

WHAT MAKES LEARNERS AND TEACHERS VULNERABLE IN SCHOOLS OF CHANDIGARH? A STUDY ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Schools as key socialization agencies are no longer perceived as shelters of good manners, human values and civic conflict solving strategies, but instead are prone to violence and deviant behavior. Regular media reports on serious acts of violence in schools indicate that school violence is becoming a major issue worldwide. Besides the severe forms of violence in schools, the minor forms of violence go unreported and without any concern making students and teachers vulnerable. A scientific assessment of the exact extent to which violence is actually prevalent in schools of Chandigarh was carried out so that potential vulnerabilities may be estimated. For this, data was collected from 935 students of 26 schools of Chandigarh. The findings of this study indicate that psychological, emotional, physical and sexual violence are widely spread in schools at various levels. Two third of the students were frequently victimized by their peers. Nine students out of ten students were victimized (with 56% reported to be frequent victims) by teachers with one or other form of violence during last twelve months. The incidents of student to teacher violence were reported from about 40% schools. These findings indicate that both students and teachers are vulnerable of violence so intervention programs are to be devised in the to change the culture within schools and to make students and teachers to feel safe in schools.

Keywords: Vulnerable, School, Teacher, Student, Violence.



INTRODUCTION

Vulnerability refers to susceptible harm due to certain factors which may cause harm or loss to people, property, resources, system and may hamper the economic, social, cultural and environmental activities. Generally, earthquake, terrorists' attacks, fire, chemical hazards, floods, accidents etc are considered as factors in a city which may cause loss to the city and its people. Administration focus on these potential disasters only and ignore some emerging factors which may prove to be disastrous if not given immediate attention and one of this potential disaster is violence in schools.

School violence has become a serious problem in recent decades in many countries, especially when weapons such as guns or knives are involved. As days are passing by, these kinds of actions by the students are becoming more frequent and more violent. The numbers of victims are increasing as we are reviewing each day. The media coverage regarding violence at schools in general and of extremely violent incidence in particular (Furlong & Chung, 1995; Schubarth, 1999 cited in Fuchs, 2008).

There are good reasons to consider school violence as vulnerability issue. Firstly, it is immediately damaging - to those persons who suffer the violence. Secondly, it can create insecurity and fear that works against the purpose of the school and goes against the rights of children to have a safe (UN Convention on the rights of the Child) to live free from fear and intimidation. Thirdly, violence breeds violence as Maguire and Pastore (1999) had reported that 85% of people involved in serious violence in adulthood were involved in violence during

adolescence in schools. “[n]o country can hope to live in peace and prosperity unless it builds mutual trust between its citizens, starting in the classroom” (UNESCO, 2011: 7).

There are both short-term and long-term effects on children involved in such experiences (Headley, 2004; Seals & Young, 2003), including internalising (e.g. depression, withdrawal) and externalising (e.g. aggression, attention deficit, conduct disorder etc) problems later in life. School violence leads to loss of trust, depression, feelings of hopelessness and suicidality (Pottinger & Stair, 2009), poorer school performance and adjustment (Munni & Malhi, 2006). Not only students but teachers also bear the consequences of violence. The victimized teachers developed a variety of maladaptive behaviors such as fear, anxiety, stress, depression, sleep disorders and poor social functioning and even school performance (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Galand, Lecoq, & Philippot, 2007; Kondrasuk et al., 2005; Reddy et al., 2013; Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf, & Spencer, 2011). Violence in schools therefore is recognized as a major social problem that not only affects the wellbeing of students and teachers but whole educational process which may ultimately undermine democratic values and education for citizenship.

Because of the impact of school violence on students as well as teachers, it has received lot of attention in the scientific communities around the world and a lot of researches have been conducted. The studies have shown that school violence is a reality in every country around the world but rate and type of violence vary from country to country and state to state. Widespread violence in India’s schools is hampering the futures of children and costing the country billions of pounds in lost social benefits (Plan International Report, 2010).

