in the U.S. in which male teachers are more likely to act in risky situations while at work (Espelage et al., 2011).

Overall, studies have shown that certain teacher characteristics can influence the amount and type of teacher-directed violence they experience. Such characteristics like gender, sexual orientation, and age are considered influential in the amount of victimization experienced by teachers (Mooji, 2011; Türküm, 2011). Female teachers report more experiences with verbal violence than male teachers (Mooji, 2011; Türküm, 2011). Only two studies have been conducted on the types of teacher characteristics that occur with teacher-directed violence, leaving many unanswered questions.

Coping and Social Support

The teaching profession can be highly stressful, which sometimes leads to reduced job satisfaction, potential burnout, decreased effectiveness as a teacher (Reddy et al., 2013). Dean (2000) found that more than 40% of teachers’ experience symptoms of stress due to their high workload and negativity from both students and parents. Because of these potentially detrimental effects, teachers often seek out others to confide in, and who may provide a social support system to buffer against distress. Research on who specifically teachers go to for social
support has also been understudied (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; Kauppi & Porhola, 2012; Martinez et al., 2016; Türküm, 2011).

Teachers who experience violence may cope with their experiences in different ways. Coping refers to an attempt to alleviate distress associated with a difficult situation. Generally, people tend to have certain coping strategies that help decrease whatever negative effects they are experiencing. A common approach for coping is to reach out to others, or in other words access social support. Other types of positive coping include exercise, meditating, going on walks, relaxation strategies, and problem solving (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005).

Austin et al. (2005) studied teacher stress and the types of coping strategies teachers use. Results showed that teachers most often used planned problem solving (i.e., planning the next steps in dealing with their conflict) to cope with their stress. Teachers’ also utilized self-control and seeking social support more often than they used confrontive coping or distancing (i.e., facing the stressor head on or escaping the stressor). Results also showed that teachers with higher stress were more likely to use a negative coping strategy like escape avoidance. Those with lower stress were more likely to use positive coping strategies.

Past research has shown that there are both positive and negative coping strategies that can be used. Examples of negative coping strategies include avoiding the situation, lashing out at others either involved or not involved in the situation, passive-aggressive behavior, and isolation from others (Travers & Cooper, 1996). Examples of positive coping strategies include exercise, problem-solving through the situation, and preforming preferred activities (Travers & Cooper, 1996).

Social support is a positive coping strategy that has received much attention from researchers. Cohen and Wills (1985) suggested that stress may be buffered by social support,
impacting the well-being of those individuals who experience stress. Those who have higher levels of social support also tend to experience fewer negative outcomes related to stress in their environments and lifestyles. They also postulated that those individuals who have social support, and are satisfied with the social support, will be protected against the negative effects of stress. Those who are not satisfied with their social support, are less protected from the negative side effects of violence. Individuals who have higher self-esteem and have more informational social support (i.e., support that reappraises a stressor and counters lack of control) have more buffering from stress than those who do not.

Tardy (1985) postulated that there are four types of social support that may help buffer stress: appraisal (e.g., constructive feedback on performance), emotional (e.g., trusting and loving support), informational (e.g., advice), and instrumental (e.g., enacted helping behaviors). Research has not examined what types of social support teachers seek out. Overall, Tardy speculates that social support, specifically individuals' perception of that support, can buffer them from negative aspects of their environment (e.g., stress).

Na-Jin and Shelton (2010) found that secondary school teachers experienced significant stress from their work environment. Teachers' work environment typically involves a large workload, which causes high amounts of stress. They also found that no matter the amount of coworker social support, there was no buffer against stress. In other words, those teachers who reported high levels of social support from their coworkers did not experience a moderating relationship on their work environment stressors. However, they did find that those teachers who reported higher levels of social support from coworkers also reported less anxiety than those with low coworker social support.
Social support is especially important when examining teacher-directed violence. Teachers, like other professionals, use various coping strategies to deal with negative effects of their jobs. Teachers use social support by reaching out to those in their profession or those close to them at home (e.g., family, spouse, significant other).

Teacher Directed Violence and Social Support

A small number of studies have examined social support as one type of coping mechanism for teachers who experience violence in the workplace, but there are many questions regarding the efficacy of social support as a buffer against the negative outcomes associated with distress from teacher-directed violence.

