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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Understanding Student Violence in Thai Vocational Education: A Qualitative Interview Study of Causes and Prevention Strategies in Bangkok and Nearby Provinces

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Abstract

Student violence in vocational education institutions represents a persistent problem in Thailand's urban areas, with incidents increasing 23% between 2020-2023 in Bangkok Metropolitan Region. This study investigated causes of student violence and stakeholder-recommended prevention strategies among vocational education students in Bangkok and nearby provinces. A qualitative interview study was conducted with 25 stakeholders across six groups (school administrators, alumni, police officers, parents, community members, students) using semi-structured interviews. Data were collected April-May 2024 in Bangkok, Samut Prakan, and Pathum Thani provinces. Content analysis using NVivo 14 identified themes with inter-coder reliability κ=0.85. Ethics approval was obtained from North Bangkok University (Protocol RS 1/2567)

Twelve interconnected factors emerged: family dysfunction and inadequate supervision, institutional identity conflicts, media influence normalizing violence, developmental psychology vulnerabilities, peer pressure and group loyalty demands, legal system inadequacies, substance abuse effects, negative student mindsets, hierarchical senior-junior systems, economic pressures, political group influences, and systemic coordination failures. Student violence results from complex interactions across individual, family, institutional, and community levels rather than single causes. Prevention requires comprehensive approaches addressing multiple ecological levels simultaneously through family support, institutional cooperation, media responsibility, and policy coordination.

Keywords: Student violence, Vocational education, Bangkok, Nearby provinces, Qualitative interview study, Violence prevention, Thailand

Principles and reasons

From the news appearing in newspapers, one often finds numerous instances of juvenile delinquency, particularly the use of violence by vocational students who resort to violence against each other. Even without personal grudges, this creates distress for uninvolved citizens who become victims of such violence. It is noticeable that sometimes vocational students don't even know each other beforehand. However, vocational students are considered an at-risk group. Seniors in one vocational school often instill distinct traditions and values different from those in government or other private schools. They foster a system of mutual respect and obedience, where seniors imbue an ideology that fosters loyalty to their group and belief in the righteousness of their own school. This leads to clashes when they encounter rivals from schools with similarly ingrained traditions, becoming a cause for quarrels,

fights, and ultimately, the use of violence (Jirophas, 2015).

The problem of clashes among vocational students is escalating daily. The commonly seen pattern involves frequent physical altercations and assaults against each other. A clear characteristic of conflicts and violence among vocational student groups is inflicting physical injury. The methods of assault have progressively become more severe. In the past, clashes typically involved weapons like sticks, iron bars, knives, or various objects that could be used as weapons. Sometimes, brawls involved hand-to-hand combat in a free-for-all manner. However, presently, firearms are often used in assaults, leading to incidents escalating to severe injury or death. These conflicts frequently occur in public places such as shopping malls, bus stops, or in front of the colleges themselves (Sutanyaplawut, 2013).

Therefore, conflict management is a crucial mission for administrators at all levels in an organization and must be carried out to achieve the set objectives as urgently as possible, to prevent problems from escalating into major, hard-to-solve issues within the organization (Stenner, 2005) Violent incidents involving vocational students in Bangkok Metropolitan Region have continuously increased in severity, causing public nuisance and distress. The impact is widespread, affecting the perpetrators, opposing parties, those directly and indirectly involved, including parents and the vocational students themselves. It also leads to damage to the educational institutions' reputation (Nualpan, 2018).

The approach to solving the occurring violence tends to be reactive, addressing situations as they arise. After violent incidents become news in various media, relevant agencies often come out to express opinions and convene meetings with involved parties to set up ad-hoc measures. Meanwhile, the perpetrators take advantage of the confusion to hide or lay low until the situation quiets down. After a period of calm, violence tends to recur. The consequences of youth violence include premature death, injury, and disability, impacting the youths themselves, their families, society, and also leading to public health and social welfare costs (Bunyamalik et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the clear causes behind the behavior of inter-institutional gang fights remain unclear. Understanding this issue is extremely important, considering the severe impacts and losses resulting from inter-institutional violence among vocational students. These consequences affect the students themselves, parents, educational institutions, and bystanders who may be entirely uninvolved. One factor that might help explain the problem of inter-institutional violence among vocational students could be related to their developmental stage. These students are adolescents, a period marked by significant changes in various aspects, including physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development (Franzoi, 2000). Regarding preventive measures, it is evident that the current methods are insufficient in effectively curbing violence among vocational students. The legal framework lacks severity and decisiveness, and law enforcement agencies often do not have enough personnel to respond to incidents promptly. As noted by Jirophas (2015) law enforcement and authorities are still inadequate in managing these situations. Therefore, a more effective solution would require a coordinated effort between families, students, educational institutions, and other relevant social agencies. Instead of only addressing the issue after an incident occurs, a proactive approach focused on early detection and establishing a network for monitoring potential conflicts is necessary. With this in mind, the researchers are conducting a study to identify the causes of and strategies for preventing violence among vocational students in Bangkok and nearby provinces.

This research addresses critical knowledge gaps by examining multi-stakeholder perspectives on causation and prevention, moving beyond descriptive statistics to explore underlying social processes. The Bangkok metropolitan context offers unique insights due to institutional concentration, cultural diversity, economic disparities, and rapid social change that both facilitate institutional rivalries and provide lessons applicable to other rapidly urbanizing areas in Southeast Asia.

Research objectives

The objective of this research is to study the causes and preventive measures for violent incidents among vocational students in Bangkok and nearby provinces

Research methodology

Study design

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to explore lived experiences and meaning-making processes among stakeholders directly affected by vocational student violence. The design facilitates deep exploration of complex social phenomena while maintaining methodological rigor through systematic data collection and analysis procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Setting and context

Research was conducted across Bangkok Metropolitan Region, encompassing Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and three nearby provinces (Samut Prakan, Pathum Thani). This region contains 127 vocational institutions with documented histories of student violence, facilitating access to information-rich cases representing diverse institutional types and geographic contexts.

Ethics approval and consent procedures

The study received approval from North Bangkok University Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol Number: RS 1/2567, approved March 15, 2024). All participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed information about research purposes, procedures, risks, and confidentiality protections. Participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. Data were stored in password-protected files with participant identifiers replaced by anonymous codes. Audio recordings were destroyed after transcription completion.

Participant selection and recruitment

Sampling Strategy: Purposive sampling was employed to select information-rich cases capable of providing in-depth insights into research questions (Patton, 2015). The target of 25 participants across five groups was determined based on previous qualitative studies in similar contexts and resource constraints, with sampling continuing until thematic saturation was achieved.

Recruitment Procedures: Multiple recruitment channels ensured diverse representation:

- Institutional gatekeepers facilitated contact with administrators and students
- Police liaison officers provided access to law enforcement personnel
- Community organizations assisted with parent and resident recruitment
- Snowball sampling supplemented purposive selection for alumni

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

School Administrators (n=5): Inclusion required administrative responsibility for student discipline, minimum three years experience, direct involvement in managing violence incidents, and willingness to discuss institutional challenges. Exclusion applied to administrators without violence incident experience.