Though severe form of school violence was rare in India in the past but in recent years the incidents of violence between students, teacher and students etc in Indian school is on rise as per the media reports. In **New Delhi**, a class monitor kicks a boy who died apparently from the injury. Another incident where a class XI student bludgeons his schoolmate following a minor fight, a 14-year-old boy was fatally shot by two other boys; A class 10 student of a government school slapped his teacher and threatened to kill her (September 2011); recently a class monitor was beaten to death by his classmates (NDTV, August 25, 2015). **M.P:** 15-year-old student at a government school in the state of Madhya Pradesh was shot dead by a 17-year-old classmate; **Tamil Nadu:** A school teacher killed 8 years old girl; A Class 9 student allegedly stabbed his Hindi teacher in the classroom yesterday at a private Chennai' school (February 10, 2012). **W.B:** A boy pointed a gun at the principal who had scolded him a day earlier for bringing a mobile phone to the school (<http://www.ndtv.com> April 2012); 15-year-old boy who killed himself and two of his school teachers have been accused for abetting his suicide (August, 14, 2014); Haryana: A teacher was killed by outsiders for not allowing student to cheat (April 2012); U.P.:A seven years old boy was beaten to death by teacher for not paying fees (December 17, 2014).

In **Chandigarh** also a number of such incidents are being revealed in media very often, like students bashed by seniors/classmates; driver of school bus sexually harassed girl of class II, teacher locked up boy in school; two teachers sexually harassed girls of senior secondary class; outsiders were called by students to beat the classmate etc. These are some of the reported cases of severe school violence, besides these there could be many which are not being reported. Besides the severe forms of violence in schools, the minor forms of violence go unreported.

There are cases with less severity which are ignored, may prove to be fatal later on. Green (2005) also opined that less serious forms of violence invariably precede more serious forms of violence. These minor incidents seem to be harmless but are detrimental and terrifying for involved as well as bystanders. In India, admitting about violence in schools is considered to be disgraceful as Indian society asserts to be peaceful. The school authorities either behave ignorant or try to snub if come across such incidents. Such a denial may aggravate the situation thus it is crucial to determine the number and nature of violent acts in schools. A scientific assessment of the extent and the causes of violence at schools needs to answer the questions, to what extent this fear is justifiable, to what exact extent violence is actually prevalent at the schools (Chandras, 1999). Thus, information on the rate and scope of different types of school violence i.e. student to student, teacher to student and student to teacher is critical for assessing the magnitude of its vulnerability for the directly involved individuals in particular and for society in general. The present study aimed at estimating the magnitude of everyday violence – both physical and non-physical – experienced and perpetrated by both students and teachers. These findings may help the stakeholders to recognize the seriousness of violence in schools of Chandigarh and induce them to establish the intervention programs to deal with it.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey method was used to carry out this research study. Mainly three types of violence, such as student to student, teacher to student and student to teachers have been undertaken. The study relied upon the primary data from the students i.e. self reports of students regarding their victimization by peers (student to student violence) as well as by teachers (teachers to student violence) and also their observations about student to teacher violence. A sample of 935 students was taken from 26 schools of Chandigarh (16 government and 10 private schools). The sample included 473 boys and 462 girl students of class 7th and 8th.

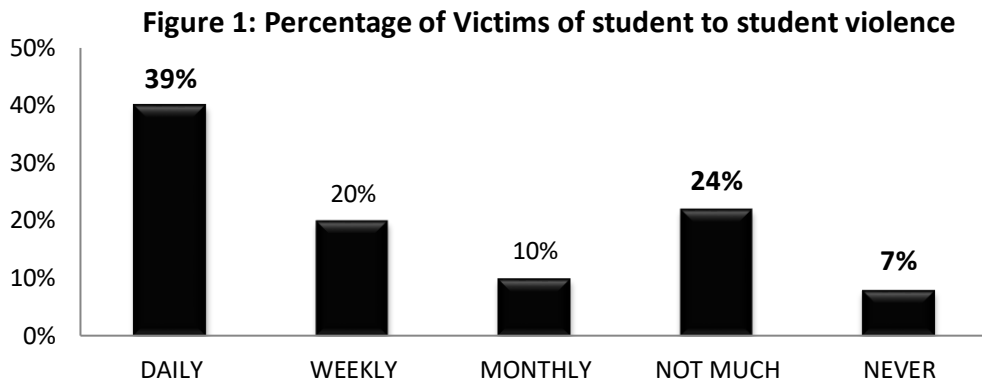
A 'School Violence Scale' was constructed which was divided into three parts i.e. student to student violence, teacher to student violence and student to teacher violence. The student to student violence was conceived as any physical, emotional, relational or sexual discomfort inflicted by a student towards other student. Both the direct and indirect form of victimization was assessed through this scale as proposed by Smith (2004). Some of the items pertaining to

