

**THE EFFECTS OF LEARNER VIOLENCE ON EDUCATORS  
AND THEIR COPING MECHANISMS:  
A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY OF EDUCATORS  
IN THE MOPANI WEST DISTRICT, LIMPOPO**

by

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that the dissertation entitled “**The effects of learner violence on educators and their coping mechanisms: A qualitative exploratory study of educators in the Mopani West District, Limpopo**” is my own work and has not previously been submitted for any degree or examination at this or any other university.

The dissertation does not contain any other person’s data or information unless specifically acknowledged and referenced properly.

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## ABSTRACT

Numerous reports about violence in South African schools have become an issue of concern for both government and society. Due to the high incidences of school violence, schools are no longer viewed as safe and secure teaching and learning environments.

From a South African perspective, research focuses mainly on violence toward learners and based on the researcher's knowledge, very little attention has been given to violence toward educators in Limpopo, a province in South Africa. The researcher noted a serious lack of focus on incidents of violence directed at educators and their coping mechanisms after victimisation, particularly within Limpopo. The study aimed to explore the effects of learner violence toward educators, and to understand the coping mechanisms educators use after victimisation. This qualitative study applied the ecological systems theory as its theoretical framework.

The sample comprised eleven educators (one male and ten females) selected purposefully from six public secondary schools in the Mopani West District in the Limpopo province. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide. A pilot study with two participants was first conducted to assess the suitability of the questions probing the experience of violence. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected. Although the experiences shared by the participants were unique, the thematic analysis revealed commonalities in the stories constructed by the participants. The themes included the causes of violence toward educators, the effects of learner violence toward educators, educators' coping mechanisms and interventions suggested by educators.

The major findings revealed that violence in schools persists, and educators continue to be victims of violence perpetrated by learners. The participants articulated the need for psychological support. Most participants wanted the Department of Basic Education or the South African Council of Education to formulate a law or policy to train educators in terms of reducing school violence and coping following victimisation. The study therefore recommends that policy be put in place to handle learners who are violent towards educators.

**Keywords:** violence, educators, schools, coping mechanism, learner, Mopani West District

## KAKARETŠO

Dipego tše ntši ka ga dikgaruru dikolong tša Afrika Borwa di fetogile taba yeo e tshwenyago mmušo le setšhaba. Ka lebaka la ditiragalo tša godimo tša dikgaruru tša dikolo, dikolo ga di sa tšewa bjalo ka mafelo a go ruta le go ithuta ao a bolokegilego le ao a bolokegilego.

Go ya ka pono ya Afrika Borwa, dinyakišišo di nepišitše kudu go dikgaruru go baithuti gomme go ya ka tsebo ya monyakišiši, tlhokomelo ye nnyane kudu e filwe dikgaruru go barutiši ka Limpopo, profense ya Afrika Borwa. Monyakišiši o lemogile go hloka ga nepišo kudu ditiragalong tša dikgaruru tšeo di lebišitšwego go barutiši le mekgwa ya bona ya kgotlelelo le maemo ka morago ga go tlaišwa, kudukudu ka gare ga Limpopo.. Dinyakišišo di be di ikemišeditše go utolla ditlamorago tša dikgaruru tša baithuti go barutiši, le go kwešiša mekgwa ya go kgotlelela yeo barutiši ba e šomišago ka morago ga go tlaišwa. Dinyakišišo tše tša boleng e dirišitše teori ya ditshepedišo tša ikholotši bjalo ka tlhako ya yona ya teori.

Sampole e be e akaretša barutiši ba lesometee (monna o tee le basadi ba lesome) bao ba kgethilwego ka maikemišetšo go tšwa dikolong tše tshela tša sekontari tša setšhaba ka Seleteng sa Mopani Bodikela ka profenseng ya Limpopo. Dipoledišano tša go se latele lenaneo la dipotšišo di dirilwe ka go šomiša tlhahlo ya dipoledišano. Dinyakišišo tša diteko ka bakgathatema ba babedi di ile tša dirwa la mathomo go sekaseka go swanelega ga dipotšišo tšeo di nyakišišago maitemogelo a dikgaruru. Tshekatsheko ya morero e šomišitšwe go sekaseka datha yeo e kgobokeditšwego. Le ge maitemogelo ao a abelanwago ke bakgathatema e be e le a moswananoši, tshekatsheko ya morero e utolotše dilo tšeo di swanago dikonegelong tšeo di hlamilwego ke bakgathatema. Dihlogotaba di be di akaretša dibaki tša dikgaruru go barutiši, ditlamorago tša dikgaruru tša baithuti go barutiši, mekgwa ya barutiši ya go kgotlelela le ditsenogare tšeo di šišintšwego ke barutiši.

Diphihlelelo tše kgolo di utolotše gore dikgaruru dikolong di tšwela pele, gomme barutiši ba tšwela pele go ba batšwasehlabelo ba dikgaruru tšeo di dirwago ke baithuti. Bakgathatema ba hlalošitše tlhokego ya thekgo ya tša monagano. Bontši bja bakgathatema bo be ba nyaka gore Kgoro ya Thuto ya Motheo goba Khansele ya Thuto ya Afrika Borwa e hlame molao goba pholisi ya go hlahla barutiši mabapi le go fokotša dikgaruru tša dikolong le go šogana le mathata ka morago ga go tlaišwa. Ka

gona dinyakišišo di šišinya gore pholisi e hlongwe go šogana le baithuti bao ba lwantšhago barutiši.

**Mantšu a bohlokwa:** dikgaruru, barutiši, dikolo, mokgwa wa go kgotlelela, moithuti, Selete sa Bodikela sa Mopani

## ABSTRAK

Verskeie berigte oor geweld in Suid-Afrikaanse skole is 'n kwessie van kommer vir beide die regering en die samelewing. Weens die hoë voorkoms van skoolgeweld word skole nie meer as veilige onderrig-en leeromgewings beskou nie.

Vanuit 'n Suid-Afrikaanse perspektief fokus navorsing hoofsaaklik op geweld teenoor leerders en op grond van die navorsing se kennis word min aandag gegee aan geweld teen opvoeders in Limpopo, 'n provinsie van Suid-Afrika. Die navorsing het opgemerk dat daar 'n ernstige gebrek is aan fokus op voorvalle van geweld gerig op opvoeders en hulle hanteringsmeganismes ná viktimisasie, veral in Limpopo. Die doel van die studie was om die uitwerking van leerdergeweld teenoor opvoeders te verken, en om die hanteringsmeganismes wat opvoeders ná viktimisasie gebruik, te verstaan. Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie het die ekologiese sisteemteorie as teoretiese raamwerk toegepas.

Die steekproef het bestaan uit elf opvoeders (een man en twee vroue) wat doelgerig gekies is uit ses openbare sekondêre skole in die Mopani-Wes-distrik in die Limpopo-provinsie. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gevoer met behulp van 'n onderhoudsgids. 'n Loodsondersoek met twee deelnemers is eers uitgevoer om die geskiktheid van die vrae wat geweld ondersoek, te bepaal. Tematiese ontleding is gebruik om die data wat ingesamel is, te ontleed. Alhoewel die ervarings wat die deelnemers gedeel het, uniek is, het die tematiese ondersoek gemeenskaplikhede in die verhale wat deur die deelnemers gekonstrueer is, aan die lig gebring. Die temas het die oorsake van geweld teenoor opvoeders, opvoeders se hanteringsmeganismes en intervensies wat deur opvoeders voorgestel is, ingesluit.

Die belangrikste bevindinge het aan die lig gebring dat geweld in skole voortduur, en dat opvoeders steeds slagoffers is van geweld wat deur leerders gepleeg word. Die deelnemers het die behoefte aan sielkundige ondersteuning verwoord. Die meeste deelnemers wou hê dat die Departement van Basiese Onderwys of die Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysraad 'n wet of beleid moet formuleer om opvoeders op te lei om skoolgeweld te kan verminder en ná viktimisasie te hanteer. Die studie beveel dus aan dat beleid ingestel moet word om leerders te hanteer wat gewelddadig teenoor opvoeders is.

**Slutelwoorde:** geweld, opvoeders, skole, hanteringsmeganisme, leerder, Mopani-Wes-distrik.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
CEO	chief executive officer
CREC	College of Human Science Research Ethics Committee
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
EST	ecological systems theory
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HoD	head of department
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LO	Life Orientation
MBE	Minister of Basic Education
NSSF	National School Safety Framework
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South African
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SADAG	South African Depression and Anxiety Group
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SAPS	South African Police Service
SEM	socio-ecological model
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	school governing board
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (No. 108 of 1996) contends that each SA has the right to security and freedom (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Constitution, therefore, protects the human rights of all the citizenry. This implies that no person should be intimidated or harmed by any means or by doing anything that violates the dignity of others or wounds them, emotionally and/or psychologically. Violation of someone's rights includes but is not limited to housebreaking, raping, hijacking at gunpoint, assault, and bullying (Krek, 2020).

Scholars and psychologists have postulated that people who happen to be exposed to violence may end up having serious challenges. These include long-lasting physical damages (wounds) and mental, psychological, and/or emotional disturbances, which can be experienced if an individual is a direct victim or witness of violence (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Price & Khubchandani, 2019). Furthermore, people exposed to violence are likely to experience extended periods of stress, depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and problems concentrating (Aslaner et al., 2018; Lamb & Snodgrass, 2017). Physical effects are the most obvious, and may include mild or serious wounds, bruises, fractures, and death by homicide or suicide (De Wet, 2016).

School violence has become a serious concern for the government and society in South Africa. According to reports, school violence can take many forms, such as bullying, gang activity, physical and verbal abuse, and possession of weapons. Schools are said to be microcosms of the problems of the larger society, for instance the learning atmosphere, learner welfare, and academic performance are all negatively affected by this violence (Banda, 2022b; Hyman, 2021; Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014). In schools, while learners have been affected by violence, educators have also become victims of violence in many provinces in South Africa (Kubheka, 2019; Maseko, 2013; Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014). As an example, in 2011, the General Secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU),

Mungwena Maluleke, reported that 67 000 teachers had resigned, citing learner violence and challenges with school management as the reason (Maseko, 2013; Netshitangani, 2014). Due to the high incidences of school violence where learners are known to bring weapons, such as guns and knives to school, schools are no longer viewed as safe and secure environments (Kempen, 2018; Maseko, 2013; Mhlongo, 2017).

