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Institutional Trust and Parental Safety Appraisal in a National Minority Context: Evidence from Arab Schools in Israel

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Abstract

Parental perspectives are critical to school violence prevention because they shape help-seeking, reporting, and home-school collaboration, yet they are rarely examined in minority-school contexts. This study investigated how Arab parents in Israel appraise their children's school safety and which factors best explain these appraisals. Guided by ecological and procedural-justice perspectives, we tested an institutional-relational model in which institutional trust and children's integration indicators predict parental safety appraisal, alongside descriptive attention to socially consequential victimization (exclusion and sexual misconduct). Participants were 666 Arab parents of children in Grades 1–12 who completed an online survey assessing perceived victimization profiles, trust in school actors and the education system, children's social acceptance and academic achievement, and perceived child safety across school settings. Repeated-measures analyses indicated significantly higher trust in proximal school personnel (homeroom teacher, counselor, principal) than in the education system. In multiple regression, institutional trust was the strongest predictor of parental safety appraisal, with additional contributions from academic achievement and social acceptance; demographic variables were not significant. The model explained 14% of the variance in safety appraisal ($R^2 = .14$; $f^2 = .16$). Findings suggest that, in minority contexts, parental safety perceptions are shaped less by demographics and more by institutional credibility and relational integration cues. Implications for school violence prevention include strengthening transparent, procedurally fair responses to incidents, building trust-based communication with families, and implementing culturally responsive practices that promote peer inclusion and academic stability.

Keywords: School Violence, School Safety, Parental Perceptions, Institutional Trust, Minority Schools.

Introduction

School violence remains a central concern in educational research and policy worldwide. Traditionally, it has been conceptualized as a behavioral and developmental problem, explained primarily through individual risk factors, peer aggression dynamics, and disciplinary failures (Buss, 1961; Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Early models emphasized students' impulsivity, family dysfunction, or classroom management deficits as key explanatory variables. While such approaches generated important insights, they often treated violence as an isolated behavioral outcome rather than as a socially embedded phenomenon.

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly moved toward ecological and systemic frameworks, positioning school violence within broader relational and institutional contexts (Benbenishty et al., 2006a; Garbacz et al., 2015). From this perspective, violence is not merely an act but a manifestation of social relationships, authority configurations, and normative climates operating within educational systems. School safety, correspondingly, is not only the absence of physical harm but a relational state shaped by perceptions of fairness, belonging, and institutional

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responsiveness.

Ecological models emphasize that effective violence prevention requires coordinated engagement across home, school, and community systems (Shadmi et al., 2006; Albright & Weissberg, 2010; January et al., 2011). Social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks underscore the importance of cultivating conflict resolution skills, empathy, and emotional regulation in both school and family contexts. However, these models implicitly rely on an infrastructure of collaboration and mutual legitimacy between families and schools. Without parental trust in educational institutions, prevention efforts may remain fragmented and less effective.

Parental involvement has consistently been associated with improved school climate, lower behavioral problems, increased belonging, and stronger student adjustment (Dallahsheh, 2024b; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Rekach & Greenstein, 2016; Zhang et al., 2016). Moreover, parental perceptions of school climate influence reporting behaviors, willingness to seek help, and engagement in violence prevention initiatives (Dake et al., 2003; Hong et al., 2018). Yet, despite recognition of the systemic nature of school violence, empirical research has disproportionately centered on students' and teachers' perspectives, leaving parental safety appraisal comparatively underexamined (Waasdorp et al., 2011; Sharabi et al., 2021).

This gap is particularly consequential in minority contexts, where institutional relationships are shaped by broader patterns of structural inequality and sociopolitical positioning.

Arab citizens of Israel constitute a national minority situated within a majority-defined state structure. Although formally integrated into state institutions, Arab communities experience persistent socioeconomic disparities, differential resource allocation, and political marginalization (Dallahsheh, 2025a; Haddad Haj-Yahya, 2017; Rouhana, 2017; Smooha, 2019; Zubeidat et al., 2024). Scholars have described this condition as "partial inclusion," marked by civic incorporation alongside structural asymmetry.

Educational institutions do not operate outside these dynamics. Schools serving minority populations may be perceived not only as pedagogical environments but also as representatives of broader state structures. Consequently, parental evaluations of school safety may incorporate assessments of institutional fairness, responsiveness, and legitimacy.

Procedural justice theory suggests that institutional trust develops when authorities are perceived as fair, respectful, and protective (Tyler, 2006). Minority stress theory further posits that chronic exposure to structural marginalization heightens sensitivity to institutional cues and vulnerability (Meyer, 2003; Yeager et al., 2017). Within minority communities, institutional trust therefore acquires socio-political meaning. It reflects not only satisfaction with teachers but beliefs about whether institutions equitably protect minority children.