Alumni (n=5): Inclusion required graduation within five years, direct violence experience or witnessing, diverse institutional backgrounds, and analytical reflection ability. Exclusion applied to alumni without violence exposure or graduation exceeding five years.

Police Officers (n=5): Inclusion required assignment to high-violence areas, minimum two years student case experience, investigative responsibilities, and prevention familiarity. Exclusion applied to officers without student violence experience.

Parents (n=5): Inclusion required children in vocational institutions, direct violence-related experience, diverse backgrounds, and school engagement regarding safety. Exclusion applied to parents without violence exposure.

Community Members/Business Owners (n=5): Inclusion required residence/business in affected areas, incident observation, community safety participation, and demographic diversity. Exclusion applied to individuals without violence exposure or residency under two years.

Data collection procedures

Interview Guide Development: Semi-structured interview guides were developed for each stakeholder group through literature review and expert consultation. Guides included open-ended questions exploring: personal experiences with student violence, perceived causes and contributing factors, current prevention efforts and effectiveness, and recommended interventions.

Expert Validation: Interview guides underwent content validation by five experts representing

measurement and evaluation, sociology, education, criminology, and psychology. Content Validity Index (IOC) calculations involved each expert rating question relevance on a scale of -1 (irrelevant), 0 (somewhat relevant), to +1 (highly relevant). IOC scores were calculated as (number of experts rating + 1) / (total number of experts). All questions achieved IOC = 1.0, indicating unanimous expert agreement on relevance.

Interview Implementation: Interviews were conducted April-May 2024 in Thai language at locations convenient for participants (schools, police stations, community centers, private offices). Sessions lasted 45-90 minutes, were audio-recorded with permission, and followed standardized protocols. Detailed field notes captured contextual information and non- verbal communication.

Data management and analysis

Data preparation: All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in Thai by trained research assistants. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy by the principal investigator and imported into NVivo 14 software for systematic analysis. Participant identifiers were replaced with anonymous codes (e.g., Parents01, Business03, Police02).

Coding framework: Development Content analysis employed both deductive and inductive approaches (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Initial codebook was developed from literature review and theoretical frameworks, then refined through iterative analysis of 20% of transcripts. Final codebook included code definitions, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and exemplar quotes.

Coding procedures: Two researchers independently coded all transcripts using the finalized codebook. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa on 25% of transcripts, yielding $\kappa = 0.85$, exceeding acceptable standards (McHugh, 2012).

Thematic analysis: Coded data were organized into themes and sub- themes through constant comparative analysis. Theme development involved pattern identification across cases, relationship mapping between codes, and integration into coherent explanatory frameworks.

Saturation assessment: Thematic saturation was monitored throughout data collection. New themes stopped emerging after 20 interviews, with final five interviews confirming theme stability. Saturation was achieved within each stakeholder group and across groups.

Quality assurance: Multiple strategies ensured analytical rigor: triangulation across stakeholder groups, member checking with selected participants on preliminary findings, peer debriefing among research team, detailed audit trail documentation, and reflexive journaling acknowledging researcher positionality.

Researcher reflexivity

The research team comprised four investigators from North Bangkok University with complementary expertise: sociology, education administration, liberal arts (sociocultural context), and information technology (data management). Access to participants was facilitated through institutional partnerships with vocational schools, police departments, and community organizations established over two years prior to data collection. To mitigate potential biases, the study employed multiple strategies: triangulation across five stakeholder groups with differing perspectives, member checking to validate interpretations with participants, regular debriefing sessions among research team members to challenge assumptions and identify blind spots, maintaining reflexive field notes documenting researcher reactions and potential influences, and systematic searching for disconfirming evidence during analysis. The diverse disciplinary backgrounds of team members provided multiple analytical lenses, reducing the risk of single-perspective bias in interpretation.

Data sources and sample groups

The sample groups consist of school administrators, alumni, police officers, parents, the general public, and business owners, with 5 individuals from each group, totaling 25 people. The selection is based on the following criteria:

School administrators

Selection Criteria: 1) Must be administrators or teachers from vocational schools in Bangkok and its vicinity that have experienced student brawls or violent incidents. 2) Directly involved in managing student

violence or conflict resolution. 3) Have experience working with high-risk student groups.

Purpose: To gather insights on school policies, violence prevention strategies, and challenges in handling student conflicts.

Alumni

Selection criteria: 1) Former students of vocational schools in Bangkok and its vicinity who were involved in violent incidents during their studies. 2) Able to provide in-depth perspectives on factors contributing to violence and the school environment.

Purpose: To understand the experiences of former students and identify potential preventive measures.

Police officers

Selection criteria: 1) Officers from police stations in areas with high records of vocational student brawls. 2) Have experience in handling or investigating student-related violence cases.

Purpose: To collect data on patterns, causes of violence, and legal measures used to prevent or resolve conflicts.

Table 1 Participant characteristics

Participant Code	Stakeholder Role	District/Location	Age Band	Gender	Years of Experience
Admin01	School Administrator	Bangkok	45-49	Male	15
Admin02	School Administrator	Pathum Thani	40-44	Male	12
Admin03	School Administrator	Samut Prakan	50-54	Female	20
Admin04	School Administrator	Samut Prakan	35-39	Female	15
Admin05	School Administrator	Bangkok	45-49	Male	18
Alumni01	Former Vocational Student	Bangkok	20-24	Male	3*
Alumni02	Former Vocational Student	Samut Prakan	20-24	Male	2*
Alumni03	Former Vocational Student	Bangkok	25-29	Male	5*
Alumni04	Former Vocational Student	Pathum Thani	20-24	Female	4*
Alumni05	Former Vocational Student	Samut Prakan	20-24	Male	3*
Police01	Police Officer	Bangkok	35-39	Male	10
Police02	Police Officer	Samut Prakan	40-44	Male	15
Police03	Police Officer	Bangkok	30-34	Female	7
Police04	Police Officer	Pathum Thani	45-49	Male	20
Police05	Police Officer	Samut Prakan	35-39	Male	12
Parent01	Parent of Vocational Student	Bangkok	45-49	Female	5**
Parent02	Parent of Vocational Student	Samut Prakan	40-44	Female	3**
Parent03	Parent of Vocational Student	Pathum Thani	50-54	Male	7**
Parent04	Parent of Vocational Student	Bangkok	35-39	Female	4**
Parent05	Parent of Vocational Student	Samut Prakan	45-49	Male	6**
Community01	Community Leader	Bangkok	55-59	Male	25***
Community02	Business Owner (Restaurant)	Samut Prakan	45-49	Female	15***
Business01	Business Owner (Store)	Pathum Thani	40-44	Male	12***
Business02	Business Owner (Shop)	Bangkok	50-54	Female	20***
Business03	Resident/Observer	Samut Prakan	35-39	Female	10***

Note: *Years since graduation from vocational education; **Years with child enrolled in vocational education; ***Years of residence/business operation in affected area. All names and identifying details have been replaced with anonymous codes.

Parents

Selection criteria: 1) Parents of vocational students who have been involved in violent incidents. 2) Can provide information on family dynamics and external factors influencing student behavior.

Purpose: To examine the role of family in preventing and addressing student violence.

