

Whose Responsibility?

Exploring K-12 Teacher Victimization
Attribution Profiles and Their Association
with Mental Health Outcomes

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Introduction

- **Teacher victimization** by students encompasses a broad spectrum of aggressive behaviors directed at teachers, including physical, verbal, relational, cyber, and sexual harassment, and personal property offenses (Curran et al., 2019; Espelage et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2019).
- According to a recent nationally representative survey study in the U.S., 22% to 80% of educators reported experiencing verbal or threatening aggression, and 2% to 56% of them reported experiencing physical violence at least once during the year (McMahon et al., 2024a).



<https://www.ravemobilesafety.com/blog/violence-against-teachers-silent-national-crisis/>



Introduction



Hanna Barczyk for NPR

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/17/1087137571/school-violence-teachers-covid>

- Research has shown that teachers who often experience violence report:
 - Higher levels of stress (McMahon et al., 2024b)
 - Burnout (Melanda et al., 2021)
 - Mental health issues (Berlanda et al., 2019; Moon et al., 2019)
- These can ultimately affect their job performance and retention (McMahon et al., 2024a; Rho & Yang, 2025).



Introduction: Attribution Theory

- **Attribution theory** (Weiner, 1986; 2014) provides a valuable framework for examining these psychological mechanisms.
- Attribution theory explains how individuals interpret causes of events, especially in relation to their successes and failures, and outlines three critical dimensions of causal attribution: **locus of causality (internal vs. external)**, **stability (stable vs. unstable)**, and **controllability (controllable vs. uncontrollable)**.
- According to Weiner, these attributions shape emotional responses and subsequent behaviors, influencing an individual's motivation, emotional states, and coping strategies.
- Applying this theoretical lens to teacher victimization, this study investigates how K-12 teachers attribute the causes of their victimization experiences and their association with mental health indicators such as depression, anxiety, stress, and burnout.



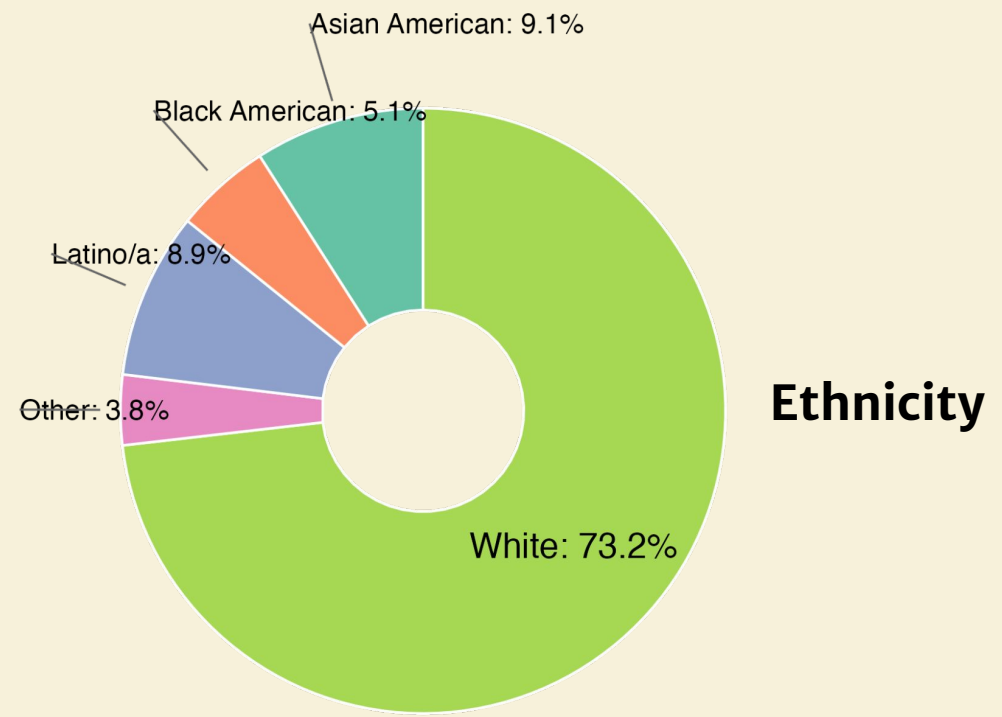
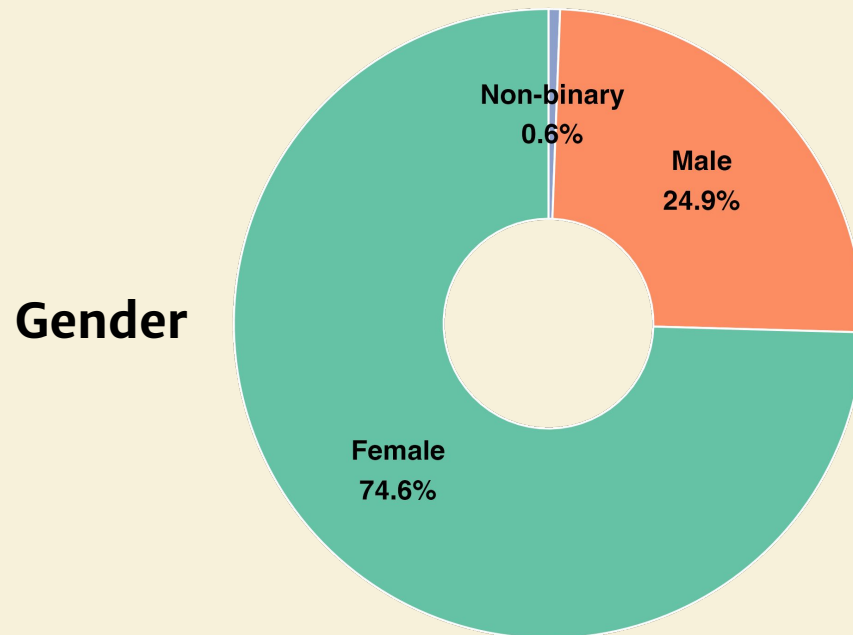
Purpose of Present Study