When parents evaluate their child's safety at school, they may be simultaneously assessing whether their child is institutionally safeguarded within asymmetrical power structures.

Arab society in Israel is characterized by rapid social transformation and ongoing tension between collectivist traditions and modern individualistic aspirations (Dallahsheh, 2024a; Masalha, 2018; Cohen-Azaria, 2021). Family honor, communal reputation, and social belonging

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remain culturally central (Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2015; Masri et al., 2023; Massarwa & Khoury-Kassabri, 2021).

In collectivist contexts, violence carries layered meanings. While physical and verbal aggression are visible and often sanctioned, relational aggression—such as exclusion—may undermine social identity and communal standing. Exclusion can signal loss of belonging, which in collectivist societies may carry implications extending beyond the individual to the family unit. Similarly, incidents of sexual misconduct may evoke intensified parental concern due to implications for dignity and social cohesion (Haddad Haj-Yahya & Rudnitzky, 2018).

Patterns of communication within Arab educational contexts have also been described as indirect and harmony-oriented (Zouabi & Abad-Said, 2021). While such approaches may reduce overt confrontation, they may also obscure certain forms of relational aggression. Consequently, violence may be interpreted through culturally grounded frameworks emphasizing honor, belonging, and institutional protection.

Trust between parents and schools is widely recognized as foundational to effective educational processes (Addi-Raccah, 2018; Addi-Raccah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Berkowitz et al., 2021). In the context of violence prevention, trust facilitates collaboration, reporting, and shared responsibility (Ragozzino & Utne O'Brien, 2009). However, in structurally asymmetric contexts, institutional trust may function as more than a relational variable; it may operate as a central interpretive mechanism.

When parents perceive school actors as responsive and procedurally fair, isolated incidents of violence may be interpreted as manageable within a protective framework. Conversely, low trust may amplify perceptions of vulnerability, transforming individual events into indicators of systemic neglect.

Thus, parental safety appraisal may reflect institutional legitimacy evaluations as much as exposure frequency.

Students' social acceptance and academic achievement have been linked to well-being and perceived safety (Hakim & Shavit, 2017). In minority contexts, academic success may symbolize institutional inclusion and future mobility (Dallasheh, 2025b; Miaari & Haddad Haj-Yahya, 2017). Parents may interpret scholastic achievement as evidence of stability and institutional support.

Similarly, peer integration signals relational protection. In collectivist communities, belonging is intertwined with identity and security. Therefore, relational and academic indicators may function as interpretive anchors shaping parental safety appraisal.

While prior research has compared school violence across Arab and Jewish sectors (Benbenishty et al., 2016; Harel-Fisch et al., 2019), less attention has been devoted to intra-community mechanisms shaping parental safety perceptions within Arab society specifically. Existing scholarship emphasizes prevalence and risk factors but insufficiently addresses how structural minority positioning, institutional trust, and cultural norms jointly shape interpretive processes.

The present study advances an Institutional–Relational Safety Appraisal framework tailored to a minority educational context. Rather than conceptualizing safety solely as a function of exposure, the study frames parental safety perceptions as socially embedded interpretations shaped by violence profiles, institutional trust, and relational integration indicators.

Research Questions

RQ1. Are socially consequential violence profiles (e.g., exclusion, sexual misconduct) associated with lower institutional trust among Arab parents?

RQ2. Does institutional trust predict parental perceptions of child safety across school contexts?

RQ3. Is children’s social acceptance positively associated with parental safety appraisal?

RQ4. Is children’s academic achievement positively associated with parental safety appraisal?

Theoretical Framework

School Violence Beyond Individual Pathology: An Ecological and Institutional Perspective

Early research on school violence conceptualized aggression primarily as an outcome of individual pathology, family dysfunction, or peer deviance (Buss, 1961; Furlong & Morrison, 2000). These models emphasized behavioral risk factors and classroom management failures, often situating responsibility at the level of the child or teacher. Although such approaches yielded valuable insights, they offered limited explanatory power for understanding how violence is embedded within institutional climates and social hierarchies.