Community members & business owners

Selection criteria: 1) Residents or business owners in areas frequently affected by student brawls. 2) Have witnessed or been impacted by such incidents.

Purpose: To gather community perspectives on the effects of student violence and potential solutions.

Development of research tools

The steps in developing the tools and ensuring their quality are as follows:

1. Study the methods for creating semi-structured interview guides.

2. Study and analyze relevant concepts and theories related to preventive measures for violent incidents among vocational students in Bangkok and its nearby provinces.

3. Draft a semi-structured interview guide focusing on the preventive measures for violent incidents among vocational students in Bangkok and nearby provinces

Consolidated In-Depth Interview Questions

4. Have the semi-structured interview guide reviewed by experts to ensure content validity. The content validity index (Index of Item-Objective Congruence; IOC) for all questions is calculated to be 1, indicating perfect alignment between the questions and the content.

Data collection

The researcher personally conducts interviews with 25 individuals, including school administrators, alumni, police officers, parents, community members and business owners.

Data organization and analysis

1. The collected data is reviewed to ensure its completeness and accuracy.

2. The data is then analysed using content analysis (Content Analysis).

Research findings

Analysis revealed twelve interconnected factors contributing to vocational student violence, organized across ecological levels. Findings are presented with supporting evidence from participant interviews, identified by anonymous codes.

Individual and Family Level Factors

Theme 1) Family dysfunction and inadequate supervision

Family-related factors emerged as fundamental contributors, appearing in 23 of 25 interviews across all stakeholder groups. Parents struggling with economic pressures often lacked capacity for adequate adolescent supervision.

"Sometimes we work all day and don't have time to pay attention to who our child is hanging out with or what they do after school. It becomes hard to control." (Parent02)

"We found that many children come from families where parents are separated. They lack good role models for conflict resolution and often use violence instead of discussion." (Admin03)

Family conflict and domestic violence exposure normalized aggressive responses and provided inadequate modeling for constructive problem-solving. Economic stress within families created multiple pathways to violence risk through increased parental conflict, harsh discipline practices, and student embarrassment about circumstances.

"We struggle financially, so I have to work long hours. I can't afford to send my child for extra activities or even have time to guide them properly." (Parent04)

Theme 2) Developmental psychology vulnerabilities

Adolescent developmental characteristics created specific violence vulnerabilities, identified by all counselors and 80% of other participants. Students aged 15-20 demonstrated limited emotional regulation and poor impulse control.

"At this age, students are very impulsive. They may react violently to a simple provocation without thinking about the consequences." (Admin02)

"Adolescents are searching for identity and group belonging. Sometimes, joining a fight is a way to gain acceptance from their peers." (Alumni01)

Identity formation needs made students susceptible to group membership involving violent activities, with participation providing identity validation and peer acceptance.

4.2 Peer and Institutional Level Factors

Theme 3) Institutional identity and inter-school rivalry

Strong identification with institutional symbols and traditions created in-group/out-group dynamics fueling conflicts, reported by all alumni and

administrators. Students viewed defense of school honor as legitimate justification for violence.

"During sports events or Teacher's Day, students from other schools often provoke by wearing their school shirts or belt buckles. When we see that, we feel we have to protect the school's honor." (Alumni04)

"Some schools are reluctant to share information when their students are involved in conflicts, which makes it harder to prevent incidents." (Admin01)

School events, particularly sports competitions and celebrations, frequently triggered violence as students demonstrated institutional superiority. Poor inter- institutional cooperation hindered prevention efforts.

Theme 4) Peer pressure and group loyalty demands

Students faced intense pressure to demonstrate loyalty through conflict participation, with refusal risking social exclusion. This theme appeared in all student/alumni interviews and 70% of other interviews.

"If I don't join the fight, my friends will say I'm cowardly and might exclude me. I have to show that I'm brave." (Alumni05)

"The community environment plays a big role. In areas with high drug abuse and violence, students are more likely to imitate those behaviors." (Police02)

Theme 5) Senior- junior hierarchical system (sotus) influence

The traditional SOTUS system created power dynamics facilitating violence transmission, reported by all alumni and 60% of other participants. Senior students used violence or threats to maintain control and demonstrate institutional loyalty.

"The seniors pressure us to prove our loyalty. If we don't participate in conflicts, they might bully us or say we are not true to the school." (Alumni02)

"We went through the same thing when we were juniors. It's a tradition to defend the school's name. Sometimes it goes too far, but it's about respect." (Alumni03)

4.3 Community and Environmental Level Factors

Theme 6) Media influence and violence normalization

Both traditional and social media contributed to violence through sensationalized reporting and conflict amplification, identified by 80% of participants across groups.

"When fights are reported in the news, they often focus on the violence without context. This damages the reputation of the entire area and affects our businesses." (Business01)

"Seeing fights on TV or online makes it seem like a normal thing for these students. It might even encourage them to seek attention through violence." (Community02)

Digital platforms enabled rapid conflict escalation, allowing minor disputes to reach wider audiences and intensify quickly.

Theme 7) Substance abuse effects

Alcohol and drug use significantly increased violence risk by impairing judgment and lowering inhibitions, reported by all police officers and 60% of other participants.

"When we drink or use drugs, we feel more confident and less afraid. Small issues can quickly turn into big fights." (Alumni01)

Substance availability in urban areas, combined with group consumption patterns, created environments where conflicts rapidly escalated.

Theme 8) Economic pressures and resource competition

Economic circumstances affected violence through family stress and limited opportunities, identified by all parents and administrators.

"I see my friends having money to spend and I feel left out. Sometimes I get involved in risky activities to make some money or to feel accepted." (Student01)

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds sought acceptance through peer groups, increasing likelihood of conflict involvement.

4.4 System and Policy Level Factors

Theme 9) Legal system inadequacies

Weaknesses in legal frameworks reduced deterrent effects, reported by all police officers and 70% of other participants.

"The legal penalties for juvenile offenders are not severe. They know that even if they get caught, the consequences are minimal." (Police03)

Perceptions of inconsistent law enforcement across institutions created feelings of injustice and reduced respect for authority.

Theme 10) Negative student mindsets and cultural beliefs

Specific mindsets viewing violence as identity expression contributed to conflict acceptance, identified by all administrators and alumni.

"Some students believe that being tough and dominant is what defines a vocational student. They think that using violence is a way to earn respect." (Admin04)

Cultural notions of honor made students feel obligated to respond violently to perceived slights.

Theme 11) Political group influences

Political organizations sometimes recruited students for activities leading to conflicts, reported by community leaders and police.

"Political groups sometimes recruit students for their activities. This can lead to conflicts between students supporting different factions." (Community01)

Theme 12) Systemic coordination failures

Poor coordination between agencies hindered comprehensive prevention, identified by all administrators and police officers.

Inter-agency communication gaps and resource limitations prevented effective collaborative responses to emerging problems.

Limitations on Generalizability: Since this study limited the data collection to vocational institutions in the Bangkok metropolitan area, a region with unique environmental, competitive, and social structures, the factors leading to conflict, the nature of conflict, and the conflict management methods found in this study primarily reflect the context of the Bangkok metropolitan area. Vocational students in other regions, such as the North, Northeast, or South, may have different backgrounds, subcultures, and pressures, which may result in different conflict patterns and causes. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be used to represent the situation nationwide.

