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# Teacher-Directed Violence: The Role of Disempowerment in Turnover

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Teacher-Directed Violence: The Role of Disempowerment in Turnover

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Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

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June 9, 2018

Department of Psychology

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DePaul University

Chicago, IL

**Thesis Committee**

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### **Biography**

Eric Peist was born in New York City, New York, March 27, 1991. He graduated from Somers High School and received his Bachelor of Arts degree with honors from University of Michigan in 2013. Eric began the program in clinical and community psychology at DePaul University in 2015 and hopes to have a career that combines research and clinical work.

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### **Abstract**

Teacher turnover is a significant issue in education, creating great economic cost and affecting students in the form of academic performance and instructional continuity. While many factors impact turnover, the effects of violence directed against teachers have rarely been explored. Violence directed against teachers has been linked to negative outcomes, such as emotional distress and professional disengagement. The construct of empowerment, or disempowerment, can help researchers to better understand the relationship between teacher-directed violence and teacher turnover, allowing for an ecological approach that explores the context around teachers' experiences of violence. The current study uses mixed methods to analyze this relationship, based on teachers' responses to an anonymous, online survey assessing teachers' experiences with violence. The first set of analyses is based on the quantitative, closed-ended survey questions and includes 2,347 teachers who reported experiencing at least one incident of teacher-directed violence and described their worst incident in a series of open-ended questions. Logistic regression models were used to determine the impact of the type of perpetrator (i.e. student, parent, colleague, administrator) and level of administrative support during their worst incident on whether the teacher left the position or requested a transfer following the incident. Administrative support during the incident was also examined as a moderator of the relation between the number of different types of perpetrators involved and requesting a transfer and/or leaving the position. The second set of analyses is based on open-ended survey questions and includes 403 teachers who mentioned leaving the profession, transferring from their positions, or retiring in their responses. Content analysis was utilized to determine the extent to which Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions of teacher empowerment (status, autonomy, decision-making, impact, self-efficacy, and professional development) apply to teachers experiencing incidents of

violence. The factors contributing to a sense of disempowerment around teachers' experiences of violence were also examined, along with how incidents of violence influence teachers' professional decisions. Quantitative results demonstrated that, compared to other perpetrators, having an administrator perpetrator during teachers' worst incidents of violence was associated with teachers being more likely to request a transfer and leave their positions. High levels of administrative support during the incident decreased the likelihood that teachers would request transfers and leave their positions. Administrative support was not a significant moderator for the relationship between the total number of perpetrator types and requesting a transfer/leaving the position. Content analysis demonstrated that teachers were low on multiple teacher empowerment dimensions that include status, autonomy and decision-making, and impact. Safety, policy, administrative responses to violent incidents and community circumstances beyond the school influenced teachers' disempowerment and contributed to teachers wanting to make professional changes. Incidents in which lack of administrative support was described as its own form of victimization and the compilation of incidents over time illustrated how violence can lead to disempowerment and turnover. Results suggest that incidents of violence create unsafe environments that often leave teachers feeling disempowered. Further, teacher-directed violence and disempowerment contribute to teachers' professional decisions related to turnover. Administrators play a large role in teacher disempowerment and turnover, especially through the level of support they provide to teachers in addressing incidents of violence. Increasing autonomy and decision-making power for teachers, as well as increasing status and respect for the profession, may increase teachers' desire to remain in the profession and their schools. The implications for research, practice, and policy are discussed.

## **Introduction**

Approximately half a million teachers move from their positions or leave the teaching profession in the U.S. every year, and this turnover costs the U.S. more than \$2 billion annually (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Furthermore, teacher turnover and the lack of properly staffed classrooms have been linked to poor student performance outcomes in English language arts (ELA) and math (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Teacher turnover is determined by total attrition (teachers leaving or dropping out of the profession) and mobility (transferring to other schools). According to data from the Teacher Follow-Up Survey, a large national survey of K-12 teachers, 8% of public school teachers transferred to another school and 8% left teaching altogether during their next academic year (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). Overall turnover was slightly higher for new teachers (1-3 years of teaching experience) than for teachers with more experience. Regarding new teachers, 13% transferred to another school and 7% left teaching altogether (Goldring et al., 2014). While teacher attrition and mobility increased nationally from 1991-1992 to 2004-2005, turnover has leveled off and remained stable from 2004-2005 to 2012-2013 at approximately 16% (Goldring et al., 2014). Despite little difference in turnover rates during this period of time, attrition and mobility continue to cost school districts immensely and negatively affect academic performance. Because of the significant costs and affects on student performance, research has focused on teachers' reasons for turnover and how it can be prevented. Violence directed against teachers has rarely been a part of this discussion, but may play an important role in teachers' professional decisions.

## **Teacher Turnover and Retention**

Many teachers leave their positions within their first couple of years of employment, especially in schools with poor academic performance (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff,

2005). Turnover appears to disproportionately affect school districts with more minority students and lower overall performance (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004); thus, turnover may be a factor in the growing achievement gap in the U.S. There is debate as to whether all teacher attrition is negative (Borman & Dowling, 2008), but an increasing body of work supports the notion that high teacher turnover rates lie at the root of many education problems.

Recent research has provided evidence for issues regarding teacher retention as an individual school problem, as opposed to one only relevant to school districts in high poverty neighborhoods. While teacher retention has often been thought to be a problem more related to low-income school districts with a large proportion of minority students, not every low-income district suffers from high rates of teacher attrition and mobility (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). Furthermore, there are schools in high-income, suburban areas that are frequently dealing with the negative effects of teacher attrition and mobility, suggesting that specific school-related factors may have a larger impact on retention than neighborhood (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). This research illustrates that there is a need to acknowledge teacher turnover and retention as a societal issue that can affect any community.

Teacher attrition can be quite harmful to a school in terms of student academic achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2013), cost (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014), and instructional continuity (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). Despite the documented negative effects of turnover, some literature has argued that attrition and turnover rates are not as troublesome as they are often reported (Harris & Adams, 2007; Henke, Zahn, & Carroll, 2001). One study compared the rates of teacher turnover to turnover in professions similar to teaching, based on their required education and qualification levels and/or type of “caretaking” involved. Overall, the rate of teacher turnover was not significantly different from the rates of turnover in

nursing, social work, and accounting (Harris & Adams, 2007). Stinebrickner (2002) argues that a large portion of teacher turnover is due to family situations, such as pregnancy, that are nonspecific to the teaching profession. In addition, much of the literature does not acknowledge that a significant number of teachers who leave the profession within their first five years of service choose to return (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). When determining turnover rates it is necessary to recognize that there are teachers who leave the profession altogether and teachers who move to other schools and districts. These two groups of teachers may have different reasons for their decisions and may affect schools differently. Even though some studies find that turnover rates in teaching are comparable to other professions and not inherently problematic, the majority of literature recognizes teacher turnover as a major issue in education (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

Ingersoll (2001) utilizes an organizational analysis to describe the “revolving door” of teachers, which involves teachers leaving their positions at high rates for a variety of reasons that do not include retirement, such as dissatisfaction and pursuing other careers. Some reasons for dissatisfaction include inadequate support from administrators, poor salary, and student discipline problems. In public schools in urban, high poverty communities, an unsafe environment is also frequently cited (Ingersoll, 2001). Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) provide evidence that large-scale improvements to organization, management, and funding of national public schools are necessary to mitigate the problem of teacher shortages. Until these issues are addressed, schools will need a greater supply of qualified educators to make up for the “revolving door” (Boe et al., 2008). There is general agreement that changes to the education system are essential for attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers. Violence directed against teachers may contribute to teachers’ motives for leaving, as victimization incidents can

cause significant distress (Moon, Morash, Jang, & Jeong, 2015). Exploring how violence directed against teachers relates to teachers' decisions to leave the profession or their positions will provide more clarity around teachers' experiences, factors that contribute to their decisions to leave, and innovative strategies for teacher retention.

### **Teacher-Directed Violence**

Teacher-directed violence has often been overlooked in the research on school violence, but recent literature has demonstrated that violence directed against teachers is a significant issue that can affect teacher retention and recruitment (Espelage et al., 2013; McMahon, Martinez, Reddy, Espelage, Anderman, 2017; Reddy et al., 2013). While multiple definitions have been utilized to describe teacher-directed violence, the term often refers to a range of actions directed towards teachers that break school rules and negatively affect the school environment (Espelage et al., 2013). These actions include both forms of physical violence, such as assault and weapon use, and nonphysical forms of violence, such as threats, damage to property, and verbal abuse. Some studies have illustrated a troubling prevalence of violence directed against teachers. One survey of Minnesota educators determined that on average, in a given year, 8.3% of teachers reported physical assault and 38.4% of teachers reported acts of nonphysical violence such as verbal abuse, threats, and bullying (Gerberich et al., 2011). Another study examining Los Angeles City public schools explored data from the Employers' Reports of Occupational Injury or Illness in California and found that during 1996-1997 school year, 22% of the surveyed schools experienced at least one case of teacher assault and approximately one third of these schools had more than one case of teacher injury. Government reporting of these situations probably underestimates the actual number of assaults and violent acts in the workplace, as many avoid writing formal reports or complaints (Casteel, Peek-Asa, & Limbos, 2007).



In a national survey of K-12 teachers from 48 states, on which the current study is based, 80% of teachers reported at least one instance of teacher-directed violence (McMahon et al., 2014). Approximately 75% reported at least one instance of verbal harassment and 44% reported at least one instance of physical violence during the current or past school year, and 94% of the teachers who reported an incident reported victimization perpetrated by students (McMahon et al., 2014). A number of negative outcomes, such as emotional distress (Moon et al., 2015), decreased well-being (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007) and professional disengagement (Galand, Lecocq, & Philippot, 2007) have been associated with violence directed against teachers, emphasizing the widespread effects violence has on teachers.

While much of the research on violence directed against teachers and victimization focuses on student perpetrators, teacher-directed violence is also committed by parents and colleagues (Martinez, McMahon, Espelage, Anderman, Reddy, & Sanchez, 2016; McMahon et al., 2017). A recent estimate reported that 37% of teachers reported at least one incident of teacher-directed violence perpetrated by a parent and 21% reported at least one incident perpetrated by a colleague in the past or current year (McMahon et al., 2014). Further, low levels of administrative support in dealing with teachers' most upsetting incidents may be related to experiencing multiple types of violence by colleagues and students (Martinez et al., 2016). Administrators can also be perpetrators of teacher-directed violence. One study determined that principals' abusive behaviors, including intimidation, lack of support, and favoring some teachers over others, can lead to teachers wanting to leave their current positions (Blase, Blase, & Du, 2008).

Because violence directed against teachers is so prevalent, it behooves researchers to address this type of violence in the context of teacher turnover. Experiences of teacher-directed

violence are stressful for teachers, and it is possible that these experiences are associated with difficulties in teacher retention in U.S. schools. School violence has been demonstrated to impact teacher decisions to leave their positions (Smith & Smith, 2006), yet violence directed against teachers is a pervasive problem that has not received attention in the turnover and retention literature (McMahon et al., 2014). Teacher-directed violence, in many forms, may impact teachers' professional decisions, but there is limited research on how these incidents ultimately impact turnover and retention.

### **Retaining to Sustaining Teachers**

Schools that offer a supportive administration (Lee & Nie, 2014), provide good working conditions (Loeb et al., 2005), and produce a positive school climate (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009) are likely to have teachers who are satisfied in their positions and want to stay. Research indicates that strong school leadership may be especially influential in empowering teachers, as teachers are able to demonstrate more control and agency over their classroom, feel as if their work is meaningful, and have a voice in school decisions (Reitzug, 1994). Working in an empowering organization might lead to greater organizational commitment and a stronger affinity for the school and its leadership (Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004).

Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2012) suggest that research focused on retaining teachers, while necessary, is missing an important part of the issue. Researchers must explore not only why teachers choose to leave their positions, which often ignores important aspects of the teaching experience, but also what conditions and contexts allow teachers to make a positive impact and gain meaning from their profession. In this sense, these authors advocate for an increased focus on sustaining teachers rather than retaining teachers (Schaefer et al., 2012). When teachers are provided an environment that fosters professional development and

meaningful work, ensuring the best teachers remain in the profession will become an easier task. Gaining a better understanding of teachers' experiences with violence, including their feelings, attitudes, and perspectives on the issue should lead to solutions. Empowerment offers an avenue for exploring the issue of teacher turnover in this context, as it offers a strengths-based approach to understanding the current perspectives of teachers. A sense of disempowerment may contribute to teachers' decisions to leave their profession. Understanding their decisions through this construct could lead to solutions that directly address disempowering incidents of violence and retention.

### **Empowerment Theory**

Empowerment is a complicated concept, as various forms and definitions of the term have been utilized throughout psychology literature, the media, and in policy. Keys, McConnell, Motley, Liao, and McAuliff (2017), in an attempt to effectively conceptualize empowerment, identify four domains that can be useful for organizing empowerment research and applications. These domains include level of analysis, focal processes and outcomes, the nature of power, and context, each of which helps to provide a framework for exploring empowerment. Relating to teachers' retention, it is a valuable framework for exploring the multiple levels of analysis at play in teachers' choices.

Empowerment is studied as a process as opposed to an end goal (Keys et al., 2017), which is a critical idea when studying the issue of teacher turnover. The education system and associated policy is frequently changing, so an empowerment perspective on retention can account for the fluid educational climate that affects teachers. For the process of empowerment to be effective, understanding the distribution of power and the specific contexts are essential (Keys et al., 2017), especially in school settings where there are multiple stakeholders who

possess different levels of power. Because experiences of violence directed against teachers are inherently disempowering, exploring potential protective factors that might counteract or prevent these disempowering incidents and ensure teachers stay and thrive in their positions is necessary. However, before widespread empowerment solutions for teachers experiencing violence in their positions are implemented, researchers must better understand how incidents of violence contribute to teacher perceptions of disempowerment. An in-depth exploration into empowerment on the individual level is relevant to the experiences of teachers in these challenging situations, as teachers must often cope with incidents of violence and the feelings they produce on this level.

**Psychological empowerment.** Psychological empowerment, which is often considered empowerment on the individual level of analysis, can include constructs such as sense of control, critical awareness, and action needed to achieve one's goals and affect outcomes. Despite its relation to the individual level of analysis, psychological empowerment is very closely connected to factors at other levels of analysis, such as the organizational, community, and societal levels (Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Eisman, 2017). A psychological empowerment perspective that attends to other levels of analysis and environmental factors may be important for assisting teachers in gaining empowerment in their own classrooms and on a larger organizational level. Because of the feelings of disempowerment teachers who consider leaving the profession may be experiencing, psychological empowerment provides an opportunity to directly address issues related to violence in the classroom that could contribute to teachers' lack of decision-making input in the school, autonomy in the classroom, and ability to impact students. An increase in psychological empowerment may impact the decisions teachers make regarding their futures in the profession.

**Relational empowerment.** The relational level of empowerment has consistently been neglected in the empowerment literature, yet empowerment processes are often embedded within relationships (Christens, 2012). Complex social networks and relationships between teachers and administrators, teachers and parents, and teachers and students directly apply to the idea of relational empowerment, which asserts the importance of examining power dynamics and interactions between different groups of people (Christens, 2012). Teachers who perceive their administrators' behaviors as more empowering may be more likely to feel empowered in their positions in the sense that they take more meaning from their work, have greater autonomy, and impact their school environments. Greater empowerment in these domains can lead to professional and organizational commitment (Lee & Nie, 2014). Examining a teacher's relationships in the profession with regard to empowerment may be valuable in determining how (dis)empowerment influences teachers' decisions to stay or leave the profession. Focusing on teacher's perspectives of relationships in regard to incidents of violence in their schools may offer explanations for professional decisions beyond the individual level.

**Organizational empowerment.** In addition to empowerment on individual and relational levels of analysis, empowerment can be studied from an organizational level (Keys et al., 2017). Maton (2008) suggests that organizational empowerment can refer to the methods in which an organization is able to successfully empower its members and others or to the organization itself becoming empowered. This organizational approach to empowerment can be directly applied to schools. For example, a school may be empowering in the sense that it makes its teachers, students, and parents empowered, but a school itself may also be empowering and empowered in the way it is able to function. Power imbalances among stakeholders in schools may impact the disempowerment of teachers (Bartunek & Keys, 1982). Bartunek and Keys

(1982) specifically explored an organization development intervention meant to equalize power among teachers and administrators, demonstrating that teachers' involvement in decision-making and satisfaction with administrators can make the power imbalance in schools more equal.

