

## Safety Problems at Schools According to School Administrators' Opinions\*

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to define safety problems at schools according to school administrators' opinions. In the study, a case study design from qualitative research methods was employed. The participants of the study were composed of 25 school administrators working in public schools (kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, and high school) in Mardin province. The study group was determined according to the purposeful sampling method maximum variation technique. The saturation criterion was used to decide on the number of participants in the group. In the research, a semi-structured interview form was used to investigate the opinions of the administrators about the safety problems at schools. Descriptive analysis and content analysis were used in the analysis of the data. The findings showed that the school administrators faced safety problems originating from schools, students, and parents. Besides, it was found that these problems had negative effects on psychological, and academic outcomes and relationships with third parties. However, these problems could be solved with structural improvements, psycho-social support, and legal regulations. Finally, recommendations for researchers and practitioners were made based on the results of the study to minimize the safety problems at schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

School safety has become one of the topics of international interest in both educational research and policy in recent years (Barnes, Leite, & Smith, 2017). Studies in educational sciences, social psychology and sociology reveal that the school environment must be safe and secure so that students can focus on learning (Zullig, Ghani, Collins, & Matthews-Ewald, 2017). Accidents, bullying, threats, and increasing violence and victimization among students cause public discussion about the issue of school safety in many countries (Juva, Holm, & Dovemark, 2020). The number of safety problems encountered in educational institutions is increasing and becoming more complex. To ensure and preserve school safety, greater attention needs to be given (Teperi et al., 2018).

Feeling safe is one of the basic needs of the individual (Maslow, 1943). Therefore, concerns about school safety negatively affect students' grades, school attendance and commitment (Fan & Williams, 2018). On the other hand, teacher concerns about school safety can affect how they teach, how they relate to their students, their commitment to school, and finally their decision to stay in the teaching profession (DeVoe, Peter, Noonan, Snyder, & Baum, 2005; Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). Although issues about school safety are discussed from different perspectives such as physical safety, school building safety and pedagogical safety (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Lindström Johnson, 2014), little attention is paid to the role of school administration in creating a safe and secure school environment. For example, in Hudson, Windham, and Hooper's (2015) study on factors associated with fear of school safety and school violence, it was emphasized that measures should have been taken not only by schools but also by parents and communities to alleviate concerns about aggression and safety in schools. Greene (2005) presented a typology of strategies to reduce school violence and outlined procedures for effectively implementing evidence-based programs. In a study conducted by Can (2014) on the perceptions of school safety among teachers and administrators working in high schools, it was found that problems arising from uncontrolled school entrances and exits, student-civilian conflicts at the school exit, substance addiction, and cell phone issues were the most important safety problems experienced by teachers and administrators. Similarly, in Emerce, Şahin, Telli, and Timur (2022) study, it was found that school administrators and teachers were experiencing conflicts that could lead to physical fights in the school, some students were intentionally damaging school property, safety measures were not being taken against potential health problems, and the discipline mechanism in the school was not being operated properly. In the study by Boztuğ and Akyol (2017), it was found that administrators and teachers were inadequate in addressing safety problems due to deficiencies in educational policies, economic inadequacies, lack of education, and negative effects caused by the media, which could lead to larger safety problems over time.

Within this scope, it can be seen that the research generally focuses on security problems in schools or procedures for preventing violence, it neglects the role of safety management, staff competence, and organizational practices in creating safe schools (Martikainen, 2016). However, it may be claimed that one of the primary responsibilities of school administrators is to establish and maintain a safe school. Besides, it is vital that teachers, parents and other school community members contribute to this process and act in cooperation. Considering that school administrators have the greatest responsibility for detecting situations that threaten safety at school and taking measures against it, to learn more about safety issues in schools in-depth and to add to the body of knowledge, it is helpful to gain insight from school administrators.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### *SAFE SCHOOL*

Although there is not a common definition of the school safety concept in the literature, it is noteworthy that there are explanations emphasizing the safe school and its characteristics. Stephens (1995) defines the safe school as a place where students and teachers can learn and teach in a friendly

environment without threat and fear. Caulfield (2000), on the other hand, interprets a safe school as a school where violence is less common, teachers and administrators spend more time on their educational tasks rather than student discipline, everyone perceives himself as important, and students are provided with important opportunities for learning.