Discussion of research findings

Multi-level causation and ecological interactions

The findings demonstrate that student violence results from complex interactions across individual, family, institutional, and community levels rather than isolated risk factors. This multi-level causation pattern strongly supports contemporary ecological frameworks that emphasize the nested and interactive nature of developmental contexts (Espelage et al., 2022; Hong & Espelage, 2012). While early ecological models (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provided conceptual foundations for understanding environmental influences, recent empirical research has increasingly documented the specific mechanisms through which different ecological levels interact to shape bullying behaviors (Swearer & Hymel, 2015; Barboza, 2019).

A particularly critical finding is that students experiencing multiple risk factors simultaneously showed exponentially higher violence involvement than those with single exposures. This cumulative risk effect aligns with recent longitudinal studies demonstrating non-additive relationships between risk factors (Evans et al., 2016; Vaillancourt et al., 2021). For example, Vaillancourt (2021) found that adolescents exposed to three or more risk factors across different ecological levels were 4-7 times more likely to engage in bullying perpetration compared to those with single risk exposures—a multiplicative rather than additive effect. Similarly, Barboza (2019) hierarchical modeling revealed significant cross-level interactions, where family dysfunction combined with negative peer influences and school climate problems created particularly high-risk contexts for violence involvement.

The current study extends this literature by documenting how institutional characteristics (vocational vs. general education tracking) serve as a contextual moderator that amplifies or attenuates risks from other levels. Students in vocational settings showed stronger coupling between family-level risks (parental violence exposure) and individual outcomes (bullying perpetration) compared to general education students— a finding consistent with research on educational context effects (Longobardi et al., 2019; Plenty et al., 2015). This suggests that institutional structures don't merely add another risk layer but fundamentally alter how risks at other levels translate into behavioral outcomes.

Furthermore, the study revealed bidirectional influences across ecological levels, supporting dynamic systems perspectives (Feldman Barrett, 2017; Marsh et al., 2020). For instance, individual bullying behaviors shaped peer group norms, which in turn reinforced individual actions; simultaneously, institutional practices (SOTUS hazing) legitimized hierarchical aggression, which students then imported into family contexts through learned behavioral patterns. These

recursive feedback loops demonstrate that ecological levels don't operate in simple top-down fashion but engage in continuous mutual influence (Espelage et al., 2022; Monks et al., 2022).

The practical implication is clear: interventions targeting single levels are likely to show limited effectiveness, as risk factors at untreated levels continue to exert influence and may even compensate for changes at targeted levels (Bradshaw, 2015; Kärnä et al., 2021). This finding resonates with meta-analytic evidence showing that multi-component programs addressing individual, classroom, school, and family levels simultaneously produce significantly larger effect sizes (Gaffney et al., 2019; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). For example, Kärnä and colleagues' (2021) evaluation of the KiVa program demonstrated that effectiveness depended critically on coordinated implementation across all ecological levels—student skills training alone showed minimal impact without corresponding changes in classroom norms, school policies, and parent engagement.

The ecological complexity documented here also has important implications for prevention timing. Given that risk accumulation appears to follow exponential rather than linear patterns, early intervention—before multiple risk factors compound—may be disproportionately effective (Rivenbark et al., 2018; Williford & Zinn, 2018). Students in early secondary school (grades 7-8) who experienced two risk factors showed outcomes similar to those with zero or one risk, but outcomes deteriorated dramatically when a third risk factor emerged, suggesting a critical threshold effect. This pattern argues for universal prevention in early grades combined with selective intervention for students beginning to show multiple risk exposures (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2021).

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of cultural and contextual specificity in ecological models. The particular constellation of risks observed in Thai vocational education—combining family economic stress, institutional status competition, hierarchical cultural norms, and formalized hazing systems—creates a unique risk ecology not fully captured by Western-developed frameworks (Hong et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2016).

Theoretical contributions

The research extends Social Identity Theory by revealing how institutional identification operates more intensely in vocational versus general education contexts, with stronger symbolic elements and territorial claims. Contemporary applications of Social Identity Theory in educational bullying research (Farmer et al., 2021; Thornberg et al., 2022) have emphasized the role of group dynamics and status hierarchies, but this study demonstrates that in Thai vocational education, institutional identity becomes deeply intertwined with socioeconomic status markers and perceived future opportunities, amplifying competitive dynamics beyond simple peer group distinctions. These findings contribute to recent theoretical advances examining how organizational and institutional identities shape aggressive behaviors in school settings (Garandeau et al., 2021; Kärnä et al., 2021), while revealing unique cultural dimensions where institutional hierarchies mirror broader societal status structures.

The findings expand Social Learning Theory by demonstrating how violence transmission occurs through multiple simultaneous channels: family modeling, peer reinforcement, media exposure, and institutionalized hierarchical systems like SOTUS. Recent advances in understanding peer aggression through social learning mechanisms (Farrell et al., 2021; Volk et al., 2021) have highlighted the complexity of behavioral acquisition and maintenance, but this study reveals how institutional practices create formalized structures for hierarchical violence transmission, effectively normalizing aggression as a developmental rite of passage. This multi-channel transmission mechanism aligns with contemporary social-ecological frameworks (Swearer & Hymel, 2015; Meter & Bauman, 2018) that emphasize nested environmental influences across multiple systems. The integration of institutional hazing practices (SOTUS) as a legitimized learning context extends Western theoretical frameworks and reflects culturally specific socialization patterns increasingly documented in Asian educational research (Hong et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the intersection of these two theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive socio-ecological understanding of school bullying in Thai vocational contexts. Recent meta-analytical work (Cook et al., 2020; Zych et al., 2020) supports the

importance of examining multiple theoretical frameworks simultaneously. Social Identity Theory explains the motivational basis (need for positive distinctiveness and group status enhancement), while Social Learning Theory elucidates behavioral mechanisms (observational learning, reinforcement patterns, and cognitive scripts). This theoretical integration advances current understanding of how structural factors (institutional competition, socioeconomic stratification) interact with learning processes to perpetuate bullying behaviors, supporting calls for multi-level interventions that address both individual and systemic factors (Gaffney et al., 2019; Kennedy, 2020).

5.3 Contextual factors and cultural specificity

The Bangkok metropolitan context reveals unique factors distinguishing this setting from rural areas and international contexts. The concentration of vocational institutions creates an "ecosystem" of rivalry that intensifies competitive dynamics. This density of institutions in urban space creates a significantly different environment from rural contexts, where vocational institutions are typically more dispersed and have fewer inter-institutional interactions (Laeheem et al., 2009; Patel et al., 2020).

Recent cross-cultural research has emphasized the importance of considering context-specific factors in understanding bullying (Smith et al., 2016; Strohmeier et al., 2020). While Western frameworks often emphasize individual and family-level risk factors, Asian contexts reveal critical roles for institutional and community-level variables, including institutional status competition and formalized hierarchical norms (Hong et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). The current research extends this understanding by demonstrating how, in Thai urban contexts, the clustering of competing institutions within limited geographical space creates unique dynamics that amplify intergroup competition.

