Students' Reports of Severe Violence in School as a Tool for Early Detection and Prevention

Yaacov B. Yablon
Bar-Ilan University

Early detection of severe violence is a significant challenge for many schools. Three studies were conducted on samples of 6th, 8th, and 10th graders (12–16 years old). The first study, based on paired reports of teachers and students ($n = 130$), showed that a high percentage of both victims and perpetrators of severe violence are not identified by teachers but are known to students. The second and third studies were based on qualitative ($n = 30$) and quantitative methods ($n = 524$) and revealed the factors that explain students' willingness to report or seek help from their teachers. The findings highlight the role of victims as a source of information regarding perpetrators and suggest a new perspective for early identification of severe violence in schools.

Early detection of violence, and especially severe violence, in school is fundamental for providing a safe school environment and for intervention. However, as will be discussed, various strategies that have been used for identification of violence have mostly failed and suffer from different limitations (Cornell, Sheras, Gregory, & Fan, 2009; Morrison & Skiba, 2001; Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001; Reddy et al., 2001). The main hypothesis posited in the present study is that students, and victims in particular, hold valuable information about perpetrators that can be employed as a useful tool for early detection. Thus, rather than trying to identify perpetrators, we can be more successful in identifying victims and via them increase the ability to detect severe violence and perpetrators.

However, students are mostly reluctant to report or seek help (Boulton et al., 2013; Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014; Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010; Yablon, 2010), and very little is known about the factors that enhance their willingness to do so for dealing with severe violence in schools. The first aim of the present study was therefore to investigate whether students hold more information on severe violence than their teachers (Study 1). The second aim was to reveal the factors that enhance students' willingness to report or seek help (Study 2). The third aim was to empirically investigate these factors among three age groups in school (Study 3). Taken together, the findings may provide

overarched evidence for successful detection of severe violence in schools.

Early Detection of Violence in School

One of the seminal works on the early detection of violent behavior in school was the "Early warning, timely response: A guide to safe schools" which was published in 1998 by the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Justice (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998). The aim of the report was to supply professionals with early warning signs that indicate that a student has a high potential for using violence. The long list of early signs included social withdrawal, isolation, victimization, previous use of violence, drug or alcohol use, poor academic success, intolerance, prejudicial attitudes, and so on. It was suggested that school teachers as well as any other professionals in the school, and even students, can be trained to recognize these warning signs and effectively intervene.

Since the publication of the report, many studies were conducted in order to identify risk and protective factors that can be used for early detection. However, the authors already pointed to the need for caution when using such an approach, which is known as profiling, and many later studies pointed to the ineffectiveness and sometimes even misuse and danger of using this strategy for early identification (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010). It was argued that many students may fit the

---

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Yaacov B. Yablon, School of Education, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan 5290002, Israel. Electronic mail may be sent to yaacov.yablon@biu.ac.il.

profiles' criteria, but in practice only very few will ever commit a violent act (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). Labeling students can itself put the students at risk and damage their social and personal well-being, and may even impinge on their human rights (Borum et al., 2010). Furthermore, the fact that there are general high levels of violence in schools and many students are unfortunately involved in violence as either perpetrators or victims raises doubts as to the usefulness of profiling as a large number of students in the at-risk group will be identified as being in danger of employing severe violence.

Other strategies for early identification were also criticized. The use of teachers' referrals was generally shown to be incomplete, sometimes inaccurate and insufficient (Dowdy, Doane, Eklund, & Dever, 2013). Peer reports were not proven to be better (Cole, Cornell, & Sheras, 2006), and even the accuracy of students' reports in self-referral questionnaires was questioned (Branson & Cornell, 2009). This led to the adoption of a more systematic and structured approach for early identification surveys, which were expected to improve the accuracy of the identification. Although these methods have had some success, they were also found to have inherent problems (Cornell et al., 2009). The number of false positive identifications is relatively high, the interpretation of the findings lacks an ecological or developmental perspective, and the prediction of violence in social interactions within the school context is limited.

Threat assessment is yet another method that was developed in response to the weakness of the more traditional ways, and especially profiling (Cornell et al., 2009; Randazzo et al., 2006). Rather than investing efforts in identifying violent students by either clinical judgments or statistical formulas, efforts are made to investigate all threatening remarks that were made by students, which may or may not lead to actual acts. The role of the school is to create a system in which all students who make threats are assessed. Two of the core assumptions of threat assessment are therefore that when a threat is made, someone will report it, and that because not all threats, and actually most of them, will not be actualized, someone in the school can and should assess whether the threat is serious and poses a danger.

Students' Help Seeking and Reports on Violence

The main argument of the present study is that early detection of violence should focus on gathering information about the violence and perpetrators from the victims rather than on directly identifying the perpetrators. It highlights the role of victims as a source of information about perpetrators and suggests a new perspective for early identification of violence. As will be discussed, it is posited that victims should be viewed as a key factor in the detection of perpetrators, because they hold valuable information that is not held by the teachers or the school authorities.

Although identifying the victims of violence and gathering information from them may be an easier task than identifying perpetrators, studies show that victims are underreported and are actually also not identified. For example, there is a significant gap between the actual extent of violence in school and the teachers' or other school staff's information and perception of the violence (Ahn, Rodkin, & Gest, 2013). Furthermore, most students do not report being victims and do not seek help for dealing with violence (Boulton et al., 2013; Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014; Eliot et al., 2010; Yablon, 2010). Some of the violence occurs when there is no school supervision and no adult knows about it (Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, Sowers, & Theriot, 2004). When available, school statistics on violence give powerful information for the design of primary intervention on the school level but not for identifying individual students who need help. Unfortunately, victims can suffer violence for a longtime without anyone knowing, helping, or intervening. For useful prevention, intervention, and detection of violent students, victims need to report or seek help from the school staff when violence does occur. Thus, rather than predicting and identifying violent students, efforts should be invested in encouraging victims to seek help or report violence. Information from them can then assist in detection and intervention with violent students.

