

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The phenomenon of students' violence at Hail University: Prevalence, causes and suggested solutions from the students' perspective

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**This study aimed at investigating the level of prevalence of various forms of violence, the root causes and potential solutions to the phenomenon of students' violence from the perspective of students at Hail University. The research sample comprised 100 male and 100 female students who were chosen randomly. A three-part questionnaire was used for data collection. It was discovered that the most prevalent form of students' violence at Hail University from the students' perspective is the verbal violence followed by the physical violence. Property destruction and violence against teaching and administrative staff ranked significantly lower. The study also found that there is a difference between what male and female participants considered to be the most important causes of violence. According to students at Hail University, a number of measures can be taken in order to reduce violence. These measures include: raising intellectual awareness among students, providing students with means which help them use their free time productively, educating students on the ethics of dialogue and disagreement with others, solving the students' academic and administrative problems and enhancing the role of the students' guidance program.**

**Key words:** Students' violence, Hail University, Saudi Arabia, prevalence, causes, solutions.

## INTRODUCTION

Various types of violence have invaded the modern world without discriminating between societies, races or countries. Nelson Mandela, for example, described the twentieth century as "a century marked by violence [...] inflicted on a scale never seen and never possible before in human history" (Krug et al., 2002).

Violence leads to serious social, psychological and economic problems, and it is the responsibility of the

various modern societal institutions to face all modes of violence and deal with them. In the past two decades, several international seminars, conferences and discussion panels have been held to analyze the manifestations, factors and causes of violence and to propose possible solutions for this phenomenon.

One type of violence that is on the increase worldwide but especially in the Arab countries is students' violence

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on university campuses or what is often referred to as “campus violence” (Carr, 2005). It is simply defined as any activity that can disrupt the educational system. Students’ violence negatively affects individuals and communities and has dangerous impact on the social, economic, and political security and stability of universities and countries.

The psychological harm caused by this kind of violence leads to fear and loss of social, psychological and educational stability (Beale, 2001; McGaha-Garnett, 2013). Quite often, violence on campuses leads to property destruction, material loss, and eventually undermines the educational process. At times, campus violence causes physical harm and, in severe cases, results in the death of the victim.

Many factors complicate the issue of students’ violence. First is the fact that this type of violence is not exclusively caused by academic issues. Instead, the phenomenon is multi-faceted and results from a combination of environmental, psychological, cultural, intellectual and social factors. Therefore, an effective treatment of this phenomenon requires a thorough study of the underlying causes. In addition, violent students do not always experience a feeling of guilt or remorse after carrying out such acts of violence.

This is due to the fact that, quite often, these students perceive themselves as defenders of their rights (and those of others); with feeling as heroes. This way of perceiving self prevents violent students from seeing and accepting viewpoints that are different from theirs. Therefore, it is necessary to tackle the root causes of violence through dialogue seminars, meetings and conferences, as well as through extracurricular activities. The modern world has become increasingly violent, and university campuses are inevitably affected. Various scholars have defined violence as a verbal or physical activity that aims at harming people, damaging property or restricting personal freedom (Al Gdah and Dhager, 2016; Ababneh, 2007).

Violence has various types and levels: psychological violence, verbal violence, and physical violence. The latter could, in extreme cases, lead to homicide. Rosenthal and Wilson (2003) perceive violence as an oral or physical behavior that involves the use of force or bullying in order to inflict harm on others or to destroy their property. Perpetrators of violence typically have a set of goals which they attempt to achieve.

The American Psychological Association defines violence as “an extreme form of aggression, such as assault, rape or murder.” This aggression could take the form of a verbal or physical expression, and it could be carried out by an individual or a group of people usually for the purpose of asserting their social existence or to achieve or defend their interests. Violence frequently results from the individual’s or the group’s frustration or incapability to take on pressures or to tolerate viewpoints different from theirs. It could be covert and explicit or

overt and implicit.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2014) provides a more detailed definition for “violence” and emphasizes the importance of intention while carrying out the act. Violence, according to WHO is “the intentional use of force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in, or has a highly likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal development, or deprivation”.

While some psychologists consider violence to be a psychological disorder and not a social one (Al-Qudha, 2006), behavioral theorists argue that the violent behavior is caused by the environment, and that in order to control such behavior, the surrounding circumstances of an individual have to be altered and controlled.