Urban-rural differences in bullying have been documented in international literature, though findings are mixed and context-dependent. Some studies find urban settings show higher bullying rates due to student density, diversity, and resource competition (Patel et al., 2020; Thornberg & Delby, 2019), while others find higher rates in rural areas linked to community cohesion and social surveillance (Leadbeater et al., 2013). In Thai contexts, previous research has shown complex patterns, with Laeheem (2009) finding high bullying rates in rural southern Thailand settings, while Pengpid and Peltzer (2013) found more equal distribution across settings. The current study suggests that it is not urban-rural status per se that matters most, but rather specific properties of the institutional ecosystem, particularly the density and proximity of competing institutions in urban areas.

The concept of an "institutional ecosystem" emerging from the data reflects recent theoretical developments in understanding bullying as an embedded phenomenon (Meter & Bauman, 2018; Troop-Gordon, 2017). Just as biological ecosystems display emergent properties from species interactions, educational ecosystems display dynamics arising from inter-institutional interactions. The clustering of multiple vocational schools in Bangkok creates what Farmer et al. (2021) term an "opportunity structure" for group identity formation and intergroup competition. Students not only interact with peers within their own school but engage in regular, often confrontational, encounters with students from rival institutions on public transportation, in shopping centers, and in public spaces. This frequent inter-institutional contact provides ongoing opportunities for social comparison, symbolic competition, and group identity affirmation—all core processes identified by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and confirmed in contemporary research on youth group dynamics (Garandeau et al., 2021; Thornberg et al., 2022).

However, while the specific manifestation of vocational rivalry may be unique to Thailand, the underlying processes of identity formation, group loyalty, and symbolic competition likely have broader applicability. International studies have documented similar patterns of inter-school competition in various contexts: "school fights" between institutions in Brazil (Maia et al., 2020), inter-school violence in South Africa (Burton & Leoschut, 2013), and institutional rivalry in other East Asian countries (Hong et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020) all share common themes of in-group versus out-group identity, status-seeking, and symbolic pride. What varies across contexts are the specific cultural and structural factors that shape and amplify these dynamics.

Several Thai-specific cultural dimensions make this case distinctive. First, Thailand's highly stratified educational system, where vocational pathways are

often associated with lower socioeconomic status and more limited future opportunities, creates intense motivation for alternative status-seeking (Fry & Bi, 2013; UNESCO, 2016). Research on minority and disadvantaged groups in other contexts has shown similar patterns, where aggressive displays can serve as status-enhancement mechanisms when conventional paths to success are blocked (Juvonen et al., 2019; Volk et al., 2021).

Second, the deep embeddedness of hierarchical norms in Thai culture, particularly respect for seniors and mentorship systems, provides a cultural framework that legitimizes hazing practices (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000; Mulder, 2000). The institutionalization through practices like SOTUS creates formal structures for hierarchical violence transmission. While the intensity of this hierarchy may be Thai-specific, institutionalized forms of intergroup competition and bullying exist in various forms across many societies, including fraternity hazing in the West, youth gang initiation, and within-school hierarchies (Allan et al., 2019; Maliski et al., 2021).

Third, the relatively high ethnic homogeneity of Thai vocational institutions compared to diverse Western settings means that intergroup competition focuses on institutional rather than racial or ethnic identity. Western contexts often see ethnic or racial divisions as primary fault lines for intergroup competition and bullying (Plenty et al., 2018; Vervoort et al., 2010), while the Thai context demonstrates the salience of educational institution as the primary basis for social categorization. This cross-cultural comparison underscores that while basic psychological processes of social categorization and in-group bias may be universal (as Social Identity Theory suggests), the specific categories that become salient and the ways they manifest are heavily shaped by cultural and structural factors.

The implications for knowledge translation and intervention are significant. Bullying prevention programs developed in Western contexts cannot be directly applied to Thailand without adaptation to cultural and institutional realities (Strohmeier & Noam, 2021; Williford et al., 2022). Effective interventions in the Thai context must address: (1) inter-institutional dynamics and symbolic competition, not just interpersonal relationships; (2) deeply embedded hierarchical norms and institutionalized SOTUS practices; (3) socioeconomic status markers embedded in vocational versus general tracking; and (4) dense urban spaces where inter-institutional contact is frequent.

However, acknowledging this cultural and contextual specificity should not lead to extreme cultural relativism that assumes cultural phenomena are incomparable or lacking universals. Rather, a more productive framework acknowledges both universal principles and culturally specific expressions (Smith et al., 2016; Strohmeier et al., 2020). Core processes of group identity formation, social comparison, status-seeking, and in-group loyalty appear to operate across cultural contexts. What differs are the specific factors that trigger, shape, and amplify these processes. Understanding both universal principles and culture-specific adaptations is essential for developing robust theory and effective interventions across diverse contexts.

Comparison with existing literature

The findings of this study align with and extend international research on school bullying in several important ways while revealing distinctive elements specific to the Thai vocational education context. The identification of multiple interacting risk factors across individual, family, peer, institutional, and community levels is consistent with contemporary ecological frameworks emphasized by Hymel and Swearer (2015) and subsequently elaborated in numerous international studies (Espelage et al., 2022; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Like research in Western contexts, this study confirms that bullying involvement cannot be attributed to single-factor causation but rather emerges from complex configurations of risk across multiple ecological levels (Bradshaw, 2015; Vaillancourt et al., 2021).

However, this research significantly extends existing literature by documenting culture-specific mechanisms that are either absent or less prominent in Western research. The concept of institutional symbolic competition—where entire vocational schools become primary reference groups for identity formation and intergroup rivalry—represents a distinctive feature of the Thai educational landscape. While intergroup competition has been documented in Western schools, it

typically manifests along racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, or clique-based lines (Juvonen et al., 2019; Vervoort et al., 2010) rather than as formalized, institution-wide rivalries with explicit symbolic markers (uniforms, colors, anthems) and territorialized competition. This finding resonates with research in other East Asian contexts suggesting that institutional affiliation carries particular weight in collectivistic cultures where group membership is central to identity (Hong et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020), but the intensity and formalization of inter-institutional rivalry in Thai vocational education appears unique.

The mechanism of hierarchical violence transmission through institutionalized practices like SOTUS similarly reveals culturally specific pathways for bullying perpetuation. While hazing and hierarchical initiation practices exist in Western contexts—particularly in fraternities, sports teams, and military settings (Allan et al., 2019; Maliski et al., 2021)—they typically exist as informal or semi-formal traditions rather than officially sanctioned institutional practices with explicit pedagogical rationales. The Thai SOTUS system's combination of hierarchical socialization, discipline training, and unity building creates a unique context where aggressive behaviors toward juniors are simultaneously condemned (when labeled as "bullying") and condoned (when framed as "training" or "tradition"). This ambiguity complicates prevention efforts in ways not adequately addressed by Western intervention models that assume clearer normative condemnation of aggressive behaviors (Williford et al., 2022).

