

An Investigation into Personal Factors Affecting School Violence among High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the personal factors affecting the school violence among high school students. To achieve these aims, survey and interview were conducted. In this study, total 1430 high school students and 12 teachers were selected by using multistage sampling method. Descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression analysis were used. Findings revealed that verbal and physical violence, and vandalism were prominent among students, with significant personal factors such as smoking, alcohol drinking, history of aggression, and victimization. Notably, significant variations in students' violence perpetration were linked to these identified factors. The finding of this study provides an insight for understanding the personal factors leading to violence perpetration, allowing educational institutions to target interventions more effectively.

Keywords: School violence, Binary logistic regression analysis

INTRODUCTION

Violence has become an alarming issue in contemporary society, manifesting in various forms such as criminal activities, oppression, exploitation, and cyberbullying. This atmosphere of violence increasingly affects children and adolescents, whose behaviors and attitudes are shaped by their social environments. With the rapid development of technology, students are now exposed not only to direct physical violence but also to psychological and cyber forms of violence through social media and digital platforms. Consequently, incidents of violence among students in educational institutions have increased significantly, affecting students' well-being, academic performance, and overall development.

According to a UNICEF report, approximately 150 million students aged 13–15 worldwide have experienced peer-to-peer violence in and around schools, highlighting the widespread nature of school violence (UNICEF, 2018). This situation poses a significant threat to students' safety and educational outcomes. High school students, in particular, are at a vulnerable developmental stage where personal characteristics, emotions, peer influence, and behavioral patterns strongly shape their responses to conflict and aggression.

School violence can produce serious short-term and long-term consequences for students, including physical injuries, anxiety, depression, poor academic performance, truancy, and antisocial behaviors. Smiley et al. (2021) noted that school violence negatively affects students' concentration, attendance, and educational achievement, while Hisham et al. (2014) found that exposure to violence significantly influences children's anxiety levels and attitudes toward learning. These effects not only harm individual students but also disrupt the overall school climate and educational process.

As schools play a crucial role in shaping students' behavior and social development, understanding the factors contributing to school violence is essential for creating safer educational environments. Among the various contributing factors of school violence, personal factors are considered particularly important because they directly influence students' behaviors, emotional regulation, and interactions with others. Factors such as anger management difficulties, low self-esteem, aggressive tendencies, exposure to violent experiences, stress, and poor coping skills may increase students' likelihood of engaging in violent behaviors. Therefore, investigating

personal factors affecting school violence among high school students is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

This study aims to investigate the personal factors affecting school violence among high school students. The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of students' behaviors and support educators, school leaders, and policymakers in developing appropriate strategies to reduce violence and promote peaceful school environments.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because school violence remains a major challenge affecting students' safety, mental health, and academic development. High school students spend a substantial portion of their time in schools; therefore, schools should provide safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments that promote students' well-being and personal growth.

In the context of Myanmar, the country's Child Rights Policy recognizes every child's entitlement to survival, development, protection, and participation in society, with a strong emphasis on the prohibition of physical, psychological, or sexual violence against children. However, a UNICEF report on school violence and bullying in Myanmar revealed that verbal, physical, psychological, and sexual bullying in Myanmar were posing a severe threat to students' well-being and educational outcomes (Fry, 2019). Scholars have also noted the increasing risk of school violence in the digital age, as students may imitate violent behaviors encountered through the internet and social media. In addition, concerns regarding school violence among students in Basic Education Schools in Myanmar have continued to grow.

The findings of this study will help educators, school administrators, and policymakers better understand the personal factors associated with school violence among high school students. Understanding these factors is important for designing effective prevention programs, counseling services, and behavioral interventions that can reduce violent behaviors and improve school climate. The study is also significant because limited research has been conducted on school violence in Myanmar, particularly regarding the personal factors influencing violent behavior among high school students. The findings may provide valuable information for schools and educational authorities to develop evidence-based policies and student support programs. Furthermore, this study may contribute to reducing the negative consequences of school violence, such as poor academic performance, truancy, emotional trauma, anxiety, depression, and antisocial behavior. By identifying the personal factors linked to school violence, schools may be better equipped to support at-risk students and foster positive social relationships among students.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

