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RECEIVED 23 August 2025

REVISED 24 October 2025

ACCEPTED 18 November 2025

PUBLISHED 15 December 2025

## CITATION

Chobphon P (2025) Perspectives on school violence: novice teachers' experiences in Thai urban secondary schools.  
*Front. Educ.* 10:1691464.  
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2025.1691464

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# Perspectives on school violence: novice teachers' experiences in Thai urban secondary schools

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Prior research has called for schoolteachers to recognize that they can have a significant impact on school violence prevention. Additionally, authorities should realize the importance of providing knowledge and creating policies and activities that enable teachers to utilize their full potential to prevent violence in schools. This phenomenological study examined the perspective of eight new schoolteachers from eight different public schools in Bangkok regarding school violence. They were individually interviewed and the collected data were analyzed thematically. This study revealed their understandings of school violence and the way their schools dealt with violent incidents. Factors that hindered their decisions to intervene were a lack of knowledge of school violence or support from school authorities, a lack of empathy, a wider hierarchical structure, a lack of self-efficacy, and misinformed perceptions of the seriousness of verbal bullying and social exclusion. To counter Thai societal normalization of bullying, the text argues for the implementation of comprehensive training, policies, and counselling services that prioritize positive reinforcement to de-normalize abuse. Aligning with Bandura's findings on the link between teacher perceptions and interventions, the study emphasizes that stakeholders must equip new teachers with theoretical knowledge and relationship-building skills to enhance their self-efficacy in preventing violence.

## KEYWORDS

violence in school, teacher training, novice teachers, urban secondary school, public schools in Bangkok

## 1 Introduction

The Thailand Global School-based Student Health Survey ([Ministry of Public Health, 2021](#)) conducted indicated that in the 12 months before the survey, 18.2% of students were subjected to physical assault at school at least once. Meanwhile, 24.4% of students were involved in a physical fight. At least 20.0% were bullied while at school. Additionally, 10.5% of students reported being bullied outside school grounds, and 15.0% of students were bullied via social media. The Director General of the Department of Mental Health has recently revealed that in Thailand, approximately 600,000 children are being bullied in educational institutions annually, making Thailand the country with the second highest rates of reported bullying worldwide ([Pisuthipan, 2023](#)).

Research has confirmed that large urban schools are more likely to see violent behaviors than small rural schools ([Yang et al., 2021](#)). Bangkok, Thailand's most modern metropolitan area, is home to government, private, and international schools of varying quality and price. Several incidents of school violence perpetrated by both students and teachers have caused public outrage. In 2020, for example, 30 preschoolers at an expensive private school in Bangkok were revealed to have been abused by their teachers ([Mala, 2020](#)).

In September 2023, newspapers reported an incident of school violence at one of Bangkok's most well-known schools, wherein a female teacher repeatedly slapped the face of a schoolboy who refused to call her "Mom" (Momentum Press Staff, 2023). On January 29, 2024, a 14-year-old schoolboy stabbed a peer to death at a municipal school; the suspect claimed that the victim had bullied him for a long time (Bangprapa and Ngamkham, 2024).

Students in urban areas often experience violence and stress (Chaudhary and Srivastava, 2017; Yang et al., 2021). However, teachers can play an important role in preventing violence (UNESCO, 2022; Yoon and Barton, 2008). However, few academic articles have examined teachers' perspectives on how to overcome school violence. This study therefore analyzed the experiences and perspectives of novice teachers who have worked at large urban secondary schools for less than 2 years, focusing on the following issues: their knowledge and understanding of violence in schools, how their schools deal with violence incidents, factors hindering their decisions to intervene (or not) in violent incidents, and ways to raise teachers' capacity to combat bullying and violence. The findings indicate that schoolteachers must better recognize their significant potential impact for preventing school violence, teacher education curriculum developers must establish programs that better equip schoolteachers with strategies for managing bullying and other types of school violence, and authorities in the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC) and school administrations must create policies to prevent and properly manage school violence.

## 2 Review of literature

### 2.1 School violence

School violence is a broad term for physical, psychological, or sexual aggression that can happen virtually anywhere related to a student's education. This includes the classroom, surrounding areas, the commute to and from school, and digital spaces. Although students are the most common victims, the perpetrators can be other students, teachers, or anyone connected to the school environment (UNESCO, 2022). School violence severely disrupts the entire educational environment, negatively impacting the learning, well-being, and daily lives of both students and staff (Benbenishty and Astor, 2008). This analysis explores the scope of school violence, focusing on its adverse consequences and the preventive measures required from both individual teachers and the broader school system.

#### 2.1.1 Consequences of school violence

School violence has many negative consequences for its victims. The worse consequence was bullying perpetration (Turanovic and Siennick, 2022). They usually suffer from worse educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2019). They also have high rates of smoking, alcohol and drug use (Ferrara et al., 2019), unsafe sex, anxiety, and depression (Eisenbraun, 2007), headache, self-harm, fear, and low self-esteem (Turanovic and Siennick, 2022). Bullied children often report feeling lonely, losing sleep at night, and contemplating suicide (UNESCO, 2019). They may be more likely to leave formal

education after finishing secondary school and have low self-esteem (Eisenbraun, 2007). Given its impact on learning, school violence is not only an issue of children's rights but also carries significant costs for education systems if left unaddressed (UNESCO, 2022). Unfortunately, the number of children being bullied in educational institutions annually is increasing. Pisuthippan (2023) stressed that the issue of school violence is not as trivial as most adults believe because it impacts children's physical and mental health and even educational outcomes. These consequences can have long-lasting effects (UNESCO, 2022). A study by Maphalala (2014) focusing on factors associated with gender-based violence in South African schools revealed that GBV remains a significant issue. The research highlighted that girls are particularly susceptible to both sexual harassment and physical abuse, often perpetrated by male learners or teachers. These incidents have devastating effects, gravely compromising girls' self-esteem, diminishing their educational success, and jeopardizing their long-term health and wellbeing.