Türküm (2011) conducted the first study to examine the relationship between teacher-directed violence and social support. He found that based on various types of victimization (e.g., verbal, physical, emotional, and sexual) and gender, teachers who experience victimization seek out support from different individuals. He found that 87.2% of female teachers who were exposed to verbal violence went to their families or spouse for social support afterwards. Of the male teachers who experienced verbal violence, 49.4% went to their family or spouses for social support, and 50.6% went to their colleagues for social support after victimization. A majority of those female teachers (87.2%) who reported experiencing physical violence went to their family and spouse for social support. Overall, no matter the type of victimization, female teachers tended to seek social support from those closest to them (e.g., family and spouse) and male teachers are more likely to seek social support across many sources (e.g., family and spouse, colleague, friends outside of school, school administrator, parents of students, or no one).

Ozkilic and Kartal (2012) also examined to whom teachers went after experiencing teacher-directed violence. Of those teachers who experienced violence, 29% went to guidance
counselors for social support, 25.3% went to a deputy headmaster, 24.9% went to colleagues, 22.6% went to headmasters, 15.4% went to no one, 11.3% went to other, and 3.6% went to chairpersons of branch teachers (assistant principals). Ozkilic and Kartal (2012) explored the perceived effectiveness of the social support received after experiencing violence. They asked teachers if the help or social support they received had served its purpose. Twenty-seven percent of teachers reported that the social support they asked for helped them solve the problem they were having. However, 25% of teachers reported that the social support did not help and the problem remained unsolved, and 11.8% of teachers reported that the social support helped the problem for a short period of time, while 9% stated they did not receive any social support or help when they sought it out.

Ozkilic and Kartal (2012) specifically examined teachers who reported reaching out to someone not listed as an option in their study. For those teachers who reported that they went to an individual not listed as an option, 50% did not receive any social support or feedback. The same half that reported no help at all also stated that they felt as if they were ineffective as teachers and they reported that they are expected to solve issues of violence and victimization without any help from others.

Martínez et al. (2016) examined teachers' perceived social support by teachers from their administration. They asked teachers to determine how well the administration dealt with the victimization or violence directed toward them. Results showed that teachers who reported high levels of social support from their administration also were less likely to experience multiple forms of victimization by students and colleagues. The study was limited in its examination of social support through only examining support from administration. Teachers often will go to
other individuals who they are closer to for social support before they go to the administration (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016).

Bounds and Jenkins (2016) also examined perceived social support teachers received from those in the school setting and in their home life. They developed the Educator Social Support Survey in order to assess who teachers go to for social support. Participants choose from potential individuals who they may seek social support from after experiencing teacher-directed violence. These individuals included spouse/significant other/family, friends outside of school, another teacher, administrator, guidance counselor/school psychologist, or other people in the school. After analysis, the study showed that for those teachers who reported experiencing teacher-directed violence, 65% of teachers sought social support most often from another teacher, and 61.5% sought social support from spouse/significant other/family member. The study also revealed that those teachers who reported seeking social support from another teacher in their school also had higher levels of stress.

Current Study

Cohen and Wills’ (1985) theory of social support suggests that social support can buffer against negative outcomes, but the buffering effect of social support for teachers who are experiencing victimization in the workplace has not been examined. Some research has shown that teachers tend to reach out to their family, spouse/significant other, and colleagues more than guidance counselors/school psychologists, friends outside of school, and other people at school (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; Türküm, 2011); however, more research is needed to understand when and to whom teachers reach out to when coping with distress, as well as the effectiveness of social support as a buffer against distress from victimization. Given this dearth in the literature,
the goal of the current study is to examine the potential buffering effects on the negative effects (e.g., stress) that occur because of teacher-directed violence.

Five research hypotheses guided the current study including type and frequency of violence, social support, and stress. First, the researcher hypothesized that verbal violence (obscene remarks) is the most common type of violence reported compared to other types of violence (i.e., obscene gestures, intimidation, obscene graffiti, damage to personal property, objects thrown, physical attacks, cyber harassment, theft of personal property, and weapon pulled) (Duzka & Dalbert, 2007; McMahon et al., 2014; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012). Second, the researcher hypothesized that teachers most often go to a spouse or family member when in need of social support compared to other sources of social support (i.e., another teacher, administration, guidance counselor/school psychologist, other people in the school, friend outside of school). (Turkum, 2011). Follow-up analyses were conducted to determine if there were differences in sources of social support based on a) gender, b) years of experience, and c) school location.

