frontiers | Frontiers in Education

TYPE Original Research
PUBLISHED 31 October 2025
DOI 10.3389/feduc.2025.1683234

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OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 10 August 2025
ACCEPTED 23 September 2025
PUBLISHED 31 October 2025

CITATION
Bitinaite R, Dirzyte A, Indrasiene V, Jegeleviciene V, Merfeldaite O, Prakapas R, Railiene A, Gusauskiene M and Serapinas D (2025) Teachers' perception of the relationship as a moderator between victimization and life satisfaction. *Front. Educ.* 10:1683234. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2025.1683234

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Teachers' perception of the relationship as a moderator between victimization and life satisfaction

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Introduction: Although teacher victimization has been associated with reduced well-being, little is known about how teachers' perceptions of their relationships within the school environment is linked to this association. This study examined whether perceived relationship quality moderates the link between different forms of victimization and teachers' life satisfaction.
Methods: A structural equation model was tested using data from a Lithuanian teacher sample (n = 1,146), incorporating three latent constructs: victimization (indicated by physical, social, verbal, cyber, and sexual victimization, as well as victimization involving property damage and violence perpetrated by school staff and parents), relationship perception (measured by perceived relationships with students, colleagues, school administration, and local educational authorities), and life satisfaction (assessed via the satisfaction with life scale).
Results: The model demonstrated good fit [$\chi^2(39) = 310.00$, CFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.916, SRMR = 0.047, RMSEA = 0.078 (0.070, 0.086)]. Victimization was negatively related to both relationship perception ($\beta = -0.35$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.25$), while relationship perception positively related to life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.44$, all $p < 0.001$). Moderation analyses revealed significant interaction effects: cyber, property, and physical victimization were more strongly associated with reduced life satisfaction among teachers who reported high perceived relationship quality with students or educational authorities. Contrary to buffering expectations, perceived relationships appeared to intensify the negative effects of victimization on life satisfaction.
Discussion: These findings suggest that victimization may be especially damaging for teachers who typically view their school relationships as supportive, pointing to a potential breach in relational expectations. This highlights the importance of contextual factors in teacher well-being.

KEYWORDS

teacher victimization, psychological well-being, life satisfaction, perception of relationship, Lithuania

Introduction

Recent studies reported declining interest in teaching profession, shortages of qualified educators, the profession's decreasing status (La Velle, 2019; Pavin Ivanec and Defar, 2023), and teachers' elevated levels of occupational stress and psychological distress compared to the general population (Stapleton et al., 2020). Besides, there remains a shortage of practical,

research-based tools designed to effectively identify the types of support educators need (Sandilos and DiPerna, 2022).

In the last decades, the teaching profession has been identified as experiencing relatively high levels of occupational stress, which has been shown to negatively correlate with job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and overall health (Johnson et al., 2005). Research has consistently documented elevated rates of violence perpetrated against teachers, highlighting it as a pervasive and persistent issue within educational settings (Longobardi et al., 2019; Reddy et al., 2018). The findings suggest that teachers are exposed to various forms of victimization, with verbal and property-related incidents being most common, and occasional reports of more severe physical threats and aggression (Astor et al., 2024). In a meta-analysis conducted by Longobardi et al. (2019), high rates of student violence against teachers were identified as a widespread international issue. Within a two-year period, prevalence ranged from 20 to 75%, with an overall rate of 53%. Lifetime career victimization rates were lower, ranging from 32 to 40%, with an overall rate of 37.79%. The prevalence varied by violence type, with more severe forms (e.g., physical attacks, theft) being less common. However, despite increasing recognition of teacher workplace victimization and concerns about its global implications, teachers' perceptions of safety and their perceived risk of victimization remain underexplored in the research literature (Berkowitz et al., 2022).

The relationship between various forms of teacher victimization and teachers' life satisfaction remains insufficiently explored despite several attempts in current research (Dirzyte et al., 2024). It is known, that work-related stress can lead to significant physiological and psychological consequences, potentially affecting both personal well-being and professional functioning (Hepburn et al., 2021). It is especially important to notice, that the subjective well-being of teachers plays a vital role in fostering students' academic growth, as psychologically stable and motivated educators are more capable of providing effective support and inspiration (Hepburn et al., 2021). Given teachers' sustained interactions with students and their influential role in shaping children's development, gaining a deeper understanding of educators' experiences with violence is essential for creating effective prevention and intervention strategies (Longobardi et al., 2019). Understanding the impact of violence on teachers' well-being in conflict-affected contexts is required for identifying factors that enhance their life satisfaction and inform effective support strategies (Chesang et al., 2024; Luque-Reca et al., 2022).

Teacher's life satisfaction

Life satisfaction, a key cognitive component of subjective well-being, refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their life based on how their achievements align with their personal expectations and standards (Diener et al., 1985; Diener and Diener, 1995). In other words, life satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of overall life quality and is consistently associated with positive outcomes across various life domains (Lee and Lee, 2023; Ng et al., 2017). Life satisfaction is conceptualized as the extent to which an individual's current life conditions align with their personal aspirations and goals (Pavin Ivanec and Defar, 2023).