Peterson and Zimmerman (2004) created a framework for organizational empowerment by developing three major components. The intraorganizational component of empowerment refers to supporting organization members. The interorganizational component refers to capability of organizations to form coalitions with other organizations. The extraorganizational component refers to how well an organization is able to effect change outside of the organization and into the community. Schools may be high or low on any of these components, and aspects of organizational components may directly impact whether a teacher chooses to stay at a school, transfer from that school, or leave the teaching profession altogether. While intraorganizational empowerment may be most directly related to teacher retention and turnover, the other components developed by Peterson and Zimmerman (2004) also affect an organization's members. Each of these levels of analysis in which empowerment has been explored interact with one another to influence teachers' experiences.

**Teacher empowerment framework.** Teacher empowerment is a valuable concept in education as it has been associated with professional commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (Bogler & Somech, 2004), as well as job satisfaction (Zemblyas & Papanastasiou, 2005). Short and Rinehart (1992), based on psychological empowerment, investigated the empowerment of teachers and determined that teacher empowerment was comprised of six dimensions. These dimensions include status and respect from others, autonomy, involvement in decision-making within schools, ability to impact others (i.e. students, other teachers, school outcomes), opportunity for professional growth and development, and self-efficacy. An

empowerment framework that centers on increasing teachers' voice, autonomy, and decision-making may be particularly valuable for assisting teachers in challenging situations and retaining the most talented and qualified educators. The dimensions outlined by Short and Rinehart (1992) are also related to relational empowerment in that teachers must navigate a complex network of relationships to succeed in these dimensions. Organizational empowerment is associated with these dimensions in that some schools may provide more conducive organizational contexts for attaining these aspects of teacher empowerment. For example, teachers who have greater autonomy determining their curricula demonstrate less job-related stress (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Furthermore, autonomy, which is related to decision-making and control over conduct standards in the classroom, is related to greater sense of empowerment among teachers (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Empowerment has been studied across many settings and groups, as well as on multiple ecological levels of analysis. Therefore empowerment is comprehensive enough to examine a wide range of factors on individual, relational, and organizational levels that impact teacher turnover in the U.S.

Teacher turnover has received a great deal of attention, but has not specifically been studied with teacher-directed violence and an empowerment framework. Since Ingersoll's (2001) study, which indicated that teachers were leaving the profession due to a multitude of organizational factors, turnover and retention have focused on determining which of these factors explain these decisions. Understanding these factors through an empowerment lens might provide insight into how these factors affect teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and professional decisions.

**Factors Related to Teacher Turnover**

Teachers' decisions to leave their professions are related to factors involving the students in a given school and occupational factors that include salary and working environment (Loeb et al., 2005). Schools with students who are predominantly of a racial minority, low socioeconomic status, and low academic performance are associated with greater levels of teacher turnover (Boyd et al., 2005; Hanushek et al., 2004). When including working conditions into the analysis of teacher turnover, the impact of individual student factors on teachers' decisions decreased, indicating that both individual (student-level) and organizational (school-level) variables play important roles in turnover (Loeb et al., 2005). Teacher characteristics are additional factors that contribute to teachers' decisions to leave the profession or transfer to other schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

**Individual-level factors in teacher turnover.** Certain characteristics that include demographics, effectiveness, and qualifications may put teachers at greater risk of leaving their current teaching positions or the profession in general (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Turnover and attrition appear to occur at higher rates for new or young teachers than for experienced or older teachers who are not at a retirement age (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). A statewide study of Texas public school teachers found higher rates of turnover within teachers' first couple years of teaching compared to teachers in their prime (11-30 years of experience), but rates increased after 30 years of experience when teachers were closer to retirement (Hanushek et al., 2004). Overall, the literature on teacher experience with regard to attrition is inconclusive, as some studies argue that more teaching experience leads to greater rates of attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008). According to two meta-analyses, one of 34 studies and another of 46 studies on teacher attrition and retention, female teachers are more likely to be lost



to attrition than male teachers; however, not all research has corroborated this finding (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006). White teachers, young teachers, and married teachers with a child all tend to be at higher risk of attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008), while science and math teachers specifically have been found to have higher rates of attrition than teachers of other subjects (Ingersol, 2001). Determining how these factors may impact turnover and sense of empowerment in the school context is a valuable next step.

Going beyond demographics, teachers who demonstrate greater ability may also be at higher risk of attrition (Guarino et al., 2006). There has been mixed evidence regarding the effects of having a graduate degree on decisions to leave (Guarino et al., 2006), but teachers with a certificate were less likely to leave (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2009) demonstrate that the effectiveness of teachers (as measured by student test scores) in their first few years may play a role in who leaves the profession in public elementary and middle schools in New York City. While teachers in schools with low-performing students are significantly more likely than teachers in schools with high-performing students to leave their schools in their first two years of teaching, teacher ability to raise achievement of students in both low- and high-performing schools impacts decisions to leave (Boyd et al., 2009). Specifically, teachers who were less effective at producing higher student math scores were more likely to transfer to another school or leave the New York City school system when controlling for the overall performance of the school (Boyd et al., 2009). One trend illustrates that ineffective teachers in low-performing schools have a higher likelihood of leaving the profession, while teachers with low effectiveness in high-performing schools are more likely to transfer to other schools. Additionally, the highly effective teachers who transfer are likely to move into wealthier schools with more resources, fewer minority students, and students with

higher performance, which may perpetuate the achievement gap (Boyd et al., 2009). These teacher-level factors, that include demographics and overall effectiveness, can impact a teacher's professional decisions, but they do not explain the entirety of turnover.

**School-level factors in teacher turnover.** A number of school-level factors are associated with teachers' desire to leave or stay in the profession such as school resources, school climate, administrations, and administrative support. Teachers' salaries in a particular school as well as the facilities and resources provided to teachers, perceived control in decision-making, and relationships with administrators may be more important than a district's student demographics (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). Organizational-level factors, when taken into account, significantly reduce the magnitude of the effects student characteristics have on turnover (Loeb et al., 2005).

School resources such as teachers' salaries and amount of instructional spending, (Borman & Dowling, 2008), working conditions (Loeb et al., 2005), and school characteristics (Ingersol, 2001) impact teachers' professional decisions. Teacher salaries in surrounding schools and districts relative to a teacher's current school can impact whether teachers choose to stay in their positions (Imazeki, 2005). Overall, higher teacher salaries suggest less teacher turnover (Loeb et al., 2005). The effects of salaries on teachers may be related to dimensions of teacher empowerment established by Short and Rinehart (1994), including teacher status and impact, as teachers who are not properly compensated for their work may not feel as if they are respected or capable of impacting the schools they work in. Consistent with this work, Struyven and Vanthournout (2014) determined that a teacher's future prospects in a position, which include future earnings and teaching contracts, served as one of the main reasons for teacher attrition. Large classroom sizes (i.e. over 33 students) have also been associated with teacher turnover

(Loeb et al., 2005), and the amount of work in the profession unrelated to teaching influences teachers' decisions to retire early (Van Droogenbroeck & Spruyt, 2014). These factors relate to Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions of autonomy and professional growth, as teachers who perceive that they are using their time for menial tasks may not believe they have control over their work or have the ability to grow as better teachers. Each of these factors relates to working conditions, demonstrating that when working conditions are acceptable and salaries are fair, teachers are more likely to remain in the profession. These factors may impact teachers' sense of empowerment in their positions, providing incentive to continue their work as teachers in their school districts.

School climate, which encompasses a vast array of school-level characteristics, is utilized to describe the overall quality and atmosphere of a school and the collection of experiences of the students, teachers, administrators, and other staff involved (Cohen et al., 2009). Safety, organization, discipline policy, and relationships are some of the components that contribute to school climate (Cohen et al., 2009), and school climate is positively related to students' academic achievement (e.g., Ruiz & McMahon, 2018). A positive school climate is associated with teacher retention, while a negative school climate is associated with greater burnout and negative reactions to the position in both general (Cohen et al., 2009) and special education (Billingsley, 2004; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). School climate has also been demonstrated to relate to students' problem behaviors over time, some of which include violence (Reaves, McMahon, Duffy, & Ruiz, 2018). Because a school's safety is necessary in developing a positive school climate, violence directed against teachers, which directly contributes to an unsafe school environment, may be a factor in teachers' professional decisions. Safety and other aspects of school climate could impact teachers' empowerment in all six dimensions of Short and

Rinehart's (1992) framework, as a school with a poor climate influencing multiple components of the organization could have wide-ranging effects on teachers as key stakeholders.

A school's administration plays a valuable role in determining teachers' decisions to stay in the profession (Boyd et al., 2011), and specifically, trust between teachers and principals may be key in limiting burnout (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014). In one study based on the Schools and Staffing Survey teacher questionnaire that examined public school teachers in the U.S., high levels of support from administrators predicted job satisfaction, which in turn was a strong predictor of intent to continue teaching (Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011). Administrative support as well as positive relationships with colleagues and parents can relate to teachers' job satisfaction and sense of belonging, while time pressure associated with the job and discipline issues relate to disruptive student behavior correlate with emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Lower job satisfaction and higher emotional exhaustion have been associated with greater motivation to leave teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), indicating that low quality relationships with administrators can contribute to decisions to leave teaching or transfer. The association between poor teacher-administrator relationships and potential teacher turnover can be explained through a lens of relational empowerment. This includes collaborative competence and the ability to facilitate others' empowerment (Christens, 2012). Administrators who are able to form relationships that promote solidarity and collaboration as well as facilitate the empowerment of teachers may influence teachers' satisfaction with their profession and positions (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; Reitzug, 1994). More specifically, strong relationships may prevent burnout and promote ability to cope with incidents of teacher-directed violence.

## Current Study

Teacher-directed violence is an issue that has the potential to negatively impact teachers' decisions to leave the profession or transfer from their positions, but this type of violence has not been studied with regards to turnover. Individual and organizational level factors contribute to teacher turnover, and turnover remains a costly problem that can negatively impact education. The violence experienced by teachers may be a significant factor in these professional decisions. Using empowerment to explore multiple levels of analysis allows for a unique perspective on examining how violence may affect teachers' decisions, as issues of empowerment and disempowerment relate to many of the challenges teachers face in fluid school systems with various stakeholders.

**Hypotheses and research questions.** The current study will utilize both quantitative and qualitative data from a national survey on violence directed against teachers. Quantitative data will be utilized to explore four sets of hypotheses: 1a) When teachers report an administrator perpetrator for their worst incidents of violence, taking into account the presence of other perpetrators (e.g. students, parents or family members, and colleagues), teachers are more likely to *request transfers* after the incidents. b) Teachers who report lower levels of administrative support during their worst incidents of violence (compared to those with higher levels of administrative support) are more likely to *request transfers* after the incidents. 2a) When teachers report an administrator perpetrator for their worst incidents of violence, taking into account the presence of other perpetrators (e.g. students, parents or family members, and colleagues), teachers are more likely to *leave their positions* after the incidents. b) Teachers who report lower levels of administrative support during their worst incidents of violence (compared to those with higher levels of administrative support) are more likely to *leave their positions* after the

incidents. 3a) Teachers who report a greater number of perpetrator types (viz., students, parents or family members, colleagues, and administrators) for their worst incidents will be more likely to *request transfers* after the incidents. b) Level of perceived administrative support (high versus low) during teachers' worst incidents of violence is proposed to moderate the relation between the number of total types of perpetrators involved in incidents of teacher-directed violence and *requesting transfers* following their worst incidents of violence. That is, the relationship between the total number of different types of perpetrators involved in teachers' worst incidents and *requesting transfers* for teachers who experience low levels of administrative support will be stronger than the relationship for teachers who experience high levels of administrative support.

4a) Teachers who report a greater number of perpetrator types (viz., students, parents or family members, colleagues, and administrators) for their worst incidents will be more likely to *leave their positions* after the incidents. b) Level of perceived administrative support (high versus low) during teachers' worst incidents of violence is proposed to moderate the relation between the number of total types of perpetrators involved in incidents of teacher-directed violence and leaving their positions following their worst incidents of violence. That is, the relationship between the total number of different types of perpetrators involved in teachers' worst incident and *leaving their positions* for teachers who experience low levels of administrative support will be stronger than the relationship for teachers who experience high levels of administrative support.

Qualitative data from open-ended questions about teachers' worst victimization experience will explore the following research questions: 1) How do Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions of teacher empowerment apply to teachers who have experienced teacher-directed violence and are considering transferring, retiring, or leaving the profession? 2) What factors

contribute to a sense of disempowerment around teachers thinking about or deciding to leave their positions or the profession? 3) How do incidents of teacher-directed violence influence teachers' decisions to transfer, retire, or leave the profession?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Data was collected from a web-based, anonymous survey created by the American Psychological Association (APA) Classroom Violence Directed Against Teachers Task Force. Some survey items were selected from other studies (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005). There were 2,422 teachers who responded to the survey and reported their worst victimization incident during the current or past year in an open-ended question (71% of teachers who took the survey). The sample for quantitative analyses fell to 2,347 teachers due to missing data on variables of interest. These participants taught in pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms and were from across the U.S., spanning 47 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. All grades from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> were well represented (17.9-26.5%), but only 7.8% of teachers taught pre-K. The majority taught in traditional public schools (94.2%). The average age for the sample was 46.49 years old. The sample on average had been teaching for 16.82 years and was majority female (84.2%). In addition, the sample was mostly White (81.7%) followed by African American (6.6%), Latinx (3.9%) and Other/Multiracial (3.6%). Teachers also came from a range of community settings: urban (48.5%), suburban (34.3%) and rural (17.1%). A total of 52.4% held a master's degree or higher. These demographics are consistent with national averages (The National Center for Education Information, 2011).

Responses to open-ended questions were examined with broader criteria, so as to cast a wider net over different forms of teacher turnover (i.e. going beyond the quantitative questions

about requesting a transfer or leaving). Qualitative coding produced a number of codes related to turnover that included “position changes”, “transfers”, “retiring from teaching,” and “leaving the profession.” Teachers received these codes if they were considering or followed through with one of these types of turnover after their worst incidents of violence (codes listed in the Appendix). All teachers who received at least one of these codes were examined. There were 448 participants who met these criteria and were included in the qualitative analyses. Some teachers were not included in the analyses due to their brevity and lack of information necessary for coding (13 teachers) while other teachers were removed because they mentioned that their interest in leaving, transferring, or retiring was not related to the incident of victimization (32 teachers). The final subset used for qualitative analyses included 403 teachers. The demographics of this subset are similar to the larger sample in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, and experience. Teachers were largely female (83.9%) and White (80.6%) and included pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers from 37 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The great majority of teachers also came from public schools (93.1%) and about half held a master’s degree or higher (53.4%).

## **Measures**

**Quantitative.** The quantitative analyses utilized a question for the independent variable that asks about the perpetrators of violence during the teacher’s worst incident of victimization. The question asks, “Thinking of this incident that you just described, who did this to you? Please answer ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ or ‘NA-Never experienced an incident’ for each option.” The perpetrator options included “Male student,” “Female student,” “Male parent/male family member of a student,” “Female parent/female family member of a student,” “Male colleague,” “Female colleague,” “Male administrator,” “Female administrator,” and “Other.” For each of these nine



categories, teachers' responses were dummy coded so 1 was equivalent to "yes, this type of perpetrator was involved in my worst incident," and 0 was equivalent to "no, this type of perpetrator was not involved in my worst incident." For the first two hypotheses, the gender of each perpetrator was collapsed into one distinct category for each of the perpetrator types (e.g. Was there a student perpetrator?). For the third hypothesis, a continuous variable for the number of types of perpetrator was created. Each "yes" response from a teacher was added to create a number that described how many types of perpetrators were involved. The maximum value was 9, a yes for each category of perpetrator and gender. Administrative support served as another independent variable and was assessed through a question that asks, "How supportive did you think your administration was in dealing with this incident?" This variable was measured on a scale from 1, "not at all supportive" to 6, "extremely supportive." Higher values indicate greater support from administrators. For all analyses, administrative support was collapsed into two categories, one for high support (e.g. an answer of 4 to 6 on the scale) and one for low support (e.g. an answer of 1 to 3 on the scale) because the majority of responses were at the extremes. In the analyses for hypotheses three and four, administrative support was used as a moderator of the relation between the number of types of perpetrators involved in a teacher's worst incident of teacher-directed violence and whether the teacher subsequently requested a transfer or left the position.

Two questions with yes/no response options were utilized for dependent variables. Each of these items is asked in relation to a teacher's most upsetting victimization incident. One question states, "After the incident, did you leave that teaching position?" Because this survey was distributed to current teachers, this question measures whether a teacher left the position at the school where the incident took place, and not whether a teacher left the profession. The

second question asks, “After the incident, did you request a transfer to another school?” assessing teachers’ intentions to leave their positions and school by beginning the process to leave rather than actual turnover that had already taken place.