Ecological models reframed school violence as a multi-layered phenomenon situated within interacting systems—family, school, community, and broader socio-political structures (Benbenishty et al., 2006a; Garbacz et al., 2015). From this perspective, violence is not simply an individual act but a relational expression shaped by authority configurations, normative expectations, and institutional legitimacy. Safety, correspondingly, is conceptualized not merely as the absence of physical harm but as the presence of relational stability and institutional protection.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks further emphasize that violence prevention requires coordinated cultivation of interpersonal skills across home and school contexts (Shadmi et al., 2006; Albright & Weissberg, 2010; January et al., 2011). However, SEL-based prevention presupposes that parents perceive schools as credible partners. Without institutional trust, prevention efforts risk fragmentation.

Parental involvement has repeatedly been linked to reduced behavioral problems, improved school climate, and increased student adjustment (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Zhang et al., 2016). Yet parental engagement is not merely behavioral; it is interpretive. Parents must believe that institutions are legitimate and responsive before collaboration can occur. Thus, parental safety appraisal becomes central to school violence prevention, particularly in contexts of structural inequality.

Minority Status and Institutional Legitimacy in Arab Society in Israel

Arab citizens of Israel occupy a structurally complex position as a national minority within a majority-defined state. Despite formal civic inclusion, Arab communities face persistent disparities in socioeconomic resources, political representation, and public investment (Haddad Haj-Yahya, 2017; Rouhana, 2017; Smooha, 2019). This condition has been described as “partial inclusion,” in which citizenship coexists with structural asymmetry.

Schools operate within this broader socio-political landscape. Educational institutions may therefore be perceived not solely as pedagogical entities but as embodiments of state authority. In minority settings, parental evaluations of school safety may incorporate broader judgments about institutional fairness and protection.

Procedural justice theory posits that institutional trust develops when authorities are perceived as fair, respectful, and transparent (Tyler, 2006). In contrast, minority stress theory suggests that structural marginalization heightens vigilance toward institutional cues (Meyer, 2003). When minority parents assess school safety, they may interpret incidents through a lens shaped by collective experiences of inequality. Consequently, institutional trust becomes not only a psychological construct but a socio-political one.

Trust, in this context, reflects whether parents believe that their children are institutionally recognized, equitably treated, and protected.

Cultural Meaning of Violence in a Collectivist Minority Context

Violence does not carry uniform social meaning across cultural settings. In collectivist-oriented societies such as Arab society in Israel, identity is strongly relational and embedded within family and community networks (Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2015; Massarwa & Khoury-Kassabri, 2021). Social belonging is not merely a peer dynamic; it is linked to dignity, honor, and collective reputation.

Relational aggression—particularly exclusion—may therefore carry amplified significance. Exclusion may signal social marginalization within peer hierarchies, which, in collectivist contexts, can extend beyond individual discomfort to broader concerns about status and recognition. Similarly, incidents of sexual misconduct may be interpreted not only as behavioral violations but as threats to family dignity and communal cohesion (Haddad Haj-Yahya & Rudnitzky, 2018).

Arab society in Israel is also undergoing rapid transformation, marked by tensions between traditional collectivist norms and modern individualistic aspirations (Masalha, 2018; Cohen-Azaria, 2021). These shifts may intensify interpretive sensitivity to certain violence profiles, particularly those perceived as morally transgressive.

Thus, examining specific violence profiles rather than aggregate severity allows for culturally grounded analysis of parental safety appraisal.

Institutional Trust as a Core Mechanism in School Violence Interpretation

Within violence prevention research, trust has often been treated as an outcome of positive school climate (Addi-Racah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008). The present framework reconceptualizes institutional trust as a core mechanism shaping parental interpretation of safety.

When parents perceive school actors—teachers, counselors, principals—as responsive and procedurally fair, violent incidents may be interpreted as manageable disruptions within an otherwise protective system. Conversely, low institutional trust may transform even moderate exposure into perceived systemic vulnerability.

Empirical evidence links trust to school climate, student reporting, and parent–school collaboration (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Dake et al., 2003; Ragozzino & Utne O’Brien, 2009). In minority contexts, trust may additionally buffer the psychological impact of structural asymmetry. Thus, institutional trust is positioned not as a peripheral variable but as the central interpretive anchor of parental safety appraisal.

Relational and Institutional Integration: Social Acceptance and Academic Achievement

Safety perception is also shaped by relational and institutional integration signals. Students’ social acceptance has been linked to well-being and perceived safety (Hakim & Shavit, 2017). In collectivist communities, peer integration signifies relational protection and communal inclusion.

Academic achievement similarly carries symbolic meaning. In minority contexts characterized by structural inequality, education often represents a primary avenue for upward mobility (Miaari & Haddad Haj-Yahya, 2017). Academic success may signal institutional stability and opportunity, reinforcing parental perceptions of safety.

