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National Parent Associations' Subjective Theories of Post-Pandemic School Violence in Chile: A Qualitative Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to reconstruct the subjective theories of national parent associations in Chile regarding school violence in the post-pandemic period. We performed a collective case study, employing a qualitative, interpretative, and exploratory approach. Information was produced through semi-structured interviews with leaders of four national associations. The information was examined using inductive thematic analysis. In general, parent association representatives largely described school violence as a loss of parental and pedagogical authority, weakening of the family–school bond, centralized school administration, and social vulnerability factors, intensified by the psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. The interviewees emphasized preventive and community-based approaches, including strengthening family involvement, incorporating school climate specialists, and implementing educational and recreational activities. Overall, the interviews show that parent association representatives tended to regard violence as a multisystemic phenomenon that, according to their accounts, requires joint efforts involving families, schools, the state, and communities rather than punitive or individualized approaches.

Keywords: school violence; subjective theories; parent associations; post-pandemic period



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1. Introduction

Chile was among the OECD member countries in which schools stayed closed the longest during the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2022). After schools reopened in 2022, a significant increase in school violence was observed relative to previous years (Bullying Sin Fronteras, 2023). Several studies have revealed the major worldwide impact of this unprecedented situation on children's and adolescents' mental health, with negative consequences especially for sociability, socioemotional development, and school climate (Llorent et al., 2023; Samji et al., 2022; UNICEF, 2021). In Chile, a Ministry of Education survey of

school principals revealed that 32% of respondents identified violence as one of the main challenges of the post-pandemic period (MINEDUC et al., 2022).

In the field of educational policy, this increase in violence prompted the development of the Educational Reactivation Plan, covering school climate, well-being, and mental health as strategic targets (MINEDUC, 2023). This process is part of a conceptual shift aimed at overcoming punitive and control-based approaches to school violence (Ascorra et al., 2018; Morales & López, 2019) by promoting a multilevel, ecological understanding of this phenomenon that considers the interplay of individual, relational, institutional, and contextual factors (Klun et al., 2025). Nevertheless, this conceptual shift is not always conveyed consistently in the explanations constructed by social actors, whose interpretations may instead be grounded in normative, moral, or experiential frameworks. This is exemplified by Chile's Ministry of Education, which, despite ongoing epistemological reform, tweeted in 2022 that school violence was an expression of structural problems that should be managed and eradicated from schools through judicial means (P. J. Castro-Carrasco et al., 2025). Likewise, teachers and principals have been found to ascribe school violence to factors external to schools (Roe & Castro, 2017). Less is known about how associations that represent parents and guardians of students view this issue.

In parallel, despite the key role that they played during the remote education period, families and national parent associations (NPAs; defined as groups of parent associations with the power to represent their members and influence public affairs) were also less involved in the design and implementation of educational strategies during the post-pandemic period (Jornet-Meliá et al., 2022; Sánchez-Delgado et al., 2022). Families had been included in the updated version of the Policy for Family and Community Participation (MINEDUC, 2017b), School Inclusion Law (MINEDUC, 2017a), and Self-Evaluation Form of the Comprehensive School Safety Plan (Superintendencia de Educación, 2021) before the pandemic. However, there is no evidence of the formal involvement of NPAs in recent school violence policy. Internationally, organizations such as the Spanish Confederation of Students' Parents (<https://ceapa.es>) or Mexico's National Association of Parents have played a larger role in policy design (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2021). In Chile, although general parent–teacher associations are organized on a national level (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2009), they have played only a minor role in policy development and research on school climate and school violence.

Building on the ecological model advanced by Bronfenbrenner (2005), the literature has highlighted the major influence of families on school climate and students' integral education (Bolaños & Stuart Rivero, 2019; Tapullima-Mori et al., 2023). However, research on school violence has historically focused on individual or familial risk factors, neglecting the involvement of parent organizations (Bordin & Handegård, 2023; Gallego-Jiménez et al., 2021). This exclusion is reinforced by the perception that families play only a minor role in formal decision-making in schools, both in Chile and elsewhere (Álvarez & Bilbao, 2023). For instance, studies in Spain have suggested that even though official norms recognize families' right to influence school life, their participation in school councils and parent associations is limited (Álvarez & Bilbao, 2023). Consequently, NPAs have been largely disregarded in research, despite their potential capacity to explain phenomena and make proposals to address them.

Only a handful of studies have examined school climate and violence from the perspective of families, focusing on their individual parental role or experience as local leaders, but leaving out their status as national actors with an influence on public affairs (Asociación de Municipalidades de Chile, 2022; Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2021; Vivallo-Urra et al., 2024). Although a positive school climate fosters family–school alliances (Povey et al., 2016), studies on leaders of parent associations have focused on organizational aspects, such as

funding, inclusion, disability, or migratory processes (Álvarez-Álvarez, 2020; Lundqvist et al., 2019), offering no further explanations for school violence.