1. What attribution profiles exist among K–12 teachers regarding student victimization?
2. How are these profiles associated with mental health indicators: depression, anxiety, stress, and burnout?



Methods: Participants

- **Sample:** 507 K-12 teachers from 42 U.S. states
- **Mean Age:** 41.12 years (SD = 10.15)
- **Teaching Roles:** 85% in regular classrooms, 7.3% special education, 7.7% in other formats (e.g., co-taught classrooms).



Methods: Data Collection

- **Period:** Spring to Summer 2023
- **Recruitment:** Snowball sampling via personal contacts, social media, and email
- **Eligibility:** K-12 classroom teachers primarily engaging with students
- **Platform:** Survey administered through Qualtrics
- **Incentive:** \$30 Amazon gift card
- **IRB:** Procedures approved by affiliated university's IRB



Methods: Analytical & Statistical Approach

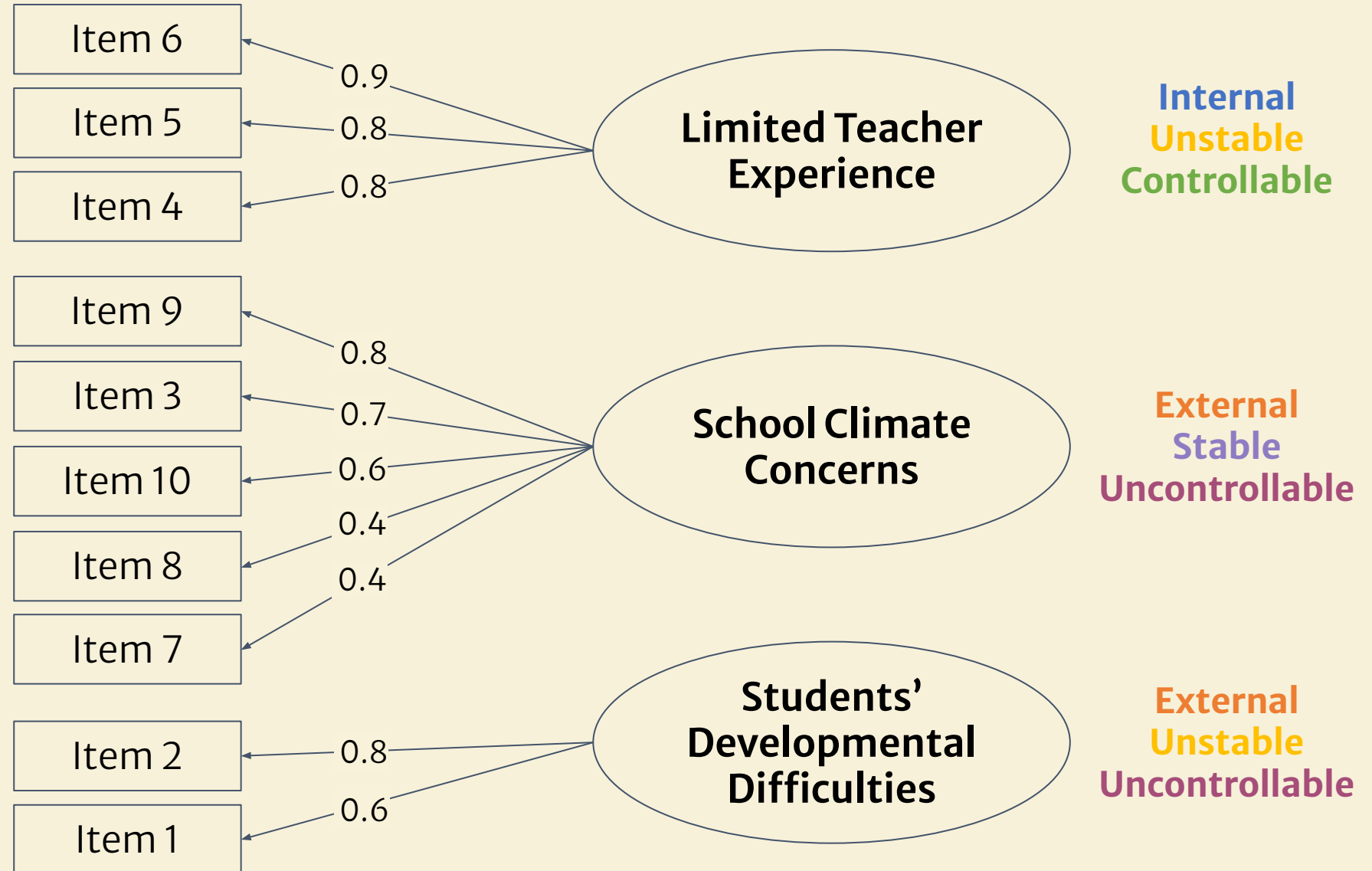
- **Scale Validation**
 - Teacher Attribution Scale developed to assess causes of victimization (Yang et al.)
 - EFA and CFA confirmed 3 attribution factors: School Climate Concerns, Limited Teacher Experience, and Student Developmental Difficulties
- **Latent Profile Analysis (LPA)** used to identify attribution profiles
 - Fit indices: AIC, BIC, saBIC, Entropy, aLMR, BLRT determined model fit
- **Welch's ANOVA** used to compare mental health outcomes across profiles
 - Post-hoc tests examined specific profile differences



Results: Scale Validation

Note. The CFA indicated an acceptable model fit.

This study was a **pilot study** using Wave 1 data. We are currently working with Wave 2 data, in which the questions were revised based on the findings from Wave 1.



Scale Items

- **Limited Teacher Experience in Classroom and Behavioral Management**
 - 6. My limited experience in behavioral and classroom management as a teacher.
 - 5. My limited experience in handling these challenging situations as a teacher.
 - 4. My limited experience in supporting the social, emotional, and behavioral development of students as a teacher.
- **Students' Developmental Difficulties**
 - 2. Students' difficulties in moral reasoning.
 - 1. Students' difficulties in social, emotional, and behavioral development.
- **School Climate Concerns**
 - 9. The school's limited support in implementing restorative practices.
 - 3. The school's social climate, such as the "bullying culture."
 - 10. The school's disciplinary policy is not clear or fair.
 - 8. Peer influence.
 - 7. The racial tension between the students and adults.

