

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Youth Witnessing Violence in Thailand: The Cultural and Political Influences

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to learn about rates of witnessing violence among high school students in Thailand, with special emphasis on the country's Southern Muslim provinces where ongoing terror reflects their struggle for independence. Seventh to 10th grade students were randomly sampled from three areas of Thailand, representing inner cities, rural areas, and the Muslim-dominated South. The sample consisted of 1,305 youths: 763 (58.5%) females. Rates of witnessing violence are high among Thai youths, and are similar to those reported in the USA. The highest rates were found in the Southern Muslim provinces, especially in their homes and communities, and were higher among males than among females. The rural areas scored high on some of the witnessing violence variables, reflecting the changes taking place in the rural areas of Thailand. The results were analyzed in light of political, religious and cultural reasons related to youth witness violence in Thailand.

**Keywords:** violence, youth, cultural and political influences, Muslim, Thailand

The rates of witnessing violence among youth in a given society are derived from the violence rates in that society. The personal, familial, school, and community spheres, as well as peers and the society's culture, all have an impact on the rates of violence and hence, on witnessing violence. Witnessing violence is studied, along with violence and victimization, as a social indicator of the society. Studies might include the direct witnessing of violence or victimization as well as indirect experiences through the media or hearing about violence. In addition to its contribution to the study of violence and victimization, the

witnessing violence phenomenon can make a unique contribution to the study of victimology. Perpetrators and victims aside, witnessing violence reflects a large hidden sector in society consisting of individuals who do not necessarily take a direct part in violent events, but who are influenced by the phenomenon because they see it or hear about it, mainly via the media. From an ecological viewpoint, witnessing violence should be studied across cultures and various social groups, for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its effects, and for tailoring appropriate culture-sensitive preventive measures and interventions to address the

problem. Witnessing violence influences people in many ways, a fact that justifies its research. The aim of the present study was to learn about the current rates of witnessing violence among high school students in three distinct regions of Thailand—urban provinces, rural provinces, and for the first time, the Southern Muslim provinces.

## Witnessing Violence

Witnessing violence is an elusive construct, with different definitions that are used interchangeably (Sherer & Sherer, 2011). The professional literature describes witnessing violence through several different concepts: “exposure” (Choe, Zimmerman, & Devnarain, 2012), “violence exposure” and “actual exposure” (Fredland, Campbell, & Han, 2008), “indirect exposure” (e.g., Kerley, Xu, Sirisunyaluck, & Alley, 2010), “community violence exposure” (e.g., Lee, 2012) which includes both witnessing and victimization, “exposure to and witnessing of violence” (Tillyer, Tillyer, Miller, & Pangrac, 2010) as meaning witnessing violence, and “chronic community violence” (Lambert, Nylund-Gibson, Copeland-Linder, & Jalongo, 2010). Some researchers combined victimization and violence exposure (Choe et al., 2012), whereas others included hearing about instances of violence in their study of the phenomenon (Trickett, Durán, & Horn, 2003). Besides the definitional inconsistency, the study of witnessing violence has been complicated further by the use of different measurement tools. One example of this is the time frame; some studies addressed violence witnessed over the last year and others examined the phenomenon over the last three months, creating an obstacle to comparison and generalization. The interchangeable use of the different definitions assumes that the different violent events have equal magnitude (Trickett et al., 2003). Hence, the phenomenon and its scope is grossly misunderstood, leading to the development of inappropriate theories, which in turn, leads to misguided decisions about policy and intervention programs. Based on the above-mentioned definition, we define the term “witnessing violence” as directly witnessing or

hearing acts and threats of verbal, physical, sexual, and psychological violence, perpetrated against and by other people. The literature indicates that being violent, experiencing family violence, as well as violence in school and in the community all create higher rates of witnessing violence (Karriker-Jaffe, Foshee, Ennett, & Suchindra, 2009; Kennedy, 2008; Spano, Vazsonyi, & Bolland, 2009; Cunningham, 2003).

## Theoretical Background

Given that there are no witnessing violence specific theories, three leading theories (Siegel, 2006) that explain victimization may be adopted to explain witnessing violence. The routine activities theory emphasizes the opportunity perspective (Cohen & Felson, 1979). This theory suggests that victimization (and thus witnessing violence) is closely linked to the individual’s association with or exposure to violent peers, and the lack of peer support, guidance, and guardianship. The lifestyle theory (Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978) suggests that victimization (and thus witnessing violence) is part of the individual’s lifestyle.

Individuals’ behavior exposes them to situations that put them at risk. Youth behaviors, such as associating with violent peers, going out late at night, taking drugs and drinking, increase their risk of witnessing violence. The deviant place theory (Stark, 1987) is an ecological theory of crime emphasizing the correlation between variations in neighborhood characteristics and deviance and crime. Youth living in disorganized neighborhoods with high crime rates are at the highest risk of witnessing violence. Residing in “bad” or “problematic” neighborhoods, or being exposed to dangerous places, raises the likelihood of becoming a crime victim (in our case, of witnessing violence).

The ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) explains that the family subsystems (the microsystem), the community (the exosystem), and the society (the macrosystem) have a joint impact on how children grow up and shape their personalities and behavior. The behavioral theory emphasizes the learning process that involves modeling from the surrounding

subsystems such as family, friends, community, and school (Bandura, 1986). These two theories are very meaningful for our study, incorporating the possible influences that according to our understanding shape violence and thus witnessing violence rates. The ecological and behavioral theories emphasize the effects of the personal, familial, school, peer, and community subsystems, and societies' influences. It is on these effects that I will focus our study in the attempt to learn about and explain the phenomenon and the levels of witnessing violence among Thai youth.