Theoretically, an approach based on subjective theories (STs) can enrich the study of school violence by shedding light on the explanations that actors construct to make sense of reality and orient their actions (Catalán, 2010, 2018; Gadewoltz, 2026). This approach has been widely applied to the analysis of educational beliefs constructed by teachers (P. Castro-Carrasco et al., 2024; Janssens & Kelchtermans, 1997), members of the press (Rodríguez-Pastene et al., 2025), and Ministry of Education leaders (P. J. Castro-Carrasco et al., 2025), particularly the explanatory arguments contained within beliefs. Thus, this approach has been established for decades in the field of educational process studies (Flick, 1987; Gadewoltz, 2026). However, efforts to analyze the explanations of parents and NPAs remain in their early stages (Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2021). Given that STs are explanatory arguments that describe, prescribe, and guide actions (Gadewoltz, 2026), in a broader study of Chilean public discourse on violence and school coexistence, the ST approach proved useful for understanding the potential influences of these associations' explanations in the public sphere and educational policies. The explanations of these organizations regarding school violence in the post-pandemic period are hypothesized to involve several levels, including macrosocial factors, school dynamics, and proposals for managing school climate. In this context, the aim of the present study was to reconstruct the STs of Chilean NPAs regarding the causes, contextual factors, and strategies for action linked to school violence in the post-pandemic period.

2. Materials and Methods

The aim of this study was to reconstruct the STs of NPA leaders regarding post-pandemic school violence and identify recurring explanatory patterns and proposed strategies. Adopting an interpretive paradigm, the present study sought to explore the meanings that participants attribute to phenomena from their perspective (Krause, 1995). The design was qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive, consisting of a retrospective collective case study (Stake, 2005). This technique assumes that participants do not literally reconstruct or interpret experiences and positions they held in the past. Therefore, the STs reconstructed in this study should not be understood as a direct, fixed window into original perceptions from 2022, but rather as situated narrative reconstructions influenced or mediated by subsequent processes of reflection, reinterpretation, and reframing. In fact, the reconstructed narratives provide access to not only past experiences but also the current interpretive frameworks through which those experiences acquire meaning.

2.1. Participants

In the Chilean educational system, in individual schools, the organizations that represent parents are referred to as parent and guardian centers. At the regional or national level in Chile, the entities that represent families and coordinate multiple parent and guardian centers are known as NPAs (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 1990). National associations play a representative role, bringing together centers established in schools with administrative and funding arrangements, and are located throughout Chile. A review of official records of NPAs in Chile revealed the absence of an up-to-date public directory of such organizations. In response, an independent search of institutional websites and social media (Facebook and Instagram) identified six active NPAs at the time of the study. Based on available contact information, communications were established via telephone, email, and direct messages on social media. Several months after initial contact and follow-up, four associations volunteered to participate in the study, comprising the final sample.

Though a complete collection strategy was initially considered, the low participation rate encountered led to the use of purposive sampling based on substantial criteria (Flick, 2023), complemented by Maxwell’s (2012) principle of heterogeneity. The following inclusion criteria were set: (a) representation of parent centers from schools of various administrative types (public, subsidized private, and private) to reflect the socioeconomic segmentation of the Chilean school system (Elacqua & Santos, 2013); (b) interregional territorial scope; and (c) boards of directors in operation during 2022. The sample was composed of the presidents of these four associations (see Table 1). Although the participating organizations are based in the country’s capital (central macrozone), they represent parent groups from schools across the country.

Table 1. Participant characteristics.

ID	School Type	Legal Entity	First Year in Position	Position in 2022	Sex of Association Leader	Participation in Policy Development	Geographical Area
1	Subsidized private (semipublic)	Yes	2011	President	Woman	Yes	Center
2	Private, subsidized private (semipublic), and public	Yes	2006	President	Man	Yes	Center
3	Private and subsidized private (semipublic)	Yes	2014	President	Woman	Yes	Center
4	Emblematic schools (public)	No	2018	President	Woman	No	Center

Of the four participating associations, three were legal entities and had participated in policy discussions, either through consultative processes or in committees. Specifically, these associations had been involved in the Policy for Family and Community Participation in Schools (MINEDUC, 2017b), School Inclusion Law (MINEDUC, 2017a), and Self-Evaluation Form of the Comprehensive School Safety Plan (Superintendencia de Educación, 2021).

These accounts reflect the perspectives of organizational leaders in their representative roles but do not necessarily capture the full diversity of views in each association.

2.2. Information Production Techniques

Information was collected through semi-structured interviews (García, 2014) to explore participants’ explanations, interpretations, and proposals for action regarding school violence in the post-pandemic period. This technique made it possible to access the meanings that the participants ascribed to the phenomenon, together with their insights into its causes and associated institutional and social responses.

The interviews were held in person and on Zoom between April and November 2024, lasted between 60 and 90 min, and were recorded and fully transcribed in accordance with ethical protocols (Resolución N°05-23 CEC-ULS). The interviews followed a semi-structured thematic script, constructed based on the study’s objectives and the dimensions of the ST approach (Catalán, 2018). They covered three core analytic aspects: meanings ascribed to school violence, explanatory factors associated with school climate, and intervention strategies proposed by the participants.

2.3. Information Analysis Procedure

Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This methodological strategy is characterized by its flexibility and focus on detecting, analyzing, and presenting recurrent meanings or themes

in qualitative data. In this framework, analysis provides a deeper understanding of the meanings that participants construct in their discourse (Flick, 2014). Specifically, inductive analysis was conducted, involving a progressive theoretical generation process based on the empirical material, with topics emerging directly from the data rather than predefined analytic categories or closed theoretical models (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This analytic process involved two complementary levels. First, an intracase analysis was performed, consisting of the individual examination of each interview. Second, an intercase analysis was conducted to compare the themes constructed by the participants. Because the goal of the study was to reconstruct STs, the results presented here only reflect the latter analysis. This process featured three consecutive stages adapted from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Flick, 2014).