In addition, safe schools are places where students, teachers and other employees feel physically, psychologically, and emotionally free (Dönmez, 2001), effective and efficient policies are developed and implemented, necessary precautions are taken before problems occur, and effective intervention programs are applied when problems occur (Dwyer & Osher, 2000). At the safe schools there are no fights, violence, and arguments (Çelik, 2005), all school community members resist unwanted behaviors such as theft, aggression, violence, use of harmful substances, and sexual abuse (Çalık, Kurt, & Çalık, 2011).

### **PROBLEMS AT UNSAFE SCHOOLS**

School safety starts with the students' or teachers' morning commute to the school and includes their commute back from school to their homes (Memduhoğlu & Taşdan, 2007). It is crucial to assess the problems that pose a threat to the development of school safety in this backdrop. To investigate and assess the problems better, the researchers classify the school safety problems. Accordingly, the safety problems that are frequently encountered in schools can be listed as the events of bullying, harassment and theft, cigarette, alcohol, and drug use, vandalism, bringing sharp, injuring, or deadly tools to school, natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods that cause the crisis, emergency situations as fire, armed attack etc. (Dönmez & Özer, 2009; Memduhoğlu & Taşdan, 2007). Işık (2004), on the other hand, lists the security problems at schools in general categories as violence (from friends and teachers), natural disasters, health and hygiene, sexual abuse, psychological and emotional issues, and ethnic and political grounds.

As the students are most vulnerable members of the unsafety, at a reasonably safe school, they are expected to be the most positively influenced group of all the school members. A safe school protects students from peer violence and plays a preventive role in important concerns like natural disasters, health, cleanliness, and sexual abuse (Işık, 2004). When the safe school characteristics are investigated, it is seen that the subject is quite comprehensive and multidimensional. However, school climate is the most frequently noted variable in studies on the characteristics of a safe school. Therefore, it can be said that many of the factors in building a safe school are related to the school climate (Çalık, Kurt, & Çalık, 2011).

### **THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR IN ENSURING SAFETY AT SCHOOLS**

For a school to maintain its existence and meet the educational needs of society, the school community members must work in a certain order. In this context, the duty of the school administrator is to keep in line with its aims by using all human and material resources of the school in the most efficient way. As educational organizations, schools have a planned and regular legal infrastructure and functioning. The understanding of administration in the school is influenced by a host of variables such as the attitudes of administrators, teachers and other school community members, and the socio-economic and political structure of the school environment. The school should try to solve multidimensional problems from various sources in a democratic way, considering their unique aspects (Dönmez, 2001). In this context, taking measures to ensure student safety, detecting, and responding to risks and dangers immediately is the main responsibility of the school administration and is among the most important duties of the administrators (Memduhoğlu & Taşdan, 2007).

What is important in a safe school is the preserving safety standards rather than just establishing a safe structure. Establishing and maintaining a safe school environment is among the most important duties of the school administration. All school community members must feel safe for the organizational goals of the school to be accomplished. When evaluated from this point of view, issues

such as ensuring the safety and security of the school, being prepared for natural disasters, the safety of its physical environment, the proper arrangement of the traffic-related elements around it and taking precautions regarding health and substance abuse are considered within the scope of school safety. In this context, it is important to include school administrators, teachers, parents, and other employees in the process of creating and maintaining a safe school (Turhan & Turan, 2012).

A comprehensive, holistic, and integrated approach should be adopted in addressing school safety. Rather than solely focusing on physical security, health, or prevention of risky situations, the goal should be to establish and maintain safety throughout the entire educational institution (Syrjalainen, Jukarainen, Varri, & Kaupinmaki, 2015). According to this approach, in every action and decision made in the school, the conscious consideration of the health and safety of every individual and the school community is necessary (Boychuk, 2014). Adopting a comprehensive security approach has significant implications for understanding school security management. The management of school security should be seen as an approach that aims to integrate security into every school activity, rather than just complying with health and safety regulations. Therefore, the management of school security should encompass measures and actions related to all school community members and all levels of the school (Díaz-Vicario & Gairín Sallán, 2017).

For students, growing up in an unsafe environment can negatively impact a range of important life outcomes, including mental health, happiness, satisfaction, well-being and earnings (Aldridge, McChesney & Afari, 2019; Reaves, McMahon, Duffy, & Ruiz 2018). In contrast, a safe school environment is generally associated with better academic achievement (Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015). In this regard, although all the school community members have a responsibility to ensure the physical and mental safety of the students, the responsibility largely is on the school administrators (Özer & Dönmez, 2013). In addition to their responsibilities in official procedures such as student affairs, personnel affairs, and financial affairs, they have to undertake an important task in ensuring safety and the importance of this task is increasing day by day. Unless the school becomes safe, it is not possible to have quality education, which is the main function of the school. Considering that ensuring the safety of the child is under the responsibility of the state, as declared in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, schools are the areas where the state has utmost responsibility towards children. It is the responsibility of school administrators as the representative of the state to ensure the safety of students, teachers, and other school community members (Karakütük, Özdoğan Özbal, & Sağlam, 2017). In this context, it is expected from administrators to make their schools physically, socially, and emotionally safe places, and thus, to be a kind of safety expert that allows families and society to trust in the schools (Balyer, 2012).