peer-victimization were adopted from Victimization Scale by Orpinas & Kelder, (1995). In the first part of the scale, there were a total of 21 items. The items pertaining to teacher to student violence included three kinds of behavior of teachers towards students. One is punishing behavior i.e. use of corporal punishment, the second type is violent behavior in the form of scolding/yelling at schools, insulting the students and third is sexual harassment. There were 12 items related with these behavior of teachers towards students. For incidents of student to teacher violence, students were required to report as per their observation (during preceding twelve months) for violent behaviors of students towards their teachers in the form of yelling /pushing/hitting / insulting/defaming/ involving outsiders to hit the teacher. The respondents were asked to respond in terms of frequency of the incidents i.e. daily, 1-2 times in week, 2-3 times in month, not frequently, rarely and never.

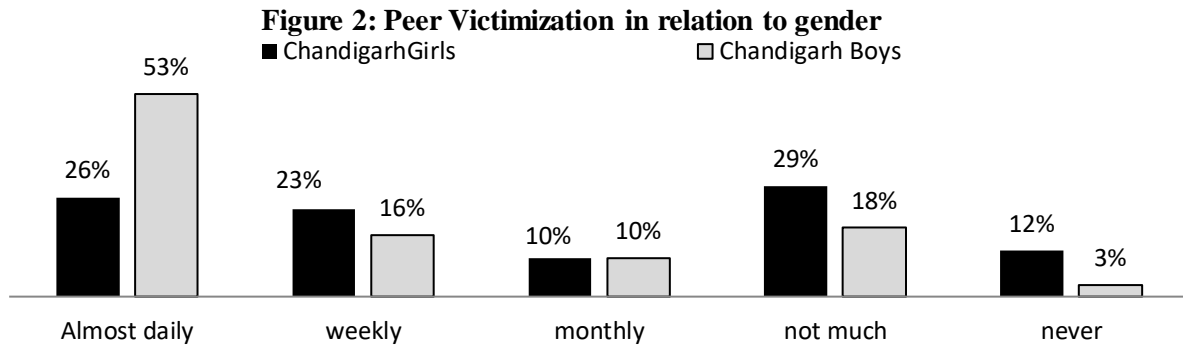
Data was analyzed by counting percentages for each item of various forms of violence to find out its prevalence in the schools. Number of victims on the basis of their frequency of victimization was found out.