Teacher's life satisfaction is heterogeneous, with distinct patterns affected by varying demographic, psychological, and environmental factors (Chen et al., 2023). Previous research showed, that positive relationships with students, colleagues, and the broader school community are associated with increased job and life satisfaction among teachers (Hamama et al., 2013; Kollerová et al., 2023). The results suggest that teachers who perceive consistent enforcement of school rules report higher levels of job satisfaction, whereas experiences of victimization are significantly associated with reduced job satisfaction (Kapa and Gimbert, 2018). For individuals who have experienced victimization, school violence indirectly affects life satisfaction by diminishing their overall satisfaction with the school environment (Varela et al., 2018). Diminished life satisfaction and happiness among teachers have been linked to increased risk of heightened psychological distress (Hamama et al., 2013). Findings show a significant negative correlation between teacher victimization and life satisfaction, with greater victimization linked to lower well-being (Dirzyte et al., 2024).

Furthermore, consistent enforcement of school rules by both leadership and peers is associated with enhanced teacher job satisfaction, reflecting the importance of a cohesive and supportive school environment (Kapa and Gimbert, 2018). It was also found, that teacher job satisfaction is significantly associated with three key aspects of the work environment: student discipline, collegial cooperation, and workload (Toropova et al., 2021). For example, teacher satisfaction is enhanced by salary structures that reflect the demands and responsibilities of the profession, comprehensive benefit schemes, and targeted policies—such as flexible timetables and limits on excessive workload (Astor et al., 2024). Even though school material resources proved insignificant when considered alongside other factors, it suggests that socially oriented working conditions are more influential for teachers than material provisions (Toropova et al., 2021). It is worth noticing, that lack of administrative support not only impacts teachers' individual experiences but also serves as a broader indicator of systemic issues within the school, such as organizational disarray, strained professional relationships, ineffective leadership, and inadequate institutional responses (McMahon et al., 2017).

Teacher's victimization

One way to enhance understanding of teacher life satisfaction is by examining their work-related experiences and exploring how these experiences influence their overall well-being. Even though teaching is often a fulfilling profession that involves meaningful, impactful, and significant work, it can also be demanding because of the job's inherent complexity (Collie et al., 2015). Teacher workplace victimization (TWV) is a multifaceted issue that can arise from various sources, including students, fellow staff members, school leadership, and external parties such as parents (Dirzyte et al., 2024; McMahon, et al., 2020b). In a study conducted by McMahon et al. (2020a), students were identified as the primary perpetrators of physical aggression against teachers, accounting for approximately 94.0% of reported incidents and parents were reported as perpetrators in around 7.0% of cases. Additionally, the study found that many teachers (43%) experienced verbal aggression concurrently, including behaviors such as yelling, insults, swearing, and talking back.

TWV may encompass a range of behaviors, including verbal abuse, threats, object throwing, physical assaults, property damage, and sexual harassment (McMahon et al., 2022; McMahon et al.,

2020b). In a national study Olivier et al. (2021), found that teachers frequently encountered aggressive behaviors at school, with almost 98.9% reporting having witnessed student altercations and 94.9% witnessing aggression toward a colleague at least once. Additionally, 47.4% of teachers reported being direct victims of student aggression during the school year. The authors concluded that while general exposure to student aggression is common, it is primarily direct victimization that poses a significant threat to teachers' emotional well-being. The findings reveal that teacher victimization by students, particularly verbal abuse, is widespread across cultures, with a significant portion of students admitting to such behavior, while threats and physical assaults, though less frequent, still occur at concerning rates in a substantial number of schools (Benbenishty et al., 2019). Interestingly, teachers who experienced a specific form of violence have been found to be more likely to encounter the same type of violence, highlighting the subjective nature of violence perception and its strong dependence on contextual factors (Melanda et al., 2021). It is known that several factors significantly predict higher rates of teacher victimization, including teacher role (e.g., special education teachers), both positive and negative dimensions of school climate, and various school organizational and community characteristics—such as the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, instructional modality, school level, and urbanicity. Although in-person instruction emerged as a significant predictor of violence against teachers across all categories of aggressors, incidents of teacher victimization were reported across all instructional modalities, including in-person, hybrid, and remote settings (Reddy et al., 2024).

It is widely believed that when teachers' mental health is negatively impacted by workplace stress, their capacity to promote and support student well-being may be diminished (Stapleton et al., 2020). Violence against teachers has harmful effects on their emotional and physical well-being, weakens their sense of connectedness to the school, and negatively impacts their job performance and likelihood of staying in the profession (Corbett et al., 2022; Moon et al., 2021). Furthermore, compared to nonvictims, teachers who experience student-to-teacher victimization are more likely to neglect their students and exhibit lower levels of pride in their teaching role. However, the results did not reveal a statistically significant difference in teacher commitment between victimized and nonvictimized teachers (Choi et al., 2024). The findings also suggest a reciprocal relationship between teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher victimization at both the individual and school levels, with stronger associations observed for physical and sexual victimization than for emotional forms (Benbenishty et al., 2019). It becomes obvious, that violence directed toward educators constitutes a significant public health crisis, with far-reaching consequences for teachers' well-being, physical and mental health, and retention within the profession, as well as for students' academic achievement and overall educational experience (Reddy et al., 2024).

Perception of the environment

Teachers' relationships with students, colleagues, principals, and educational authorities play a crucial role in shaping their commitment, with emotional factors mediating these connections within the organizational context of schools (Jo, 2014). Relationships, conceptualized as an element of organizational factors, have frequently been evaluated as one among several dimensions constituting school climate (Chan et al., 2008; Collie et al., 2012). The study conducted by (Jo, 2014) investigated core relationship concepts through the characteristics of relational exchanges that fulfill human needs, as social interaction within relationships is known to be fundamental to the survival of human beings (Berne, 2009).