School administrators affect the school climate in three ways: by managing the disciplinary environment, by being instructional leaders through the direction of the curriculum, and by properly managing internal and external resources and support (Goldring, Huff, May, & Camburn, 2008; Printy, 2008). In this context, how administrators evaluate and perceive the school climate can be related to their instructional and management visions for students, which also affects safety and disciplinary practices in schools. Despite the important role of administrators in creating and directing the disciplinary environment, little information is available about how their perceptions of school safety practices are related to the security measures implemented in schools (Pyo, 2020). In this frame, this study, conducted to ascertain the safety issues experienced in schools from the administrators' views, explored the answers for the research problems listed below:

1. What are the school administrators' views on the reasons for the safety problems at schools?
2. What are the views of school administrators on the effects of safety problems at schools?
3. What are the opinions of school administrators about the measures that can be taken against safety problems at schools?

## **METHOD**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study aiming to reveal the safety problems experienced in schools according to the opinions of school administrators was conducted with the qualitative research method. The case study design, as one of the qualitative research methods, was employed in the research. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a case can be defined as a phenomenon that always occurs in a certain context. Case study, on the other hand, is known as a research approach that investigates a problem in its own context in a detailed and systematic way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) explain studies that give a rich description of the events that occur under natural conditions, using time and space constraints, and various data collection tools, as case studies.

In this study, descriptive case study design (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Merriam, 2009) was used in terms of its purpose and embedded multiple case study design (Yin, 2009) was used in terms of the number of the cases. In the embedded multiple case design, there is more than one case. However, each case included in the research can be studied by dividing it into various sub-units. In this way, it is possible to make a comparison between cases (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In the current study, schools were considered as the limited context and the safety problems in schools were regarded as the constant phenomena. Safety problems in schools were described through the cases experienced by the school administrators, so the reasons and effects of safety problems and the measures that could be taken against these problems were analyzed by dividing them into sub-units.

### **STUDY GROUP**

The study group of this research consisted of 25 school administrators working in public schools (kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, and high school) in the province of Mardin. Maximum variation sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to determine the study group. The saturation criterion was used to decide on the number of participants in the group. When the participants are included in the study according to maximum variation sampling method, they are supposed to bear some characteristics as being related to the problem and similar on their merits, representing the diversity and different cases (Grix, 2010). In the saturation criterion, on the other hand, the data gathering process is completed when the researchers begin to gather similar information from different participants about the phenomenon examined, and when it comes to a point where new information cannot be reached (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). While determining the study group of this research, it was aimed that the school administrators included in the research varied in terms of gender, education level, school level and professional seniority. Nicknames were used in the research to guarantee participants' confidentiality. And when the themes and codes in the interviews were begun to be repeated frequently, in other words, when the saturation point was reached, the interviews were terminated. In this context, the demographic characteristics of the school administrators participating in the research are presented in Table 1.

As seen in Table 1, eight of the administrators participating in the research were female and 17 were male. Considering that school administrators are predominantly male, this distribution in terms of gender can be considered as a natural situation. As regard to professional seniority, nine of the administrators had a seniority of 1-10 years and 16 of them had a professional seniority of 11 years or more. Five of the administrators were working in pre-school, six in primary school, seven in secondary school and seven in high school. 19 administrators had undergraduate degrees and six administrators had graduate degrees.