Youth who perpetrate school violence face several significant adverse consequences, primarily related to future harm and antisocial behavior. These individuals are at a higher risk of bullying others (both in-school and external), self-harm, and suicidality. They also demonstrate elevated rates of weapon carrying, school dropout, dating violence victimization, subsequent violence perpetration, and antisocial/offending behavior. Conversely, the link between school violence perpetration and poor outcomes in school performance, academic achievement, or various mental health indicators (including depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety) was determined to be weak or absent (Turanovic and Siennick, 2022).

#### 2.1.2 Role of teachers in preventing violence

Teachers are a significant potential factor in enhancing violence prevention at school (Welsh, 2000). Teachers play important roles in creating a positive school climate (Venkatesamy and Hu, 2024) and preventing students' aggressive behaviors (Yoon and Barton, 2008). The effectiveness of their response to violence depends on how well teachers are prepared (UNESCO, 2022). In daily routine, teachers are generally the first adults to respond to a violent incident. One commonly used strategy to manage violence incidents is to then transfer the matter to the school administrators and guidance office (Yoon and Bauman, 2014).

Teachers' decision to intervene in bullying incidents is influenced by numerous factors (O'Brien et al., 2024). Some factors that may prevent them from intervening include a lack of knowledge or skills to intervene effectively, a lack of relationship with the student, a lack of awareness of how serious the issue is, a belief that certain types of bullying (e.g., relational bullying) are less serious than others, a lack of self-efficacy in problem management, normalized bullying between school staff and students, and a lack of support from the leadership team in the school (O'Brien et al., 2024; Marshall, 2012).

Although various professional organizations have recommended training teachers in dealing with or preventing school violence and bullying (Yoon and Barton, 2008), training opportunities remain limited. Most of the teachers feel that they do not receive adequate pre- or in-service training (UNESCO, 2022).

Therefore, they express the need for stronger training to improve their understanding and recognition of all types of violence, including violence perpetrated by teachers or the school staff. Owing to a lack of knowledge, teachers do not always recognize many kinds of school violence. For example, several teachers reported that they did not know how to consistently differentiate between bullying, teasing, and playing (Marshall, 2012). Pre- and in-service training programs provide teachers with theoretical knowledge on the issue of violence such its causes and different categories; this knowledge would improve their level of awareness of the violent occurrences at their schools. Moreover, this training can support teachers to develop skills in dealing with violence incidents (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; UNESCO, 2022). Clearly, teachers without such knowledge cannot intervene the incidents efficiently (O'Brien et al., 2024). Teachers also require better education about the experiences of students who are physically, emotionally, and socially at risk (UNESCO, 2022).

The quality of teacher–student relationships in schools is vital for preventing violence. Students who are committed to academic success and feel attached to their teachers are less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors (Hawkins et al., 1998; Volungis and Goodman, 2017). In contrast, a lack of close relationships may make some students become aggressive (Yoon and Barton, 2008). To build teacher–student relationships, teachers should undergo relevant training programs and effectively apply appropriate communication skills. To cultivate quality relationships, teachers should treat students with dignity and respect, which includes empathy, genuineness, and a nonjudgmental attitude (Volungis and Goodman, 2017). In addition, teachers should support joint activities and learning about other cultures to foster contact between students with diverse background which lead to less bullying perpetration (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2020).

As noted in Section 2.1.2, teachers with higher self-efficacy tend to intervene more often in bullying situations among students (Fischer et al., 2021). In addition, less experienced teachers lack self-efficacy in managing violent incidents. They may feel more threatened and less confident in their ability to intervene in such incidents (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; O'Brien et al., 2024).

Bullying between the school staff and students is also a barrier to effective intervention. When students view teachers displaying bullying behavior, whether with other teachers or with students, they will be more likely to consider these behaviors acceptable. However, they will also feel more unsafe in school (Marshall, 2012). Empathy also increases the likelihood that teachers will intervene to prevent or stop violent incidents. Here, “empathy” refers to teachers’ ability to understand and share their feelings with their students. Empathy is an important characteristic of teachers that can help students who are victims of bullying (O'Brien et al., 2024). Empathy has been shown to be a protective factor against bullying and victimization (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2020).

### 2.1.3 Role of schools in preventing violence

Some school characteristics, such as school size, location, physical condition, and policies, contribute to students’ violent behavior (Eisenbraun, 2007). The school culture and attitudes of all stakeholders influence the ways a school and its teachers respond to the issues of bullying and school violence (Mahabeer,

2020). As previously noted, large urban schools are more likely to experience violent behaviors than small rural schools. Schools in good condition with a healthy and supportive environment can better reduce the occurrence of violent acts (Eisenbraun, 2007). What students see, hear, know about, and experience from their daily school activities contributes to the judgment of their overall school climate (Fisher et al., 2018) and belief of whether violence is acceptable there.

