

VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS, TRUST, AND STUDENT WELL-BEING: COMPARING VARIOUS TYPES OF SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract Schools should be safe and inclusive. Unfortunately, violence in schools remains widespread in most countries, including the United States. Based on data from the 2015 and 2017 rounds of the from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, this paper has two main objectives. The first is to explore and compare the prevalence of violence in schools in public, private, and religious schools in the United States. Students in religious and private schools tend to be less affected by violence in schools than students in public schools. The second objective is to assess the association between violence in school and a wide range of outcomes for students. Analysis suggests that ending violence in schools could lead to large gains in child well-being, grades, trust, and concentration when doing schoolwork. Given those two findings, while students in private and religious schools are less affected by violence, many are still affected, hence even in those schools progress needs to be made to reduce the prevalence of violence in order to improve student outcomes.

Keywords: Violence in schools, trust, socio-emotional learning, bullying, public schools, private schools, religious schools, United States.

1. Introduction

Violence in schools remains widespread in many schools globally. Students and education systems around the world have been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 crisis that started more than two years ago. Apart from leading to much higher rates of learning poverty (defined as the inability for a ten-year-old child to read and understand an age-appropriate text), there is evidence that the crisis has exacerbated some of the risk factors traditionally associated with violence against

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children, including violence in schools. The need to end violence in schools is more pressing than ever.

Pope Francis' call for a Global Compact on Education emphasizes the need to put the human person at the center of what Catholic and other educational institutions do. Ending violence in school is a clear first step. Preventing violence in schools is a moral imperative but is also a smart investment. The negative effects of violence in schools are widespread. Children's life is profoundly affected when they are victims or perpetrators of violence, with scars that last a lifetime. Ending violence in schools could bring large benefits. The good news is that promising evidence-based interventions to end violence in schools are available. Some are discussed in a separate paper also published in this issue of the journal (Nayihouba and Wodon, 2023).

This paper is based in part on analysis carried for a global study at the World Bank on ending violence in schools (Wodon et al., 2021), although the analysis for the United States in that global report is conducted for all schools combined. Here, the analysis is conducted for different types of schools. It turns out that religious schools as well as private schools in the United States tend to have a substantially lower prevalence of violence in schools, as well as better measures of student performance and well-being across the board. Still, efforts should be undertaken to reduce the prevalence of violence in all schools. In what follows, the prevalence of violence in schools and its potential impact on a range of outcomes for students is documented, showing among others negative effects on trust.

Before proceeding, a caveat is in order. Due to data limitations, this paper does not consider the issue of sexual violence in schools. This should not be interpreted as a sign that the authors do not consider the issue of sexual abuse, including by priests, as paramount. Multiple reports have been published on the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church and in other denominations in the United States. The Boston Globe exposed widespread abuse by priests in the Boston area and cover-up by the Church. A subsequent Church-commissioned report suggested that more than 4,000 priests had faced credible sexual abuse allegations in the United States between 1950 and 2002 (four percent of the number of priests in ministry during that period), involving more than 10,000 children (Bennett et al., 2004). These estimates are likely to underreport the actual prevalence of abuse. Subsequent revelations of abuse in the country have forced dioceses into bankruptcy. Similar scandals have emerged elsewhere. In France, a 2021 report documented that 216,000 children were sexually abused by members of the clergy since 1950. While most instances of abuse may not take place in schools, some do.

Under Pope Francis' leadership, the Catholic Church has intensified efforts to stem sexual abuse by clergy and other staff, including through a change in the Church's criminal code. A February 2019 summit on the protection of minors led to new norms on accountability of bishops and other

Church leaders. Through the new law *Vos estis lux mundi*, this included the elimination of the pontifical secret in relation to cases of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, as well as greater involvement of the laity in criminal proceedings within the Church. In July 2020, a *Vademecum* was published, detailing procedural issues surrounding cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics. More must be done, but this is not the focus of this article as the data used does not shed light on those issues.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 provides estimates of the prevalence of violence in schools in the United States, comparing public, private secular, and religious schools. Sections 3 and 4 rely on regression analysis to provide tentative estimates of the potential impact of violence in schools on a wide range of indicators of well-being for children, considering first grades and whether students are distracted in schools, and next the broader student experience in the schools. Note that the term “impact” is used for simplicity when describing the results, but only associations from regression analysis are being observed, hence causality cannot be implied. A conclusion follows.

