

Student-on-teacher violence in South Africa's Tshwane South District of Gauteng Province: Voices of the victims

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Abstract

School violence is a growing concern globally. Despite various educational policies and frameworks developed to prevent school violence in South Africa, the system continues to fail teachers. Due to violence, schools are no longer safe places for teachers and learners. In South Africa, teachers are regularly exposed to physical violence and verbal attacks by learners. This qualitative study aimed to understand the lived experience of teachers who had experienced violence against them by learners. This study aimed to investigate the effects of violence on the wellbeing of teachers and strategies to support the victims. This qualitative study was conducted in one district in the Gauteng Province in South Africa and was underpinned by the National School Safety Framework as a theoretical lens. The findings revealed that teachers are experiencing social, emotional and psychological trauma. Many teachers cannot perform their duties fruitfully and are constantly anxious to go to school. The study recommends that the department employ stricter measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all its teachers. All stakeholders, including community forums, parents, police services and social development and support services, must collaborate to ensure safe schools in South Africa.

Keywords: School violence, teachers; learners, unsafe environment; trauma

Introduction

Violence in schools against teachers is a global phenomenon, with a 50% spike in the UK and the USA during the period 2016 to 2017 (Chelala, 2018; Milne, 2018; van Nieuwenhuizen, 2018). South African teachers are not exempted from acts of school violence, threats and

physical and psychological abuse (van Nieuwenhuizen, 2018). This study focuses on violence against teachers perpetrated by learners in one district in the Gauteng Province in South Africa. It aims to explore teachers' views and experiences of violence against them by learners. Pillay and Ragpot (2010) show that teachers in South Africa are repeatedly exposed to physical and verbal attacks and continued abuse by learners in and outside their classrooms. According to van Nieuwenhuizen (2018), he reported in the City Press Newspaper on 20 November 2018 that violence against teachers is escalating in South Africa. In the Limpopo Province, 900 incidents of violence were reported by June 2018. Chelala (2018) and Milne (2018) stated that in the UK, there had been an increase of more than 50% during the period 2016 to 2017 in violence against teachers, resulting in severe physical injury and emotional stress. Le Roux and Mokhele (2011) also reported an increased culture of violence at schools, with its consequent negative impact on teachers' quality of teaching and learning, which significantly deteriorated due to a drop in teachers' enthusiasm and passion.

This article explores teachers' lived experiences and the effects of violent acts on them. Several studies show a worrisome increase in Gauteng's rate of school violence (Caluza, 2019). In 2010, Pillay and Ragpot reported more than 34 cases of school violence in the province. There was the infamous gruesome incident in 2011 when a learner fatally stabbed a female teacher in Soweto. In 2012, a national study on school violence was conducted that highlighted that school violence was escalating in all provinces. The National School Violence Study (NSVS) report for 2012 undertaken by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) statistics revealed that the Western Cape Province had the highest rate of school violence (28.7%), followed by Limpopo (25.2%) and Free State (13.2%) (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). The high level of violence in these provinces suggest that there is an urgent need to prioritise school safety. Teachers are afraid and reluctant to go to classes due to violence in their schools in some of the Johannesburg South District (Pijoos, 2020) and Capricorn District in Limpopo Province (Moreroa, 2022). Teachers spend money to procure books and other resources they could use to help protect themselves against violence and abuse from learners in class (Moreroa, 2022). MEC Panyaza Lesufi envisaged including undercover police to assist in curbing violent pupil behaviors and the placement of professional correctional officials in schools to assist in rehabilitating violent pupils (Pijoos 2020). This came after the Gauteng education department found that at least 13 pupils in the province were facing criminal charges (News 24, 2019). Davids (2005) also notes a subculture of gang violence which has become a most feared phenomenon in many communities in South Africa. Gangsterism is prevalent in

all provinces in South Africa and teachers must deal with this behaviour daily. Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2017) argue that gangsterism is responsible for inciting violence in South African schools. Their study revealed that gangsterism is not isolated to urban areas of the Western Cape but is also prevalent in rural schools in Limpopo. Gang violence in schools is psychologically traumatic to teachers and affects the quality of teaching (Khuzwayo, 2012). Venketsamy (2023) found that apart from gang violence, the high teacher-learner ratio also negatively impacts teachers' classroom management, and that most teachers could not discipline learners in their overcrowded classrooms. When teachers tried to enforce discipline the learners became violent towards the teacher.