Students must be disciplined for their inappropriate behavior to ensure school safety. Successful discipline includes clear, fair, and unbiased rules, which can enhance orderliness (Skiba and Peterson, 2000; Batsche and Knoff, 1994). The methods of discipline should be positive. However, when negative consequences must be used, they should always be followed with an explanation and additional positive reinforcements (Eisenbraun, 2007). The Thai Ministry of Education’s (MoE’s) *Regulations of the Ministry of Education on Punishment of Pupils and Students, B.E. 2005* specifies that schools can punish students in four ways: admonishment, parole, behavior score deduction, and activity performance for behavioral change. In addition, the regulations prohibit punishing students harshly, in the form of bullying, out of anger, or with vengeance. Teachers must consider the age of the student and the severity of the offense (Office of the Permanent Secretary, 2018).

In general, when bullying occurs, bullies are often punished but there is no mechanism to foster empathy or understanding in the bullies themselves (Sokantat et al., 2021). Experts have called for schools to be more active to promote the development of students’ fundamental values, which are essential for building healthy communities (Peterson and Skiba, 2001). Some schools create school-based programs that incorporate fundamental values and specific social skills to help remedy violence issues, such as proper anger control techniques, problem-solving skills, and effective communication (Patel et al., 2022; Eisenbraun, 2007). Students must also learn to be wary of communication styles that inadvertently or unintentionally make listeners feel bullied. Appropriate social skills increase the success of students’ social relationships and prevent negative responses from others (Eisenbraun, 2007). Additionally, increased parental involvement improves communication between home and school (Peterson and Skiba, 2001).

Support from school administrators and general structural support are important for enabling teachers to implement violence prevention (Nunan and Ntombela, 2022). Insufficient support causes new teachers professional anxiety regarding this issue (Simkhada et al., 2025). School administrators must establish policies or codes of conduct that can assist them. Having an explicit school policy on bullying is effective in terms of encouraging teachers to intervene in violent incidents. When they lack support from the school’s leadership, teachers can be less willing to cope with their students’ problems (O'Brien et al., 2024; Sela-Shayovitz, 2009). In addition, school administrators should clearly define what incidents are considered violent and provide guidelines for teachers on how to respond when they experience, witness, or learn about violence (UNESCO, 2022; Yoon and Bauman, 2014).

Thai public schools have a bureaucratic structure, which means they are highly formal and strictly adhere to rules and regulations. They are also structured with a vertical hierarchy (Chobphon, 2024; Tönnies, 1963). The hierarchy is based on age, occupation, wealth,

and rank. Thais value the superior–inferior relationship for the guidance and order it provides. However, those of inferior status are also frequently afraid to express divergent opinions to superiors. Most Thais restrain themselves from expressing their ideas when dealing with superiors (Arya, 1979). Moreover, respecting seniors is deemed important. Seniority is based on job position, age, and work duration in an organization (Chobphon and Wongpipit, 2022). Because of this hierarchical social structure, adults hitting, scolding, and using violence to dominate children has become normal (Sokantat et al., 2021). Younger people (both teachers and students) are expected to obey, comply, and respect older people. Juniors creating conflicts, disagreeing, arguing, and criticizing senior people are considered rude or are seen as troublemakers, facing social or professional repercussions. Therefore, younger individuals usually avoid openly defying seniors (Wetprasit, 2016).

## 2.2 Conceptual framework and supporting theory

This paper presents a conceptual framework of school violence and bullying using a conceptual framework of school violence and bullying of UNESCO (2019), Bandura's (1992) social cognitive learning (SCL) theory and self-efficacy. This framework outlines the complete research process, from establishing the problem and questions to planning data handling and interpreting the findings (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The three concepts, UNESCO's framework of school violence and bullying, Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCL), and Self-Efficacy, interrelate by providing a comprehensive lens through which to define, explain, and influence the phenomenon of school violence and the response to it, particularly by teachers. The UNESCO framework provides the context within which SCL operates. In other words, UNESCO's Framework systematically defines the spectrum of school violence (physical, psychological, sexual, and potentially self-directed violence), outlining the specific behaviors that constitute a problem in the school environment, all of which influence the sociocultural factors that SCL highlights, as the school environment, policies, and norms dictate how these violent behaviors are perceived and addressed. Self-efficacy helps further explain the actual behavior of the teacher in intervening or not intervening against the types of violence categorized in the UNESCO framework. In summary, the UNESCO Framework identifies the problem, SCL explains why teachers behave in a certain way when faced with the problem, and self-efficacy is a key predictor within SCL of how effectively they will execute their personal agency to resolve the problem.

### 2.2.1 UNESCO's framework of school violence and bullying

UNESCO (2019) has provided a conceptual framework of school violence and bullying that encompasses physical, psychological, and sexual violence. Physical violence includes physical attacks and fights, corporal punishment, property destruction, and physical bullying. Physical bullying is defined as repeated, aggressive physical acts against someone. It involves a

variety of behaviors, including: being hit, hurt, kicked, pushed, or shoved around forced to do things against one's will and having personal belongings stolen, taken away, or destroyed. Psychological violence includes verbal and emotional abuse, social exclusion, and psychological bullying. Psychological bullying encompasses verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and social exclusion, all aimed at harming a person's mental wellbeing or social standing. Examples of common actions of Psychological bullying include being subjected to unpleasant teasing, intentionally left out of activities, excluded, or completely ignored by peers. Sexual violence includes both completed and attempted nonconsensual sex acts, unwanted touching, sexual harassment, and sexual bullying (UNESCO, 2019). Sexual bullying is a form of harassment that involves making fun of someone through actions or words with a sexual nature. This type of bullying includes: sexual jokes, sexual comments and sexual gestures. However, Miller (2012) has proposed that the conceptualization of school violence should also include violence toward the self, such as self-destructive behavior, self-harm, and suicide.