As a pioneer of this theory, Skinner () has focused on the noticeable behavior and the role of motivation in controlling and correcting it (Nye, 1999). Bandura (1977) the founder of the social learning theory, argues that people learn by observing others. Focusing on mass communication, Bandura (1977) warns that “children and adults acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new styles of conduct through filmed and televised modeling”. Therefore, he considers the concern over televised violence to be a legitimate one.

A number of studies, such as Thatcher and John (1975) and Raine et al. (1997), establish a connection between aggression and the disorders of the chromosomes and the electrical activity in the neurotic system and the brain. Moreover, these studies argue that there is an inherited tendency to violence. In this regard, stimuli which work as instinctual takeoffs for violent responses were discovered.

While the aforementioned studies are concerned with violence in general, others have focused on campus violence. Whitaker and Pollard (2013) maintain that “campus violence has become a topic of such great concern in recent years that the traditional ‘ivory tower’ has given way to another image: campuses as microcosms of a larger increasingly violent society”. Due to the serious implications of this phenomenon, an increasing number of educational institutions and government agencies are “independently sponsoring investigations of certain forms of violence” (Litman and West, 1975).

A report by the College Parents of America, America’s only membership organization comprised of current and future college parents, suggests that the causes for campus violence include embarrassment on part of the victim, confusion over what constitutes a crime and underestimating the seriousness and consequences of a violent action.

Furthermore, a number of educational institutions have adopted definitions which focus on campus violence. The website of Emory University defines campus violence as “any physical assault, threat of assault (written, electronic,

verbal, or otherwise), and/or threatening behavior (physical or verbal) occurring in the campus”.

Most educators and researchers agree that students' violence arises from a layering of causes and risk factors that include access to weapons, drug addiction, media violence, cyber abuse, the impact of school, community, and family environments and personal alienation.

Focusing on medical students in the US, Hendricks-Matthews (1997) concludes that certain mechanisms must be created in order to assist students who have personal histories of domestic violence. Furthermore, the researcher argues that medical students must receive the support they will need to face the psychological difficulties of working with survivors of domestic violence.

In a pilot study conducted by Marcus and Reio (2002) at the University of Louisville, male and female participants were asked to describe a “most recent physical fight.” The study revealed that gender and stimulation-seeking are indirect predictors whereas mood, severity of other's injuries, argument and alcohol consumption have direct effects on self-injury. In addition, the study pointed out to important differences between male and female participants: males fought in public spaces while females fought in private situations, and the first inflicted greater injury to opponents.

Bryden and Fletcher (2007) explored the safety concerns of male and female staff members on a small American university campus. The findings of the study reveal that women staff members experience more harassment and acts of violence than their male counterparts.

However, both male and female staff members were almost equally concerned with improving safety features on campus. This appears to be due to the fact that though the numbers of male staff members who had actually experienced any form of violence is significantly lower than their female counterparts, more male staff members were concerned about safety issues. The findings of the study clearly indicate the need for the continued education of staff, faculty, students and administration about inappropriate behaviors and actions that constitute victimization.

Though a significant number of the issues and findings included in the aforementioned studies apply to violence on campuses of Arab universities, other issues are unique to the Arab world. This is particularly true since the Arab world has, over the past few years, witnessed drastic political, social and economic changes and conflicts which quite often involved the use of violence.

Repeatedly, university campuses have become the scenes of various forms of violence. In addition, it is notable that most studies on campus violence in the Arab world are related to the universities in Jordan where the phenomenon has reached alarming levels. Studies related to violence in Saudi campuses, on the other hand, are still meager.

A study entitled “Violence in the Jordanian Universities”

conducted by the Public Security Directorate in Jordan and posted on its website deals with this increasingly alarming phenomenon. According to the study, the most important reasons for violence are tribal bigotry, poor relationships among family members, unemployment, wrong upbringing, the students' inability to solve their social and academic problems, continuous oppression, lack of self-confidence, the impact of the media and the rapid economic and social changes. The study recommends increasing students' awareness through seminars and discussion panels and activating the role of the societal and the intelligence police on campuses, implementing the regulations and rules against violence and educating students on the importance of accepting opinions different from theirs.