Previous studies have already been conducted in various fields in order to investigate why students are reluctant to seek help. In spite of the general paucity of research (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010), studies yielded a list of conditions, including emotional, social, cognitive, and behavioral ones. Previous findings also showed that the willingness to seek help and variables that explain willingness to seek help vary according to the problem. Studying the factors related to the willingness to seek help for severe violence in school therefore requires special attention and a separate investigation, as carried out in the present study.

Three forms of severe violence acts were investigated in the present study: physical, sexual, and weapon use. Although violence in school is a

widespread phenomenon, these calamitous events are unfortunately not rare (National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education, 2014). Deadly school shootings have taken place in many countries, including the U.S., India, France, Norway, Germany, Finland, Brazil, and Israel. The number of students who bring weapons to school in Israel, where the present study was conducted, is 4%–9%. On average, 15% of students faced sexual assault, and 6%–20% were victims of severe physical violence that caused serious physical harm. Although worldwide statistics point to the measure of severe violence in school, it is accepted that many additional incidents that take place are not recorded.

From a theoretical point of view, the reluctance to seek help can be explained by the high and negative psychosocial costs of seeking and receiving help. The cost might be even greater for such severe forms of violence. For most people, the need for help is a sign of their own incompetence and involves an admission of failure (Bohns & Flynn, 2010). This also explains why students generally prefer to approach informal help providers such as a friend rather than a formal or professional one such as a teacher or counselor (Leach & Rickwood, 2009). Furthermore, general personal and social negative attitudes toward seeking help, inconvenience, shame, stigmatization, concerns about confidentiality, not knowing where to go, or beliefs that the treatment cannot help, reduce the chances that someone will seek help (Gulliver et al., 2010).

The research literature on self-disclosure of severe violence is also relevant for understanding help seeking or reporting in order to deal with severe violence in school. Schaeffer, Leventhal, and Asnes (2011) suggested that students will report or seek help when they have the opportunity to do so and described this process as facilitated disclosure. They suggested that students will not expose the fact they were hurt unless someone encourages them do to so. From a developmental perspective it is suggested that students may lack the skills to initiate a conversation about their suffering, may not interpret the situation correctly, or may lack the appropriate terms or schemata for describing it (McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014). From a practical point of view, this line of studies suggests that reporting or seeking help may depend on an opportunity to do so, and whether teachers and other professionals in schools set the base for meaningful and fruitful contact with the students.

The present study therefore had two main goals. The first was to investigate the extent to which students hold information on severe violence in schools, of which the teachers are not aware. This also served as the basis for the main hypothesis of the study that help seeking can serve as a useful way to detect severe violence in school. The second goal was to elucidate the factors that can predict as well as enhance students' willingness to seek help or report on severe violence to their teachers.

Study 1

The aim of Study 1 was to investigate the difference between information that students and their homeroom teachers hold regarding perpetrators of severe violence in their classroom. Previous studies investigated the differences between information on violence gathered from different informers in school (e.g., Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002). However, these studies focused on identifying victims of violence by different informers, whereas the present study is the first to investigate such differences in identifying perpetrators. The aim of the study was to provide empirical evidence for the hypothesis that students hold information that is unknown to teachers, which, if they share, can lead to better detection of severe violence in school.

Because the study focuses on students' willingness to seek help as a way to identify perpetrators, we looked at the differences between teachers and students in two aspects: (a) how many of the perpetrators who are known to the students are also known to the teachers, and (b) to what extent do teachers identify students who are victims of severe violence and can potentially lead to information about perpetrators.

The focus of the study is thus on the ability of teachers to identify victims and perpetrators. For doing so, we used a methodology for diagnostic test evaluation (Lalkhen & McCluskey, 2008) and looked at four different estimations for evaluating teacher's accuracy in identifying victims: sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV), and negative predictive value (NPV). Sensitivity can also be seen as a truth-positive evaluation rate and indicates the rate at which the teacher correctly identifies those students who are victims of severe violence. Specificity, which can be regarded as a truth-negative rate, indicates the teacher's ability to correctly identify students who are not victims of severe violence. PPV and NPV are dependent on the appearance of the problem among the specific population examined, which in the present study is the prevalence of severe violence among students.

Although PPV indicates the probability that a student is a victim when the teacher says he or she is, NPV is the probability that the student is not a victim when the teacher also says that.

Although no previous studies have investigated the prevalence of teachers' identification of perpetrators, and specifically the gap between the information held by teachers and students, such an investigation is a fundamental stage for the next phase of the present study, which is the willingness of students to seek help from teachers and by that reducing the possible gap.

Method

Participants

One hundred and fifty public elementary, middle, and high schools were randomly sampled from state-run Jewish schools across Israel (50 from each school level). In order to compare information held by students to those of their teachers, a dyad of a homeroom teacher and a student were sampled from each of the school levels. Of these, 130 pairs participated in the study (87% response rate). From 6th grade (elementary school), 29.2% (76% response rate); from 8th grade (middle school), 35.4% (92% response rate); and from 10th grade (high school), 35.4% (92% response rate). All participants were Hebrew speakers, about 7% of them immigrated to Israel within the past 10 years (range: 6–10 years), and 16.6% reported being an observant Jew. Fifty-eight percent of the students and 94% of the teachers were female. The total number of students in the 130 classrooms that were sampled was 2,454.