Discussion of school violence is twofold; the actual crimes of violence and the fear that accompanies the incident against the victim. According to UNICEF (2019), teachers' experience of the actual crime and the accompanying fear can cause severe physical and psychological trauma. These will inevitably affect teachers' productivity and commitment to the profession and could negatively affect their wellbeing and contribution to teaching and learning. South Africa's National Development Plan envisaged having safe schools by 2030 where citizens can live without fear in all spheres of life (National Planning Commission, 2013). Despite this initiative, school violence against teachers has increased and is evident daily in the national media. School-based violence is multi-dimensional, and how it displays itself will often depend on the environment where it manifests itself.

Why teachers experience violence against them at school

There are various reasons why learners display acts of violence against teachers. According to Joyce (2013) these include learners believing that they received unfair treatment from teachers, teachers' unrealistic requirements, and students' feelings of teacher provocation. Her findings suggest that most learner violence against teachers tends to be spontaneous or emotional responses to perceived aggravation, frustration, and unfair treatment. However, as noted by SACE (2000), school violence is also caused by socio-economic and inherent learner behaviour problems. Espelage, Anderman, Brown et al (2013) also note that school violence can be associated with domestic and community violence. How parents, caregivers, and siblings behave in the home environment influences learners' behaviour. Its influence how a learner engages with others and whether they have respect for the morals and values of other individuals (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Singh and Steyn (2014) found that learners who have endured mistreatment and abuse at home tend to display such aggressive behaviour towards

others at school, especially people of authority (teachers). As Joyce (2013) stressed, teachers who have been exposed to crime and violence at school must not be ignored, as it negatively affects their professional and personal lives and, according to Singh and Steyn (2014), is responsible for a high teacher turnover in most schools in rural South Africa. Violence at schools leads to poor teaching and learning and weakens the bond between learners and teachers.

Effects of violence on teachers

According to Mkhize, Gopal and Collins (2012), teachers affected by school violence experience high levels of depression, social isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and nervousness. When teachers are exposed to violence over extended periods, the outcomes include symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and sickness, fatigue, and career change (Sifo & Masango, 2014). Workplace stress is a leading cause of concern for education stakeholders. A survey to determine how much stress educators experience revealed that 91.3% of educators experience stress due to daily violence and abuse (Zedan, 2012). Furthermore, stress and anxiety can be caused by an increased workload, problematic learners, lack of motivation among learners, lack of resources and teaching facilities, and, in the current study case, school violence by learners (Zedan, 2012).

Carroll-Lind, Chapman and Raskauskas (2011) indicated that due to violence at schools against the teacher, they (teachers) are likely to suffer physical and psychological stress. Wet (2010) found that learners' violent behaviour towards teachers has led to increased distress among them (teachers). Furthermore, teachers exposed to learner violence felt belittled and disempowered, making them helpless, scared and anxious to go into the classrooms and face these learners. A study by Klassen and Chui (2010) revealed that teachers are not as efficient in their job when they are experiencing stress due to violence. Emotional exhaustion is a usual indication of exhaustion due to pressure from work and constant abuse from learners (Maslach 2017). Maslach (2017) discovered that individuals who experience exhaustion have chronic health problems such as sleeplessness, tension, headaches, high blood pressure, ulcers, and a potential for greater susceptibility to colds and flu. Teachers in the exhaustion stage may display reduced self-esteem (Maslach, 2017) and lack of self-confidence, impacting their quality of teaching (Farber, 2015). Maslach (2017) explained that the teacher in the exhaustion stage would no longer go the extra mile to present and support their learners. These teachers will often be absent from school and eventually resign from the profession (Bounds & Jenkins,

2018). Dworkin and Tobe (2014) found a direct correlation between learners' behaviour and attitudes towards teachers, thus increasing teacher anxiety and workplace stress.