In addition, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (2009) and Burton and Leoschut (2013) investigated the level of violence in SA schools nationwide through two studies, in 2008 and in 2012. The 2008 study comprised 12 794 learners from both primary and secondary schools, 260 school principals, and 521 teachers (Burton, 2008). In this study, principals and teachers were taken as educators (Burton, 2008); thus, a total of 788 educators participated in the study. It is worrying that the study established that 15.3% of learners and educators at both primary and secondary schools were at least once involved in some form of violence at school. The 2012 study comprised 5 939 learners, 121 principals and 239 teachers, finding that more than a fifth of learners had experienced violence at school (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Coetzee (2017) states that most studies focus on learners as victims of violence rather than on educators. Educators are also seriously affected, and studies in this area are therefore needed.

Journalists have reported several incidences of learner violence against educators in South Africa. For example, Marriah-Maharaj (2022) reported that in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) a learner pleaded guilty to killing a teacher and trying to dispose the body. Nair (2022) reported on a school principal and his wife in KZN who were shot and killed by a learner. Nair added that the SA Council for Educators (SACE) which is responsible for the professional registration and regulation of educators in South Africa (Makoa, 2019), mentioned their concern about the increasing violence against educators following this incident. The chief executive officer (CEO) of SACE further expressed concern that schools are becoming dangerous for educators since some learners continue to violate them outside the school premises (Nair, 2022). Against this background, the current study explored the experience of educators as victims of violence and how these educators use different coping mechanisms after victimisation.

## 1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PROBLEM

Various scholars have focused their studies mainly on violence against learners. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, very little attention has been paid to date to violence against educators, and how they cope after victimisation (Botha & Zwane, 2021; Reddy et al., 2018; Santor et al., 2021). The existing research on violence against educators falls short of providing viable solutions for how educators can cope effectively after victimisation. Research conducted offers limited insights into strategies aimed at mitigating violence against educators (Baruth & Mokoena, 2016; Coetzee, 2017). It is crucial to examine violence against educators, as educators play a considerable role in any society working towards development, South Africa included (Coetzee, 2017; Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Kruger, 2011). This does not detract from the concern for learners; their age renders them vulnerable to many challenges in society, including experiencing violence at school. Regarding the focus on educators, despite many attempts to protect the interests of educators, for example through the Employment of Educators Act (No. 76 of 1998) (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 1998), violence against educators is reportedly increasing. Furthermore, educators have raised concerns about the unsafe environment in schools (Coetzee, 2017; Mncube & Harber, 2013; Madikizela-Madiya & Mncube, 2014). Invariably, due to violence against educators, many have shown that they are demoralised, and some are planning to quit, while others are demanding to have armed guards at schools (Coetzee, 2017; Rossouw & Stewart 2008).

SACE (2020) emphasises the significance of introducing more effective coping strategies for the reduction of learner violence against educators because of the ongoing incidences that are taking place in South African (SA) schools.

The Minister of Basic Education (MBE), Ms Angelina Motshekga, expressed her concerns about school violence (see Narain, 2015), and the increase of different types of violence against educators by learners countrywide. In response to this unprecedented increase in violence, they promised to take drastic measures to reduce the school violence rate, such as implementing training for teachers "in values, human rights and citizenship" (SA Government, 2015, para 2). In addition, they spoke of the implementation of the National School Safety Framework for Safer Schools in April 2015 (Leoschut & Makota, 2016). Different sources have reported numerous incidents

of violence against educators, and alarming examples of such violence have already been published in newspapers and other sources (Claassen, 2013; Coetzee, 2017; Madiba, 2012; Nair, 2022). Since 2003, SA schools have been declared battlegrounds (Mncube, 2014; Netshitangani, 2014).

### **1.3 RESEARCH AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In light of the problem delineated above, this study aimed to explore the effects of learner violence on educators, and the coping mechanisms of which educators make use after victimisation.

**The objectives of the study were:**

- to explore the effects of learner violence on educators; and
- to explore the coping mechanisms that educators utilise after victimisation.

**The following questions underpinned the research objectives:**

- What is the effect of learner violence on educators?
- What are educators' coping mechanisms following victimisation?

### **1.4 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

The researcher resides in a region where alarming rates of violence occur in schools. The region is known as Mopani West District in Limpopo. According to the researcher's observations, despite reported incidences of violence in schools and those cases that are unreported but known, few educators receive only limited or non-emotional support after the incidences of violence had taken place. As a professional educator, research psychology student, and a concerned community member, the researcher saw the need to investigate the problem in an attempt to establish the coping mechanism educators utilise after victimisation.

The current study was therefore motivated by a profound concern for educators who find themselves working in schools characterised by significant levels of unpredictably dangerous situations, which may subsequently give rise to various social and mental health issues. As previously mentioned, this challenging environment

compel some educators to contemplate leaving the teaching profession altogether. The current research endeavour consequently delved into the intricate dynamics of the challenges educators faced after encountering different forms of violence and aimed to unearth effective coping mechanisms. The primary focus of the study was on educators within the Mopani West District in Limpopo, thereby taking into account the regional context. It is essential to note that, while the findings of this study provide valuable insights for educators in similar situations, the generalisability of these findings to all SA educators is limited. Due to the fact that people experience violence in different ways, the coping mechanism used by one educator in one province or nation may not be the same as those used by another.

### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY**

The research study will contribute substantially to our understanding of the effects of learner violence on educators and will offer insightful information about the coping mechanisms educators use. The researcher aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the difficulties experienced by these crucial individuals within the education sector through a thorough investigation of the effects of learner violence on educators. This knowledge holds great importance for educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders, as it illuminates the often-underemphasised issue of educator well-being and safety within schools. The insights derived from this research could serve as a catalyst for formulating targeted interventions and support systems designed to address violence in educational settings, ultimately fostering a safer environment that is beneficial to learning – for educators and learners alike.

### **1.6 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

The following definitions of concepts were used in this study:

- A **coping mechanism** is defined as any form of adjustment or adaption that could assist an individual in reducing a stressful experience (Perry et al., 2013).
- An **effect** is defined as a condition resulting from a certain cause or action (Fan et al., 2012).

- An **educator** is “a person who provides instruction or education; a teacher” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2023b, para 1). In South Africa, within the Employment of Educators Act No. 76 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1998), an educator is –
  - [A]ny person engaged in teaching, education or training, providing professional educational services, including therapy and psychological education, within public schools, departmental offices, or adult basic education centers under the relevant Act (DBE, 1998).
  - In the current study, teachers and principals were considered educators.
- A **learner** is “a person who is learning a subject or skill” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2023c, para 1). In this study, a ‘learner’ was a person who attended school to learn academically.
- **Mopani district** is a district located in Limpopo, a province of South Africa. It is known for its diverse landscapes, including mountains, savannas, and subtropical forests. The district is named after the Mopani tree, a common tree species in the region. The Mopani district is characterised by its rich cultural heritage, wildlife, and agricultural activities, making it an important and vibrant part of Limpopo (Chauke et al., 2015).
- **Violence** is an intentional use of physical, emotional, or psychological behaviour that could cause physical, emotional, and psychological harm. In this study, ‘violence’ refers to any form of harmful action (either physical or emotional) directed at the victim by the perpetrator (Espelage et al., 2013).

## 1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the College Research Ethics Committee (CREC) at the University of South Africa, reference number 59102950\_CRECHS\_2021 (see Appendix A). Subsequently, the researcher initiated contact with the Mopani West District office, where the objectives and relevance of the study were communicated to the district manager. Permission to conduct research within six selected schools in the Mopani West District was requested and duly granted, as evidenced by the approval letter in Appendix B.

Following this, the researcher approached the six schools individually, seeking permission from the respective school principals to interview educators. A presentation was given in the staff room of each school to introduce the study, and educators were informed about the research purpose. Contact details were provided for those interested in participating. This process of visiting schools and giving presentations spanned one week.

Two weeks later, the researcher contacted volunteers who expressed interest in the study. Meetings were arranged with these individuals. This interview phase was extended over a period of two weeks. All voluntary participants were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix C) to review, followed by an opportunity to seek clarification and to ask questions to ensure compliance with ethical practices. Subsequently, participants were presented with an informed consent form (see Appendix D), signifying their understanding of the objectives and relevance of the study, and their voluntary participation, as outlined by Kumar (2011).

Throughout the research process, the researcher aimed to uphold principles of dignity and respect, fostering a safe and comfortable environment for participants to share their experiences openly. In addition, the researcher ensured that confidentiality was rigorously maintained by excluding personal identifying details from the report, ensuring the anonymity of participants. Notably, the study did not hold any harm for the participants. The researcher ensured that measures were in place to mitigate any potential emotional discomfort that might arise during the interviews. More details will be provided in Chapter 4, Research Methodology.

## **1.8 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

**Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study** – the chapter outlined the introduction, description of the study problem, research aim, objectives and research questions, study rationale, significance of the research study, definition of concepts, and ethical considerations. The structure of the thesis was also presented in this chapter.

**Chapter 2: The Literature Review** – the literature reviewed presented literature on learner violence towards educators and educators' coping mechanisms. The



literature reviewed outlined international and SA studies focusing on the nature of school violence and coping mechanisms.

**Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework** – the third chapter provided the theoretical framework utilised in this study. The ecological systems theory (EST), as developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1970 (see Bronfenbrenner, 1989, 1994, 1996), was used as the guiding theoretical framework to understand the effect of violence on educators. A discussion of the microsystem, mesosystem factors, exosystem factors and chronosystem factors is provided.

**Chapter 4: Research Methodology** – in this chapter, the research method used in the study was introduced, and the research design was described. Furthermore, the study setting, the methods used for data collection, and the sample population were clarified. Additionally, the chapter provided information about the data collection tool (i.e. interviews), the pilot study that was conducted, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

**Chapter 5: Data Presentation, Interpretation and Discussion** – this chapter outlined the findings of the study, which emerged in the form of five themes with sub-themes. The main themes were narratives of violence, causes of violence against educators, effects of violence on educators, the coping mechanisms used by educators and interventions.

**Chapter 6: Summary, Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations** – in this section, an overview of the preceding chapters is presented. The discussion underscored how the research questions were addressed, followed by a conclusive summary. Furthermore, the chapter expounded on the limitations of the study and puts forth recommendations for future research.