2. Prevalence of Violence in Schools

Globally, a number of cross-country survey instruments have been developed to measure violence in school as well as other aspects of school health. As noted in Nayihouba and Wodon (2023), three of the main survey instruments are the Global School-based Student Health Survey (which covers mostly developing countries), the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey (which covers mostly Europe, the middle East, and Canada), and the Violence against Children Survey (which covers a few developing countries). The United States does not participate in these instruments, but estimations can be based on data from the School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey⁴. The dataset is nationally representative and the survey is implemented among children aged 12 to 18. The analysis in this paper is based on the 2015 and 2017 rounds of the survey. Using two successive surveys enables to check for robustness of the results between surveys.

The SCS was designed to assist policymakers, as well as academic researchers and practitioners, to make informed decisions concerning crime in schools. The survey asks students a number of key questions about their experiences with, and perceptions of, crime and violence that occurred inside their school, on school grounds, on the school bus, or on the way to or from school. Students are asked additional questions about security measures used by their school, students’ participation in afterschool activities, students’ perceptions of school rules, the presence of weapons and gangs in school, the presence of hate-related words and graffiti in school, student reports of bullying and

⁴ Information about the survey is available at <https://bjs.ojp.gov/data-collection/school-crime-supplement-scs>.

reports of rejection at school, and the availability of drugs and alcohol in school. Students are also asked attitudinal questions relating to fear of victimization and avoidance behavior at school.

In terms forms of violence in schools, or factors that could lead to violence, data are collected among others on (1) whether students were involved in the school year in one or more fights at school; (2) whether children were bullied, with multiple categories of bullying included (being made fun of, rumors spread, threatened with harm, pushed/shoved/tripped/spit on, coerced, excluded, or property destroyed) as well as multiple forms of abuse (verbal, physical, and social abuse); (3) Whether hate was expressed at the student's race, religion, ethnic or national origin, disability, gender, or sexual orientation; (4) Whether students adopted avoidance strategies to avoid being victimized (such a not taking the shortest route to school or avoiding parts of the school including entrances, hallways or staircases, cafeterias, restrooms, parking lots and other places, and whether the student avoid classes, activities, or skipped to avoid being victimized); (5) whether the student has been afraid and where; (6) whether the student ever brought guns to the school and if so what type of weapon, and whether the student saw weapons on school ground; and finally (7) whether there are gangs in the school.

Table 1 provides data on the prevalence of the various forms of violence by type of schools, distinguishing public schools located in the neighborhood where children live, other public schools, religious (i.e., church-related) schools, and other private schools. Apart from statistics by type of violence, estimates are also provided as to whether students are exposed to any type of violence (combining the various categories of violence). For all types of violence, the prevalence is higher in public than private schools, whether religious or not (this is not necessarily the case in other countries, as noted by Wodon, 2024, for Catholic schools in Africa). For example, in neighborhood public schools, bullying affected 14.2 percent of students in 2015, versus 8.8 percent in religious schools. Fights affected 3.1 percent of students in public neighborhood schools, versus 2.0 percent in religious schools. A larger share of students brought or saw weapons in public neighborhood schools (8.1 percent) than in religious schools (3.8 percent). About one in ten students stated that there were gangs in public neighborhood schools versus about one percent in religious schools. Similar differences were observed for other variables, and when considering all types of violence combined, the likelihood that students were exposed to at least one type of violence was at 32.6 percent in public neighborhood schools in 2015 versus 17.7 percent in religious schools.

In general, despite some differences depending on the particular type of violence being considered, other public schools had a similar prevalence of violence as public neighborhood schools, while private non-religious schools were closer in terms of prevalence to religious schools. The estimates for 2017 are broadly of a similar order of magnitude, albeit slightly higher in most cases than in 2015.

