



The Relationship Between Students’ Perception of School Climate and Student Outcomes

Nattaly Velasquez, MSW | Erica Lizano, Research Advisor
Department of Social Work

Abstract

Despite the growing research in school climate and school reform policy in primary and secondary education programs, student outcomes suggest many schools are failing at providing an equitable educational experience. The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between student’s perception of school climate (e.g., school safety, school discipline, and school connectedness) and student outcomes (e.g., attendance, grades, future aspirations). This study utilizes secondary data from a sample of $N=14,273$ eligible youth ages 12-18 from the School Crime Supplement, a cross-sectional study administered as a supplement to the annual National Crime Victimization Survey. The findings of the study suggest that education and school reform policies are directed toward creating suitable learning environments where students feel secure, connected, and engaged which promotes student academic achievement and future outcomes.

Introduction

Significance of the Study

- In recent years education reform in the U.S. has focused on ensuring students are learning and receiving an equitable education, however, there is a discrepancy in student outcomes that indicate many schools are failing (Michael et al., 2015).

Purpose

- Inform decision-making in the development and implementation of school-based interventions and strategies.

Purpose

- What is the relationship between students’ perception of school climate (e.g., school safety, school discipline, and school connectedness) and student outcomes (e.g., attendance, grades, and future aspirations)?

Literature Review

- Education reform in the U.S. has focused on ensuring students are learning, however, despite recent efforts, there is a discrepancy in student outcomes that indicate many schools are failing at providing an equitable education to all students (Michael et al., 2015)
- Positive school climate is an evidence-based risk prevention and school improvement strategy (Thapa et al., 2013).
- Positive school climate has an impact on students’ motivation to learn, buffers the impact of low socioeconomic status and academic achievement, mitigates violence and aggression, and promotes students’ healthy development and overall well-being (REMS TA Center, 2021; Thapa et al., 2013).

Methodology

Research Design

- The present study is a secondary cross-sectional study that draws data from the School Crime Supplement (SCS), a cross-sectional study administered as a supplement to the annual National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) Series (United States Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). Annual data is gathered from a nationally representative sample of 95,000 households and 160,000 unique respondents residing in the U.S. and the District of Columbia 12 years or older.

Sample

- NCVS used a stratified, multi-stage cluster sample design. The target population of the NCVS are U.S. residents living in U.S. and the District of Columbia age 12 or older living in housing units (HUs) or noninstitutionalized group quarters (GQs).
- The SCS was designed to produce national estimates of school-related crime and violence given the smaller target population. Out of the 14,273 NCVS respondents eligible for the SCS supplement, 7,0005 completed the SCS interview and 7,268 were noninterviews.

Measures

Independent Variables:

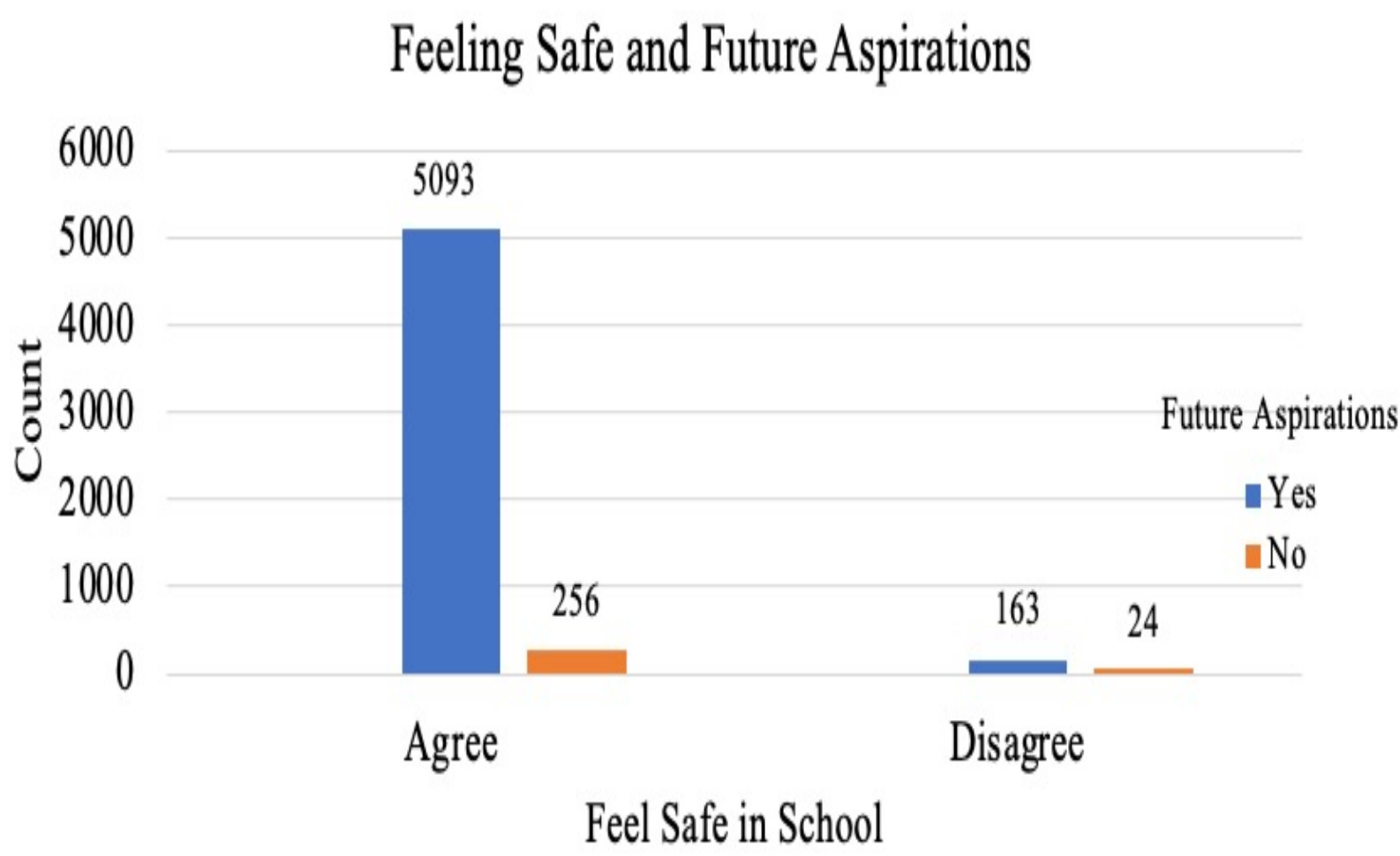
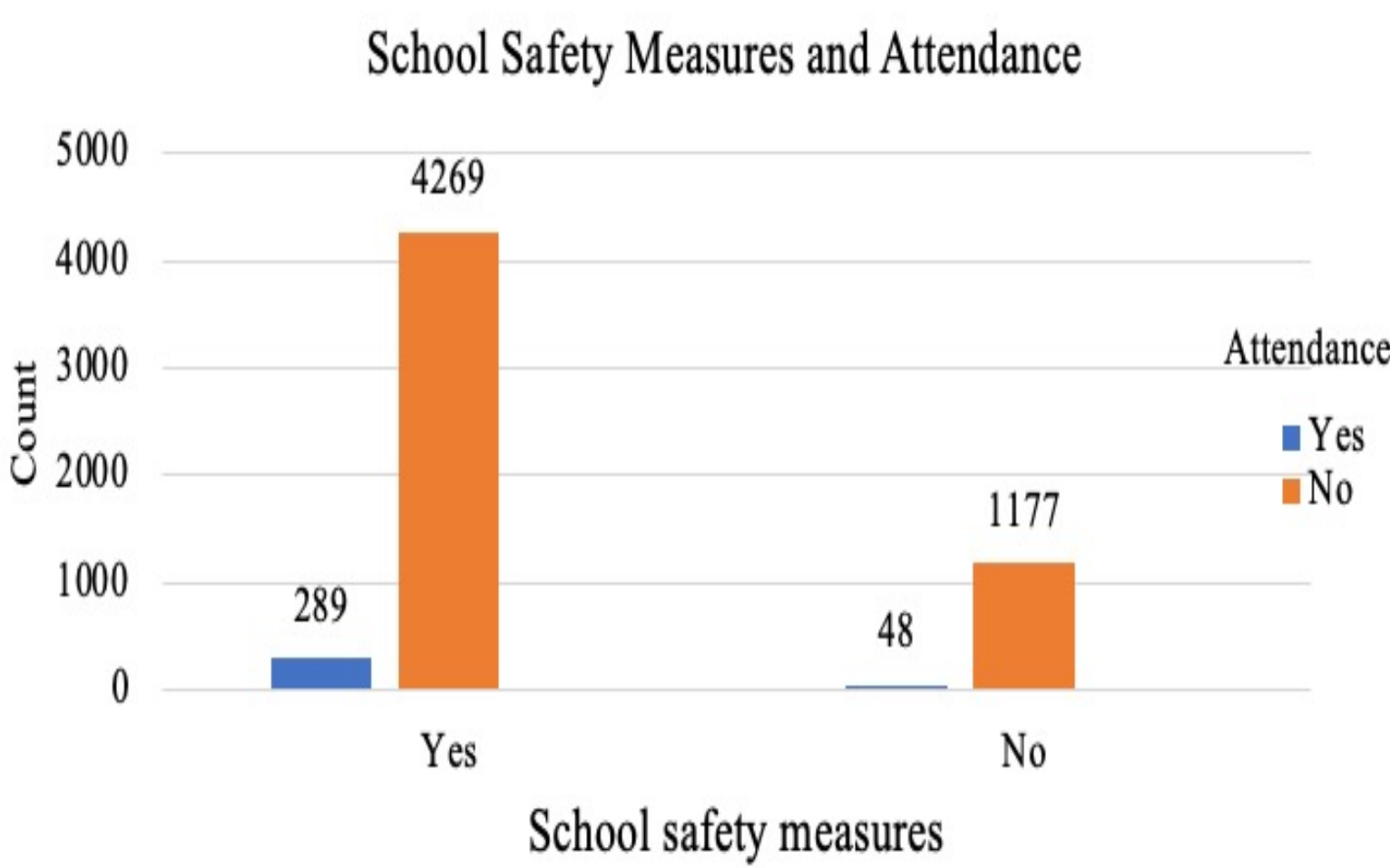
- School safety
- School discipline
- School connectedness