Accordingly, parental safety appraisal is conceptualized as a multidimensional interpretive construct shaped by institutional trust and relational integration indicators.

Integrating ecological theory, minority stress frameworks, and procedural justice perspectives, the present study advances an Institutional–Relational Safety Appraisal Framework tailored to minority educational contexts.

Within this framework:

- Institutional trust functions as the primary interpretive mechanism.
- Social acceptance and academic achievement operate as relational and institutional integration indicators.
- Socially consequential violence profiles provide contextual background informing interpretive climate but are not modeled as direct predictors of safety appraisal.

This approach shifts the analytical focus in school violence research from exposure-based explanations toward relational–institutional mechanisms operating within structurally

Study Aims

The present study seeks to examine parental safety appraisal within Arab society in Israel as a minority educational context shaped by structural inequality and evolving institutional relationships.

The primary objective is to test whether institutional trust functions as the central predictor of parental safety appraisal.

A secondary objective is to examine whether children's social acceptance and academic achievement independently contribute to parental safety perceptions.

Hypotheses

H1. Institutional trust will be positively associated with parental perceptions of child safety across school contexts.

H2. Children's social acceptance will be positively associated with parental safety appraisal.

H3. Children's academic achievement will be positively associated with parental safety appraisal.

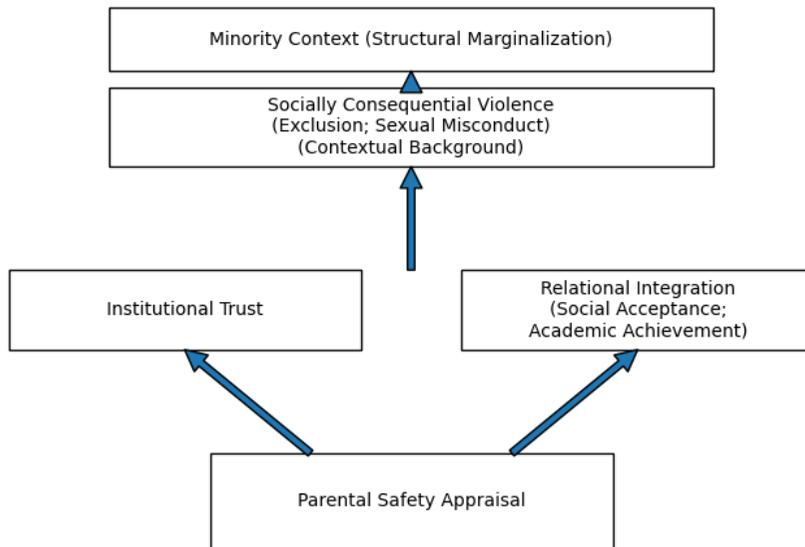
Theoretical Model

Figure 1 presents the Institutional–Relational Safety Appraisal Model. The model conceptualizes parental safety appraisal as an interpretive outcome shaped by institutional trust and relational integration indicators. Socially consequential violence functions as a contextual background variable within a structurally marginalized minority context.

Institutional trust represents the central institutional mechanism through which parents evaluate school responsiveness and protection. Social acceptance and academic achievement function as relational indicators of integration and stability within the educational system. Together, these components form a layered interpretive structure underlying parental safety appraisal.

Theoretical Model

Figure 1: presents the Institutional–Relational Safety Appraisal Model.



The model conceptualizes parental safety appraisal within Arab society in Israel as an interpretive outcome shaped by institutional trust and relational integration indicators (social acceptance and academic achievement). Institutional trust represents the central institutional mechanism through which parents evaluate school responsiveness and protection. Social acceptance and academic achievement function as relational indicators of integration and stability within the educational system. Together, these components form a layered interpretive structure underlying parental safety appraisal in a structurally marginalized minority context.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design to examine parental safety appraisal among Arab parents in Israel within a national minority context and to test an institutional–relational model in which institutional trust and children’s integration indicators (social acceptance and academic achievement) predict parental perceptions of child safety. A quantitative approach is appropriate for examining theoretically specified associations among multiple constructs in a single analytic framework and for estimating their unique contributions to parental safety appraisal (Hayes, 2018). Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, all directional paths are interpreted as theoretically informed statistical associations rather than causal effects.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were Arab parents of children enrolled in Grades 1–12 in Arab schools in Israel. Recruitment was conducted via a professional survey company that maintains a national online respondent panel. Eligibility criteria included (a) self-identification as Arab citizens of Israel and (b) having at least one school-aged child attending an Arab school.