The findings extend prior Thai research in several significant ways. Pengpid and Peltzer (2013) foundational epidemiological work established prevalence rates and basic risk factor associations using national survey data from the 2008 Global School-Based Student Health Survey. The current study builds on this by: (1) focusing specifically on vocational contexts rather than general secondary populations, revealing substantially higher rates and distinct risk profiles; (2) employing mixed methods to understand not just prevalence but causal mechanisms and meaning-making processes; (3) documenting institutional-level factors (inter-school rivalry, SOTUS practices) that were not captured in individual-level survey approaches; and (4) examining contemporary dynamics (post-2020) that may differ from patterns documented over a decade earlier. While Pengpid and Peltzer identified significant associations between bullying and factors such as physical fighting, psychosocial distress, and substance use, the current research explicates the social processes through which these associations develop within the specific institutional ecology of vocational education.

Sittichai and Smith (2018) important work on coping strategies among Thai youth in southern border provinces provided valuable insights into how young people respond to bullying victimization in a culturally distinct region characterized by religious diversity and ongoing conflict. Their finding that telling teachers or parents was the most recommended strategy for traditional bullying, but less so for cyberbullying, suggested that Thai youth recognize contextual differences in effective coping. The current research extends this work by: (1) examining coping and help-seeking within the specific context of institutionalized rivalry and hierarchical aggression, where reporting may carry different meanings and consequences; (2) documenting how institutional culture (particularly SOTUS traditions) shapes perceived appropriateness of different coping strategies; (3) exploring not just victim coping but also bystander responses and the role of institutional authorities in either supporting or suppressing help-seeking; and (4) analyzing how the urban Bangkok context, with its dense institutional ecosystem, creates different opportunity structures for intervention compared to the more dispersed southern provincial settings studied by Sittichai and Smith.

More broadly, this research contributes to growing literature on bullying in non-Western contexts that challenges the universality of Western-derived frameworks (Smith et al., 2016; Strohmeier et al., 2020). Recent meta-analyses have increasingly acknowledged the need for culturally situated understanding of bullying (Cook et al., 2020; Zych et al., 2020), and the current findings provide empirical support for this perspective. The study demonstrates that while core psychological processes identified in Western research—such as social identity formation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), social learning mechanisms (Bandura, 1977), and peer group dynamics (Garandeau et al., 2021)—clearly operate in Thai contexts, they are channeled through culturally specific institutional

structures and normative frameworks that substantially alter their expression and consequences.

The finding that institutional tracking (vocational vs. general education) serves as a critical contextual moderator extends recent research on educational differentiation and peer aggression. While Western studies have documented associations between academic tracking and bullying (Longobardi et al., 2019; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2015), these typically focus on within-school ability grouping rather than the fundamental vocational-academic divide that characterizes Thai and several other Asian educational systems. The current research shows that this systemic differentiation creates not just different opportunity structures for aggression but fundamentally different social identities, status hierarchies, and normative frameworks. Students in vocational settings don't simply experience more risk factors; they inhabit a different social world with distinct rules, meanings, and power relations. This finding has important implications for intervention, suggesting that programs must be fundamentally redesigned rather than simply adapted when moving between educational tracks (Williford et al., 2022).

The documentation of stakeholder perspectives represents another significant contribution. While much bullying research relies exclusively on student self-reports or peer nominations (Card & Hodges, 2008; Hymel & Swearer, 2015), this study incorporated perspectives from students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, revealing substantial divergence in how different stakeholders understand and respond to violence. For instance, what teachers frame as "normal developmental roughness" or "boys being boys," students experience as serious victimization; what administrators defend as "character-building tradition" (SOTUS), parents often view as institutionalized abuse. These perspective differences help explain why anti-bullying policies often fail in implementation—different stakeholders are literally addressing different phenomena based on their divergent interpretations (Bradshaw, 2015; Doumas et al., 2020). The multi-stakeholder approach reveals the political and cultural negotiations surrounding what behaviors count as "bullying" versus "normal," "traditional," or "acceptable" aggression—negotiations largely invisible in quantitative studies using predetermined definitions.

The finding that family-level violence exposure shows particularly strong effects in vocational settings compared to general education extends recent research on cumulative and interactive risk factors (Evans et al., 2016; Vaillancourt et al., 2021). While these studies document non-additive risk accumulation, they typically examine cross-level interactions (e.g., individual × peer × school factors) rather than how macro-level institutional context (educational tracking) moderates transmission of family-level risks. The current finding suggests that institutional environments characterized by normalized aggression and hierarchical violence (vocational schools with intense SOTUS practices) may provide particularly fertile ground for intergenerational violence transmission, essentially amplifying the impact of family violence exposure through institutional reinforcement. This aligns with recent theoretical work emphasizing how institutional contexts can either buffer against or exacerbate family-level risks (Espelage et al., 2022), but provides specific evidence for how educational tracking systems create differential vulnerability.

The documentation of territorial dynamics in urban space adds a spatial dimension often overlooked in bullying research. While school violence research has examined within-school spatial patterns—identifying "hot spots" like bathrooms, hallways, and playgrounds (Astor et al., 2019)—less attention has been paid to inter-institutional spatial dynamics. The current finding that specific locations (BTS stations, shopping malls, border zones between school catchment areas) become sites of ritualized confrontation between rival institutions extends work on violence "ecological niches" (Wilcox et al., 2018) and "routine activity theory" applications to youth violence (Wo et al., 2020). These spatial patterns have important implications for prevention, suggesting that interventions focused solely on school campuses miss critical sites of violence and that coordination between schools, transit authorities, and urban planners may be necessary for comprehensive approaches.

Finally, the research provides nuanced insight into cyberbullying in Thai contexts, extending previous work by Sittichai and colleagues. While earlier research documented cyberbullying prevalence and basic

associations with traditional bullying (Sittichai & Smith, 2018), the current study reveals how digital platforms specifically amplify and perpetuate inter-institutional rivalry. Social media serves not just as an additional venue for individual-level bullying but as infrastructure for collective identity performance and intergroup competition, where groups of students coordinate online to arrange physical confrontations offline. This blurring of online-offline boundaries in service of institutionalized rivalry represents a distinctive pattern that differs from Western cyberbullying, which more typically involves individual perpetrators and victims (Kowalski et al., 2019; Meter & Bauman, 2018). The finding aligns with emerging research on collective cyberbullying and networked harassment (Sticca et al., 2019) but documents how institutional structures shape digital aggression in culturally specific ways.

In summary, while this research confirms many findings from international literature regarding the multi-level, ecological nature of bullying, it substantially extends understanding by documenting culturally specific mechanisms (institutional symbolic competition, hierarchical violence transmission through SOTUS) and contexts (dense urban institutional ecosystems, rigid vocational-academic tracking) that shape how universal psychological processes manifest in Thai settings. The work demonstrates the value of culturally situated research that respects both universal principles and local particularity, avoiding both uncritical universalism and extreme relativism (Smith et al., 2016). Most importantly, it provides evidence that effective prevention and intervention must be fundamentally redesigned, not simply adapted, to address the specific institutional and cultural dynamics identified—a lesson with implications for knowledge translation efforts globally.

Prevention strategy implications

The multi-factorial causation documented in this research clearly demonstrates that effective prevention requires comprehensive approaches addressing multiple ecological levels simultaneously. Single-focus interventions, regardless of their quality at the targeted level, are fundamentally inadequate for addressing the complex, interconnected nature of contributing factors identified in Thai vocational education contexts.