First, the transcripts were coded using an identification system consisting of the letter A (for association), followed by the association number and line numbers indicating the location of the quoted excerpt in the transcript (e.g., A1:20–31). In the second stage, these codes were compared, rearranged, and grouped according to emerging patterns, consistent with the goals of the study, which yielded provisional themes. Finally, in the third stage, the topics were refined, hierarchized, and related to one another to construct a thematic map that represented the phenomenon in a descriptive and relational manner, emphasizing causal relations and strategies for action in the STs of NPAs. This process was managed and systematized in Microsoft Excel, which facilitated the organization of codes, categories, and relevant textual excerpts. To promote analytic rigor, the coding and interpretation process was triangulated by the research team. This involved independent coding by multiple researchers, followed by comparison and discussion of discrepancies until consensus was reached regarding category definitions and relationships among themes (Mucchielli, 2001).

To enhance transparency, an example of the analytic process is provided. For instance, segments referring to “lack of parental authority,” “absence of norms at home,” and “parents’ fear of their children” were initially coded separately. During the second stage, these codes were grouped under a broader thematic category related to parental authority. In the final stage, these patterns were reformulated into STs by identifying their implicit causal structure and expressing them as explanatory propositions (e.g., if parents do not establish norms, then children may show lower adherence to school rules).

In this study, STs were operationalized as structured explanatory arguments that linked causes, contextual conditions, consequences, and strategies for action as expressed in the participants’ narratives. After the coding and thematic grouping phases, the research team analyzed the relationships established by the participants among the various elements of their discourse, particularly causal attributions, conditional statements, justifications, and explanations regarding school violence and coexistence. The arguments used by the participants were reconstructed as STs when they contained an implicit or explicit causal structure, were repeated among participants, or emerged as a prominent explanatory pattern in a case and could be reformulated as explanatory propositions with at least one antecedent and one consequent (cause and effect). Thus, the themes were progressively reorganized into hierarchically superior (or supraordinate) explanatory structures that articulated causes, contextual factors, and strategies for action. The transition from themes to STs consisted of not merely grouping frequent content but rather identifying the explanatory structure—that is, the deep structure present in the participants’ textual discourse (surface structure). This process of reconstruction involved a shift in interpretation from descriptive thematic categories (first-cycle analysis) to analytically reconstructed explanatory formulations (second-cycle analysis; Saldaña, 2025) grounded in participants’ discourse.

Data analysis followed an iterative process in which coding and categorization were continuously refined across cases. It is important to note that this study faced limitations in

accessing a larger sample size. This is due to the small number of national organizations representing parent associations in Chilean schools (six organizations). Of those, only four agreed to participate, so theoretical intercase saturation was not achieved. Intercase saturation was considered achieved when no substantially new themes or explanatory patterns emerged in the second-cycle analysis, and recurring patterns were consistently identified across participants.

An audit trail was maintained throughout the analytic process, including records of coding decisions, category development, and iterative refinements, which supported the consistency and transparency of the analysis.

3. Results

The STs presented in this section correspond to analytic reconstructions derived from participants' discursive accounts. These reconstructions are not direct or literal statements but interpretative formulations developed through thematic analysis to capture recurring explanatory patterns across cases. The 37 STs identified should be understood as analytic units derived from the coding process, representing variations and nuances in broader thematic patterns rather than fully independent explanatory systems.

The analysis revealed 37 STs, reflecting explanatory systems shared by the participating NPA representatives. Of these theories, 19 referred to the causes of school violence, eight referenced contextual conditions that influence the phenomenon, and 10 reflected action strategies aimed at addressing and preventing school violence.

3.1. Causes of School Violence

Table 2 summarizes the reconstructed STs related to the perceived causes of school violence. The table presents the analytical progression from initial coding to the reconstructed subjective theories, grouped into the thematic categories identified during the second cycle of analysis.

Table 2. STs related to the causes of school violence.

