

**Association of school violence with mental health among  
secondary school students in Baghdad city**

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**Abstract:**

Violence among adolescents may have serious developmental, physical, and mental health consequences for the affected individuals.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to demonstrate the nature of physical fighting and bullying behavior and their correlates among secondary school students in Baghdad city.

**Methodology:** A cross-sectional comparison study was conducted on school students in 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class, by using a self-completed questionnaire. A multistage probability sampling technique stratified by school type and gender. In which schools, classrooms and students were selected randomly. The overall response rate was 75%, and sample size 200 students were selected from four secondary schools (Al-Salam & Al-Farabi for male students), (Al-Markazya & Al-Hariri for female students). In the present study, socio-demographic background, family-related factors, adolescent-related conduct disorders, cigarette smoking, poor school achievement, environmental-related violence, mental health were considered in relation to school violence, descriptive statistics and the person  $X^2$  test were used and comparison test for dependent samples.

**Results:** Unfortunately, demonstration of violence behavior among school adolescent was high, from the 200 students were engaged in school violence at baseline physical fighting (punching) 17.5%, bullying behavior 12.5%. The most important risk factor for school violence was subjected to corporal punishment at home /school, school violence negatively associated with protective factors including: feeling to connectedness to family, parental monitoring and supervision, and attendance to school. Furthermore, students who have involved in school violence reported poor mental health including: depression, anxiety, hopelessness and suicidal

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ideation and attempts. Physical fighting and bullying behavior among secondary school students are a public health problem .

**Recommendations** :School violence could be a cautionary signal indicating more severe psychiatric problems , such as depression , anxiety ,and suicide behavior , no violence against students is justifiable and all forms of violence preventable , most intensive efforts at prevention and intervention may reduce and prevent school violence .

### Introduction

Violence is a problem that can be understood and changed ,not an inevitable consequence of the human condition .{1} World Health Organization (WHO) promotes a broad definition of violence :”The intentional use of physical force or power , threatened or actual against oneself , another person , a group or community , that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury , death , psychological harm , maldevelopment or deprivation “ . The definition used by the WHO associates intentionality with the committing of the act itself , irrespective of the outcome it produces ,excluded from the definition are unintentional incidents such as most road traffic and burns .{2} Violence is a daily for people living all over the world. Adolescent are especially vulnerable to its consequence because the adolescent is the life period when socialization mostly occurs, being a victim of violence and / or witnessing may lead many adolescents to use violence to resolve interpersonal conflict instead of using non-violence conflict resolution skills .{3} Violence pervades the lives of many people around the world , and touches all of us in some way , to many people staying out of harm’s way is a matter of locking doors and windows and avoiding dangerous place.{4} To other ,escape is not possible ,the threat of violence is behind those doors –well hidden from public view. Violence is often predictable and preventable ,like other health problems ,it is not distributed evenly across population groups or setting . {5} There is no gene for violence is a learned behavior , and it is often learned at home from parents and family members or community , friends , peers , or neighbors . {6} Violence is a problem that can be understood and change , not an inevitable consequence of the human condition .{7} Violence among adolescents may have serious developmental , physical , and mental health consequence for the affected individuals .{8} Violence –related behavior such as fighting and weapon carrying may lead to serious physical and psychological consequence for adolescents .{9} School violence is mostly non-fatal , but can cause serious damage to the

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development of a child and young person , it can be perpetrated against and by students , or the staff .{10} The more common type of interpersonal violence seen in schools including physical fighting , bullying behavior and corporal punishment , although bullying can include physical aggression , fighting is no necessarily bullying .{11, 12}

### **Aims of study :**

**1-**Demonstration the nature of school bullying and physical fighting activities among some school adolescents

**2-**Assessment the association of school violence with social and mental health .

### **Material and methods**

**Samples:** Data collection continued for period starting from 1 st October 2017 to 1 st May 2018 .The sample size actual was (200) adolescents students , the place where data collected is secondary schools(Al-Salam ,Al-Farabi for male students & Al-Markazya , Al-Hariri for female students ) in Baghdad city .

**Setting :**A special questionnaire was design including information concerning demographic characteristic such as ; age , address , class , school name , economic status and some related variables such as ; income family , condition family , smoking , and education of parents .

