The Negative Consequence of Teacher Directed Violence to Student Learning [*]

Molefi MOTSOENENG [1] iD

Abstract

The study explores the experiences of secondary school teacher-directed violence. Violence directed at teachers can have a negative attitude towards their job, as well as not performing to expectations. Thus, it is important to increase knowledge regarding violence as educators experience it, so as to be able to work preventively and minimise the violence. The study is guided by the ınterpretative phenomenological analysis which seeks to understand the experiences of teacher-directed violence. Interviews were conducted with 10 teachers from various secondary schools at a neutral venue outside the respondents' schools and homes. Analysis revealed five main themes, namely absenteeism due to fear, fear for their safety, teacher turnover as result of violence, harassment, and intimidation. The findings revealed that more serious acts of violence on teachers affected their performance at school. If not addressed, this problem of violence has the capacity to render the education system dysfunctional. In conclusion, authorities must act against this threat on teachers in order to normalise the situation at schools throughout the country.

Keywords: Teacher-directed violence, safety, absenteeism, intimidation and harassment

1. INTRODUCTION

The study examines the consequence of learner violence on teachers' desire to work. The school environment has been characterised as violent when teachers are exposed to violence ranging from physical to verbal, to social forms of violence (Lokmić, Opić, & Bilić, 2013; Prpić, 2021; Ünsal & Atanur-Baskan, 2021). Assaults intended to cause bodily harm to teachers are rising and teacher-directed violence is contributing to a toxic workplace environment (Waheed & Youssef, 2007). Over the years, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has tried various means to protect learners in schools, but, unfortunately, teachers' safety has been neglected (Mahome, 2019). This violence is a burning issue that needs to be addressed urgently in an effort to provide a safer environment regarding the work and safety of both learners and teachers (McMahon, Martinez & Espelage, et al, 2014; Wilson, Douglas & Lyon, 2011).

Furthermore, it is confirmed that teacher-directed violence contributes negatively to excellent teaching and increases fear, physical and psychological consequences to the victims, and low learner performance (Eddy & Camp, 2017; Huang, Gluschkoff, Elovainio, Hintsa, Pentti, Salo, Kivimäki, & Vahtera, 2020; Wilson et al., 2011). As well as the physical dangers posed by assault, theft, and vandalism, there are psychological and social side effects for teachers that cause anxiety and fear which need to be addressed (van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2010). A main concern is that continuing forms of violence, such as harassment and intimidation which are not as visible, may more than likely not be taken seriously, but have the potential to be more harmful to the victims (Bass, Cigularov, Chen, Henry, Tomazic, & Li, 2016).

Teacher-directed violence, according to Nielsen and Einarsen (2018), is a worldwide phenomen with similar features and outcomes present around the world. According to Moon, Morash, Jang and Jeong, (2015), Canada and the United States reported 80% of teachers were victims of verbal, psychological, and physical violence. Similarly, 4% of a nationally representative sample of Israeli 7th-11th grade students reported they had threatened to hurt a teacher (Maeng, Malone, & Cornel, 2020). The Taiwanese situation is not different: a nationally representative sample of 14,022 Taiwanese youths reported that nearly one-third of students were involved in verbally and/or physically aggressive ehaviour against teachers (Moon, et al., 2015). In addition, teachers may feel blamed, powerless, or unsafe, especially if administrators do not step in to support them (Maeng et al., 2020).

Increased teacher turnover and greater health care costs negatively impact the overall culture of the school (Wilson, et al. 2011). Because both teacher-directed violence and teacher turnover are so prevalent, the extent to which these two issues are related is an important question. Teacher violence has demonstrated that it influences the teacher's decision to quit altogether (Peist, McMahon, Davis & Keys, 2020); however, there is still a dearth of research on teacher-directed violence in relation to turnover and retention of teachers (McMahon et al., 2014). Poor working conditions, school violence, a negative school climate, and ill-disciplined learners are directly related to the satisfaction of teachers (Lokmić, Opić, & Bilić, 2013). A teacher moving to a different school is directly related to their experience of being threatened with injury or being assaulted by a student (Moon, Saw & McCluskey, 2020). Poor working conditions, violence, ill-disciplined learners, and a negative school climate being directly related to teacher satisfaction and retention are also noted by McMahon, et al., (2014). These negative outcomes for teachers have subsequently been linked to low student achievement and adjustment (Espelage, et al., 2013; Gray, Wilcox, & Nordstokke, 2017; Khoury-Khassabri, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2009). Thus the aim of the study of the is to explore the the negative consequence of teacher-directed violence to student learning.