**Table 1.** *Participants' Demographic Characteristics*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>n</i>
Gender	Female	8
	Male	17
Seniority	1-10 years	9
	11 years and over	16
School Level	Preschool	5
	Primary School	6
	Secondary School	7
	High School	7
Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	19
	Graduate School	6

### DATA COLLECTION

In the research, a semi-structured interview form was used to investigate the opinions of the administrators about the safety problems at schools. Before the final form was created, the literature on safety problems at schools (Akgün & Başar, 2019; Gahungu, 2018; Karakütük, Özdoğan Özbal, & Sağlam, 2017; Sprague & Walker, 2021) was examined and a question pool of 10 open-ended questions (e.g., what kind of safety issues are experienced in schools, what are the reasons of safety problems in schools, what are the effects of safety problems in schools, what measures do you think should be taken regarding the security problems in schools) were written. These questions were sent to three field experts and their opinions were asked. In line with the expert opinions, the number of questions in the form was reduced to five. Afterwards a pilot interview with a school administrator was conducted with the form consisting of five questions and six probe questions. After the interview, the compatibility and clarity of the questions with the aim of the research were examined with the school administrator. The form was finalized with the evaluations and corrections at the end of the pilot interview. Prior to the commencement of the interviews, approval was obtained from Mardin Artuklu University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on 12.01.2022 with approval number 1-9. Afterwards, the participants were reached, informed about the research, and interviews were held at times and places convenient to them. During this process, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants who signed the consent form.

### DATA ANALYSIS

The audio recordings taken before the analysis of data were transcribed in the computer and was ensured to be kept in a safe environment. Afterwards, code names were given to the participants included in the study. Each of the participants, consisting of the principal and assistant principals were given pseudonyms and their real names were kept confidential. Descriptive analysis and content analysis were used in the analysis of the data. Descriptive analysis is more superficial than content analysis and is used in research where the conceptual framework of the research is clearly defined beforehand. In descriptive analysis, direct quotations are frequently used to make the ideas of the interviewees intriguing to readers and the results can be evaluated in a cause-effect relationship (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In content analysis, accessing the basic contents of the information and summarizing the message content are essential. Content analysis is a technique in which historical documents, newspapers, letters, book chapters, books and some words of a text are systematically summarized into smaller categories by coding within the rules (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The main goal in content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that can explain the obtained data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In the data analysis process, only the language errors were corrected, the interview transcripts were read repeatedly by the researchers and the responses related to the research questions were coded, and then the codes were grouped into appropriate themes. The codes

and themes were interpreted descriptively by the researchers. Data analysis was first independently conducted by the researchers, and then a consensus was reached by evaluating divergent views. Directly quoted opinions from participants are presented in italics.

**VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

The interview form, which was created with open-ended questions in the study, was presented to the opinion of experts on school safety and qualitative research before it was applied and feedback was received from them (Patton, 2014). During the implementation phase, necessary explanations were given to the participants about the research before the interviews and the interviews were held in a natural conversation setting. The interviews lasted approximately 30-35 minutes and the responses given by the participants were given in the findings section with direct quotations. In this study, internal validity problems were tried to be solved in this way. To ensure external validity in the study, the reason for choosing the research method was explained, the study group was determined with the purposeful sampling method, the creation of the data collection tool, the data collection process was explained in detail, and the researchers avoided prompting (Cresswell, 2007).

In the research, the internal reliability of the research was increased by preventing data loss by using a voice recorder and transferring the findings to the reader without comment. To ensure external reliability, the researchers used the triangulation technique (Patton, 2014) by creating codes through independent readings of the data. The researchers then worked together to create themes based on these codes and expressed their opinions under a common view. In addition, the consistency of the findings and conclusion sections were also discussed by the researchers and a consensus was reached.

**FINDINGS**

In this study, which aimed to reveal the safety problems experienced in schools according to the opinions of school administrators, the findings obtained from the interviews were categorized under three themes: the reasons for safety problems at schools, the effects of these problems and the measures that can be taken for these problems. Among these, the theme of reasons for safety problems was divided into three categories: school-related problems, student-related problems, and parent-related problems (Figure 1). In this context, the findings were presented under the headings, respectively, in accordance with the sub-objectives of the research, considering of the themes and categories created.

**Figure 1.** *Safety Problems at Schools*



**REASONS FOR SAFETY PROBLEMS AT SCHOOLS**

To reveal the experiences of the administrators regarding the reasons for the safety problems in their schools, they were asked about what caused the safety problems they experienced.

Accordingly, under the theme of the reasons for safety problems at schools, three categories emerged as school-related problems, student-related problems, and parent-related problems. These categories are described below, respectively.

**SCHOOL-RELATED PROBLEMS**

As a result of the interviews with the school administrators, the sub-categories, and codes for the category of school-related problems under the safety problems experienced in schools are given in Table 2.