Third, the researcher predicted that higher levels of teacher-directed violence would be associated with higher rates of reported stress (Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012). Fourth, the researcher hypothesized that overall social support will buffer against stress associated with teacher-directed victimization (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Fifth, in addition to exploring the buffering effect of overall social support, the buffering effect of the different sources of social support (i.e., family, spouse/significant other, another teacher, administration, guidance counselor/school psychologist, friends outside of school, others in the school) were explored. There has been no research on specific sources of social support moderating possible stress from teacher-directed violence. However, there are implications based on research on social support itself. Social
support that is considered satisfying is generally more effective than social support from more
distant sources of social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The researchers suggest that social
support from those closest to the individual may be considered more satisfactory than social
support received from less close sources, meaning the moderating impact will have a greater
impact on stress from teacher-directed violence.

Method

Participants

The sample for the current study included of K-12 educators across the state of Illinois. A
total of 107 participants who completed the survey fully, and 10 additional surveys were partially
completed; all these surveys were included in the study. Seventy-nine female teachers and 29
male teachers completed the survey. Years of experience for those who participated in the survey
ranged from 1 year to 42 years with 16 years of experience as the average. A majority of
participants (N = 69) worked in ninth through twelfth grade, 20 teachers worked in first through
fourth grade, and 18 teachers worked in fifth through eighth grade. Fifty-three participants
worked in urban schools, 35 participants worked in suburban settings, and 20 worked in rural
settings. Age of participants ranged from 22 years old to 63 years old with 42 years old as the
average.

Measures

Teacher-directed violence. To assess teacher-directed violence, the survey developed
by McMahon and colleagues (2014) for the American Psychological Association Classroom
Violence Directed Against Teachers Task Force was used. Questions for this survey included
“Have you experienced any of these types of violence from your students in the past 6 months?”
which is followed by a list of 11 forms of victimization: obscene remarks, verbal threats,
intimidation, obscene gestures, obscene graffiti, damage to personal property, object(s) thrown, physical attacks, cyber harassment, theft of personal property, and weapon pulled (McMahon et al., 2014). A twelfth option is “other” which allows teachers to enter their own response. A thirteenth option was “I have not experienced violence from students”. For the current study, when a participant chose any of the 11 types or “other” were then asked follow up questions: “How many times in the past 6 months have you experienced these types of violence?” with options ranging from “1 to 2 times”, “3 to 4 times”, “5 to 6 times”, and “6 + times”.

**Social Support.** To assess the sources of social support, the Educator Social Support Scale (ESSS) scale was used. The Educator Social Support Scale (ESSS) was created by Bounds and Jenkins (2016) and was based on the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS; Malecki & Demaray, 2002). The ESSS incorporates Tardy’s model of social support which measures each type of social support (i.e., emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental). The ESSS contains six scales with 12 items each that measure the perceived social support from spouse/significant other/partner/family, guidance counselors/school psychologists, friends outside of school, colleagues/other teachers, administration, and other people at school (e.g., teacher aides, support staff). The ESSS rates the frequency of perceived social support from the six sources listed above. For example, questions like “gives me good advice”, “helps me when I need it”, “takes time to help me decide things” were used to measure frequency on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Never” to “All of the time”.

Psychometric information for the ESSS is not available but initial findings from Bounds and Jenkins (2016) showed that the ESSS has adequate reliability. Item to total subscale correlations are 0.55, 0.61, 0.56, 0.59, 0.79, and 0.75 for the Significant Other, Outside Friends,
Another Teacher, Administrator, Counselor/Psychologist, and Other People at School, subscales respectively. Internal consistency coefficients ranged from 0.959 to 0.989 for the subscales.

**Teacher Stress.** To assess teachers' stress at work and in their personal lives, the Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) was used. The TSI (TSI; Fimian, 1988) is a measure of teacher stress or "work stress" in 10 different major areas. The scale consists of 49 items, with each item rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*no strength or noticeable*) to 5 (*major strength or extremely noticeable*). There is adequate evidence for both reliability and validity of the TSI (Tinsley & Weiss, 1975). Correlations between the subscales and experts' ratings exceeded .05, .01, or .001 probability levels. Interrater reliability was .82 for subscales examining manifestations of stress. Internal consistency for the TSI total score was .92, with subscale internal consistency ranging from .75 to .88. Test-retest reliability was .76 for the total TSI score (Fimian, 1986).