Framework of analysis

South Africa's National School Safety Framework [NSSF] (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2016) was used as an analytical framework for this paper. This framework argues for the importance of safety in schools for all its stakeholders, including learners, academic staff and support services. The DBE, through this framework, is committed to preventing, managing and responding to safety incidents by creating a safe and supportive environment in all schools. This framework aims to "create a safe, violence and threat-free, supportive learning environment for learners, educators, principals, school governing bodies and administration" (DBE, 2016, p. 3). Mubita (2021) argues that school safety is indispensable for teachers and students staying physically and psychologically healthy. DBE (2016) also notes that when individuals are safe in their environment, they will be able to concentrate wholeheartedly on implementing their responsibilities. According to Hernandez, Flodean and Bosworth (2010), a safe school is a place devoid of violence and conducive to teaching and learning without perceived fear or intimidation. It is an environment where teachers, learners and visitors are free to interact without fear of threats, where teaching and learning take place within a conducive learning environment.

According to Reimers, Schleicher, Saavedra et al., (2020) school safety should be based on clear policies and guidelines and all decisions regarding school safety should be data-driven. South Africa's National School Safety Framework (NSSF) articulates that ensuring a safe school environment requires all stakeholders to play a decisive role in ensuring that schools are free from violence and any form of threat to teachers, learners and other stakeholders. To achieve this goal, the DBE (2016) expects school and non-school stakeholders to understand the nature of violence and its effect on teachers, learners and other stakeholders within its environment. Furthermore, this framework envisages assisting the schools in understanding and identifying all security issues and threats, guiding schools to effectively respond to identified security issues and threats, creating reporting systems, managing reported incidents appropriately and helping the school monitor its progress over time.

Research methods and design

This qualitative, interpretive study investigated teachers who experienced violence at school. Creswell (2014) states that the qualitative research approach examines and understands the

meaning that individuals assign to a social problem. To comprehend the truths of the participants, the researcher engaged with the participants and probed into their experiences of violence they endured from learners. Maree (2016) states that listening to a person in their social environment allows one to understand why they have certain beliefs. Each participant's responses were interpreted to make meaning of the data produced. The authors used semi-structured open-ended questionnaires as a tool to collect qualitative data. The study included six (6) participants from three (3) schools in the Gauteng Province, located in the Tshwane South District. Two participants from each school voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

School	Participant	Gender	Years of teaching
A	P1	Female	5
	P2	Female	6
B	P3	Female	4
	P4	Female	5
C	P5	Male	7
	P6	Female	3

Ethical approval

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Pretoria research office (Ref. EDU 109/20) and the Gauteng Department of Education. Participants who agreed to participate in this study were informed about the processes involved. Participants were informed of voluntary participation, anonymity and the right to withdraw without prejudice from the study. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the codes P1-P6 were used where 'P' refers to 'participants' and '1-6' refer to the numbers allocated to each participant to ensure confidentiality.

Data Generation

The questionnaire comprised section A, which required the participants to provide their biographical data. Section B of the questionnaire consisted of five questions revolving around teachers' experience of violence against them by learners. Six participants were purposively selected because they met the inclusion criteria. Five of the participants were females and one

was male. The inclusion criteria were a) the participant had to be a victim of violence at school, b) they must be teaching in a public school, and c) they reported an act of violence to their school leaders.

Data Analysis

The data gathered were analysed using thematic coding. The interviews were transcribed, and the data were coded into themes. Data analysis in coding and categorising themes was based on the NSSF framework. The researcher approached the data analysis described by Creswell (2014). The analysis included the following steps: open coding to ensure a thorough understanding of the data and classifying the data; accordingly, secondly, all the data was reviewed, and themes were identified from the codes. The data that were related to each other were grouped into themes. After the themes were identified, the final stage was discussed with the research supervisor to confirm the findings' accuracy.