FINDINGS

➤ **Student to Student Violence**



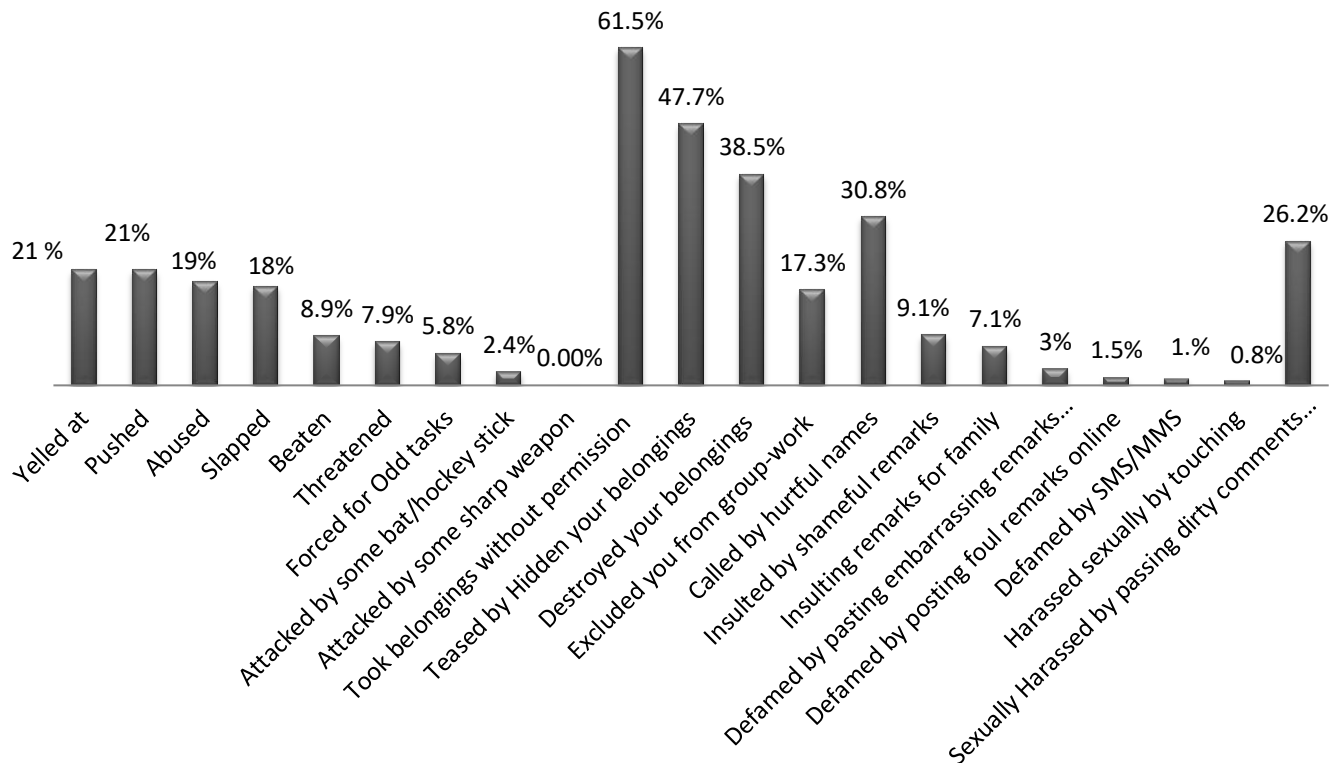
The incidents of student to student violence are very common as 69% students were victimized by their peer frequently i.e. 2-3 times in a month. Only 7% students reported that they were never victimized by their peers during last one year.



While analyzing the gender difference, it was found that lesser number of girl students are victimized of student to student violence than the boy students. There were 26% girls and 53% boys who experienced bullying on daily basis (irrespective of the ways of victimization). Overall, more boys (79%) than girls (59%) were frequently victimized by their peers and 29% girls and 18% boys encountered violence in rare occasions. There were only 3% boys and 12% girls who reported that they were never victimized by their peers during the last twelve months.

On looking at the type of victimization, following picture emerged (fig 3):

Figure 3: Different forms of Peer victimization with percentage of Victims



It is evident from the data shown in figure 3 that students victimize their peers by a number of ways and the most common among these are psychological violence such as irritating others by destroying or meddling their properties (vandalism), using hurtful names, relational bullying (exclusion from group) etc. Though psychological violence is more common among students, but number of victims of physical and sexual violence is also considerable as one out of five students being frequently pushed/slapped or sexually harassed with dirty comments by their peers. It is generally considered that girls experience sexual harassment more than boys in schools but the data (vide table 1) depict that more boys than girls are sexually victimized in schools.