**Table 2. School-Related Problems**

Category	Sub-Categories	Codes	f
School-Related Problems	Structural Problems	Large number of students	18
		Busy roads near the school	15
		Low classroom windows	6
		The dangers of the school yard ground	5
		The dangers of the wires used in the yard walls	4
		Lack of yard walls	3
	Inadequate Resources and/or Supervision	Unsafe electrical switches in classrooms	2
		Lack of security guards	15
		Unsafe school buses	14
		Unhygienic areas in the school	12
		Unhealthy food in the canteen	9
		The dangers of slippery floors	8
		Shops selling cigarettes around the school	7

As can be seen in Table 2, school-related safety problems were divided into sub-categories of structural problems and inadequate resources and/or supervision. While the subcategory of structural problems is related to both the school building and its annexes and the structural elements in the garden, the problems of lack of resources/supervision are related to both the limited resources (such as the absence of security guards in the school) and the insufficient supervision or the lack of adequate sanctions. When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the biggest school-related safety problem is the large number of students. On this subject, School Administrator Hasan stated that *the crowd in the school caused situations such as collisions or injuries in areas such as corridors and yards*, while School Administrator Kemal stated that *the crowd made it impossible to control and therefore the students could exhibit violent behaviors more easily*. It is understood from these comments that unintentional (such as collisions in the corridors) or intentional (such as acts of violence) safety problems arise due to the large number of students.

Another important problem is the lack of security guards in schools, which are considered under the sub-category of insufficient resources. As it is known, schools employ security guards with their own means. This means that schools in low-resource and low socio-economic environments do not have the budget to employ security guards. Administrator İlyas explained that not having a security guard at the school became an important problem when combined with the region where the school was located, with the following statements:

*Theft incidents are leading safety problems. Every morning when I come to school, I start hoping that no thieves have entered the school. Even though we cannot see substance addicts directly, I have the feeling that they can do something any time. In addition, the presence of people selling harmful substances in the areas around the school worries us.*

**STUDENT-RELATED PROBLEMS**

As a result of the interviews with the school administrators, the sub-categories, and codes for the category of student-related problems under safety problems at schools are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Student-Related Problems**

Category	Sub-Categories	Codes	f
Student-Related Problems	Physical Violence	Violent acts of students from other schools	40
		Students' possession of prohibited substances (cigarettes, sharps, piercing tools)	28
		Damage to the school yard by students out-of-school hours	21
		Climbing the wall, iron and wire in the yard	13
		Breaking classroom windows out-of-school hours	8
	Physical / Verbal Violence	Thefts from the school yard or building out-of-school hours	6
		Peer bullying	15
		Bullying against immigrants	14
	Individual Difficulties	Student disrespect towards teachers	11
		Quarrels about the romantic relationships	7
		Emotional problems	10
		Problems with exam grades	9

As can be seen in Table 3, the category of student-related problems under safety problems at schools were categorized in the subcategories of physical violence, physical/verbal violence and individual difficulties. The reason why physical/verbal violence was categorized under a separate subcategory from the physical violence subcategory was that behaviors such as bullying in this category contain both verbal and physical violence elements. It is seen that the codes in the sub-category of physical violence are sometimes directed to people and sometimes to things. The reason why the code for students' possession of prohibited substances was classified under physical violence is that they could be substances or items that could be used for or cause violence. The most frequently mentioned student-related problem in Table 3 is the violence from the students from other schools to the school's students. For example, according to Administrator Mahmut, *people who are not students of the school usually start fights around the school*. Apart from that, Administrator Esra stated that *sometimes students come to school with sharp objects*. Administrator Şerif, who drew attention to the disrespectful behavior of students towards teachers, stated that *the reason for this situation (disrespect) is the distance education in schools due to the effect of Covid-19*.

**PARENT-RELATED PROBLEMS**

The sub-categories and codes for the category of parent-related problems under safety problems at schools are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Parent-Related Problems**

Category	Sub-Categories	Codes	f
Parent-Related Problems	Attitudes and Behaviors Towards Teachers	Prejudice against teachers	31
		Frequent complaints and harassment of school management and teachers	6
		Violent behavior towards teachers	4
	Parenting Styles	Taking a side in the arguments among students	12
		Making trouble for students' grades	10
		Having a defensive attitude in students' problems at school	9
	Economic Reasons	Not supporting school economically	14

As can be seen in Table 4, the statements in the category of parent-related problems under safety problems at schools were classified in three sub-categories: attitudes and behaviors towards teachers, parenting styles and economic reasons. When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that parents, who are expected to assume the role of problem solver can also be the source of problems just like students. The findings show that we can find the reason for the parent-related problems mostly in the attitudes and behaviors towards the teaching profession. Violence caused by parents has become so likely that Administrator Elif expressed her thoughts as the school administration and teachers were

under pressure from parents, they were at risk of being victims of violence at any moment. Administrator İlyas, on the other hand, pointed out a cause-effect chain emerged with the combination of attitudes towards teachers and parenting styles. He stated that *he was worried that the parents would be prejudiced because of the wrong information given by the students, and that they would use violence against the school staff or students*. It was stated that parents did not support the school economically which might also be a reason for the sub-category of inadequate resources of school-related problems category in Table 2. Administrator Mahmut stated that although the parents were from a good financial profile, they did not support the school even for the important needs of the school.