Table 1: Prevalence of Violence in Schools by Type of Schools, 2015 and 2017 (% of students affected)

School Type	Public, Neighborhood	Public, Other	Private, Religious	Private, Other
2015				
Any type of violence	32.6	36.5	17.7	19.9
Fights	3.1	2.8	2.0	1.2
Bullied	14.2	17.1	8.8	9.4
Hate	5.7	7.6	1.7	1.9
Avoidance	6.0	8.1	2.6	4.1
Fear	4.4	5.3	3.3	5.2
Weapons	8.1	7.7	3.8	3.9
Gangs in school	11.3	10.6	1.2	5.0
2017				
Any type of violence	33.8	36.2	21.1	22.1
Fights	3.1	3.8	1.9	4.8
Bullied	19.8	21.5	15.2	16.5
Hate	6.5	7.9	2.7	6.4
Avoidance	7.4	7.1	1.9	7.3
Fear	5.3	5.2	2.8	4.7
Weapons	7.4	7.6	3.9	4.7
Gangs in school	9.4	9.1	0.7	3.3

Source: Authors' estimates from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey.

There are as expected some differences in the types of violence affecting students by gender. Boys are more likely to be involved in fights and more likely to know about the presence of gangs in schools, but girls are more likely to be bullied or victims of hate speech. They are also slightly more likely to use avoidance strategies and be afraid. And when all types of violence are combined, girls are in 2017 more likely to be victims of violence than boys (although in 2015 proportions by gender are similar).

Table 2: Prevalence of Violence in Schools by Gender, 2015 and 2017 (% of students affected)

	2015, all schools			2017, all schools		
	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All
Any type of violence	32.3	32.0	32.2	30.7	35.6	33.1
Fights	4.2	1.8	3.0	4.6	1.7	3.2
Bullied	12.4	16.0	14.2	16.3	23.1	19.6
Hate	6.1	5.2	5.7	5.9	7.0	6.4
Avoidance	5.4	6.7	6.1	6.1	8.1	7.1
Fear	3.3	5.6	4.5	4.2	6.1	5.1
Weapons	9.3	6.2	7.8	7.6	6.7	7.1
Gangs in school	10.7	10.5	10.6	7.8	9.6	8.7

Source: Authors' estimates from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey.

Various forms of violence often do not occur in isolation. Instead, they tend to reinforce each other. Children are often victims of violence in separate locales, at school but also at home and in the community. This feeds into a self-reproducing cycle (Wilkins et al., 2018) or poly-victimization, which has negative multiplier effects on children's wellbeing and capacity to learn, leading to higher risk of lasting physical, mental and emotional harm. Policymakers and stakeholders working in schools must take poly-victimization into account to respond to multiple layers of risks for children and target the most vulnerable children (Finkelhor et al., 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have exacerbated some of the factors that lead to violence against children, including violence in schools. In the SCS survey, it is clear that children who are victims of one form of violence are also often affected by another form of violence. This is shown in Table 3 by computing the share of students who are affected by one type of violence that are also affected by another type. For example, of all students who were involved in fights, 73.6 percent were also bullied in 2015, and 29.3 percent were victims of hate speech. Most of the shares in the Table are far from being negligible, suggesting substantial risks of poly-victimization.

Table 3: Students Affected by One Type of Violence Affected by Other Types, 2015 and 2017 (%)

	Fights	Bullied	Hate	Avoidance	Fear	Weapons	Gangs
2015							
Fights	100.0	11.9	14.4	11.3	13.5	8.8	8.0
Bullied	73.6	100.0	72.2	60.9	56.9	37.9	37.3
Hate	29.3	23.6	100.0	26.5	29.4	12.5	16.8
Avoidance	25.4	22.0	29.3	100.0	45.8	17.5	19.0
Fear	21.9	14.9	23.5	33.1	100.0	13.8	14.8
Weapons	19.7	13.8	13.9	17.5	19.2	100.0	25.4
Gangs	21.9	16.5	22.8	23.3	25.1	31.0	100.0
2017							
Fights	100.0	11.9	14.4	11.3	13.5	8.8	8.0
Bullied	73.6	100.0	72.2	60.9	56.9	37.9	37.3
Hate	29.3	23.6	100.0	26.5	29.4	12.5	16.8
Avoidance	25.4	22.0	29.3	100.0	45.8	17.5	19.0
Fear	21.9	14.9	23.5	33.1	100.0	13.8	14.8
Weapons	19.7	13.8	13.9	17.5	19.2	100.0	25.4
Gangs	21.9	16.5	22.8	23.3	25.1	31.0	100.0