### 2.2.2 Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory

Bandura's (1992) SCL theory is one of the well-known theories in the field of education. It proposes that personal agency is socially rooted and influenced by sociocultural factors. Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory uses the concept of reciprocal causation to explain how human actions are shaped. Essentially, it says that three main factors; personal factors, behavior, and environment constantly influence each other in a two-way street. Personal factors refer to one's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, expectations and physical and physiological characteristics. Behavior is one's actions and choice while environment means one own situation and social influence (Pajares, 1996). According to Bandura (1992), people react differently depending on their perceived socially conferred roles and status. This concept also applies to the ways teachers decide to intervene in violent incidents in the school, which is influenced by their cognition (knowledge and understanding of school violence), personal factors (e.g., they are too busy to manage the incident), and the ways they believe, think, and feel toward the seriousness of the incident in the overall context of school policy and environment.

### 2.2.3 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy beliefs are critical elements of human behavior and motivation (Pajares, 2009). Self-efficacy beliefs can be defined as individuals' judgments based on their perception of their own capabilities to perform a given task (Pajares, 2009). One of the major areas of self-efficacy research is the academic setting (Pajares, 1996). The study (Pajares, 1996) confirmed that self-efficacy beliefs correlate with people's choices. Teachers who believe in their capacity to improve their school's climate can create a positive atmosphere for development and help students in need (Bandura, 1993). Importantly, they intervene more often in bullying and feel confident in managing such incidents (Fischer et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2024). In addition, less experienced teachers lack self-efficacy in managing violence incidences (O'Brien et al., 2024). They feel more threatened and less confident in their ability to intervene in



such incident (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; O'Brien et al., 2024). The four most effective ways of creating a strong sense of efficacy are: mastery experiences, social model, social persuasion and reducing people's stress reactions and altering their negative emotional (Bandura, 1994). Mastery experiences, particularly the successful completion of a task, serve to bolster an individual's sense of self-efficacy. Observing similar role models succeed in difficult circumstances enhances one's sense of self-efficacy. Receiving verbal persuasion can increase one's self-efficacy the belief that one possesses the capabilities to organize and execute actions necessary to manage prospective situations. Lowering emotional arousal, especially by mitigating stress and negative affect, can significantly enhance an individual's sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

## 3 Materials and methods

### 3.1 Phenomenology

The primary goal of this study was to examine the experience and perspective of new teachers in public urban schools on the topic of school violence. It primarily applied a phenomenological approach to enable the study of people's conscious experience of their everyday life. This approach is thus well suited to studying subjective human experiences (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

### 3.2 Researcher context

The researcher is an Assistant Professor in a Faculty of Education, where he is responsible for instructing future teachers and educational professionals. He is interested in the various aspects of adjustment experienced by newly hired teachers. He first took interest in qualitative research during his graduate studies. For the past 5 years as a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, his research has continued to be exclusively qualitative in nature.

### 3.3 Participants and recruitment

This study utilized purposive sampling wherein researchers generally select a sample from a population directly relevant to the question being studied (Merriam, 1998; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The inclusion criteria for participants were that they must (1) be employed as teachers in extra-large public schools in Bangkok, (2) be assigned to teach the secondary level, and (3) have had less than two years of experience. OBEC defines an extra-large school as having over 1,680 students enrolled during the school year (National Education Information System, 2023). The Office of the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Commission (Office of the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Commission, 2019) stipulates that new teachers must have a two-year probationary period before becoming a practitioner-level teacher. Therefore, this probationary period was used as a criterion to select new teachers. These new teachers were expected to have knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, understand their school's context, and easily recall what they had learned in their training programs. Teachers were excluded if they could not attend the scheduled Zoom interviews more than twice. The participants

TABLE 1 Participant demographics.

Pseudonym	Subject	Experience (Months)
Air	Visual arts	18
Bright	Science	9
Mild	English	6
Game	Music	8
Ruji	Thai language	6
Pat	Career education	9
Mon	Guidance	10
Yu	English	22

were informed that they were free to withdraw at any stage of this study with no adverse consequences, at which point any previously collected data regarding their experiences would be permanently destroyed.

The participants were all presumed to have similar qualities. For a homogeneous qualitative sample, Kuzel (1999) recommends five to eight participants. To increase the trustworthiness and scope of the study, eight participants were recruited. The recruitment announcement was posted in a public teachers' community Facebook group. It invited those interested to contact the researcher directly via a private message on the LINE application. Those who responded were contacted via a LINE call, during which the researcher explained the study's aims and procedures before formally inviting them to participate. Those who agreed were asked to sign a consent form and return it via LINE. Later, participants were asked to schedule a meeting at their convenience, and the Zoom meeting ID was sent via LINE. All eight participants—Air, Bright, Mild, Game, Ruji, Pat, Mon, and Yu—were female, and their average teaching experience was 10.625 months, as shown in Table 1. All participants' names appearing in this article are pseudonyms.

### 3.4 Data collection

This study applied semi-structured interviews for data collection. A semi-structured interview is guided by a list of questions to be explored, but it does not have pre-determined wording or a specific order for the questions. This format is flexible, enabling researchers to react to the immediate situation, respondents' evolving perspectives, and any new insights that arise (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). All interviews lasted <60 min each.