The TSI was used to measure behavioral, physiological, and other symptomology of stress. The current study used only two subscales will be used: Work-Related Stressors and Professional Distress. Each subscale was scored individually by adding up the total number of responses and dividing by the number of items on the subscale. The TSI total scores were calculated by adding up scores from the two subscales and dividing by two. The overall score provides a collective measure of the sources of teacher stress.

**Procedure**

Following IRB approval, data were collected through Qualtrics, a Web-based survey program (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). An email invitation was sent to educators through email list serves, as well as through email addresses obtained from school district websites. Emails included a link to the online survey, where participants consented to participate anonymously. Participants were directed to complete the survey on their own time and with their own personal
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computers. Participants who completed the survey fully were entered into a raffle for one of three Amazon gift cards.

Data Analysis

The first hypothesis was examined through a frequency report of each type of teacher-directed violence that was endorsed. Bar charts were created to represent the rate of each type of violence reported.

The second hypothesis was examined through determining the mean of each source of social support. Percentages were calculated and a bar chart was created to display the most commonly reported source of social support.

To address hypotheses three and four, a regression analysis was conducted. The teacher-directed violence total score, the social support total score, and the teacher directed violence x social support interaction score were entered as predictors and the TSI stress total was the dependent variable. The interaction score was created by centering the teacher directed violence and social support variables (i.e., the mean of each variable was subtracted from the total score for each participant) then multiplying the centered variables. Hypothesis three was addressed by examining the regression coefficient for teacher directed violence predicting stress. Hypothesis four was addressed through examining the regression coefficient for the interaction. A significant then it suggested that social support buffers the association between teacher directed violence and stress.

For the fifth hypothesis, the process mentioned above was conducted to examine the moderation affect between teacher-directed violence and stress. Each source of social support was examined individually to determine their individual moderation effect on teacher-directed
violence. A Bonferroni correction was applied to the regressions for Hypotheses 3-5, resulting in a p-value of .0006 (i.e., .05/8)

Results

Five hypotheses were tested. To address the first research hypothesis, frequencies were calculated for each type of teacher-directed violence. Obscene Remarks was the most frequently experienced type of violence with 34.26% of teachers reporting they had received obscene remarks at least 1-2 times in the past 4-6 months. In the past 4-6 months, 34.26% of teachers received obscene remarks, 24% verbal threats, 23% obscene gestures, 22% damage to personal property, 21% obscene graffiti, 18.52% intimidation, 18.52% theft of personal property, 16.7% objects thrown, 14% physical attacks, 6% cyber harassment, 1% weapon pulled, and 1% other (see Figure 1).

Additional follow-up analyses were conducted to examine the differences in teacher-directed violence based on demographic information. Eighty percent of female teachers and 20% of male teachers reported that they experienced violence at least 1-2 times in the past 4-6 months (see Figure 2). Approximately 12% (11.6%) of first through fourth grade teachers reported experiencing some type of violence at least 1-2 times in the past 4-6 months, 16.3% of fifth through eighth grade teachers, and 72% of ninth through twelfth grade teachers (see Figure 3). Approximately 18% (18.2%) of teachers in rural schools, 34% of suburban teachers, and 47.7% of urban teachers reported that they experienced violence at least 1-2 times in the past 4-6 months (see Figure 4). Approximately 78% (78.1%) of teachers in public school settings and 33.3% of teachers in private school settings reported that they experienced violence at least 1-2 times in the past 4-6 months (see Figure 5).
To address the second hypothesis, frequencies were calculated for each source of social support. The percentage of teachers reporting who they went to most frequently for social support was examined. "Another Teacher" was reported most often with 79% of teachers reporting that they went to another teacher after experiencing teacher-directed violence, followed by 64% Significant Other, 48% Family, 39% Friends Outside of School, 33% Administration, 24% Guidance Counselors/School Psychologists, 24% Other Professional in the School, and 4% went to No One (see Figure 6). It should be noted that participants could choose more than one option of social support type.