## **1.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter provided an outline of the dissertation, including the background to the research problem, the aims of the research, the research questions that needed to be answered, the ethical considerations, and an outline of the chapters.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The effect of violence within educational settings is a concern of profound significance, resonating both nationally and internationally. While the focus of this research study lay within the specific context of educators in the Mopani West District of Limpopo, it is essential to contextualise this issue within the broader global landscape. This chapter serves as a gateway to understand the effects of learner violence on educators, and the coping mechanisms educators employ comprehensively. The chapter therefore depicts the journey that provided an extensive overview of school violence, both nationally and internationally.

#### **2.2 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE**

Martinez et al. (2016) view a safe school as one that is free of any danger and where harm is absent; an environment where all school workers – for example, school administrators, educators, and learners – may interact without fear of being ridiculed, intimidated, harassed, humiliated, or without experiencing any form of violence. This implies that school violence is part of an unsafe environment.

Various studies have been conducted locally and internationally, focusing on violence against learners and educators (De Wet, 2020; Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya 2014; Shields & Nadasen, 2015). Nonetheless, limited research has yet focused on the effects of school violence on educators and their coping mechanisms following victimisation in South Africa, specifically in Limpopo (Kgosimore, 2018; Mothibi et al., 2017). School violence thus needs to be examined from another perspective: learner violence against educators and the coping mechanisms used by educators. This requires an understanding of the sociocultural influence on learners' behaviour leading to teacher abuse and the best ways to deal with school-based violence, which affects both learners and educators in one way or another (Sugut & Mugasia, 2014).

South Africa is a multicultural country with 12 342 283 learners and 23 718 public schools (2018 statistics), accommodating learners from different backgrounds (DBE,

2018). Some of these schools are found in areas or communities that experience high rates of crime and violence. Learners from these areas are frequently exposed to violence. Many learners carry dangerous objects, such as knives and guns, and go to school under the influence of substances, such as drugs and alcohol (Khan, 2016; Mncube & Harber, 2014; Nzama & Ajani, 2021). The extent of violence and crime that occur in the community and society at large is high and has a significant bearing on what is found in schools in terms of violence. This has a negative effect on education in general and educators in particular (Mncube & Harber, 2013). It is disappointing to note that scholars observe that there seems to be an acceptance and normalisation of violence to resolve and settle differences and conflicts in different societies (see Mac Ginty, 2021; Gådin & Stein, 2019). De Wet (2020) also agrees that some SA teachers justify actions of violence towards the learners with the administration of corporal punishment on cultural and religious grounds as well as their unfamiliarity with alternative disciplinary strategies.

The SACE (2021) issued their 2019–2020 annual report proving that although corporal punishment was banned in South Africa on 18 September 2019, it is still practised in certain provinces (Mahlangu, et al., 2021). Educators use corporal punishment as a form of discipline for classroom management. Corporal punishment and assault fall under the top three categories of educator misconduct at a rate of 38%, followed by sexual harassment at a rate of 22.18% (SACE, 2020). Learners being exposed to such an environment tend to act in the same manner, leading to violence against educators (Grobler, 2018).

Martinez et al. (2016) contend that school-based violence may come from different sources, appear in various forms, and involve different individual players. A single element cannot adequately explain why learners tend to act violently towards their educators. Every act of school violence is the culmination of diverse factors. These could cause educators to think about leaving the teaching profession, as they suffer from depression and post-victimisation stress (Yablon, 2017). In essence, school violence may also involve different actors, for example, learner-on-educator (teachers) violence, learner-on-learner violence, and learner-on-school administrator violence (Krek, 2020). School violence in South Africa is a problem, and one of which the media is aware, as one sees frequent reports appearing in written and electronic media about

shootings of educators by learners, stabbings of learners by other learners, as well as other forms of violence that occur in both public and private schools (De Wet, 2020). A recent type of violence involves using technology as a platform for practising bullying. Most learners nowadays make use of smartphones that make the internet easily accessible. Such learners may revert to cyberbullying (Yablon, 2017).

## **2.3 SOME CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR LEARNERS ENGAGING IN VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR**

The section reports on the intricacies of peer interactions, covering elements such as peer pressure and social influences and the influence of these on moulding the conduct of learners. In addition, the current research closely examined the school setting as a determinant contributing to learners' involvement in violent actions. The research involved an exploration of both biological and psychosocial factors that affect the inclination towards violent behaviours. Lastly, this section shows how family dynamics, comprising structural elements, parenting approaches, exposure to domestic violence, and other familial aspects, influence the behaviour of learners within the school environment.

### **2.3.1 Negative Peer Association**

Burdick-Will (2017) states that negative peer association influences learner violence against educators. An association or friendship with peers who engage in violence, such as theft and fighting, often leads such learner to become violent. This process, where negative peers reinforce delinquency, is called **deviancy training** (see Dewey, 2015; Jiang, 2023). According to research, learners who attend schools in dangerous neighbourhoods where violence is practically an everyday occurrence have been linked to poor cognitive, behavioural, and psychological outcomes (Chauke, 2021; Maman et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2016). This has a direct influence on learners' attitudes towards educators. Furthermore, learners involved in gangs and substance abuse are likely to become deviant and engage in violence against teachers (Banda, 2022b; Burdick-Will, 2017). For example, in a recent report in South Africa, a secondary school educator was stabbed to death on the school grounds in Alexandra, Johannesburg by learners (Banda, 2022a).

### **2.3.2 Schools as Contributing Factors**

Scholars have attributed learner violence against educators to the features of the school, such as its management, leadership style and level of stability (Mertoglu, 2015; Miller & Chandler, 2003; Netshitangani, 2014; Terzoudi, 2020). Schools that are disorganised, in other words poorly managed and disordered, become the breeding ground for violent learners because disorganisation contributes to the disorder (Perry & Morris, 2014). Grobler (2018) argues that the composition of learners in terms of their social backgrounds, and the makeup of teaching staff in terms of skills, abilities, and competencies influence orderliness. Educators are frequently exhausted, disengaged, and overburdened with instructional and administrative responsibilities (Arabi et al., 2018). Being overburdened often prevents educators from speaking kindly to learners or assisting learners in resolving problems (Koenig et al., 2018)

Learners also become violent against their educators because some educators provide inadequate educational and academic explanations (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012). Challenges arise when there is a disagreement between school management and educators, sometimes on regulations and policies. Learners then take advantage of those differences, ignore school rules, and become violent as educators attempt to correct those learners (Alzyoud et al., 2016). In addition, educators' lack of skills, not being prepared for class, and the lack of other competencies create a hostile environment and build poor teacher–learner relationships that cause violent behaviours in learners (Terzoudi, 2020).

Gangsterism that is rife in communities together with a lack of security on school premises contributes to violence at schools. Some of the violence in South Africa can be ascribed to a lack of proper security fencing, allowing gangsters operating in the community to enter the school premises and violate either the educators or the learners. Gang violence in communities is linked to school violence, as a protest by the mothers of children at Blomvlei Primary in Hanover Park, Cape Town, demonstrated. They held a protest in August 2019 to raise awareness of gang violence in the area (Banda, 2022b). The COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa brought with it an unfortunate surge in school vandalism. A member of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a prominent political party in South Africa, reported that during the initial COVID-19 lockdown, over 200 schools fell victim to burglaries, vandalism, and even arson

(Banda, 2022a). With the closure of schools for extended periods due to the pandemic, these educational institutions were left unattended and vulnerable, providing an opportune setting for acts of vandalism and violence to flourish (Mollo, 2020). Consequently, these incidents extended beyond the immediate physical damage to school infrastructure; they contributed to an unsettling atmosphere that raised concerns about normalising violence (Chisango & Marongwe, 2021). In this environment, both learners and educators were exposed to potential community violence, eroding the sense of security within the educational space.

### **2.3.3 Personal Traits: Biological and Psychosocial Factors**

According to Joyce (2013) and Prinsloo and Nesor (2007), biological and psychosocial traits influence how an individual interacts with others. Adolescents may display increased impulsivity, emotional volatility, and a desire for independence as they navigate the significant physical and psychological changes of this phase, all of which might increase the predisposition for violent behaviour (Maneiro et al., 2017; Schulz & Sisk, 2016). This risk may be increased by personal traits, such as an aggressive nature, or a history of exposure to violence. The severity of aggressive inclinations may also be influenced by biological factors, such as the hormonal changes that come with adolescence (Schulz & Sisk, 2016). Adolescence is thus a time of many emotional and behavioural changes that, in some instances, might drive aggressive behaviour. Some adjustments may become complex and challenging (Guyer & Nelson, 2016; Joyce, 2013). The fifth stage of Erik Erikson's development theory occurs between the ages of 12 and 18 and is identity versus role confusion. Adolescents explore their independence and solidify their sense of self throughout this phase (Sigelman & Rider, 2018). One recent issue that piqued the interest of the media and of parents was aggressive behaviour among high school learners. This has raised a concern and increased the interest of researchers (Lunneblad & Johansson, 2021). Males are observed to be more violent than females (Archer, 2022). This could be a result of various factors, such as social roles, genetics, and hormonal makeup (Archer, 2022; Joyce, 2013). Biosocial differences are linked to violent behaviour, and the argument is put forward that antisocial tendencies due to one's genes may be inherited from parents (Loeber & Pardini, 2008; Sigelman & Rider, 2018). Individual characteristics,

in addition to social interaction, could influence one's biological makeup or the combination of the two aspects.

According to Sigelman and Rider (2018) and Tolan (2012), much evidence shows that men often experience more violence than women in their lives. Gender differences appear to be present early and persist throughout development, focusing on male aggression, which includes violence and intense behaviour, the capacity to harm, coercion, and other hostile activities (Coker et al., 2020).

#### **2.3.4 Family Issues**

Chen et al. (2020) postulate that families contribute to learner violence against educators. Likewise, research shows that parent–child separation or disrupted families could contribute to teenage violence. A temporary or permanent separation in the family before the teenager is sixteen years old has been seen to create violent behaviours (Day, 2012).

According to Peterson et al. (2019), children who witness spousal or partner violence and home-based violence tend to behave poorly at all levels of their interactions within society. Such learners are more likely to be disobedient to their classmates or school authorities than those who have not experienced such (Zimmerman & Posick, 2016).