From an attachment theory perspective, teachers develop internalized mental representations of their dyadic relationships with students through ongoing, repeated interactions in the classroom. These representations encompass the teacher's self-concept in various professional roles (e.g., caregiver, instructor), their perceptions of individual students' needs, and their understanding of the relational dynamic with each student. Such representations also inform the teacher's perceived role in supporting the student's development and learning trajectory (Pianta, 1999; Pianta et al., 2003). Up to now, teacher–student relationship quality at the dyadic level has mostly been assessed using teacher-report questionnaires (Koenen et al., 2019). Questionnaires predominantly capture teachers' explicit perceptions of the teacher–student relationship by focusing on aspects that are accessible to conscious reflection and self-report (Bosmans and Kerns, 2015).

It is well established that social support in the workplace, particularly peer support, plays a crucial role in enhancing employees' psychological well-being and professional satisfaction (Hamama et al., 2013). Empirical findings indicate that teachers' life satisfaction can significantly impact their professional performance and interpersonal relationships within the school community, including interactions with colleagues, students, administrators, and parents (Çevik, 2017; Heller et al., 2002). Teachers' relationships reflect their complex professional roles, with colleague interactions influencing commitment more directly, while relationships with students and principals follow emotional, indirect pathways (Jo, 2014). In this case, school becomes a crucial developmental context that supports well-being and resilience, with positive relationships within the school environment shown to enhance both teachers and student's life satisfaction (Felner et al., 2001; Hamama et al., 2013; Lee and Lee, 2023). Organizational social support as well has been identified as a significant contributor to teachers' emotional well-being and life satisfaction (Hamama et al., 2013). At the interpersonal level, the findings reveal that teachers often encounter challenges in their interactions with parents, students, and colleagues, which are exacerbated by a perceived lack of administrative support. These experiences highlight the critical role that school leadership and institutional backing play in fostering effective communication and relational dynamics within the educational environment (McMahon et al., 2017). As it was found that organizational support moderated the relationship between stress and both negative emotional outcomes and overall life satisfaction (Hamama et al., 2013).

Research on school coexistence and socio-emotional education has highlighted the importance of creating a positive, respectful, and inclusive school climate for both students and teachers. In particular, Rosario Ortega and colleagues have contributed significantly to the theoretical and empirical understanding of these issues, emphasizing that school coexistence extends beyond the absence of conflict to encompass the promotion of constructive relationships, emotional well-being, and collaborative problem-solving within the educational community (Ortega et al., 2012; Ortega-Ruiz and Córdoba-Alcaide, 2017). Their work also underscores the role of socio-emotional

education as a preventive strategy, fostering skills such as empathy, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution, which can mitigate the risk of violence and improve overall school climate. Furthermore, psycho-educational interventions designed within this framework have been shown to enhance teachers' sense of safety, strengthen relational networks, and promote resilience in the face of challenging interpersonal situations (Ortega-Ruiz and Córdoba-Alcaide, 2020).

Present study

Research has consistently demonstrated that teacher victimization adversely affects various aspects of educators' professional and personal lives, including decreased job satisfaction and overall well-being (Moon et al., 2020). While some studies have reported mixed findings regarding the direct link between victimization and life satisfaction (Reddy et al., 2018) more recent evidence suggests that victimization, particularly when perpetrated by students, is related to diminished life satisfaction (Yang et al., 2022).

However, the contextual factors that may influence or moderate this relationship remain underexplored.

One potential moderating factor is teachers' perception of their relationships within the school community. Educators who feel respected and supported by students, colleagues, parents, and educational authorities may be more resilient to the negative effects of victimization. Conversely, when victimization occurs despite generally positive perceived relationships, it may represent a significant violation of expectations, potentially amplifying the harm to life satisfaction. Despite its theoretical significance, this moderating role of perceived relationships has not been thoroughly investigated.

To address this gap, the present study aims to examine whether teachers' perceptions of relationship quality moderate the association between various forms of victimization by students, parents, and school staff and overall life satisfaction. Specifically, we investigate six types of victimization—physical, social, verbal, cyber, and sexual victimization, as well as victimization involving property damage, verbal victimization or bullying by school staff or violence perpetrated by parents and assess whether the perceived quality of relationships with students and educational authorities alters the strength or direction of these associations. We hypothesized that (H1) teacher victimization is negatively associated with life satisfaction, (H2) teachers' positive perceptions of relationships are positively associated with life satisfaction, and (H3) perceived relationship quality moderates the relationship between victimization and life satisfaction (see Figure 1).

Method

The sample

The study employed a test design using a heterogeneous convenience sample of 1,146 teachers working in educational institutions across various cities in Lithuania. Among the participants, 1,059 identified as female (92.4%), 85 as male (7.4%), and 2 chose not to disclose their gender. The average age of participants was 51 years (SD = 9.290), with ages ranging from 20 to 72 years.

Of the 1,146 participating teachers, the largest proportion were subject teachers (n = 596, 52.0%), followed by primary education teachers (n = 150, 13.1%), preschool teachers (n = 136, 11.9%), specialists providing student support (n = 110, 9.6%), administrative staff (n = 67, 5.8%), non-formal education teachers (n = 47, 4.1%), and vocational teachers (n = 27, 2.4%).

Regarding qualification category, nearly half of the participants were methodologist teachers (n = 506, 44.2%), 36.0% were senior teachers (n = 413), 15.6% were teachers without additional qualification (n = 179), and 2.4% were expert teachers (n = 27).

