Violence among Students in Universities

A case study on the University of Jordan

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of violence is as old as the creation of human beings, since the oldest documented crime in religious prescriptions dates back to the assassination of Adam’s son Abel by his brother Cain. This paper sheds light on the phenomenon of students' violence at the Universities of Jordan and through applying a case study on the largest university in Jordan; University of Jordan. The University of Jordan is the oldest Jordanian university which was established in 1962. The university is a state-run institution and has the largest campus in Jordan. Having a huge number of young students attending one campus may represent a fertile soil for violence. From a social work perspective, violence includes physical assault, intimidation, threatening behavior, aggression, as well as ethnic and sexual harassment. Indeed, among Jordanian universities, the University of Jordan witnessed the most frequent events of violence, including the ethnic ones. Henrik (2006) illustrated that in the United States, for example, the interaction of expansion in higher education and economic decline with youth bulges increases the risk of some types of violence. The World Health Organization defined violence as: the intentional use of force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, against one another. Many causes were given to explain violence among the youth, including students, such as dysfunctional families, TV violence, latchkey homes, child abuse, domestic violence, drugs, gangs, poor cognitive and emotional development, family breakups, inequitable educational opportunity, and poverty (Edwards, 2001; Huston, 1992; Arllen et al., 1994; Ascher, 1994). The prevention of injury and violence in campus is an indicator of having a healthy campus, specifically through the reduction of physical fighting, weapon carrying, homicides, physical assaults, sexual and emotional abuse, and intimate partner violence (American College Health Association, 2002). However, most theories consider violent behavior as a learning behavior rather than stemming from instincts (Pierson and Thomas, 2006).

PROBLEM OF THE STUDY:
Previous literature on the subject of students’ violence in campus arrived to heterogeneous causes, consequences, and recommendations on the subjects since this phenomenon could be understood from a cross-cultural perspective. So this study concentrates on causes, consequences, relationship with culture, and recommended solutions related to violence from the perspective of students attending the University of Jordan.
Significance of the Study:
The findings of previous research found violence to be most common in late adolescence (Pastore and Maguire,
2000), and is more common among college students (Cogan and Porcerelli, 2003). Indeed, increasing knowledge which might result in reducing college violence will eventually reduce the level of violence in the whole society (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). In Jordan, there is no clear and scientific understanding of this phenomenon. As a result, understanding the causes, effects, and solutions as reported by students themselves may help in finding the best techniques and intervention plans to limit the incidence of this phenomenon in campus. Generally, the study of violence, as reported by Galtung, (2000), offers a new vision, ethics, and ideology that enhance harmonious relations. In sum, this study is essential for building what Boulding (2000) considered a culture for peace.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY:
This study aims at identifying the following:
2. Different consequences of violence.
3. The relationship between students’ violence and societal culture.
4. Proposed solutions to limit students’ violence.

Literature Review:
The related literature on the subject of students violence, mainly that in the fields of social work, psychology, sociology, psycho-sociology, health, and education yielded many characteristics. To begin with, there are multiple causes of violence that could be found in the political, economic, moral, psychological, and religious domains of human life (Marsella and Noren, 2003). Indeed, safety and violent-related behaviors are shaped through a socio-ecological approach which combines different levels of influence, including individual, group, community, along with public policy and societal influences (Stokols, 1996; Chalk and King, 1998). Examples of each level were illustrated by Langford (2006). In terms of individual influences, they are related to faculty, student, and staff beliefs and attitudes about violence. In addition, group or interpersonal influences are related to responses of bystanders to violence and group norms about appropriate behavior. Further, institutional influences are related to factors, such as high level of alcohol consumption inside campus and campus policies and procedures. Furthermore, community influences included factors related to the extent of community law enforcement, and high level of violence and drug selling in the neighboring community. Finally, public policy and societal influences are related to factors such as law enforcement and media images, as well as male gender role socialization that glamorize violence. Expectations, social networks, and changing roles may affect attitude malleability (Visser and Krosnick, 1998). Students’ attitudes are affected by college experience during the years of the study (Lottes and Kuriloff, 1994). Brand and Anastasio (2005) sampled 145 undergraduate students attending a course on violence by using a questionnaire. The respondents completed the questionnaire two times; at the beginning and end of the semester-long course. Some of the findings showed that students’ support for death penalty, catharsis, and punishment decreased. Similarly, while students’ belief in the role of biological influences on violent behavior did not change over the course period, their acceptance of environmental influences increased. Physical fighting,
sexual harassment and assault, weapon carrying, gang activities, psychological harassment, alcohol consumption, and ethnic violence are common in school, college campuses, and universities. Under such circumstances, educational institutions experiencing such incidences become hazardous to students and reflect an unsafe environment (David, 1995; Pezza and Bellotti, 1995). Sweet et al. (2005) conducted a study on 451 undergraduate students in the United States. The study identified 35 respondents as fight-seekers. The findings showed that fight-seekers were mostly males, with friends who seek out fights, fight when drunk, with others who were drunk, and fought three times as frequently as non-fight-seekers. Some of these findings were congruent with some previous research on the subject, such as that of Moffitt (1993) and White et al. (2001). Most pieces of evidence show that violence is a learned behavior (American Psychological Association, 1993).