Instruments

Teachers and students completed a six-item questionnaire designed for the present study based on an extensively used questionnaire in the Israeli school system that was developed by Benbenishty, Astor, Zeira, and Vinokur (2002) as a Hebrew modification of the California School Climate Survey (Furlong et al., 2005). In order to focus on severe violence, the relevant subscales (two items each) for measuring severe physical violence (e.g., you were injured as a result of a physical attack and needed medical treatment, Cronbach's α = .90), sexual violence (e.g., a student touched or tried to touch you in a sexual way against your will, Cronbach's α = .88), and weapon use (e.g., bringing a knife or a pocketknife for purposes of defense or attack, Cronbach's α = .84) were used. The students

were asked to indicate how many times they were victimized in the last month on a four-level scale (*never*, *once*, *twice*, *three or more times*). Using the same scale, the teachers were asked to evaluate how many times their (specific) student was a victim of each of the described violent acts during the last months. For identification of perpetrators, each dyad of a teacher and a student received a list of the students in the class and were asked to indicate all students who perpetrated one of the violent acts described in the questionnaire even once during the past month.

Procedure

Questionnaires and data collection were approved by the Ministry of Education's chief scientist prior to the onset of the study and in accordance with the regulations of the education system. Informed consent of the students' parents was obtained and both students and teachers freely participated in the study. Teachers and students were contacted by the research team and received an explanation on the study goals and procedure, and anonymity was assured. If they agreed, the students were also asked to provide a signed consent by their parents. Only teachers whose students completed the research questionnaire were included in the study and vice versa. The final student participation rate was 91% and the teacher participation rate was 96%. Data were collected during the 2013 academic school year. A teacher and a student from the same school completed the research questionnaire on the same day. A research assistant met each of them separately in the school on a school day, explained the research, and was on hand to answer any of their questions.

Results

Identification of Victimized Students

In order to study identification of victimized students', responses on the victimization scale were summed into a dichotomous variable: victim or nonvictim (Table 1). Four statistical indicators were calculated in order to evaluate the differences between students' self-report on victimization and their identification by their own teachers: sensitivity, specificity, PPV, and NPV. As can be seen in Table 2, the teachers identified 68%–88% of the students who reported themselves as victims of severe physical violence (n = 61), 32%–54% of those who were victims of sexual violence

(n = 43), and 30%–70% of those who were victims of weapon use (n = 38). From a developmental perspective, higher levels of identifications were demonstrated by teachers of 8th graders compared to those of 6th and 10th graders. It should be noted that while teachers demonstrated only a low to moderate ability to identify victims of severe violence in the 6th and 10th grade, they were able to identify all students who had never been victimized in all grades.

Identification of Perpetrators

Using the list of students in their classroom, the students identified 359 (of 2,454) of their classmates as perpetrators (15%). Of these, 136 (17%) of 798 were identified by 6th graders, 119 (15%) of 782 by 8th graders, and 104 (12%) of 874 by 10th graders. The teachers identified only 170 students from the list as perpetrators (80 in 6th grade, 57 in 8th grade, and 33 in 10th grade).

Table 1

Number of Victims of Severe Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, and Weapon Use Among 6th, 8th, and 10th Graders Who Participated in Study 1

Form of violence	Victimization	Grade		
		6th	8th	10th
Physical	Yes	22	16	23
	No	16	30	23
Sexual	Yes	8	14	22
	No	30	32	24
Weapon use	Yes	5	13	20
	No	33	33	26

Note. Victimization was measured as the mean of items referring to each violence form. Victims include students who reported that they were victims of even one act of violence within the past month.

Logistic regression analysis with grade as a categorical variable was used to measure the teachers' identification rate. The results indicated significant differences in identification rates among teachers in the three grades, $\chi^2(2)$ = 16.82; p < .001. The findings point to a 59% match between teachers and students in identifying perpetrators in the 6th grade (B = 1.12; SE B = .27; Wald = 16.86, p < .001; e^B = 1.98), 48% in the 8th grade (B = 0.68; SE B = .28; Wald = 52.96, p < .01; e^B = 3.07), and 32% in the 10th grade. Pairwise comparisons using Bonferroni analysis revealed a significant difference between teachers in the 10th grade and teachers in the 6th and 8th grades.

Discussion

The findings of Study 1 show that teachers are generally unaware of many of their students being either perpetrators or victims of severe violence. Previous studies have already revealed a gap between students and their teachers in their overall evaluation of various forms of violence and of different risk behaviors in schools (Ahn et al., 2013; Brener et al., 2002). Although these studies were based on mean levels of violence, the present study provides the first evidence on the ability of teachers to identify specific students in their classroom and that teachers are not aware of the behavior of specific students.

A few important trends regarding victims of severe violence can be seen from the results of the present study. First, 6th and 10th graders are at greater risk of not being identified by their teachers as victims of violence. Second, victims of sexual violence and weapon use are at greater risk of not being identified as victims than victims of physical violence. Specifically, over 40% of 8th graders and most victims of sexual violence and weapon use in

Table 2

Comparison of Sensitivity, Specificity, Positive Predictive Value (PPV), and Negative Predictive Value (NPV) of Teachers' Identification of Victimized Students

	Form of violence								
	Physical			Sexual			Weapon use		
	Grade 6	Grade 8	Grade 10	Grade 6	Grade 8	Grade 10	Grade 6	Grade 8	Grade 10
Sensitivity	0.68	0.88	0.70	0.38	0.54	0.32	0.40	0.69	0.30
Specificity	0.80	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.97	0.92	1.00	1.00	1.00
PPV	0.83	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.88	0.78	1.00	1.00	1.00
NPV	0.63	0.94	0.77	0.86	0.84	0.59	0.92	0.89	0.65

6th and 10th grades are not known to their home-room teachers. Unless teachers approach them, any information about perpetrators would not be gathered. The explanation for these findings is beyond the scope of the present study. It is, however, possible that students in the transition between elementary to high school are regarded as being at greater risk for many behavioral, emotional, and educational difficulties (Topping, 2011), so that teachers are more concerned and aware of them. Being able to identify more students who suffer from physical violence than students who suffer from sexual violence or weapon use can be a result of the overt aspects that characterize physical violence. It is also easier for students to share such information, as will also be seen from the results of the present study (Study 3).