A pandemic outbreak has a pervasive impact on social order and the economy, as was the case with the COVID-19 outbreak in South Africa. Almeida et al. (2022) conducted a study after COVID-19, revealing that families' well-being and mental health had been negatively affected. Most families experienced financial hardships, and learners who could not afford online learning or those from rural areas who did not have such privilege suffered much stress, and some ended up dropping out. The number of out-of-school children in South Africa tripled from 250 000 to 750 000 in a year because of COVID-19 and its socioeconomic impact on families (Chimbindi et al., 2022).

According to Fegert et al. (2020), domestic violence and child maltreatment increased during all the levels of lockdown but mostly in Level 1 (total shutdown with movement restriction, from 26 March until 16 April 2020) (Ramaphosa, 2020). It

caused harm to the children and learners, and left them to retaliate when triggered, either at school or in the community (Fegert et al., 2020). The difficulties experienced by families, as mentioned earlier, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the return of children to school. Some children returned to school with feelings of anger stemming from the abuse they might have faced at home during the lockdown. Mainly, underprivileged learners, residing in rural areas and who lacked access to online learning, experienced heightened stress levels (Mukuna & Aloka, 2020). This increased stress, in turn, manifested as anger-driven behaviour in children, perpetuating a cycle of violence within school environments.

## **2.4 NATURE OF VIOLENCE PERPETRATED AGAINST EDUCATORS**

A nationwide survey in the United States revealed that 80% of educators experienced at least one of the 11 different forms of school violence within the current or preceding school year (McMahon et al., 2014). It thus comes as surprise that there has been limited focus by the media, academia and policymakers on the repercussions of school violence on educators – in the United States but also on a global scale (Espelage et al., 2013). A study conducted in West Malaysia by Santos and Tin (2018) found that nearly 6% of educators reported quitting their jobs due to bullying directed towards other educators.

According to De Wet (2016), school violence – not limited to physical, emotional and psychological violence – is experienced by educators throughout South Africa. Educators are typically called to intervene when learners fight in class using (often deadly) weapons, leading to occasional involvement by educators as they attempt to resolve conflicts or pacify the altercations, which, in turn, may result in physical harm to the educators themselves. (De Wet, 2016; Harber, 2001).

Several scholars reported school violence cases as depicted in literature and the media (see Collings & Magoj, 2003; Garbarino & Nesi, 2017; Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014; Petso, 2021; Yavuzer & Rezzan, 2012). For instance, Gibbs (2013) states in the print media instructors continually fear increasing violence because learners do not respect educators. In some provinces in South Africa, educators have been harassed, intimidated, and physically assaulted by learners, and have reported serious fights involving weapons at school (De Wet, 2016). Similarly, in the Free State



(a province in South Africa), the Department of Education (DoE) lamented about educators who have been assaulted by learners (Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014).

According to Maseko (2013), the MBE had to address the media after a fatal incident where a learner in North-West (a province in South Africa) stabbed an educator to death. Maseko continues and highlights threats of violence by learners against educators. The MBE mentioned another incident in Gauteng where a learner had pointed a gun at an educator (Maseko, 2013).

Many incidents in South Africa demonstrate the challenges of increasing violence on educators by learners; however, less is known about how educators cope with the violence. There is also a dearth of literature focusing on psychological interventions to assist educators. In addition to the above incidents, it was reported that a learner stabbed to death an educator in Zeerust at Ramotshene Secondary School, and another case was reported at Eldorado Park Secondary School where a learner also pulled a gun at an educator (Gous, 2018). The MBE expressed her concern about the increase in violence against educators by learners (Gous, 2018). Little is however being done to assist victims (i.e. teachers) in coping after the traumatic event (Mukwevho, 2022).

During the lockdown period (26 March–16 April 2020), there was a total shutdown of schools (Le Grange, 2020). There is a noticeable gap in the literature in the SA context, notably regarding the prevalence of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic at Level 1 (total shutdown), a period when physical school attendance was restricted.

It is however imperative to draw insights from studies conducted in other countries that may shed light on the distressing escalation of violence during this global crisis. A prominent study by Augusti et al. (2021) conducted in Norway, comprising 9 240 middle school adolescents, reported a concerning 8.2% incidence of psychological abuse during the lockdown. This form of violence transcended the learner–teacher dynamic, with educators themselves grappling with psychological distress exacerbated by the formidable challenges of transitioning to online teaching, as substantiated by Özüdoğru (2021). The strain induced by the abrupt shift to digital teaching modalities added to the educators' emotional burden and left them vulnerable to accusations from learners struggling to adapt to distance learning (Azhari & Fajri,

2022). This multifaceted impact fostered a distressing cycle of online violence, with additional reports underscoring instances of online sexual abuse, quantified at a disconcerting rate of 5.6% during the time of the pandemic (Augusti et al., 2021). These sobering findings unequivocally underscore the persistent nature of violence in its various manifestations within the academic community (i.e secondary schools) against the backdrop of the COVID-19 lockdown.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a study by Lee (2020) in the United Kingdom revealed that 14.4% of teenagers reported experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while 40.4% disclosed feelings of depression or anxiety. Furthermore, adolescents reported heightened rates of sadness and nervousness directly associated with the pandemic. Consequently, the limited access to mental health treatments due to pandemic restrictions increased the burden on parents, making it challenging for them to address both the educational and the mental health needs of their children (Le Grange, 2020; Lee, 2020). When the lockdown was lifted, the return to the school environment in a state of emotional instability, coupled with unaddressed frustrations and psychological burdens, posed a critical threat to the well-being of both learners and educators. In such a distressing atmosphere, educators might have found themselves vulnerable to the manifestation of violent behaviours from learners (Bhat et al., 2020).

In some cases, the emotional turbulence and distress that learners bring with them to school might manifest in disruptive conduct and acts of aggression towards educators. Such behaviours may stem from unresolved frustrations and challenging circumstances learners had encountered during the lockdown (Robinson et al., 2023).

In South Africa, the national restrictions were lowered to Level 3 on 1 June 2020. This meant that schools reopened under certain restrictions (Miller, 2020). The first group of learners, Grade 7 and Grade 12, returned to school on Monday, 8 June 2020, as part of a gradual lifting of the coronavirus restrictions (Level 3) (Le Grange, 2020). According to the South African president, COVID-19 regulations still needed to be adhered to, namely –

- social distancing (1 metre);
- wearing of masks (on a regular basis); and

- washing hands regularly.

The regulations left learners and educators stressed (Ramaphosa, 2020). Analysts estimate that, at the time, a quarter of SA government schools lacked running water, making handwashing difficult to implement and stressful (Ellis, 2020). Most schools were in poor condition, especially those in rural areas (Pillay, 2021). Under these circumstances, schools had to restart, and school violence persisted.

Schools therefore resumed under lockdown Level 3 in South Africa. The first lockdown, which was Level 1, was a total shutdown where only essential workers could go to work. Level 2 implied restricted movement. These lockdowns were containment measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Level 3 allowed for more movement and opening of businesses and schools, with a night-time curfew.

With the reopening of schools during partial lockdown (Level 3) and the subsequent complete easing of lockdown restrictions, incidents of school violence however resumed; reinstating a concerning trend observed globally. In line with this global pattern, South Africa is not immune to the prevalence of school-related violence (Devries et al., 2022). A tragic example of this occurred in 2020 when a learner was fatally stabbed in Eerste River, located in the Western Cape (another province in South Africa) (Palm, 2020). In August 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic (Levels 3 and 4), a tragic incident occurred at Entokozweni Secondary School in Kwaggafontein, Mpumalanga, where a Grade 10 learner succumbed to injuries sustained in a fight with another learner (Ngqakamba, 2021). In 2022, a similarly distressing event unfolded at Arthur Mfebe High School in Cofimvaba, Eastern Cape, when a learner was fatally stabbed by a fellow pupil (Baloyi, 2022).

Dr Shaheda Omar, the clinical director at the Teddy Bear Foundation, expressed concerns over the recent surge in school violence, emphasising the significance of these incidents (see Mukwevho, 2022). It is however important to note that these cases represent isolated occurrences within the broader context of school violence, and the severity of the issue may extend beyond these specific incidents. It is important to highlight that these unfortunate events transpired during the initial stages of the pandemic, specifically at Level 3. Additional incidents have been reported during the earlier phases of the pandemic, including the tragic incident involving the deputy

principal of Phomolong Secondary School, who was fatally shot by a learner at the school gate in January 2022 (Ndlovu, 2022).

## **2.5 THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE TOWARDS EDUCATORS**

Zebun (2016) and Mikolajczuk (2020) explain that violence is the intentional use of physical, emotional, or psychological behaviour, which could cause physical, emotional, and psychological harm. Physical violence may take the form of hitting, beating, kicking, strangling, and using objects, such as knives, sticks, and stones, with severe cases including bodily harm severe enough to cause death (Chia et al., 2013; Khan, 2016).

In contrast, Masitsa (2011) and Roman (2019) state that violence could also be in the form of verbal and emotional abuse. **Verbal** abuse occurs when a perpetrator involves name-calling, racial slurs, cursing, screams, passing of remarks, and use of foul language. **Emotional** abuse involves but is not limited to the following: physical threats, sarcasm, spreading of rumours, persistent teasing, exclusion, torment, and humiliating remarks. Victims of violence sometimes feel hopeless, blame themselves, and some withdraw from their families or community (Kucmin et al., 2018). This implies that, after an incident of violence, some educators may begin to withdraw into themselves, and become isolated. Isolation could lead to PTSD, further disengagement, burnout, and peri-traumatic distress (i.e. distress experienced during and/or immediately after a traumatic event).

### **2.5.1 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Peri-Traumatic Distress**

In their studies, Shavel et al. (2017) found that educators suffer distinct negative effects on their well-being due to violence inflicted on them by learners. These effects include symptomatic physical behaviours and PTSD. Furthermore, Shalev et al. (2017) indicated that victims of any form of trauma might experience both short-term and long-term PTSD challenges.

In support of the above view, Bell et al. (2017) contends that educators who are victims of learner violence may also experience psychological symptoms, such as PTSD, serious heightened levels of stress, and fear. Bell et al. (2017) state that educators sometimes experience PTSD after a traumatic incident that threatens the

safety of him or her, leading to feelings of fear and helplessness. According to Kucmin et al. (2018), symptoms of PTSD may be observed when educators show unrelated feelings, such as a constant sense of danger, unnecessary avoidance of people, and feelings of numbness, as well as increased anxiety and emotional arousal, which may not be easily explained.