In terms of school location, most participants worked in urban schools (n = 720, 62.8%), followed by town schools (n = 299, 26.1%) and rural schools (n = 122, 10.6%).

Instruments

To explore teacher victimization by students, parents, and school staff and its association with teachers' life satisfaction, this study employed several validated instruments. Teachers' overall life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), a five-item tool designed to capture global cognitive evaluations of one's life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985). The response pattern follows a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). The SWLS was validated in many previous studies and contexts (Diener et al., 1985, 2013).

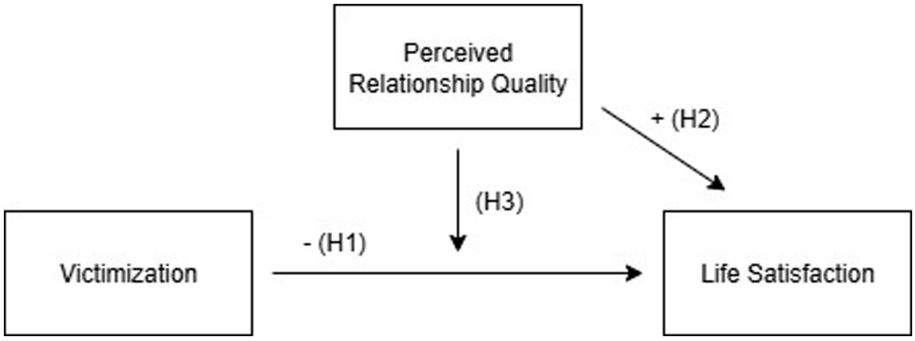


FIGURE 1
Conceptual model of hypothesized relationships between victimization, perceived relationship quality, and life satisfaction.

To assess victimization by students, the study used the Multidimensional Teacher Victimization Scale, which measures teachers' experiences of six types of student-initiated aggression: physical, social, verbal, cyber, sexual, and property-related (Yang et al., 2019). Each statement follows a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (more than once a week). Multidimensional Teacher Victimization Scale was initially validated in previous studies (Yang et al., 2019).

To evaluate verbal victimization by parents, the authors constructed a four-item scale based on the verbal victimization subscale of the Multidimensional Teacher Victimization Scale. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (more than once a week). Verbal victimization or bullying by school staff was assessed using two additional items: "As a teacher, I was bullied by another teacher or teachers" and "As a teacher, I was bullied by administrative staff." These items also followed a 5-point Likert response format ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (more than once a week).

To assess the quality of teachers' relationships with students, colleagues, school leaders, and the local municipality (based on experiences over the past 2 months), the Teacher Relationship Quality Scale (Jo, 2014) was used. This scale is designed to evaluate the quality of professional relationships as perceived by the teachers themselves.

Procedure

The study was conducted between October and December 2023. Recruitment was carried out through professional teacher networks, municipal education departments, and the Lithuanian Education and Science Professional Union. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently employed as teachers in Lithuanian educational institutions, have at least 6 months of teaching experience, and consent to participate in the research. No exclusion criteria were applied with regard to subject taught, school level, or geographical region, in order to ensure diversity in experiences.

Data collection took place online. Participants received an invitation containing a unique survey link and an information sheet outlining the study's aims, ethical considerations, voluntary nature of participation, anonymity assurances, and estimated completion time. Written informed consent was obtained electronically before beginning the questionnaire by asking participants to click an "I agree" box. The survey required approximately 30 min to complete and was available in Lithuanian.

The research followed the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Scientific Committee of the Lifelong Learning Laboratory at Mykolas Romeris University (protocol No. MVGLAB-2023-01). Before analysis, data were screened for completeness, missing responses, and outliers. Statistical assumptions for the planned analyses (e.g., normality, multicollinearity, reliability) were verified before conducting SEM and moderation models.

Statistical analysis

SPSS v.29 AMOS and JASP 0.19 packages were used to conduct structural equation modeling (SEM) and moderation analyses (Rosseel, 2012). The measurement model was assessed via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) within the SEM framework. Structural equation modeling allowed simultaneous examination of relationships among latent constructs (Kline, 2016). Model fit was evaluated using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and the chi-square test statistic (χ^2), which was presented for descriptive purposes (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). Values higher than 0.90 for CFI and TLI, and values lower than 0.08 for RMSEA and SRMR were considered indicative of a good fit. Statistical significance was established at p-values lower than 0.05 (Kline, 2016; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2014).

Moderation analyses tested whether the quality of perceived relationships moderated the associations between specific forms of victimization and teachers' life satisfaction. Prior to analysis, predictor and moderator variables were mean-centered to reduce multicollinearity, and interaction terms were calculated by multiplying the centered variables. For each form of victimization, a separate SEM model was specified with life satisfaction as the dependent variable, including the predictor, the moderator, and their interaction term. The significance of the interaction indicated that the effect of victimization on life satisfaction varied depending on perceived relationship quality. For significant interactions, simple slopes analyses were conducted at low (−1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of the moderator, and the results were plotted to visually illustrate the moderation patterns. All moderation results are reported with unstandardized estimates (B), standard errors (SE), 95% confidence intervals (CI), and p-values.