Identifying perpetrators also seems to be a great challenge for teachers. As reviewed earlier, studies discuss how difficult it is for teachers to identify students who may act violently in the future. The findings of the present study show that teachers do not identify about 40% of the students who use violence in 6th grade, 50% of them in 8th grade, and about 70% of them in 10th grade. These students are known as perpetrators to their peers but were never brought to the attention of their teachers. The fact that teachers are aware of most of the violent students in the sixth grade is a source of strength and can be explained by the fact that the elementary school homeroom teachers are those who teach most of their students' classes and spend much of their time with them (Ministry of Education, 1994). It may therefore allow them a closer look and more involvement in what is happening with them. Nonetheless, they are not aware of two of every five violent students in their classroom, a number that increases with the students' age.

In conclusion, the findings of Study 1 point to the role of victims as a potential source of information about perpetrators and set the base for Study 2. Future studies are needed in order to elaborate the findings of Study 1 and reveal those factors that may influence the knowledge of teachers about severe violence compared to information held by their students. This is beyond the scope of the present study.

Study 2

The findings of Study 1 provide solid support for the main hypothesis posited in the present study, that victims hold information about perpetrators that is not available to their teachers. As discussed, seeking help or reporting would therefore be advisable as a successful way for identification and early detection of violent students in school. The main question is, therefore, what are the factors that can enhance students' willingness to approach their teachers for help and specifically for dealing with severe violence. Because no previous studies revealed these factors, this was the aim of Study 2.

Method

Participants

A random sample of 30 students from 6th, 8th, and 10th grades (10 from each grade) participated in the study. The participants were randomly sampled from the schools which participated in Study 1 (but who themselves did not participate in Study 1). Half of the participants from each grade were boys and half were girls. All participants were Hebrew speakers, about 10% of them immigrated to Israel within the past 10 years (range: 8–10 years), 20% reported being an observant Jew.

Instruments

Data were collected through conversational (open-ended) and semistructured in-depth interviews. Questions were aimed at understanding the factors that inhibit or enhance students' willingness to seek help for dealing with, or with what would become, severe violence. The participants were asked general questions about their own and their friends' experience with violence in school. They were then asked about their willingness to seek help in general and from the teachers and other school staff in particular. The interviews were dynamic and interactive and the order of questions changed between participants in order to allow the flow of the interview and the involvement of the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Questions included, for example: "How much and what type of violence is there in your school?", "What do you do when violence takes place?", "Do you see any of your teachers as potential help providers for dealing with violence? Why?", and "What is necessary for you to report or seek help for violence from your teacher?"

Procedure

Interviews and data collection were approved by the Ministry of Education's chief scientist and parents' informed consent were obtained prior to the

onset of the study. The students received a letter from the research team and were invited to freely participate in the study. The participation rate was 83%.

Data were collected during the 2013 academic school year. Individual interviews were held with each of the students during a school day at the school. The interviews lasted 30–45 min and were recorded. Interviews were conducted by three qualified research assistants who hold an MA in educational counseling. Confidentiality was assured and the participants were told that they could stop the interview or quit at any point and with no harm to them or to the study. At the end of the interview, the students received a small gift (a paper notebook) for their participation.

Because the study deals with student victimization, all participants received a written form of informative guidelines on what they can do (now or in the future) if they want to receive further help. They also received additional information and guidelines during the interviews on what to do and how to receive help when necessary.

Results and Discussion

Qualitative data analysis was carried out by the author of this article, who was assisted by two researchers trained in qualitative research methods. Data analysis was performed in four stages. In the first stage, we repeatedly read the interview transcripts and all other data in order to obtain an overall picture of the processes and a deep understanding of the experiences undergone by each participant (Giorgi, 2000). In the second stage of analysis, we looked at each interview and identified the themes that appeared in it. This allowed us to focus our reading of the data and reduce the amount of data used for the categories relevant to our study (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Findings of previous studies were taken into account when organizing data around categories. In the third stage, we searched for repetitions and methodology in the descriptions of the participants and collected data. The repeated topics were organized into primary categories. Additional categories were defined based on the research questions, even though these appeared at a lower frequency. In the last stage of analysis, we reduced our categories solely to those with great significance and importance for understanding the phenomenon and providing answers to the research questions. Overall, agreement among the three reviewers on the selected categories was 86%, with a kappa of .87. The categories

which were identified from the interviews as explaining students' willingness to seek help or report severe violence to their teachers are summarized in Table 3.

Previous studies have shown that the willingness to seek help varies across situations and that

Table 3

Summary of Factors Explaining Students' Willingness to Seek Help or Report Severe Violence to Their Teachers

Category	Explanation	Example
Positive relationships with teachers	Strong, open, and ongoing positive relationship with the teacher regardless of a specific need	"I turned to my teacher because she knows me and supports me all the time"
Teachers' availability	Open access and communication via multiple communication platforms and clear information about accessibility	"When I need my teacher I know exactly when and where to find her"
Teachers' ability to assist	The perception that even if this is an unclear need or situation, the teacher can provide the right help	"Whatever it is she knows what to do"
Confidentiality	The level of reliance on the help provider that the identity of the one who approached for help would be kept confidential	"The most important thing for me is that no one here will know about the things that happened to me" "There is no chance I would talk to anyone here . . . everyone will know about this in a minute"
Level of exposure to violence	The frequency of a violent act or the gravity of an incident	"When it didn't stop, I realized I needed to ask someone for assistance" "It was shocking (when it happened). I needed to do something but didn't know what"

different factors may explain the willingness to seek help in each. Furthermore, a long list, sometimes mixed, and even contradictory, of variables was found in different studies so that no conclusion could be reached for understanding the factors that can explain the willingness to seek help specifically for severe violence in school. The exploratory findings of Study 2 therefore reveal these factors and set the base for a large-scale investigation as carried out in Study 3.