As indicated above, educators may experience physical, emotional, and/or psychological trauma immediately after encountering learner violence, as well as long-term effects, which come to the fore after some period of learner violence. Literature available suggests that PTSD is reflected by physical symptoms, such as dizziness or faintness, a feeling of tightness in the stomach, pains in the chest and throat, gastrointestinal distress, and nausea, which may lead to vomiting, and hot and cold bodily sensations (Barlow & Durand, 2009; Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2023).

Cuncic (2022), Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014), and Wilson et al. (2011) postulate that teachers who have experienced school violence become less interested in activities and avoid any events or activities that are related to the trauma. Educators will thus show signs of fear of the school environment as well as demonstrate behaviours that reflect avoiding dealing with learners. Crawshaw (2015) states that educators might also show signs of avoidance through unpunctuality and absenteeism. While lamenting the repercussions of school-based violence, Mthiyane (2013) explains that such violence also leads to educators feeling distressed, fatigued, depressed, and, in some cases, experiencing suicidal thoughts.

According to Gorman et al. (2015), peri-traumatic distress may be explained as the negative emotions that individuals experience and which cause the individual to feel a sense of helplessness, unhappiness, grief, frustration, and anger due to violence and/or other reasons. Violence, therefore, could lead to educators feeling frustrated, sad, afraid, weary, and unsafe. In addition, Cuncic (2022) posits that peri-traumatic distress makes individuals want to dissociate from other people, particularly anybody who might appear like those who violently abused them. It is also observed that individuals who have experienced violence might have an altered perception of self, and they might feel as if all things have somehow changed (Dopelt et al., 2019).

There are many different types of stress, and measuring trauma and its effects can be difficult (Whiting et al., 2019). According to Shalev et al. (2017), occurrences of violence could cause people to feel emotionally cut off from their families and disengaged. Occurrences of violence might also fuel sentiments of rage and terror. Gayton and Lovell (2012) theorise that, when individuals practise emotional distance and resilience, traumatic events could become more manageable and better endured over time. However, in their research, Dopelt et al. (2019) found that several educators had left their profession because of violence in schools, citing that experiencing violence caused work–family problems and irritation, and left educators feeling emotionally spent and worn out due to demanding work demands.

### **2.5.2 Educators' Burnout Challenges**

According to Lawn et al. (2020, p. 349), burnout may be defined as “a state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment resulting from stress”. Educators' experiences of learners' misbehaviours, such as verbal threats or unwarranted gestures, intimidation, theft, and property damage, might have deleterious effects leading to burnout.

Burnout is a psychological syndrome characterised as emotional weariness that results in diminished success in one's regular work (Dall'Ora et al., 2020; Patel et al., 2018). Detachment, among other things, might result from burnout. Detachment and decreased personal accomplishment also indicate a poor opinion of oneself, feelings of ineptitude, and inefficiency in one's regular employment (Patel et al., 2018). Burnout causes feelings of failure, self-doubt, helplessness, loneliness, and an inability to cope (West et al., 2018).

According to Espelage et al. (2013) and Maman et al. (2019), non-physical types of violence should be taken seriously as they affect educators' commitment to their professional engagement significantly. The authors further indicate that non-physical violence affects educators, causing depression and dissatisfaction, eventually leading to burnout. Invariably, educator disengagement affects learners' academic performance negatively. Educators who become depressed and disengaged subsequently become unable to contribute positively and maintain learners' engagement, thus affecting the quality of their work (Park et al., 2016). Furthermore,

research revealed that learner violence is the reason why a third of educators have left the profession, as they feel threatened and disempowered (Kgosimore, 2018; Motsoeneng, 2022).

Espelage et al. (2013) observed that educators who experience trauma and other stress-related challenges become incapacitated in promoting relevant skills in their learners, such as social competencies and citizenship responsibilities. In addition, trauma experiences lead to educators failing to do proper classroom management, which creates a negative school climate, which is inappropriate for good academic engagement. Klassen and Chiu (2011) as well as Espelage et al. (2013) contend that violence against teachers tarnishes the image of the school as a result of negative publicity.

There are several other adverse effects of burnout on educators. According to Almutairi and Mahalli (2020), Matin et al. (2012), and Mutkins et al. (2011), educators who are burnt out perceive a loss of personal success in their work, decreased job satisfaction, and diminished productivity. In addition, problems associated with burnout include a decreased dedication to teaching, plans to change jobs, and a propensity for depersonalisation (Aksu & Temeloglu, 2015).

### **2.5.3 Physical Injuries**

According to Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014) as well as Botha and Zwane (2021), violence against educators in schools could cause permanent physical disability, deep wounds leading to permanent scars, and other types of bodily deformation, which later bring memories of sadness and anger. Physical abuse could cause mild wounds, bruises, fractures, and even death. After physical abuse, some educators – if not given psychological counselling – end up committing suicide, especially if they are disabled and no longer able to do their daily routine themselves as before (Knizek et al., 2011).

## **2.6 COPING STRATEGIES VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE USE**

As discussed above, some educators fail to cope with the violent experience to the point of feeling suicidal; educators therefore need ways or strategies to help them cope with these most difficult moments. Ereno et al. (2014) define coping as a positive effort

that victims of violence could make to manage the stress and depression through which they are going. Coping may also be explained as a conscious, volitional (i.e. of the will) effort to control one's emotions, cognition, physiology, and external circumstances that bring stressful and depressing feelings to an individual (Bilsker et al., 2019).

Many people create routines that serve as a means of stress relief (Meadowglade, 2019). These are referred to as 'coping mechanism', and they assist individuals in overcoming difficult circumstances. A coping mechanism may be seen as an addiction, as they share addictive characteristics with many habits such as excessive use of substances (i.e. alcohol or drugs), compulsive shopping or engaging in repetitive behaviors (like excessive gaming or social media use). Coping mechanisms are utilised as diversionary tactics and as a crutch to avoid stress. As a result, coping mechanisms are rather like unconscious habits and not like choices made that could be bad for people's well-being (Meadowglade, 2019).

People with stress, anxiety, and other mental health problems suffer physically and mentally or emotionally. Their symptoms may affect their perceptions, mood, thinking, and behavior. These symptoms might be extreme to the extent that they can significantly impair people's daily lives. Varieties of coping mechanisms are used to manage the symptoms. As mentioned above and according to Baqutayan (2015) and Lewis et al. (2011), different people utilise different coping mechanisms to assist them in dealing with the suffering caused by loss, sadness, or other severe emotions. Coping mechanisms can be either physical or mental. Physical coping mechanisms could be relaxation activities, exercise, or engaging in self-harm, whilst mental mechanisms could be meditation or prayer. Coping strategies can be either good (such as relaxation activities) or detrimental (such as practising self-harm) (Baqutayan, 2015).

Exercise, mindfulness practices (such as meditation and yoga, optimistic thinking and self-talk), and cognitive behavioural therapy are some examples of good strategies (Larson, 2021). Larson (2021) argues that self-harm, harsh self-talk, excessive exercise, eating disorders, alcohol, drugs, and gambling are examples of harmful coping mechanisms. An unhealthy coping mechanism might appear to be beneficial, but it just numbs and suppresses the pain. According to Kar et al. (2021), coping mechanism may be acquired through culture, family, and personal experiences, or they



could be passed down from one generation to the next. When people feel helpless and lack control over life events, such as losing a loved one, they might use coping mechanisms as tools to assist them in feeling positive about themselves.

Coping mechanisms can be categorised in two ways. These mechanisms can either be positive or negative depending on the results they bring to individuals (Meadowglade, 2019). The following are examples of **positive coping mechanisms** educators could use:

- colleague-to-colleague support;
- involvement of the school governing body(SGB) as well as parents in mitigating minor and manageable misdemeanours;
- detecting incidents of violence timeously through school–police collaborations;
- monitoring access and entries onto the school premises;
- exercising as a form of coping;
- individual prayer; and
- private counselling.

**Negative coping mechanisms** are:

- substance abuse, e.g. alcohol or drugs;
- excessive use of activities, such as watching TV; or
- practising a specific ritual to numb the pain.

Montero-Marin et al. (2014) present two major strategies that victims of violence could use: the problem-focused coping strategy and the emotion-focused coping strategy. In **problem-focused** coping, individuals use the defensive coping mechanism of denial. This strategy is used by victims of violence when the individual refuses to accept that he or she has a problem (Compas et al., 2013). In an **emotion-focused** coping strategy, the victim of violence relaxes and expresses the emotion openly as a stress coping mechanism (Montero-Marin et al., 2014).

Some victims use the **repression** strategy, which is the act of blocking or trying to forget the painful event or situation through which one has been. Ahmed et al. (2007) and Heffer and Willoughby (2017) state that **projection** is another strategy. Here the victim tries to attribute repressed feelings to others as he or she feels threatened by the violent experience and cannot confront them. Employees who experience emotional stress may most likely make unprofessional decisions (Zana, 2019). Due to the overwhelming, stressful condition brought about by learners' threats or violent attacks on educators, many of the distressed educator's close circle, normally colleagues, family members, and friends are affected by the educator's change of behaviour (Ahmed et al., 2007; Baqutayan, 2015). Traumatic and high-stress situations may have an adverse effect on someone's emotional, social, mental, and physical health, which may result in job dissatisfaction, work performance that is below par, and internal strife (Kheswa, 2019). This type of stress could affect the individual's relationships, decision-making, the way he or she communicates with others, and could cause a lack of interest in activities he or she used to enjoy. Prolonged stress may lead to mental illness (Wiegner et al., 2015).

According to Sitoyi (2020), some educators miss classes or take time off work to avoid facing the learners. This can be considered as another type of coping mechanism. Some educators who could not handle the forms of violence in schools decided to leave teaching completely (Sitoyi, 2020).

## **2.7 INTERVENTIONS TO ASSIST VICTIMS**

In South Africa, violence prevention has been identified as a priority in the public health sector (Tonsing et al., 2011). According to Matzopoulos and Myers (2014), the Western Cape Provincial Department of Health initiated a Provincial Violence Prevention Policy Framework due to responses to the extraordinarily high occurrence and pressure suffered by the health facilities because of violence. In addition, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) established safe school campaigns in 2014 (RSA, 2014). In 2011, the South African Police Service (SAPS) signed a memorandum of understanding with the DBE to encourage the implementation of the existing partnership for ensuring school safety (Gauteng Department of Education [GDE], 2011).