Results

Structural equation model fit and latent associations

A structural equation model tested includes three latent constructs: Victimization, Perception, and Life Satisfaction. Victimization was specified as a latent factor indicated by six forms of student-to-teacher abuse (physical, social, verbal, cyber, sexual, and property). Perception of relationship was specified as a latent factor indicated by four measures of teachers' perceived relationship with different groups (students, colleagues, school administration, and local educational authorities). Life satisfaction was modeled as a latent construct measured as a single factor. The model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(39, N = 1{,}146) = 310.00$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.078 [0.070, 0.086], SRMR = 0.047, CFI = 0.941, and TLI = 0.916. The model of associations with factor loadings on the latent constructs is presented in Figure 2.

The results indicate that the latent constructs were well-defined by their indicators. For the Victimization factor, standardized loadings ranged from 0.555 (Physical abuse) to 0.912 (Verbal abuse); for the Perception factor, loadings ranged from 0.562 (Relationship with students) to 0.716 (Relationship with parents). As expected, the latent factors were significantly related: victimization was moderately negatively associated with relationship perception ($\beta = -0.35$) and with life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.25$, both $p < 0.001$), while relationship perception was positively associated with life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, teachers who experienced more victimization tended to report a more negatively perceived environment and lower life satisfaction, whereas a more positively perceived environment was associated with greater life satisfaction.

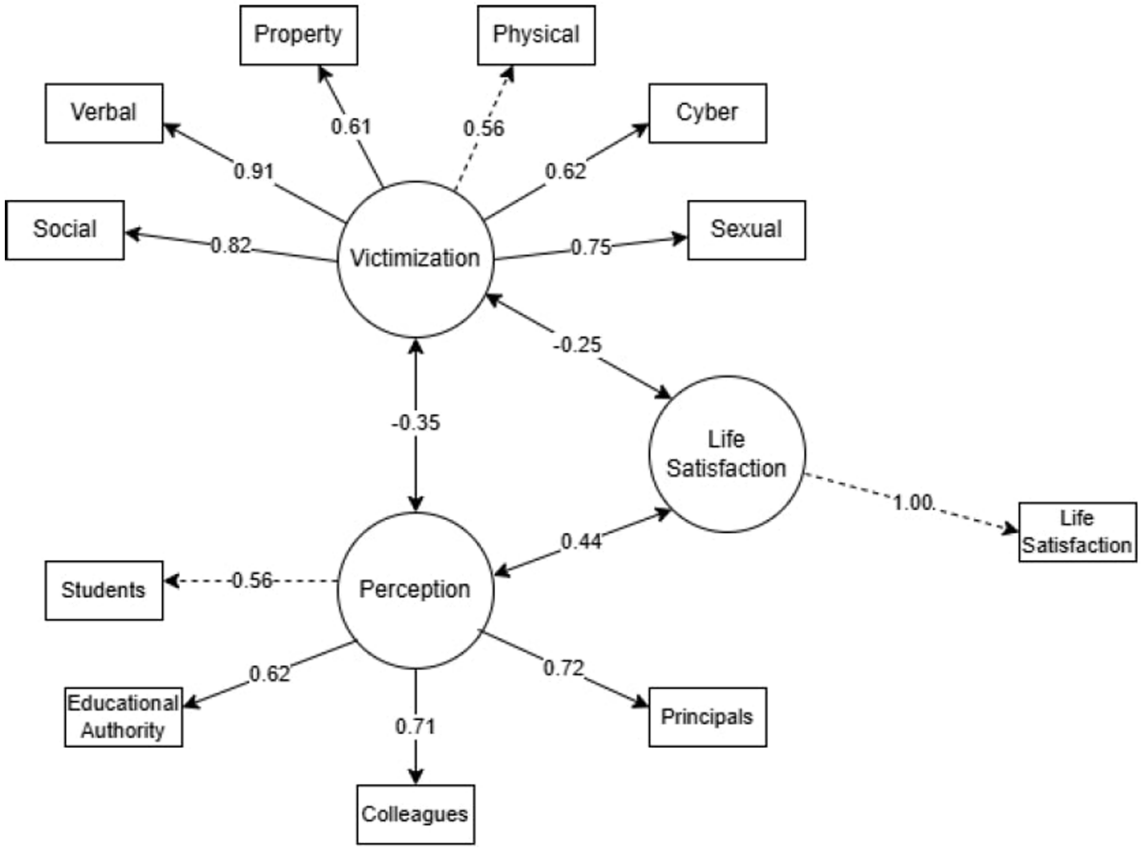


FIGURE 2
Structural equation model of the associations between victimization, perception, and life satisfaction.

Moderation effects

We next examined whether teachers' specific relationship perceptions moderated the relationships between different types of victimization and life satisfaction. Three interaction effects were significant: (1) Cyber victimization × perceived relationship with students, (2) Property victimization × perceived relationship with students, and (3) Physical victimization × perceived relationship with educational authorities. All three interaction terms were statistically significant, indicating that the effect of victimization on life satisfaction varied depending on the quality of teachers' perceived relationships. The moderation effects of perceived relationships on the association between victimization and life satisfaction are presented in Table 1.

The interaction between cyber abuse and perceived relationship quality with students was significant ($B = -0.477$, SE = 0.217, $p = 0.028$). Simple slopes analysis showed that for teachers with high perceived relationship quality with students (1 SD above the mean), greater cyber victimization by students was associated with significantly lower life satisfaction ($B = -0.852$, SE = 0.302, $p = 0.005$). In contrast, for teachers with low perceived relationship quality with students (1 SD below the mean), cyber victimization was not significantly related to lower life satisfaction ($B = -0.225$, SE = 0.139, $p = 0.105$). This pattern suggests that when teachers generally perceive their relationship with students positively, experiencing cyber victimization has a particularly strong negative impact on their life satisfaction (see Figure 3). However, when teachers already perceive their relationship with students negatively, additional cyber victimization does not significantly further reduce their life satisfaction.