The unique contribution of the findings of Study 2 will be elaborated in the General Discussion. However, it should be noted that the findings point to unique elements that are related specifically to the willingness to seek help for severe violence. Foremost, positive relationships with teachers appeared important in two different ways. From a psychological perspective it appeared that psychological costs of seeking help decrease when forming positive relationships with the students, because the students view the teachers more as informal help providers than formal ones. Another aspect of positive relationships with the teachers, which usually does not associate with the teachers' work, is that it enables the process of facilitated disclosure (Schaeffer et al., 2011). This means that when teachers form positive relationships with their students, they can encourage them to share their feelings or experiences with difficult situations such as violence. The teacher, rather than the student, initiates the discussion, but the student responds positively and shares the information.

Another factor that was found to be essential for seeking help for severe violence is confidentiality. Confidentiality is apparently a serious barrier for students to seek help from their teachers, and is of utmost importance for those who eventually do seek help or report in other cases as well (Bersoff, 2014). In schools, however, this should receive unique attention, as confidentiality is a challenging aspect for teachers and other school professionals. They usually cannot promise confidentiality, because providing treatment sometimes means that additional people and professionals must be involved and also because according to state laws they must report such severe forms of violence (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The findings of Study 2 also stress the theoretical and practical aspects of the role of teachers in schools as mental health providers (Franklin, Kim, Ryan, Kelly, & Montgomery, 2012). Thus, it appeared that it is important for teachers to be qualified to provide help for students and identify students who are at risk. Elaborating the discussion

on such roles of teachers in schools is beyond the scope of this study, and should receive more attention in future discussions.

Study 3

Following the exploratory findings of Study 2, the aim of Study 3 was to empirically investigate the five factors that were found to explain students' willingness to seek help or report severe violence.

Method

Participants

The research sample consisted of 524 students (243 boys, 275 girls, and 6 who did not state their gender) who were randomly sampled from state-run Jewish schools across the country. The participants included 178 sixth graders (M_{age} = 11.54; SD = .33) studying in elementary schools, 194 eighth graders (M_{age} = 13.64; SD = .52) studying in junior high schools, and 152 tenth graders (M_{age} = 15.49; SD = .48) studying in high schools. For sampling, the country was divided into seven sections based on the Ministry of Education's division into districts. The sample size from each district was based on the district's relative size. Only schools whose students did not participate in Study 1 or Study 2 were included in the sample. Overall, students were sampled from 35 schools with 10–20 students sampled from each classroom (participation rate was 74%–92%). All participants were Hebrew speakers, about 6% of them immigrated to Israel within the past 10 years (range: 4–10 years), 15% reported being an observant Jew.

Instruments

Victimization. The measure of exposure to severe physical violence, sexual violence, and weapon use was based on the school violence questionnaire developed by Benbenishty et al. (2002), as was used and described in Study 1.

Help-seeking questionnaire. Willingness to seek help, the perception about teachers' ability to assist, and level of confidentiality were based on self-report items following each of the items on the victimization scale. Help seeking was measured as a categorical variable with reference to each question on the victimization scale. The students were asked whether they sought help or reported to their homeroom teacher about each act of violence

(1 = *yes*, 2 = *no*, 3 = *sought help from someone else in school*). The students were also asked to rate the measure of perceived ability of the teacher to help for each of the violence forms and the level of confidentiality they can promise using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). These scales were previously used in studies conducted with Israeli students to measure their perceptions of teachers and school counselor characteristics (National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education, 2014).

Relationship with teacher. The students' relationship with their teacher was measured using the Network of Relationship Inventory–Revised (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Two subscales representing the relationship qualities of closeness and trust were used: support and intimacy. The support scale contained items such as: "To what extent can you depend on your teacher to cheer things up?" The intimacy scale included items such as: "To what extent do you tell your teacher everything?" The students were asked to respond to the nine items and indicate how strongly each attribute was experienced in their relationships with their teacher using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The items were summed to yield a single relationship index (Cronbach's α = .92).

Availability. The availability of the teacher for students was measured using a seven-item self-report scale developed by Gelerenter (2009). The participants were asked to rate the extent to which teachers are available for them on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*), based on various communication platforms including being in their room; being accessible at school; communicating via e-mail, telephone, or Internet; holding personal meetings; and responding when left a message. All items were summed to yield a single availability index (Cronbach's α = .91).

Sociodemographic characteristics. A sociodemographic questionnaire was used to elicit information on the participants' age, gender, and other school demographics.

Procedure

Following the approval of data collection and questionnaires by the Ministry of Education's chief scientist, parents' informed consent was obtained through the schools. Data were collected during the 2013 academic school year. The research questionnaires were administered to the participants during a school day by a research assistant who explained the aims of the study and the questionnaires. Respondent anonymity was assured, and the students were told not to write names or any identifying details on the forms.

Results

To examine within classroom level effects, intraclass correlation (ICC) coefficients were computed for all independent variables when group size was ≥ 12. All ICCs ranged from .02 to .06, indicating no nested effect between classrooms (Woltman, Feldstain, MacKay, & Rocchi, 2012).

In order to study students' willingness to seek help, only students who were victims of at least one incident of physical violence ($n = 128$), sexual violence ($n = 99$), or weapon use ($n = 77$) were included in the analysis (Table 4). Descriptive statistics of students' willingness to seek help revealed that only 28.6% of the students who were victims of violence sought help from their teachers for dealing with physical violence, 25.9% for dealing with sexual violence, and 33.9% for dealing with weapon use. More girls sought help than boys for dealing with physical violence, girls = 68.9%, boys = 31.1%; $\chi^2(1) = 5.39$; $p < .05$, and with weapon use, girls = 64.8%, boys = 35.2%; $\chi^2(1) = 4.33$; $p < .05$, whereas no differences were found for sexual violence (girls = 51.6%, boys = 48.4%; $\chi^2(1) = 0.04$; $p > .05$).