According to the researcher, there are limited efforts to prevent or to deal with the immediate aftermath of violence against educators (Kgosimore, 2018; Sibisi et al., 2019; Zwane, 2021), therefore, more needs to be done, mainly assisting the victims to cope after incidents. One of the objectives of this study was therefore to identify educators' coping mechanisms (see section 1.3 above).

Mukwevho (2022), a social work manager in the social crime prevention unit at the SA Department of Social Development, states that the department only provides psychosocial support to the areas with high-risk and dangerous incidences of violence (i.e. killings, stabbings, incidences with physical attacks) because their service basket is limited. This is evidence enough that schools with low violence or minor incidences (i.e. teasing, swearing or any non-physical attacks) may never receive any form of psychosocial support.

## **2.8 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

The literature revealed the need for investigating the effects of learner violence and the coping mechanisms of educators who were victims of or who had witnessed learner violence within the SA context. The researcher discussed the literature on contributing factors to reasons why learners engage in violent behaviour at school. Some of the factors noted were negative peer association, the influence of the school environment on learners, family background and issues related to how a child is raised, and some individual characteristics. The literature also reflected the nature of school violence nationally as well as internationally, and its effect on educators. The literature showed that, while affected educators suffered from one form of violence or another, they have not received enough help. The current study thus grappled with the following research questions:

- What is the effect of violence on educators?
- What are educators' coping mechanisms following victimisation?

The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework that underpinned this study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The theoretical basis for this study was rooted in the socio-ecological model (SEM), initially conceptualised by Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s, and in the 1980s refined as the ecological systems theory (EST) (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). While the EST functions as a specialised framework focusing on the immediate environmental influences on an individual's development and behaviour, the SEM provides a broad perspective that encompasses interconnected systems. The EST was chosen as the most pertinent framework for the current study, which explored the effects of learner violence on educators, and the coping mechanisms used by educators.

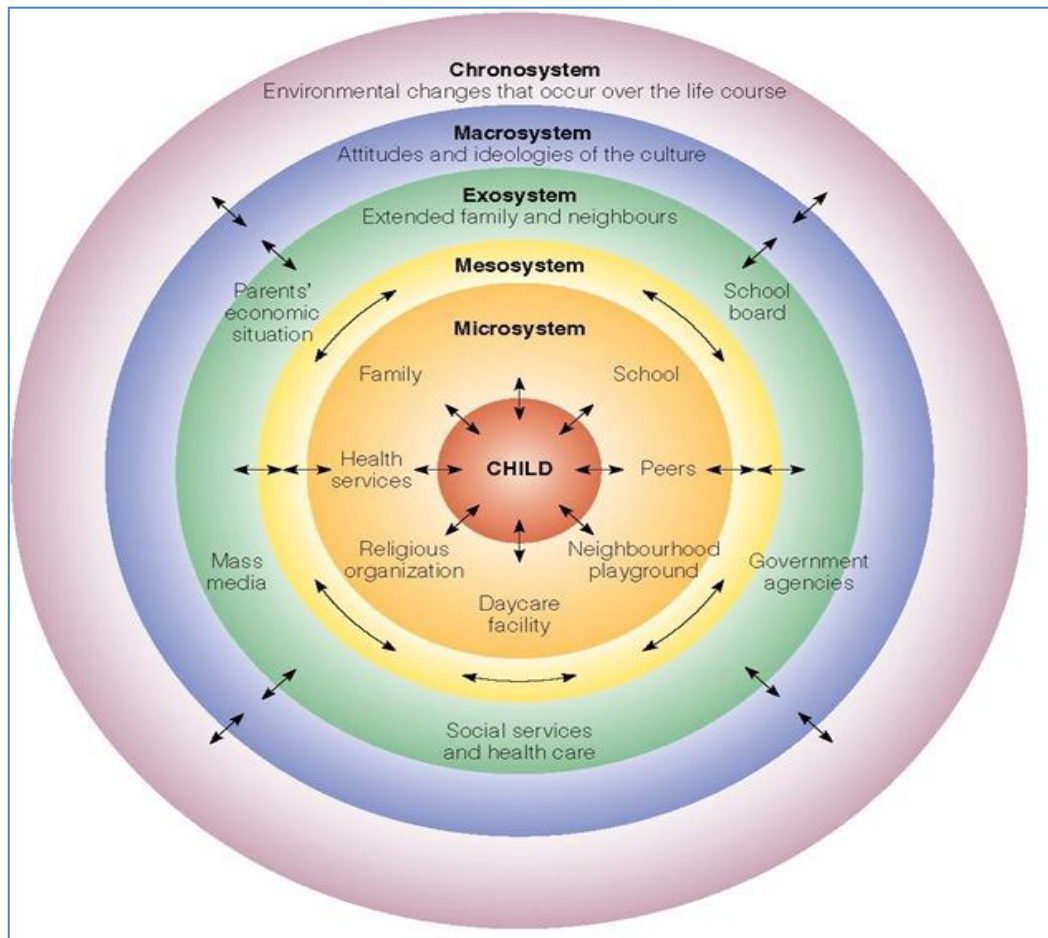
The adoption of the EST as the theoretical foundation for this research was guided by its instrumental role in facilitating comprehensive analysis. Scholars widely acknowledge the utility of the EST in understanding the dynamics of violence among learners (see El Zaatari & Maalouf 2022; Eriksson et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2021; Sabri et al., 2013; Sibisi, 2021), making it an appropriate framework for examining the effects of learner violence on educators, and the coping strategies of educators. By applying the EST, the study recognised that violent incidents occur within complex social contexts, involving intricate interactions among individuals across various ecological levels (Neuman, 2014).

By delving into the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, the EST allows a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted factors influencing individual attitudes and behaviours (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Sabri et al., 2013). In this research, the application of the EST enabled a robust examination of the diverse levels at which the effects of learner violence on educators manifest. The study sought a thorough understanding of the effects of violence and the coping mechanisms educators use by considering extensive ecological systems, such as the school environment and community dynamics (Neuman, 2014). This approach offered a comprehensive view of the complicated problem at hand by acknowledging the connection between people and their environments (Espelage et al., 2013).

A key element of the EST, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, is the connections between the various elements: none can be viewed in isolation.

**Figure 3.1**

***Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory***



Source: Bronfenbrenner et al. (1984)

### 3.2 THE MICROSYSTEM

The microsystem is premised on the understanding that an individual is mainly influenced by those who are closer to him or her as they interact, and immediate relationships surrounding that individual have a bearing on his or her behaviour (Martin et al., 2013). In his theory, Bronfenbrenner (1994) posits that individuals are part of microsystems that may be explained as the proximal (close) relationships that provide continuous and highly influential direct and indirect interaction with an individual.

Microsystems are therefore patterns of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced in the process of development of an individual in a face-to-face setting (McCall, 2013). Microsystems mainly entail family, parents, friends, and school, which have physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, allow, or inhibit certain types of behaviours and engagement (Joyce, 2013). The engagements and the influences of the interactions have a bearing on creating a violent (or non-violent) individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The study examined how an educator's close interaction with learners that violated him or her channelled or influenced the educator's day-to-day behaviour. Educators are affected by their immediate environments at the micro level or individual level. In terms of their own safety and well-being, educators are directly affected by the availability of drugs, alcohol, and weapons in the community. Due to the greater likelihood of violence linked with the availability of these in the community, educators experience heightened stress, anxiety, and fear. Their emotional and psychological states may be affected, resulting in burnout or decreased job satisfaction (Tuppince, 2017).

### **3.3 MESOSYSTEM**

The second stage, presented as a circle, is called the mesosystem. The mesosystem is considered one step away from the immediate interactions and people involved in the individual's community, such as colleagues, church members or neighbours, influencing him or her directly or indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1996).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), the mesosystem comprises the connections and processes that interact between different levels in which the developing individual is located. For instance, consider the way an individual influences relationships of two mesosystems – home and school – where the influencing relationships may be parent–educator and learner–peer relationships.

In essence, meso is at a higher level than micro, as it involves the connections or interactions between different microsystems, and the influence this interaction has on the individual (Botha & Zwane, 2021). If these subsystems are positive or negative by creating a better or worse character, the individual will reflect those same

behaviours, which in some instances create a violent individual, in this case, the learner (McCall, 2013).

Educators may be affected negatively by experiencing or witnessing violence at schools. For example, the way their colleagues look at them might change, and this could change their behaviour towards people in the mesosystem, such as neighbours and church members.

### **3.4 EXOSYSTEM**

Bronfenbrenner (1996) explains that there are processes and linkages or connections between the different settings in an exosystem, but at least one does not contain the developing individual. In this stage, events indirectly affect processes within the immediate setting within which the developing person is affected. The settings involve domains to which young people have little direct access but which somehow influence them and the people with whom they have close relationships, such as the neighbourhood or community (McCall, 2013).

In some cases, the availability of drugs, alcohol, and weapons from gangsters in the community who are involved in crime, influences an individual to become violent (Chisholm & Ward, 2005; Flores, 2005). The social activities and behaviours of the community members sometimes influence learners, and this in turn has adverse effects on educators. External influences from the exosystem, such as drug abuse within the community or learners arriving at school intoxicated, could have a cascading effect on classroom dynamics. These external factors might lead to disruptive and problematic behaviour among learners, making it challenging for educators to maintain control over the class. Educators therefore often find themselves frustrated and stressed as they manage these disruptive situations. The escalating tensions in the classroom could further result in conflicts and even physical altercations between learners and educators. This unsettling environment leaves educators in constant unease and instils in them a genuine fear for their safety and well-being within the educational setting (Tintswalo, 2014).

### 3.5 MACROSYSTEM

Bronfenbrenner (1994, p. 40) postulates that the macrosystem may be explained as the structure of society or what may be called the “societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture”. Invariably, this may be viewed as an interrelated pattern of microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem characteristics of a given culture or subculture of a community or society.