Results

#profile	LL	AIC	BIC	saBIC	Entropy	aLMR	BLRT	Relative frequency of smallest profile (%)
1	-2156.704	4325.408	4350.779	4331.734	–	–	–	100
2	-2082.283	4184.566	4226.851	4195.110	.838	>.001	>.001	13.32
3	-2024.136	4076.272	4135.471	4091.033	.786	>.001	>.001	10.77
4	-1990.731	4017.462	4093.575	4036.441	.817	<.05	>.001	6.37
5	-1923.883	3891.767	3984.794	3914.963	.908	>.001	>.001	4.56
6	-1913.566	3879.131	3989.072	3906.545	.860	>.05	>.001	4.56
7	-1873.302	3806.604	3933.460	3838.236	.938	>.001	>.001	.08

Note. #profile = the number of profiles, LL = Log Likelihood, AIC = Akaike Information Criterion, BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion, saBIC = sample-size adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion, aLMR = p -value of adjusted Lo, Mendell, and Rubin's Likelihood Ratio Test, BLRT = p -value of Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test



Results

Latent Class



LC 1: Moderate Teacher and School Climate Attribution and Low Student Attribution



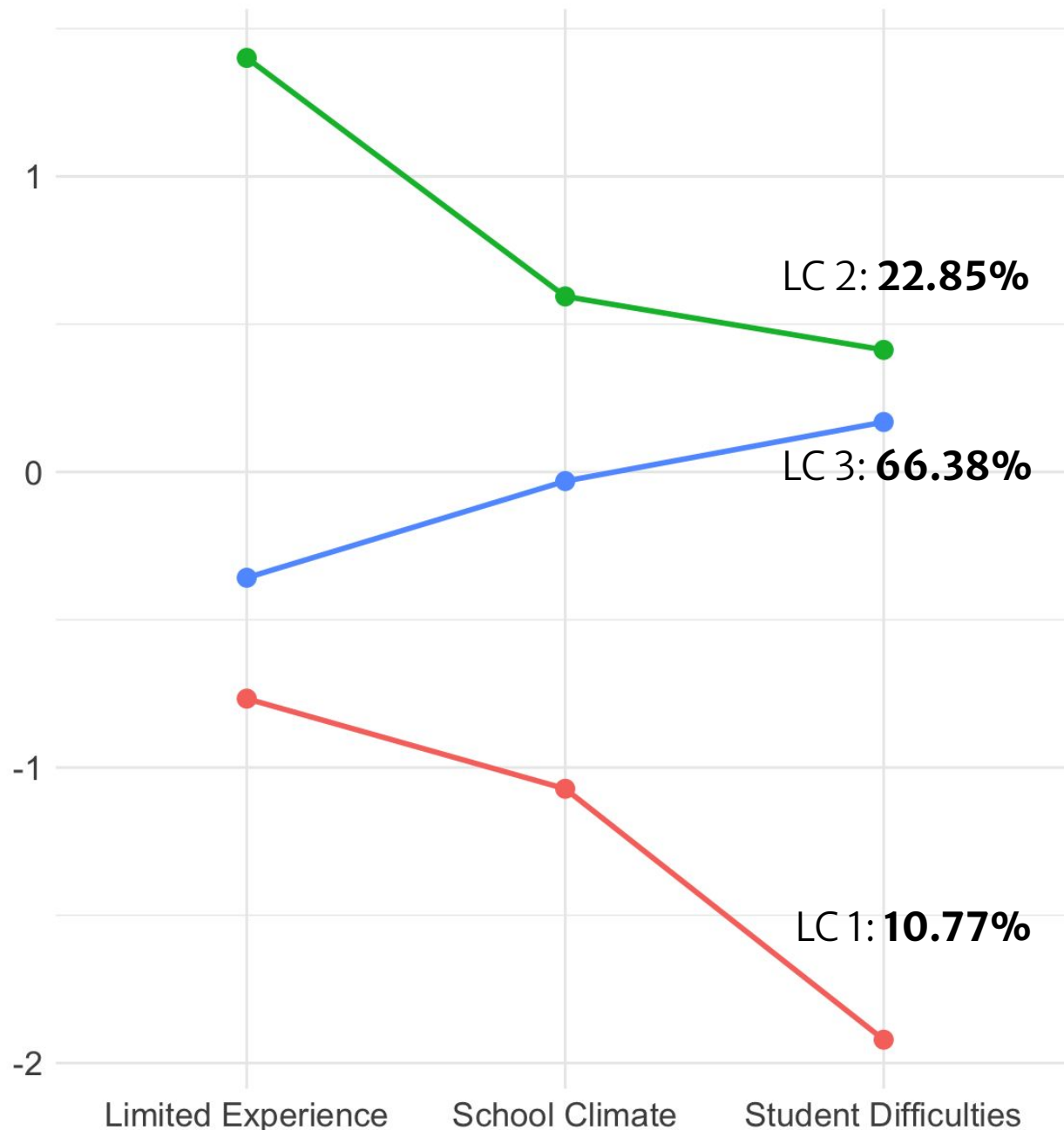
LC 2: High Teacher Attribution, Moderate Climate and Student Attribution



LC 3: Moderate Attribution across Teacher, School Climate, and Student

Group Differences on Mental Health Outcomes

What's your guess?