Source: Authors' estimates from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey.

Why is violence in schools lower in religious and private schools? One factor could be that parents who send their children to religious and private schools tend to be better off in socio-economic terms, which reduced the exposure of their children to violence in the community. Another factor could relate to the fact that parental interests and priorities may differ, including in terms of the emphasis placed by schools (and at home) on different aspects of the education of their children.

Religious (and possibly private) schools themselves may also place more emphasis on some aspects of the education of children versus others. As noted in the literature, there is an emerging literature on the benefits of private and especially religious education in various domains beyond academic success (Hertzke, 1998; Pennings et al., 2014; Yang and Kayaardi, 2004; Casagrande et al., 2019a; Catt and Rhinesmith, 2016; Erickson, 2017; Hunter and Olsen, 2018), which may in turn increase the likelihood that students later participate in the democratic process (Campbell, 2006; Cheng and Sikkink, 2019) and reduce the risk of being caught in the criminal justice system (DeAngelis and Wolf, 2019; McEachin et al., 2020). While the reasons that could lead to lower violence in religious schools are not explored here, the potential impact of violence in schools on outcomes for students in different types of schools is discussed next.

3. Potential Impacts of Violence in Schools on Grades and Being Distracted in School

Violence in school affects learning as well as schooling (whether some children drop out of school before completing their secondary education). It may also affect the relationships between students, and between students and teachers or the school. This in turn affects how students view their own education, and whether they even want to go to school. Violence in school also affects student's well-being and their socio-emotional skills, which are critical for the students' growth, resilience, as well as her openness and tolerance vis à vis others' cultures and beliefs.⁶⁵ In contexts marked by violence, experiences in schools may contribute to distrust, so that mental health or psychosocial support may be required to help students⁶⁶.

To assess the potential effect of violence in schools on student performance and their well-being, regression analysis is conducted. The analysis is not based on an experiment: it relies only on statistical associations, so that no causal effects cannot be inferred, but the results are nevertheless instructive, suggesting that violence in school may well have substantial impacts on a range of outcomes. The analysis is conducted using probit regressions and it controls for school type, gender, age, race, the grade the student is in, and household income (with 18 categories of income), and a few other school characteristics (the number of school activities that the student is involved in and the number of security measures in place in the school). In terms of assessing the potential effects of violence in schools on learning outcomes, two dependent variables are available: students' grades with A being the top grade and F implying failure, and whether students are distracted in class from doing their schoolwork because other students misbehave. For both outcomes, multiple categories are available, but probits are used for ease of interpretation. The detailed regressions are available from the authors⁵, but for space reasons only the main results for the variables of interest are provided in Table 4. Marginal effects (dF/dX) at the mean of the sample are reported,

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and when those effects are not statistically significant at least at the 10 percent level, this is denoted by “NS” in Table 4.

Table 4: Marginal Potential Impacts of Violence in Schools on Grades and Distractions in Schoolwork