### 3.5 Validation

To check the results' accuracy, two kinds of validation strategies were applied: member checking and data triangulation. Member checking involves seeking participant feedback on a study's preliminary analyses, including the extracted themes. Because the researcher was working alone, sending the preliminary findings to the participants for their feedback helped assure that the results were not derived solely from the researcher's individual bias. To

TABLE 2 Themes and sub-themes.

Themes	Sub-themes
Definition of “school violence”	
Violence management systems	
Factors hindering teachers from effectively intervening in school violence	(1) Lack of knowledge of school violence (2) Lack of support from the school authority (3) Lack of empathy (4) Vertical power and hierarchy (5) Lack of self-efficacy (6) Misunderstanding of the seriousness of verbal bullying and social exclusion
Ways to raise teachers’ capacity to involve and overcome bullying and violence situations	(1) Cultivate knowledge and skills on violence prevention (2) Improve policies and practices

establish data triangulation, viewpoints from all eight participants were used to establish themes (Creswell, 2009).

3.6 Ethical approval

This study was approved by the Office of the Chulalongkorn University Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (COA No. 123/67).

3.7 Data analysis

The interviews were audio recorded via the Zoom application and the recordings were then transcribed into Word documents. The documents were formatted into two columns. The first column contained the interview transcripts, and the second column contained the researcher’s “open coding.” The researcher read and reread the transcripts several times to make sense of all the data. They then identified segments that appeared to answer any part of the research questions (Merriam and Tisdel, 2016). They created codes that matched short segments of data in the second column. A code was a word or short phrase assigned to summarize the data segment (Saldana, 2016). This process was repeated for the whole transcript (Merriam and Tisdel, 2016). Subsequently, codes that shared pertinent characteristics were grouped into categories (Saldana, 2016). Finally, the major categories were compared and merged if necessary, followed by thematic analysis. Table 2 provides Themes and Sub-Themes.

4 Results

The interviews revealed the participants’ perspectives on the definition of school violence, the ways their schools deal with violence incidents, factors hindering their decision to intervene, and what is necessary to strengthen their readiness to deal with violence. Results and findings were guided by the UNESCO Framework, which identifies the problem as perceived by teachers in their definition of school violence. SCL explains why teachers

behave in a certain way when faced with the problem, which aligns with the findings of factors hindering teachers from effectively intervening in school violence. Self-efficacy is a key predictor within SCL of how effectively individuals will execute their personal agency to resolve the problem, which addresses the lack of self-efficacy reported by teachers.

4.1 Defining “school violence”

Participants defined “school violence” broadly. All agreed that it is an act that affected the mind and body of the victim and mentioned two types of school violence: physical and psychological. As Game explained, “It is not only physical harm but also mental harm”. Mild, Pat, and Yu brought up sexual violence, while Air, Bright, Mild, and Mon mentioned cyberbullying. Mild said that violence “includes sexual harassment in both verbal and actions. Another kind of school violence is cyberbullying.”

As Pat explained, “Violence in schools is caused by fellow students and by teachers and school personnel.” This was echoed by Game. Meanwhile, Air, Bright, Mild, and Mon included the problems of self-harm and suicide in their definitions of school violence. Air said, “A student who studied in my class almost committed suicide because she had problems with her friends. In my opinion, committing suicide is a form of school violence.” Their opinions thus conformed with Miller (2012).

4.2 School violence management systems

The participants mentioned various people and committees in their schools that were involved in managing violence. Everyone mentioned class teachers in this capacity. These results were in line with Yoon and Bauman (2014), who considered teachers the first responders when violence occurs and noted that transferring the matter to school administrators and school guidance was a typical approach. Air explained class teachers’ duties in this capacity: “The homeroom teachers are (some) of the first people to be notified if a student in her (sic) class is found to be breaking the rules or being involved in a violence incident, either as a victim or perpetrator.”

Six participants (Air, Bright, Ruji, Pat, Mon, and Yu) agreed that grade-level leaders play a role in dealing with violent incidents at the grade-level for which they are responsible. Yu explained,

(Grade) Level leaders oversee the behavior of students at that level. They will ensure that students in their grade are disciplined. It is their duty to put an end to the various forms of violence that occur at [that] level.

Furthermore, five participants (Air, Bright, Ruji, Pat, Mon, and Yu) regarded student disciplinary affairs committees as the main authorities for dealing with violent incidents. Yu explained the duty of the student disciplinary affairs committee:

School administrators appoint a group of teachers to be the student disciplinary affairs committee, whose duties are to ensure that students are in the prescribed discipline and to prevent, deter, and correct inappropriate student behaviors.

According to these participants, these committees are responsible for punishing students who break school rules. Examples of punishment included reprimands, demerits, probation, and suspension. The method of punishment depends on the seriousness of the students' act, consistent with the MoE's regulations (Office of the Permanent Secretary, 2018). In serious incidents, the committee invited the parents of the conflicting parties to a meeting to inform them of the matter and asked them to cooperate with the school to prevent the student(s) from repeating the act.

Three participants (Air, Bright, and Mon) indicated that at their schools, the guidance department was instrumental in dealing with school violence. This also follows Yoon and Bauman (2014), who noted that transferring the matter to school administrators or guidance officers was a typical approach. Mon said, "If the student disciplinary affairs committee thinks that the student should receive counseling, he or she will be referred to the guidance counselor for further counseling."

Four participants (Game, Ruji, Pat, and Mon) reported that their schools used a penalty-based system to make students behave appropriately. Game said:

If a student violates school rules (in ways) that include violent actions, they will get mark deduction. When >50% of (their) marks (are) deducted, at the end of the semester, they have to attend a one-day camp for behavior modification.