Table 1: Victims of Sexual harassment by Peers

	Daily	Many times	Occasionally	Rarely	Total	Never
Boys (%)	7%	7%	5%	14%	33%	67%
Girls (%)	3%	1%	2%	7%	13%	87%

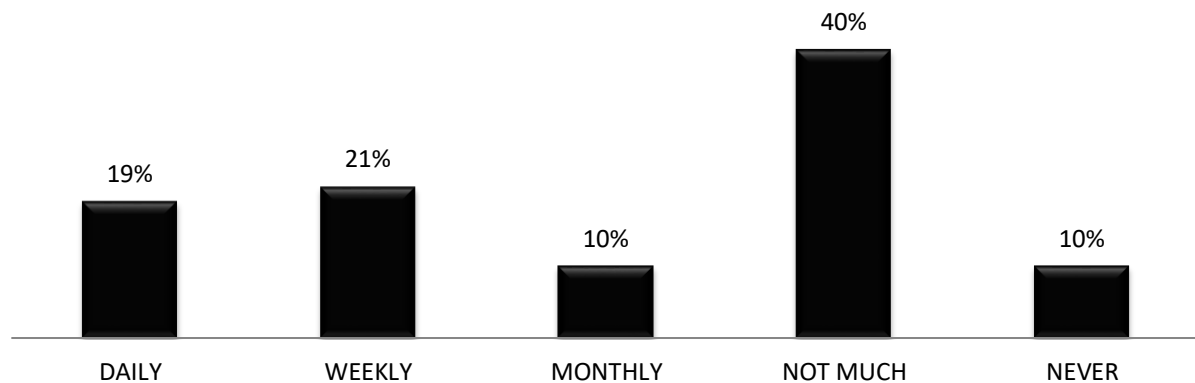
There found to be 33% boys who reported that they were sexually harassed by their peers in the schools whereas 13% girls reported the same. Among these about 14% boys and 4% were

frequently harassed. The forms of sexual harassment included dirty comments mostly and touching sometimes.

With regards to school type, it was found that the total number of victims of student to student violence (irrespective of its frequency) were more in government schools than private schools in Chandigarh.

Teacher to Student Violence

Figure 4: Victims of Teacher to Student violence in schools



With regards to violence by teachers on students (figure 4), it was found that 19% students encountered teachers' aggression in routine whereas 21% students reported to be victims of teachers' aggression for 1-2 times in a week during last one year. Besides, 10% students faced teachers' aggression for 2-3 times in a month during last one year. Thus every second student in schools of Chandigarh frequently faces teachers' aggression. Out of the rest 50%, there were only 10% students who reported that they did not encounter teachers' aggression even once in the last one year. Remaining 40% students experienced violence by their teachers only in few occasions during last one year.

Figure 5: Different forms of victimization by Teachers with percentages of victims