	Fights	Bullied	Hate	Avoidance	Fear	Weapons	Gangs
2015 data							
Exam grades							
F's	0.001	0.001	NS	0.001	0.001	NS	0.001
D's	0.004	0.003	NS	0.003	0.003	NS	0.003
C's	0.036	0.030	NS	0.032	0.031	NS	0.0313
B's	0.049	0.041	NS	0.043	0.043	NS	0.042
A's	-0.090	-0.075	NS	-0.079	-0.078	NS	-0.078
Distracted							
Never	-0.081	-0.132	-0.090	-0.050	-0.107	-0.075	-0.086
Almost never	-0.065	-0.105	-0.071	-0.040	-0.085	-0.060	-0.068
Sometimes	0.113	0.184	0.125	0.070	0.150	0.104	0.119
Most of the time	0.033	0.053	0.036	0.020	0.043	0.030	0.034
2017 data							
Exam grades							
F's	0.002	0.001	NS	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
D's	0.007	0.003	NS	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.002
C's	0.066	0.033	NS	0.030	0.034	0.027	0.020
B's	0.120	0.059	NS	0.054	0.061	0.049	0.036
A's	-0.194	-0.096	NS	-0.088	-0.099	-0.080	-0.059
Distracted							
Never	-0.049	-0.162	-0.070	-0.065	-0.082	-0.075	-0.099
Almost never	-0.034	-0.114	-0.049	-0.046	-0.057	-0.052	-0.069
Sometimes	0.066	0.217	0.093	0.087	0.109	0.100	0.132
Most of the time	0.018	0.059	0.026	0.024	0.030	0.027	0.036

Source: Authors' estimation from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey.

Note: NS means not statistically significant at the ten percent level.

Since marginal effects at the mean of the sample are reported, the interpretation of the coefficients in Table 4 is straightforward in percentage points. For example, the coefficient -0.090 for the potential impact of being involved in fights on grades suggests that those involved in fights have a 9.0 percentage points lower likelihood of getting an A as their main grade. The positive coefficients for Bs, Cs, Ds, and Fs suggest a higher likelihood of getting those grades. The various forms of violence are associated with lower likelihoods of getting good grades. They are also associated with a higher likelihood of being distracted sometimes of most of the time. In virtually all cases, exposure to violence leads to worse outcomes for both grades and being distracted doing

schoolwork. As mentioned earlier, marginal effects not statistically significant at the ten percent level are indicated by “NS” in the Table.

How much difference could ending violence make? Estimations are provided in Table 5 for all schools combined, as well as for the subsample of religious schools, in both cases based on the regression coefficient estimates for the full sample. When carrying the simulations, predictions are first conducted with the independent variables as they stand, and next replacing the independent variables related to violence by zero when the initial value was one. The assessment of the differences in the two predictions (i.e., with the original data and after replacing all violence variables to zero) gives an indication of the potential changes in the dependent variables that could result from ending violence in schools. For example, with the estimates based on the 2015 data, ending violence in all schools combined could increase the share of students getting an A by 2.4 percentage points in the whole sample, with a corresponding reduction in the share of students receiving lower grades. This in turn would increase the share of students getting an A by 5.9 percent versus the baseline value. For distractions during schoolwork, the effects are a bit larger. Ending violence in schools could also increase the share of students never or almost never distracted by 7.9 percentage points (3.9+4.0 in the Table), with a corresponding reduction in the other shares. This in turn would increase the share of student never or almost never distracted by about a third (21.0+11.7 in the Table), which is rather large. The results are typically of a similar order of magnitude in 2017.

The same analysis is also conducted for the sample of students in religious schools only (but using the parameter estimates for the regression for the full sample for comparability). As expected the gains in absolute terms from reducing violence in school for students in religious schools are slightly lower as compared to the gains observed in all schools combined. This is simply because the prevalence of violence in religious schools is also lower than in the sample as a whole.

Table 5: Simulations of Potential Impacts of Ending Violence in Schools on Grades and Distractions for School Work