Three participants (Game, Ruji, and Mon) mentioned mark deduction and two (Pat, Yu) reported the use of a student conduct record.

### 4.3 Factors hindering teachers from effectively intervening in school violence

The findings confirmed those of O'Brien et al. (2024), who noted that numerous factors can influence teachers' decision to intervene or not in bullying incidents. Factors that hindered the participants from intervening in violent incidents were a lack of knowledge about school violence, a lack of support from the school authorities, a lack of empathy, the vertical power structure at their schools, a lack of self-efficacy, and misunderstandings of the seriousness of verbal bullying and social exclusion.

#### 4.3.1 Lack of knowledge about school violence

Gaining a theoretical knowledge of the issue of school violence can raise teachers' level of awareness of its occurrence at their own schools (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; UNESCO, 2022). A lack of knowledge means teachers will not know that certain actions are considered violent. Therefore, they will not intervene to prevent such actions (Marshall, 2012). However, school violence receives scant attention in pre-service teacher education programs. Almost all the participants agreed that this topic was rarely mentioned during their studies. Additionally, curriculum developers for teacher education do not include content on school violence. Game mentioned:

I think there was nothing in the curriculum that taught me how to deal with aggressive children or violent situations. We are not taught how to effectively intervene when they encounter an incident of violence in their school. New teachers who had never encountered violence situations before may be shocked.

Indeed, Bright even "encountered (violent) situations (in my) real job during my teaching training." As a result of her lack of education on the subject, Air said, "I am not very confident in my ability to spot behavioral abnormalities in students. The girl who tried to kill herself studied in my class, but I had no idea she was in trouble and trying to commit suicide." Clearly, without knowledge of school violence, teachers cannot intervene in violent incidents efficiently (O'Brien et al., 2024). This result was consistent with the study of Yoon and Barton (2008), who reported that teachers' opportunities to train to deal with or prevent school violence remain limited.

#### 4.3.2 Lack of support from school authorities

Support from school administrators and relevant structures helps teachers prevent the occurrence of school violence (O'Brien et al., 2024; Nunan and Ntombela, 2022). School administrators should provide clear guidelines for teachers on how to respond to violence (Yoon and Bauman, 2014). However, even school administrators lack knowledge about how to deal with students' psychological problems that caused violence. Bright told a story indicating that her school's administrators lacked knowledge about depression and could not differentiate between attention-seeking behavior and symptoms of mental distress:

One student had family problems. She tried to commit suicide. The school administrators did not pay any attention to this incident because they thought that the student was just seeking attention. School administrators became aware of the problem when that student tried to commit suicide three times.

Each participant agreed that their schools' administrators did not discuss what teachers should do when witnessing violence in school at new employee orientations or other meetings. Additionally, the administrators did not provide clear guidelines for the proper management of school violence. Pat said:

When I first arrived, the school administrators did not talk about violence in the school, problems to be aware of, and ways to solve them. I think there should be some information for me because I'm new here. If a problem arises, I should know what [to do] and how to do (it). Do I have to inform someone, and what should I do next?

#### 4.3.3 Lack of empathy

Teachers lacking empathy are less likely to intervene to prevent violent incidents (O'Brien et al., 2024). Bright recounted the experience of a friend who worked at another public school in Bangkok. According to that friend, teachers who did not empathize

with their students did not help even when they saw their student being mistreated:

One day, the teachers invited the father of a girl who often skipped classes to meet them. After meeting the teacher, the father walked up to the girl while the whole school was lining up on the field in front of the flagpole. Her father scolded and hit his child violently in front of all the students. Instead of going to stop him, the teachers just stood there and said to each other that (girls) like (her) should be beaten to death.

#### 4.3.4 Vertical hierarchy

Seven participants (Air, Bright, Game, Ruji, Pat, Mon, and Yu) reported that some teachers in their schools demonstrated verbal abuse by making unreasonable demands, insulting, and harshly reproaching students. They had no school system or regulations that could stop their undesirable behavior. Fellow teachers who witness these behaviors did not dare stop them because these were often senior teachers who had worked for a long time. In Thai's culture of seniority, younger people are expected to respect older people, and resisting them is deemed rude (Wetprasit, 2016). Bright said:

Sometimes, the teacher's words were like bullying because she criticized the student in terms of appearance. When that teacher told other teachers how she reprimanded the student, they laughed loudly together. I don't think those teachers felt that those words were inappropriate.

Mon told a similar story:

A teacher showed a bias and made aggressive comments that discouraged students. However, I didn't dare to warn her because she is a senior teacher. I had discussed this matter with my friends and a subject leader. We agreed that we didn't have the authority to tell long-time teachers to change their behavior.

Although the MoE prohibits punishing students in harsh ways, bullying them, or punishing them out of anger (Office of the Permanent Secretary, 2018), Game mentioned that teachers themselves exhibited physical violence toward schools. Even the student disciplinary affairs committee of her former school used harsh methods to deal with students with behavioral problems:

Some teachers in the student disciplinary committee snatch, push, and rebuke the students who violate the school discipline. Then, the committee called the students' parents and told them to prevent their children from violating school rules again. I view these actions as violence perpetrated by teachers. However, I dare not express my opinion. I keep quiet because I was just a temporary teacher at that time.