The following demographic variables were examined in relation to requesting a transfer and leaving the position in preliminary analyses and taken into account in subsequent analyses when significant: gender, race/ethnicity, grade levels taught, number of years teaching, and school-community setting (e.g. rural, suburban or urban). Because age and number of years teaching were highly correlated ( $r = .73$ ), only age was used in quantitative analyses.

**Qualitative.** For the qualitative analyses, responses to a series of four open-ended questions about “the most upsetting incident that happened” when the teacher was “the target of verbal or physical aggression or intimidation” at his or her school were explored. Specifically, there was a focus on responses to two questions in determining the subset of teachers that were used for the study: “How did this incident impact your view of your current teaching position?” and “Please provide any other information that may be important to note in the incident described.” Both of these questions, the first of which examines the impact of the event, are the areas of the survey where teacher mobility and attrition were most discussed. While there was no specific question that pulls for information on teacher mobility and attrition, these two open-ended response questions provided a space for teachers to voice their opinions on future professional decisions. When the teachers who mentioned turnover-related codes were identified, all four of the open-ended questions received attention to create an overall picture of the teachers’ experiences.

The data were previously coded to reflect teacher perspectives (approach to coding is described below), including teachers expressing turnover intentions and actual turnover

decisions. “Position change” was coded when a teacher expressed a desire to change positions or mentioned a position change. “Transfer” was coded when a teacher stated he or she wanted to transfer or did transfer to a different school, grade level, or district due to the incident.

“Retirement” was coded when a teacher mentioned he or she wanted to retire to get out of the profession or was happy that he or she was retiring soon. “Leave” was coded when a teacher explicitly stated a desire to leave, being in the process of leaving, or having already left the teaching profession altogether. All of the open-ended response questions for participants who received one of these codes were reviewed to understand the specific incident that led to these responses related to teacher turnover.

### **Procedures**

The survey data was collected for a study to assess the extent to which teachers report violence in schools and the corresponding individual and contextual factors related to the violence they experience (McMahon et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2016). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Illinois approved the study. The APA Center for Psychology in Schools and Education (CPSE) was responsible for survey data collection. The CPSE collaborated with the National Education Association (NEA), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and individual states’ associations of education to distribute the survey nationally and encourage teacher participation, regardless of whether teachers experienced violence. Recruitment occurred from January to May of 2010.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

**Quantitative.** Previous research has used both binomial and multinomial logistic regression to explain the effects of individual and organizational factors on teacher turnover (Kukla-Acevedo, 2011). Logistic regression was utilized to examine the main hypotheses for the

quantitative portion of the study based on Agresti's (2002) approach to building logistic regression models. Univariate analyses were first used to determine covariates of significance. Logistic regression models were explored with the variables of interest. Interaction effects were explored next. Preliminary analyses examined demographics including gender and race/ethnicity as well as other characteristics of the teachers in the sample such as age, grades taught, and school-community setting. The options for race/ethnicity were White, Latinx/Hispanic, African American, and other. Because the number of teachers who identify as Asian was small (approximately 1%), this group was included in the other category. The grades taught by teachers were included to explore whether there were differences in experiences across grade levels. School-community setting was included to determine if there were differences based on urban, small urban, suburban, and rural school settings. Each of these demographic variables was explored in relation to the two quantitative dependent variables (i.e. requesting a transfer and leaving the position after the incident) through logistic regression. Demographic variables that were significantly related to the dependent variables were included in subsequent logistic regression models as controls. All variables were assessed for multicollinearity and potential outliers.

***Hypotheses 1.*** The first hypothesis predicted that having administrator perpetrators and less administrative support (during teachers' worst incidents of violence), taking other perpetrators into account, increases the likelihood that teachers *request transfers* after the incidents. A binomial multiple logistic regression model was used because the dependent variable (i.e. requesting a transfer) is dichotomous (i.e. yes/no). Part a of this hypothesis was explored by including all dichotomous perpetrator type variables (e.g. student, parent or family member, colleague, and administrator) in the model to determine if administrator perpetrators of

teachers' worst incidents increase the probability that teachers request transfers. Part b of this hypothesis was addressed by including administrative support during teachers' worst incidents as an independent variable in the model to determine if low support increases the probability that teachers request transfers.

**Hypothesis 2.** The second hypothesis predicted that having administrator perpetrators and less administrative support (during teachers' worst incidents of violence), taking other perpetrators into account, increases the likelihood that teachers *leave their positions* after the incidents. A binomial multiple logistic regression model was used because the dependent variable (i.e. leaving the position) is dichotomous (i.e. yes/no). Part a of this hypothesis was explored by including all dichotomous perpetrator type variables (e.g. student, parent or family member, colleague, and administrator) in the model to determine if administrator perpetrators of teachers' worst incidents increase the probability that teachers leave their positions. Part b of this hypothesis was addressed by including administrative support during teachers' worst incidents as an independent variable in the model to determine if low support increases the probability that teachers will leave their positions.

**Hypothesis 3.** For Hypothesis 3, a moderated logistic regression model was utilized to determine if a) there is a main effect of the total number of perpetrator types (IV) involved on teachers *requesting transfers* after their worst incidents (DV) and b) administrative support moderates the relation between the total number of perpetrator types involved in teachers' worst incidents of teacher-directed violence and whether teachers request transfers after the incidents. The interaction between administrative support and number of perpetrators was added in the second step of the logistic regression to examine any added variance to the model beyond the main effects.

**Hypothesis 4.** For Hypothesis 4, a moderated logistic regression model was utilized to determine if a) there is a main effect of the total number of perpetrator types (IV) involved on teachers *leaving their positions* after their worst incidents (DV) and b) administrative support moderates the relation between the total number of perpetrator types involved in teachers' worst incidents of teacher-directed violence and whether teachers leave their positions after the incidents. The interaction between administrative support and number of perpetrators was added in the second step of the logistic regression to examine any added variance to the model.

**Qualitative.** Previous qualitative coding based on this survey involved creating a coding framework for the responses to open-ended questions and using a conventional content analysis approach to examining the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Conventional content analysis uses an inductive approach (Creswell, 2013) in exploring textual data to gain understanding and describe a phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Violence directed against teachers has not received significant attention in the education literature, so there is limited theory and research on this topic. Coding inductively allowed the method of developing codes to come from the data as opposed to imposing a guiding theory. A codebook was created for the open-ended questions through an iterative process of multiple stages (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process began with open coding in which coding team members determined themes individually across a random subset of teachers' responses to all four open-ended questions. Afterwards, the coding team developed, refined, and arranged the themes and subthemes discovered through consensus-based discussions. The coders included definitions, boundary criteria, and examples for each theme and subtheme in the codebook. Once there was a codebook draft for all 4 questions, the team coded and attained Cohen's kappa for each question individually, further editing and developing the themes as the questions were coded. Utilizing the codebook draft, coding team

members individually applied the codes to a subset of responses for the first question. The process of individual coding, consensus-based discussion and decision-making, and refinement of the hierarchical coding structure was repeated until there was coding saturation and there was strong agreement on the codes. Then, two coders coded the data and made changes to the codebook until they attained inter-rater reliability ( $\kappa = .80$ ) on approximately 10% of responses as recommended by Lacy & Riffe (1996). Kappa was calculated using the codes from the codebook relevant to the specific question. Once this reliability was established, the two coders each coded half of the responses in the given question according to the hierarchical coding structure. After kappa was achieved for the first question, the process of coding and refining the codebook was repeated for the second question until reliability was achieved on 10% of the data, and then this process was repeated for the third and fourth questions. Coding for projects utilizing data from this APA survey used QSR International's NVivo 10 Software (NVivo qualitative data analysis software; QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012). The current study will continue to analyze qualitative, open-ended responses using the same software.

Directed content analysis is an additional type of qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) that was used in tandem with conventional content analysis for the current study to evaluate the open-ended responses of teachers who mentioned position changes, transferring, retiring, and/or leaving the profession. Qualitative content analysis refers to a variety of research methods and approaches utilized to analyze text data, paying special attention to content and context regarding the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This form of analysis has the goal of understanding a particular phenomenon, but can use either deductive or inductive reasoning to describe the meaning of data or to develop themes from the data (Cho & Lee, 2014). Directed content analysis involves more of a deductive approach, as opposed to the inductive approach

used in conventional content analysis. Directed content analysis takes existing research into account and uses themes and categories extracted from theory that has already been explored. The current study further examined Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions of teacher empowerment within the context of teacher-directed violence. The study allowed for additional themes to come out of the data that helped explain teachers' professional decisions in the context of violence directed against teachers.

The first step in applying directed content analysis involves the identification of concepts that will frame the coding process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After data has been collected and is capable of being analyzed, researchers use codes based on prior theory to determine whether the theory is supported in this context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Based on Short and Rinehart's (1992) work, the dimensions examined were status, autonomy, involvement in decision-making, impact, opportunity for professional growth and development, and self-efficacy. These six categories informed how the researcher analyzed and comprehended the data, but additional codes related to multiple levels of empowerment were considered if they fit the data. An addition to the codebook for this subset of responses was created and refined as two coders completed consensus coding for small groups of responses. Once the two coders reached agreement on the codebook (e.g. Short and Rinehart's dimensions and additional codes that came out of the data), inter-rater reliability was attained ( $\kappa > .80$ ) for 10% of the responses included in this analysis. Coders achieved inter-rater reliability ( $\kappa > .80$ ) for each variable that was included in the additions to the codebook, as suggested by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2014). This qualitative approach to analysis assessed the extent to which an empowerment framework explains teachers' experiences related to turnover, and how disempowerment contributes to teachers' decisions in the context of violence. It allowed for additional themes to emerge outside of Short and



Rinehart's (1992) dimensions. Empowerment offers a lens to better understand incidents of teacher-directed violence and the potential effects they may have on teachers' professional decisions, as a teacher's sense of empowerment or disempowerment could impact teachers' attitudes and behaviors.

## **Results**

First, preliminary analyses were conducted to determine the extent to which demographic variables are related to the dependent variables. Next, quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted to provide insight on teachers' professional decisions in regards to teacher-directed violence. The results from quantitative analyses using logistic regression models are described first, followed by the results from qualitative analyses using content analysis.

### **Sample Characteristics**

Based on the larger sample used in the quantitative analyses (N=2,347), perpetrators of teachers' worst reported violent incidents vary, as 76.4% of teachers reported students as a perpetrator of violence, 28.5% reported parents/family members, 13.8% reported administrators, and 9.9% reported colleagues. Many teachers indicated that multiple perpetrators were involved with their worst incidents, with 34.4% of teachers reporting two or more perpetrators for their worst incident of violence. The majority of teachers reported that their administrators provided low levels of support (54.3%), while about 45.7% reported that their administrators provided high levels of support during their worst incidents. Approximately 8.5% of teachers (N=200) reported requesting transfers and 7.1% of teachers (N=166) reported leaving their positions after their worst incidents. There was significant overlap between these two variables as 84 teachers (3.6% of the sample) expressed that they both requested transfers and left their positions. Approximately 12% of the sample (N=282) indicated that they requested transfers, left their

positions, or did both. Teachers who received high administrative support, requested transfers 3.3% of the time and left their positions 3.1% of the time. Teachers who received low levels of administrative support, reported significantly more turnover (12.9% requested transfers and 10.4% left their positions).

### **Preliminary Analyses**

All assumptions for logistic regression were met. The dependent variable in all models was binary (Cohen & Cohen, 2003). Furthermore, each observation is independent of one another and there is low multicollinearity between predictor variables as variance inflation factors are below 10 (Cohen & Cohen, 2003). There generally is a need for a large sample size when running logistic regression, as it is important that each cell has more than 10 observations (Cohen & Cohen, 2003). Crosstabs were run across all categorical independent and dependent variables and all variables met this criterion. Because the sample size for the current study is large and crosstabs produces counts greater than 10 for each cell, logistic regression is an appropriate method of analysis.

Once it was determined that the assumptions for logistic regression were met, control variables were further explored to determine their relationship with the dependent variables. The control variables included gender, race/ethnicity, grade levels taught, age, and school-community setting (e.g. rural, suburban or urban). Two multiple logistic regressions, one with each dependent variable, revealed that most demographic and control variables were not associated with a teacher leaving his/her position or requesting a transfer after his/her worst experienced incident. Teacher's age was associated with a teacher being more likely to leave his/her position after the worst incident ( $\chi^2(1, N = 2325) = 4.8, p < .05$ ), so this variable was included in all subsequent regression models.

### **Missing Data**

For each independent binary variable that assessed whether a type of perpetrator was involved in the teacher's worst incident of violence, the teacher had the option to choose "No," "Yes," or "NA-Never experienced an incident." The teacher could also leave the question blank. A number of teachers chose the "NA-Never experienced an incident" response for one or more of the perpetrator types even though they indicated they had experienced an incident. For this reason, all "NA" responses were categorized as "No" responses so as to avoid an overestimate of "Yes" responses. The same answer options were included for the two dependent variables. Some teachers responded "NA" even though they had experienced an incident. These responses were also categorized as "No" responses to provide a conservative estimate on whether teachers requested transfers or left their positions. Teachers who skipped the turnover questions (DVs) but indicated they had experienced an incident of teacher-directed violence were considered missing data (e.g. 1% for leaving the position after the incident and 12% for requesting a transfer). The missing responses were also categorized as "No" responses for these analyses because they did not indicate the occurrence of leaving or transferring. To ensure that this would be appropriate, researchers ran all analyses with both the missing data using listwise deletion and with the missing data changed to "No" responses. Results were not significantly different, so the missing data was changed to "No" for the final analyses.

### **Hypothesis 1**

Hypothesis 1 is presented in two parts. First, the hypothesis predicts that when teachers report an administrator perpetrator of their worst incident of violence, taking into account the presence of other perpetrators (e.g. students, parents or family members, and colleagues), teachers are more likely to request transfers after the incidents. Second, teachers who report low

administrative support during their worst incidents of violence (compared to those who report high administrative support) are more likely to request transfers after the incidents. Results demonstrate that the logistic regression model that includes all predictors for Hypothesis 1 is significant ( $X^2(6, N = 2347) = 130.29, p < .01$ ; See Table 1). More specifically, administrator perpetrator involvement was significantly related to teachers requesting transfers ( $p < .01$ ) but the presence of other perpetrators (i.e. student, parent or family member, colleague) was not significant. The odds ratio demonstrates that when a teacher reports an administrator perpetrator for his or her worst incident, it is approximately 3.1 times more likely that a teacher requests a transfer afterwards. Less administrative support was also significantly associated with teachers requesting a transfer ( $p < .01$ ). The odds ratio indicates that when a teacher received high administrative support during their worst incident, they were approximately 68% less likely to request transfers.

Table 1

<i>Perpetrator and Administrative Support on Requesting Transfers</i>				
	B	S.E.	Significance	Odds Ratios
Constant	-2.420	.363	.000**	.089
Age	-.002	.007	.719	.998
Student Perpetrator	.244	.185	.187	1.277
Parent/Family Member Perpetrator	.060	.171	.723	1.061
Colleague Perpetrator	.412	.214	.054	1.510
Administrator Perpetrator	1.126	.182	.000**	3.084
High Support	-1.151	.200	.000**	.316

*Note.* \*\*Indicates significance at  $p < .01$

**Hypothesis 2**

When teachers report an administrator perpetrator of their worst incidents of violence, taking into account the presence of other perpetrators (e.g. students, parents or family members, and colleagues), it was predicted that teachers would be more likely to leave their positions after the incidents. In addition, teachers with low administrative support (compared to those who report high administrative support) during their worst incidents of violence were hypothesized to be more likely to leave their positions after the incidents. A likelihood ratio test for the model for Hypothesis 2 indicates that this model is significant ( $\chi^2(6, N = 2347) = 68.48, p < .01$ ; See Table 2). Administrator perpetrator involvement was significantly related to teachers leaving their positions ( $p < .01$ ), but the presence of other perpetrators (i.e. student, parent or family member, colleague) was not significant. Teachers were almost twice as likely to leave their positions when an administrator perpetrator was involved in the incident versus not involved in the incident. Similarly, administrative support was also significantly related to teachers leaving their positions ( $p < .01$ ). Teachers who reported high administrative support during their worst incident were also about 68% less likely to leave the position.