### **The Scope of the Problem**

Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, and Kracke (2009) conducted a nationwide survey in the US regarding the exposure to violence among children under 17. They found that approximately 60% of the children surveyed had been exposed either directly or indirectly to violence in the past year, 25.3% had witnessed a family assault or community violence in the past year, 46.3% had been exposed to a physical assault, 60.6% had experienced or witnessed one or more cases of direct victimization, and many had experienced more than one exposure. Margolin et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study (three annual assessments) of four types of violence exposure: marital physical aggression, mother-to-youth aggression, father-to-youth aggression, and community violence. They indicated that over half of the youth had experienced multiple types of violence exposure in each wave of data collection. Lambert et al. (2010) performed a longitudinal study of exposure to community violence among sixth, seventh and eighth grade urban African American youth, and found that 20% of the participants experienced the most persistent involvement with community violence.

### **Where Do Youth Witness Violence?**

Slovak and Singer (2001) showed that the highest rate of witnessing violence among the

youth takes place in school (approximately 80%) followed by witnessing violence in the community, and at home (approximately 50% each). Sherer and Sherer (2011) indicated similar results in Thailand: 61.8% of their study participants witnessed violence in school, followed by 46.6% who witnessed violence in the community. In a very recent study, Sherer and Sherer (2014) found that although rates of witnessing violence among Thai youths were high, they were similar to those reported in the West. Hitting and punching in school was the most frequently witnessed violent act.

### **Effects of Witnessing Violence**

The effects of witnessing violence are enormous and devastating. Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, and Kenny (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 118 studies and found that exposure to interparental aggression is associated with significant disruptions in children's psychosocial functioning. In a meta-analysis of studies of victimization and witnessing violence, Fowler, Tompsett, Braciszewski, Jacques-Tiura, and Baltes (2009) found that children's and adolescents' exposure to community violence causes a unique form of trauma that is particularly associated with the development of PTSD symptoms and negative mental health symptoms. Moreover, they found that PTSD symptoms were equally predicted by victimization, witnessing, or hearing about community violence. Witnessing violence in the community was found to affect youth violence (Karriker-Jaffe et al. 2009; Kennedy, 2008; Spano et al. 2009). Witnessing interparental violence was associated with own child abuse (Cunningham, 2003). Community violence exposure was found to be related to youths' academic functioning (Hurt, Malmud, Brodsky, & Giannetta, 2001; Schwartz & Gorman, 2003). Slovak and Singer (2001) found that rural youth who witnessed gun violence were more susceptible to anger, dissociation, posttraumatic stress and total trauma, higher levels of violent behaviors, and exposure to violence in other settings.

## The Research Setting: Thai Society

The traditional Thai society observed Buddhism, which stresses compassion, harmony, responsibility, and caring for others (Hoffman, Demo, & Edwards, 1994; Klausner, 2002). Thai children were expected to respect their parents and their religion and Thai girls were educated to behave properly from an early age. These messages were conveyed directly by role models, such as parents, relatives, and significant others, and indirectly, such as through mass media, books, songs, or religious and other cultural practices. Girls learned to be caring, self-sacrificing, pleasant, friendly, and yielding to others' demands, particularly of men and especially of seniors. They were expected to become good, subordinate housewives, to be less ambitious than men, and to value submissive behavior (Klausner, 2002), whereas men were trained to be "real men" or "heroes" (Ogena & Kittisuksathit, 1997).

In recent decades, Thailand's increased economic prosperity has led to westernization, urbanization, and changes in cultural and religious norms. Today, Thai society is in transition, experiencing socioecological and socioeconomic changes in many aspects of life. Industrialization and urbanization are increasing, fertility rates are declining, and the population is aging. Aspirations to higher education are increasing, and coupled with the need for labor in the manufacturing industry, this gives way to a new form of social structures. Thai youth are leaving their natal communities to find better schools and workplaces. The traditional village social network, which was based on the extended family and kinship relations, is changing, and traditional Thai values are undergoing a dramatic transformation. Thai society is becoming more independent, egalitarian, aggressive, confrontational, litigious, and competitive (Klausner, 2002; Rigg, Veeravongs, Veeravongs, & Rohitarachoon, 2008; Vuttanont, Greenhalgh, Griffin, & Boynton, 2006; Yoddumnern-Attig, 1992). Thai society is becoming more violent as well; the political, business, and bureaucratic elite, who serve as role models, behave in aggressive ways, which, in turn leads to higher rates of violence in society (Klausner, 2002).

Thai society is experiencing the coexistence of traditional and Western values and norms. Thai parents have less control over their children, resulting in adolescents' confused identity and increasing behavioral problems (Vuttanont et al. 2006). Today's Thai youth are less diffident and docile in their behavior; they accept challenges and are not easily deterred. Higher numbers of Thai girls participate in the labor market, and leave their homes in search of better opportunities for higher education and work. This reality, along with other lifestyle changes, has led to new ways of dating, sometimes without the parents' consent. Vuttanont et al. (2006) found that the desire to become "Western," while simultaneously retaining their traditional submissiveness, has led to the girls' confusion. They found that approximately 43% of Thai girls aged 17 or under reported having sexual intercourse, and approximately 25% of them became pregnant. Living away from home carries implications for youth witnessing of violence.

Nevertheless, the Thai family is still the source of behavior codes and ethics; children take care of their parents in old age and seniors are highly respected by younger people, especially in rural areas (Limanonda, 2010). Due to adherence to Theravada Buddhism, the core ideology of family roles and duties has remained relatively constant (Yoddumnern-Attig, 1992).