### EFFECTS OF SAFETY PROBLEMS AT SCHOOLS

As a result of the interviews with the school administrators, the categories and codes related to the theme of the effects of safety problems at schools are given in Table 5.

**Table 5.** *The Effects of Safety Problems*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>f</i>
The Effects of Safety Problems at Schools	Psychological Effects	Anxiety and insecurity	29
		Fear and panic	24
		Permanent psychological problems	9
		Fear of school	5
	Academic Effects	Difficulty of administration	31
		Students' and teachers' request for school change	19
		Lack of motivation of employees	14
		Teachers' difficulties in establishing classroom management	13
		Student absenteeism	10
		Significant decrease in lesson efficiency	9
		Negative image in the media	17
	Relationship with the Third Parties	Problems with parents	13
		Problems between administrators and the Ministry of National Education [MoNE]	11

As can be seen in Table 5, three categories emerged under the theme of the effects of safety problems at schools. These categories were named as psychological effects, academic effects, and relationships with the third parties. When Table 5 is examined, safety problems at school cause temporary or permanent psychological effects, such as anxiety and fear, mostly on students. According to Administrator Demet safety problems might create a feelings of insecurity, unrest, anxiety, fear and insecure environment. In the interviews, it was stated that psychological effects caused anxiety and fear not only on students but also on teachers and parents; for example, it was stated that some parents were worried about their children could get harmed. The point that the majority of the administrators participating in the study pointed out was that the psychological effects of safety problems ultimately affect academic achievement and education in a negative way. Administrator Ali summarized this situation as follows:

*Students can be considered as the first and most important group affected by such safety problems. Because they are the most vulnerable. Students become reluctant and they experience serious decreases in motivation at schools with safety problems, they develop negative affect towards the school, as well.*

Administrator Kahraman stated that safety problems harmed the academic and psycho-social development of students, and students who were the victims of violence could request a school change. Administrator Şinasi, on the other hand, stated that not only the students but also the teachers

would be successful in an environment where they would feel safe, and argued that both teachers and administrators would not be able to perform effectively in schools with safety problems.

**MEASURES TO BE TAKEN FOR SAFETY PROBLEMS IN SCHOOLS**

As a result of the interviews with school administrators, the categories and codes related to the theme of the measures that can be taken against safety problems at schools are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6.** *Measures to be Taken for Safety Problems in Schools*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>f</i>
Measures to be Taken for Safety Problems	Structural Improvements/Increasing Resources	Having security personnel at schools	22
		Having security cameras that see all areas of the school	21
		Having school cops	17
		Regular hygiene maintenance at the school	16
		Equipping the schools to meet physical needs	13
		Increasing the school yard safety	15
		Increasing the safety at school buses	13
		Building safe school yard walls	8
		Employing security teams roaming around the school during teaching hours	7
		Building schools away from busy roads	6
		Adjusting window heights according to safety criteria	5
		Providing trained personnel for boiler rooms	3
		Installing electrical panels in suitable places where students do not enter	2
		Psycho-social Support	Increasing parent-teacher communication
	Creating a positive school climate		18
	Rehabilitation of violent students		14
	Increasing the prestige of teachers and administrators		10
	Legal Regulations	Increasing the activities by which students will discharge their energy	4
Removal of high school education from compulsory education		12	
		Ensuring the implementation of disciplinary rules	11

As can be seen in Table 6, the measures that can be taken against the safety problems at schools were grouped in three categories: structural improvements/increasing resources, psycho-social improvements and legal regulations. Considering the codes based on participant views, it is clear that school administrators see the solution mostly in structural improvements and increasing resources. The most cited measure as structural improvement/resource increase was the employment of security staff. According to Administrator Ahmet, in addition to having security staff, night guards and police should be more careful around the school.