Associations	Themes	Initial Coding	ST	Reconstructed ST
1, 2, 3, 4	(1) Parental authority crisis	Lack of rules and norms at home	ST1	(Antecedent) Families are not playing their role; (Consequent) thus, they are not imposing rules and norms on their children.
			ST2	(If) children are not subjected to norms and rules at home, (then) they will become less tolerant of the norms and rules of the school system.
		Parental neglect due to work	ST3	(Antecedent) Parents care more about their job than about fulfilling their role as parents; (Consequent) therefore, they are not imposing rules or norms on their children.
		Lack of transmission of values	ST4	(If) parents do not take it upon themselves to give values to their children and address violent behavior, (then) small children will tend to exhibit violent behavior at school.
		Parents' fear of their children	ST5	(If) parents fear their children, (then) young people will become violent toward their parents.
		Delegation of responsibility to the state	ST6	(If) families delegate their responsibility for educating their children to the state, (then) school violence will increase.
		Justification of violence	ST7	(If) there are parents who justify violence in schools, (then) school violence will increase.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Associations	Themes	Initial Coding	ST	Reconstructed ST
1, 2, 3	(2) Weakening of the family–school bond	Distance between educational actors	ST8	(Antecedent) Educational actors were closer to one another in the past, (Consequent) but nowadays there is less closeness, and everything is impersonal.
		Teacher authority crisis	ST9	(Antecedent) In the past, students respected teachers, (Consequent) but now parents berate the teacher when their children complain at home, and “it’s almost like they want to get her fired for that.”
		Social modeling	ST10	(If) there is animosity among parents or toward the teacher, (then) “this attitude is transferred to the children.”
1, 2, 4	(3) Centralized school administration	Limited participation of parents’ centers	ST11	(If) Parents’ centers do not play an active role in the school, (then) school violence will persist.
		Limited family participation	ST12	(Antecedent) Parents are ignored in decision-making; (Consequent) therefore, they cannot participate in the development of the norms of the parents’ center or the school’s educational policy.
		Disregard for school climate	ST13	(If) the concept of school climate does not exist in the school’s institutionality, (then) there are no clear rules about behavior in the school or they are personally defined by the principal or the relevant authority.
		Insufficient training in the school climate	ST14	(If) those in charge of maintaining school climate have not received adequate training in school climate, (then) they cannot act effectively.
1, 4	(4) Social vulnerability	Vulnerable settings	ST15	(Antecedent) Schools (public or subsidized private) located in vulnerable areas (consequent) have higher rates of school violence.
		Territorial concentration of drug use and trafficking	ST16	(Antecedent) in environments where violence, drug trafficking and use, alcohol, and illegal land occupations are more common, (consequent) rates of school violence are higher.
		Gang affiliation	ST17	(If) children are affected by high levels of social vulnerability, (then) they will be more likely to be part of gangs and engage in drug trafficking.
3	(5) Dissatisfaction with the school admission system	Family frustration	ST18	(If) students are admitted into schools that they dislike, (then) parents will “give up” and students will spend their time engaging in violence, not studying, and smoking.
1	(6) Belated state intervention	Weak state response	ST19	(Antecedent) The state does not promptly address the increase in intraschool violence, (consequent) which can result in violence outside the school.

Based on the first and second cycles of analysis, STs were reorganized into three broader thematic categories to reduce conceptual overlap and capture higher-order interpretative patterns. These categories were: (a) crisis of authority and socialization processes, (b) exclusionary school governance and institutional management, and (c) structural and institutional conditions fostering school violence.

The categories mentioned most frequently were those linked to changes in crisis of authority and socialization processes (Themes 1 and 2). The four participating association representatives reported a clear weakening of parental authority and families’ ability to set norms and boundaries and, thus, control their children’s episodes of school violence (ST1–ST7). They partly ascribed this situation to some parents’ neglect due to their work demands during the pandemic lockdowns (ST3). In addition, some interviewees said that many parents tend to delegate their children’s education to the school or state (ST6).

Look, I think parents are really lost, too. They don't have a clear idea of where to go. So, you don't see parents establishing order, but actually, if they ask them to come to the school because their kid misbehaved, because he didn't do what he was asked to do in class, then parents come here to fight. Because it's the school's fault. Because the school didn't set clear rules. Because the school doesn't make the children behave. . . . So, they're leaving everything in the hands of the school or the state, and they wash their hands of the whole issue. . . . So, I guess there's a lack of interest in raising their children well, and when you see how violent parents are when they come here, well, that's when you start wondering what you can expect from the children (A3:168–188).

Other responses linked perceived changes in parent–child relationships with parents' fear of their children (ST5). According to this theory, many children and young people returned to their schools “ignoring rules and regulations” (A1:296), despite schools being characterized by rigid norms that must be conformed to without exception (ST1, ST2). Thus, participants regarded the increase in intraschool violence observed after the lockdowns as a consequence of a broader erosion of normative authority and socialization mechanisms.

Also, the children came back, ignoring rules or regulations. So, it was more frustrating for them whenever they had to meet the school's rule that forces them to, I don't know, spend two hours in the classroom listening to the teacher without being able to run or play. So, logically, we're making them feel frustrated, but to me, that's the result of their frustration (A1:296–299).

The theory regarding the delegation of educational responsibility to the school appeared to be linked to the perception that Chile has been permeated by a culture of individual rights that has led parents to feel that they are “caught between a rock and a hard place,” preventing the use of corrective measures at school and in the household.

The state pressures us with children's rights. We can't yell at them, we can't tell them off, we can't look for the school we want, we can't choose a really strict school, and even the strict school can't set its own rules because the superintendency punishes them. So, we're between a rock and a hard place, and parents say, what can we do? Well, we let them do as they wish and let the state take charge (A3:193–200).

Participants also linked this perceived authority crisis to the weakening of the family–school relationship. This theory seemed to be causally constructed based on the perceived distance between these institutions and the impersonal, adversarial relationships between school professionals and families (ST8). Participants complemented this belief with the idea that, alongside the authority crisis in families, there is a crisis of pedagogical authority (ST9) that explains some degree of animosity between teachers and parents (ST10). Furthermore, some interviewees argued that the internalization of a discourse centered on individual rights has limited the implementation of corrective measures both at school and in families, leaving parents feeling “caught between a rock and a hard place.”

Nowadays, when a child gets home complaining, we have parents here complaining and criticizing the teacher because their child said such-and-such. And they came to the school to file a complaint, as if they wanted to get her fired for that (A1:430–436).