This article deals with three provinces of Thailand, one of which is a Southern province of Thailand, a region with special characteristics. The tension in Thailand's three Southern Islamic provinces began in the 1960s, when a national Muslim movement aspiring for independence began to instigate terror attacks. Thanks to an amnesty program, the violence had largely subsided by the late 1980s, but the conflict was not resolved. Between 1979 and the end of 2003, the deaths of 233 people were attributed to political violence (Melvin, 2007). The conflict escalated on January 4, 2004, when gunmen attacked an army camp in the Narathiwat province and 20 schools and two police posts in the province were torched. Tires were burnt simultaneously on many roads in the Yala province (Melvin, 2007). Since then, the violent conflict has been perpetuated by extreme Islamist terror group and Thai-Buddhist vigilante squads are also involved

in the fighting (Askew, 2008). Hence, terror attacks are an ongoing reality in Thailand, claiming many victims and disturbing the peace of the residents in the South. This includes attacks on police, army forces, and official government workers (such as the killing of teachers and burning of schools) which reflects a political struggle of the Thai government to assimilate the Malay Southern people to the Thai country, a religious aspect – the difference of the Buddhist Thai and the Muslims Malay people, and a cultural aspect, a struggle of the Malay people for maintaining their culture against the efforts of the Thai society to narrow the cultural differences between these two sections of the Thai society.

The Southern conflict is rooted in cultural differences between the Malay people of the South from the Thai culture. Liow (2009) claimed that the armed insurgency has not changed in the last one hundred years, rooted in the specific cultural, historical, and political milieu of the Malay-dominated Deep South. Joll, (2010) thought that the conflict remains rooted in insecurity about cultural and ethnic identity, and historical grievances. In his study of the five Southern provinces, Ruohomaki (1997) claimed that there are some behavioral distinctions between the South and other parts of Thailand, which are probably related to ecology, family process, local history, and culture. He recognized a Southern regionalism, which is driven by political and cultural alienation, manifested by feeling of dislike for the central government and its representatives, and pride in the local dialect, culture, and history. Satha-Anand (1987) studied the violence in the Deep South and found a cultural diversity in the region—the Malay-speaking at home Muslims differ from the Thai-speaking at home Muslims who are much more assimilated. Albritton (2010) found differences of values and social attitudes of the Thai and Muslim people of the South. Thus, for example, regarding trust of people, 18.8% of the Southern people agreed to this attitude compared with 47.8% of the rest of Thailand people. Moreover, Albritton (2010) found that the Malay-speaking Muslims are different from other Muslims; and that their sympathy for the insurgency lies not in religion, but with loyalty to specific forms of Malay culture that characterizes the region.

We expected that the special surrounding of the youth in the Southern provinces would be indicated in higher witnessing of violence in this area, this should be the case when comparing city and rural areas – the city youth should have higher witnessing of violence, given higher violence rates in cities. The males should have higher witnessing violence rates than the females, who are more restricted by the Thai culture.

## **Methods**

### **Sample**

Aside from Bangkok, which was chosen to represent city and the Thai reality at large, the sample was randomly drawn using a systematic sampling method from two other regions of the Thai society. The first was one rural province that was randomly chosen from among all the rural areas of Thailand, and the second was randomly chosen from the three Southern Muslim provinces in the South. In each region, we randomly chose, using a systematic sampling method, two high schools, and in each high school, we randomly chose two classes from each of the seventh to tenth grades, again using a systematic sampling method, to participate in the study. All the students who were present on the day that the questionnaires were administered were included in the study. The final sample consisted of 1,305 youths: 542 (41.5%) males and 763 (58.5%) females.

### **Procedure**

The research ethics committee of the university approved the study. Students received letters explaining the research goal and their right not to participate in the study. Anonymity was assured. Ten students chose not to participate.

### **Instruments**

The research was based on a structured self-report questionnaire, which included a Thai translation of some scales originally written in English. All the

questionnaires were adapted to the Thai reality. For this purpose, we asked several groups of Thai youths for their views about the topics. We also consulted experts in the field of youth violence. A police officer spoke to us about the legal aspects of youth behavior and made suggestions regarding topics that should appear in the questionnaires. Later, he reviewed the questionnaire. The instruments that were originally in English were translated from English into Thai by three professional English to Thai translators; they were then back-translated by three other translators to verify accuracy. When possible, we compared our translation to other Thai translations. We pretested the questionnaire with several groups of students and appropriate adjustments were made. The following instruments were employed in the study:

**Individual attributes** were measured by: gender, age, religion, and religiosity (performing religious practices: 0 = *never* to 4 = *regularly*), weekly allowance, working status, working hours a day, monthly income, number and gender of siblings, birth order, and average grade score last year. Use of drugs and alcohol was measured by the questions: "During the last year: How often did you use soft drugs? How often did you use hard drugs? How often did you drink alcohol?" The response scale ranged from 1 = *never* to 7 = *every day*.

**Family characteristics** included parents' age, education, religious observance (0=*never* to 4=*regularly*), profession, occupation and work status, abuse of alcohol ("How often does (did) your father drink alcohol?" 1=*never* to 6=*every day*), family income, economic status, and family structure.

### Witnessing Violence Questionnaire

The witnessing violence questionnaire is based on Dulmen, Belliston, Flannery, and Singer's (2008) exposure to violence scale. We adapted the scale to the Thai reality. The scale included 37 questions regarding witnessing violence in the last three months for each of the following places: witnessing violence at home (37 variables), in school (37 variables), and in the community (37 variables). The answering scale ranged from 1= *never* to 5 = *almost every day*. The description of each witnessing violence incidence was emphasized, so that its meaning became clear. This

was done in order to get clear-cut understanding and results of witnessing violence. We factor analyzed the witnessing violence at home subscale using principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation. The factor analysis results explained 52.60% of the variance and included five items: severe physical violence (i.e. Did you see anyone being attacked or stabbed with a knife?= 14.96%), Internet/phone violence (i.e. Did you see anyone using the internet to threaten somebody? = 13.54%), mild physical violence (i.e. Did you see anyone being hit, punched or slapped by someone? = 11.53%), and verbal violence (i.e. Did you see anyone been cursed? = 9.10%). The last factor included one item (3.46%), and therefore was omitted. The Cronbach's scores for these factors are .914, .875, .864, and .774 respectively.