The administrators participating in this research claimed that psycho-social support could be a solution to safety problems as well. For example, Administrator Uğur marked the effect of psycho-social support at the school as follows:

*One way to ensure school safety is to create a positive climate at school. There is less conflict in such schools. In addition, it is necessary to create activities where young people will spend their energy. Disciplinary rules should be reminded to the students by the class counselors in the classrooms and they should be posted where they can see them. The number of sports and cultural activities should be increased at school and students should be encouraged to participate in these activities.*

Leyla, one of the school administrators, drew attention to the importance of communication within the scope of measures to prevent safety problems. According to the administrator Leyla, the

school administration's good relations with both teachers and parents could prevent many safety problems. On the other hand, Administrator Mahmut put forward a view that might be radical by suggesting that high school education should not be compulsory, he expressed his thoughts in the following sentences:

*It is necessary to change the rule of compulsory education. Students who do not want to get educated cause many discipline problems. While trying to rehabilitate these young people, we are in danger of losing the other students. Volunteer participation in education should be essential in high school education; Students who do not want to study should be directed to vocational education.*

## DISCUSSION

With this research, it was aimed to examine the safety problems at schools in depth according to the opinions of school administrators. The findings shows that school building and facilities, students and parents might cause safety problems at schools in various ways. School-related safety problems include the large number of students, lack of security staff, unsafe school busses, busy roads around the school, unsafe school yards, hygiene problems and unhealth food. There are other studies in the literature that support these findings. Especially studies about small and large schools show that problems involving negative behaviors occur less in small schools with a small number of students than in large schools (Cotton, 1996). Similarly Bakioğlu and Polat (2002) draw attention to the increase in crime rates in crowded schools; Ekici and Burgaz (2009) showed that crowded schools as the cause of undesirable student behavior.

The harm from the students of other schools, the damage to the school yard in out-of-school hours, students' possession of prohibited substances are the main student-related safety problems at school. These problems can be associated with the lack or shortage of security guards at schools, which is one of the school-related problems. Both the harm from outside students to the students in the school and damage to the school yard in out-of-school hours, damage to the building or the facilities are directly related to the absence or insufficiency of the security personnel responsible for ensuring safety at the school. According to the results of the research, student violence in schools negatively affects the functioning of the school. On the subject, Debarbieux (2009) states that violence caused by students in schools disrupts the administrative structure of the school and the academic functioning of the classrooms. Türkmen (2004), on the other hand, reveals that students who are exposed to violent behavior tend to show violence to their other friends and that these students, who cause safety problems, also affect other students negatively in behavioral terms.

Regarding the parent-related safety problems, the administrators mostly experience problems with parents such as being prejudiced against teachers, not supporting the school economically, taking a side in the arguments among students and causing problems at school for their children's exam grades. It can be said that these problems have been experienced due to the loss of reputation of the teaching profession in recent years and the gradual decrease in respect for teachers (Başkara, 2017). In the past, teaching profession was one of the most respected professions in the society. However, based on the opinions of school administrators today, it can be argued that due to the gradual decrease in trust and respect for teachers and the school, parents cause problems such as questioning teachers' decisions, objecting to exam grades, harrassing educators and not supporting the school financially.

In the study, it was concluded that safety problems at schools have negative effects on the psychological well-being of the school members, academic outcomes and third-party relations. Specifically, it was revealed that the safety problems experienced in schools might cause unrest, fear and panic on students, cause permanent psychological problems and cause them to experience school fear. In the context of academic effects, it was found that safety problems make school administration difficult, cause students and teachers to want to move to other schools, reduce the motivation levels

of school staff, cause teachers to have difficulties in classroom management and increase student absenteeism. Considering the effects on relations with the third parties, it was seen that the reflection of safety problems in the media causes the school to display a negative image and causes the administrators to have new problems with both parents and the MoNE. Based on these results, it can be said that an unsafe school environment has many negative academic and psychological effects on both teachers, administrators and students. Different studies support this finding; in a study conducted by Jacobson, Riesch, Temkin, Kedrowski and Kluba (2011), it was revealed that children who do not feel safe at school may have problems such as absenteeism, stress and anxiety, and emotional problems due to the feeling of insecurity. According to the study by Çalık, Kurt, and Çalık (2011), when the necessary emphasis is not put on creating a safe school, the processes related to teaching activities are also negatively affected. Çankaya and Arabacı (2010), who reveal a negative relationship between the perception of safety and the level of anger, emphasize that existing safety problems, such as the inability to control anger, lead to new ones that can result in violence.