These committee are officially appointed by school administrators, and they have the duty and authority to deal with violent incidents, which places them in a superior position. Because Thai society values a strict hierarchical structure, teachers

who are of inferior status do not dare express disagreement with authority figures (Arya, 1979).

#### 4.3.5 Lack of self-efficacy

Bright did not "dare" to stop students who used violent words with their friends because she thought that it was the students' "personal matter," indicating a low sense of self-efficacy (O'Brien et al., 2024). Similarly, Pat lacked a sense of self-efficacy in speaking up against senior teachers' bullying because of her place in the vertical hierarchy: "I was afraid of the dire consequences because most of those teachers were senior teachers, and I was just a new teacher."

Ruji shared a story about social exclusion happening in her class. The popular students in the class were annoyed with two of their classmates, which in turn caused all the other students to exclude these two students. Consequently, the behaviors of these two students changed from being interested in studying and submitting work on time to not attending class and not submitting work. Like Pat, Ruji also lacked the self-efficacy to intervene due to both a lack of guidance and the school's hierarchical structure:

As I am a new teacher, I am not quite sure what to do. I am not the class teacher of this group of students. I am afraid if I had done anything, it would have been disrespectful to their class teachers.

#### 4.3.6 Misunderstandings of the seriousness of verbal bullying and social exclusion

Some participants thought that verbal bullying and social exclusion were not serious types of school violence (O'Brien et al., 2024). Pat added that harsh, sarcastic language used by senior teachers with students was normal and acceptable. Therefore, she chose not to get involved when she overheard it: "I think it is normal. I have been accustomed to teachers' harsh ways of speaking since I was a student (myself)".

### 4.4 Ways to empower teachers to combat bullying and violence

When asked how they can be supported in preventing and dealing with school violence, participants provided two suggestions for teacher curriculum developers, OBEC, and school administrators: (1) to cultivate knowledge and skills on violence prevention, and (2) to improve policies and practices.

#### 4.4.1 To cultivate knowledge and skills on violence and violence prevention

Teachers are important factors in preventing violence in schools (Welsh, 2000). However, as seen above, less experienced teachers lack self-efficacy in managing violence (O'Brien et al., 2024). Developing effective teacher preparation programs for violence management can increase this self-efficacy. Bright, Mild, Ruji, and Yu believed that curricula should include courses that



provide knowledge about violence in schools. Bright said, “Open a course that provides theoretical knowledge about school violence and how to prevent and solve violent problems.”

To increase teachers’ capacity, four participants (Mild, Ruji, Pat, and Mon) suggested stronger pre-and in-service training programs that can improve teachers’ understanding and recognition of all types of violence (Marshall, 2012). Ruji said, “Teachers should be trained to understand the different forms of violence and to be aware of the harmful effects of violence.” This would also help develop their skills in managing violent incidents (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; UNESCO, 2022). As Mon advised, “Teachers need to be trained regarding how to intervene effectively in all forms of school violence.”

As noted previously, a good teacher–student relationship is vital for preventing violence (Hawkins et al., 1998; Volungis and Goodman, 2017). Air, Game, Pat, Mild, Ruji, and Mon recommended that teacher curriculum developers and training course creators add a unit about how to create these relationships. Mon suggested that “teachers should be trained in the basic counseling skills.” Pat believed that “the (teacher education) faculty should add more content to (help pre-service teachers) better understand the personalities and behaviors of Gen Z students.”

In addition, four participants believed that students should also be taught knowledge about violence and its prevention. Mild, Ruji, Pat, and Mon recommended organizing school activities that make students aware of violence incidents in schools and promote their social skills. Mild suggested that schools “Organize activities that help students understand themselves, have good communication and social skills, and know what actions are considered violent.” Ruji mentioned that it would also be helpful to “Make students aware of the harmful effects of violence.” These suggestions were in line with Patel et al. (2022) and Eisenbraun (2007).

#### 4.4.2 Policy and practice improvement

Support from school authorities helps teachers prevent and manage violence effectively (O’Brien et al., 2024). To increase teachers’ effectiveness in preventing school violence, the participants suggested the OBEC and school administrators create school policies that can prevent violence and assist teachers in managing violent acts.

Five participants (Air, Bright, Mild, Mon, and Yu) believed that many of their students, who live in urban areas, experienced stress problems similar to those in Chaudhary and Srivastava’s study (2017). Yu proposed that the OBEC create an online counseling center “where students can discuss problems without showing their identity.” Mild and Mon advised that school administrators should encourage counselors to effectively counsel students at risk of committing violence. According to Mon, “They should set aside hours for students with problems who need to consult with guidance counselors and should count those hours as the guidance counselor’s teaching load.” Mon and Yu even suggested hiring a psychologist for the task. Mon stated: “I would like to have a psychologist to counsel at-risk children and educate teachers about the needs and characteristics of today’s youth.”

All participants recommended improving school policies and practices regarding bullying and violence. Air, Bright, Mild, and

Game asked for “specific guidelines for the ways to deal with violence” (Game). Providing guidelines for teachers on how to respond when they experience or learn about violence is an important support (Yoon and Bauman, 2014). Pat suggested that improving the overall school climate can also mitigate school violence by creating perceptions of the school as a caring community (Yoon and Barton, 2008). To do this, “School administrators should create policies that promote equality, (respecting others’) rights, (treating) each other with respect, (recognizing) duties, and abolish systems that use coercive power, such as the seniority system.”

Air and Bright suggested a student information system that has continuity from the student’s entry to the present and should include details of personal history and behavioral problems. Bright said: “This system will help teachers understand each student better and effectively prevent students who may commit violence and help the ones who will be victims.”