A second explanatory dimension referred to exclusionary school governance and institutional management (Theme 3). Participants ascribed school violence to a type of school administration that limits the involvement of parents' centers in decision-making (ST11), thus tending to centralize the establishment of norms and sanctions (ST13) and

exclude families from the development of policies and rules related to school violence and school climate (ST12). In addition, interviewees also noted the insufficient training received by officials in charge of school climate (ST14). Some participants also associated school violence with the emergence of ideological positions that legitimize violence as a form of political expression, thereby normalizing violent behavior among some students (ST7).

Finally, participants referred to broader structural and institutional conditions associated with school violence (Themes 4–6). Though less frequently, some association representatives referred to other exosystemic factors such as social vulnerability in some territories (A1, A4); the Chilean school admission system (A3); and the state's slow response to instances of school violence (A1). As shown in Table 3, two participants (A1, A4) ascribed the incidence of school violence to school types and situations affecting certain territories (ST15–ST17). Particularly, the interviewees argued that violence is more prevalent in public and semipublic schools and areas characterized by high rates of drug and alcohol use (normally neighborhoods with a larger concentration of economically disadvantaged families).

Table 3. STs related to contextual factors that affect school violence.

Associations	Theme	Initial Coding	ST	Reconstructed ST
1, 2, 3, 4	Psychosocial impact of lockdowns on young people	Mental health problems	ST20	(If) a person has mental health problems, (then) they will express themselves through violence.
		Exposure to violent video games	ST21	(Antecedent) During the lockdowns, (consequent) children were more exposed to violent games.
		Self-reference	ST22	(Antecedent) During the lockdowns, (consequent) there was less development of social skills, more egotism, a need to defend one's position, and low tolerance.
1, 2, 3	Family impact of the lockdowns	Child loneliness	ST23	(Antecedent) Parents had to work during the pandemic, (Consequent) so children stayed home alone for long periods without socializing.
		Intrafamily violence	ST24	(If) there is intrafamily violence, (then) children will return to school behaving more violently when the lockdowns are over.
			ST25	(If) there is "animosity" between the parents at home, (then) "the violence will be transferred to the children."
2	Individualist culture	Economic, political, and social model	ST26	(Antecedent) We are immersed in an essentially individualist economic, political, and social model, (Consequent) which increases school violence.
		Lack of solidarity	ST27	(Antecedent) The individualist culture of today (Consequent) generates competition, a lack of solidarity, and defensive attitudes among people.

Violent events happen in those schools. Violence occurs in public education in general. That's where children are more exposed, more vulnerable, more violent. That's where you see more drug trafficking, more drug use, more alcohol. It is in those schools where violence indices are higher, and clearly, families are a major factor for violent kids (A1:283–287).

Participants viewed dissatisfaction with the school admission system as a consequence of legal regulations that hinder freedom to choose a school. Although this mechanism is aimed at ensuring educational equality, some families are not assigned to the school that they desire, generating a context of frustration that these participants perceived as fostering school violence (ST18). In addition, some interviewees perceived the state as a bureaucratic institution that responds slowly and inefficiently to school violence (ST19).

In the end, parents give up and enroll their child in whatever school they are assigned to. And so, we have kids feeling lost in schools they don't like, where they don't want to be, and they start engaging in violence, not studying, escaping from the classroom, and looking for places to smoke (A3:158).

All the red tape you need to go through to get a solution in Chile these days is also a type of violence against us. When a violent incident occurs in a school, or when there's sexual abuse, months and months can pass from the time you file a complaint until the problem is resolved. Actually, we have some students who have required psychological aid, and they've had to wait 435 days for an appointment. And when you consider that the health system is a support network, that's violence, too (A1:146–157).

Taken together, these STs explain school violence as the result of transformations in authority, socialization, and institutional regulation across family, school, and societal contexts. In this explanatory structure, violence is attributed to weakened parental and pedagogical authority, fragile family–school relationships, exclusionary school governance, and structural conditions of social precarity and institutional dissatisfaction.

3.2. Contextual Factors That Affect School Violence

As shown in Table 3, on the second level of analysis, participants' STs were organized into two broader categories: (a) psychosocial impact of the lockdowns for young people and families and (b) individualist culture. In the reconstructed STs, contextual conditions with an impact on school violence were described by participants as factors that may have intensified and accelerated the emergence of the phenomenon, especially in the post-pandemic period.

These STs are grouped into higher-order categories that synthesize recurring contextual patterns identified across participants.

Participants primarily interpreted the pandemic lockdowns as a process that negatively affected young people's psychosocial development, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships. According to the interviewees, prolonged social isolation contributed to difficulties with social interaction, low frustration tolerance, and mental health problems among students and their families (ST20, ST22). Some participants also mentioned systematic exposure to video games with violent content during lockdowns as a factor that may have normalized aggressive behaviors and forms of interaction (ST21).

They spent two years locked up, watching violence on their screens all day, playing violent games. When we had online meetings, we asked the parents to set parental controls on their devices so they wouldn't see more violence, because the kids were going to go back on the streets at some point, and they were going to express all this violence. And it's like we prophesied it, because they went out on the streets to beat each other up (A3:279–287).

In addition, the interviewees considered higher levels of intrafamily violence (ST24, ST25) and child loneliness (ST23) to be contextual factors capable of explaining school violence during 2022. Many young people witnessed violent incidents such as abuse and assault in their homes. The participants described these experiences as ways for

children and young people to learn violence through social modeling (ST10). They viewed these conditions not as direct causes, but as contextual frameworks that amplified prior vulnerabilities, especially with respect to students' emotional regulation, mental health, socialization, and interpersonal relationships.