School violence is a kind of behavior having the general characteristics of violent behavior, but the actors are kids and adolescents and that it takes place in primary and secondary schools: in places where they are together for several hours a day all year (Estevez, Jimenez & Musitu, 2008). Cowie and Jennifer (2004) defined school violence as a phenomenon in which a member of the school community (teacher, student, other education worker, parent or visitor) is intimidated, bullied, abused, threatened or assaulted; or their property is deliberately damaged by another member of that community or the public in circumstances arising out of their activities in a school. Therefore, violence in schools may be:

- student(s) to student(s);
- student(s) to staff member;
- staff member to student;
- staff member to staff member;
- caused by or involve a parent
- caused by “outside” forces not directly connected to the school.

Violence in schools can include peer-to-peer violence in the form of bullying, physical fighting, and sexual violence or teacher-to-student violence in the form of corporal punishment (including both physical and emotional violence) or sexual violence.

Estevez et al. (2007) identifies the various types of violence happening in the school context into two main categories: action directly directed towards objects or school material and action directly directed towards individuals such as teachers and peers. The first category encompasses the vandalic actions such as breaking desks or doors, painting names, messages and graffities on the school walls. The second category includes verbal and physical aggressions towards the teachers or peers, and serious problems of discipline in the class such as disobeying the school rules and regulations.

According to Estevez et al. (2008), a violent student at school is the one who fails to adhere to the school's regulations governing the interactions in the classroom and the school setting and engage in punitive behaviors directed at the others that can manifest, relational, reactive or proactive aggressions. Fagan and Wilkinson (1998) stated the different reasons for students being engaged in violent behaviors;

- To attain or maintain a high social status like some group leaders are the teenagers that stand out for their violent behavior.
- To wider power and control over other students.
- To seek vengeance by imposing their own law and social norms when they perceive the existing ones unacceptable or unfair.
- To challenge the authority and resist the established social controls that they feel oppressive.
- To experiment new risky behaviors, often choosing environments where they can practice violent and antisocial behaviors.

Wilson (1975) argued that people are biosocial organisms whose behaviors are influenced by both their physical characteristics and the environmental conditions. Modern biosocial theorists believe that physical, environmental and social conditions interact in complex ways to produce human behavior (Englander, 2007). According to Vygotsky (1978), the much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction and his sociocultural theory asserts that learning is an essentially social process in which the support of parents, caregivers, peers and the wider society and culture plays a crucial role in the development of higher psychological functions. Patterson (1997, as cited in Estevez et al., 2008) stated the bidirectional character of the interaction in his social interaction theory: the environment influences the individual and the individual influences the environment. It underlines the interactive character of the human behavior and the violent behavior is the result of the interaction between the individual's characteristics and the circumstances of the surrounding social contexts (Estevez et al., 2008).

Farrington (1996) identified numerous risk factors leading to school violence and protective factors for youth violence in terms of different contexts: the individual context, the interpersonal context, the community context and the context of wider society. Regarding individual contexts, risk factors such as impulsiveness, hyperactivity, restlessness, limited concentration span, poor performance at school, lack of commitment, attitudes that condone problem behavior and drug abuse are stated and female gender, resilient, temperament, self- efficacy and high intelligence are menteioned as protective factos.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Violent behaviors in the school are categorized into vandalic actions and interpersonal violence (Estevez et al., 2007). Vandalic actions include breaking desks or door, painting names, messages and graffities on the school walls. Interpersonal violence in the school may be students to students, students to staff members, staff members to students, staff members to staff members and parents to staff members.

The biological factors and personal history factors increase the likelihood of being a victim or a perpetrator of violence (WHO, 2002). Sprague and Walker (2002) identified the characteristics of the students enrolled in the schools as a source of vulnerability to school safety. Victimization types and levels are strongly associated with student characteristics such as age and gender (Astor & Benbenishty, 2008). Substance abuse and prior history of aggression and abuse increase the risk for violence perpetrator (WHO, 2002). Exposure to various kinds of violence in the forms of direct involvement or as witnesses is related to the development of aggressive behavior in school (Baldry, 2003). Tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse is also associated with school violence perpetration (Barnes, Brynard & Wet, 2012).