Al-Fuqaha (2001) focuses on the students at Philadelphia University in Jordan, and explores the relationship between the level of the student's violence and aggressive behavior, on the one hand, and his or her field of study, gender, academic performance, number of family members and income on the other. The study shows that there is a correlative relationship between the level of violence and the student's gender, academic performance, and family size. On the other hand, the study indicates that there is no relation between the level of violence and the student's field of study or income.

A study by Almahreez (2006) classifies the causes of violence at Jordanian universities to those related to faculty members, university policies, administrative regulations and social, psychological and political aspects. Tawalbah (2013) investigates the students' viewpoints on the causes of the spread of students' violence at the University of Yarmouk in Jordan and presents their suggestions to solve this problem. The study shows that the most important reason for the prevalence of student's violence is the absence of deterrent procedures in applying rules and regulations against students who commit acts of violence at the university. To solve the problem, the participants suggest forming a university-family system, creating a behavior record which is to be signed by both students and parents and holding students' conferences and discussion panels to discuss and analyze the phenomenon.

Mahafza (2014) on the other hand, attributes students' violence in Jordanian universities to the admission of academically underqualified students, the inadequacy (both in quantity and quality) of extra-curricular activities, competition among students during election times, disbelief in and disregard for administrative rules and tribalism. Alshoraty (2015) categorizes the reasons for university violence into student-related and society-related.

The main reasons for student-related violence are: distance from Islamic values, inadequate use of psychological and educational counseling, forming groups on the basis of kinship, and student frustration over poor

academic performance. The reasons for society-related violence are: the bigotry to the honor of family or tribe, negative impact of peers, tribal solidarity, and interference of influential individuals to alleviate or eliminate punishment imposed on violent students.

### The current study

This study is important for the following reasons:

1. Findings of previous research reveal that violence is most common among college students (Cogan and Porcerelli, 2003).
2. Students' violence is on the increase on the campuses of Arab universities (Alshoraty, 2015).
3. Campus violence has not been adequately investigated, especially in the Arab world (Moubarak and Mesmar, n.d.).
4. Scholarly investigation of this phenomenon in Saudi Arabia is almost non-existent. Hence, it is important to thoroughly study the phenomenon of students' violence from all perspectives and angles but especially from the students' viewpoint because they are typically the perpetrators and first victims of this kind of violence.

The current study attempted to shed light on the phenomenon of violence at Hail University (HU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) from the perspective of the HU students. More specifically, this study investigates the extent to which various types of violence are prevalent at the HU, the root causes, and the possible solutions for students' violence from the HU students' perspective.

### Setting/Context

This study was conducted at HU during the first semester of the academic year 2015 to 2016. HU is one of 25 government universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) located in Hail, a city in the northwest of the country. Established in the year 2005, the university currently hosts more than 26 thousand students. Due to cultural and religious considerations, the male and female students are taught in totally separate campuses by male and female staff members respectively (Hussein and El-Emami, 2016). Like the rest of Saudi Arabia, the environment in Hail is highly conservative, and while the male campus is open to outsiders, the female campus is enclosed in high walls and no male is allowed a few meters from the main entrances. At the entrances, female security officers conduct a quick check on every person who enters, except for the staff and administrative members, to ensure that they have no forbidden items (these include smartphones and sharp objects).

## METHODOLOGY

The researcher used the descriptive-analytic method to produce statistical information about the HU students' perspective on the prevalence, causes and possible solutions to the phenomenon of violence at HU.

### Purpose of the study

This study seeks to find answers to the following inquiries in relation to students' violence at Hail University from the perspective of the HU students:

1. How prevalent is each type of students' violence at HU?
2. What causes students' violence at HU?
3. What are the potential solutions to the phenomenon of students' violence at HU from the students' perspective?

### Participants

The population of the study consisted of approximately 26,370 students enrolled at the HU during the first semester of the year 2015/2016. The sample of the study consisted of 100 male and 100 female students randomly chosen. The only condition applied for the selection of participants is that they should have spent at least two academic semesters at the university. The rationale behind this condition is to ensure that students have adequate experience and information about the issue of campus violence. Since all freshmen have to complete a preparatory year and take all their classes in buildings exclusively devoted for the preparatory year, it was not hard for the researcher to exclude them. Due to cultural restrictions, male and female students are taught in two separate campuses. Therefore, the researcher sought the assistance of a male colleague to distribute the questionnaire to male participants.