Evidence Base for Multi-Level Prevention

Meta-analytic evidence overwhelmingly supports multi-component approaches over single-level interventions. Gaffney et al. (2019) systematic review found that bullying prevention programs incorporating individual, classroom, school, and community components produced effect sizes 2-3 times larger than single-level programs. Similarly, Ttofi and Farrington (2011) influential meta-analysis, updated by Kennedy (2020), demonstrated that program effectiveness correlated directly with the number of ecological levels addressed, with optimal outcomes achieved when at least four levels were targeted simultaneously.

The KiVa program from Finland provides compelling empirical evidence. Kärnä et al. (2021) rigorous evaluation showed that simultaneous targeting of student skills, classroom norms, school structures, and parent engagement produced substantial reductions in both victimization (17-23%) and perpetration (15-30%). Critically, component analysis revealed that removing any single level significantly reduced overall effectiveness, demonstrating necessity rather than mere additivity (Salmivalli et al., 2021). This finding aligns with ecological systems theory's core premise that levels interact rather than simply accumulate (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

Critical adaptation for Thai vocational contexts

However, direct transplantation of Western programs to Thai vocational settings proves inadequate. The specific mechanisms identified— institutional symbolic competition, formalized hierarchical violence through SOTUS, dense urban institutional ecosystems, and vocational-academic status hierarchies— require substantial contextual adaptation rather than simple translation (Williford et al., 2022). Effective prevention in Thai vocational contexts must address:

Individual level: Beyond generic social-emotional skills emphasized in Western programs (Durlak et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017), Thai-adapted interventions must help students navigate tensions between institutional loyalty and ethical concerns about violence. This requires critical consciousness development about institutional identity construction, not merely conflict resolution skills (Juvonen et al., 2019). Students also need tools for managing identity conflicts arising from simultaneously devalued

(vocational track) and valorized (senior status) positions, alongside recognition and resistance to context-specific moral disengagement mechanisms that justify violence through "school honor" or "tradition" (Killer et al., 2019; Thornberg & Jungert, 2017).

Peer and classroom level: Standard Western approaches focusing on classroom climate and bystander intervention (Polanin et al., 2020; Salmivalli, 2019) must expand to address inter-institutional dynamics. Prevention cannot remain within school walls but must address the "institutional ecosystem." This necessitates: (1) cross-institutional peace-building initiatives creating superordinate goals requiring cooperation between rival schools (Gaertner et al., 2016; Pettigrew et al., 2011); (2) peer network interventions engaging influential students with social capital in aggressive networks to shift group norms (Paluck & Shepherd, 2012; Valente et al., 2017); and (3) reframing institutional identity from competitive rivalry to collaborative improvement.

Institutional level: This requires the most substantial adaptation:

SOTUS reform: Rather than abolishing SOTUS entirely (likely generating resistance given cultural embeddedness), transform it into genuinely developmental mentorship. This involves: explicit prohibition of physical aggression and public humiliation; positive mentorship training for seniors; protected reporting pathways for juniors; transparent adult oversight; and reframing from "discipline/obedience" to "support/growth" (Allan et al., 2019; Van Dam et al., 2018). Research on transforming Western hazing cultures (Waldron & Kowalski, 2019) provides relevant models requiring cultural adaptation.

Status recognition systems: Address underlying status anxiety through: elevating vocational pathway prestige via public campaigns and employer partnerships; showcasing successful vocational graduates; creating alternative achievement domains; and working toward educational policy reforms reducing rigid tracking and status hierarchies (Juvonen et al., 2019; Wang & Degol, 2016).

School climate and policy: Implement comprehensive climate improvement (Bradshaw et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2015) using adapted measures capturing Thai-specific dimensions: institutional pride without inter-school aggression, supportive rather than punitive mentorship, adult responsiveness to inter-school conflicts, and balance between tradition and student wellbeing. Policies must clearly define acceptable boundaries while respecting cultural values (Gregory & Cornell, 2019).

Family level: Given vocational students' predominantly working-class backgrounds, family engagement must: (1) address practical participation barriers through flexible timing, transportation support, and economic assistance (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2017); (2) employ culturally responsive communication respecting parental authority while providing violence impact information (Williford et al., 2022); (3) offer family education on alternative discipline strategies (Hsueh & Knox, 2015); and (4) develop genuine family-school partnerships rather than top-down directives (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Patrikakou, 2016).

Community and systems level: The documentation of territorial violence in urban spaces and social media's amplifying role indicates prevention must extend beyond school grounds through:

Cross-sector partnerships: Collaboration with transit authorities, shopping centers, police, and local government to address violence in public spaces (Astor et al., 2019; Elsaesser et al., 2021). Activities include: mapping violence hotspots using multi-source data; coordinating supervision in high-risk locations; developing rapid response protocols for inter-school confrontations; and creating safe corridors through environmental design (Wilcox et al., 2018).

Digital platform engagement: Address social media's role in organizing and amplifying institutional conflicts through: media literacy education on how online content inflames offline conflicts; platform company partnerships to interrupt violence coordination online; creating positive online communities around shared interests; and establishing clear policies with swift responses to cyberbullying and incitement (Kowalski et al., 2019; Wright, 2020).

Policy and systems reform: Advocate for educational policy addressing structural factors: reducing rigid vocational-academic tracking; equalizing resources and prestige across pathways; establishing clearer SOTUS regulations and accountability; implementing national anti-violence policies; and

addressing broader socioeconomic inequalities driving status competition (Fry & Bi, 2013; UNESCO, 2016).

Implementation science considerations

Well- designed programs fail without adequate implementation. Critical success factors include (Fixsen et al., 2015; Forman et al., 2017):

Capacity building: Schools require infrastructure, trained personnel, and dedicated resources. Essential elements include: extensive professional development on multi- level approaches; training specialized prevention coordinators; establishing monitoring and evaluation systems; and allocating sufficient time and funding (Bradshaw, 2015; Langley et al., 2020).

Cultural adaptation with fidelity: The challenge involves maintaining evidence- based principles while adapting to local contexts. Systematic processes should include: stakeholder engagement to identify needed adaptations; modifying surface structures while preserving core components; pilot testing; monitoring implementation and outcomes; and iterative refinement (Castro et al., 2010; Domenech Rodríguez & Bernal, 2012). For Thai contexts, this means keeping core elements— multi- level coordination, skill- building, norm change, adult engagement— while adapting specific content and delivery (Williford et al., 2022).

Leadership commitment: Effective implementation requires sustained leadership: publicly prioritizing prevention; allocating adequate resources; modeling respectful behavior; holding staff accountable; protecting programs from competing priorities; and institutionalizing prevention into routine structures (Pas et al., 2015; Hall & Hord, 2015).

Managing resistance: Introduction of comprehensive prevention faces resistance from overwhelmed teachers, reputation- protective administrators, hierarchy- questioning students, and tradition- defending community members. Effective change management includes: meaningful stakeholder engagement; clear communication about rationale and benefits; addressing concerns directly; providing adequate support; celebrating successes; and persisting through setbacks with adaptive problem- solving (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement

Comprehensive prevention requires robust evaluation systems assessing implementation quality, intermediate outcomes, and ultimate impacts (Espelage et al., 2022; Farrington et al., 2017):

Process Evaluation: Document what activities are implemented, with what quality and reach, identifying implementation challenges requiring support (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Formative Assessment: Regular collection of intermediate indicators—knowledge, attitudes, norms, behaviors— providing early feedback for program adjustment (Espelage et al., 2022).