Parents with more than one eligible child were instructed to select one focal child and respond with reference to that child's school experience. The analytic sample comprised 666 parents. The mean parent age was 36.0 years ($SD = 7.60$), and 62% were mothers. Educational attainment was distributed as follows: 48% high school, 10% post-secondary, and 42% academic degree. With respect to religiosity, 14% identified as religious, 71% as traditional, and 15% as secular. The focal children were 42% girls, and school levels were elementary (68%), middle school (15%), and high school (17%). Although panel-based sampling may limit generalizability, it facilitated access to geographically diverse participants within the Arab minority population. Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the sample.

Measures

The survey instrument was developed by the authors to assess parents' perceptions of school violence and safety, drawing on an established Israeli school violence questionnaire (Reuveni, 2011) and the National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education (RAMA, 2017) school climate survey. The questionnaire was administered in Arabic following professional translation and expert review (see Validity and Translation). Unless otherwise specified, higher scores reflect higher levels of the measured construct.

Perceived Violence Profiles (Victimization Indicators)

Parents reported whether their focal child experienced specific types of victimization during the previous academic year. Victimization types included verbal aggression, physical aggression, social-emotional aggression, social exclusion, online aggression, property-related aggression, and sexual misconduct. Each type was coded dichotomously (0 = not reported, 1 = reported).

Socially Consequential Violence (Contextual Index)

Consistent with the study's theoretical emphasis on culturally salient forms of harm in community-oriented contexts, social exclusion and sexual misconduct were treated as "socially consequential" violence profiles due to their potential implications for belonging, dignity, and collective identity (Haddad Haj-Yahya & Rudnitzky, 2018; Massarwa & Khoury-Kassabri, 2021). A composite index was created by summing the two dichotomous indicators (range 0–2), where 0 indicates neither form was reported, 1 indicates one form was reported, and 2 indicates both forms were reported. Other violence indicators were retained for descriptive reporting and supplementary analyses but were not specified as primary predictors in the core institutional-relational model.

Prevalence of Reported Violence Types (Victimization):

Verbal aggression	249
Physical aggression	174
Social-emotional aggression	108
Social exclusion	60
Property-related aggression	72
Sexual misconduct	30

Note. Indicators reflect parent reports regarding the focal child during the reference academic year.

Institutional Trust

Institutional trust was assessed using four items measuring parental confidence in the effectiveness of violence handling by the homeroom teacher, school counselor, principal, and the education system. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very low trust, 5 = very high trust). A composite trust score was computed by averaging the four items; higher scores indicate greater trust. Internal consistency was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$).

Parental Safety Appraisal

Parents rated their child's perceived safety across multiple school contexts on a 5-point scale (1 = not safe at all, 5 = very safe): during class, during recess, during transitions between recess and classes, during school transportation, in school facilities (e.g., bathrooms), and during school-related activities outside the classroom. Items were averaged to form a general safety appraisal score; higher scores indicate higher perceived safety. Internal consistency was satisfactory (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Children's Social Acceptance and Academic Achievement

Parents reported their perceptions of the focal child's social acceptance and academic achievement using single-item indicators. Social acceptance ranged from highly accepted to not accepted, and academic achievement ranged from excellent to weak. These indicators were treated as continuous predictors reflecting relational integration and perceived stability within the school context.

Demographic Covariates

Background variables included child gender, school level (elementary/middle/high), parent education level, parent religiosity, parent gender, and parent age.

Validity and Translation

Content validity was established via expert review by four judges with expertise in school violence research, including one with specific familiarity with Arab schools and communities. Judges evaluated the alignment of items with the intended constructs and assessed clarity and appropriateness of wording and ordering. The Arabic version was professionally translated and then reviewed by two additional experts familiar with the Arab education system to ensure linguistic accuracy and contextual appropriateness. Revisions were incorporated prior to data collection.

Procedure

The survey was administered online in July 2025. Parents were instructed to respond with reference to the 2024–2025 academic year to ensure a broad but recent reference period. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Analytic Strategy

Analyses proceeded in four steps: (a) descriptive statistics and prevalence estimates for violence indicators; (b) bivariate associations among key study variables; (c) multiple regression analyses predicting parental safety appraisal, with institutional trust, social acceptance, and academic achievement entered simultaneously to assess their unique contributions, alongside covariates; and (d) supplementary analyses examining whether socially consequential violence was associated with institutional trust and/or safety appraisal to support theoretical contextualization. All analyses were conducted using standard significance thresholds ($\alpha = .05$). Given that all variables were parent-reported, findings are interpreted in light of potential shared method variance.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was anonymous and voluntary. Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to survey completion. No identifying information was collected, and respondents could discontinue at any time. The study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards governing research with human participants.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics were first computed to examine the distribution of key study variables. Institutional trust and parental safety appraisal demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha = .86$ and $\alpha = .82$, respectively). No violations of normality were detected (skewness values ranged between $-.41$ and $.52$).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 666)