Dependent Variables:

- School safety
- School discipline
- School connectedness

Results

- A significant association was found ($\chi^2(1) = 10.32, p < 0.001$), while a Phi statistic suggested a weak relationship (0.04). Students who perceived their school took measures to make sure students were safe with assigned security guards or police officers were significantly more likely to skip class within the last 4 weeks (6.3%) versus 3.9% of students who perceived their school did not take measures to make sure students were safe.
- A significant association was found ($\chi^2(1) = 24.37, p < 0.001$), while a Phi statistic suggested a weak relationship (0.07). Students that felt safe in their school were significantly more likely to consider attending school after high school such as college or technical school (95.2%) versus 87.2% of students that did not feel safe in their school



Discussion

Strengths and Limitations

- The strengths of the present study include the use of a nationally representative sample across 95,000 households. Furthermore, the current study also uses a sample that examines school climate and student outcomes across primary and secondary education programs and schools.
- The limitations of the present study include that no inference of causality can be made due to the cross-sectional study design. Additionally, the study was conducted addressing only three domains of school climate, therefore future studies should test the relationship of other domains of school climate to produce a better measure of school climate.

Implications and Future Research

- The results gathered from the study contributes to social work practice by highlighting the intersecting and multi-faceted factors that create a positive school climate and significantly affect student grades, attendance, and future aspirations to continue their education.
- The findings of the present study suggest policy implications at the district level and the development of school reform policies in the domains of school safety, school discipline and school connectedness.
- Future studies should further examine the association of additional indicators of school climate including the physical environment, school participation, mental health, engagement, etc. and student outcomes to produce a better and wholistic measure of school climate.

References

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