We factor analyzed the witnessing violence at school subscale using principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation. The factor analysis results explained 53.7% of the variance and included six factors: Internet and phone (12.30%), sexual and fights (i.e. Did you see someone forcing a date to have sex against their will? = 11.1%), physical fights (i.e. Were you injured by a knife or a gun in fighting? = 9.60%), verbal violence (9.79%), threat (i.e. Did you see someone using a stone or stick to threat somebody? = 6.94%), and low physical violence (i.e. Did you see anyone been thrown objects such as bottles at him? = 4.9%). Cronbach's scores for these factors are: .914, .849, .803, .802, .648, and .691 respectively. We factor analyzed the witnessing violence in the community subscale using principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation. The factor analysis results explained 60.88% of the variance and included six items: Severe physical violence (11.30%), mild physical violence (11.16%), Internet/phone violence (9.74%), verbal violence (9.37%), low physical violence (9.10%), and text message violence (SMS) (6.15%). Cronbach's scores for these factors are .859, .87, .865, .807, .831, and .832, respectively.

## Results

### Description of the Sample

The demographic characteristics of the sample are

presented in Table 1. From the table, it can be seen that, compared to the other two provinces, families were larger in the Southern province, parents were more religious, the number of intact families was

higher and family income was lower. Most of the participants were female (52%), which was to be expected because school dropout rates were higher among males. As expected, we found that 99.7%

**Table 1** *Sample Characteristics*

Variables	Sample 1305	Bangkok 568 (43.5%)	Rural 424 (32.5%)	South 313 (24.8%)
Gender: Male	542 (41.5%)	252 (44.4%)	171 (40.3%)	119 (38.0%)
Female	763 (58.5%)	316 (55.6%)	253 (59.7%)	194 (62%)
Age ((years*12) + (months)/12.	14.23 S.D. = 1.15	14.24 S.D. = 1.09	14.06 S.D. = 1.07	14.59 S.D. = 1.33
Religiousness*				
Never	965 (74.6%)	547 (97%)	418 (99.1%)	0
Seldom	9 (.7%)	7 (1.2%)	1 (.2%)	1 (0.1%)
Often	319 (24.7%)	9 (1.6%)	3 (.7%)	307 (99.7%)
Regularly	1 (.1%)	1 (0.2%)	0	0
Working Status				
Works	89 (6.8%)	32 (5.6%)	25 (5.9%)	32 (10.2%)
Don't work	1216 (93.2%)	536 (94.4%)	399 (94.1%)	281 (89.8%)
Number of siblings**				
0	245 (18.8%)	135 (23.8%)	97 (22.9%)	13 (4.2%)
1-2	763 (58.5%)	380 (65.2%)	297 (70.0%)	96 (30.6%)
3-4	182 (13.9%)	59 (10.4%)	23 (5.4%)	99 (31.6%)
5-6	79 (6%)	4 (.8%)	5 (1.1%)	70 (22.3%)
7 or more	37 (2.8%)	0	2 (.2%)	35 (11.2%)
Parent performing of religious act**				
Never	14 (1.1%)	6 (1.1%)	4 (.9%)	4 (1.3%)
Seldom	219 (16.8%)	129 (22.7%)	84 (19.8%)	6 (1.9%)
Some times	385 (29.5%)	202 (35.6%)	169 (39.9%)	14 (4.5%)
Often	332 (25.4%)	176 (31%)	122 (28.8%)	34 (10.9%)
Regularly	355 (27.2%)	55 (9.7%)	45 (10.6%)	255 (81.5%)
Family income**				
Less than 8,000 baht	371 (28.6%)	62 (10.9%)	116 (27.4%)	193 (61.9%)
8001 - 16,000 baht	483 (37.2%)	215 (37.9%)	193 (45.6%)	75 (24.4%)
16001 - 24000 baht	205 (15.8%)	135 (23.8%)	50 (11.8%)	20 (6.5%)
24001 - 32000 baht	88 (6.8%)	64 (11.3%)	20 (4.7%)	4 (1.3%)
32001 - 40000 baht	109 (8.4%)	39 (10.4%)	38 (9%)	12 (3.9%)
More than 40001 baht	41 (3.2%)	32 (5.6%)	6 (1.4%)	3 (1.0%)
Father's education**				
Primary school or lower	491 (39.1%)	148 (26.8%)	210 (51.5%)	133 (45.1%)
High school	431 (34.3%)	185 (3.5%)	135 (33.1%)	111 (37.6%)
Vocational	157 (12.5%)	111 (20.1%)	32 (7.8%)	14 (4.7%)
BA degree	108 (8.6%)	75 (13.6%)	21 (5.1%)	12 (4.1%)
MA or higher	31 (2.5%)	18 (3.3%)	3 (.7%)	10 (3.4%)
Other	37 (2.9%)	15 (2.7%)	7 (1.7%)	15 (5.1%)
Mother's education**				
Primary school or lower	513 (40.1%)	186 (33%)	203 (48.6%)	124 (41.5%)
High school	459 (35.9%)	182 (32.3%)	146 (34.9%)	131 (43.8%)
Vocational	153 (12%)	100 (17.8%)	34 (8.1%)	19 (6.4%)
BA degree	105 (8.2%)	70 (12.4%)	26 (6.2%)	9 (3.0%)
MA or higher	22 (1.7%)	14 (2.5%)	5 (1.2%)	3 (1.0%)
Other	28 (2.2%)	11 (2.0%)	4 (1.0%)	13 (4.3%)
Family structure*				
Parents married/living together	910 (70.9%)	390 (68.9%)	294 (69.7%)	236 (76.4%)
Parents are separated	159 (12.3%)	96 (17%)	45 (10.7%)	18 (5.8%)
Parents are divorced	109 (8.4%)	38 (6.7%)	43 (10.2%)	28 (9.1%)
My parents is a widow	29 (2.2%)	14 (2.5%)	10 (2.4%)	5 (1.6%)
Parents (or one) remarried	42 (3.2%)	17 (3.0%)	14 (3.3%)	11 (3.6%)
Other	38 (2.9%)	11 (1.9%)	16 (3.8%)	11 (3.6%)

\* P<.05, \*\* p<.001

of the participants in the Southern provinces were Muslim (Table 1).