Findings

Based on the data generated and analysed, the following themes emerged regarding teachers' experience of violence against them by learners.

- Teachers' experience of violence.
- Causes of teachers' experience of violence.
- Effects of violence on teachers.

Teachers' experience of violence

To explore participants' experiences of violence, the authors asked each participant to share their lived experiences during the interview. All the participants, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6, agreed that they were victims of violence against them by learners. They reported that the learners showed no respect, were ill-disciplined, arrogant, insolent, and were verbally and physically abusive to them.

P1 stated, *“I have very little grounds to stand on when learners are abusive towards me. I tried to report these incidents, but they went on deaf ears. Nothing is done about it.”*

According to P2,

I am faced with this dilemma on a daily basis. I sometimes just don't want to go to class anymore. When my back was turned, the one learner threw his books at me.

P4 had a similar experience,

This one boy was so disrespectful. I asked him to leave my class. He pulled out a knife and threatened me. The other kids just laughed. There was nothing I could do. My experience was so bad that another female student threatened me verbally. She even said that she knew where I lived and would come to my house. For this reason, I was too afraid to even report the incident to the principal.

The authors confirmed that all six participants experienced some form of violence against them in their schools from the data. "*Sometimes the violence is passive and at other times it is active*", according to P5. When the researcher probed further regarding passive and active violence, the examples she cited were students swearing at her (using vulgar words) that are inaudible to the teacher; throwing balls of paper at the teachers when their backs were turned; students painting graffiti on their cars, classroom doors, and scrawling obscenities on the school bathroom with teacher's names on the wall.

In their responses both P3 and P6 reported that they had experienced violence since they started insisting that learners do their homework and submit their work on time. As a result of their insistence to submit work, learners became antagonists towards them. They left abusive notes on their tables, wrote obscene words on the board and passed sniggering remarks when they left the class. Both participants stated that the learners were continuously abusive, showed no respect, and disregarded their instructions. P5, the male teacher, indicated that the violence against him was more active than with the female teachers (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6). Learners would throw paper balls, rocks and berries (syringa berries) at him. This was often done when his back was turned to the learners. He was physically pushed by learners. He also reported that once, "*When my back is[sic] turned, a learner threw a tennis ball at me.*"

The violence against teachers indicates that teachers have no control over learners in their classes. Teachers are often afraid to report these cases to higher authorities. According to P1, she indicated, "*This learner was so rude and arrogant that she blatantly told me that she would stab me in the street if I reported her.*"

Causes of teachers' experience of violence

To delve deeper into violence against teachers, the authors asked the participants their views of the causes of violence against them. The participants' responses were as follows:

P1; P3 agree with P5 that:

The primary cause of violence in our society and especially in schools today is 'Children's Rights'. Children have more rights in schools today than the teachers. Teachers cannot even lift their finger or point at a learner. These learners will

articulate their rights to their teachers indicating that they have a right to be in school, be educated and protected.

P4 responded to this question by saying:

The main cause, in my opinion, is discipline at home. These children are not disciplined at home, they bring that [indisciplined] behaviour into our classrooms and we have to tolerate this nonsense.

P5 on the other hand thought that:

The main cause of violence started when the DBE implemented the policy of non-corporal punishment. This was the beginning of chaos in our schools. Learners know that a teacher cannot spank him or them, and they would report the incident to the police.

He went on further to say:

Why should I lose my job because I want to educate these disrespectful children – well, I just tolerate them until the end of each day.

Other causal factors from the interview transcript are related to academic tension, violence learned in society, student underperformance in class, and bullying.

For instance, P3 indicated,

I have found that those learners who are not coping in class are the ones who are constantly showing signs of aggression towards me. This particular learner does not like to do my work, and when I ask him for his work, he responds very aggressively towards me. I feel rather intimidated by this learner.