### Research instrument

To collect data for this study, a questionnaire was distributed to a randomly selected sample of HU students (100 males and 100 females). The questionnaire consisted of three parts, and each part had five statements. Students were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statements using the Likert 3-point scale ranging from 9 (agree), 5 (neutral) and 3 (disagree). The Likert scale is appropriate for this kind of research as it is used to measure latent constructs - that is attitudes, feelings, opinions, etc. which are not directly observable. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it was presented to a jury of seven members from the Faculty of Education at HU. Members of the jury were asked to carefully read the questionnaire and to record their comments and suggestions. All relevant comments and suggestions were implemented in the final draft. To ensure the reliability of the instrument of this study, the test-retest method was used. The researcher applied it to a sample of 48 students of the study population. Then, it was reapplied to the same sample, ten days later. The coefficient was (.78), which is considered suitable for this kind of studies.

## RESULTS

Figure 1 provides a summary of the participants' level of agreement with all the statements included in the three parts of the questionnaire. Figure 1 shows that students tend to have more definite opinions (agree or disagree

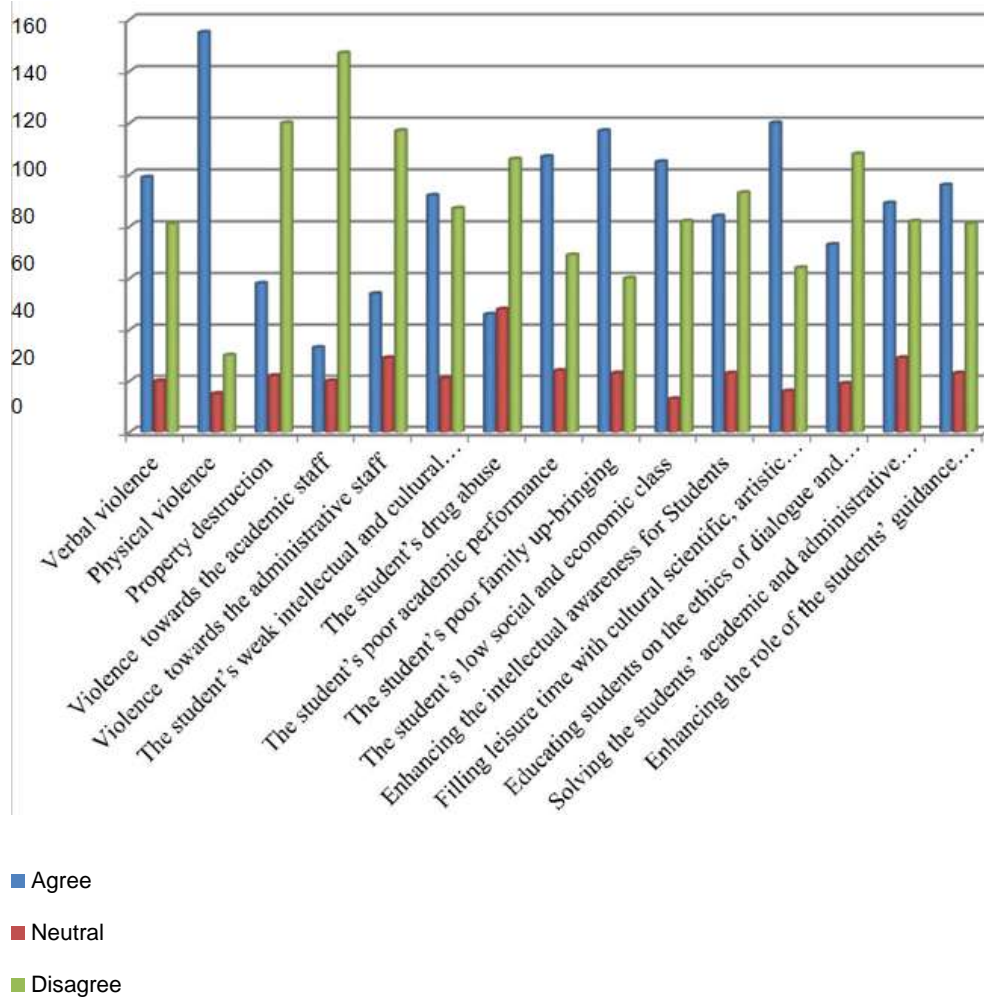


Figure 1. Overall summary of all responses.

instead of neutral) concerning the various statements of the questionnaire.