### Witnessing Violence

Witnessing violence rates among the Thai youths are high, but are actually similar to those reported in the USA (Finkelhor et al. 2009; Margolin et al. 2009). We found that up to 61.9% of the participants witnessed at least one violent act at home in the last three months, 87.1% witnessed at least one violent act in school, and 63.2% witnessed at least one violent act in the community. Slovak and Singer (2001) indicated a similar trend in the US. In another study in Thailand, Sherer and Sherer (2014) found that 61.8% of participants witnessed violence in school, followed by 46.6% who witnessed violence in the community. These high percentages might indicate that the violence phenomenon in Thailand is escalating (Klausner, 2002; Sherer & Sherer, 2011, 2014).

### Differences among Provinces and Between Genders

To control for the significant demographic differences that were indicated among the provinces, I used a MANCOVA test, controlling for father's and mother's education and family income, to study the differences among the provinces and between genders on the different witnessing violence scales. On the witnessing violence at home scale, the MANCOVA test indicated a significant overall effect (Wilks' Lambda =.375,  $F(4,1219)=507.06$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.625$ ). Interaction effects were also observed (Wilks' Lambda =.970,  $F(8,2438)=4.87$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.016$ ). Significant univariate main effects were observed on province (Wilks' Lambda =.929,  $F(8,2438)=11.37$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.036$ ) and on gender (Wilks' Lambda =.947,  $F(4,1219)=17.10$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.053$ ) and univariate interaction main effects were observed (Wilks' Lambda =.969,  $F(8,2438)=4.87$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.016$ ).

Univariate interaction effects were observed on witnessing violence on the Internet/phone at home variable ( $F(2,1123)=3.30$ ,  $p<.037$ ,  $\eta^2=.006$ ). The interaction effect resulted from the higher mean

scores among the males in the Southern province (See Table 2).

Univariate significant effects were observed on province on the witnessing severe physical violence at home ( $F(2, 1123)=9.92$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.017$ ) and on mild physical violence at home variable ( $F(2, 1123)=17.49$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.030$ ). Significant univariate effects were observed on gender on all four variables ( $F(1, 1123)$  ranged from 6.00 to 42.01  $p$  ranged from .014 on verbal violence to .0001 on all other three variables.  $\eta^2$  ranged from .005 to .035.

On the witnessing violence at school scale, the MANCOVA test indicated a significant overall univariate main effect (Wilks' Lambda =.083,  $F(6,1098)=2035.00$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.917$ ), in addition to interaction main effects (Wilks' Lambda =.973,  $F(12, 2196)=2.54$ ,  $p<.002$ ,  $\eta^2=.014$ ).

Univariate approaching significant interaction effects were indicated on witnessing Internet/phone violence at school ( $F(2, 1103)=4.28$ ,  $p<.075$ ,  $\eta^2=.005$ ) resulting from the higher mean scores of the males in the Southern province. Univariate effects of province were observed on all other five variables of violence at school (mild physical violence, severe physical violence, verbal violence, threats and low physical violence). ( $F(2, 1103)$  ranged from 3.18 to 30.75,  $p$  ranged from .042 on threats to .0001 on witnessing severe violence, verbal violence and low violence variables.  $\eta^2$  ranged from .053 to .006.

On the witnessing violence in the community scale, the MANCOVA test indicated a significant overall effect (Wilks' Lambda =.421,  $F(6,1189)=272.17$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.579$ ). Significant univariate main effects were observed on province (Wilks' Lambda =.922,  $F(12,2378)=8.22$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.040$ ) and on gender (Wilks' Lambda =.964,  $F(6,1189)=7.36$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.036$ ). Interaction main effects were indicated on witnessing mild physical violence in the community ( $F(2,1194)=3.48$ ,  $p<.031$ ,  $\eta^2=.006$ ), resulting from the Southern province's higher mean score and the higher mean score among the males than among the females. Univariate main effects were observed on witnessing severe physical violence in the community on province ( $F(2,1189)=16.29$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.027$ ), and on gender ( $F(1,1194)=36.75$ ,  $p<.0001$ ,  $\eta^2=.030$ ).

Univariate effects were observed on province



**Table 2** Means and Standard Deviations of Witnessing Violence at Home, School and at the Community by Provinces and Gender

Witnessing violence at home												
Gender	Severe Physical <sup>a</sup>		Internet/Phone <sup>a</sup>		Mild Physical <sup>a</sup>		Verbal Violence					
	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female				
Bangkok (1)	17.85 <sup>c</sup> (7.03) <sup>d</sup>	16.37 (5.09)	11.88 (4.78)	11.13 (4.00)	11.03 (4.28)	9.96 (2.42)	10.84 (4.07)	10.52 (4.01)				
Rural (2)	19.82 (7.77)	18.50 (4.64)	11.63 (4.34)	10.15 (2.72)	11.23 (3.90)	10.06 (2.28)	11.37 (4.44)	10.54 (3.42)				
South (3)	20.73 (9.52)	17.85 (5.65)	13.30 (5.85)	10.90 (3.70)	13.06 (5.43)	11.04 (3.22)	11.51 (4.31)	10.78 (3.784)				
tDifferences <sup>a</sup>	3 > 1 & 2		3 & 1 > 2		3 > 1 & 2							