Similarly, there was a significant interaction between property-related abuse and perceived relationship quality with students ($B = -0.417$, SE = 0.188, $p = 0.027$). In this case, both simple slopes were significant. For teachers with low perceived relationship quality with students, higher levels of property victimization were associated with lower life satisfaction ($B = -0.380$, SE = 0.131, $p = 0.004$). For teachers with high perceived relationship quality with students, the negative relationship between property victimization and life satisfaction was even stronger ($B = -0.927$, SE = 0.244, $p < 0.001$). Thus, while any property victimization by students was linked to reduced life satisfaction, the decline in life satisfaction was greater among teachers who generally perceived their relationship with students as positive (see Figure 4).

The interaction between physical victimization and perceived relationship quality with educational authorities was also significant ($B = -0.320$, SE = 0.160, $p = 0.046$). For teachers reporting high perceived relationship quality with educational authorities, physical victimization by students was associated with significantly lower life satisfaction ($B = -0.706$, SE = 0.243, $p = 0.004$). However, for teachers with low perceived relationship quality with educational authorities, physical victimization showed no significant relationship to life satisfaction ($B = -0.132$, SE = 0.183, $p = 0.472$). This indicates that being physically victimized by students has a pronounced detrimental

TABLE 1 Moderation effects of perceived relationships on the association between victimization and life satisfaction.

Interaction	Level of moderator	*B*	SE	*p*	95% CI	*Z*
Cyber victimization × perceived relationship with students	Interaction term	−0.477	0.217	0.028	[−0.901, −0.053]	−2.20
Property victimization × perceived relationship with students	Interaction term	−0.417	0.188	0.027	[−0.786, −0.048]	−2.21
Physical victimization × perceived relationship with educational authorities	Interaction term	−0.320	0.160	0.046	[−0.633, −0.006]	−2.00

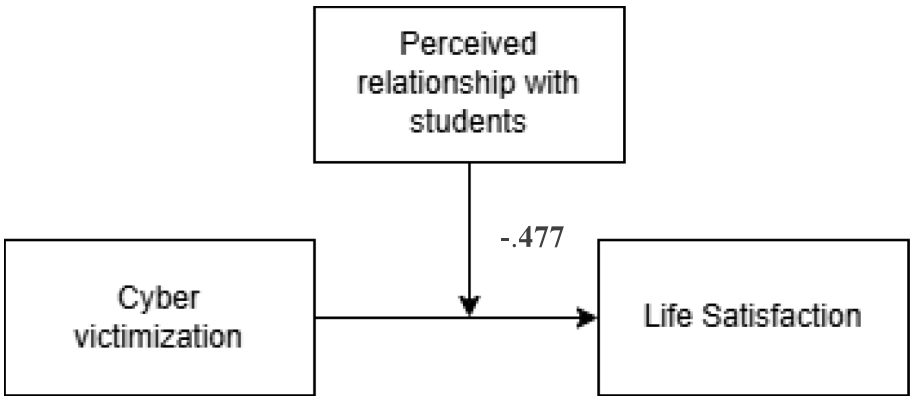


FIGURE 3
Moderating effect of perceived relationship with students on the link between cyber victimization and life satisfaction.

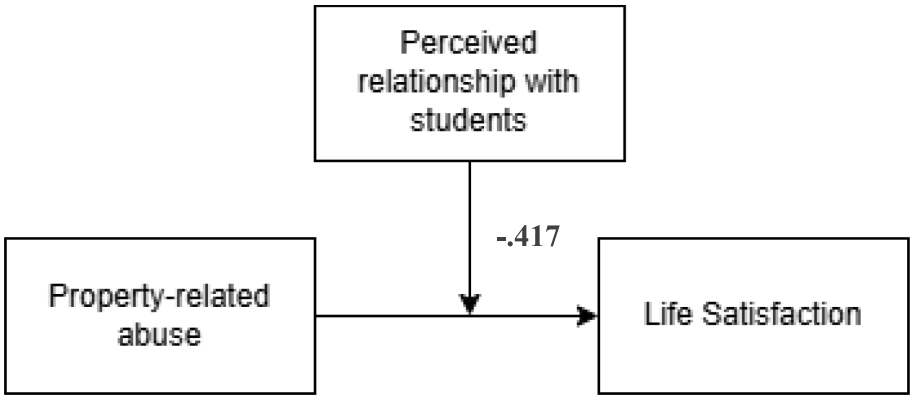


FIGURE 4
Moderating effect of perceived relationship with students on the link between property-related abuse and life satisfaction.

effect on life satisfaction particularly for teachers who otherwise perceive their relationship with educational authorities positively (see Figure 5). Conversely, when such a positive relationship is lacking, physical victimization does not significantly reduce life satisfaction further.

All three moderation analyses revealed an unexpected pattern: rather than buffering the effects of victimization experienced by teachers from students, higher levels of perceived positive relationships (with students or educational authorities) tended to magnify the negative association between victimization and life satisfaction. Teachers who generally perceived better relationships experienced greater declines in life satisfaction when victimized. These results suggest that victimization may be especially harmful to life satisfaction for those teachers who typically perceive positive relationships within their school environment, potentially due to violated expectations of supportive interactions.