Three logistic regression models were used to predict help seeking from homeroom teachers for physical violence, sexual violence, and weapon use (0 = did not seek help, 1 = sought help). The independent variables were level of exposure to violence, relationship with the teacher, the teacher's

Table 4

Number of Victims of Severe Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, and Weapon Use Among 6th, 8th, and 10th Graders Who Participated in Study 3

		Grade		
Form of violence	Victimization	6th	8th	10th
Physical	Yes	48	45	35
	No	130	147	117
Sexual	Yes	28	39	32
	No	148	155	118
Weapon use	Yes	22	29	26
	No	156	165	124

Note. Victimization was measured as the mean of items referring to each violence form. Victims include students who reported that they were victims of even one act of violence within the past month.

availability, the teacher's ability to assist, and confidentiality. Gender and age were also included in the model as predicting variables. All three models were found to be statistically significant (Table 5), with an overall prediction success of 92.3% for physical violence, 91.6% for sexual violence, and 86.2% for weapon use. As can be seen from Table 5, the relationship with the teacher is the most important factor in predicting help seeking for all three forms of violence. The odds of seeking help for violence increased with the increase in positive relationships with the teachers. The level of exposure to violence also predicted the willingness to seek help in each of the three forms of violence, with the odds for approaching the teacher increasing when suffering greater violence. The teacher's ability to assist contributed only to explaining the willingness to seek help for dealing with physical and sexual violence but not for weapon use.

Discussion

The most salient finding of Study 3 is that students' relationships with their teachers are a key factor in predicting their willingness to seek help. Such positive relations between students and teachers have been shown to be important for students' well-being in many other areas as well (Cicchetti, 2003; Noam & Hermann, 2002; Pianta, 1999). From a psychological point of view, such positive relationships may lessen the psychosocial costs attached to help seeking, such as the threat to self-esteem and embarrassment (Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007). Positive relationships with teachers may

also shift the focus from teachers as formal help providers to that of informal help providers, who are consistently preferred as help providers by students (Leach & Rickwood, 2009). Such positive relationships also lead to greater knowledge on the teachers' ability to assist (Yablon, 2010), which then increases the willingness to turn to them for help.

The fact that a higher perception of the teacher's ability to assist was related to the willingness to seek help for dealing with physical and sexual violence, but not for weapon use, may suggest that students have different expectations from teachers in helping with each of the violence forms. Also, because zero-tolerance policies are associated with weapon use in schools, it is possible that students do not consider the teacher's ability to assist in such cases as a relevant factor.

General Discussion

In response to the need for early detection of severe violence in schools, the findings of the present study provide evidence, the first of its kind, on differences between teachers and students in the identification of perpetrators of severe violence in school. The findings suggest that early detection of a large number of perpetrators can be performed via their victims. The findings show that teachers do not identify about 40% of perpetrators in 6th grade, about 50% in 8th grade, and over 70% in 10th grade. The findings also show that, on average, teachers do not recognize 60% of victims of sexual violence, 55% of victims of weapon use, and

Table 5

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Help Seeking From Teachers for Severe Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, and Weapon Use

Predictor	Physical				Weapon use				Sexual			
	B	$SE\ B$	Wald	e^B	B	$SE\ B$	Wald	e^B	B	$SE\ B$	Wald	e^B
Relationships	1.17***	.35	10.92	3.21	0.83**	.35	5.76	2.30	0.86***	.28	9.29	2.37
Availability	−0.38	.33	1.35	0.68	−0.07	.31	0.04	0.94	−0.59**	.26	5.29	0.55
Exposure	0.83***	.19	19.78	2.30	0.63*	.32	3.95	1.88	0.53***	.13	17.07	1.70
Ability to assist	0.84***	.24	12.17	2.32	0.21	.19	1.17	1.23	0.76***	.16	22.24	2.14
Confidentiality	−0.41	.27	2.19	0.67	0.27	.21	1.67	1.31	−0.40***	.15	6.68	0.67
Age	−0.12	.20	0.36	0.89	−0.59**	.22	7.38	0.56	−0.15	.19	0.65	0.86
Gender	0.48	.43	1.24	1.61	−0.49	.42	1.34	0.61	0.24	.36	0.46	1.27
Constant	−7.87				2.31							
χ^2	71.44***				33.17***				85.32***			
df	7				7				7			
Nagelkerke R^2	.35				.20				.34			

*$p < .05.$ **$p < .01.$ ***$p < .001.$

26% of victims of physical violence. These students therefore do not receive the necessary support at school, and the information they hold about perpetrators is not shared with the teachers.

A review of the research literature on early detection of violence shows that each of the existing approaches has many limitations and an overall low success rate (Cornell et al., 2009; Morrison & Skiba, 2001; Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001; Reddy et al., 2001). The main assumption of the present study was that gathering information from victims can more successfully lead to the detection of perpetrators and can be used for intervention and before violence escalates even further.