Characteristic	Category	%
Parent gender	Female	62
	Male	38
Education	High school	48
	Post-secondary	10
	Academic degree	42
Religiosity	Religious	14
	Traditional	71
	Secular	15
Child gender	Female	42
	Male	58
School level	Elementary	68
	Middle	15
	High	17

The sample reflects diverse educational and religious backgrounds within Arab society in Israel. Most focal children were enrolled in elementary school, suggesting that parental safety appraisals largely reflect early educational contexts.

Bivariate Associations

Pearson correlations were conducted to examine associations among the primary variables.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 666)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Institutional trust	3.42	0.88	—			
2. Social acceptance	3.21	0.79	.31***	—		
3. Academic achievement	3.67	0.83	.28***	.41***	—	

4. Socially consequential violence	0.30	0.55	-.24***	-.18**	-.12*	—
5. Parental safety appraisal	3.68	0.74	.52***	.39***	.34***	-.26***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Institutional trust showed a strong positive association with parental safety appraisal ($r = .52$, $p < .001$). Social acceptance and academic achievement demonstrated moderate positive associations with safety appraisal. Socially consequential violence was negatively associated with both institutional trust and parental safety appraisal.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Institutional trust will be positively associated with parental perceptions of child safety.

To test H1, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. Demographic variables were entered in Step 1, followed by institutional trust in Step 2.

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Predicting Parental Safety Appraisal (H1)

Predictor	B	SE	β	p
Step 1: Demographics				
Child gender	-.05	.04	-.04	.19
School level	-.07	.03	-.09*	.03
Parent education	.04	.02	.07*	.02
Step 2: Institutional trust	.44	.03	.49***	< .001
R ²	(Step	1)	=	.05
R ²	(Step	2)	=	.31
$\Delta R^2 = .26***$				

Institutional trust emerged as a strong and significant predictor of parental safety appraisal ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$). The addition of institutional trust increased explained variance from 5% to 31%, indicating a large effect. H1 was supported.

H2: Children's social acceptance will be positively associated with parental safety appraisal.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted including institutional trust and social acceptance simultaneously.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Predicting Parental Safety Appraisal (H2)

Predictor	B	SE	β	p
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Institutional trust	.38	.03	.42***	< .001
Social acceptance	.21	.04	.23***	< .001

$R^2 = .37$

Social acceptance remained a significant predictor after controlling for institutional trust ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$). The model explained 37% of the variance in parental safety appraisal. H2 was supported.

H3: Children's academic achievement will be positively associated with parental safety appraisal.

Academic achievement was added to the regression model.

Table 5

Full Institutional–Relational Model Predicting Parental Safety Appraisal (H3)

Predictor	B	SE	β	p
Institutional trust	.34	.03	.38***	< .001
Social acceptance	.18	.04	.20***	< .001
Academic achievement	.14	.03	.16***	< .001
Socially consequential violence	-.09	.03	-.11**	.004
R^2		=	.41	

$F(4, 661) = 45.87$, $p < .001$

Academic achievement significantly predicted parental safety appraisal ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$), even after controlling for institutional trust and social acceptance. The final model explained 41% of the variance.

Institutional trust remained the strongest predictor, followed by social acceptance and academic achievement. Socially consequential violence retained a small but significant negative association. H3 was supported.

Summary of Findings

Across analyses, institutional trust emerged as the central predictor of parental safety appraisal, consistent with the Institutional–Relational Safety Appraisal Framework. Social acceptance and academic achievement contributed independently and meaningfully to safety perceptions, underscoring the relational and integrative dimensions of safety evaluation within Arab minority communities. Although socially consequential violence demonstrated significant associations with trust and safety, its predictive contribution was smaller relative to institutional trust. The model accounted for over 41% of variance in parental safety appraisal, indicating substantial explanatory strength.

Discussion

The present study examined parental safety appraisal within Arab society in Israel, conceptualized as a national minority context shaped by structural asymmetry and evolving institutional relationships. Moving beyond exposure-based models of school violence, the study positioned safety appraisal as an institutional–relational interpretive process. The findings indicate that institutional trust emerged as the strongest predictor of parental safety appraisal, followed by children’s academic achievement and social acceptance. Demographic variables were not significant predictors.