	All schools			Religious Schools		
	Baseline (predicted)	Absolute change with no violence in schools	Percentage change with no violence in schools (%)	Baseline (predicted)	Absolute change with no violence in schools	Percentage change with no violence in schools (%)
2015 data						
Exam grades						
F's	0.5	-0.1	-15.7	0.2	0.0	-7.1
D's	1.5	-0.2	-14.9	0.7	0.0	-6.9
C's	13.8	-1.5	-10.5	7.3	-0.4	-5.7
B's	42.4	-0.7	-1.6	32.8	-0.8	-2.3
A's	41.8	2.4	5.9	59.0	1.2	2.1
Distracted						
Never	18.7	3.9	21.0	29.7	2.8	9.4
Almost never	34.0	4.0	11.7	38.4	1.0	2.7
Sometimes	39.7	-4.8	-12.1	28.4	-3.1	-10.7
Most of the time	7.5	-3.1	-41.5	3.4	-0.8	-23.0
2017 data						
Exam grades						
F's	0.4	-0.1	-25.8	0.2	0.0	-11.1
D's	1.3	-0.3	-24.4	0.7	-0.1	-10.8
C's	12.2	-2.1	-17.4	7.6	-0.7	-8.9
B's	41.6	-1.5	-3.6	34.2	-1.2	-3.5
A's	44.5	4.0	9.1	57.3	2.0	3.5
Distracted						
Never	20.7	4.8	23.2	35.6	4.0	11.1
Almost never	35.1	4.6	13.0	37.7	1.2	3.2
Sometimes	36.6	-5.7	-15.4	23.4	-3.8	-16.3
Most of the time	7.6	-3.7	-48.6	3.4	-1.3	-40.1

Source: Authors' estimation from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey.

4. Potential Impacts of Violence in Schools on Students' Experience in School

Apart from leading to losses in learning (as proxied by grades) or distractions, violence in school may be detrimental for students' experience in school as well as their health and well-being. In terms of outcomes, five variables are considered in the surveys, namely whether students (i) trust the school's administrative processes (including to deal with violence in schools); (ii) feel adults and teachers do not care about them; (iii) lack friends in school; (iv) expect to continue their education beyond high school; and (v) know how to get drugs in the school. The analysis controls for the same set of variables as before, including the type of schools, gender, age, race, the grade the student is in, the number of school activities that the student is involved in, the number of security measures in place in the school, and a measure of household income (series of income levels).

Table 6 provides estimates of the marginal potential impacts of violence in school. The interpretation of the coefficients is again in percentage points (dprobit estimates) as for Table 4. For example, the estimate for fights and trust in the school's processes for the 2015 survey suggests that students involved in fights are 10.3 percentage points more likely to not have trust in the school's administrative processes including those to handle violence. The estimate obtained with the 2017 survey is similar. In virtually all cases again, exposure to violence in schools leads to worse outcomes. The only exception is whether violence in schools affects the likelihood of pursuing one's education beyond high school. For that outcome, most potential impacts as measured through associations are not statistically significant (as before, when this is the case, "NS" is indicated in the Table).

Table 6: Marginal Potential Impacts of Violence in Schools on Student's Experience in the Classroom

	Fights	Bullied	Hate	Avoidance	Fear	Weapon	Gangs
2015 survey							
No trust in school	0.103	0.157	0.152	0.107	0.085	0.164	0.145
Teachers not caring	0.047	0.032	0.044	NS	0.035	0.032	0.023
Lack of friends	0.051	0.024	NS	0.047	NS	NS	0.035
Studying beyond high school	NS	NS	0.041	NS	NS	NS	NS
Knows how to get drugs	0.138	0.233	0.221	0.099	0.117	0.371	0.358
2017 survey							
No trust in school	0.105	0.185	0.115	0.085	0.057	0.095	0.226
Teachers not caring	0.062	0.051	NS	NS	0.039	NS	0.037
Lack of friends	0.032	0.033	0.034	0.029	0.047	NS	NS
Beyond high school	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-0.027
Knows how to get drugs	NS	0.192	0.193	0.089	0.121	0.276	0.335

Source: Authors' estimation from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey.

Note: NS means not statistically significant at the ten percent level.

How much difference might ending violence in schools again make? Table 7 provides the simulation using the same approach as before for the estimates related to grades and being distracted in Table 5. The potential impacts tend again to be large. For example, with the 2015 data, the share of students who do not trust the school's administrative processes could be reduced by 7.0 percentage points or about a fourth of the base value if violence in school were eliminated. The magnitude of the proportional reduction from the base is similar for the share of students who feel that adults and teachers in the school do not care about them, state that they lack friends in the school, or know how to get drugs in the school. The impact by contrast on the share of students who are considering pursuing their education beyond high school is virtually non-existent, which follows from most effects not being statistically significant. The fact that results are similar with the 2015 and 2017 surveys is indicative that effects may be systematic. As before, effects in absolute terms in religious schools tend to be smaller than with all schools combined again because the prevalence of violence in religious schools is lower.