It should be mentioned that no claim is made that students' reports need to be taken without caution. Previous studies have already discussed the reliability and validity of students' reports on violence in general, and in comparison to reports made by teachers, counselors, peers, and objective observers (e.g., Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000). Findings show that on the one hand, students appeared to report reliably over time (Brener et al., 2002). On the other hand, there are cognitive and situational biases that increase the inaccuracy of reports (Brener, Billy, & Grady, 2003). It should however be noted that whereas those studied usually discuss students' self-report using various scales, the present study deals with reports made by individual students who seek help from their school teacher for dealing with a specific problem. Although false reports are still possible, their likelihood is even smaller. It is also interesting to note that previous studies showed that students with unreliable reports tend to report more violence victimizations (Rosenblatt & Furlong, 1997) rather than omit or fake victimization. Therefore, from the findings of the present study it is suggested that students' reports should be counted, serve as a basis for a detection of severe violence in school, and be used for further elaboration and for gaining a deeper understanding of the circumstances and involved students (Schaeffer et al., 2011). Because students are mostly reluctant to report and seek help from their teachers (Boulton et al., 2013; Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014; Eliot et al., 2010; Yablon, 2010), the findings of the present study also revealed the factors that are important for students for approaching their teachers. Building strong and positive relationships with their teachers is apparently the most important factor. This finding is supported by a large body of studies that raise the importance of such positive relationships with teachers in many other aspects of students' lives

(Cicchetti, 2003; Noam & Hermann, 2002; Pianta, 1999).

It should be noted that many studies have previously investigated factors that explain students' willingness to seek help in various fields, including violence in school. Although some findings, such as age and gender, are consistent, they generally change according to the problem children face. Reporting violence in school, and especially acts of severe violence, has unique characteristics as it involves social, emotional, and developmental aspects. Victims of such violence have many barriers that stop them from sharing their experience with others (Schaeffer et al., 2011). The findings of the present study indicate that students in higher grades are at greater risk for not reporting victimization, for not being identified by their teachers as victims, and for not being identified by their teachers as perpetrators. Because these findings interact with the fact that with age, many students lose close relationships with teachers and other adults (Pianta, 1999), the findings stress the need for investments in building such relationships for prevention and intervention.

It should be noted that the present study was conducted in Israel and relates to students' willingness to seek help from their homeroom teachers. In Israel, students are assigned to a class at the beginning of the first school year in each school level. They study most of their lessons with the same class as a group, while the teachers move from classroom to classroom during the day. Each class is assigned a homeroom teacher and subject matter teachers. In elementary school, the homeroom teachers teach most of the curriculum, whereas in junior and high schools, the homeroom teachers teach only one subject and hold the homeroom teacher position as well. Nonetheless, they have 1–3 weekly hours for meeting and spending time with their students (usually one for a group session and another 1–2 hr for individual meetings) and must be in the school at least 5 days a week (teaching other classes) in order to be available for their homeroom students (Ministry of Education, 1994). This may affect the findings of the present study, and generalization of the findings should be made accordingly. It is expected, however, that if the detection rates and willingness to seek help from homeroom teachers are so low, they will be even lower for other teachers. Enhancing students' willingness to approach their teachers about violence may therefore be more difficult in other settings yet have the potential to dramatically increase the ability of teachers and schools to

detect perpetrators and identify early signs of severe violence.

The present study is not without limitations. First, the findings of Study 1 were interpreted in a way that teachers' identification of perpetrators was compared to the ones made by their students. As already discussed, previous studies show that overall students' reports on violence are reliable (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002). It is, however, possible that responses are biased and some reports may even be false. In future studies it may be helpful to use additional informants and elaborate a discussion on the contribution of different informants. Similarly, in studying students' willingness to seek help, we looked only at victimization, but without referring to all types of victims. Another limitation of the study relates to the fact that Study 3 is based on self-reports only. Although such a research design is common in the study of students' help seeking, the effects of possible shared variance should be taken into account. Finally, although the present study was based on three different samples, it is limited in demographic diversity. Future research should examine students' willingness to seek help within more ethnically diverse samples.

References

Ahn, H.-J., Rodkin, P. C., & Gest, S. (2013). Teacher–student agreement on bullies and kids they pick on in elementary school classrooms: Gender and grade differences. *Theory Into Practice*, *52*, 257–263. doi:10.1080/00405841.2013.829728

Benbenishty, R., Astor, R. A., Zeira, A., & Vinokur, A. D. (2002). Perceptions of violence and fear of school attendance among junior high school students in Israel. *Social Work Research*, *26*, 71–87. doi:10.1093/swr/26.2.71

Bersoff, D. N. (2014). Protecting victims of violent patients while protecting confidentiality. *American Psychologist*, *69*, 461–467. doi:10.1037/a0037198

Bohns, V. K., & Flynn, F. J. (2010). Why didn't you just ask? Underestimating the discomfort of help-seeking. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *46*, 402–409. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2009.12.015

Borum, R., Cornell, D. G., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. R. (2010). What can be done about school shootings? A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher*, *39*, 27–37. doi:10.3102/0013189X09357620

Boulton, M. J., Murphy, D., Lloyd, J., Besling, S., Coote, J., Lewis, J., & Walsh, L. (2013). Helping counts: Predicting children's intentions to disclose being bullied to teachers from prior social support experiences. *British Educational Research Journal*, *39*, 209–221. doi:10.1080/01411926.2011.627420

Branson, C. E., & Cornell, D. G. (2009). A comparison of self and peer reports in the assessment of middle school bullying. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, *25*, 5–27. doi:10.1080/15377900802484133

Brener, N. D., Billy, J. O. G., & Grady, W. R. (2003). Assessment of factors affecting the validity of self-reported health-risk behavior among adolescents: Evidence from the scientific literature. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *33*, 436–457. doi:10.1016/s1054-139x(03)00052-1

Brener, N. D., Kann, L., McManus, T., Kinchen, S. A., Sundberg, E. C., & Ross, J. G. (2002). Reliability of the 1999 youth risk behavior survey questionnaire. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *31*, 336–342. doi:10.1016/S1054-139X(02)00339-7

Cicchetti, D. (2003). Editorial: Experiments of nature: Contributions to developmental theory. *Development and Psychopathology*, *15*, 833–835. doi:10.1017/S0954579403000397

Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data analysis: Complementary strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cole, J. C., Cornell, D. G., & Sheras, P. (2006). Identification of school bullies by survey methods. *Professional School Counseling*, *9*, 305–313.

Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2009). A retrospective study of school safety conditions in high schools using the Virginia threat assessment guidelines versus alternative approaches. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *24*, 119–129. doi:10.1037/a0016182

Cortes, K. I., & Kochenderfer-Ladd, B. (2014). To tell or not to tell: What influences children's decisions to report bullying to their teachers? *School Psychology Quarterly*, *29*, 336–348. doi:10.1037/spq0000078

Dowdy, E., Doane, K., Eklund, K., & Dever, B. V. (2013). A comparison of teacher nomination and screening to identify behavioral and emotional risk within a sample of underrepresented students. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, *21*, 127–137. doi:10.1177/1063426611417627

Dwyer, K., Osher, D., & Warger, C. (1998). *Early warning, timely response: A guide to safe schools*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education.

Eliot, M., Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2010). Supportive school climate and student willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence. *Journal of School Psychology*, *48*, 533–553. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2010.07.001

Franklin, C. G. S., Kim, J. S., Ryan, T. N., Kelly, M. S., & Montgomery, K. L. (2012). Teacher involvement in school mental health interventions: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*, 973–982. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.027

Furlong, M. J., Greif, J. L., Bates, M. P., Whipple, A. D., Jimenez, T. C., & Morrison, R. (2005). Development of the California school climate and safety survey-short form. *Psychology in the Schools*, *42*, 137–149. doi:10.1002/pits.20053

Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children's perceptions of the personal relationships in their social networks. *Developmental Psychology*, *21*, 1016–1024. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.21.6.1016

Gelerenter, Y. (2009). *The contribution of the school counselors to students' willingness to seek help in the event of school violence*. Unpublished dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel.

Giorgi, A. (2000). *Phenomenology and psychological research*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Gulliver, A., Griffiths, K. M., & Christensen, H. (2010). Perceived barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking in young people: A systematic review. *BMC Psychiatry*, 10, 113. doi:10.1186/1471-244X-10-113

Ladd, G. W., & Kochenderfer-Ladd, B. (2002). Identifying victims of peer aggression from early to middle childhood: Analysis of cross-informant data for concordance, estimation of relational adjustment, prevalence of victimization, and characteristics of identified victims. *Psychological Assessment*, 14, 74–96. doi:10.1037/1040-3590.14.1.74

Lalkhen, A. G., & McCluskey, A. (2008). Clinical tests: Sensitivity and specificity. *Continuing Education in Anaesthesia, Critical Care & Pain*, 8, 221–223.

Leach, L. S., & Rickwood, D. J. (2009). The impact of school bullying on adolescents' psychosocial resources and help-seeking intentions. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 2, 30–39. doi:10.1080/1754730X.2009.9715702

McElvaney, R., Greene, S., & Hogan, D. (2014). To tell or not to tell? Factors influencing young people's informal disclosures of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29, 928–947. doi:10.1177/0886260513506281

Ministry of Education. (1994). *Circular of the general director (No 6)*. Jerusalem, Israel: Author (Hebrew).

Ministry of Education. (2008). *Circular of the general director (No 2.1)*. Jerusalem, Israel: Ministry of Education (Hebrew).

Morrison, G. M., & Skiba, R. (2001). Predicting violence from school misbehavior: Promises and perils. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38, 173–184.

Mulvey, E. P., & Cauffman, E. (2001). The inherent limits of predicting school violence. *American Psychologist*, 56, 797–802. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.56.10.797

National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education. (2014). *Monitoring the level of violence in schools based on student reports, 2009 and 2011—Summary*. Jerusalem, Israel: Ministry of Education.

Noam, G. G., & Hermann, C. A. (2002). Where education and mental health meet: Developmental prevention and early intervention in schools. *Development and Psychopathology*, 14, 861–875. doi:10.1017/S0954579402004108

Pellegrini, A. D., & Bartini, M. (2000). An empirical comparison of methods of sampling aggression and victimization in school settings. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92, 360–366. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.92.2.360

Pianta, R. C. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Randazzo, M. R., Borum, R., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Modzeleski, W., & Pollack, W. (2006). Threat assessment in schools: Empirical support and comparison with other approaches. In S. R. J. M. Furlong (Ed.), *Handbook of school violence and school safety: From research to practice* (pp. 147–156). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Rapp-Paglicci, L., Dulmus, C. N., Sowers, K. M., & Theriot, M. T. (2004). Hotspots for bullying. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 1, 131–141. doi:10.1300/J394v01n02_09

Reddy, M., Borum, R., Berglund, J., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2001). Evaluating risk for targeted violence in schools: Comparing risk assessment, threat assessment, and other approaches. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38, 157–172.

Rosenblatt, J. A., & Furlong, M. J. (1997). Assessing the reliability and validity of student self-reports of campus violence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 26, 187–202. doi:10.1023/A:1024552531672

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schaeffer, P., Leventhal, J. M., & Asnes, A. G. (2011). Children's disclosures of sexual abuse: Learning from direct inquiry. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 35, 343–352. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2011.01.014

Topping, K. (2011). Primary–secondary transition: Differences between teachers' and children's perceptions. *Improving Schools*, 14, 268–285. doi:10.1177/1365480211419587

Vogel, D. L., Wester, S. R., & Larson, L. M. (2007). Avoidance of counseling: Psychological factors that inhibit seeking help. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85, 410–422. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2007.tb00609.x

Woltman, H., Feldstain, A., MacKay, J. C., & Rocchi, M. (2012). An introduction to hierarchical linear modeling. *Tutorials in Quantitative Methods for Psychology*, 8, 52–69.

Yablon, Y. B. (2010). Student–teacher relationships and students' willingness to seek help for school violence. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 1110–1123. doi:10.1177/0265407510381255