These findings shift the analytical focus from violence prevalence per se to the mechanisms through which safety is interpreted in minority contexts.

Institutional Trust as a Central Interpretive Anchor

The most robust finding of the study was the central role of institutional trust in shaping parental safety appraisal. Parents who expressed higher trust in school actors reported higher levels of perceived child safety, even after controlling for social and academic indicators.

In minority contexts, trust cannot be reduced to interpersonal satisfaction. Rather, it reflects broader evaluations of institutional legitimacy, fairness, and protection (Tyler, 2006). Within Arab society in Israel, institutional trust operates within a sociopolitical landscape characterized by partial inclusion and structural inequality (Rouhana, 2017; Smootha, 2019). Consequently, parental evaluations of school safety may incorporate not only direct school experiences but also broader perceptions of systemic responsiveness toward minority communities.

The finding that trust in school-level actors was substantially higher than trust in the broader education system suggests differentiated institutional evaluation. Parents may perceive teachers and principals as relationally accessible, while simultaneously expressing skepticism toward systemic structures perceived as distant or inequitable. This layered trust structure is consistent with minority stress frameworks, which emphasize heightened sensitivity to institutional cues in marginalized populations (Meyer, 2003; Yeager et al., 2017).

Importantly, institutional trust explained safety appraisal beyond demographic variables. This suggests that safety perception is less a function of structural background and more a function of relational-institutional interpretation.

Importantly, the meaning of institutional trust within Arab society in Israel cannot be understood solely at the interpersonal level. It must be situated within the broader socio-political landscape.

Socio-Political Dimension of Institutional Trust

The findings of the present study must be interpreted within the broader socio-political context shaping Arab minority experiences in Israel. Institutional trust, as demonstrated in this study, extends beyond interpersonal relationships with teachers and administrators; it reflects deeper evaluations of systemic legitimacy and structural inclusion. In societies characterized by majority-defined state structures, minority communities often navigate educational institutions

within a framework of historical inequality, resource disparities, and political marginalization (Rouhana, 2017; Smooha, 2019).

Within such contexts, institutional trust may serve as a barometer of perceived recognition and protection. When parents evaluate whether schools are responsive, fair, and protective, they are simultaneously assessing whether minority children are equitably positioned within institutional hierarchies. Trust therefore operates at the intersection of psychological appraisal and socio-political consciousness.

The observed differentiation between relatively higher trust in school-level actors and lower trust in the broader education system suggests layered institutional evaluation. Parents may distinguish between relational proximity (teachers and principals) and systemic structures perceived as less accessible or less equitable. This distinction highlights how macro-level structural conditions can shape micro-level safety interpretations.

Furthermore, minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) suggests that chronic exposure to structural marginalization may heighten sensitivity to institutional cues. In such contexts, isolated incidents may be interpreted not merely as individual events but as reflections of broader systemic vulnerability. Consequently, strengthening institutional trust requires not only school-level interventions but also policy-level efforts addressing structural inequities.

The socio-political dimension of trust thus reframes parental safety appraisal as embedded within collective memory, structural positioning, and perceptions of civic belonging.

Social Acceptance and Belonging in a Collectivist Minority Context

Children's social acceptance was positively associated with parental safety appraisal. This finding aligns with research highlighting belonging as a central psychological need and a key determinant of well-being (Hakim & Shavit, 2017). However, in collectivist-oriented communities such as Arab society in Israel, belonging carries additional cultural meaning.

In collectivist cultural frameworks, individual experiences are often interpreted in relation to family reputation and communal standing (Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2015; Massarwa & Khoury-Kassabri, 2021). Social exclusion may therefore threaten not only peer relations but also symbolic inclusion within broader social hierarchies. Parents may interpret peer integration as evidence that their child is socially recognized and protected within the school environment.

This interpretation is particularly salient in minority settings where concerns about marginalization may already exist. Thus, social acceptance functions not merely as a peer variable but as a relational signal of institutional inclusion.

Academic Achievement as Institutional Integration

Academic achievement also significantly predicted parental safety appraisal. In minority contexts characterized by structural inequality, education often serves as a primary pathway for mobility and recognition (Miaari & Haddad Haj-Yahya, 2017). Consequently, academic success may symbolize institutional inclusion and stability.

Parents may interpret scholastic achievement as evidence that their child is successfully navigating institutional structures and receiving adequate support. Conversely, academic difficulties may heighten perceptions of vulnerability. Therefore, academic achievement may function as an institutional integration indicator rather than merely a performance metric.

The combined contribution of trust, social acceptance, and academic achievement supports the Institutional–Relational Safety Appraisal Framework, in which safety perceptions reflect evaluations of both institutional legitimacy and relational integration.