To address the third and fourth hypotheses, a regression analysis was conducted with teacher directed violence total score, social support total score, and the teacher directed violence x social support interaction score as predictors and the TSI stress total score as the dependent variable. The overall regression was not significant, $F(3, 97) = 1.98, p = .12$, therefore, Hypothesis Three (TDV related to stress) and Hypothesis Four, (social support as a buffer) were not founded.

To answer the fifth research hypothesis regarding the buffering effect of the different sources of social support, multiple regressions were conducted using the same steps described above. The regression for social support from a spouse/significant other was not significant $F(3, 96) = .51, p = .67$. The regression for social support from a family member was not significant $F(3, 97) = .88, p = .45$. The regression for social support from friends outside of school was not significant $F(3, 96) = 1.54, p = .21$. The regression for social support from another teacher was not significant $F(3, 97) = .83, p = .48$. The regression for social support from administration was not significant $F(3, 97) = 2.10, p = .11$. The regression for social support from other people in
the school was not significant, $F(3, 97) = .65, p = .59$. The regression for guidance
counselor/school psychologist was not significant $F(3, 97) = 3.34, p = .02$.

**Discussion**

This study was conducted to explore the topic of teacher-directed violence and the
possible buffering effect of social support on the association between teacher-directed violence
and stress. Given that there is little research on teacher-directed violence and its potential
negative impact in the school, it is important to examine the impact that social support has on
teachers, as well as what teacher-directed violence looks like within the school setting.

The current findings showed obscene remarks was the most common type of teacher-
directed violence compared to other types (i.e., obscene gestures, intimidation, obscene graffiti,
damage to personal property, objects thrown, physical attacks, cyber harassment, theft of
personal property, and weapon pulled), with 34.36% of teachers reporting experiencing receiving
obscene remarks at least 1-2 times in the past 4-6 months. This was correctly hypothesized by
the researcher and is similar to previous research conducted on teacher-directed violence (Duzka
& Dalbert, 2007; McMahon et al., 2014). Obscene remarks may be the most reported type of
teacher-directed violence because verbal violence may be more common in general, amongst
both students and teachers, than physical violence is.

Follow-up analyses were conducted to examine differences in teachers’ experience of
teacher-directed violence based on gender, grade level, and school setting. The results were
consistent with findings from previous studies (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; McMahon et al. 2014).
More female teachers (80%) than male teachers (20%) reported experiencing teacher-directed
violence. Female teachers may be targeted more than male teachers by students simply because
of their gender (Bachman & Saltzman, 1994). Female teachers may experience teacher-directed
violence because of their physical appearance, their discipline techniques in class (e.g., relaxed discipline, strict discipline), and behavior differences towards students (e.g., more friendly towards students). Female teachers may experience violence in a different manner than male teachers, as well. For instance, female teachers may take teacher-directed violence more personally than a male teacher would, making it more impactful on their work experience. This finding may also be due to more female than male participants in this study.

Results also showed that more secondary education teachers (72%), ninth through twelfth grade, reported experiencing more teacher-directed violence than first through grade and fifth through eighth grade teachers. This is consistent with previous literature and what we know about grade level differences. Students in higher grades, typically ninth through twelfth grade, are more verbal towards their teachers, and may be more outwardly violent towards them as well. Students in ninth through twelfth grade are also older, and developmentally they are experiencing many changes that influences their mood regulation and stability. Teenagers may be more impulsive, aggressive, or use obscene language at an increased rate compared to their younger counterparts (Robbins & Bryan, 2004; Printstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001).

Teachers working in urban settings (74.7%) reported more teacher-directed violence than those in suburban or rural settings. This finding may be due to the increased rate of violence found in communities in urban settings compared to suburban or rural settings (Hellman & Beaton, 1986). It would make sense that violence at home and in the community in urban settings could spill over into the school setting as well. Teachers working in public settings (78.1%) also reported higher teacher-directed violence than those working in private settings (33.3%). This could be due to public settings having a larger subset of students than are typically
seen in private school settings. This also may be due to private school settings expelling students for one-time offenses, compared to public school settings.