Results

Patterns of profile groups differences are similar, but less differential for burnout.

Welch's ANOVA with Outcome Variables

	Latent Class 1 (A)	Latent Class 2 (B)	Latent Class 3 (C)	Ω^2	Post-hoc Test
Depression, Anxiety, and Stress	.33	.58	.88	.16***	A < C; B < C
Burnout	1.56	1.86	2.32	.24***	A < B, C; B < C



Discussion

- According to Weiner's Attribution Theory, people experience greater emotional distress when they attribute negative events to **external, stable, and uncontrollable causes**
- In this study, we found that:

Class	Attribution Pattern	Characteristics	Emotional Impact
LC1	Low overall blame, esp. low student attribution	Measured or reflective Stance	↓ Blame → ↓ Distress
LC2	Internal-dominant, Moderate external attribution	Internal but unstable attribution	↑ Agency → moderate distress
LC3	Broad, External, Uncontrollable	Broad and diffuse pattern “everything is to blame”	↑ Helplessness → ↑ Distress

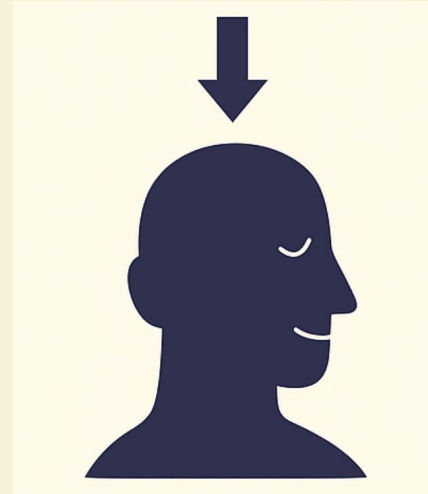


Discussion

- These findings (LC2 vs. LC3) suggest that **broad and diffuse attributions across multiple sources** may be more psychologically damaging than more focused attribution patterns.
- When teachers focus on a **more focused and controllable set of causes**—such as their own experience—they may feel more agency and experience less distress.



Multiple sources might increase
confusion and distress



Focused and controllable
attributions might reduce
distress



Summary of Findings

- This study explored how K–12 teachers attribute their experiences of victimization and how these attribution styles relate to mental health outcomes.
- Three latent attribution profiles were identified:
 - **Latent Class 1:** Moderate attributions to teacher and school climate, low student attribution → Reported the **lowest** levels of distress (depression, anxiety, stress, and burnout)
 - **Latent Class 2:** High teacher attribution, moderate school climate and student attribution → Reported **moderate** distress levels
 - **Latent Class 3:** Moderate attribution across teacher, school, and student → Reported the **highest** levels of distress



Implications

- **Professional development** should encourage teachers to reflect on attribution styles and move away from diffuse, externalized blame.
- **Targeted mental health supports** may be particularly helpful for teachers with broad and uncontrollable attribution patterns (e.g., LC3).
- Promoting **protective attribution profiles**, such as the restrained and less blaming style of LC1, may help prevent distress before it escalates.
- **System-level efforts** (e.g., improving school climate, behavioral supports, and teacher preparation) can reduce perceptions of uncontrollability and indirectly shift attribution patterns.
- **Policy-level actions** should acknowledge that **how teachers interpret adversity**, not just what they experience, significantly affects their mental health. Attribution-informed resilience training can promote long-term well-being and retention.



Limitation and Future Directions

Limitations

- Cross-sectional design
- Self-report measures
- Sample representativeness
- Limited cultural scope

Future Directions

- Longitudinal design
- Intervention research
- Mixed-method approaches
- Cross-cultural comparisons



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Thank you ! Comments or Questions?

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