## 5 Discussion

This research applied the UNESCO (2019) framework of school violence to examine the experiences and perspectives of novice Thai secondary-level teachers in urban schools. All participants gave broad definitions and examples of school violence that covered all the types of school violence conceptualized by UNESCO (2019). However, four participants also raised examples of incidents of self-harm and suicide. They believed these incidents are related to school violence and that teachers could help prevent them. This opinion echoed Miller (2012), who suggested that the UNESCO (2019) framework should be broadened to include suicide and self-destructive behaviors.

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory offers a robust framework for understanding why novice teachers may choose not to intervene in violent incidents. This non-intervention is primarily explained by cognitive factors (knowledge and understanding of school violence), personal factors (e.g., being too busy to manage the incident), and the way they believe, think, and feel about the seriousness of the incident and the environment (e.g., school policy and school climate). For example, Ruji did not intervene to assist two students who were the victims of social exclusion. According to Bandura’s cognitive theory, Ruji not only lacks self-confidence but also lacks knowledge and understanding of the severity of social exclusion and its profound effects on victims. Bright, Mon and Game witnessed verbal and physical violence by senior teachers, but they decided not to intervene because of their personal belief in the Thai seniority system as well as the school’s climate of hierarchical governance.

Thai public schools are highly formal and strictly adhere to rules and regulations (Chobphon, 2024). Therefore, the main duty of a student disciplinary affairs committee is to manage student discipline and punish wrongdoers. However, these committees typically do not prioritize or pay attention to solving bullying problems. Sokantat et al. (2021) observed that current disciplinary systems tend to penalize the bullies without implementing any real strategies to cultivate their empathy or understanding of others. Student disciplinary affairs

committees must furnish resources on bullying prevention and knowledge and conduct investigations when bullying instances are reported on school grounds (Sokantat et al., 2021).

Despite the novice teacher participants being based in Bangkok, Thailand's most modern metropolitan city, they lacked knowledge about school violence. Almost all the participants agreed that the topic was rarely mentioned in their subjects during their training and that school administrators had not indicated how teachers should deal with incidents. The main reason that educators who create teacher education curricula and school administrators overlook the issue of violence and bullying is because, within the foundation of Thai culture, these actions are often viewed as non-serious or simple horseplay (Sokantat et al., 2021). The lack of support from school administrators causes new teachers professional anxiety (Simkhada et al., 2025) and prevents them from intervening in bullying (Marshall, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2024).

The participants even mentioned incidents where senior teachers or disciplinary committees verbally or physically abused students but fellow teachers who witnessed the behavior did not dare to intervene. These incidents highlight the impact of the seniority system on Thais across all situations, especially in a professional setting. This system is reflected in the actions of teachers who witness such behavior from senior teachers and staff hesitate to intervene. This was not due to a lack of knowledge (Marshall, 2012), or a failure to understand the seriousness of such actions (O'Brien et al., 2024), but rather was rooted in the witnessing teacher's lower rank as a newcomer (Arya, 1979). This system empowers people in a senior position to intimidate others by using their status, normalizing the domination of others (Sokantat et al., 2021). Thus, a teacher verbally or physically mistreating a student is treated as commonplace and even imitated by students with one another. The bullying of students by teachers as well as the failure to intervene stem from the teachers' lack of empathy for their students. According to Schultze-Krumbholz et al. (2020), empathy is a protective factor against bullying and victimization.

Meanwhile, less experienced teachers lacked the self-efficacy to manage violence incidents. They felt more threatened and less confident in their ability to intervene (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; O'Brien et al., 2024). To strengthen early-career teachers' capabilities in addressing school violence, the participants suggested enhanced training on the different types of violence and intervention strategies. The participants also suggested school administrators implement explicit policies and guidelines for the management of violence within schools. This step would lower teacher stress and build their confidence, simultaneously increasing their self-efficacy.

Some participants proposed providing students with programs that help reduce violence. Sokantat et al. (2021) found that equipping students with comprehensive knowledge and understanding about bullying can enhance bullying prevention by empowering students to intervene with peers. Furthermore, Schultze-Krumbholz et al. (2020) recommended that providing students from different backgrounds with opportunities to collaborate and experience diverse cultures is a key strategy for minimizing bullying behavior.

## 6 Conclusion

Due to the societal normalization of bullying in Thailand, the issue of school violence has been widely overlooked by educators, curriculum designers, and school management. This prevailing attitude means that almost every teacher participant was uninformed about the topic. All were also under the influence of the Thai seniority system, which normalizes verbal and physical abuse by people with seniority toward others. Training and policies should be put in place to support teachers and administrators in properly identifying and managing violence and bullying. Meanwhile, violence and bullying should be de-normalized by providing counseling for students and using positive rather than negative reinforcement.

The findings of this study were in alignment with Bandura (1992), who demonstrated that teachers' decision to intervene or not in school violence is influenced by their perception, personal factors, and the way they believe, think, and feel about the seriousness of an incident and the school environment. Improving theoretical knowledge about the issue can raise awareness among new teachers and develop their skills in managing incidents (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; UNESCO, 2022). To improve self-efficacy among new teachers and enable them to effectively prevent violence, curriculum developers, OBEC, and school authorities should equip educators with knowledge about violence, Gen Z students' behaviors, and ways to build good student-teacher relationships.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by ethics review committee for research involving human subjects, Chulalongkorn University. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Author contributions

PC: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Generative AI statement

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