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2. METHOD

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which focuses on lived experiences of teacher-directed violence, is the most appropriate methodology. The choice of IPA was influenced by the "prime reason for choosing IPA over any other qualitative approach being be because it is consistent with the epistemological position of your research question" (Smith Larkin, & Flowers, 2009:46). The advantage of using IPA qualitative is that it provides the researcher the chance to speak directly with study participants and see the environments in which they worked, lived, and interacted (Lobiondo-Wood, & Haber, 2010). The semi-structured interview was designed to seek information on teachers-directed violece. With regards to the teachers-directed violence, interviews focused upon their personal experiences with violence, negative effects on their health and carrers. The questions were first first given a go ahead by a colleague in the department to assess its relevance to the topic. In ensuring validity participants' feedback on the transcript of the interview and determining whether the resultant themes and concepts accurately reflect the phenomenon under investigation was importan (Noble, & Smith, 2015). The reliability has to do with ability of the researcher to assess the'soundness' of the research in terms of the applicability and appropriateness of the methodologies used and the integrity of the conclusions drawn is satisfied.

2.1. Participants

Ten participants were purposively sampled. They came from local schools with entirely African teachers and students. Interviews were conducted with 6 females and 4 males teachers. Age ranges from 25 to 40 years, with an average experience of 5 to 12 years teaching experience. Most of the participants were African and spoke Sesotho.

2.2. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection which involves IPA is a process aimed at understanding the respondents lived experiences regarding violence at various schools. The data collection in the study involved a process over 6 months in which a maximum of ten in-depth semi-structured interviews were held. The researcher conducted the interviews throughout the study. The interviews each lasted for a maximum of one hour. Thereafter, they were subjected to a semi-interview which lasted for a maximum of 30 minutes.

2.3. Data Analysis

The raw data analysis was transcribed verbatim from transcripts using IPA (Smith et al., 2009). The six steps suggested by Smith (2011a, b) were utilized as follows: reading and re-reading the transcript carefully with the objective of themes identification, clustering of themes, refining the clustering of themes, cross case analysing to identify superordinate themes, labelling of super-ordinate themes, and writing of a narrative report. The researchers took an approach of openness and occupied themselves in the data, as was consistent with the approach taken on data collection. The researchers tried by all means to understand each participant's lived experience before taking the next move. During the analysis stage, the researchers were honest regarding each participant's lived experience, focusing mainly on lived experience whilst searching for common themes (Eatough & Smith, 2006). The researchers corroborated the themes which had been inferred through discussion.

3. FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

Themes 1: Absenteeism due to fear

The participants reported on the reasons behind high absenteeism of teachers. Most took sick leave when they were absent from the work, although the reason was to avoid the students.

> *"When I think of reporting to work, I always think about these learners who are going to make my life miserable at all costs. I develop an attitude not to see them I used means to stay away from work even to an extent of consulting a doctor to book me off for three day minimum a week then I know I see them only for two days in a week"* (Respondent # 3).

> *"I used all my days' sick leave days in a year and my leave days for the rest of the year also. I did that to be away from this unsafe environment. I think it is cause of this constant illness I suffered. I am now left with no option but to face these unruly learners daily."* (Respondent # 7)

> *"Within a week you can rarely find a full staff complement, there is always a staff member absent due to sickness or taken a leave. They cite the violence as the main reason why they stay away. It's a pity that committed learners suffer because these violent learners, because tuition cannot take place in this toxic environment"* (Respondent # 5).