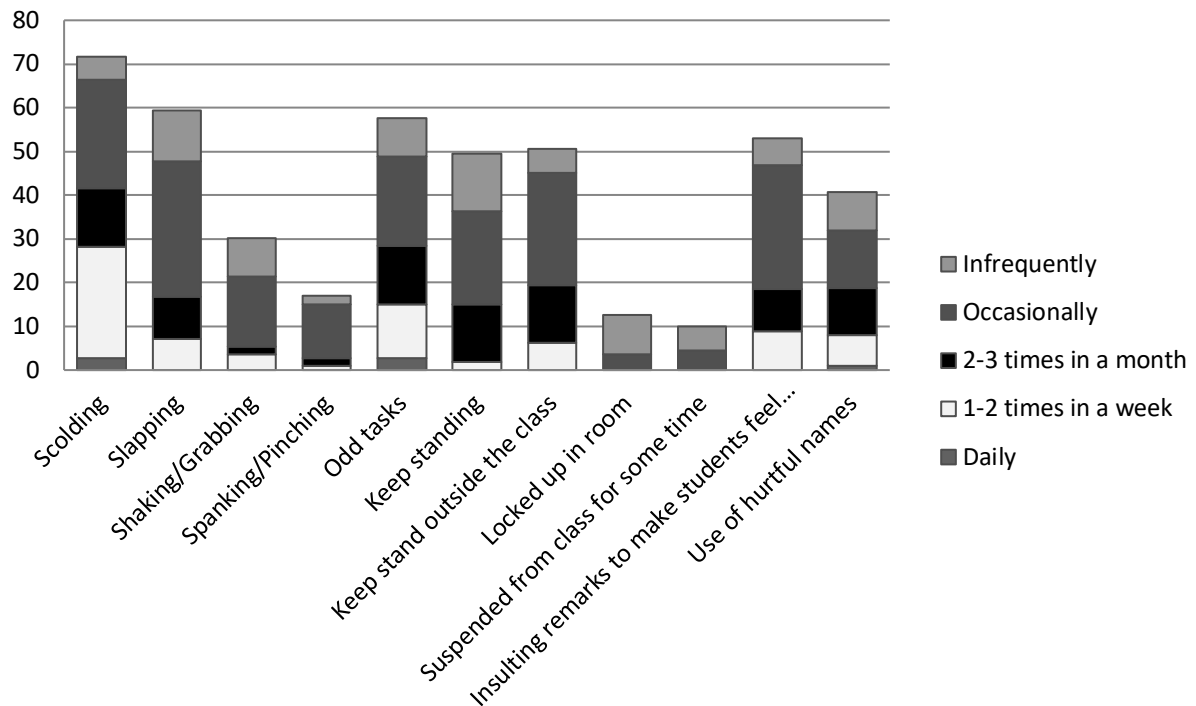


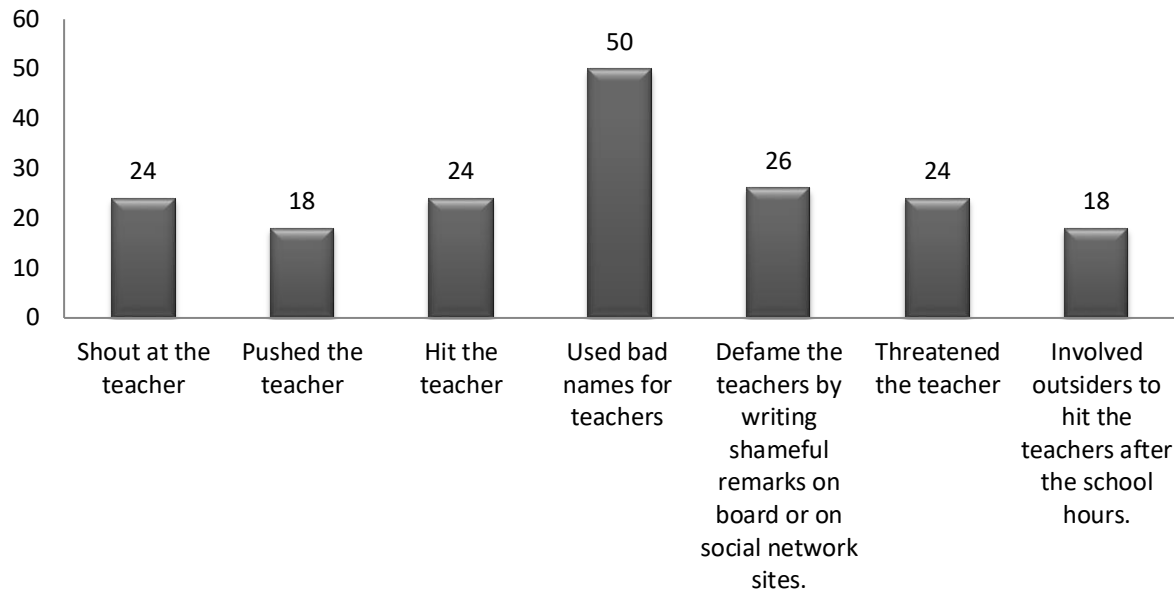
Figure 5 illustrates that *scolding* by teachers is the most prevalent type of teacher violence towards students followed by *slapping*, *assigning odd tasks* and *insulting behavior* (shameful remarks by teachers) as more than fifty percent students experienced it. Besides these, harassment by punishments inside and outside the class is also common. Some students also reported that they were sexually harassed by their teachers.