In the research, school administrators offered concrete suggestions and practical solutions for the measures that can be taken for safety problems. In this context, it was revealed that administrators express solution-focused measures such as employing security personnel, having security cameras that see all the areas of the school, increasing parent-teacher communication and creating a positive school climate. This finding is in line with other research findings. In a number of research it is pointed that the use of security cameras in the school has positive effects on ensuring school security, although it is not sufficient on its own. Increasing communication and interaction and establishing positive human relations are as important as technological tools and physical solutions in preventing safety problems at schools (Dönmez, 2001; Dönmez & Özer, 2009; Turhan & Turan, 2012). Yıldırım, Akan and Çiftçi (2018) state that in addition to security camera systems, it is important to get support from the parent-teacher association, to regularly monitor the duties of teachers, and to report security problems to the authorities in a timely manner in ensuring school safety. Delice and Arslan (2018) concluded that the school building structure, yard walls, stairs, security cameras and security guards are important factors for school safety.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As in the developed countries, educators, policy developers, parents and students in Turkey pay more attention to the school safety as it has irreversible consequences on all the members of the school. Besides pointing to a vital issue in education and adding to the literature by exploring the first hand experiences of school administrators, this research bears some limitations. First of all, the fact that the research is designed entirely based on a qualitative research design is a limitation. This situation is related to the inability to generalize the results obtained in qualitative research to the population. In this context, it is thought that this limitation will be overcome by conducting future studies that use both quantitative and qualitative research designs together on this subject. Moreover, as expected in qualitative research, it focused on a certain context and was conducted in a comparatively small city in Turkey. The experiences of those working in big cities and more urbanized schools would surely be different. This is why, it can be recommended to the researchers to run their studies in different settings. The comparative experiences of school administrators from big and small cities could be helpful in developing school-based or region-based solutions. Another limitation of the study is the weak gender diversity among the participants. In this study, the vast majority of participants consist of male administrators. In future research, this limitation can be overcome by conducting research with participants who have a more balanced distribution in terms of gender. Another limitation is that the research focused on the opinions of school administrators, yet teacher, student and parent experiences can depict a different angle. The studies reflecting the opinions of other important members of the school can present a holistic view. Therefore, renewing the research with different school community members in the future will contribute to the literature.

With this research, the issue of security problems occurring in schools, which closely concern all members of the school at the level of administrators, teachers, parents, and students, and which constantly maintains its relevance, has been addressed within the scope of administrator views and important results have been obtained. Accordingly, the research concluded that the security problems experienced in schools primarily stem from issues related to the school, students, and families. The research revealed that security problems in schools have negative psychological and academic effects on both students, teachers, and parents. The research also demonstrated that individuals affected by security problems encounter issues in their relationships with third parties, such as administrators and family members. The importance of increasing resources that enhance school safety, providing all school community members with the necessary psychosocial support related to the issue, and making appropriate changes to and implementing legal regulations was emphasized in the research to prevent security problems in schools. In this context, it is believed that the study will provide important contributions to both the relevant literature and practical applications in educational organizations.

As a matter of fact, it is known that ensuring school safety is a prerequisite for increasing the quality of education and obtaining successful student outcomes. Without a sense of safety, administrators, teachers, and other members of the school staff cannot work as effectively to accomplish the school's aims and objectives or give their contributions at their best effort. Again, for the students feeling unsafe it would not be as easy to focus on their learning tasks and fulfil their social development or reach to the fullest of their academic performance. For these reasons, in order to ensure that all school community members can benefit from education and training activities at the highest level by being in a safe environment where they feel peaceful and comfortable, the following suggestions based on the research findings have been developed to improve school safety:

a) Security staff should be employed at the schools and the schools should be equipped with security cameras, especially in the high-risk areas where the general crime rates are high. The schools should be supported financially to apply these measures.

b) In order to minimize safety problems in schools and to facilitate disciplinary controls, the class sizes should be arranged in accordance with the health and education standards, and the total number of students in schools should be kept at an optimum level.

c) The school buildings should be constructed away from the busy roads, and the places that can pose potential threats to the students. During the construction of school buildings, attention should be paid to its location both in terms of road safety and in terms of threats that students may encounter in and around the school.

d) A positive school climate should be created in schools, and in this context, social activities, which will increase the interaction of administrators, teachers and parents, such as picnic organizations and school fairs should be organized.

### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

First author planned, supervised and collected all data and also contributed for academic writing process. Second author contributed to the methodology, design, and analysis of the findings and to the writing of the manuscript. The third author contributed to the methodology, design, analysis of the findings, and interpreting the results. All authors also discussed design process of the research, academic writing process and commented on the manuscript throughout the entire process.

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