The second contextual factor mentioned by the participants concerned Chile's economic, political, and social model, which they said encouraged the development of individualism in the population (ST26). The interviewees described this cultural phenomenon as a source of the lack of solidarity and defensive attitudes they perceived among people (ST27).

We were immersed in—well, we're still immersed in a highly devastating economic, political, and social model that forces you to become individualistic, and within that individualism, I'm better than you. Therefore, my self-centeredness is based on this: that's what I was talking about. I give you a dirty look, I don't like you, I don't like her, or she gave me a dirty look (A2:171–172).

3.3. Strategies for Action

As shown in Table 4, on the third level of analysis, the STs related to strategies for action or possible solutions to school violence were classified into three categories: school management, family-oriented strategies, and student-oriented strategies. In general, participants viewed these strategies as ways to prevent school violence, consisting of the strengthening of community bonds and institutional capabilities.

Table 4. STs related to action strategies for addressing school violence.

Association	Theme	Initial Coding	ST	Reconstructed ST
1, 2, 3, 4	School management	Structure	ST28	(If) the school climate dimension is integrated into school management, (then) it will become necessary for schools to have a school climate official.
			ST29	(If) psychologists specialized in school climate are incorporated, (then) communication gaps with students will be reduced.
		Collaborative work across levels	ST30	(If) parents' centers play an active role and collaborate with the school climate official, (then) school violence will be prevented and school climate (communication among teachers, parents, education assistant, and students) will be improved.
		Teaching in the classroom	ST31	(If) team activities are conducted in the classroom, (then) students will learn to tolerate and understand each other, reducing school violence.
		Open days at school	ST32	(If) schools are opened, (then) parents will get to know teachers and the bonds among them will be strengthened.
2, 4	Family-oriented strategies	Training for families	ST33	(If) parents take part in "schools for parents" (supported by specialized institutions), (then) school violence will diminish.
			ST34	(If) more civic education is provided, like community workshops about drugs and alcohol supported by government agencies, (then) school violence will decrease.

Table 4. *Cont.*

Association	Theme	Initial Coding	ST	Reconstructed ST
1, 2	Student-oriented strategies	Extracurricular activities	ST35	(Antecedent) To keep children from spending so much time home alone, (consequent) we decided to give them support after school hours.
		Recreational activities	ST36	(If) recreational and manual activities for students are reinforced, (then) children will keep busy.
		Pedagogical activities outside the classroom	ST37	(Antecedent) Outdoors pedagogical meetings (consequent) bring to light the problems affecting students at home.

The action-oriented STs are organized into broader strategic domains, which integrate conceptually related proposals and reduce fragmentation across individual formulations.

Regarding school management and based on observation of school experiences deemed successful by these authorities, one ST stands out: Participants suggested that school violence may be mitigated through a community-oriented (or open-door) institutional logic characterized by interlevel participation and collaboration. This logic would emphasize the participation of organizations representing families at all levels of institutional decision-making and in classroom work (ST30–ST32).

We have very active parents' centers as well as wonderful schools that reported no serious violent incidents during the whole year. These parents' centers are actively working to improve school climate, and they are making a real effort, because remember, the school climate official has to be constantly organizing activities for parents, for students. And we see that they're managing school climate well. There's good communication among teachers, parents, educational assistants, and students (A1:476–490).

In this context, support provided by professionals (such as psychologists) and school climate officials (ST28, ST29) appeared to be part of the interviewees' explanations. With respect to family-oriented strategies, the participants proposed educational activities for families, led by specialists external to the schools (ST33, ST34). These activities included schools for parents, ideally consisting of workshops on wide-ranging topics such as civics and the prevention of drug and alcohol use (ST33, ST34). All these activities require the support of public organizations that specialize in these topics.

With respect to students, participants from associations that represent semipublic schools proposed increasing pedagogical innovation through extracurricular activities (ST35), recreational and hands-on activities for students (ST36), and other activities that allow them to express personal problems and receive support (ST37). The interviewees said these activities should ensure that students stay protected and busy while benefiting from adequate psychological support.

4. Discussion

The following discussion presents an interpretive synthesis of the findings. In particular, the proposed model is not a direct empirical result but rather an analytic construction developed by the authors to integrate and relate the STs identified in the Section 3. This is a theoretical hypothesis that seeks to integrate the themes identified into a broader, comprehensive framework. It is an interpretive proposal that we invite future research to test, with the aim of uncovering and analyzing STs regarding post-pandemic school violence held by other actors in the school system.

4.1. Interpretive Model: A Comprehensive Map of Reconstructed STs

It is important to note that this model represents an interpretive synthesis grounded in participants' accounts and does not imply direct causal verification of macro-level processes.

In line with studies that analyzed the STs of other actors in the Chilean education system (Chilean Ministry of Education leaders, teachers, and school principals), from the perspective of the participating associations, participants tended to view school violence as not primarily originating in schools, but rather as an external or “imported” phenomenon grounded in wider structural and contextual conditions (P. J. Castro-Carrasco et al., 2025; Roe & Castro, 2017). As Figure 1 shows, participants' accounts suggest that the sources of school violence may include factors such as the period of nationwide social upheaval in 2019, the socioeconomic vulnerability of local territories (e.g., municipalities and regions in which schools are located), pandemic lockdowns, and what participants described as broader features of the social and economic organization of society. Based on participants' accounts, these conditions can be interpreted as contributing to an environment of systemic tension that may indirectly influence schools.