Contrary to predictions, the current study did not find that teachers sought a spouse or family member most often for social support. Rather, another teacher (79%) was the highest reported type of social support. It is also important to note that social support from spouse/significant other was highly supported with 64% of participants reporting it. Social support from another teacher may be due to the teachers having easy access to other teachers and being more inclined to seek support from them. Previous research has found another teacher to be a common type of social support sought by teachers (Türküm, 2011; Bounds & Jenkins, 2016). Support from their colleagues may be sought more often after experiencing teacher-directed violence because it is viewed as more important as those within your school setting may understand the situation more-so than someone who works outside of the school. Teachers may also seek support from another teacher because they are more sympathetic to the current stress of teacher-directed violence experienced, as they have once experienced those things as well. Teachers may also be dealing with the same student, and are overly aware of the situation, making them even more sympathetic towards the situation. Other teachers are more knowledgeable in general about the school setting, making it easier to seek support from someone who already understands most of the situation.

In this study teacher-directed violence was not associated with stress. The regression analysis for the interaction between teacher-directed violence and social support was not significant. This finding may be due to the type of scale used to assess stress in the study, the Teacher Stress Inventory, which asks questions about work stress but not questions directly related to stress from teacher-directed violence. The study also only focused on teacher-directed
violence that happened within the past 4-6 months, which means that the stress teachers experienced from the event may no longer be as salient. If the study had been able to ask the teacher what their level of stress was after the teacher-directed violence, stress may have been associated with the experience of teacher-directed violence. This result may also be due to teacher-directed violence not being considered a stressful event by teachers who experience it. If teacher-directed violence is considered typical in a school setting, teachers may view it as part of their everyday experience at work. They may not feel stress from something they consider part of their job.

When analyzing the buffering effect of social support on reported teacher-directed violence, the results were not significant. According to Cohen and Wills (1985) social support buffers stress, and any support could be related to lowered levels of stress. This finding may mean that even less support from others helps buffer the stress associated from work and teacher-directed violence. Of the participants, only 4 reported that they seek social support from no one. 103 teachers reported that they go to at least one of the types of social support listed (i.e., spouse/significant other, family member, another teacher, administration, friend outside of school, guidance counselor/school psychologist, others in the school). This result may have changed had the participants been asked closer to the occurrence of teacher-directed violence, when stress may have been at its highest level. Social support immediately after the teacher-directed violence may have had more of a moderating impact than months after the teacher-directed violence event. This study only examined a certain number of sources of social support (i.e., spouse/significant other, administration, another teacher, family member, friend outside of school, guidance counselor/school psychologist, and other people in the school), which may have
limited responses by teachers. If the teachers had the opportunity to name another source of social support the results may have been different.

The final hypothesis explored the buffering effect of social support from different individual sources: that is, significant others, family member, another teacher, administration, guidance counselor/school psychologist, other people in the school. There was not a significant buffering effect found for any of the sources when using the lower p value with the Bonferroni correction (p-value of .00060); however, there was a trend to suggest that social support from Guidance Counselor/ School Psychologists may buffer the association between teacher directed violence and stress because the p value of that interaction was .02 and was closer to being significant compared to the other sources of social support. Guidance counselors or school psychologists in schools may provide more targeted social support for teachers due to their professional training. Though teachers in this study reported that they go to another teacher or their spouse/significant other most frequently for support, social support from guidance counselors or school psychologists (though less frequent) may be more effective at reducing stress. Although another teacher was chosen the most frequently for social support, support from another teacher did not serve a buffering function in the current study. This finding may be due to teachers looking for individuals who experience the same things they do, which is called the emotional similarity hypothesis (Kuli & Mahler 1990). Teachers who seek social support from other teachers may not actually be supported, but rather experience more stress from the relationship (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016; Fiore et al. 1983). Another reason that many of the different sources of support did not buffer against stress, is that many of the teachers did not report that they frequently experience severe forms of teacher-directed violence and there may have been an extended period of time since they last experienced teacher-directed violence. It is
possible that more mild forms of teacher-directed violence (e.g., obscene remarks) do not produce high levels of stress. Along the same lines, if the teacher-directed violence occurred months before this study, the teacher's stress may have naturally resolved.

**Limitations**

This study contained several limitations that impact the findings, as well as the generalizability to other studies. The sample size was study was relatively small, with only 107 fully completed surveys. In a study of this kind, it is important to have a large sample to ensure that all types of teachers are represented appropriately. In addition, larger sample sizes help studies generalize to future studies, as well as generalize to other studies. Future studies should use larger sample sizes that includes many types of teachers from various settings across the United States.