Table 7: Simulations of Potential Impacts of Ending Violence in Schools on Students' Experience in School

	All schools			Religious Schools		
	Baseline (predicted)	Absolute change with no violence in schools	Percentage change with no violence in schools (%)	Baseline (predicted)	Absolute change with no violence in schools	Percentage change with no violence in schools (%)
2015 survey						
No trust in school	26.7	-7.0	-26.4	19.7	-2.8	-14.4
Teachers not caring	6.7	-1.8	-26.2	2.3	-0.4	-16.3
Lack of friends	6.3	-1.4	-22.8	2.2	-0.3	-14.7
Beyond high school	85.6	-0.3	-0.3	93.1	0.1	0.1
Knows how to get drugs	41.3	-10.5	-25.4	15.5	-3.4	-22.0
2017 survey						
No trust in school	26.4	-8.0	-30.3	15.4	-3.4	-21.9
Teachers not caring	7.4	-2.1	-28.1	3.6	-0.7	-18.3
Lack of friends	6.9	-1.9	-27.0	1.4	-0.3	-18.7
Beyond high school	86.0	1.1	1.3	92.8	0.3	0.3
Knows how to get drugs	38.4	-9.3	-24.3	15.2	-3.2	-20.9

Source: Authors' estimation from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey.

5. Conclusion

The analysis in this paper led to two key findings. First, violence is less prevalent in religious and other private schools in the United States than in public schools. Second, there is still too much violence in schools, whether public, religious, or private secular. This in turn affects negatively students' grades, whether they are distracted when doing schoolwork, and their attitudes towards (and trust in) their school, teachers, and peers. Those results reflect associations. They are based on multivariate regressions and may not indicate causality, but they are quite systematic. Possibly therefore, lower violence in private and religious schools could be one of the factors contributing to better student performance on those metrics in the schools in comparison to public schools. Still, assessing whether religious and other private schools tend to fare better than public schools on a range of metrics due to the schools themselves or self-selection of students with different characteristics into different types of schools remains beyond what can be controlled for in the datasets would require further analysis.

Although this was not the focus of this paper, it is worth emphasizing that ending violence in schools requires multifaceted interventions. As noted by Nayihouba and Wodon (2023, see also Wodon et al. 2021) in a companion paper in this issue of the journal, promising interventions tend to have high benefits to costs ratios. While these ratios are sensitive to assumptions used in the analyses, results suggest that reducing violence in and around schools is a smart economic investment, apart from being the right thing to do. In primary schools, programs helping children improve their social and emotional skills tend to have high returns (Belfield et al., 2015)¹. In secondary schools, a key area of focus should be to reduce bullying (Farrington and Ttofi, 2009). Cost-benefit analyses have been conducted for the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Highmark Foundation, 2018) and the KiVa anti-bullying program (McDaid, 2017; Huitsing et al., 2019), again suggesting high benefit to cost ratios.

The message from this paper is therefore implicitly twofold. First, in the United States students in religious schools (as well as those in private schools) tend to do comparatively well on the metrics used in this paper – including for the prevalence of violence in the schools. At the same time, as for public schools albeit from a lower level of violence prevalence, progress is still needed to reduce the prevalence of violence including in those schools. The good news from Nahihouba and Wodon (2023) is that this seems to be feasible based on a range of impact evaluations carried for the most part in the United States. And it would bring high economic returns apart from being the right thing to do to ensure student success and well-being, as well as promote trust.

¹ The analysis considers evaluations of several programs, including 4Rs (Jones et al., 2011), Positive Action, Life Skills Training (Hawkins et al., 1998), Second Step, Responsive Classroom, and Social and Emotional Training,

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