> "*When I feel like staying away I do, because the school is so dysfunctional you think the learners are managers, because everything they say it goes, no questions. No one will ask you why you were absent for the last two days or three. It is very chaotic here, we do not even sign the register and most of us take an advantage of poor admistration and stay away"* (Respondent # 9).

The South Africa education sector is certainly not spared from teacher absenteeism. South African teachers lead with regard to absence from work when compared to their Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region counterparts, with 19 days annually as opposed to 9 days in SADEC region. Chauke (2014) argues that teacher absenteeism contributes to students' underperformance in schools. It is assumed that between 10% and 12% of teachers avoid going to school, which amounts to 39,000 teachers on a daily basis. In addition, 77% of instances in which teachers are absent are Mondays and Fridays. The teachers affected by a 'stress' response to violence

have also been taking long leave and this extended absenteeism has further negative effects on teaching and learning at schools (Singh & Steyn, 2014).

Theme 2: Fear for their Safety

The teachers were more worried about their safety at school. They expressed having developed a fear for the learners – a fear for what might happen to them and their colleagues.

> *"I am afraid to discipline the learners, because you are not sure what will happen to you if you upset them. They carry the weapons with them to the schools. The random search done by police does not assist because there is no consequence management. They will display a knife when they are in wrong to threaten you not to say a word to correct the behaviour. I fear for my life every day when I am in classroom, I find myself teaching only twenty minutes and then I left the class" (Respondent # 1).*

> *"A colleague was attacked and killed by learners who were disciplined for an unruly behaviour at school. He was attacked at gate at his house and killed and fled with his car. They were arrested at border when entering Lesotho. The learner did this heinous act with the assistance his friends from Lesotho. They first flatten his motor car tyres at school I saw it as warning. I think we have lost our authority as teachers" (Respondent # 4).*

> *"They pour a full bucket of cold water on me and told me I am interfering in their business now they are teaching me not to poke my nose in their affairs. I have accepted that they are not prepared to be disciplined. I must put my life first and leave them" (Respondent # 8).*

The establishment of a safe school environment in which effective teaching and learning can take place is hampered by teacher-directed violence (Singh & Steyn, 2014). The learner violence against teachers creates an unsafe environment for teachers and is a prime source of teachers' strikes (Shields, Nadasen & Hanneke, 2015). According to Segalo and Rambuda (2018), teachers fear for their safety and thus opt not to deal with leaners behaviour. The use of weapons by learners to coerce teachers to submit to their demands not to be punished for their violence against their teachers has compromised the safety of teachers. Due to these incidents, teachers feel that fear and insecurity thwart their efforts to meet their professional responsibilities of creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools (Zulu, Urbani, van der Merwe & van der Walt, 2004).

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Theme 3: Teacher turnover as a result of violence

Many good teachers have left the profession citing violence as one of the reasons. Those currently working planned to take a package and start something new, rather than live with the constant fear of being attacked or being killed in the line of duty.

> *"The learners have changed drastically unlike the learners I encountered them when I started teaching. I have made up my mind I am quitting at end of the year. I am taking early retirement is better than to die here. I fear these learners anything is possible with them" (Respondent # 10).*

> *"The reports that teachers are being killed make me not take my safety lightly, for the fear. I am taking a package at the end of financial year. I cannot wait another year I have made my life I am leaving. You have to watch your back every time you are in school premises. I might be the next victim who knows what these learners are planning behind my back" (Respondent # 1).*

> *"I was attacked by learner in a class with a scissor. I had to run around the table for my life until I got an opportunity to escape. I ran straight to the principal office. I reported the matter and the principal did nothing. I do not see any reason why I still have to work I am currently serving a notice, I am definitely leaving at end of the month. My life take a first priority" (Respondent # 8).*

Teacher-directed violence is a prime reason for teachers to leave their post (Peist, et al., 2020). This is confirmed by Moon et al. (2020) who state that violence contributes significantly to the decision to leave the profession altogether. There are, however, few studies that have examined the relationship between teacher-directed violence and teacher turnover. Teachers who reported experiences of being threatened with injury or being assaulted by a student were more likely to move to a different school the following year (Curran, Viano, & Fisher, 2019; Zurawiecki, 2013). Teachers have very often accepted that they have lost control over their classrooms; very often, they do not know of methods that can be used to replace corporal punishment with other non-violent corrective techniques (Botha & Zwane, 2021).