Definition of Key Term

School Violence

School violence can be defined as a phenomenon in which a member of the school community (teacher, student, other education workers, parent or visitor) is intimidated, bullied, abused, threatened or assaulted; or their property is deliberately damaged by another member of that community or the public (Cowie & Jennifer, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

This study used a mixed methods approach in which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed within the single study. This study used the sequential explanatory mixed method approach where quantitative phase (numbers) followed by the qualitative phase (personal experience).

Sampling

The target population of this study was students and teachers from Yangon Region. For quantitative purpose, this study used multistage sampling to select the required participants. Total 1430 high school students were involved in this study. In the qualitative study, interviews also employed multistage sampling. Total 12 teachers were participated in the interview section.

Instrumentation

To collect the required **quantitative data**, a set of questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire consists of three parts; personal data, school violence perpetration questionnaire. The reliability coefficient of school violence perpetration questionnaire was 0.94. **In a qualitative study**, semi-structure interview was conducted with teachers relating to the experience of school violence and causes of school violence.

Data Analysis

In the quantitative data analysis procedures, types of violence mostly occurred in schools were investigated with the descriptive statistics. To investigate personal factors affecting school violence, the binary logistic regression was conducted by coding dependent variables (violence perpetration) into two groups with No group (no violence perpetration) and Yes group (violence perpetration).

RESULTS

Investigating the Types of Violence Mostly Occurred in Basic Education Schools

To investigate the types of violence mostly occurred in Basic Education Schools, weighted frequency and percentage of perpetrating each type of violence was calculated. Table 1 showed the weighted frequencies and percentages of different types of school violence perpetrated by the students in descending order.

Table 1 Weighted Frequencies and Percentages of Types of School Violence Perpetrated by Students (N=1430)

No.	Types of School Violence	Weighted Frequencies	Percentages
1.	Verbal Violence	9187	81%
2.	Physical Violence	7528	74%
3.	Vandalism	5010	71%
4.	Neglect	4420	63%
5.	Financial Violence	3229	52%
6.	Emotional Violence	2942	51%
7.	Sexual Violence	2876	47%
8.	Cultural Violence	2217	40%
9.	Psychological Violence	1791	35%
10.	Spiritual Violence	842	18%

According to Table 1, it was found that the verbal violence, physical violence and vandalism were mostly occurred among the students with 81%, 74% and 71 % respectively, and spiritual violence was least occurred among the students with 18 %.