  

Witnessing violence at school										
Gender	Internet/Phone <sup>a</sup>		Mild Physical <sup>a</sup>		Severe Physical <sup>a</sup>		Verbal Violence <sup>a</sup>		Threats <sup>a</sup>	
	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female
Bangkok (1)	12.29 <sup>c</sup> (5.01) <sup>d</sup>	12.29 (4.65)	10.57 (4.30)	9.45 (2.84)	12.40 (4.60)	12.39 (4.64)	16.13 (4.99)	16.33 (5.23)	5.97 (2.41)	5.79 (2.02)
Rural (2)	12.22 (4.45)	11.09 (3.30)	10.58 (3.61)	10.11 (3.32)	13.34 (4.60)	12.87 (4.31)	16.05 (5.34)	15.29 (4.74)	6.19 (2.11)	5.83 (2.07)
South (3)	13.89 (6.44)	12.36 (5.32)	11.82 (5.32)	10.09 (3.22)	11.09 (4.69)	11.02 (4.01)	12.71 (4.68)	13.69 (5.01)	5.84 (2.55)	5.27 (1.82)
Differences <sup>a</sup>	3 > 2, 1 > 2		3 > 1		3 < 1 & 2, 2 > 1&3		3 < 1 & 2 < 1		3 < 1 & 2	

  

Witnessing violence in the community												
Gender	Severe Physical <sup>a</sup>		Mild Physical		Internet/Phone <sup>a</sup>		Verbal Violence		Low Physical		SMS <sup>a</sup>	
	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female	Male <sup>b</sup>	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Province	10.96 <sup>c</sup> (4.36) <sup>d</sup>	9.83 (3.51)	14.44 (5.83)	13.39 (5.46)	9.94 (4.37)	9.16 (3.78)	9.20 (3.78)	8.81 (3.81)	10.60 (4.10)	10.15 (4.03)	2.58 (1.28)	2.52 (1.61)
Bangkok (1)	10.44 (4.07)	9.62 (3.40)	13.84 (5.57)	13.23 (5.32)	9.66 (4.28)	9.17 (3.72)	9.22 (3.86)	8.79 (3.99)	10.45 (4.05)	10.21 (4.07)	2.49 (1.23)	2.44 (1.04)
Rural (2)	10.60 (3.84)	9.22 (2.13)	15.35 (6.25)	13.27 (5.11)	9.59 (3.81)	8.53 (2.94)	9.42 (4.00)	8.56 (3.36)	10.68 (4.28)	9.66 (3.52)	2.50 (1.09)	2.31 (.99)
South (3)	12.50 (5.09)	11.03 (4.64)	14.83 (5.83)	13.86 (6.11)	10.92 (4.95)	9.89 (4.63)	8.92 (3.36)	9.18 (4.04)	10.83 (4.05)	10.64 (4.44)	2.86 (1.54)	2.79 (1.46)
Differences <sup>a</sup>	3 > 1 & 2				3 > 1 & 2						3 > 1 & 2	

<sup>a</sup> Province differences based on MANOVA & LSD Post Hock tests. P<.001.

<sup>b</sup> Gender Differences based on MANOVA tests.

<sup>c</sup> Mean Scores.

<sup>d</sup> Standard Deviations.

on witnessing Internet/phone violence in the community ( $F(1,1194)=8.98, p<.0001, \eta^2=.015$ ), and on witnessing text-message violence in the community ( $F(1,1194)=7.76, p<.0001, \eta^2=.013$ ).

Univariate effects of gender were indicated on witnessing Internet/phone violence in the community ( $F(2,1194)=8.98, p<.0001, \eta^2=.015$ ), on witnessing verbal violence in the community ( $F(1,1194)=3.85, p<.050, \eta^2=.003$ ) and on witnessing mild physical violence in the community ( $F(2,1194)=7.05, p<.008, \eta^2=.006$ ), (See Table 2).

As indicated in Table 2, on witnessing violence at home, the Southern province had higher mean scores than the other two areas on all four variables. On witnessing violence at school, no clear-cut results were produced and on witnessing violence in the community, the Southern provinces had higher mean scores than the other two areas on three out of six variables (See Table 2).

## Discussion

We studied witnessing violence among youth from three areas of Thailand, in two high schools in Bangkok, two high schools in a rural province and two high schools in the Muslim-dominated Southern region. We found high rates of witnessing violence among youth in Thailand that were similar to those reported in the USA (Finkelhor et al., 2009; Margolin et al., 2009). As expected the results mostly indicated higher levels of witnessing violence in the Southern Muslim province, and that it was higher among the males than among the females. It seems that the ongoing terror attacks in the Southern Muslim region, coupled with political and cultural effects have direct bearing on the higher witnessing violence rates among the youth in this area. These results support the ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which explains that the family subsystems (the microsystem), the community (the exosystem), and the society (the macrosystem) have a joint impact on youth behavior.

## Witnessing Violence at Home

Kitzmann et al. (2003), who conducted a meta-analysis of 118 studies, found that exposure to interparental aggression is associated with significant disruptions in children's psychosocial functioning. We found that on witnessing severe physical violence at home, witnessing Internet/phone violence at home, and on witnessing mild physical violence at home, the Southern province had significantly higher mean scores of witnessing violence at home than the other two provinces, probably resulting from the high violence rates in this turbulent political violent environment and religious and cultural effects.