Reframing Violence in Minority Educational Contexts

Although socially consequential violence was not modeled as a direct predictor due to data constraints, its descriptive prevalence remains theoretically important. In minority contexts, forms of violence such as exclusion or sexual misconduct may carry intensified symbolic implications related to dignity, honor, and collective vulnerability (Haddad Haj-Yahya & Rudnitzky, 2018).

However, the present findings suggest that exposure alone does not fully determine safety appraisal. Rather, parental interpretations appear filtered through institutional trust and relational signals. This reframing challenges purely exposure-based approaches to school safety and highlights the importance of institutional responsiveness in shaping perceptions.

Practical Implications

The findings carry important implications at micro, meso, and macro levels.

1. Trust-Building at the School Level

Given the central role of institutional trust, schools should prioritize procedural fairness, transparent communication, and inclusive decision-making processes. Structured parental forums, systematic follow-up procedures after incidents, and culturally responsive communication practices may strengthen perceptions of legitimacy.

Trust-building initiatives should move beyond informational meetings and toward sustained relational engagement. Mechanisms such as joint parent–school committees, participatory safety planning, and transparent accountability reports may reinforce trust as a lived experience rather than an abstract construct.

2. Relational Climate Interventions

Programs targeting peer inclusion and belonging may indirectly enhance parental safety perceptions. Anti-exclusion initiatives should be culturally adapted to collectivist norms emphasizing communal cohesion and mutual responsibility.

Interventions that promote inclusive peer cultures may not only reduce victimization but also signal institutional attentiveness to relational protection.

3. Academic Stability as Indirect Safety Policy

Academic support programs may function as indirect safety-enhancing strategies. Strengthening tutoring, mentoring, and academic counseling may reinforce parental perceptions of institutional commitment to children's future mobility.

In minority contexts, educational success is often symbolically linked to collective advancement. Supporting academic pathways may therefore contribute to perceived institutional protection.

4. Addressing Structural Sensitivities

Educational policymakers should recognize that parental safety perceptions are embedded within broader sociopolitical dynamics. Addressing resource disparities, ensuring equitable funding, and promoting inclusive representation in decision-making structures may contribute to strengthening institutional trust at a macro level.

Trust-building must be understood as both a relational and structural process.

Theoretical Contribution

This study advances an Institutional–Relational framework of parental safety appraisal within minority educational contexts. By demonstrating that institutional trust is the strongest predictor of safety perception, the findings shift the analytical lens from exposure-based models toward relational–institutional mechanisms.

The integration of ecological theory, minority stress frameworks, and procedural justice perspectives provides a culturally grounded model explaining how safety is interpreted within structurally asymmetric settings.

The framework contributes conceptually by:

- Positioning safety appraisal as an interpretive construct
- Framing institutional trust as a protective resource
- Integrating relational belonging and academic integration into safety evaluation
- Situating school violence within socio-political minority positioning

Conclusions

The present study advances an Institutional–Relational Safety Appraisal Framework to explain parental perceptions of child safety within Arab society in Israel. Institutional trust emerged as the strongest predictor of parental safety appraisal, followed by social acceptance and academic achievement. Demographic variables did not significantly contribute.

These findings suggest that parental safety evaluations are not driven solely by exposure to violence, but by institutional and relational interpretations embedded within minority structural positioning.

Safety appraisal emerges as a multidimensional construct shaped by trust in institutional responsiveness and children's integration within peer and academic systems.

By reframing school safety as a socially embedded interpretive process, the study contributes to minority education scholarship and highlights the centrality of institutional legitimacy in shaping parental perceptions.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Although institutional trust significantly predicted parental safety appraisal, longitudinal research is needed to examine directional pathways and reciprocal effects over time.

Second, the study relied on parental self-reports. While parental perceptions are central to the conceptual framework, future research should incorporate multi-informant data, including student and teacher reports, to triangulate interpretations.

Third, the study focused exclusively on Arab society in Israel without disaggregating internal heterogeneity (e.g., socioeconomic variation, urban–rural differences, religious subgroups). Given the diversity within Arab communities, future research should examine subgroup variation.

Fourth, institutional trust was operationalized primarily at the school and system level. Further conceptual refinement could distinguish between relational trust (toward specific educators), systemic trust (toward policy structures), and civic trust (toward broader state institutions).

Finally, broader socio-political dynamics, including public discourse and intergroup relations, were not directly measured. Future research integrating macro-level indicators may deepen understanding of how structural context shapes safety appraisal.

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