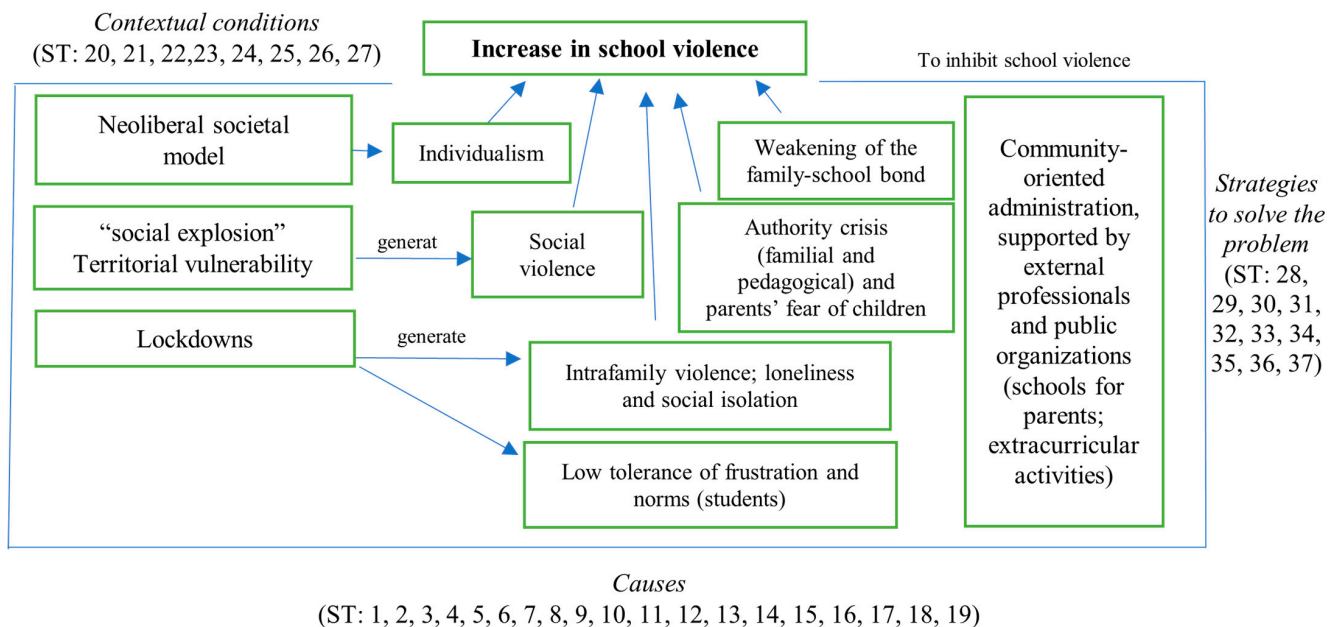


Figure 1. Conceptual diagram of school violence.

One relevant finding concerns the association between work demands and the weakening of parents' roles and authority, which participants linked to the delegation of educational responsibilities to the school. They associated this dynamic with a lack of norms, failure to transmit values, and parents' fear of exercising authority, leading students to be intolerant of institutional norms, thus influencing the expression of school violence. Likewise, participants interpreted the lockdowns as a critical event that was interpreted by participants as intensifying intrafamily violence issues, mental health problems, and child loneliness. They also linked the emergence of social violence to the 2019 social uprising in Chile (Jiménez-Yañez, 2020)—a wave of nationwide protests that affected multiple regions of the country—and to what participants described as territorial vulnerability, a term used to refer to municipalities or regions characterized by a high concentration of poverty and social exclusion (Sánchez-Martí, 2024). Overall, participants described these conditions as external influences that exceed the school's mandate and educational capacity, reinforcing a sense of institutional impotence in addressing school violence.

Faced with this situation, the participating association representatives proposed strategies aimed at managing and addressing school violence, reflecting a new comprehension of the problem characterized by a shift to community-based and systemic approaches rather than punitive or individualized ones. They identified incorporating school climate experts as a key strategy for dealing with institutional impotence and the insufficiency of school climate training, along with improving the response to issues associated with intrafamily violence, mental health, and child loneliness. In addition, participants described extracurricular and recreational activities as mechanisms for addressing students' low tolerance of institutional norms. Finally, they discussed collaborative work across levels, together with initiatives like schools for parents and an open-door school policy, to strengthen parents' role and authority and restore the concept of shared educational responsibility. Taken together, these strategies indicate that for these participants, participants emphasized that school violence should be addressed through a collective process aimed at reconstructing the social fabric among family, school, and community.

Although the interpretive model emphasizes multisystemic and structural explanations, alternative readings of the data are also possible. Some of the STs identified—particularly those referring to parental authority, lack of norms, or transmission of values—can be interpreted in more normative or moral frameworks that emphasize individual or family responsibility. These perspectives coexist with more systemic and community-oriented interpretations, reflecting underlying tensions in how school violence is understood. Acknowledging these alternative interpretations helps to avoid a unidirectional reading of the findings and highlights the plurality of explanatory logics present in participants' accounts.