Effects of violence on teachers

For an in-depth understanding of the effects of violence against teachers, the researchers asked: “how did learner violence affect you?” In the probing question, she asked teachers to describe the emotional, psychological, and social effects violence had on them and how it affected them.

Participants 4 and 5 made no secret of the fear they experienced in their classes. P4, a young female teacher said:

I am in constant fear and anxiety when I enter my class. I do not know what to expect from these learners. If they are not slandering my name on some piece of

paper and passing it around, they mock me behind my back. When I question their behaviour, they often respond, 'what are you going to do about it?'

After a violent experience at school, P3 stated:

The experience at school makes me feel angry with everyone around me. It is so unfair that I have to go through this kind of behaviour daily. Most of the time, I am unable to think straight. My family has complained that I am withdrawn and have become irritable and sluggish in my behaviour. I don't look forward to school. School is just a negative space for me at the moment.'

Another participant, P2, highlighted her experience as:

I am a nervous wreck when I enter the class. The learners refuse to sit and listen to my lesson, and they are constantly disrupting, talking to each other and snickering at me. Most of my time, I try to focus my attention on those learners who want to learn, but my conscious gets the better of me for neglecting the unruly learners.'

P5 similarly confessed,

I am depressed most of the time. I hate Monday to Friday to go to school. I have no choice but am forced to go to school and face daily abuse and ridicule from these learners. I am not sure how long I will be able to endure this behaviour. I have already been to the psychologist and was diagnosed as depressive. I am on medication just to cope with this job. I sometimes ask myself, is this really worth it? If I find another private school with fewer learners, I am definitely going to transfer. I have come to the end of my tethers at this school.

P3 shared her experience:

At that moment, I definitely felt like this boy would physically like fight with me now. And I mean they're more or less my height, so it's not like there's a big height difference; we're more or less like the same and they're boys, I'm sure they're physically stronger. As a result of the constant bad behaviour, I have become socially withdrawn in my class. I don't know when these learners will turn on me.

P4 said:

I think from my experience I have got to share this with you. On top of the list, it would be the sense of absolute disrespect for teachers. They make one feel

insecure and less worthy, and we begin to develop poor self-esteem when they pick on the way we dress. This sort of behaviour comes mainly from my female learners.

P1 cynically stated that:

A teacher is just a teacher too stupid to do anything else. Very often, that's the public's perception, and that filters through to violence because if somebody is not human or sub-human or a very low form of human life; very easy to just assault that individual person; they don't really matter, whereas you would think twice before assaulting an attorney. These learners' behaviours had a major social and psychological impact on me. I am wary when I go to the shopping centre in my community. These learners are standing in groups at the shops. I am scared all the time and not sure what they will say to me outside the school environment.

According to P5, she said:

I fear going to school every morning. I am sick with fear and anxiety. I don't know what the learners will be up to another day. Sometimes I wish I could go back to university and just study or find another job. Sadly, my qualification is for teaching only. What makes my situation worse is the financial responsibility I have. I cannot afford to leave my job at this stage. So, can you see and understand my predicament. This is psychological trauma to me.

All participants expressed anger and frustration at the alarming state of learner violence directed at them in schools. and with learners' disrespect towards them, and the fact that there is no support for teachers who are victims of this phenomenon. This was stressed by P2:

it does have an impact that now even my teaching ability comes to...I lose energy, I become so lethargic and now even at home, even at school, I start shouting at kids who are so innocent. I still have that anger. I've just been disrespected and violated by a learner, so these are some of the effects this has on us as educators.

The responses show that participants are experiencing extreme social, psychological and emotional trauma due to violence. They are in constant fear and anxiety, yet the education system expects these teachers to perform optimally.