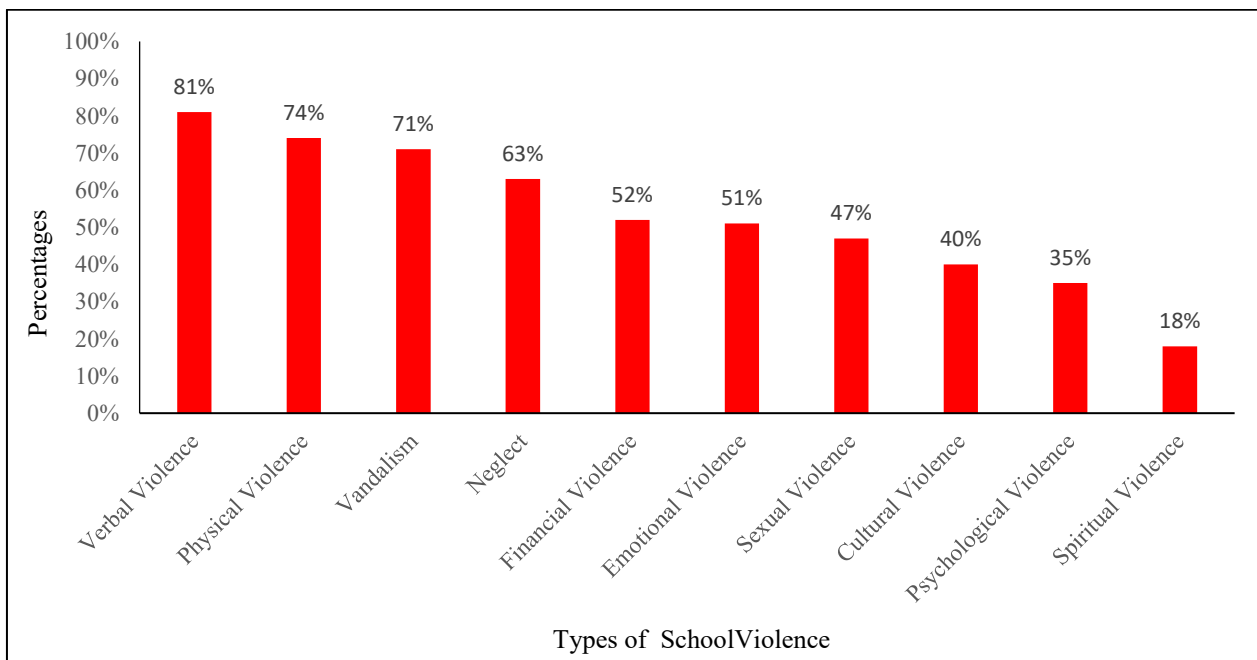


Figure 1 Percentages Showing Types of Violence Perpetrated by Students

Investigating the Students' Personal Factors Associated with School Violence

To investigate the dominant personal factors affecting the violence perpetration, a binary logistic regression analysis was conducted. The relationship between the dependent variable (students' violence perpetration) and independent variables such as gender, grade, age, smoking, drinking alcohol, history of aggression, victimization and living arrangement were investigated. The overall model fitting information for binary logistic regression analysis was shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Model Fitting Information for Students' Violence Perpetration with Affected Factors (N=1430)

Model Fitting Criteria	Chi-Square	df	p
Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients	855.246	7	.000
Hosmer and Lemeshow	5.207	8	.735
-2Log Likelihood	1030.614		
Cox and Snell R square	.45		
Nagelkerke R square	.61		
Overall Correct Prediction	85.7%		

According to the Omnibus Tests of model coefficients, the chi-square value of 855.246 with 7 degrees of freedom (df) and p-value of 0.000 indicating that the model is statistically significant to predict the demographic factors affecting the students' violence perpetration.

The Hosmer and Lemeshow test, the measure of the model fit, was used to measure the correspondence between actual and predicated values of the dependent variable. The smaller difference in the observed and predicted values indicates a better model fit. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test statistic give a chi-square value of 5.207 with 8 degrees of freedom (df) and a p-value of 0.735. A non-significant p-value suggests that the model fits the data reasonably well.

The -2Log Likelihood value is 1030.614. The values of the Cox and Snell R square, and the Nagelkerke R square, are 0.45 and 0.61, respectively, indicating the proportion of variance in the outcome variable explained by the model. These values show that the 45% to 61% of the variability in violence perpetration could be explained by the model. The overall prediction rate of the model is 85.7%.

According to results of the binary logistic regression, it was found that gender, grade age and living arrangement did not significantly affect the students' violence perpetration, conversely, smoking, drinking alcohol, history of aggression and victimization significantly affected the students' violence perpetration. The parameter estimates of the binary logistic regression model of violence perpetration as predicted by smoking, drinking alcohol, history of aggression and victimization are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Parameter Estimates of Personal Factors Affecting the Students' Violence Perpetration (N=1430)

Variable	Code	Coeffi- cient	S.E	Wald	df	p	Exp (B)	95% CI for Exp(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Constant		-6.22	1.16	28.64	1	.000	.002		
Smoking		.67	.19	12.78	1	.000	1.96	1.35	2.82
No (Ref)	0								
Yes	1								
Drinking Alcohol		2.35	.18	69.02	1	.000	10.46	7.34	14.90
No (Ref)	0								

Yes	1								
History of aggression		2.25	.26	73.27	1	.000	9.48	5.66	15.86
No (Ref)	0								
Yes	1								
Victimization		2.86	1.07	7.15	1	.007	17.49	2.15	42.50
No (Ref)	0								
Yes	1								

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$

The parameter estimates presented in Table 4 showed the important insights:

- Smoking: Students who smoke were 1.96 times more likely to perpetrate than students who do not smoke.
- Drinking Alcohol: Students with alcohol drinking were 10.46 times more likely to perpetrate violence than students who do not drink alcohol.
- History of Aggression: Students with the history of aggression were 9.48 times more likely to perpetrate violence than students with no history of aggression.
- Victimization: Students who were being victimized were 17.49 times more likely to perpetrate violence than students who were not being victimized.