4.2. Implications

The findings of this study have relevant implications for educational practice and policy, particularly regarding how school violence is conceptualized and addressed. The STs identified suggest that families tend to interpret violence through a multisystemic lens, linking it to family dynamics, school organization, and broader social conditions. These findings suggest the relevance of moving beyond individual or punitive approaches, as reflected in the emphasis placed on research on school violence (Turanovic & Siennick, 2022) and policies regarding educational reactivation and school coexistence in Chile (Ascorra et al., 2018; Morales & López, 2019), and strengthening school climate policies grounded in collaboration among families, schools, and communities. In practical terms, this involves promoting participatory governance structures, integrating specialized school climate professionals, and designing interventions that address socioemotional development, communication, and conflict resolution across levels of the educational system.

At the same time, the presence of normative and moral explanations—such as the emphasis on parental authority or the transmission of values—suggests that interventions must also consider the belief systems that orient family and institutional practices. Rather than dismissing these perspectives, educational policies and programs should engage with them critically, creating spaces for dialogue and training that support families in their educational role while aligning with evidence-based approaches to school *convivencia*. This includes the development of parent education initiatives, community-based programs, and intersectoral support networks capable of addressing issues such as mental health, intrafamily violence, and social vulnerability, which are perceived as underlying conditions of school violence (Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2021).

5. Conclusions

The results presented in this article reveal the importance of NPAs' attachment to parental authority, school management, the nature of the family–school relationship, the

psychosocial characteristics of the neighborhood contexts in which schools are located, and timely state intervention as relevant dimensions for explaining school violence during the post-pandemic period. Taken together, these explanations may contribute to formulating causal hypotheses at multiple systemic and ecological levels, consistent with the model advanced by Bronfenbrenner (2005) and recent multilevel approaches to the study of school violence (Klun et al., 2025). The STs identified in the study point to both macrosystemic factors—such as migratory processes, the social explosion of 2019, and the primacy of individualist cultural values in Chilean society—and institutional and relational dynamics typical of school and family settings. Likewise, all participants acknowledged the impact of the lockdowns and prolonged interruption of in-person classes on children's and adolescents' socialization, emotional well-being, and behavioral regulation. These explanations are consistent with the international literature, which has documented the psychosocial effects of the pandemic on children and adolescents and its association with increased school conflict (Llorent et al., 2023; Samji et al., 2022; UNICEF, 2021).

Nevertheless, the analysis also revealed the presence of moral and normative narratives, particularly in connection with the parental authority crisis or the view that violence stems from a lack of values. These interpretations, which had already been supported in several studies about authority figures in Chile (Araujo, 2022), are relevant inasmuch as they orient proposals for action toward restoring discipline and obedience, rather than strengthening socioemotional capacities and community work. Though these positions convey legitimate concerns of families, they also reproduce conceptual frameworks associated with punitive approaches to school violence and school climate that have been widely challenged in critical educational research (Ascorra & Morales, 2019).

Future studies could explore in greater depth the distinction between the descriptive and prescriptive dimensions of subjective theories, analyzing how particular explanations of school violence are associated with specific normative assumptions and action-oriented proposals.

The results also reveal internal tensions among these NPAs, expressed through the coexistence of divergent ways of interpreting and addressing school violence. Although some participants emphasized the authority crisis and the need for greater institutional control, others stressed the importance of community governance, parental training, and the strengthening of bonds among school, family, and territory. These tensions reflect the opposition between control-oriented approaches and community-based views of school climate (Morales & López, 2019) and include minority voices that warn of the politicization of certain parents' centers. Thus, NPAs do not constitute a homogeneous actor; rather, they hold heterogeneous ideological positions that directly influence their diagnoses and proposals for action.

With respect to strategies for action, the participants widely regarded school as a community-oriented, open, and participatory space that is closely linked with its social environment. However, they said this ideal is hindered by insufficient public support. The association representatives criticized the excessive bureaucratization of school management and the primacy of administrative and control-oriented approaches over policies focused on strengthening professional capacities, pedagogical management, and educational programs for families and students. These criticisms are in line with diagnoses that question the bureaucratic and managerialist character of Chile's educational policy, especially with respect to how school climate and school violence are addressed (Morales & López, 2019).

6. Study Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was small ($n = 4$) and drawn from a limited and hard-to-reach population. Chile lacks an official registry of NPAs

or legislation governing their operation, and only six active associations were identified through independent searches, of which four agreed to participate. Furthermore, purposive sampling and the focus on association presidents limit the scope of the findings. Although these participants provided informed perspectives in their representative roles, their views cannot be assumed to reflect those of all families, parent organizations, or even the full executive boards of their associations.

Second, the study adopted a qualitative and interpretative design aimed at reconstructing STs and identifying recurring explanatory patterns. Consequently, the findings should be understood as exploratory rather than statistically representative, reflecting interpretations constructed in the Chilean post-pandemic context. Future research could expand these findings by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, including additional members of parent organizations and other educational actors.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes a novel perspective by making visible the STs of Chilean NPAs, an actor that has received little scholarly attention and for which few official records exist. The findings provide an initial analytic understanding of the explanatory frameworks that orient their collective action while highlighting multisystemic explanations and internal ideological tensions regarding school violence. They also offer relevant insights for policies that recognize parent associations as actors in public affairs and promote shared responsibility among schools, families, communities, and the state.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

NPA	National parent association
ST	Subjective theory

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