**Statistical analysis :** Statistical analysis was that of descriptive study including frequency and percentage , and chi-square test to find any association between variables . {13}

### **Discussion:**

School violence may range on a continuum from suitable behavior (e.g. ,teasing , name calling ,bullying ,and other forms of intimidation and harassment) to severe actions , such as physical fights and shootings .{14,15} School violence is mostly non-fatal ,but can cause serious damage to the development of a child and young person .It can be perpetrated against and by students ,or the staff .{16} The present study demonstrated that being a male is a significant independent risk factor of violent behavior as has been shown in many other studies .{17,18,19 ,20,21} .Results of this study revealed that there is age (15-17)years that 62.6% in male and 76.1% in female while grade level that there is 50.0% in 6<sup>th</sup> secondary of both male and female effects on school violence .Our findings agreed with the results of GSHS from Lebanon {22}. However, a number

**2<sup>nd</sup> INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE FOR HEALTH  
AND MEDICAL SCIENCES (ISCOHMS 2022)**

of studies reported age or grade effects ,suggesting that older adolescents are more likely to commit violence than their younger counterparts {23,24,25,26} .In table 4 shows the parental socioeconomic factors (family income)and found to be dependently associated with violent behaviors, in previous studies parental socioeconomic status was also found to be associated with the use of violence by adolescents {27}. Some studies have suggested that socioeconomic factors may be related to bullying rates ,however the assessment of parental socioeconomic status is very difficult ,due to the variation in socioeconomic infrastructure in Iraq. According to family disruption ,this study suggested that the lack of an intact family was also associated with an increased risk of the engaged in violent behavior. Thus ,parental death ,separation/ divorce and travelling of father , were all related to adolescent violence .These results were agreed with previous works {28}.Family disruption has negative considerations all over the world .Cultural , socioeconomic factors may contribute to family disruption . In consistent with other studies , this study revealed that students who resetting an exam or repeating a grade , showed a significantly higher tendency to violent behavior. Other studies suggested that low levels of achievement in school have consistently been found to be associated with violent behavior {29,30,31}. Furthermore , a closer look at individual life events revealed that poor grades were the most important risk factors for youth violence {9,16 } .School violence causes impairment of mental health by increasing anxiety , fears and perceptions of defenselessness and hopelessness. Depression , anxiety ,suicidal ideation and attempts are strongly linked to physical fighting ,being bullied or to acting as a bully even an infrequent involvement in these aspects of behavior . Results of this study revealed that students being involved in school violence have negative traits ( anxiety, depression includes: sadness and hopelessness). Correlation between violent behavior and a history of psychiatric disorder ,depression, anxiety , sadness and hopelessness have been documented in previous studies {21,18,22,29,30}.Furthermore ,research suggests a link between violent behavior directed at oneself (i.e., suicidal behavior) and violent behavior directed at others among adolescents {2,6,23,29,31 }

**Conclusion:**

1-Physical fighting and bullying behavior among adolescents a public health problem worthy of our most intensive efforts at prevention and intervention .

## 2<sup>nd</sup> INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL SCIENCES (ISCOHMS 2022)

2-The most important risk factor for school violence was the subjection to corporal punishment at school.

3-More studies are needed on these protective factors. It is clear that the development of strong attachment bonds between parents and children, feeling of connectedness to parent and family and monitoring, supervision and parental involvement in the activities of adolescents can be powerful sources of protection for children.

4-Physical fighting and bullying behavior could be a cautionary signal indicating more severe psychiatric problems, such as depression, anxiety, and suicide ideation.

### **Recommendations :**

1-A wide nation study is very important to demonstration of physical fighting and bullying behavior among secondary school adolescents.

2-Longitudinal studies are also needed to measure the causation relationship between school violence and mental health among Iraqi school students.

3-Supporting and repairing school health services and integrating school violence assessment into these programs to make annual estimation for school violence in order to build a baseline data for prevention and control efforts.

4-Workshop for teachers, students, and families to increase their knowledge about adolescents interpersonal violence and its correlates.

5-Increasing the level of public awareness about these problems by using mass media.

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