This major system has important characteristics, which include but are not limited to belief systems, “bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of the broader systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40) and is therefore influential to behaviours of an individual. According to some scholars, a culture of violence and moral degeneration in a specific society thus tends to breed violent behaviour among children and youth (De Wet, 2003; Flores, 2005; Maree, 2008).

At this level, the macrosystem is further away from the individual than the exosystem and does not seem to affect the individual directly but indirectly exerts both negative and positive interactive forces, such as community contexts and social networks. In the macrosystem, which includes broader socioeconomic and cultural effects, outside forces, such as drug addiction in the community or learners showing up to class drunk, could have an effect on the dynamics in the classroom. These cultural and societal standards might help to normalise substance misuse, which could cause disruptive and troublesome conduct in learners. Educators frequently struggle to maintain control over the class as a result of being influenced by societal conventions, which may be a major source of stress and frustration. Culture-based attitudes could influence classroom tensions, which in turn could lead to disagreements and physical altercations between learners and educators. Educators are perpetually uneasy in this disturbing classroom climate, and they also have real concerns for their safety.



### 3.6 CHRONOSYSTEM

The chronosystem entails changes that occur over a period in the characteristics of an individual and the environment in which the individual resides. For instance, changes may include phases in the family structure, the individual's socioeconomic status, employment and residence, and his or her ability in everyday life (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1996).

According to this theory and chrono-level system factors, some of the chronological events may be death or divorce in the family, which could lead an individual to become aggressive and violent due to depression, stress, anger, or pain from the loss of a loved one (Ryan & Paquette, 2001). The pain may lead the individual to become violent as a coping mechanism.

The above issues show that learners are influenced by internal (biological and psychological) and external factors (social) and circumstances that are related (Bronfenbrenner, 1996).

The current study used the four-level ecological system theory to understand the effect of violence on an individual – whether a first-hand victim or a witness (Hawker & Boulton, 2000) – better. This theory allows one to understand the factors that put people at risk of violence.

The overlapping rings in the theory in Figure 3.1 above illustrate how factors at one level influence factors at another level. For example, when an individual is affected or stressed by something, his or her relationship with others will start to suffer. The way the affected individual interacts with the community and society will also be affected.

Hawker and Boulton's (2000) research found that violence could cause stress or depression. They state that a wide range of emotions surrounding some experiences of being victimised might include reactions, such as stress or work avoidance (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). For this study, it was hypothesised that educators might miss their classes or even stay in class for shorter periods due to fear of being violated or victimised. Among the different challenges faced by males and females who experience violence (in this study, educators), depression is the most common mental

health symptom (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2001). Furthermore, being victimised is associated with physical health problems, such as headaches and stomach aches (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2001).

### **3.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter discussed the ecological systems theory (EST), explaining the five different systems, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, according to which individual development occurs. The theory shows how learners and educators relate to their immediate surroundings. This allowed for an understanding of how violence in a community affects its members, and how violence of learners towards educators affects the latter. The next chapter discusses the methodology adopted in this study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provided comprehensive insight into the methodology employed to conduct this study, thereby ensuring the rigour and trustworthiness of the research findings. The primary objective of this chapter was to elucidate the underlying research philosophy, design, data collection methods, and analytical approaches. In addition, it delved into key ethical considerations, and the pivotal role of the researcher within the qualitative research framework.

#### **4.2 DEFINING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research technique enables the reader to assess the overall credibility of the study. It is a particular process or type of approach employed by the researcher to locate, choose, process, and analyse information gathered on a particular subject (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). Furthermore, the methodology aims to show how the research questions are linked to inquiries made in the field of study, as opposed to the intended outcome of the study, which is a claim regarding significance (Yilmaz, 2013). A qualitative research design was employed in the current study. The reason for using this design is that it allows the researcher to interact with participants in the research process to assess and explore how participants construct meaning out of context (Wagner et al., 2012).

#### **4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

In terms of research, the term 'paradigm' was coined by Kuhn (1962), to refer to a conceptual framework shared by a community of scientists that provided them with a handy model for assessing issues and finding answers. According to Kuhn (1974, p. 459), a paradigm is "an integrated cluster of substantive notions, variables, and issues linked with appropriate methodological methods and tools". Antwi and Hamza (2015, p. 218) state that, according to Khun (1977), "the term paradigm refers to a research culture with a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that a community of researchers

has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research". A paradigm "implies a pattern, structure and framework or system of scientific and academic ideas, values and assumptions" (Olsen et al., 1992, p. 16, cited in Antwi & Hamza, 2015, p. 218). It is an approach to thinking about and doing research (Antwi & Hamza, 2015.) Eberhardt (2014) defines a paradigm as that which organises the interaction between the knower and the thing that must be understood (how to learn about it) as well as how the researcher interprets reality and what is thought to be real.

In this study, the researcher employed the interpretivist research paradigm. Since interpretive researchers believe that reality comprises people's subjective perceptions of the outer world, such researchers may accept an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological view that reality is socially produced. Interpretivists contend that there is no single method or manner to acquire knowledge (Willis, 1995). There is therefore no right way to find knowledge, no wrong or right theory (Smith, 1991). The researcher evaluates theories in terms of their applicability to the study and how 'interesting' they find them. By examining the phenomenon of interest, researchers develop constructs. The interpretivist paradigm emphasises the significance of contextualising analysis because "a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations" (Pham, 2018, p. 4).

Understanding the world as it is from people's subjective experiences is central to the interpretative paradigm (Gichuru, 2017). Interpretivist employ procedures emphasising meaning rather than measurement, including participant observation or interviewing, which both rely on relationships that form between the researcher and the subjects. In the current study, the researcher wanted to understand the participants' experiences, and to construct meaning. The researcher therefore saw it fit to adopt an interpretivist research paradigm to explore the experiences of the educators who were victims of learner violence, and to understand the coping mechanisms of these educators.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN, RESEARCH AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

According to Maree (2016), a research design aims to outline the steps and rules for carrying out the study and to be employed in a study to help identify the correct answers to the research questions. According to Wolfenden et al. (2017), selecting a design should be congruent with how the research question, goals, purpose, and

methodology are arranged within a specific paradigm or tradition. The coherence of the research design is critical to any study, and it ties to the ideas of the 'olden thread' in research (Maree, 2010).

This study thus used an explorative qualitative design, allowing the researcher to examine the root causes of the problem thoroughly. The researcher was consequently able to delve into the repercussions of learner aggression on educators. It may be claimed in this instance that the design was appropriate. With a focus on educators in Mopani West District schools in Limpopo, this design helped comprehend the effect of learner violence on educators and the way educators cope after victimisation.

**The aim of the study was to:**

- to explore the effects of learner violence on educators; and
- to explore the coping mechanisms that educators utilise after victimisation.

**The following questions underpinned the research objectives:**

- What is the effect of violence on educators?
- What are educators' coping mechanisms following victimisation?

#### **4.5 SAMPLING METHOD AND POPULATION**

Purposive sampling was used for this study because it was appropriate for the context and goals of the study. With the goal of exploring educators' experiences with violence and their coping mechanisms in the Mopani West District of Limpopo, this sampling technique involved selecting participants based on their unique qualities or expertise in terms of the research problem (Maree, 2016). The advantage of purposive sampling is that it allows the researcher to choose participants with the knowledge and experience relevant to the research questions. In this case, educators who had experienced or observed acts of school violence were best positioned to provide valuable insights (see Campbell et al., 2020).

This method is efficient, particularly when the researcher is targeting a specific group or population with unique characteristics. It ensures that the sample is well suited to address the research objectives. The selection of educators from six secondary schools in the Mopani West District aimed to provide equitable representation. The

choice of purposive sampling in this study was justified by the need to collect in-depth, context-specific data from educators who had direct experience with school violence. This enhanced the ability of the study to capture diverse perspectives and experiences within the district. By selecting educators from various schools within the district, the study aimed to enhance the representation of diverse perspectives; thus, strengthening the relevance of the findings within the local context.

Utilising a non-probability purposive sampling technique in this study offered distinct **advantages** that were closely aligned with the specific research objectives. Valuable insights provided by Vehovar et al. (2016), and Lamm and Lamm (2019) shed light on the benefits of employing such this sampling approach.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the need for rich, qualitative insights, purposive sampling allowed for the selection of participants who could provide valuable first-hand accounts of their experiences and coping mechanisms.

The **disadvantage** of purposive sampling is that it could introduce bias if the researcher's criteria for selection are too narrow or too subjective (Etikan et al., 2016). One limitation of purposive sampling is that the findings may not be generalised easily to a broader population (Campbell et al., 2020). In this study, the sample comprised educators within the Mopani West District but might not have been fully representative of the experiences of educators in other regions. While the results may not be readily generalisable beyond the Mopani West District, they hold significant relevance and applicability within this specific context, contributing to a deep understanding of educators' responses to violence in their professional lives.

Permission to conduct research within selected schools in the Mopani West District was requested in writing to the Mopani West District office (Department of Education) and duly granted, as evidenced by the permission letter in Appendix B.

After obtaining permission to conduct the research, the researcher visited six schools to obtain consent from the school principals to interview the educators. The school principals were prepared for the visit after the researcher had obtained an authorisation letter from the Mopani West District (see Appendix B). Presentations were conducted in the staff rooms of the schools, introducing the study and informing the educators about its purpose, along with providing contact details for interested

participants. This phase, involving school visits and presentations, lasted one week. Following this, interested volunteers contacted the researcher two weeks later, leading to scheduled meetings for the interview phase over the next fortnight. In order to adhere to ethical standards, all participating volunteers were given an information sheet (see Appendix C) for review, with an opportunity to seek clarification and ask questions. The participants were then presented with an informed consent form (see Appendix D), signifying their comprehension of the objectives and relevance of the study, and their voluntary involvement, as emphasised by Kumar (2011). The non-probability purposive sampling approach allowed the researcher to target individuals possessing the requisite knowledge and experiences related to the research topic specifically. This targeted approach ensured that the participants were well-informed and able to offer rich, context-specific insights (Vehovar et al., 2016). It was expected that these participants were likely to share detailed narratives and provide nuanced perspectives, enriching the qualitative data collected during the study.

#### **4.5.1 Inclusion and Exclusion**

The study comprised eleven educators, consisting of one male and ten females, representing six public secondary schools in the Mopani West District of Limpopo, encompassing both rural and township areas. The participants were diverse in terms of gender, race, and background, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the educator community. The age range of the participants was between 25 and 60 years. Specifically, the 11 participants were individuals who had either personally experienced or witnessed violence within these school environments between the year 2010 and 2020 were strategically selected to provide first-hand accounts of these experiences. The researcher intentionally selected schools known for a high incidence of violence within the Mopani West District.