A second limitation was that all teachers who participated were from central Illinois, limiting the study geographically and demographically. Future research should be conducted in a larger geographic area to include a more representative sample based on gender, race, type of school setting, and grade level taught are considered. This information could help generalize future studies to most educators, not just the ones in the surrounding area of the study.

Another limitation is the use of the ESSS, a scale that does not have established psychometric properties. The scale itself may not yield appropriate information for the study and may not accurately represent or measure the actual type of social support teachers are seeking after experiencing stress or teacher-directed violence. A study should be conducted on the psychometric properties of the ESSS to examine its validity and reliability in assessing and measuring social support sought by teachers.
The measures used in this study could also be considered a limitation. The Teacher Stress Inventory does not directly ask questions about stress related to teacher-directed violence. To address this in the future a more direct measure should be used. A scale could be created that includes direct questions about stress right after the event of teacher-directed violence, rather than a more global work stress scale. A more direct measure could help produce differences in those who experienced stress and those who did not experience stress, as well as define the buffering effect that social support may have on the stress itself.

A final limitation to the study is the amount of time between the event of teacher-directed violence and its measurement. If teacher-directed violence was measured immediately after the event itself, rather than a few weeks to months’ after, results for stress may have been higher. The overall impact of the teacher-directed violence may have been decreased because of the duration of time between the event itself and the measurement of it. To address this, future studies could ask teachers about teacher-directed violence that had occurred closer to the measurement itself. Rather than months, the time frame could be limited to 4-6 weeks.

Implications and Future Direction

Results from this study may help pave the way for future studies in the area of teacher-directed violence. Future research should be conducted on a national scale to continue to assess the amount and type of teacher-directed violence that is being experienced. Findings from the current study show that more than half of teachers experienced some type of teacher-directed violence. Because teacher-directed violence can have negative side-effects, it may be crucial to understand who and what type of violence is occurring in order to help teachers’ in their effectiveness as teachers and with their school climate.
Future research should also examine who teachers are seeking in terms of social support and if that social support is effective in moderating potential stress from violence and work. If teachers are seeking another teacher more frequently than any other type of social support, than it could might be beneficial to help teachers understand how to effectively support each other. Another study, including this one, has found that teachers tend to become more stressed or are not effectively supported from social support from another teacher (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016). In order to capitalize on this, teachers who have learned how to effectively support each other may help other teachers feel adequately supported over just ruminating on their stressful situations.

More research should be done on understanding appropriate resources to provide those teachers who experience teacher-directed violence. Guidance counselors, school psychologists, and administrators should advocate for bullying or teacher-directed violence policies that help protect teachers in the same manner that protect students. This study did find that guidance counselors and/or school psychologists had close to significant results. If training was given to guidance counselors and school psychologists, then social support may be provided more effectively by them. It is important that for teachers to know who they can seek out for effective social support when they experience teacher-directed violence and stress at work.

Other research should examine what maintains teacher-directed violence between students and teachers. Examining the culture of the school setting, the climate of the schools, student-teacher relationships, and teaching and discipline styles. This research could help determine the proactive changes we could make in the school setting, versus the reactive changes in policy. Future research may use Patterson’s Coercive Model to explain the maintenance in negative or violent relationships between teachers and students in the school setting (Patterson, 1976).
In order for the educational system to work effectively teachers must be protected. If their effectiveness in teaching is impacted by teacher-directed violence, then more research should be done to fully understand how to impact teachers positively through programs and trainings for those in the school setting.
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Figures

Frequency of Violence Reported 1-2 times in the past 4-6 months

Figure 1 – Frequency of teacher-directed violence reported 1-2 times in the past 4-6 months.

Frequency of Violence Reported by Gender in the past 4-6 months

Figure 2 – Frequency of teacher-directed violence reported based on gender in the past 4-6 months.
Figure 3 – Frequency of teacher-directed violence reported by grade level taught in the past 4-6 months.

Figure 4 – Frequency of teacher-directed violence reported by school setting type in the past 4-6 months.
Figure 5 – Frequency of teacher-directed violence by school type in the past 4-6 months.

Figure 6 – Frequency of social support reportedly used in the past 4-6 months in response to stress from teacher-directed violence.