**Part one of the questionnaire**

In this part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to decide whether they agree, disagree or if they are neutral about the prevalence of various types of violence at HU. Table 1 includes a summary of their responses.

How prevalent is each type of students' violence at HU?

Tables 1 and 2 show that verbal violence (name calling, using foul language and cursing) is considered the most prevalent type of students' violence at HU by both male (mean=7.56) and female (mean=8.04) respondents. The number of male and female respondents who agreed that this form of violence is prevalent is close (75 and 80

respectively). However, 22 male respondents and 8 of the female did not agree that verbal violence is prevalent. The number of male students in comparison to female students (22 to 8) who selected "Disagree" is higher. In response to this item female students are typically more watchful of their language than their male counterparts. This is particularly true in the Saudi patriarchal culture which encourages women to be docile and modest in all situations. Physical violence (mean=7.12 and 5.22 respectively for male and female respondents) ranked second. Again, the significantly lower mean for female respondents could be attributed to gender and to the fact that more strict environment and surveillance system applied in the female campus could significantly reduce all forms of violence. The other three forms of violence were seen as less prevalent than the verbal and physical violence, and the fact that violence towards the academic staff is perceived as least prevalent. This could be attributed to the fact that the Saudi culture views educators with reverence and respect.

**Table 1.** The prevalence of various forms of violence in HU from the students' perspective.

The following types of students' violence are prevalent in the HU campus		Agree			Neutral			Disagree		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Physical violence	Q1	67	32	99	5	15	20	28	53	81
Verbal violence	Q2	75	80	155	3	12	15	22	8	30
Property destruction	Q3	33	25	58	8	14	22	59	61	120
Violence towards the academic staff	Q4	18	15	33	12	8	20	70	77	147
Violence towards the administrative staff	Q5	31	23	54	22	7	29	47	70	117

**Table 2.** Mean for prevalence of violence.

Variable	Male	Female
	Mean	Mean
Physical violence	7.12	5.22
Verbal violence	7.56	8.04
Property destruction	5.14	4.78
Violence towards the academic staff	4.32	4.06
Violence towards the administrative staff	5.3	4.52

**Table 3.** Causes for students' violence at HU from the students' perspective.

The following are causes for students' violence at HU		Agree			Neutral			Disagree		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
The student's weak intellectual and cultural awareness	Q6	56	36	92	8	13	21	36	51	87
The student's drug abuse	Q7	28	18	46	23	25	48	49	57	106
The student's poor academic performance	Q8	62	45	107	12	12	24	26	43	69
The student's poor family up-bringing	Q9	65	52	117	14	9	23	21	39	60
The student's low social and economic class	Q10	41	64	105	6	7	13	53	29	82

## Part two of the questionnaire

### *What causes students' violence at HU?*

In this part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to decide whether they agree, disagree or if they are neutral about the causes for violence in HU. Table 3 includes a summary of their responses. Tables 3 and Table 4 reveal that male respondents considered poor family upbringing, poor academic performance and weak intellectual and cultural awareness (mean=7.18, 6.96 and 6.52 respectively) to be the most important causes for campus violence in HU. Social and economic class and drug abuse were considered less important by male students. Female respondents, on the other hand, perceived that the low social and economic class is more important than poor family upbringing (mean=6.3) and poor academic performance (mean=5.94). This could be attributed to the fact that females usually pay more attention to social status and class than males.

## Part three of the questionnaire

In this part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to decide whether they agree, disagree or if they are neutral about the suggested solutions for violence in HU. Table 5 includes a summary of their responses.