Table 2

*Perpetrator and Administrative Support on Leaving the Position*

	B	S.E.	Significance	Odds Ratios
Constant	-3.273	.418	.000*	.040
Age	.015	.007	.040*	1.015
Student Perpetrator	.182	.202	.366	1.120
Parent/Family Member Perpetrator	-.004	.187	.985	.996
Colleague Perpetrator	.320	.243	.188	1.378
Administrator Perpetrator	.555	.207	.007**	1.741
High Support	-1.144	.207	.000**	.319

*Note.* \*Indicates significance at  $p < .05$ , \*\*Indicates significance at  $p < .01$

### Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 uses a moderated logistic regression model to determine if teachers who report a greater number of perpetrator types (i.e. students, parents or family members, colleagues, and administrators) will be more likely to request transfers after the incidents. In addition, it is predicted that the level of perceived administrative support (high versus low) during teachers' worst incidents of violence moderates the relation between the total number of types of perpetrators involved in incidents of teacher-directed violence and requesting transfers following the worst incidents. A likelihood ratio test demonstrates that the model is significant ( $X^2(4, N = 2347) = 105.14, p < .01$ ; See Table 3). The first part of Hypothesis 3 was confirmed, as there was a main effect of the number of perpetrator types during teachers' worst incidents on teachers requesting transfers ( $p < .01$ ). The moderation was not confirmed as there was no significant interaction effect between administrative support and the number of perpetrators

involved in a teacher's worst incident when the dependent variable was "requesting a transfer" ( $p = .424$ ).

Table 3

*Moderated Logistic Regression for Requesting Transfers*

	B	S.E.	Significance	Odds Ratios
Constant	-2.341	.335	.000**	.096
Age	-.001	.007	.861	.999
High Support	-1.554	.305	.000**	.211
Number of Perpetrators Involved	.257	.054	.000**	1.293
High Support*Number of Perpetrators Involved	.101	.127	.424	1.107

*Note.* \*\*Indicates significance at  $p < .01$

#### **Hypothesis 4**

Hypothesis 4 states that teachers who report a greater number of perpetrator types (i.e. students, parents or family members, colleagues, and administrators) will be more likely to leave their positions after the incidents. Furthermore, hypothesis 4 predicts that the level of perceived administrative support (high versus low) during the teacher's worst incidents of violence moderates the relation between the number of total types of perpetrators involved in incidents of teacher-directed violence and leaving the position following the worst incidents. Results from a likelihood ratio test suggest that this model is effective in predicting whether teachers leave their positions after their worst incidents ( $\chi^2(4, N = 2347) = 65.98, p < .01$ ; See Table 4). The main effect of total number of perpetrator types on leaving the position was significant ( $p < .01$ ). The interaction effect was not significant, so level of perceived administrative support was not

demonstrated to moderate the effect of total number of perpetrator types on leaving the position ( $p = .955$ ).

Table 4

*Moderated Logistic Regression for Leaving the Position*

	B	S.E.	Significance	Odds Ratios
Constant	-3.215	.383	.000**	.040
Age	.015	.007	.037*	1.016
High Support	-1.215	.329	.000**	.297
Number of Perpetrators Involved	.179	.060	.003**	1.196
High Support*Number of Perpetrators Involved	-.009	.162	.955	.991

*Note.* \*Indicates significance at  $p < .05$ , \*\*Indicates significance at  $p < .01$

### Qualitative Analyses

To build on quantitative analyses, teachers' open-ended responses were analyzed utilizing content analysis. Teachers included in this analysis indicated in their responses that after their worst incident they either considered or followed through with changing their positions, transferring to a new school, retiring early and/or leaving the profession. Teachers reported experiencing a range of violent incidents including verbal aggression, physical aggression, and threats. Multiple dimensions from Short and Rinehart's (1992) teacher empowerment framework applied to the incidents described by teachers, but additional categories were determined to impact teachers' professional decisions and sense of disempowerment. Quotes from teachers are used to illustrate the themes. Teachers' gender, age, and number of years taught are included in parentheses to provide additional context to their responses.



**Dimensions of teacher empowerment.** This section will explore the first research question and address how Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions of teacher empowerment apply to teachers who have experienced teacher-directed violence and are considering transferring, retiring, or leaving the profession. Because teachers were explaining violent incidents that influenced their desires to transfer, retire, or leave their positions or profession, coding focused on disempowerment along Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions. In this sense, the dimensions were coded when teachers cited that they were lacking in one of these areas. Despite there being six dimensions of teacher empowerment (i.e. status, autonomy, decision-making, impact, professional development, and self-efficacy), four were included in the final coding scheme (status, autonomy, decision-making, and impact). Professional development and self-efficacy were rarely coded when reliability was established during the inter-rater reliability phase; therefore, they were not included in further coding and analyses. Decision-making and autonomy often overlapped, so both of these dimensions were included under the same definition in the sample. The dimensions of status, autonomy and decision-making, and impact were significantly more common than the other dimensions and are further explored below (See Table 5).

Table 5

*Dimensions of Teacher Disempowerment*

	Definition	Examples
Lack of status	Perception that the teacher lacks respect and admiration from those with whom they work and whom their work involves.	Administrators trusting another opinion over the teacher's, teacher is not acknowledged for their work, receiving blame when it is unwarranted
Lack of autonomy and decision-making	Belief that teacher lack control over certain aspects of their work life and input, specifically incidents related to violence.	No control over disciplinary action, lack of input on student placement decisions, little control over the classroom behavior
Lack of impact	Perceptions that teacher does not have an effect or influence on school life and/or the lives of their students.	School violence prevents teachers from having positive effects on students, inability to help a student

***Lack of status.*** Short (1994) defines status as “teacher perceptions that they have professional respect and admiration from colleagues” (p. 490). The current study expanded the definition to include a more ecological approach that also involves respect from other school stakeholders such as parents. Lack of status refers to “perceptions that teachers do not have professional respect or admiration from those with whom they work and their work involves, as well as a lack of respect for teachers’ expertise and knowledge.”

Teachers frequently cited a lack of status and respect in their positions, as this was the most referenced dimension of teacher empowerment (42% of the subsample). A lack of respect played a significant role in teachers’ feelings about the profession and their professional futures in a number of ways. Some teachers were bullied by parents or administrators, which to them reflected some level of disrespect. One teacher (F, Age 47, 23 years teaching) explained that “parents do not respect the teacher(s)” and that “parents feel they can do or say anything without

repercussions.” She wanted to transfer to teaching in younger grades where incidents of violence were less severe. Another teacher (F, Age 57, 27 years teaching) described a specific incident of bullying by a parent:

This year a parent entered my room and began a verbal assault that ended with her pushing me...in front of the students...I filled assault charges...She got probation, and never apologized to me or the students...Teachers are easy targets...I am retiring early at the end of this year. Every class period can become an ambush in a split second.

This teacher emphasized how the lack of respect parents had for her classroom impacted her decision to retire. Further, one teacher (F, Age 58, 6 years teaching) described the ongoing bullying by her administrator and how it affected her ability to teach:

This was not just one incident but a series of incidents in which I was bullied by an administrator...I was told if I continued to disagree with her methods I would never work in the district again...I am considering leaving the teaching profession due to continued disrespect and bullying by the principal.

Other teachers felt disrespected in the form of administrators trusting other opinions over their own or administrators choosing to support others over the teacher. A teacher (F, Age 45, 21 years teaching) explained, “The worst part of a student and parent bullying and intimidating was that the administrator took the child and parent’s side. He did not back me, the teacher.” Another teacher (M, Age 33, 8 years teaching) explained:

The most upsetting part [of the incident] was that my principal was trying to intimidate me not to file complaints with the sheriff and the school board...administrators will not back their staffs...after the experience with the administrative team I most likely will never teach public school again in Florida.

These teachers demonstrate that administrators play important roles in making teachers feel respected and affecting the status dimension of teacher empowerment.

Teachers also felt that they were not acknowledged for their hard work and some specifically described a feeling that teaching was not a valued profession. One teacher (F, Age 37, 13 years teaching) said, “The problem with education is not bad teachers. It is the total lack of professionalism and respect that once was given to teachers. Until you find that again you will never find teachers...wanting to stay.” Another teacher (F, Age 51, 31 years teaching) echoed these sentiments and explained that “in the last few years there are rising amounts of both verbal and physical violence against public educators.” She said:

I am gravely concerned for the path that our society is taking. And our leadership is not taking action. They find fault with the educators...I just don't think teachers will be able to hold up under the continuous onslaught of 'meanness' for lack of a better term...Most of us came to this profession with a servant's heart and we are badly mistreated at best and physically harmed at worst.

These teachers highlight the disrespect that many in the profession feel that they must endure. This lack of status and respect from parents and administrators contributes to disempowerment and teachers' desires to change their positions, retire early, or move on to different professions.

***Lack of autonomy and decision-making.*** The original teacher empowerment framework defined autonomy as “teachers' beliefs that they can control certain aspects of their work life” (Short, 1994, p. 490). Short (1994) acknowledges that autonomy can include “freedom to make certain decisions” (p. 491). Because teachers' statements about autonomy and decision-making were frequently intertwined, these dimensions were combined for the current study. The

definition for lack of autonomy and decision-making expands upon Short's (1994) definitions. Lack of autonomy and decision-making refers to "teachers' beliefs they cannot control certain aspects of their work life including incidents of violence and their consequences, as well as teachers' perceptions that they are not involved in relevant school decisions."

Many teachers described a feeling that they could not control certain aspects of their work life and/or become involved in important decisions relevant to their work (22% of the subsample). In the context of school violence, this was often seen as having a lack of control over discipline for their students. Teachers often felt that their opinions on discipline were ignored for much less desirable disciplinary action or complete inaction. A teacher (F, Age 54, 17 years teaching) described a student who "is constantly acting out" and rarely gets punished for his actions in other classrooms. This teacher explained that she had "referred the student several times for skipping, swearing, and acting out to the office," but "he has been suspended for one day only." Because the teacher felt like she had little control over students' discipline, she decided that she was going to leave her current state and look for a teaching job elsewhere. Another teacher (F, Age 44, 24 years teaching) said, "When students realize that teachers' hands are tied and cannot really do anything about their behavior, they get the upper hand." This teacher was disappointed by how little she could do to help the situation.

Teachers frequently cited frustration when a student who was involved in a violent incident was soon placed back in their classrooms without their consultation. This teacher (F, Age 29, 2 years teaching) described such an incident:

When I was 5 months pregnant a student threw a desk at me and narrowly missed. After the student was taken to the office, he returned back to my class and became violent

again soon after, choking another student... If he had been allowed to cool down more in the office or disciplined he would not have choked the other student.

Another teacher (F, Age 33, 4 years teaching) who was physically attacked by her student explained, "This is totally unacceptable that they [students] are sent back to my classroom, many times after 15 minutes." These teachers specifically wanted the perpetrators to have more time away from their classrooms, but were not consulted about the decisions to let them reenter.

Teachers also mentioned losing control over their classrooms and what they are allowed to do as teachers. A teacher (F, Age 35, 12 years teaching) argued "that teachers have lost the right to teach." She felt that the majority of her day "is spent babysitting and trying to diffuse 'incidents.'" Specifically regarding decision-making, one teacher (M, Age 42, 15 years teaching) stated:

I want to leave the position and feel that the educational system here is corrupt and only "favorites" have the chance of any type of future development. If you are not part of the "elite", you will not be asked to participate in any school wide conversations/decision makings or any suggestions will be dismissed.

Teachers often felt that they lacked control over their classrooms, schools, and discipline. More specifically, teachers often felt as if they did not have a role in important decisions that involved their work, especially when dealing with incidents of violence. This lack of autonomy and decision-making ability affected teachers' professional decisions as well as their feelings of disempowerment around incidents of violence.

***Lack of impact.*** Impact in the teacher empowerment framework refers to "teachers' perceptions that they have an effect and influence on school life" (Short, 1994, p. 491). The current study develops the definition further; adding the importance of having influence on

students' lives in particular. A lack of impact referred to teachers who felt that "they did not have an effect and influence on school life and the lives of their students" (11% of the subsample).

This included teachers who felt that they were unable to help their students succeed in and out of the classroom. Many teachers indicated that they were discouraged that their attempts to assist students were ineffective. One teacher (F, Age 64, 35 years teaching) described an incident of verbal aggression and intimidation by a student that led to her decision to retire early. She said, "To this day, I'm still pushing to get this child help. I feel like I'm spitting in the wind. He continues to be disruptive." Another teacher (F, Age 43, 5 years teaching) explained her frustrations. "Trying to help a student be all that he or she can be, using your own money for supplies for the kids only to be told to \*\*\* off. Really makes you wonder if the kid will ever care." Teachers also felt that they lacked the ability to make an impact when violent incidents became so disruptive that they affected the entire class's ability to learn. This was reflected by a teacher (F, Age 50, 15 years teaching) who said, "It does make me wonder if teaching is worth all the time...it seems that other student population(s) during these incidents are often ignored because so much time is given to the students causing the trouble." Another teacher (F, Age 50, 25 years teaching) described a similar sentiment:

The problem with these incidents are that there are students in the room who don't exhibit such problems. When I have to stop and deal with unacceptable classroom behaviors, the other students lose valuable education time. It is not fair to the other children.

Teachers' impressions that they are having minimal impact on their students and schools contribute to feelings of disempowerment. Many teachers described situations, like the ones above, in which they questioned their abilities to effect change in their schools and students. As

teachers begin to feel that their work has become less meaningful and impactful, this may lead to teachers wanting a professional change.

**Contextual factors.** To answer the second research question, which asks what factors contribute to a sense of disempowerment around teachers thinking about or deciding to leave their positions or the profession, the main coder examined themes beyond those from Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions of teacher empowerment. There were a number of other factors related to teachers' professional decisions that often contributed to teachers' feelings of disempowerment. The main themes included safety, policy (on the school and state/national level), administrative responses to violence and lack of support, and community involvement and circumstances (See Table 6). Each of these themes contributed to the school context in which incidents of violence occurred. While they are less related to empowerment at the individual or psychological level specifically, these contextual factors affect empowerment on many levels of analysis including the relational and organizational levels. Administrative responses and lack of support and community involvement highlight the importance of relational empowerment and emphasize how relationships among school stakeholders can help teachers handle incidents of violence. Safety and policy relate to organizational empowerment, as these themes centered on the school's ability to protect teachers and allow them to flourish in their positions. An empowering school setting should empower its teachers, but much of what teachers mentioned about safety and policy focused on how schools actively disempower those involved with incidents of violence.



Table 6

<i>Contextual Factors</i>		
	Definition	Examples
Safety	Teacher cites concerns related to their own physical well-being or the physical well-being of loved ones and students	Serious physical injury, threats on one's life, incidents that put classroom at risk of physical injury
Policy	Teacher cites school discipline systems or laws as a factor in the incident and professional decisions.	Chronic lack of consequences in schools, classroom placement issues, poor enforcement of the rules
Administrative Response and Lack of Support	Teacher cites dissatisfaction with how administrators handle an incident and/or provide assistance to the teacher.	Teacher asks for help but is ignored, administrators minimizing teachers' concerns, choosing the side of a perpetrator over the teacher
Community Involvement and Circumstances	Teacher cites a cause of the violent incident and a reason for transferring, leaving, or retiring as being related to home-life, parents, or community factors	Lack of parent responsibility, community violence, poverty

**Safety.** Safety was coded in this sample when “teachers cited concerns about their physical well-being or the well-being of students, loved ones, and others as a factor in considering or acting on a professional change.” During their descriptions of violent incidents, teachers often mentioned safety concerns, as approximately 47% of teachers cited safety. This occurred in multiple forms and included a range of situations, such as when teachers mentioned incidents of violence that caused serious injury and/or hospital visits. In general, teachers who received this code reported significant fear associated with safety risks.

Some teachers described feeling unsafe due to incidents involving parents. When one teacher (F, Age 46, 18 years teaching) described her worst incident of violence, she said, “A

parent barging into my room and physically threatening me...I was cut off from all call aids because of placement in the room...by the door the parent controlled.” This teacher explained how this lack of safety made her want to quit the position. Another teacher (F, Age 33, 5 years teaching) felt that safety was a larger school-wide problem.

Administration at the school does not enforce the safety policy. Parents are sent to teachers’ classrooms from the office at any time during the day. Teachers are not made aware that parents are coming to the classroom. The office just sends them.

This teacher was especially concerned about the access parents and others had to their classroom during the day when she was teaching.

Other teachers reported incidents that led to needing medical attention. One teacher (F, Age 48, 9 years teaching) mentioned, “A student on a dare pile drove into the side of me, knocking me out of the wheelchair. I was taken to the hospital via ambulance.” Another teacher (F, Age 57, 15 years teaching) described a situation in which she was separating two students during a fight. She said, “My collarbone was dislocated. I was unable to do many shoulder functions for 6 months. Workman’s comp couldn’t/didn’t do anything since no bones were broken and they didn’t recognize the dislocation.” In addition, one teacher (F, Age 56, 4 years teaching) reported that she was planning to leave teaching because of an incident that threatened her life:

I have a severe ADA protected latex allergy. Multiple times students have deliberately exposed me knowingly to latex, blowing a balloon in my face, causing anaphylaxis reactions requiring hospital treatment...I loved teaching and I love my students, but I have suffered severe bodily injury and could possibly be killed if this continues to happen...