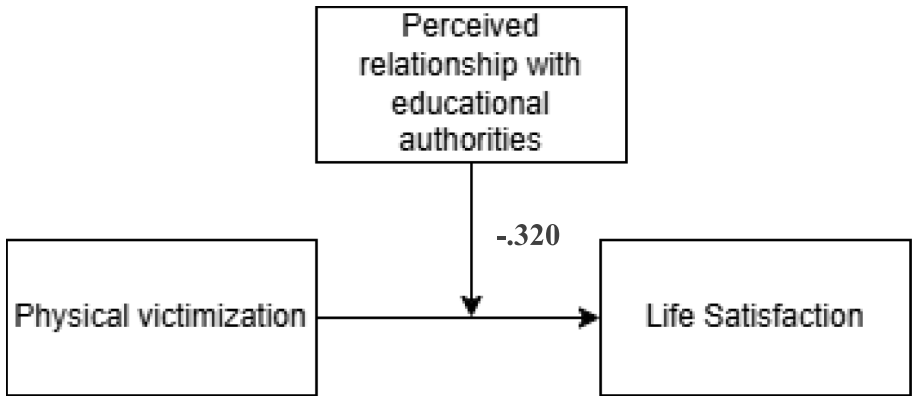


FIGURE 5
Moderating effect of perceived relationship with educational authorities on the link between physical victimization and life satisfaction.

Discussion

Present findings highlight the damaging impact of teacher-directed victimization on educators' well-being. Consistent with expectations, teachers who experienced higher levels of victimization reported lower perceived relationship quality within their school and reduced life satisfaction. Likewise, victimization was directly associated with diminished overall life satisfaction, reflecting the toll that exposure to violence and abuse takes on teachers' broader sense of well-being. This finding is consistent with existing research documenting the adverse effects of victimization on teacher well-being (Corbett et al., 2022; Moon et al., 2021; Olivier et al., 2021; Reddy et al., 2024). In contrast, teachers who felt they had positive, supportive relationships in their school tended to report greater life satisfaction, which supports the notion that a collegial and respectful school climate is a significant resource for teacher well-being. This aligns with prior evidence indicating that teachers' professional commitment is strongly influenced by the quality of their relationships with students, colleagues, school leaders, and educational authorities—relationships that are shaped by emotional dynamics within the broader organizational context of the school (Jo, 2014).

Our findings are consistent with and contribute to the existing body of research on teacher victimization and its implications for well-being. Numerous studies have documented that teachers who are subjected to violence or harassment in schools experience lower job satisfaction and impaired mental health (Hamama et al., 2013; Hepburn et al., 2021). For example, Kapa and Gimbert (2018) found that teachers who encountered frequent rule violations or violence in their schools reported significantly reduced job satisfaction. Such convergence of evidence reinforces that teacher-directed aggression is a serious risk factor for diminished well-being. On the positive side, our finding that supportive school relationships correlate with higher life satisfaction echoes previous research emphasizing the importance of social support and positive school climate for teachers (Kollerová et al., 2023). Previous research has demonstrated that teachers who experience positive relationships with students and colleagues, alongside a strong sense of support from the broader school community, typically report higher levels of job and life satisfaction. For instance, Hamama et al. (2013) demonstrated that both interpersonal support and organizational support were significant contributors to teachers' life satisfaction.

The current findings can also be interpreted in line with research emphasizing that teachers' well-being is shaped not only by individual-level factors but also by the relational and institutional contexts in which they work (Ortega et al., 2012). Our results extend this perspective by demonstrating that the quality of perceived relationships—while generally beneficial—can, under certain circumstances, heighten vulnerability to the negative effects of victimization. This aligns with Ortega's view that relational expectations and the broader climate of coexistence are critical variables in understanding the full emotional impact of aggression in schools. A central contribution of the current study was the identification of perceived relationship quality as a moderator in the association between teacher victimization and life satisfaction. Contrary to the initial hypothesis that high-quality perceived relationships would exert a protective or buffering effect against the negative impacts of victimization, the findings indicate that, in certain contexts, stronger perceived relationships can exacerbate the consequences of victimization. Rather than serving as a protective factor, higher levels of perceived relational support appear to heighten teachers' vulnerability, leading to more pronounced decreases in life satisfaction after experiencing victimization. Similarly to our findings, study done by Yang et al. (2022) shows that teachers who perceive their school environment as more positive and collectively supportive may be more sensitive to the adverse effects of victimization, compared to those in less favorable or cohesive school climates.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research indicating that victimization can undermine the psychological benefits typically associated with social support in the workplace, including peer and organizational support, which are otherwise known to enhance teachers' emotional well-being and overall life satisfaction (Hamama et al., 2013). This pattern indicates that experiences of victimization within an otherwise positive and supportive relational context may constitute a significant breach of expectations, thereby intensifying the emotional impact on the individual. Teachers who typically perceive their school environment as safe, respectful, and supportive may be particularly vulnerable to such incidents, as the violation of these relational expectations can lead to a more profound disruption in their sense of well-being. In

contrast, teachers who already perceive their relationships with students or institutional actors as strained may experience a less pronounced decline in life satisfaction following victimization, potentially due to lower baseline expectations of support. The unexpected moderation pattern observed can be interpreted through the lens of expectation violation and related theoretical frameworks. Our results suggest that the violation of positive expectations is a key mechanism that exacerbates the toll of victimization. Expectancy-violation theory posits that when individuals experience events that sharply contradict their prior expectations in a relationship, the ensuing emotional reaction is particularly intense (Berger et al., 2015). These findings highlight that the context of relational expectations is crucial for understanding the full impact of teacher victimization on well-being.