## Areas of Political Violence and Youth Violence

In regard to youth violence in areas of political violence, Qouta et al. (2008) found an association between exposure to military violence and children's aggressive responses. Keresteš (2006) found that war horrors and atrocities predicted aggression and long-term effects on prosocial behavior among Croatian boys and girls. Cummings et al. (2010), who studied political violence and child development in Northern Ireland, found support for the relations between political violence and child adjustment. Harland (2011), who studied the same reality, claimed that young males participated in aggressive behavior in the name of defending their community, which afforded them status among their peers and other community members. Peltonen, Qouta, El Sarraj, and Punamaki (2010) asserted that aggression and antisocial behavior might be a result of participating in political violence. Sagi-Schwartz (2008) claimed that children's responses to political violence and trauma might be directed toward others and the society. Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Schermerhorn, Merrilees, and Cairns (2009) claimed that children's individual characteristics (such as age and gender, processes related to effects of conflict and violence at the level of psychological functioning) might account for some of the impact of exposure to political violence. Following the social-cognitive theory guidelines, we might expect that children's and youths' observation of violent behavior by

positively-perceived figures might lead them to view violence as normative or acceptable and thus promote the occurrence of violent behavior among them (Bandura 1986, 2001).

Exposure to political violence might create aggression-related schemata, which are crystallized by continued exposure to political violence, which strengthens its formation and effects, including youth participation in political violence, and its justification. Living in a politically violent environment influences youths' perceptions and behavior. Todorov and Bargh (2002) showed that repeated use of aggression-related mental concepts through exposure to aggression-related events might affect the perception and judgments of the relevant behaviors of others and that increased accessibility to concepts affects not only perception and judgment but also one's own behavior.

Sherer (2009) blamed the Arab-Israeli conflict for the general rise in the incidence of violence between these two peoples, as well as on the legitimization of such violence on cultural and nationalistic grounds. However, such justifications for crime and delinquency (and, in our case, violence) against the other ethnic group on nationalistic grounds or in accordance with the "condemnation of the condemners" rationalization (Sykes & Matza, 1957) might become second nature and be turned inward toward one's own community (Sherer, 2009). Another aspect of the politically violent environment, which might contribute to witnessing violence, relates to children's direct involvement in the political conflict and its influences. The findings of Qouta et al. (2008) emphasized that some parents in the Gaza strip are involved in and support their children's politically motivated violent behavior. They found that political activity among boys was associated with supportive and affectionate fathering, whereas the political activity among girls was associated with punitive and restrictive mothering and fathering. This reflects cultural influences, girls are expected by the Muslim religion to stay home and not be involved in social activities without family control. The situation in the Muslim Southern area of Thailand has similar characteristics. We believe that the girls are less involved in the political violent activity, given the

more traditional and religious nature in the South. However, the violent activity in this area is high which might explain the higher rates of witnessing violence in the region compared to the other two areas.

Sagi-Schwartz (2008) warned that some long-term effects of political violence reactions to chronic danger might become a source of danger to the next generation.

Aside from the political violence explanation, the routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) may explain the higher rates of witnessing violence in the Southern provinces. Given that witnessing violence is closely linked to the individual's association with or exposure to violent peers, a reality of the struggle in the Southern provinces. The lifestyle theory (Hindelang et al., 1978) may explain these results as well. The theory suggests that individuals' behavior exposes them to situations that put them at risk. Associating with violent peers, a given reality in the Southern provinces, increase their risk of witnessing violence. In addition, the deviant place theory (Stark, 1987), an ecological theory of crime, may be used to explain these results. Residing in "bad" or "problematic" neighborhoods, or being exposed to dangerous places, raises the likelihood of witnessing violence. Additionally, these results may be explained by the ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the behavioral theory (Bandura, 1986) which emphasize the impact of the family, school, community, and the society subsystem on youth behavior.

### **Witnessing Violence in School**

Witnessing violence in school was higher than in the family and the community—a result that is generally supported in the literature (Slovak & Singer, 2001; Sherer & Sherer, 2014). We found that the rural provinces had higher mean scores on witnessing violence in school than the Bangkok area on severe violence and on threats, whereas on mild violence, no difference was found between the rural and Bangkok provinces. These results might be an indication of the changing realities in the rural areas of Thailand. Rural areas, which are expected to be more "traditional" and, thus, have lower violence rates and therefore lower witnessing violence rates, are probably becoming more

aggressive as a result of adopting behaviors from the media and via other cases of exposure. This has been made possible by better transportation enabling travel into cities, leading to the development of new social associations and the resulting adoption of behaviors that are reshaping the local rural communities. Klausner (2002) claimed that differences in violence between rural and inner-city settings in Thailand are becoming blurred. Such explanations are supported by the social learning theory, which emphasizes that deviant behaviors are reinforced by the media, by various socializing institutions, and among peers (Akers, 1996). Moreover, because youth generally have greater exposure to the media and adapt more easily to changing realities, they adopt behaviors that lead to higher levels of violence in the rural areas, and subsequently, to higher rates of witnessing violence in these areas. Similar realities were indicated in the US. Johnson et al. (2008) studied the results of a national youth risk behavior survey in the US, and concluded that rural teens were either equally or more likely than both suburban and urban teens to experience violent behavior, victimization, suicide behaviors, and drug use. The witnessing violence phenomenon in the rural areas of Thailand has apparently gained momentum, since Sherer and Sherer (2014) found no significant differences in witnessing violence between the rural and inner-city settings.

These results may be explained as well by the routine activities theory which emphasizes the opportunity perspective (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The theory suggests that victimization (and thus witnessing violence) is closely linked to the individual's association with or exposure to violent peers, such as the students' peers in their schools. Another plausible explanation for the higher mean scores on witnessing violence in school relates to the fact that school is the only entity among the three locations that is supervised by teachers. We believe this to be the source of higher mean scores in the rural and Bangkok areas over the Southern area, which holds higher mean scores in the homes and community, but lower scores in school. A cultural explanation enlightens an expiation for these results. Since the public schools in the Muslim Southern region are obliged to teach three hours of Islamic

studies per week (Araya, 2006), this might be the reason for the lower witnessing violence rates found in the Southern schools. It is possible that the nature of the supervision coupled with Islamic studies in the Southern schools lowers the violence rates, whereas in the home and community settings, the surrounding political violence influences the rates of violence and witnessing violence.