These injuries associated with incidents of violence seriously affect teachers and how they thought about their profession. Because their schools could not ensure their safety, the incidents described led teachers to consider and follow through with leaving their schools.

One teacher (F, Age 35, 5 years teaching) summarized how safety can impact professional decisions. “When you throw in fear of your safety with the other stresses of teaching, it no longer seems worth it.” This statement highlights how many teachers felt after experiencing serious incidents of violence. For some teachers, safety became the main factor for wanting a professional change.

Many felt that if safety was not better addressed by their schools that they would need to leave their positions or change their profession. Teachers who felt unsafe could not begin to feel empowered through their work because of the constant worry and stress this lack of safety caused. For these teachers, safety was often central to their disempowerment.

***Policy.*** Policy was coded in the sample when “teachers cited school or government policy, often regarding discipline, as a factor for considering or acting on a professional change.” Policy on the school level and government level were both seen as important in teachers’ decisions or thoughts about leaving their positions or profession. On the school level this generally included policies or programs involving discipline and student placement, while on the government level this included laws. One-time incidents in which a teacher disagreed with an administrative decision were included in the administrative response/lack of support code. About 35% of teachers cited policy concerns that contributed to feelings of disempowerment or thoughts of transferring, retiring, or leaving.

Many teachers cited poor discipline policies at their schools that contributed to their feelings of disempowerment and desires to leave their positions or profession. One teacher (M,

Age 60, 38 years teaching) explained, “What is upsetting is that there are no consequences for students that are violent...I want to retire. Until there is a system in place for students to receive consequences for inappropriate behavior, this will continue.” Another teacher (F, Age 56, 10 years teaching) echoed a similar opinion, stating that “the school system has no real punishment,” so students feel that “they can get away with their verbal and nonverbal abuse.” Beyond discipline policy affecting the students, teachers felt that policy around parents required changes. One teacher (F, Age 57, 27 years teaching) argued, “Teachers are easy targets, both physically and verbally because School Board policies dictate a “customer service” attitude in dealing with parents and students. All meetings between parents/teachers should be scheduled in an office setting, attended by another teacher...” This teacher reported that she would retire early because of her perception that teachers are not adequately protected in situations involving parents. She highlighted the policy surrounding these issues in creating an environment where teachers are not treated as professionals.

Teachers specifically cited school policy around classroom placement as a major problem that contributes to incidents of teacher-directed violence and teacher turnover. One teacher (F, Age 57, 30 years teaching) described a student in Kindergarten who would physically attack her. This teacher felt that there were not proper placements for a child of this age. She argued, “There are few placement options for the very young. There needs to be a hierarchy of services and support for these youngsters...I wanted to leave the profession.” Placement was also a main concern of a special education teacher (F, Age 32, 9 years teaching) who experienced multiple violent incidents by a student and suffered a serious injury. This teacher acknowledged that she was “currently looking to move outside of special ed., or possibly switch careers.” She believed

that this student's placement did "not fit his needs" and went "against professional recommendation."

While the majority of teachers who reported concerns related to policy focused on the school level, others expanded their criticisms of policy to government and laws. Government funding was specifically mentioned by teachers, who were dissatisfied with how they perceived funding affected discipline. For example, a teacher (F, Age 32, 7 years teaching) suggested that her administration was "trying to hide their real numbers and figures [for discipline] for more funding." This led to her decision to leave teaching. Another teacher (M, Age 39, 9 years teaching) described how funding impacted school discipline. He said, "Poor/illegal behavior is tolerated due to unethical administration and the influence of funding and contract renewals instead of admitting there is a problem [with discipline] and doing what is truly best to cultivate learning." One teacher (F, Age 32, 6 years teaching) specifically focused on teachers without tenure and how this policy may affect them. She explained that while "tenure helps protect many teachers...for those teachers without it, parents making outrageous claims/demands can be a nightmare and can certainly help to explain why so many leave the profession in the first five years." Regarding policy, one teacher (F, Age 43, 20 years teaching) explained that "attitudes and laws make us powerless to change" incidents of teacher-directed violence in schools. Each of these teachers' responses illustrate how policy beyond the school level can impact their own positions and turnover decisions.

Overall, policy on both the school and government levels impacted teachers' feelings about the profession as a whole. Policy appears to be a driving force in teachers feeling disempowered, as teachers often reported policy as a hindrance to being an effective teacher. Furthermore, school policies highlighted a lack of organizational empowerment, in which

schools struggle to empower stakeholders. Often, teachers felt that serious incidents of violence should be discussed with their administrators and that appropriate discipline should follow.

Unfortunately this was rarely the case in this sample. Policy issues played a significant role in leading these teachers to consider or follow through with changes in their professional lives, such as transferring to other positions or leaving the profession.

*Administrative response/lack of support.* Administrative response/lack of support was coded when a teacher “mentioned that administrators’ actions or lack of actions related to violent incidents contributed to their consideration or follow-through with transferring, retiring, or leaving the profession.” If the administrator was the main perpetrator of the original incident, this was not coded, as it did not reflect a response to the incident. A lack of support provided by principals was the most common response to violence by other perpetrators. Administrators’ actions immediately following incidents often left teachers feeling unsupported, and approximately 43% of teachers mentioned that administrative responses to incidents or their lack of support contributed to their thoughts about professional decisions regarding turnover. A new teacher (F, Age 23, 1 year teaching) was already looking for a different position because of administrative responses to incidents of violence. She explained, “I do not feel supported in my position as a new teacher and events of abuse occur all of the time...no one cares and nothing ever happens.” Administrators often downplayed teachers’ concerns about incidents of teacher-directed violence and many did nothing to support teachers in these situations. After an incident in which a student threw a metal chair at his teacher, the teacher (F, Age 49, 28 years teaching) asserted that this was the first time she ever felt “devalued as a teacher.” She said, “I had talked with my administrator about this child before and I received no support from her.” When a student threatened a teacher’s (F, Age 45, 22 years teaching) life on social media, administrators

addressed the issue in a way that minimized its severity. She explained the impact of this decision and the administrators' lack of support:

Because of the lack of leadership and support from my principal and superintendent, I chose to leave the school district at the conclusion of the year...My feelings of anger and frustration were rooted in the school district's focus on "image control" rather than safety.

Teachers described incidents that may have been prevented with adequate support. For instance, one teacher (F, Age 27, 5 years teaching) wrote about an incident in which a student was both verbally and physically aggressive. She said, "This situation could have been prevented if the administration would do a better job of supporting their teachers with smaller incidences before they escalate." This teacher explained that incidents such as the one she described were leading her to consider leaving teaching.

Administrative responses to violence and lack of support appear to significantly affect teachers' occupational decisions. Many of the teachers in this sample argued that the responses they received from administrators after violent incidents were weak or completely inappropriate. Teachers often felt discouraged by the responses from their superiors, and this reflects a lack of relational empowerment, as teachers are not treated as collaborators in the school setting. Instead of administrative actions working to empower teachers, for many teachers in this sample, administrative actions significantly worked to make teachers feel disempowered. Lack of support along with other poor responses to violence, were frequently discussed by teachers as they explained their reasoning for wanting to leave their schools.

***Community involvement and circumstances.*** This category was coded for circumstances that occurred outside of the school. The definition for community involvement and

circumstances involves “teacher mentions of students needing more assistance from their home life or parents, as well as community characteristics or a lack of supports in the community that contribute to teachers’ professional decisions.” Outside factors related to the communities in which they worked, often influenced teachers’ professional decisions and feelings of disempowerment in their positions (37% of teachers). In general, the types of community factors cited fell within two categories: parents/the home and community factors outside of the home (e.g. community violence).

Teachers frequently cited that parents did not take appropriate responsibility for their actions and parents were quick to blame others before changing. One teacher (F, Age 34, 10 years teaching), who had taken a special interest in a struggling student, explained that parents played a role in questioning her decision to continue on as a teacher. She said, “The parents always want to blame the teachers for the way their children behave. Parents need to take responsibility for their children.” More generally, teachers described problems related to students’ home lives that impacted incidents of violence at school. One teacher (F, Age 55, 2 years teaching), who transferred from her position, described a range of issues occurring at home for her students:

I felt some of the children had such a horrible home life that it was difficult for them to function in school...they saw violence in their homes (two of my students had a family member shot)...parents were in and out of jail so there was no consistency at home...some had parents that drank and did drugs. I cried lots of tears some days as I was driving home as I thought of some horrible story a student would share with me...

Another teacher (F, Age 56, 17 years teaching) articulated the challenges of working with students whose parents and home lives lack consistency:



It is exhausting trying to stay a positive role model for children who are considered “disposable” by their families. I have earned their trust after two quarters of school, but it is still a struggle depending on how the child was treated each morning before they arrive on my doorstep.

Gang violence also influenced teachers decisions to leave the profession, transfer, or retire. One teacher (F, Age 56, 31 years teaching), who had been trying to transfer for two years, described her school’s community: “This is a low-income neighborhood with a few lock-downs per year because of gang activity. Many students are children of gang members.” For this teacher, gang activity significantly contributed to her decision to request a transfer.

Teachers frequently associate violence in schools with community issues and involvement. Parents are most often mentioned in this context as not taking responsibility for their children when they are involved in violent incidents. Further, teachers attribute students’ actions to their home lives and their parents. Beyond parents, community violence, drug abuse, and other community characteristics play a role in school violence. When teachers feel as if they do not have control over their students’ learning and behavior or that they are unable to help students in these community contexts, they may request transfers or leave the profession.

**How incidents of violence affect professional decisions.** Understanding the dimensions of teacher empowerment and contributing factors to disempowerment and teacher turnover provide important aspects of the overall picture. Furthermore, it is necessary to explore how the teacher empowerment dimensions, contextual factors, and incidents of violence interact to influence decisions regarding turnover. This section explores the third research question: How do incidents of teacher-directed violence influence teachers’ decisions to transfer, retire, or leave the profession? Teachers reported a number of varied experiences with incidents of violence. These

experiences led to the consideration or follow-through of turnover-related decisions, but not always in the same way. Some teachers described the role of administrators in handling the incident as being worse than the incident itself, many focusing on administrators' roles in supporting them in incidents involving parents. Others talked about the compounding of multiple incidents over time. Sometimes these types of experiences overlapped (e.g. lack of support across multiple incidents), but for each of these situations, there were patterns especially prevalent in teachers' responses. Patterns illustrated how disempowerment, contextual factors, and incidents of violence can produce the conditions where teachers feel they need a change. Specifically disempowerment appeared as a mediator in the relationship between teacher-directed violence and decisions regarding turnover. Across teachers' responses, disempowerment often followed incidents of violence, impacting teachers' status, autonomy and decision-making, and impact. After teachers became disempowered, they considered or made professional changes such as transferring, retiring early, or leaving the profession.

*Administrative support as its own form of victimization.* In these responses, while teachers reported other victimizations, the lack of support from their administrators was central. The original incident of violence mattered significantly less than the inaction or lack of support from administrators afterwards. These teachers specified that they were changing schools or leaving the profession to avoid their superiors and find positions where they could be supported. For many teachers, this lack of support was chronic, making it difficult to teach effectively and feel safe. In this sense, the lack of support created an environment in which teachers were disempowered, disrespected, and lacked autonomy and decision-making ability in their classrooms. Administrators' action, or inactions, set the tone for a disempowering school environment in which teachers lacked voice and did not have the ability to effectively influence

discipline decisions. Teachers were frequently left to deal with a challenging student or situation in isolation, as administrators ignored teachers biggest concerns. This disempowerment influenced professional decisions.

A teacher (F, Age 35, 9 years teaching) highlights the effects that lack of support after serious incidents of violence can have on teacher turnover:

I had a student in my class who threw terrible fits. He kicked me, threw scissors at me, screamed obscenities at me, and finally he slammed his elbow down on my thumb...I had to go to the hospital and have it splinted for 3 weeks. I had been trying to involve administration from the first incident, but the principal said I was overreacting...The child had no boundaries at home, and when he behaved that way at school, admin refused to back me up...

In her response, the teacher first illustrates concerns about her safety. Because of the lack of safety, she stresses the need for administrative involvement and support. She continuously comes back to the lack of support from the administrator, as she felt that she was unable to properly address the situation without it. While the incidents of violence she is experiencing are harmful, her administrator's involvement is just as, if not more, important to her. The administrator's actions are disempowering on a relational level, demonstrating a lack of respect for the teacher's expertise and ignoring the knowledge she had about the situation. The teacher is particularly low on the status dimension of teacher empowerment, as the principal ignores and minimizes her issue. The teacher explains how the support influenced a professional change:

I left that school at the end of the school year, because I shouldn't have to work in a school where students are allowed to physically injure me without reprimand. The principal blamed me for the entire issue...I am currently in a wonderful teaching position.

I carefully choose where I work, making sure that administration is supportive of teachers and has a no violence policy—there's no excuse for teachers to be injured on the job by students...the incident made me angry—it was avoidable had my principal done anything to support me with the situation throughout the year...

The teacher explains that support is one of the main aspects of choosing where she works, emphasizing that supporting teachers should be one of the primary roles for administrators. She also highlights the importance of school leadership in creating positive and empowering school environments where teachers feel safe and respected.

Lack of support was especially common during incidents where the main perpetrator was the parent of a student. Often these incidents involved verbal aggression or threats, sometimes occurring in response to an incident perpetrated by their children. Regardless of the incident, lack of support was usually central. In these incidents, a pattern developed in which after the incident occurred, there was rarely a consequence. Following the incident, administrators did nothing to protect the teacher or chose the parent's side in a dispute, demonstrating a lack of support. Teachers reported frustration related to the lack of respect parents demonstrated when addressing their concerns with teachers. In addition to the disempowerment created solely through administrators' lack of support, these incidents involved multiple school stakeholders (i.e. an administrator and a parent) teaming up against a teacher. This created a power imbalance in which teachers' voices were drowned out. Teachers were often made to acquiesce with a final decision made by the administrator. Frustration and disempowerment associated with these situations led many teachers to leave their schools or consider leaving.

This pattern is illustrated through a teacher (F, Age 53, 15 years teaching) who reported an incident that led her to request a transfer:

The most upsetting situation was a parent who was entering my classroom to “kick my \*\*\*”...having my 3<sup>rd</sup> graders listen to threats, “\*expletives\*,” and bullying. Why?

Because her child had a fist fight in the cafeteria and I sent her to the office for time out. I am a professional and I can assure you lawyers, doctors, etc. do not have to deal with this on a daily basis.

This situation demonstrates how little control teachers have regarding who enters their classrooms. She went on to describe the lack of accountability that parents have in the school system: “Parents know they can do things like this and get away with it with no removal of child from school.” The sentiment was shared across many teachers in the sample, who indicated that parents rarely faced consequences for their aggressive actions. In response to the incident, she said:

I will be proceeding with a voluntary transfer. Many other teachers are leaving the profession...one of my former students in high school came to visit me. I highly discouraged her from entering the teaching profession. If I weren't so close to retirement, I would get out. I am too good for this treatment and don't deserve it.

The teacher mentioned administrators, stating, “We need administrators and school board members to work the classroom for a day. We need help.” This example illustrates the negative impact that parent-perpetrated incidents of violence can have on teachers and the importance of having administrators who support teachers in disputes. The teacher in this example indicates that many administrators are out of touch with their teachers and the incidents of violence they experience. While student perpetrators are often the focus in school violence, parent perpetrators and administrative support during parent-perpetrated incidents have a significant impact on teachers' status and autonomy, as well as teacher turnover.

*Multiple incidents over time.* Some teachers reported the occurrence of multiple incidents over a significant period of time. Even though teachers were asked to describe their worst incident, many could not pick just one. For these teachers, violence has been ubiquitous throughout their careers. Experiencing violence consistently across time in particular settings contributed to feelings of hopelessness, frustration, or anger, as well as disempowerment in the form of status, autonomy, decision-making, and impact. These continuing experiences with violence often make teachers feel as if they do not have voice in the matters of disciplining students and there is nothing they can do to stop the violence. As these incidents continue to occur, a message is sent to teachers that their experiences are unimportant and not worthy of addressing. This indicates a lack of status for teachers in their schools. Beyond the lack of respect these teachers feel, repeated incidents of violence create environments in which teachers feel as if they do not have control over stopping violence. In this sense, teachers believe they cannot make an impact on the school and their students. Many of the teachers who experience multiple incidents over time indicated that they were retiring early to “get out” as soon as possible, but others expressed a desire to transfer to teaching different age groups or populations or to leave teaching for another field.