The findings suggest that the impact of school-based violence on teachers is not solely determined by the severity of the incident itself but is also significantly related to the teacher's pre-existing relational environment and expectations of support. From a theoretical standpoint, the results point to the need for models of teacher life satisfaction that account not only for the protective benefits of supportive relationships but also for the potential psychological vulnerabilities these relationships may introduce when disrupted by unexpected aggression. Future research should further investigate this gap, potentially by assessing teachers' perceived betrayal or cognitive appraisals in the aftermath of victimization.

Limitations and future directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the data was collected using a cross-sectional design, which prevents any conclusions about the direction of effects. Although the results suggest that victimization is associated with lower life satisfaction, and that perceived relationship quality moderates this link, it remains unclear whether these variables influence each other over time. Longitudinal or experimental designs are recommended to better understand causal pathways. Second, some of the instruments used in the study, including the Multidimensional Teacher Victimization Scale and the Teacher Relationship Quality Scale, have not undergone full psychometric adaptation and validation in Lithuania. Although rigorous translation and piloting procedures were applied, the absence of formal validation studies in the Lithuanian context may affect the reliability and comparability of the results. Future research should prioritize the adaptation and validation of these instruments to strengthen measurement accuracy in this cultural setting. Third, the study relied exclusively on self-reported data, which introduces the risk of response biases, such as social desirability or common method variance. Teachers' perceptions of their relationships and experiences of victimization may not fully reflect objective reality. Future studies could incorporate multiple data sources, such as administrative reports, or behavioral observations, to validate and expand on these findings. Also, it is also worth mentioning that the sample consisted predominantly of female teachers in Lithuania, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Gender and cultural norms may shape how teachers perceive victimization and relationships, and how these experiences affect their well-being. Replicating the study in different cultural contexts and with more gender-balanced samples would help determine the extent to which these findings hold across diverse educational environments.

Although the study explored moderating effects, the results revealed unexpected patterns, particularly that stronger perceived relationships with students or educational authorities sometimes amplified the negative impact of victimization. This counterintuitive outcome raises important questions about how expectations, role identity, and relational vulnerability may shape emotional responses to aggression. Future research should explore these psychological mechanisms in more depth, possibly through qualitative approaches or mixed-method designs.

Practical implications

The findings underscore the importance of developing interventions that address both relational and resilience factors. In educational contexts, this means that while fostering positive relationships remains important, professional development programs should also prepare teachers to manage the emotional consequences of relational breaches. Training in boundary-setting, coping strategies, and emotional regulation could mitigate the heightened vulnerability associated with positive relational climates. At the institutional level, schools should establish clear protocols for responding to teacher victimization, ensuring consistent and visible support from leadership. Whole-school approaches, including socio-emotional learning initiatives and conflict resolution programs, could help create safer and more supportive environments for both teachers and students.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the complex links between teacher victimization, perceived relationship quality, and life satisfaction. The results confirm that various forms of victimization by students, including cyber abuse, verbal aggression, physical violence, and property-related offenses, are significantly associated with reduced teachers' life satisfaction, consistent with previous research showing the detrimental effects of teacher-directed aggression on well-being and job satisfaction (Hamama et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2022; Corbett et al., 2022). These findings underscore the serious psychological toll that experienced aggression can take on educators in professional settings where such behaviors may be under-recognized or normalized (Moon et al., 2021; Reddy et al., 2024).

Importantly, the study also explored whether perceived relationship quality with students, colleagues, and educational authorities could serve as a protective factor against the negative consequences of victimization. While higher-quality relationships were generally linked to greater life satisfaction, as suggested by prior work on social and organizational support (Kollerová et al., 2023; Hamama et al., 2013), they did not consistently buffer the harmful effects of victimization. In several cases, the opposite pattern emerged. Specifically, among teachers who reported high-quality relationships with students, greater experiences of cyber victimization were associated with significantly lower life satisfaction. Similarly, property-related victimization had a stronger negative impact on life satisfaction for teachers who perceived strong support from educational authorities.

These unexpected findings suggest that aggression may be more psychologically disruptive when it occurs in environments perceived as supportive or respectful, possibly due to feelings of betrayal, violated expectations, or dissonance between relational ideals and reality. This interpretation is consistent with expectancy violation theory (Berger et al., 2015) and aligns with Ortega et al.'s (2012) perspective on school coexistence, which emphasizes that relational expectations and the broader climate of respect and collaboration are critical in understanding the emotional impact of aggression in schools.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval from the Scientific Committee of the Lifelong Learning Laboratory at Mykolas Romeris University on October 2, 2023, under protocol No. MVGLAB-2023-01. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The ethics committee/institutional review board waived the requirement of written informed consent for participation from the participants or the participants' legal guardians/next of kin because the study involved minimal risk to participants, and obtaining signed consent was impractical due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and their voluntary participation before completing the survey. The waiver was approved by the institutional ethics committee.

Author contributions

RB: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Visualization. AD: Investigation, Data curation, Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization, Software, Validation, Formal analysis. VI: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. VJ: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Software, Validation. OM: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Resources. RP: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. AR: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. MG: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. DS: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Data curation.

Funding

The author(s) declare that financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article. This research received funding from the Lithuanian Education and Science Professional Union.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The authors declare that Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript. Generative AI, specifically ChatGPT (developed by OpenAI), was used for correcting English language grammar.

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