What are the potential solutions to the phenomenon of students' violence at HU from the students' perspective? The female respondents ranked this solution the lowest (mean=4.58). A possible interpretation for this discrepancy is the fact that male and female campuses are totally separate and thus the types of academic and administrative problems they experience could be substantially different as well. The responses to statement 2 are also worth commenting on. Table 6 shows that while male respondents considered solving the students' academic and administrative problems to be the top potential solution to the phenomenon (mean=7.34). While the mean for the male responses to this item is 7.22, the

**Table 4.** Means for causes of violence.

Important causes for violence in HU	Female	Male
	Mean	Mean
The student's weak intellectual and cultural awareness	5.42	6.52
The student's drug abuse	4.58	5.14
The student's poor academic performance	5.94	6.96
The student's poor family upbringing	6.3	7.18
The student's low social and economic class	6.98	5.58

**Table 5.** Potential solutions to the phenomenon of students' violence at HU from the students' perspective.

The following are potential solutions to the phenomenon of students' violence at HU		Agree			Neutral			Disagree		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Enhancing the intellectual awareness for students	Q11	48	36	84	10	13	23	42	51	93
Filling leisure time with cultural scientific, artistic and sport events and competitions	Q12	68	52	120	7	9	16	25	39	64
Educating students on the ethics of dialogue and disagreement with others	Q13	28	45	73	7	12	19	65	43	108
Solving the students' academic and administrative problems	Q14	71	18	89	4	25	29	25	57	82
Enhancing the role of the students' guidance program	Q15	32	64	96	16	7	23	52	29	81

**Table 6.** Mean for potential solutions.

Potential solutions to the phenomenon of students' violence at HU	Male	Female
	Mean	Mean
Enhancing the intellectual awareness for students	6.08	5.42
Filling leisure time with cultural scientific, artistic and sport events and competitions	7.22	6.3
Educating students on the ethics of dialogue and disagreement with others	4.82	5.94
Solving the students' academic and administrative problems	7.34	4.58
Enhancing the role of the students' guidance program	5.24	6.98

mean for the female responses is 6.3. This is particularly peculiar since the male students have far greater access to means of entertainment and sports than their female counterpart. The reason for the lower mean of the female responses could therefore be attributed to the patriarchal cultural norms of the Saudi society which allows men far greater freedom than women.

## DISCUSSION

The responses to various questions in the questionnaire revealed that both male and female respondents tend to have decisive opinions (agree or disagree) instead of being neutral. Both male and female respondents rated verbal violence as the most prevalent form of violence followed by physical violence. Other forms of violence were perceived as less prevalent at HU. This is

consistent with Al-Makhareez (2006) who concluded that verbal violence is far more prevalent than other forms of violence at three Jordanian universities.

As for the causes of students' violence, poor family upbringing, poor academic performance and weak intellectual and cultural awareness were the most important causes for campus violence in HU from the perspective of male respondents. Social and economic class and drug abuse were considered less important by male students. Female respondents, on the other hand, perceived that the low social and economic class is more important than poor family upbringing and poor academic performance. These results are consistent with the findings of other studies (Tawalbah, 2013; Al-Makhareez, 2006; Marcus and Reio, 2002).

While male respondents considered solving the students' academic and administrative problems to be the top potential solution to the phenomenon, the female

respondents ranked this solution the lowest. A possible interpretation for this discrepancy is the fact that male and female campuses are totally separate and thus the types of academic and administrative problems they experience could be substantially different as well.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the results of the study, the researcher presented the following recommendations to reduce students' violence on the campus of HU:

1. Designing cultural, psychological and educational awareness programs and seminars aiming to increase student's awareness on the dangers of violence in general and campus violence in particular.
2. Developing the sense of social responsibility among university male and female students, by involving them in meaningful social, academic, and cultural activities.
3. Conducting further educational and scientific studies to identify the causes for students' violence. Students should be encouraged to participate in these studies.
4. Promoting a righteous and moderate understanding of religion for students and illustrating that Islam encourages forgiveness, love and mercy.
5. Activating the role of the social institutions as well as the literary and cultural clubs to educate people of the danger of violence and to instill the culture of pluralism and teamwork among students.
6. Granting students trust and allowing them more freedom to express themselves and answering their inquiries on different issues.
7. Activating and strictly implementing university disciplinary laws.
8. Activating the counseling students program and working to solve students' social and academic problems.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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