One teacher (F, Age 33, 11 years teaching) described the range of incidents she has experienced over her career. When asked about her worst incident, she responded:

Being physically attacked by a student who was out of control. This happened on multiple occasions. I have been hit, spit at, bitten, kicked, pushed, had things thrown at me, had someone try to stab me in the eye with a pencil, threatened by a student.

Because of the range of incidents she had experienced, she transferred to a different type of classroom. “I used to teach EBD (Emotional Behavioral Disorders) self-contained and dealt with

this quite often...It was because of extremely violent out-of-control students that I switched to teaching first grade collaborative special education.” This teacher in many ways felt helpless in stopping these incidents of violence, as the only way out of experiencing violence was to transfer to a new position. Her experiences with violence led to her believe there was “only so much the public school system can do” for some of the most challenging students, emphasizing the lack of impact this teacher felt that she and the school can have on the students. This teacher’s responses allude to the idea that violence is an inherent aspect of teaching and some teachers feel that they are limited in their abilities to solve these problems in their positions. Another teacher (F, Age 53, 24 years teaching) expressed the range of violent incidents one can experience consistently over years of teaching:

At least 2-3 times each year, I come into contact with an angry parent...Not only has there been threats of physical harm but also damage to my personal property...I’ve been cursed at and humiliated in front of students, other faculty/staff, and parents...Almost on a daily basis during the past 8-9 years, I have been the victim of intimidating comments, threats...physical aggression...and have felt as if I could not seek any refuge or haven...

Her comments indicate a feeling of hopelessness, as she does not see positive resolutions to these incidents: “This continues to happen because the system allows it and for whatever reason, the people in places who should handle this will not or choose not to deal with it.” This statement reflects a lack of empowerment, common among many teachers in the sample, as teachers believe that there is no opportunity for them to positively impact the school environment. It also indicates a lack of organizational empowerment, in that the school system as it currently exists, fails to empower its stakeholders. This teacher’s comments illustrate the importance of strong leadership in ending the cycle of violence that she must consistently endure in her position. The

teacher continues by saying, “It makes me realize that as soon as possible, I’ll retire and do something else that is not as demanding, demeaning, thankless, and dangerous.” Both of these teachers demonstrate the effect that experiencing continuous violence can have on professional decisions and the profession as a whole. Teachers who consistently experience incidents of violence throughout many years may be especially at risk for turnover, as the system has repeatedly failed to protect them.

In general, disempowerment frequently followed violence. As teachers dealt with a range of challenging incidents, they began to feel disempowered, lacking status, autonomy and decision-making, and an ability to make an impact on their schools and students. Lack of administrative support contributed to this disempowerment on multiple levels of analysis, creating environments that did not help teachers when they needed it most. In addition, teachers recounted experiencing multiple incidents of violence over time, highlighting some of the most disempowering schools. Over time, disempowerment appears to influence teachers’ decisions to transfer to other positions, retire early, or leave the profession, as incidents of violence and the context surrounding these incidents create challenging work environments with little optimism that these issues will be resolved.

### **Discussion**

Results suggest that teacher-directed violence plays a role in teachers’ considerations and decisions to transfer, retire, and leave the profession. Through mixed methods research, multiple facets of these relationships have been explored. The important role of administrators regarding teacher turnover was confirmed. Having an administrator perpetrator of a teacher’s worst incident of victimization led to a significantly greater probability that the teacher requested a transfer and left his or her position afterwards. Similarly, administrative support during these



incidents was significantly related to whether the teacher chose to request a transfer and leave the position, as teachers who received high levels of support were less likely to report these outcomes. Teachers' open-ended responses indicated that lack of status, autonomy and decision-making, and ability to make an impact contributed to feelings of disempowerment that left teachers questioning their positions and the profession. Perceived safety, school and government policy, administrative inaction and lack of support, and community involvement were cited by teachers as factors that influenced violence and subsequent professional changes. A combination of teacher disempowerment and contextual factors related to incidents of violence created school environments conducive to teacher turnover.

### **Characteristics of Teacher Turnover**

Before examining the central hypotheses, it is necessary to explore the characteristics of the sample. In the current study, 8.5% of teachers requested a transfer and 7.1% of teachers left their positions after experiencing their worst incidents of teacher victimization. Overall, approximately 12% of the sample requested transfers, left their positions, or reported doing both. This suggests that while many teachers left after violent incidents, a significant portion of teachers began the process of leaving by requesting a transfer. The percentage of teachers leaving after the incident (7.1%) is consistent with the Teacher Follow-Up survey, which found that after the 2011-2012 school year, approximately 8% of teachers left their schools to teach in a new school (Goldring et al., 2014). Another study found, on average, 7% of teachers remained in the profession but left their schools each year (Curran, Viano, & Fisher, 2017). Both of these studies do not account for teachers who were considering leaving or making a professional change during that year. The current study demonstrates that more teachers were already taking the necessary steps to leave, by putting in requests for transfers. That these teachers had already

made formal requests makes it likely that many will follow through and leave their schools if their transfers are accepted, as turnover intention is a strong predictor of actual turnover (Vandenberg & Barnes-Nelson, 1999).

Rarely has turnover been explored in the context of school violence. The current study examines turnover and teacher-directed violence, focusing on the role of perpetrator type in influencing whether teachers request transfers and/or leave their positions. Curran and colleagues (2017) also explored turnover in the context of violence directed against teachers and demonstrated that teachers are more likely to leave the profession or stay in the profession and change positions when they have experienced threats or physical attacks in the previous year (Curran et al., 2017). Because the current study includes only teachers who experienced at least one incident of teacher-directed violence, examining differences in rates of turnover based on teacher-directed violence remains an important step in understanding the relationship between violence and turnover.

Among the teachers in the study, 46% reported high levels of administrative support during their worst incidents of violence (compared to 54% who reported low levels of support). Of the teachers who received high administrative support during these incidents, only 3.3% requested transfers and 3.1% left their positions. Conversely, of the teachers who received poor support, 12.9% requested transfers and 10.4% left their positions. Ingersoll (2001), in his landmark study on teacher turnover, demonstrated that 38% of teachers changing their positions and 30% of teachers leaving the profession identified poor administrative support as an important reason for their decisions. Support was one of the most mentioned factors contributing to decisions about turnover (Ingersoll, 2001). The preliminary statistics from the current study also indicate the importance of support with regard to turnover, as teachers are over three times

more likely to request transfers or leave their positions if they received poor support during their worst incidents.

This study specifically examined perpetrators of teachers' worst incident of violence and determined that of the teachers who experienced an incident of teacher-directed violence, 76.4% reported student perpetrators, 28.5% reported parent perpetrators, 13.8% reported administrator perpetrators, and 9.9% reported colleague perpetrators. These statistics highlight the range of perpetrators involved in teacher-directed violence and that many incidents of violence involve more than one type of perpetrator. Previous research using the same national survey has stressed that violence occurs across perpetrator types and that many teachers experience multiple incidents of violence with student, parent, colleague, and administrator perpetrators (McMahon et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2016). The current study illustrates how teachers often experience singular incidents with multiple perpetrators across the school, demonstrating the complexity of these incidents and the stress these incidents can cause.

Logistic regression models demonstrated that age was a significant predictor of whether teachers left their positions after their worst incidents of violence. As age increased, teachers were more likely to leave. Age was not a significant predictor of teachers requesting transfers. The literature on teacher turnover has largely shown that turnover is more common in younger, inexperienced teachers than older, experienced teachers as long as the teachers are not near retirement age (Guarino et al., 2006). The average age for this sample was approximately 46 years old, and it included a range of teachers across the spectrum and teachers with varied experience levels. That increasing age led to a greater likelihood of leaving the position is not consistent with the field's general findings, but exemplifies that turnover occurs beyond teachers' first years in the profession. Given the circumstances teachers are facing in this sample,

it is possible that having spent more time in the profession dealing with incidents of violence, older teachers are more likely to leave their positions.

### **Perpetrators of Teacher-Directed Violence and Turnover**

Based on quantitative analyses investigating the role of perpetrators and administrative support during incidents of violence, the study provides insight into the relationship between teacher-directed violence and turnover. Specifically, this section will examine administrative perpetrators, administrative support, and teachers who experience incidents with multiple perpetrators.

**Administrative perpetrators.** The current study examined whether the presence of specific perpetrators during teachers' worst incidents was predictive of their requesting transfers and leaving their positions. While having student perpetrators, parent perpetrators, or colleague perpetrators during teachers' worst incidents of violence did not significantly affect turnover, having an administrator perpetrator was related to teachers requesting transfers and leaving their positions after the incident. While teachers clearly experience a multitude of dangerous and harmful incidents perpetrated by students, parents, and colleagues (Curran et al., 2017; McMahon et al., 2014), administrator perpetrators have great influence over professional decisions (Blase & Blase, 2004; Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). Students and parents change from year to year, but administrators are enduring, as they are less likely to change over time. Unlike colleagues, teacher interactions with administrators cannot be readily avoided or minimized. Research demonstrates that principal-on-teacher bullying is a significant issue that impacts teachers in multiple ways (de Wet, 2010). This includes increased symptoms of depression and psychological distress, apathy, questioning of career decisions, and a decrease in teachers' confidence in their own abilities to effectively teach (de Wet, 2010). When

administrators are involved with violent incidents, teachers may begin to consider and follow through on professional changes such as requesting transfers or leaving their positions.

Administrators are often directly involved with handling serious incidents of violence and teachers rely on administrators to implement school policy and ensure safety (Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009). Consequently, when administrators contribute to the negative effects of violent incidents, teachers may feel a need to leave their schools.

**Administrative support.** The current study demonstrated that administrative support during the incident was a key factor in teachers' turnover decisions. Specifically, teachers who received low levels of administrative support during their worst incidents of violence were more likely to request transfers and leave their positions after the incident. Research highlights that teachers' perceived administrative support is a strong predictor of job satisfaction (Tickle et al., 2011), and low levels of support have been associated with professional disengagement (Galand et al., 2007). There is evidence that high levels of administrative support are associated with staying in the profession (Cancio et al., 2013; Prather-Jones, 2011). In addition to support, principal leadership styles that encourage collaboration, inspire trust, and value respect, foster teacher motivation (Finnigan, 2012). Principal leadership is one of the most important factors in preventing school violence, as strong leaders create a positive, inclusive, and caring school climate that promotes safety (Astor et al., 2009). These characteristics of strong leaders are likely to be lacking from administrator perpetrators of violence and administrators who do not provide appropriate support during incidents of violence. Administrator perpetrators and unsupportive administrators, instead of promoting collaboration and safety, contribute to harmful teacher experiences.

**Role of multiple perpetrators.** The number of types of perpetrators involved in teachers' worst incidents of teacher-directed violence was significantly related to teachers requesting transfers and leaving their positions after the incident. Research suggests that a large percentage of teachers experience violence by multiple types of perpetrators (Gerberich et al., 2011; McMahon et al., 2014). This is consistent with the current study, in which 34.4% of teachers reported experiencing an incident with more than one perpetrator. When teachers experience incidents of violence from several people across different school levels (e.g. parents and administrators), they may become more prone to negative teaching experiences that lead to greater turnover. If teachers encounter violence from more than one source, they may be unable to rely on another source for support and appreciation during times when it is needed most.

#### **Requesting a Transfer Versus Leaving the Position**

The logistic regression results for all models were consistent across both dependent variables (i.e. requesting a transfer and leaving the position). Administrator perpetrators and administrative support during teachers' worst incidents were significantly related to teachers' decisions to request transfers and leave their positions. While both of these variables essentially explore whether teachers transfer after incidents of violence, there are differences between them. Leaving their positions indicates that teachers actually left their schools; whereas, requesting transfers demonstrates that teachers have begun to take the steps of moving to new schools. However, teachers who requested transfers may or may not end up leaving the position, based on a variety of factors including availability of open positions within the district at the time of request. Further, requesting a transfer suggests an interest in a different position or different school within the same district; whereas, leaving a position may result in a different position, school, or district.

Given the similarities in the two constructs of requesting a transfer and leaving the position, as well as turnover intention as a strong predictor of actual turnover (Vandenberg & Barnes-Nelson, 1999), it is not surprising that the same predictors were significant in each of the logistic regression models. A large portion of the teachers requesting transfers will likely follow through, as this demonstrates more than an intention, but rather a concrete step towards moving from the school. Of the teachers in the sample, 84 (3.6%) indicated that they had both requested transfers and left their teaching positions. It is likely that this overlap reflects a sequential process, in which teachers requested transfers first and subsequently left their positions. The processes that occur following incidents of violence, and how teachers address the issues, including what occurs following requests for transfers and outcomes associated with leaving positions should be further explored.

### **Teacher Empowerment**

In addition to the quantitative methods used to explore incidents of teacher-directed violence and teacher turnover, the current study used qualitative methods to gain a more nuanced understanding of these incidents and how they impact career decisions. Content analysis demonstrated that aspects of Short and Rinehart's (1992) teacher empowerment framework, that highlights six key dimensions of empowerment, were applicable to incidents of violence when explored through a disempowerment lens. Most literature on teacher empowerment has focused on how to empower teachers and what specific factors make teachers feel empowered. This study explored the inverse, focusing on what factors in schools lead teachers to feel disempowered and how disempowerment relates to teacher turnover. More specifically, this study found that lack of status, lack of autonomy and decision-making, and lack of impact led to

teacher disempowerment and contributed to teachers transferring, retiring early, and leaving the profession.

**Lack of status.** Teachers frequently cited a lack of status in their positions that impacted their work in a number of ways and contributed to professional decisions. Lack of status in their positions was demonstrated through administrators siding with perpetrators of violence over the teacher, receiving unwarranted blame for actions that were not their fault, and parents accessing classrooms without permission. Teachers often mentioned the disrespect they received from multiple school stakeholders. In an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2014) survey, while approximately 90% of teachers reported satisfaction with their positions, only about one third of teachers indicated they felt their work was valued. This discrepancy speaks to the responses teachers gave in the current study, emphasizing a lack of respect regarding their opinions in the school and community. Bogler and Nir (2012) determined that of the dimensions of teacher empowerment, status was the best predictor of extrinsic job satisfaction (i.e. satisfaction related to working conditions). Consistent with these findings, teachers from the current study explained how perceived lack of status influences their career decisions, emphasizing the need for school communities to respect teachers and create environments where they feel valued.

**Lack of autonomy and decision-making.** Teachers also cited a lack of autonomy and decision-making in their positions, often discussing their inability to influence discipline policy and follow-through. Previous research has demonstrated that teacher autonomy is directly related to outcomes such as teacher engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion (Skaalvic & Skaalvic, 2014). Government policy, such as “No Child Left Behind,” can directly impact teacher performance and sense of autonomy (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010). Researchers



have suggested the importance of creating policy that encourages professional autonomy (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010). Many of the teachers who left their positions or were planning to make career changes cited incidents of violence that left them feeling they did not have any control over their classrooms or influence over school decision-making. For instance, teachers frequently disagreed with the discipline perpetrators received, and many were hurt or frustrated by the fact that they were not even consulted about the consequences. Administrators who collaborate with their teachers involved in incidents of violence to develop appropriate methods of discipline may be more effective in preventing turnover in their schools (Prather-Jones, 2011). In some cases, circumstances may prevent students from receiving the discipline teachers feel students deserve, but having a dialogue between administrators and teachers about the incident may help the teacher have a greater role in decision-making surrounding the situation.

**Lack of impact.** A lack of impact on students and their positions influenced turnover, in that many teachers reported incidents of violence prevented them from effectively teaching students. In addition to not having the desired impact on students, teachers felt they were unable to impact the school as a whole. Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach (2014) determined that teachers' impact was significantly related to organizational citizenship behavior, or behaviors that go beyond teachers' typical obligations. Some of these behaviors can include staying late to help students or organizing school activities. Research demonstrates that workers high in organizational citizenship behavior have less intention to leave their positions (Coyne & Ong, 2007; Sharoni et al., 2012). If teachers believe their work has an impact on the school and their students, they may be more willing to put in extra time and continue to engage in the field because of the internal rewards they experience in "making of a difference".