Theme 4: Harassment

The teachers reported a continuous harassment by learners. In their own words, they reported these acts of harassment:

"I am a victim of cyberbullying, which is a common form of harassment now of late. They are sending us messages on our cell phones. Mostly the messages are not appropriate for learners to be sent to teacher, they contain vulgar language. Moreover, they even insult us through Twitter and Facebook" (Respondent # 6).

"I was referred as stupid for not allowing a learner to leave early for unsound reasons. He just wanted to knock early that Friday because I refuse and referred him to principal now I am stupid teacher. To add to that he started referring me as 'cow' meaning I am stupid. Now my official name to learners is 'cow'" (Respondents # 2).
"The learners in my class has given me a nickname when they are gossiping about me they use it. They use it to warn others that you are coming, they must be careful. Other learners will quickly leave the class because they are aware you will ask for a homework, you will find an empty class to teach" (Respondent # 5).

"In my class when I write on the board the whole class laughs and makes funny remarks referring me as a 'sheep' but immediately when you turn to them, they are all quiet" (Respondent # 3).

It has been reported by McMahon et al., (2014) that harassment of teachers is more common than other forms of violence. According to Burns, Fogelgarn and Billett (2020), teacher-targeted bullying and harassment by learners has a real, detrimental, and continuing impact which is negative on teacher wellbeing. Kõiv (2015) conducted a study on teacher-targeted bullying in Estonian schools over a ten-year period from 2003–2013, which found that bullying or harassment against teachers increased on average by 300% over that period.

Theme 5: Intimidation

The teachers complained of intimidation from learners who resisted being disciplined for unruly behaviour. These acts of intimidation made them very uncomfortable because they were not certain when they would be attacked. They were constantly walking in fear in the school premises. They described the acts of intimidation as follows:

"I was threatened by a young learner and when the school knocks out, he was waiting for me at gate asking me to do what I was doing in the staff room. I was shocked and shaking not even know what the learners will do next. I was walking with colleague he quickly left me with the learner, I could see that he is afraid of the learner. My sin was to demand a homework from which I given them the previous day" (Respondent # 9).

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"I was threatened by a group of boys who has turned toilets into a dagga smoking area that if I do not leave them alone they will deal with me" (Respondent # 4).

"I met a learner from class in the township he was with other boys smoking dagga and he told me straight that it is not at school here if I open my mouth he will sort me. I must not act like a teacher outside school premises" (Respondent # 10).

Verbal abuse (insults, slander), intimidation, and disrespecting the instructions of the teacher are the most common source of violence endured by most of the teachers (Kopecký & Szotkowskis, 2017). Many teachers have reported acts of violence ranging from personal property damage to some being threatened with physical violence by the learners (Burns et al., 2020). This extends to fist fighting and throwing dangerous weapons at them.

4. CONCLUSION

Teacher victimisation incurs significant costs, including lost wages, lost instructional time/productivity, increased workers' compensation, litigation, and negative publicity (Levin et al., 2006). In addition, learners exit the system without completing schooling, in which case they face a bleak future with little hope of finding employment. Teachers fear to discipline learners because they fear for their safety. Therefore, there is an urgent need to better understand the nature and extent of learner-on-teacher violence to improve learners' and teachers' experiences and make school systems safer and more effective (McMahon et al., 2014).

Teacher-directed violence has included a range of acts of violence against teachers. It may be argued that systemic resistance or political indifference to how the teaching environment in classrooms today has altered has made it possible. the safety of teachers is very impotant for students to receive quality teahing, with violence against them thus make ipmposibel.

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