Overall, in more than 60% schools teachers exhibit violent behavior towards their students and as much as around 50% students frequently fall victims of it. The teachers had various reasons which they try to justify in the name of improving students' behavior.

➤ **Students to Teacher Violence**

Not only students but teachers are also not very safe in schools of Chandigarh as they had to face the violent behavior of their students in schools. The incidents of student to teacher violence (one or another type) are reported from about 40% schools. The observations of students have been illustrated in figure 6 with regards to incidents of violence by students towards teachers.

Figure 6: Witnesses of Student to teacher violence in schools



Half of the sample of students reported that they had witnessed some students who used bad names for their teachers and even tried to defame the teachers by posting shameful comments. Many students reported that some of their peers even shouted at the teachers and also threatened them. A few students witnessed incidents of physical violence against teachers by the students (pushing/hitting etc). These findings indicate that Students tend to be involved in more non-physical violence toward teachers than physical.

Whatever is the type of violence, it is surely an issue of big concern it undermine democratic values and education for citizenship.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The higher rate of violence in schools of Chandigarh may also be understood by taking in to consideration the findings of Preston (2009) who mentioned that because of diversity of population in urban schools, student discipline and classroom management are major issues. Youth from urban communities often display disruptive and aggressive behavior in the classroom setting. The schools of Chandigarh also have a large immigrant population which constitutes diverse groups of students, on the basis of such as ethnicity, culture, religion and language. Thus, it may be a reason for higher rate of violence in schools of Chandigarh especially government schools. Moreover, some studies suggest other reasons for the higher rates of school violence. First reason relates with stage of development as early adolescence is a

difficult age. Young teenagers are often physically hyperactive and have not learned acceptable social behavior, thus perpetrate violence. Second reason relates with diversity as many school students come into contact for the first time with young people from different backgrounds and distant neighborhoods, thus may not be able to accept the diversity (Constitution Rights Foundation of U.S., 2015 <http://www.crf-usa.org/school-violence/causes-of-school-violence.html>). According to Skiba, et al.(n.d.), students in urban schools serving predominantly lower socioeconomic status (SES) minority children are twice as likely to be victims of violence as students in suburban, town, or rural areas.

With regards to teacher to student violence, nine students out of ten students were victimized by teachers with one or other form of violence out of which 50% reported to be frequent victims of teachers' aggression/violent behavior. The high prevalence may be attributed to overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources as reported by researchers (Tao, 2015) in some developing countries and also to administrative and social acceptance. Adults condone corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure as long as this does not leave a physical mark on the children adults. Jain (2015) reported that parents condone violence by teachers on their wards unless it leave any physical mark. Moreover, many considered it as measure to improve behavior and academic performance (Morrow & Singh, 2014)

Violence breeds violence and this pattern is apparent here in the schools of Chandigarh as a decade back there used to be cases of bullying and corporal punishment but incidents of student to teacher violence was never noticed but now many teachers are victimized by their students as evidenced in this study. The reason may be displacement of aggression from bullying situation by peer or teachers, the students have started targeting their teachers.

The school violence in schools may be seen in context with general unrest in the country as in latest peace index the country ranked at 141 out of 163 (2016) because it is perceived that "levels and patterns of violence in schools often reflect the levels and patterns of violence in countries, communities and families, these in turn reflect prevailing political and socio-economic conditions, social attitudes, cultural traditions and values, and laws and law enforcement" (Pinheiro, 2006 p. 111).

One would fear that children and juveniles are raised in an environment characterized by deviant norms where they adapt to violent habits and patterns of deviant behavior that might consolidate and intensify over time which in turn would undermine the schools' mission with respect to the socialization and education of the young generation (Fuchs, 2008). Thus, school violence is a serious issue which calls for urgent attention by all the stake holders. As it is rightly stated by a researcher, "violence in schools is a critical problem that needs to be tackled head on. This is not a fad problem that will go away. It is not an issue that can be taken lightly as a 'kids will be kids'

thing. If allowed to continue, it may wreck children lives, schools, communities and even a nation”.

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