**Professional development and self-efficacy.** The other two teacher empowerment dimensions included in Short and Rinehart's (1992) framework are professional development and self-efficacy. It is likely that the question prompts did not evoke the type of responses that might lead the teachers to acknowledge their own limitations and needs for development opportunities. Self-efficacy was mentioned rarely in the context of certain teachers feeling that they were not prepared or did not have the skills to work with challenging student populations in special education. Even though these dimensions received significantly less attention from teachers in this sample, there is evidence that professional development and self-efficacy are related to teacher satisfaction (Wu & Short, 1996). Specifically, one study determined that self-efficacy was the most important dimension in predicting teachers' intrinsic job satisfaction (i.e. satisfaction with the work they do) (Bogler & Nir, 2012). These findings highlight the importance of exploring how these dimensions impact turnover in the future.

### **Factors Related to Teacher Disempowerment and Turnover**

Teachers' responses in the current study explored the context around Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions of empowerment. In addition to individual-level empowerment, teachers focused on the conditions and factors that influenced their disempowerment in relation to incidents of violence. Results demonstrated four main factors that influenced teachers' disempowerment and decisions related to turnover: 1) safety, 2) policy, 3) administrative responses to incidents of violence/lack of support, and 4) community involvement and circumstances. Each of these factors contributed to the context that led to teacher-directed violence. Teachers' concerns related to these four factors affected their disempowerment (in the form of lack of status, autonomy and decision-making, and impact) and their considerations and decisions to transfer, retire, and leave the profession.

**Safety.** Safety was a major concern of teachers in the survey, and teachers reported feeling that at times they feared for the safety of themselves and their students. Some teachers cited threats on their lives and serious physical injury that contributed to the lack of safety they felt surrounding incidents of violence. Research demonstrates that it is not uncommon for teachers to be the victims of physical assault and serious physical injury (Casteel et al., 2007; Tiesman, Hendricks, Konda, & Hartley, 2014), and increased school safety is associated with decreases in teacher turnover (Kraft, Marinell, & Shen-Wei Ye, 2016). An authoritative school climate, characterized by high levels of structure and support, is related to less victimization and greater teacher safety (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2012), but many teachers describe schools that lack the necessary structure and consistency to prevent teacher-directed violence. For example, some teachers indicated that parents and family members had open access to their classrooms, which led to incidents of violence and fear for their safety. Poorly enforced rules allowed these problems to continue and demonstrate the lack of structure representative of the schools described in this sample. Often teachers' schools were disorganized, and teachers rarely expected their schools to ensure their safety. Teachers consistently mentioned safety as an important factor in their decisions to transfer, retire early, or leave the profession.

**Policy.** Policy and its enforcement, was a significant issue for teachers. Teachers cited a chronic lack of consequences for students, problems with student placement, and concerns about state or national level policy as concerns. Based on Ingersoll's (2001) study, 18% of teachers who transferred and 30% of teachers who left the profession cited student discipline problems as a significant factor in their dissatisfaction with the profession. In the current study, issues regarding policy contributed to teachers' disempowerment and turnover, as policy enforcement, or the lack thereof, limited teachers' autonomy in the classroom and voices in decision-making.

Some policy decisions directly affected teachers' abilities to effectively work with student perpetrators, who sometimes remained in classrooms after incidents of violence and avoided discipline altogether.

**Administrative responses.** Teachers often felt that administrative responses to incidents of violence were inappropriate, and at the center of insufficient administrative responses, was a lack of support for teachers when coping with violence. Astor and colleagues (2009) argue that the principal is central to ensuring low violence, safe schools. Administrators who are fair, clear, and consistent with their responses to discipline generally have schools with lower rates of victimization (Gottfredson et al., 2005). Research indicates that supportive administrators can lead to teacher perseverance and help with retention (Prather-Jones, 2011). Specifically, it is important that administrators enforce student consequences for misbehavior and involve teachers in the decision-making process (Prather-Jones, 2011). In the current sample, teachers frequently felt that administrators minimized their concerns regarding disciplinary responses for students. When teachers asked principals for help, they frequently ignored their requests. High levels of administrative support can also help teachers feel respected in the school and form collaborative relationships with their colleagues (Prather-Jones, 2011). Teachers' responses demonstrated that administrators' choices after violent incidents led to teachers feeling disrespected and undervalued, indicating disempowerment related to status. This disempowerment then contributed to turnover or consideration of turnover.

**Community context.** Parent involvement in the schools and additional community circumstances such as violence contributed to teachers' disempowerment and desire to leave the profession or their schools. Teachers often wanted greater involvement from parents when they were concerned about their son or daughter's performance, but disliked their involvement around

incidents of violence. In addition to involvement, many teachers were disappointed in the parenting of their students and the lack of consequences they faced for their actions at home. Similar to the responses from teachers in the current study, Smith and Smith (2006) interviewed teachers who had left city schools and found that teachers were especially troubled by the disconnect between them and the parents. Community violence was another major concern, as it often spilled over into the school environment (Smith & Smith, 2006). Numerous teachers in the current study described incidents of violence brought on by gang involvement among the students and the students' family members. Many teachers were afraid of the violence occurring in their school communities and felt that they needed to transfer to escape it. In general, community violence may influence teachers' empowerment on the dimension of impact. As teachers experience and witness the negative effects of violence on the students in their communities, they may feel as if their work is limited in how it can help students succeed.

### **How Teacher Disempowerment Influences Teacher Turnover**

Empowerment provides an appropriate lens to examine how incidents of violence affect teachers and lead to professional changes. When exploring patterns in teachers' responses, it appears that disempowerment often serves as a mediator between the occurrence of violence and subsequent decisions about turnover. While mediation has most frequently been studied with quantitative analyses, there is evidence that qualitative approaches, such as content analysis, are effective in identifying mediators and describing causal mechanisms (Bate et al., 2012; MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). In the current sample, disempowerment related to status, autonomy and decision-making, and impact followed incidents of violence that often did not have positive resolutions. Sometimes administrators' lack of support during the incident became more important than the incident itself. Other teachers described multiple incidents continuing to

occur over time with poor solutions. As teachers experienced repeated incidents of violence, they began to feel disempowered in their positions. When teachers became disempowered, they were likely to consider making professional changes such as transferring, retiring early, or leaving the profession. Teachers do not often have the appropriate resources or supports in dealing with violent incidents effectively. Feelings of disempowerment soon follow, leading teachers to consider other career options (e.g. transferring, retiring, leaving the profession).

**Lack of support as its own form of victimization.** Teachers in the sample often described lack of support as being a more important factor in their turnover than the incidents of violence themselves. McMahon and colleagues (2017) illustrated the significance of administrative support during incidents of violence and argued lack of support could be considered its own form of victimization. They found that 237 teachers mentioned lack of administrative support in their open-ended responses, and lack of support occurred on multiple levels of analysis (e.g. individual, interpersonal, and organizational). Further, teachers cited issues of support regarding how administrators addressed incidents with parents and other perpetrators as well as issues with implementation of policy. These themes directly relate to the lack of support seen in the teachers considering professional changes in the current study, as teachers often discussed lack of administrative support in disputes with parents and poor administrative follow-through on discipline policies. Lack of support following incidents of violence contributed significantly to teachers' disempowerment and subsequent decisions about turnover.

Teachers' responses indicated that incidents of violence involving parents were especially salient in situations where administrators did not provide adequate support. Communication between teachers and parents was often poor, and administrators often intervened in disputes,

choosing the parent's side over the teacher's side. Parents frequently blamed teachers for issues involving their children while teachers complained about parent involvement. According to teachers, administrators often served as the mediators during times of teacher-parent conflict, but many believed that administrators were ineffective in these roles, providing limited support to teachers. Research demonstrates that many teachers (approximately 25%) will go to administrators for support after they experience violence (Bounds & Jenkins, 2016), but some teachers will avoid administrators in these situations (Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012). Many teachers believe that their administrators do not care about them or their concerns and that teachers are expected to handle these incidents on their own (Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012). When miscommunication led to serious conflict in the current sample, teachers were often disappointed in how administrators attempted to solve it. Poor administrative responses to violence may lead teachers to avoid using their administrators for support during conflict with parents in the future, despite the important role administrators play in solving school issues related to violence (Astor et al., 2009). It is important that teachers and administrators work collaboratively to solve parents' problems or concerns, as well as other incidents of violence that affect teachers. This may ultimately prevent teachers from becoming disempowered and encourage teachers to stay in their positions and the profession.

**Multiple victimizations.** A number of teachers indicated that they had experienced numerous incidents over many years during their time in the profession. For many, the consistent violence they experienced contributed to their disempowerment and desire to explore professional changes. Limited research has explored the compounding effects of teachers experiencing multiple and ongoing incidents of violence, but Martinez and colleagues (2016) specifically examined teachers who experienced multiple types of violence over a two-year

period. This study found that the mean number of victimization types experienced (i.e. type of violence and perpetrator) over the current or past year was greater than four (Martinez et al., 2016). Open-ended responses from teachers in the current study indicate that some teachers were consistently experiencing multiple types of violence. Even though the question asked teachers to write about their worst incident of victimization, many teachers wrote about numerous experiences or described one experience that include multiple types of victimization. This highlights the complexity of teacher-directed violence and that incidents are not necessarily isolated. For many teachers, it is the experience of dealing with multiple incidents that leads to feelings of disempowerment through lack of status, autonomy and decision-making, and impact. In turn, teachers are left to consider various professional options such as transferring, retiring early, or leaving the profession.

### **Beyond Individual Empowerment**

Content analysis of teachers' responses demonstrated that factors beyond the individual's own sense of empowerment influence professional decisions regarding turnover. Research highlights the importance of personal empowerment and team empowerment for teachers, and both are associated with organizational commitment (Somech, 2005). While Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions can explain some of the disempowerment evident from teachers' responses in this study, relationships and organizational characteristics played an equally large role. Christens (2012) argues for expanding the definition of psychological empowerment to include a relational component. This relational aspect of empowerment includes collaboration and facilitating the empowerment of others. For teachers, a relational component to empowerment was intertwined with the teacher empowerment dimensions in their responses, as relationships with parents and administrators were central to their disempowerment. Teachers



indicated they lacked status and respect, autonomy and decision-making ability, and impact, but it was often breakdowns in communication and relationships that were central to their descriptions of violent incidents.

Organizational empowerment was influenced by school discipline policies and community circumstances. Organizational empowerment can refer to a number of characteristics, such as the ability to empower organization members, provide members the opportunity to develop skills, and inspire change (Maton, 2008). The schools that teachers described often lacked these characteristics of empowering organizations. Teachers often cited they were unable to impact their students and the school environment in the ways they hoped. Incidents of violence were consistently mishandled, and poor leadership contributed to teachers feeling unsupported by the school. Organizational disempowerment may be most evident in teachers' descriptions of school policy. Teachers frequently disagreed with discipline strategies, felt policies were inconsistent, and often did not have input in how policies were implemented. Whereas schools should empower teachers and make them feel safe, it appears that the teachers from the current study often describe schools that actively disempower teachers during incidents of violence.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The current study includes a number of strengths. For example, the study pulls from a large, national sample and is the first study to explore violence directed against teachers using an empowerment framework. The study also adds to the limited research on the relationship between teacher-directed violence and turnover, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore this relationship. Different methodologies allow for studying multiple facets of the problem, such as the perpetrators of violence directed against teachers, the circumstances

surrounding these incidents, and how violence plays a role in turnover. Themes of empowerment were identified through open-ended responses, but they appeared organically, in the sense that teachers were not specifically asked about empowerment. This demonstrates that teachers' responses inherently included aspects of empowerment. Most importantly, the current study seeks to promote teachers' voices in the discussion on school violence and the impacts of this violence.

The study is also limited in some ways. For example, administrative support was measured dichotomously. This variable in the current study does not account for teachers who received moderate levels of support during incidents of violence. Exploring administrative support as a continuous variable may provide additional information about the effect it has on teacher turnover. In addition, teachers' written responses on open-ended questions are relatively brief. While some teachers expanded upon their worst incident of teacher-directed violence, others provided limited context around the incident they described. In-depth qualitative interviews that allow researchers to ask specifically about elements of disempowerment could expand upon our understanding of the effects disempowerment has on teachers transferring, retiring early, or leaving the profession. While there are strengths to not mentioning empowerment in survey questions, this may also serve as limitation. Because the survey does not directly include questions related to the construct, researchers were unable to pull for specific components of empowerment from teachers. Having specific empowerment-related questions could have provided additional context to what teachers mentioned without them. Further, this study does not separate the different types of turnover (e.g. transferring, leaving the position, considerations of retirement or leaving the profession). There are likely differences surrounding teachers who want to transfer to different schools or change their positions versus teachers who

want to retire early versus teachers who want to leave the profession. Future research may look to separate these types of turnover and explore the circumstances that lead to teachers making each specific decision. Despite these limitations, the results from this study suggest several implications for research, practice, and policy.

### **Implications for Research, Practice, and Policy**

**Research.** The current study demonstrates promise for using Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions of teacher empowerment and empowerment theory as a way to explore teachers' experiences with incidents of violence and subsequent turnover. Although empowerment theory emphasizes the study of empowerment at multiple levels of analysis and incorporates both process and outcomes, Short and Rinehart's (1992) dimensions focus on teacher empowerment at the individual level and research using this framework has typically focused on outcomes. This theory could be further developed to incorporate processes through which teachers gain status, autonomy, decision-making, impact, self-efficacy, and professional development, as well as outcomes that result through these dimensions. These dimensions allude to other levels of analysis, but do not take the next step of exploring teachers' relationships and the interactions between levels. Through expanding the focus on the dimensions to include relational and organizational empowerment and exploring how these dimensions develop in teachers, empowerment theory may become better equipped to explain teachers' decisions about turnover. Because teachers are embedded within the school system that includes a vast array of stakeholders, any teacher empowerment theory should consider this organizational context.

While empowerment theory has generally been used as a strengths-based approach to solving problems, increasing participation, and gaining mastery, the current study explores empowerment through a different lens that focuses on what teachers lack and need to become

empowered. By exploring the inverse of empowerment, researchers can identify power structures and dynamics that impact empowerment from a different perspective. This approach strays from typical empowerment theory, but the study highlights the benefits of seeing what teachers are missing in order to describe how they can increase their empowerment. Studying disempowerment may provide researchers with information and knowledge to create and test empowering interventions that directly address teachers' greatest concerns.

This study lays the groundwork for using dimensions of teacher empowerment to explore turnover in the context of violence directed against teachers, but more quantitative and qualitative research is needed to determine the influence these dimensions have in turnover decisions. Empowerment and the dimensions of empowerment should be explored as independent variables and moderators in future studies about teachers transferring, retiring early, and leaving the profession. Studies that assess empowerment in these ways may provide researchers with direction in what types of empowerment are most important in the context of school violence and teacher turnover, as well as the role different empowerment dimensions play in teacher and student success. As researchers use empowerment in the study of teacher-directed violence and turnover, theory may be better able to generate predictions about teachers' actions.

There are multiple ways to quantitatively measure teacher empowerment. The School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPEC) is a theory-driven teacher-report measure created by Short and Rinehart (1992) that allows researchers to explore each of the six dimensions of teacher empowerment, and can be useful in studies examining school violence. Previous studies have used the measure and found associations between empowerment and professional commitment (Bogler, & Somech, 2004) and job satisfaction (Zemblyas & Papanastasiou, 2005). While Short and Rinehart (1992) demonstrated the reliability and validity of the measure, there is

some disagreement on the validity of its dimensions, and some researchers argue that the dimensions outlined by Short and Rinehart (1992) are not confirmed through rigorous methods of factor analysis (Klecker & Loadman, 1998). Other scales with established reliability and validity used in the measurement of teacher empowerment include the School Leader Empowering Behaviors (SLEB) scale (Lee & Nie, 2013) and Spreitzer's (1995) scale of psychological empowerment. The SLEB specifically focuses on teachers' perceptions of administrators' empowering actions (Lee & Nie, 2013), while Spreitzer's (1995) scale is shorter than the SPEC, examines empowerment along four dimensions (i.e. meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact), and was created for use in multiple professions. Researchers should consider the differences between these scales and weigh the benefits between each of these specific measures for studying teacher empowerment. It is likely that certain scales' usefulness will depend on the components of teacher empowerment researchers choose to focus on.

There is also a need to examine teacher empowerment with more diverse samples, as the majority of teachers in the current study were White and female. Although, the sample was consistent with the demographics of teachers nationally (The National Center for Education Information, 2011), it remains necessary to explore the similarities and differences in empowerment across diverse groups of teachers. The process of disempowerment and reasons for turnover may not be consistent for all teachers. Studies should also continue to consider the age and experience of teachers in examining the effects of teacher empowerment on turnover. The current study controlled for age and years of teaching experiences, but had findings that were inconsistent from previous research that mostly shows younger teachers are more likely to leave the profession and their positions (Guarino et al., 2006). These variables should be studied

within the context of teacher empowerment and teacher turnover in multiple ways to determine how teachers at different points in their careers are affected.