The constant term in the model was also significant, indicating a meaningful starting point. In summary, smoking, drinking alcohol, history of aggression and victimization seemed to be significant factors affecting the students' violence perpetration.

Qualitative Findings

To explain more about the quantitative findings, qualitative study was conducted by the interview. Based on the quantitative findings, schools were classified into two group; high rate of school violence and low rate of school violence. Group I included six teachers from township with the highest rate of school violence perpetration. Group II included six teachers from township with the lowest rate of school violence perpetration were selected for interview. Semi-structure interview format was used.

Teachers' Responses

Class teachers and teachers who are members of school disciplinary board were selected for interview. Teacher participants were asked a series of opening questions. When interviewing about **the causes of school violence**, teachers from Group I stated the six causes of school violence. Three teachers described the students' **personal factor, gender**, as a major causes of violence perpetration. They stated that male students were more sensitive, having little tolerance and having no ability in emotional control. Two teachers mentioned the history of aggression as a cause of violence perpetration.

DISCUSSION

To investigate the significant variations in school violence perpetration based on personal factors, this study employed the binary logistic regression analysis. It was found that the dominant personal factors of violence perpetration were smoking, and drinking alcohol, history of aggression and victimization. The significant variations in students' violence perpetration according to these factors were found. These results align with the previous research of Barnes et al. (2012) which indicated the positive correlation between substances abuse including smoking, drinking and drug, and various form of violence. These results are consistent with studies conducted by Chen and Astor (2012) and Barboza-Salerno et al. (2009), all of which highlighted the direct relationship between the history of aggression, victimization and violence perpetration among students. The overall prediction rate of the binary logistic regression model for the demographic factors affecting violence perpetration was 85.7% indicating the model's robustness and applicability to the future studies.

Although this study focused primarily on personal factors, school violence is a complex issue that cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics. According to the ecological perspective, students' behaviors are also influenced by environmental factors such as family conditions, peer relationships, school climate, community violence, and media exposure. Therefore, personal factors may interact with environmental influences in shaping students' violent behaviors.

For instance, students who experience family conflict, lack of parental supervision, negative peer influence, or unsafe school environments may be more likely to engage in violent behavior. Exposure to violence within communities and through digital media may further reinforce aggressive attitudes and behaviors among adolescents. In addition, poor teacher–student relationships, weak school discipline systems, and limited emotional support within schools may contribute to the development of school violence.

Therefore, future research should comprehensively investigate environmental and socioecological factors affecting school violence among high school students. Examining the combined influence of personal, family, peer, school, and community factors would provide a more holistic understanding of violence perpetration. Such investigations could support the development of comprehensive violence prevention and intervention programs that address not only students' personal behaviors but also the broader environmental conditions contributing to school violence.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed for Basic Education Schools and educational institutions:

1. As verbal and physical violence are predominantly occurring among adolescent students, administrators should implement **prevention programs** focused on conflict resolution skills, anger management, and promoting positive communication to reduce verbal and physical violence.
2. Smoking, drinking alcohol, and a history of aggression and victimization were identified as dominant personal factors influencing violence perpetration. Administrators and teachers should consider **targeted interventions and support services** for students exhibiting these risk factors such mentoring and counselling the students with history of aggression and victimization. In addition, schools should focus on **moral and civic teaching, and school health services** for educating about the danger of smoking and alcohol drinking.

LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted only in high schools within Yangon Region, Myanmar; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to students from other regions or educational settings in the country. In addition, the study focused solely on student-to-student violence and did not examine other forms of school violence involving teachers, school staff, or outsiders. Regarding the factors associated with school violence, this study investigated only personal factors affecting violence perpetration among high school students.

Environmental and socioecological factors, such as family background, peer influence, school climate,

community environment, and media exposure, were not included in the analysis. Therefore, future studies should examine these broader environmental factors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of school violence.

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