In the United States, most teen-age homicides are males, including teenagers, killing other men or children. It is important to see, understand, and act toward the warning signs of violence in order to reduce it. It is equally important to teach boys at an early age how to talk about their pain. Many high school boys participate in a fight every year. On television, boys are more likely to be presented in violent acts than girls and that violence characterizes patriarchic male dominance and character (Stark, 2004; Courtenay, 1999). Male students are more involved in violence than their female counterparts. This could be attributed, as explained by Bowker (1981), to difference in the socialization process where females are socialized to be more law abiding. Similarly, younger students are more likely to commit crimes than older people. Sampson and Laub (1990) explained that when people grow up and have children, they lose more by being involved in deviant behavior. The responses of an American university male student, as reported by Puddifoot and Cooke (2002), showed that carrying guns is a symbol of power, independence, freedom, control, danger, and to a lesser degree protects from crime.

Roark (1987) suggested many preventive intervention measures to reduce the level of campus violence. Some of these interventions include: training in social skills, sexual decision making, assertiveness, and anger and stress management. Previous literature on the subject of students' violence yielded different solutions and techniques to reducing campus violence. Some of these solutions include: teaching students coping strategies such as time management (Macan and Trusty, 1995), discouraging drug and alcohol use, punishing and treating violent students, and optimizing learning and academic atmosphere (Whitaker and Pollard, 1993), teaching students appropriate behavior in different settings (Conklin and Robinson, 1993), reducing poverty (Monsey, 1995), and teaching students necessary skills to resolve their differences without resorting to violence in schools before entering colleges and universities (Bodine, 1995). One of the suggested ways to reduce violence is to involve students and professionals, including instructors, in some courses in youth violence protection (American Medical Association, 2000; American Psychological Association, 1998). Similarly, a study by Rodriguez-Frau and Mirabal-Colon (2005) reported that 95% of undergraduate students attending a course on violence at the University of Puerto Rico had their understanding of youth violence increased and improved. However, since each student has unique needs and problems, there is no specific method or solution to avoid violence in different circumstances (Bennett- Johnson, 1997). Dwyer et al. (1998) emphasized the importance of having
a crisis intervention plan to be used when some students are suspicious of having some warning signs of violence. Programs related to violence protection on campus, as explained by Carr (2005), have to be evaluated to determine its efficacy.

Generally, the previous literature on students’ violence stemmed from many fields of knowledge, including social and behavioral sciences. Further, different studies employed different techniques and methodologies causing the comparison between their findings to be difficult. Furthermore, most studies dealt with topics related to the causes and consequences of violence. Yet, the findings and conclusions of the previous literature may not be completely applicable on the community of the study for many reasons, including cultural differences. As a result, analyzing the phenomenon of students’ violence should be viewed from a cross-cultural perspective that respects cultural privacy and sensitivity and this is what my research will add to previous literature, as it discusses the multifaceted aspect of violence from the point of view of students who are affected by it to bring about change from within in a method that respects cultural sensitivity and difference.

Methodology & Results:

To be able to analyze the situation of violence among students in the university of Jordan, a survey that includes question on: what are the causes of violence, effects of violence on the students and the society as a whole, and methods on decreasing and eliminating violence among students. The population “community” of the study consisted of 250 undergraduate students registered at the University of Jordan during the fall semester of the academic year 2013/2014. The sample of students included both genders, students from different nationalities, students from different specializations and ones standing on different academic level.

The first section was dedicated to undercover what are the causes of violence among students, the questions took in consideration the psychological aspect that might cause the violent acts, cultural reasons, feeling of gender superiority and societal fractionalization. The questions aimed to understand the students’ perspective on their colleagues’ violent behavior, as previous studies focused on the scientific aspect of it without taking in consideration that students can bring about change from within as they know their colleagues better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tribal fanaticism &amp; lack of political awareness</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>05.6</td>
<td>01.6</td>
<td>01.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenient rules and lack of punishment</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>08.1</td>
<td>05.2</td>
<td>01.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper investing of free time</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>09.5</td>
<td>02.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting students with low grades</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>07.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of extra-curricular activities (MUN, Clubs..)</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>04.8</td>
<td>02.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural shock (rural – urban)</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>03.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In analyzing the previous results, we find out that violence among students in the University of Jordan according to the students is a deeply-rooted problem caused mainly by tribal fanaticism and lack of political awareness. Due to the tribal fractionalization of the Jordanian society, violent behaviors attributed to tribal fanaticism usually spike up during the period of student elections as it sparks competition among students. The second cause of violence according to students is having lenient university rules and lack of punishment for the violators and therefore, the lack of fear among students. The third main cause of violence according to violators’ colleagues is the lack of extra-curricular activities. The University of Jordan is one of the top universities in Jordan. However, it still follows a traditional method of education that is based in lecturing only. Students have no extracurricular activities or fun events where they can let their negative energy out therefore any small problem can cause a conflict to erupt at any second.