In addition to quantitative methods, it is important to use qualitative data in exploring some of the context and nuance around the dimensions of empowerment. The current study used open-ended response questions, but long-form interviews may be another way to gain rich data about teachers' experiences with violence and the role of empowerment or disempowerment. By studying what aspects of empowerment teachers are lacking, future research may explore how to increase teacher empowerment in these areas. A focus on the six dimensions presented by Short and Rinehart (1992) might be one area of focus, but questions could also focus on empowerment at multiple levels of analysis. Even though dimensions such as professional development and self-efficacy were rarely mentioned in teachers' responses in this study, it is possible that the teachers who are changing positions or leaving the profession are lacking in these areas.

Professional development and self-efficacy should be explored in the context of school violence and teacher turnover. In general, there is a need for more research to use the ecological framework to explore the various levels of analysis related to teacher-directed violence and turnover. Future studies should examine empowerment beyond the individual level, focusing on contextual factors and the environment, as well as empowerment at the organizational level.

This qualitative data focuses on teachers who have actually left or transferred but also on teachers who are thinking about transferring, retiring, or leaving. Some teachers who are considering these career moves may not follow through. Understanding which teachers decide to follow through on these decisions could help schools better learn how to retain their teachers. Future research should assess the percentage of teachers who follow through on their turnover intentions, as well as the factors that influence their decisions.

**Practice.** The current study has implications for school discipline. Osher, Bear, Sprague, and Doyle (2010) indicate that there are multiple approaches supported by research that can improve school discipline. These include ecological approaches to classroom management, such as improving the quality and efficacy of activities, the addition of school-wide positive behavioral supports (SWPBS), such as systematic support systems, behavioral interventions, and communication of school rules, and social emotional learning (SEL) that aims to increase self-awareness, relationship skills, and self-management (Osher et al., 2010). Teachers would benefit from training in these skills to prevent violence from occurring in the classroom. This may lead to greater teacher empowerment in the form of professional development and self-efficacy. Having a system-wide commitment to positive classroom management and SEL would also benefit schools beyond the teachers. Specifically, implementing SEL curricula for students across all grade levels could foster the development of empowered and socially and emotionally mature students, contributing to empowering school environments. School psychologists may play an important role in this implementation, as they receive in-depth training in intervention and evidence-based practice.

Sometimes incidents of violence cannot be avoided. Teachers should be prepared to handle incidents of violence and should know best practices for ensuring the safety of themselves and their students. A majority of pre-service teachers recognize the importance of violence prevention training in reducing school violence and making students feel safe (Kandakai & King, 2013). School-based violence prevention programs for teachers have been successful in increasing teachers' self-efficacy in handling incidents of violence and bullying situations (Schultes, Stefanek, van de Schoot, Strohmeir, & Spiel, 2014). These types of programs may increase teachers' perceived safety over time, as they are more prepared when incidents of

violence do occur. Teachers have identified that having time to collaborate and consult with service providers is a useful support (Sautner, 2008) and providing opportunities for teachers to talk about their experiences of violence with others may help teachers feel safer. In turn, this may increase teachers' empowerment on the dimension of status, as teachers' experiences and opinions are respected, harmful experiences of violence are addressed, and teachers are able to receive direct support in coping with violent incidents.

Teachers should also work to develop strong relationships with parents from the beginning of the academic year. Reaching out to parents at the beginning of the year is one way for elementary school teachers to start a positive dialogue with parents before any incidents of violence can occur (Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan, & Brown, 2010). This is not always feasible, but when teachers are proactive in reaching out to parents, conflict can be avoided. Teachers should not only contact parents when their child has done something wrong or is in trouble, but should be open to contacting parents when their child performs well. When teachers are burdened with too many students, it may be useful to send class wide e-mails or newsletters for parents so they know what their children are working on in the classroom. Having some flexibility to meet or talk with parents when necessary can be beneficial as parents may not be able to meet during normal school hours.

While the current study has focused on teacher disempowerment and the factors associated with it, it is also possible that principals and administrators may be disempowered. Principals often experience a significant level of stress due to the breadth of job responsibilities they must balance (Boyland, 2011). Principals have to satisfy multiple school stakeholders that include teachers, parents, system administrators, and the school board, and their needs and opinions often conflict with one another (Boyland, 2011). When considering support for



teachers, it is also important to keep administrators in mind. Some methods for supporting principals involve professional development and trainings focused on problem-solving, time management, and communication (Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003). Boyland (2011) suggests that reducing principals' workload may be the best method of providing relief, as principals indicated that they had too many responsibilities. Hiring additional administrators, sharing responsibilities with others in the school, and decreasing paperwork may work towards solving this problem (Boyland, 2011). Greater collaboration with teachers and other school stakeholders may also be beneficial, providing a voice to others with less power in the school. As opposed to implementing discipline policies solely from the administrative level, principals can consider creating discipline committees that work together to make important disciplinary decisions for students and provide appropriate placement recommendations.

**Policy.** Teachers frequently cited issues with discipline policies at their schools, and this study emphasizes the need to improve these policies. When discipline is necessary, policies should be clear and fair (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Mayer, 2002; Skiba & Knesting, 2002). Further, both teachers and school administrators should carry out these policies with consistency (Gottfredson et al., 2005), ensuring that the consequences for students are appropriate based on the incident's severity (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). When school discipline policy follows these guidelines, teachers may better understand why and how discipline is being implemented. Certain strategies such as zero tolerance are not effective (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008) and should be avoided, as exclusionary discipline like out-of-school suspension and expulsion is related to a number of negative outcomes (Gonsoulin, Zablocki, & Leone, 2012). Providing education for teachers and administrators on what policies are backed by evidence may be beneficial for gaining buy-in.

Policies that create safe school environments are important, as a large portion of teachers in the current study were concerned about their own safety and the safety of others related to incidents of violence. Including multiple perspectives in the development of policy and policy decisions may be especially valuable, as the school is made up of a number of stakeholders that includes teachers, administrators, students, parents, and mental health professionals. Providing diverse stakeholders the opportunities to participate in policy decisions allows for unique perspectives on school violence and how to address it (Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2010). Specifically allowing teachers to contribute to discussions about policy may lead to increased empowerment in the form of status, decision-making, and impact. Policies should also be formed in a way that is sensitive to the local community and context, and including more voices from the community may provide more successful policy (Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011). Specifically related to violence directed against teachers, Espelage and colleagues (2013) suggest an anonymous reporting system for teachers as a way to develop a registry of incidents of teacher-directed violence. An organized method of reporting can provide insight into future policy changes at both the school and government levels. If beneficial changes are to be made in supporting teachers experiencing violence, information about these incidents needs to be collected.

### **Conclusion**

For teachers, navigating incidents of violence is part of the job, yet teacher-directed violence has received minimal attention in discussions on school violence and how to make schools safer. Teachers who experience these incidents are at a great risk of transferring, retiring early, or leaving the profession, as teachers become disempowered in their positions. Multiple environmental conditions such as inconsistent discipline policy, lack of administrative support,

and strained relationships with school stakeholders perpetuate violence and contribute to disempowerment. This study aims to give teachers a voice in the discussion on the violent incidents that directly affect them. Through collaboration of the multiple stakeholders involved in school communities, it is possible that we can decrease school violence and empower teachers. Through empowerment, teachers may be more likely to stay in the profession, as schools are able to retain their best teachers and provide stability to the classroom.

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## Appendix

### Teacher Disempowerment Codebook

#### *Initial Codes for Teacher Turnover*

##### **1. Transfer**

**Description:** Teachers stated that they want to or did transfer or move to a different school, grade level, or district as a result of the victimization.

**Note:** This only includes voluntary transfer. If the transfer is involuntary use appropriate response code. If it's ambiguous then assume voluntary.

**Example:** I am leaving the state of Florida and returning to Michigan. The high school where I teach has a large number of students who are "out of control". This incident, along with others, have influenced my decision to leave the state.

##### **2. Leave**

**Description:** Statements explicitly expressing leaving, left, or desire to leave the teaching profession altogether.

**Example:** This incident and others make my teaching position incredibly stressful. I consider other professions and don't think that I will remain in the teaching field for a long period of time.

##### **3. Retirement**

**Description:** Teacher indicates that they want to retire to get out or are happy that they will retire soon

**Example:** It made me think about the possibility of retiring sooner than I had planned

**Example:** Thank goodness I am close to retiring

##### **4. Position Change**

**Description:** Expressing a change or desire to change positions

**Example:** I thought at that time that I studied the wrong thing and I ask for a position change as an assistant teacher

#### *Teacher Level of Empowerment*

##### **1. Lack of Perceived Status**

**Definition:** Perceptions they don't have professional respect and admiration from those with whom they work and whom their work involves, that others don't have respect for their expertise and knowledge.

- Teacher mentions feeling disrespected by parents or administrators
- Administrators trust another opinion over their teacher's opinion (e.g. taking a parent's side over the teacher's side)
- Includes being "bullied" by a colleague, administrator, or parent/The mention of power differences that contribute to teachers feeling powerless.
- Teacher mentions that he/she is not acknowledged for their work

- Teacher mentions others blaming them for something they perceive as not their fault

Ex. I think it is because the parents do not respect the teacher(s) me. They feel that they can do or say anything without any repercussions. I think that the administration at the school does not know what to do with a parent like that because they are constantly yelling sue, and going over their head as well. We are fighting a losing battle and it is getting worse every year.

Ex. I feel there is an atmosphere that it is open season on teachers and that we are all bad and the public can do what they want. This is not true at all inner city schools, under a strong administrator it is very different.

## 2. Lack of Autonomy and Decision-Making

**Definition:** Teachers' beliefs they cannot control certain aspects of their work life including incidents of violence and their consequences, as well as teachers' perceptions that they are not involved in relevant school decisions.

- Includes teachers who feel like the role of a teacher has changed and that they have little control over their classrooms or with students and administrations.
- Lacking control over a situation or your job (includes mention of the student being uncontrollable or showing uncontrollable behavior in the presence of the teacher-Teacher must mention "control" in regards to the student)
- Teacher mentions that they have no control over discipline in the classroom
- Teacher mentions that the student remains in the classroom despite their recommendation or disagreement.

### Exclusion

- If teacher explains that they are unable to teach effectively due to misbehavior affecting classroom learning or student influence this should be coded as "lack of impact."

Ex. It made me feel as if I have no control over my situation because I needed to continue at this school for the entire year.

Ex. Students pretty much do whatever they want at our school this year. Teachers have no rights...

Ex. In addition to other incidents that administration can only do so much due to discipline red tape and the fact that teachers have lost the right to teach, I feel that most of my day is spent babysitting and trying to diffuse "Incidents" I am currently thinking of leaving this profession and I was recently evaluated as an exemplary teacher.

## 3. Lack of Impact on Others

**Definition:** Teachers' perceptions they do not have an effect and influence on school life and the lives of their students.

- Teachers mention that they are unable to help their student(s) at this current time, either from the circumstances of the job or other circumstances outside of the school.
- Teacher mentions that having disruptive students impacts the whole classroom and prevents proper instruction.

### Exclusion

- Teacher admits to having some blame

Ex. Teachers are trying to teach all the students in the class and what we are finding is that we spend too much time dealing with a few disruptive students, writing them up and sending them out, just to have them returned to the classroom, doing the same things in a matter of minutes...It is unfair to the majority of students who are there to learn.

Ex. Trying to help a student be all that he or she can be, using your own money for supplies for the kids only to be told to Fuck off really makes you wonder if the kid will ever care. When the parent arrives they are just as bad...Because of the significant verbal abuse and lack of desire of the students to want to learn I left the position mid year when offered a better teaching position  
 Ex. I requested to transfer to elementary. I've taught all grades between first and senior year in high school. I have a better chance to change this type of bullying behavior to more prosocial behavior in a younger child, while at the adolescent stage it is more of a matter of damage control.

### ***Additional Factors***

#### **1. Safety**

Definition: Teachers cite concerns about their physical well-being or the well-being of students, loved ones, etc. as a factor in considering or acting on a professional change.

- Teacher feels that their physical well-being or well-being of a loved one is threatened
- Teacher mentions being scared or fearful for their well-being and safety
- Teacher mentions “safety” specifically
- Teacher indicates that an incident put the safety of his/her classroom at risk
- Teacher mentions serious injury that results in hospital visits or surgery

Ex. I was scared that this behavior would continually escalate. I wanted to work in a safe environment. I have since found a safe environment in a school district close by.

Ex. I do not feel safe. I would not recommend my profession to an incoming college student. I am wondering when school districts will get tough on this kind of student.

#### **2. Policy**

Definition: Teachers cite school (or government) policy, often regarding discipline, as a factor for considering or acting on a professional change. Teachers may also cite policy as a reason why violent incidents occur.

- Teacher mentions a chronic lack of consequences for students
- Statement indicates that the incident occurred due to poor rules or policy
- Includes policy related to other perpetrators than students
- Includes incorrect classroom placement for a student (general ed versus special ed or alternative setting).
- Belief that a certain policy makes it too challenging to teach effectively.
- Includes lack of enforcement of policy

Exclusion

- A one-time incident in which an administrator does not provide a consequence should be coded as administrative response.

Ex. there is no discipline in the school Students no nothing is going to happen to them

Ex. He had been allowed to bully students at my school since Kindergarten. There are no set consequences for bullying, and teachers are reprimanded when they have to write a referral because our school grade takes into account the number of behavior incidents.

#### **3. Administrative response/lack of support**

Definition: Teachers mention that administrators’ actions or lack of actions related to violent incidents contributed to their consideration or follow-through with transferring, retiring, or leaving the profession.

- This includes teachers who mention their administrators provided no support.
- Teacher is asking for help or needs help but administration does nothing
- Administration does not provide appropriate support for teacher
- Administrator downplaying a concern of the teacher to protect the school
- Lack of support without any additional policy implication should always be coded under “administrative response to incidents” instead of “policy”

#### Exclusion

- If the administrator is the main perpetrator of the original incident, this should not be coded.
- If an issue with the school board is indicated, code this as community involvement.

Ex. I felt I did not get enough support from administration, who preferred to keep it quiet and not scare off tuition-paying parents. I left that school at the end of the year and moved to a public school.

Ex. When reporting a verbally threatening comment by a student to the principal there was no support, student was not removed from room, suspended. It was a big so what?

#### 4. Community Involvement and Circumstances

Definition: Teacher mentions students needing more assistance from their home life or parents, as well as community characteristics or a lack of supports in the community that contribute to teachers’ professional decisions.

- Teacher explains that the cause of violent incidents is related to home-life, parents, or the community.
- Teacher mentions that parents do not take responsibility for their own actions or the actions of their children.
- Teacher mentions gang violence or other factors such as low SES as contributing to discipline problems
- Teachers cite community problems as contributing to challenges in the school district and desire to leave, transfer or retire.
- Includes situations involving the school board
- Can still be coded if parent is perpetrator

#### Exclusion

- Issues with teachers union do not get coded under community involvement.

Ex. It is exhausting trying to stay a positive model for children who are considered "disposable" by their family. I have earned the trust after two quarters of school, but it is still a struggle depending on how the child was treated each morning before they arrive on my doorstep.

Ex. Student has no parent showing them right from wrong

## Relevant Survey Questions

### Quantitative Questions

1. Thinking of this incident that you just described, who did this to you? Please answer "Yes," "No," or "N/A" for each option. Thank you. (Required)

- Male Student
- Female Student
- Male parent/male family member of a student
- Female parent/female family member of a student
- Male colleague
- Female colleague
- Male administrator
- Female administrator
- Other

2. How supportive did you think your administration was in dealing with this incident? If you have never experienced an incident, please choose the "N/A" option. Thank you. (Required)

- 1: Not at all supportive
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6: Extremely supportive

3. After the incident, did you request a transfer to another school?

- Yes
- No
- NA-Never experienced an incident

4. After the incident did you leave that teaching position?

- Yes
- No
- NA-Never experienced an incident

### Qualitative Questions

1. Please think about all of the times when you were the target of verbal or physical aggression or intimidation in your school. Can you describe, in the space provided below, what was the most upsetting incident that happened to you in your role as a teacher?

If you did not experience an incident, please record N/A in the space below. Thank you. (Required)

2. In your own words, please explain why you think this incident happened. Please type "N/A" in the box if you've never experienced an incident. Thank you. (Required)

3. How did this incident impact your view of your current teaching position? Please type "N/A" in the box if you have never experienced an incident. Thank you. (Required)

4. Please provide any other information that may be important to note in the incident described. Please type "N/A" in the box if you have never experienced an incident. Thank you. (Required)