Discussion

School violence is a pervasive barrier to teaching and learning, and its prevalence significantly affects teachers' wellbeing. Student violence against teachers in Gauteng Province of South Africa is rampant, and it can harm the education sector's wellbeing, effectiveness, and permanency. The participants in this study revealed that the violence experienced by teachers is rampant and continuing. Although the sample was small in this study and was explicitly focused on Gauteng, Burton and Leoschut (2013) revealed that other South African provinces equally experience a high rate of violence. This includes provinces such as the Western Cape, Limpopo and Free State. Even though many teachers are being abused and attacked by learners, the participants revealed that they do not receive support from their school leaders or their respective departments of education and the DBE.

Teachers must act professionally and ensure quality school teaching and learning (Joyce, 2013). Espelage et al. (2013) note that violence significantly impacts teachers' morale and integrity, robbing teachers of the passion and enthusiasm to go into the classroom and teach. This was evident in most participants' responses, as they indicated that they “*fear to go to school*” or were always “*feeling anxious*”; or were “*feeling threatened and unsafe in schools.*” This accords with the 2012 National School Violence Study by Burton and Leoschut (2013), where 70% of South Africa’s high school teachers whom they surveyed reported that they do not feel safe within their school environment, despite school principals indicating that their teachers feel safe in schools. Due to the increased violence against them, most participants lacked enthusiasm for teaching. In their research, Bester and du Plessis (2010) found that the relationship between teachers and learners deteriorated significantly due to violence in schools. This is supported by Moreroa (2022) who also identified similar findings in her studies in Limpopo, a rural province in South Africa. Makota and Leoschut (2016) aver that school violence detracts from teaching and learning and sours teachers' attitudes. Learner-on-teacher violence impacts the overall learner success in a school negatively.

This study also highlights the need for teachers to be given more authority to discipline learners for whom they are responsible in their classrooms. Most teachers feel disempowered and learners show no respect for them as professionals, a situation that concurs with similar findings by Maphosa and Shumba (2010). The participants believe that abolishing corporal punishment and the absence of any form of punishment for bad student behaviour have increased the incidence of school violence against teachers. De Lange, Mitchell and Bhana (2012) reported that teachers felt that their authority to guide learners and to correct them when

they are guilty of some misdemeanour was eradicated when corporal punishment was abolished. Santos and Tin (2018) also noted that the increase in school violence is due to learners knowing that 'teachers can do nothing' when they (learners) behave aggressively toward them. They found that learners know there will be no repercussions for harassing or speaking inappropriately to teachers. These learners are fully aware that they are protected by "Children's Rights" and the Constitution of South Africa.

The participants were of the view that teachers were supposed to educate learners, correct them and lead them to responsible adulthood. However, like the study by Joyce (2013), this study also found that when teachers highlighted learners' mistakes or misbehaviour, learners tended to become aggressive and violent towards them.

This study revealed that most teachers considered learner violence to have detrimental effects on them and on their attitudes towards teaching and learning. The participants reported suffering emotional, psychological and social trauma due to violent experiences. These findings agree with Mkhize, Gopal and Collins (2012), who states that teachers who are affected by school violence experience depression, social isolation, loneliness, anxiety and nervousness. When teachers are exposed to violence over extended periods, the outcome includes symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), fatigue and sometimes marital breakdown (Sifo & Masango, 2014). All participants in this study indicated the extreme stress they have experienced in their work environment and felt unable to cope. A survey by Zedan (2012) revealed that 91.3% of South African high school teachers experienced high-stress levels due to problematic learners and school violence.

According to SACE (2018), every teacher has the right to a safe and conducive work environment. This study, though limited in scope, found that South Africa's teachers need to be in a safe and conducive environment. Teachers feel unprotected, threatened, and anxious in their work environment (Chetty, 2021). Consequently, teachers feel vulnerable and fearful to go the extra mile to support learners (Xaba, 2014). The participants revealed that learners know their (teachers) home addresses, travel routes and mode of transport and some have threatened to meet teachers after school or visit them at their homes. The participants also revealed that despite the various policies developed by the DBE and the provincial education department to address school safety, these policies have little or no impact on protecting teachers.