The second section was devoted to know the students’ opinion on the effects of their colleagues’ violent acts on the university and its image, the society as a whole and the education process. It consisted of five questions to create a better understanding of students’ opinion on violence in their campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students feel less secure in their university</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>09.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively affects the instruction process</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroying University’s property</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>06.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affects the percentage of international students registered</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives a bad image about the university</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In analyzing the aforementioned results, we notice that, according to students, violence affects not only the university but the society and the educational system as a whole. According to students, the main effect of violent behaviors in the University of Jordan is the destruction of university’s property. The University of Jordan is one of the historical monuments in Jordan, and clashes among students result to the destruction of benches, tress, classes and much more. 2032 international students are currently enrolled in the University of Jordan for the year 2013-2014, in comparison to 3240 that were registered in the previous year that witnessed 15 clashes among students. This supports the results of the study, as the second main effect according to students is that violent acts and conflicts affect the percentage of international students registered which is considered as an image of the whole country. This is linked to the third effect as well, as we can see in the results of the survey, students claim that the clashes among students give a bad image about the university among other universities locally and internationally.

The third section was dedicated to gather up recommendations from students to eliminate the violent acts in their university. This section of the survey consisted of 5 questions in addition to an “other” box dedicated to collect other suggestions that help in controlling and abolishing violence between students, taking in consideration the different backgrounds and majors of the pupils.
In examining the above-mentioned results, we note that, the results of all suggestions to curb violence are very close. The first recommendation is the introduction of extra-curricular activities within the university whereby students can invest their free time and energies to avoid fighting. These extra-curricular activities include the creation of clubs that aim to introducing a fun atmosphere in the university, in addition to projects that aim to bring about change to the society. The second recommendation suggested by the students is the introduction of a rehabilitation program that obliges violent students to serve a certain amount of hours in community service, as a method to invest their negative energies in something useful to the society. Another important recommendation is including anger management and conflict resolution courses in the educational stream of the university. These courses are a necessity as they teach the students the negative effects of conflicts, in addition on how to control their anger and furious tempers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
In light of the findings of the study, and in addition to the recommendations mentioned in the survey, the following suggestions may be put forward to limit students’ violence on campus:

1. Training teaching staff and administrators on the skills of detecting and coping with indicators of violence among students.
2. Establishing a professional unit that provides free guidance and counseling services on campus. Such unit needs to include qualified and experienced staff, mainly psychiatrists and social workers.
3. Respecting and understanding the relationship between the cultures of different ethnicities of students, namely those participating in violent acts. This is critical and important since, as reported by Pedersen (2001), the inclusion of cultural factors in conflict mediation has many advantages, such as the role of culture in offering understanding and solutions into the causes, processes, and effects of conflict. Indeed, understanding such cultural factors is important for the success of any intervention plan as reported by many studies (Devore and Schlesinger, 1999; Herberg, 1993).
4. Encouraging students to respect the concept of national unity. This could be achieved through different tools. Some of these may include having curriculum dealing with and respecting national unity and understanding, instead of fanaticism, and having more activities inside and outside campus through the Deanship of Student Affairs and the Community Service Office to involve students from different ethnicities and nationalities in different activities.

5. Having a coalition working on the issue of students’ violence where many other universities could also be involved. This is beneficial for having mutual experience and getting more feedback on the subject of violence. Other candidate parties in this coalition may include the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, mass media, and non-governmental organizations working on or interested in the subject of violence.

6. In different occasions, students who were involved in violence were not punished by the university. This may motivate these students or others to be involved in some violent acts on campus. So there is a critical need for creating and implementing very powerful procedures and punishment system for those who are behind creating violence on campus.

7. Limiting the accessibility of outsiders to enter the university’s campus, as in many cases, they were the reason to ignite conflicts and especially during elections.

8. Religion is a vital and basic component of any given culture (Durkheim, 1961), including the Jordanian culture. Hence, religious men and institutions, inside and outside campus should be involved in any awareness campaign targeting university students. Such campaign should present religion as a symbol of tolerance, coexistence and inclusion, instead of violence, conflict, and exclusion. Religious preachers should present these pillars to the public.
REFERENCES