### **Witnessing Violence in the Community**

The rates of witnessing violence in the community were higher than witnessing violence at home. This result is supported in the literature. Slovak and Singer (2001) found that witnessing violence was most prevalent in the school setting in the US, and the next prevalent setting was the neighborhood. In the present study, significant differences of witnessing violence in the community on the six witnessing violence factor created variables (physical violence, mild physical violence, Internet/phone violence, verbal violence, mild physical violence, text message violence (SMS)) were indicated on three of them. On these variables, the Southern Muslim province had higher mean scores than the Bangkok and the rural provinces. As the community is probably the main arena for political violence, this might be the reason for the higher mean scores of witnessing violence in the Southern province. In our view, the reality in the violent communities in the South is completely different from the reality in other parts of Thailand or in the West. The political violence has unique characteristics and influences. Although similar, in many ways, to "regular violence in the community," the political violence might be supported and even promoted by many citizens due to ideological justification, and is hence more accepted on national grounds. Therefore, it would be wise to exercise caution when comparing these results to "regular" turbulent communities in Asia or in the West.

Given that youth and parents in the Muslim regions are more religious, and more parents are married and less are separated than in the other two regions, supports a cultural explanation for these differences. Seems that cultural influences contribute and explain the differences between the Muslim

region and the other two regions.

National aspirations, terror attacks, high prevalence of violence in everyday life, media, political, religious, and cultural influences taken together can explain the high witnessing violence rates of youth in the South. The violent atmosphere in this area is part of the adolescents' daily reality (UNICEF, 2008). Local support for this behavior provides a degree of legitimacy and personal involvement in violence.

The deviant place theory (Stark, 1987) suggest that youth living in neighborhoods with high crime rates or violence (as we find in the turbulent Southern provinces) are at the highest risk of witnessing violence. Youth who experience community violence are affected because they are: bystanders, witnesses or familiar with victims, or are cognizant of or anxious about the potential for violence (Horn and Trickett 1998). Youth living in areas with the highest crime rates report the most violence exposure; they are also in the city's poorest neighborhoods (Selner-O'Hagan et al. 1998).

We claim that the violence rates in the South are a result of their ecological surroundings. The ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) indicates that the microsystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem, which consists of broader societal and cultural characteristics, directly and indirectly affect individuals' behavior, which is consistent with our explanation. In addition, the behavioral theory explains that, like any other social phenomenon, violence is learned through role modeling and adaptation (Bandura, 1986) especially from significant others. One of the profound dangers of the nationalistic views and violent acts of the insurgents is that more youth in the Southern provinces of Thailand might identify with these nationalistic aspirations, looking upon the insurgents as role models and adopting their violent behaviors.

### **Gender Differences**

We found that males witnessed significantly more violence or violence of higher severity than the females. This result is supported by the literature.

Thus, Kaya, Bilgin, and Singer, (2012) found general witnessing violence differences among youth in Turkey—female students reported higher rates of witnessing threats and some milder forms of violence at school, whereas males witnessed more serious forms of violence. Shields, Nadasen, and Pierce, (2009) indicated that boys in South Africa were more likely to witness violence in the neighborhood than girls. Ghanizadeh and Tavassoli (2007), who studied high school students in Iran, found gender differences in reports of witnessing violence in the family—a larger number of females than males reported witnessing serious fights between parents. However, some studies indicated no gender differences in witnessing violence. For example, Lambert et al. (2010) studied youth in early adolescence in the US and found no gender differences in witnessing community violence.

Aside from gender differences in the exposure to violence, gender differences in the witnessing and reporting of such violence might be an outcome of cultural gender role expectations, interpretation of given phenomena, or gender differences in the readiness to reveal such information which too may result from cultural expectations. The social role theory (Archer, 2006; Wood & Eagly, 2002) proposes that women and men conform to gender stereotypes, which are often segregated along gender lines and act in accordance with them. These stereotypes are grounded in cultural realities. Since these roles produce expectations that lead to different patterns of behavior in men and women, they might also influence interpretations of the given phenomenon of witnessing violence. Miller and White (2003) claimed that the meanings and consequences of violence by females are strikingly different from those of males, and that both are grounded in gender inequality.

The rates of witnessing violence in the Muslim provinces in the South are high, especially in their homes and communities. It is clear that this phenomenon should be treated. We recommend that policy makers and influential public figures as well as citizens of the South should be advised to draw attention to these rates and be provided with information about possible effects of this situation on the children. This is in the hope that the information

might influence policies regarding the parties involved in this struggle, and to remove the children from the struggle, as far as possible.

### Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations for Further Study

Aside from the possibility that the participants did not reveal their true experiences because of social desirability, or due to shame and unwillingness to report such behaviors, cultural gender roles might also have influenced the interpretation given to the same phenomenon and their willingness to reveal their own witnessing violence experiences. As indicated, males and females interpret violent acts differently (Edelen, McCaffrey, Marshall, & Jaycox, 2009). Another caveat is the possibility that, despite our careful measures to validate the tools, some cultural or linguistic errors between the Muslim and Buddhist regions occurred, resulting in misunderstanding of the witnessing violence measures.

Further studies should cover a wider array of independent and dependent variables and involve a qualitative part to reveal the hidden meaning of witnessing violence. They should also study possible ways of easing the burden of the political violence on children in the South. The situation in the rural areas of Thailand calls for removing the causes of the escalation of violence and hence of the witnessing of violence and finding ways to reduce this phenomenon

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