Conclusion

Each year thousands of teachers across South Africa experience violence. School violence is rampant, affecting teachers' wellbeing (UNICEF, 2019). Chetty (2021) states that twenty per cent of teachers in South Africa believe schools are places of extreme violence that come from different sources and take on many forms. Learners are becoming increasingly violent and aggressive towards teachers and other authority figures within the school environment (Nhambura, 2020). The teacher's authority is no longer respected and acknowledged in schools (Saferspaces, 2021). Several factors cited for learner violence against teachers according to Mncube and Harbor (2013) include academic tension, inappropriate disciplinary measures at the school level, socio-economic factors and learned anti-social behaviour. These acts of violence leave profound social, psychological and emotional trauma on the victim teachers. Many teachers who have experienced violence are eager to leave the system for alternative employment, and many revealed that their careers had been destroyed through trauma and PTSD.

According to Chetty (2021), principals and teachers should be assured of protection against harm from learners. Security in schools must be assured and no teacher should feel unsafe within the school environment. The strict measure should be in place to ensure that such behaviours do not repeat themselves.

In this study, the authors highlighted the findings and experiences of violence against teachers in one district in the Gauteng Province in South Africa. Schools that experience problems with violence against teachers must ensure active safety security measures are in place for teachers and that perpetrators of violence should be held accountable.

Despite the DBE developing policies and guidelines such as “Safety in Education Partnership, Safety in Education pledge and School Safety Framework” to prevent and protect teachers against violence in schools, these have been ineffective. In its Bill of Rights, the Constitution of South Africa (1996) articulates the protection of all citizens; the participants in this study believe these policies, laws and rights are only good on paper and are not implementable. According to DBE spokesman, Elijah Mhlanga, and Minister Angie Motshekga, the department is concerned about the violence in schools, and they are doing their best to engage with communities, the South African Police Force and the Department of Social Development to work collaboratively to prevent violence against teachers and other stakeholders (Motshekga, 2019).

Recommendations

Although this study was limited to a small number of participants, the finding has assisted the authors in making worthy recommendations. The following recommendations are proposed.

Minimising teacher's experience of violence

- The participants felt that teacher-training institutions must prepare their students to cope with violent learner behaviour. They must train new teachers and equip them with strategies for curbing violent learner behaviour. They emphasized that higher education institutions must prepare pre-service teachers on appropriate and practical classroom management strategies.

Supporting teachers when facing the effects of violence against them

- The study recommends that the DBE and the provincial education departments employ social workers, psychologists, and counsellors at schools or district levels to support teachers who experience violence or trauma. These professionals must be positioned at schools, district or provincial levels and accessible to teachers. These services should also be easily accessible to learners. Since some of the problems teachers face with learners are beyond their capacity to handle, support from counsellors, psychologists, and social workers will alleviate teachers' burden on dealing with learners' social issues and prevent them from behaving violently at school.
- Developing a teacher trauma incident management system can assist in understanding how teachers are affected by school violence. The DBE should initiate an institute that could serve as a central resource for teachers and schools struggling with school violence to prevent escalation (Duffy & Mooney, 2014). The authors believe that the DBE should consider the initiative of a safety centre for teachers in each province. Furthermore, a teacher safety association should be established with the unions and other stakeholders to protect and safeguard teachers from harm or hurt.

Reinforcing the strategies to minimise violence against teachers

While South African schools are furnished with the learners' code of conduct, safety policies, and the disciplinary committee, schools are still haunted by incidents of violence. There is a need, therefore, to adopt a new approach to learner discipline that incorporates psychological and psycho-educational support systems.

- Schools must have a solid partnership with parents, the community, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders, such as law enforcement agencies, to ensure that learners know that misbehaviour and violence against teachers carry some negative repercussions.
- The DBE must create an effective curriculum that teaches values such as tolerance, mutual respect, fairness, and good citizenship. An example of such a curriculum is the character education curriculum formed in 1992 by the Joseph Institute (Peterson, O'Connor & Fluke, 2014).

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