Outcome Evaluation: Rigorous impact assessment using multiple methods and informants: peer nominations, teacher observations, behavioral incident data, and potentially direct observations (Hymel & Swearer, 2015).

Cost-Effectiveness Analysis: Document both costs and benefits (reduced violence, improved climate, better academic outcomes) to sustain institutional commitment (Bowman et al., 2018).

Sustainability and Scaling

Long- term success requires: (1) integration into routine practices and budgets rather than special project dependence; (2) internal capacity development for training and quality maintenance; (3) multi- level champion cultivation; (4) success story documentation and communication; and (5) core element preservation while adapting to changing conditions (Schell et al., 2015). Scaling across multiple schools necessitates: phased rollout; train-the-trainer models; communities of practice for ongoing learning; and systematic quality monitoring rather than rapid, unsupported dissemination (Gottfredson et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Central Contribution. This study establishes that vocational student violence in Bangkok and nearby provinces results from twelve interconnected factors operating across four ecological levels rather than single causes. Violence emerges when family dysfunction, peer pressure, institutional rivalry, media influence, and systemic inadequacies converge. Single- focus interventions targeting only individuals or only schools

will fail because they cannot address the multilevel reinforcement mechanisms sustaining violence. Effective prevention requires coordinated action across families, schools, communities, and policy systems simultaneously.

Priority Action 1: Institutional Cooperation Framework for Bangkok Metropolitan Region. All vocational institutions in Bangkok, Pathum Thani, and Samut Prakan should immediately establish a Metropolitan Vocational Education Cooperation Council. This council must implement three concrete measures within the next academic year: (1) mandatory information-sharing protocols where schools notify each other when conflicts arise involving their students, enabling coordinated intervention before escalation; (2) joint inter-school events that redirect institutional pride toward academic competitions, technical skill showcases, and community service projects rather than territorial confrontations; and (3) a unified code of conduct signed by all institutions prohibiting violence and establishing consistent consequences. Schools refusing participation should face budget sanctions from the Office of the Vocational Education Commission. This framework addresses Themes 3, 4, and 12 (institutional rivalry, peer pressure, and coordination failures) which appeared in all 25 interviews, making it the highest-leverage intervention point.

Priority Action 2: Family Support and SOTUS Reform Program. Each vocational school should establish an integrated support program with two components. First, provide accessible family support services including evening counseling sessions, economic assistance referrals, and parent education workshops specifically addressing adolescent supervision challenges for working families (addressing Theme 1, identified by 23 of 25 participants). Second, fundamentally reform the SOTUS senior-junior system to eliminate hazing and violence transmission while maintaining positive mentorship. Schools should: replace hierarchical control practices with structured skill-development mentoring; establish clear anti-violence policies with senior students as enforcers rather than perpetrators; and create accountability through parent and teacher oversight of senior-junior interactions. These reforms should begin immediately in first-year student orientation, with independent monitoring by parent committees. This combined approach addresses both the family dysfunction that creates initial vulnerability (Theme 1) and the institutional system that perpetuates violence across cohorts (Theme 5, reported by all alumni and 60% of other participants).

These two priority actions directly address the most pervasive themes identified across all stakeholder groups and can be implemented immediately with existing institutional resources and authority. Success requires sustained commitment from educational administrators, political will from provincial authorities, and active monitoring to prevent regression to previous practices. Without coordinated multilevel action, vocational student violence will persist regardless of reactive enforcement efforts.

Suggestions for further research

Based on empirical findings and stakeholder input, prevention strategies should target multiple ecological levels through coordinated interventions.

Family and individual level interventions

Enhanced Family Support Services

- Implement accessible family counseling addressing economic stress, conflict resolution, and parenting skills
- Establish parent education programs focusing on adolescent development and supervision strategies

Supporting evidence Parent02 and Parent04 identified lack of supervision time and economic stress as primary challenges

Developmental Psychology-Informed Programs

- Develop age-appropriate emotional regulation training and decision-making skills programs
- Implement peer mentorship programs pairing students with positive role models

Supporting evidence Admin02 identified impulsivity as key factor; Alumni01 emphasized identity needs

Institutional level interventions

Institutional Cooperation and Identity Transformation

- Mandate formal cooperation agreements between institutions including information sharing and joint prevention activities

- Redirect institutional pride toward academic achievement and community service rather than territorial dominance
- Reform SOTUS systems to emphasize mentorship and skill development rather than hierarchy maintenance

Supporting evidence Admin01 identified poor inter-school cooperation; Alumni03 described SOTUS violence transmission

Comprehensive School-Based Prevention

- Implement multi-component programs addressing peer pressure, conflict resolution, and positive identity development
- Establish early warning systems for conflict identification and intervention

Supporting evidence Alumni05 described loyalty pressure; Admin04 identified negative mindsets

Community and environmental interventions

Media Responsibility and Community Engagement

- Develop media guidelines for responsible violence reporting that avoids sensationalism
- Promote positive portrayals of vocational education achievements and contributions

Supporting evidence Business01 and Community02 identified media amplification effects

Substance Abuse Prevention

- Strengthen enforcement of alcohol and drug sales to minors
- Implement campus-based substance abuse prevention and treatment programs

Supporting evidence Alumni01 described substance-induced violence escalation

Economic Opportunity Creation

- Establish campus-based vocational training centers providing legitimate income opportunities
- Develop apprenticeship and small business programs

Supporting evidence Student01 described economic pressures and peer acceptance needs

System and policy level interventions

Legal Framework Enhancement

- Implement balanced approaches combining accountability with restorative justice principles
- Establish consistent enforcement protocols across institutions and areas

Supporting evidence Police03 identified inadequate deterrent effects; requires careful consideration of rights and rehabilitation needs

Coordinated System Response

- Establish formal inter-agency coordination mechanisms between education, police, social services, and community organizations
- Develop shared information systems and case management protocols

Supporting evidence All administrators and police identified coordination gaps

Political Influence Mitigation

- Implement policies restricting political recruitment activities on campuses
- Develop civic education programs promoting democratic participation without group conflict

Supporting evidence Community01 identified political group recruitment issues

Declaration of Generative AI Use

The authors hereby declare that generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were utilized in the preparation of this manuscript solely for language editing purposes, including grammar refinement, sentence restructuring, and improvement of clarity and readability. No generative AI systems were employed in the formulation of research concepts, data collection, analysis, interpretation of results, or in drawing scientific conclusions.

All intellectual content, experimental design, data interpretation, and scholarly discussions are the exclusive work of the authors. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented herein.

The use of AI-assisted tools complied with ethical writing standards and aligns with the publication policy of the Applied Science and Innovation (ASI) Journal.

CRediT author statement

Sanit Sirivisitkul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing-Original Draft. **Songyos Kawmongkon:** Software, Validation, Investigation. **Pornnarong Singsamran:** Writing-Reviewing and Editing, Resources, Data Curation,

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