Regarding the inclusion criteria, educators with a minimum of three years' tenure at their respective schools were chosen. The decision to exclude recent victims was made considering their vulnerability to distress or trauma. The study also specifically omitted educators who relied solely on hearsay and who had not personally witnessed or experienced violence perpetrated by learners. In addition, the focus of the study was limited to public secondary schools, with private schools being excluded based on evidence suggesting a higher prevalence of violence in public schools, as indicated by

the research conducted by Botha and Zwane (2021). This deliberate focus on public schools allowed for a targeted examination of the specific context under investigation.

#### 4.5.2 Study Setting

In the context of this study, it was imperative to understand the geographical backdrop that framed the research. The study was positioned in the Mopani West District, a vibrant locale situated within the larger Mopani Municipality. Figure 4.1 below visually demonstrates the precise location of Mopani West District within the broader Mopani Municipality area. Understanding the specific setting is pivotal in comprehending the environmental, social, and demographic factors influencing this research.

**Figure 4.1**

#### *Mopani Municipality Map*



*Source:* Municipalities of South Africa (2023).

This study was carried out in the Mopani West District, which is in the Greater Letaba region of the map shown in Figure 4.1. According to reconciled data, the population of the Mopani District Municipality rose from 1 068 569 in 2007 to 1 092 507 in 2018. (Stats SA, 2011). The majority of the population, 81%, live in rural areas, 14%



live in cities, and 5% live on farms. The participating schools are located in the Bolobedu region of Modjadjiskloof. Due to various socioeconomic and political factors, urban areas have continuously been linked to high levels of violence; hence, the researcher decided to use this area in this study. Urban areas frequently have problems, such as overpopulation, substandard housing, and weak social cohesion, creating social tensions and conflicts (Sampson et al., 2002). The incidence of violence in metropolitan settings is further exacerbated by the existence of gangs, drug trafficking, and other illegal enterprises (Kubrin, 2012).

#### 4.6 DATA COLLECTION

The study employed a semi-structured interview approach conducted through face-to-face interactions, integrating open-ended questions as the principal data collection approach. As highlighted by Magaldi and Berler (2020), semi-structured interviews involve guided discussions that blend predetermined questions or themes with the flexibility to explore unforeseen lines of inquiry. Unlike structured interviews with fixed questions and closed-ended responses or unstructured interviews with no predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews strike a balance by providing a framework while allowing participants the freedom to elaborate on their responses (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

One of the key **advantages** of utilising semi-structured interviews is their capacity to collect comprehensive and in-depth qualitative data (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). The open-ended nature of the questions enables participants to express their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives freely. Researchers can delve deeper into specific areas of interest, seeking clarification or additional detail as needed (Creswell, 2013; Maree, 2016). This method facilitates a thorough understanding of the research topic, making it appropriate for exploring complex phenomena, such as the effects of violence on educators and their coping mechanisms. At all participating schools, the school management provided a serene, comfortable classroom where the interviews were conducted in English.

The semi-structured interviews in this study were recorded using voice recording and were later transcribed by the researcher. Direct engagement during interviews helps foster a strong rapport and trust between the interviewer and the interviewee

(Kakilla, 2021). Such in-person dialogues facilitate a deep understanding of the interviewee's viewpoints, revealing nuanced insights that may not be evident through other interview methods (Adams, 2015). However, face-to-face interviews might occasionally evoke discomfort among interviewees, especially when discussing sensitive or personal topics. This discomfort might limit the level of information shared during the interview, potentially influencing the overall data-collection process (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017).

#### **4.6.1 How the Space was Prepared (adhering to COVID-19 precautionary measures)**

The interviews were conducted during the pandemic, strict adherence to COVID-19 measures applied. COVID-19 measures at the time included regular hand cleanliness and the use of masks that completely covered the mouth and nose (Dodds & Hess, 2020). The researcher chose an open area in which to conduct the study (i.e. empty classroom). Alternatively, if the interviews had to take place indoors (i.e. principal's office), the researcher ensured the windows were open to maximise ventilation. A minimum social distance of two metres was maintained between the researcher and the participants at all times.

A pilot study was used as the starting point for data analysis to evaluate the validity of answers to the questions. Two educators who had observed or encountered violent behaviour took part in the pilot project. The results from the pilot study were included in the overall findings.

### **4.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

The study employed thematic content analysis to analyse the data that were collected. Thematic content analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2021), involves systematically examining data, identifying relevant perspectives expressed in interviews, and identifying recurring patterns (themes) within the dataset. In addition, classifying and systematic coding were utilised (as suggested by Braun et al., 2023) to explore large amounts of textual data covertly. This was done to identify trends and patterns in the language used, as well as its frequency, relationships, and grammatical structures (see Braun et al., 2023).

Several data analysis phases occurred, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021). The phases were as follows:

- Familiarisation with the data by checking for familiar information. The researcher achieved this by transcribing the recordings and checking the notes made during the interviews to gain a clear understanding of what was said.
- Before coding, the researcher read all the data several times to allow for the emergence of concepts and the recognition of potential patterns. The researcher started by creating initial codes after reading, rereading, and becoming comfortable with the recorded data. The researcher then checked for any mistakes in data recording and the overall credibility of the data.
- Initial codes were generated by identifying interesting elements in data. The researcher reviewed each recording, noted the points that jumped out as relevant or potentially interesting, and highlighted all the phrases and sentences matching the codes.
- The themes were identified by searching through the coded data, noting the repetition of codes, and keeping a record of each step. The researcher used a table and assembled concepts to ensure that they formed a graspable pattern.
- Reviewing themes was undertaken by making sure that the themes were a valuable and accurate representation of the data. The researcher did this by comparing the data set against the themes. The intention was that, if the researcher encountered any problems while doing this, the themes would be split, combined and/or discarded, or that new ones would be created.
- The researcher defined and named themes. The meaning of each theme was formulated, and the researcher figured out how this would help her understand the data. Naming the themes meant that the researcher created an understandable name for each theme.
- The researcher produced or wrote the report, finally summarising the findings. To do this, a methodology section was included, which explained the data collection process. The writing of the conclusion was based on the conclusions drawn from the transcribed data. The researcher finally turned the analysis into

a comprehensible piece of writing using vivid and persuasive examples from the literature, which connected to the themes, the research questions, and analysis.

The data analysis was carried out manually, and the researcher developed a methodical approach using the phases described above to examine the data and arrive at a conclusion by developing codes and themes that suggested potential responses to the research questions. Following consideration of the theoretical framework, topics, research questions, and literature review, the study finally explained the findings.

#### **4.7.1 Quality Indicator in Qualitative Research**

The steps below were taken on account of recommendations by scholars to ensure the quality of the data collected (Bashir et al., 2008; Yadav, 2022).

##### ***4.7.1.1 Trustworthiness and Credibility***

Transferability, confirmability, credibility, and dependability are four strict criteria that Lincoln (2010) developed for qualitative researchers to establish trustworthiness. According to Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018), while the qualitative research approach prefers the term 'trustworthiness' and its four components – credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability – the quantitative approach uses the validity and reliability to describe trustworthiness. For example, the researcher ensured that the data obtained would be secure and non-threatening in order to establish a reasonable level of trustworthiness (see Wagner et al., 2012). Interviews took place at the schools where the participants worked. This was for the participants' convenience to save on time and travel costs, by not taking them away from work. Most of the interviews took place in the principal's office and the school's classrooms. These were safe and private spaces.

##### ***4.7.1.2 Pilot Study***

A pilot study is referred to as a 'little study' or a scaled-down version of the major study in which the researcher utilises a small group of volunteers who share some of the same traits as the primary participants in the study (Manion et al., 2013). From the 11 candidates who were interviewed for this study, the researcher used two educators for the pilot study.

The researcher used a pilot study to confirm whether the interview questions were valid, that is, to see if they would reveal the information the research was trying to obtain. The pilot study checked whether the questions as they were phrased were clear regarding the research aims and would provide valid results. In addition, the researcher used the pilot study to determine whether the questions from the interview schedule consistently produced similar answers without deviations, which would have given rise to inconsistency. Where discrepancies were found, the researcher modified the interview questions to make them more suitable for achieving the desired meaning, validity, and consistency (see Appendix E).

#### ***4.7.1.3 Transferability***

Transferability allows for a fair generalisation within a technique that does not necessarily result in general conclusions (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014).

Transferability is found where the findings may be transferred to a similar circumstance and yield the same or similar outcomes (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). Results and analysis in this respect can be used for purposes outside of the specific study topic (see Collis & Hussey, 2003; Du Plooy-Celliers et al., 2018; Shenton, 2004). The researcher chose individuals who had experienced or witnessed learner violence at the chosen schools using non-probability sampling. Given the diverse experiences and distinct social contexts of each participant, it is plausible that the research methodologies applied in this study could be applicable in similar settings but may produce varying outcomes. The findings of the current study might not be universally applicable to different contexts due to the foundational principles of social constructivism, emphasizing the unique socio-cultural factors influencing the interpretation and manifestation of learner violence. The chapter on the findings (see Chapter 5) reflects the raw data from the interviews. Another researcher may interpret the same data differently using the same research methods but a different set of lenses. This report presents the research methodologies and findings to enable applicability of the finding's transparency to other investigations.

#### **4.7.1.4 Confirmability**

The researcher ensured that the interpretation of the results was solely based on the data collected and the findings. After completing the data analysis, the researcher returned to the participants and discussed the findings with a select few to see whether they agreed with the findings. Most participants were satisfied with how their data were put forward in the report. In the case of those who were not, suitable corrections were made to represent accurately what they had said.

#### **4.7.1.5 Credibility**

Credibility involves how accurately the researcher understands the information provided by the participants (Shufutinsky, 2020). The researcher took care to ensure that the interpretation in this study was accurate and truthful. In addition, the researcher gained credibility by spending much time with the participants to have a profound understanding of them and their experiences. Du Plooy-Celliers et al. (2018) claim that adopting triangulation techniques, such as using several instruments or participants from various occupational levels, might boost trustworthiness (i.e. management and subordinates could be asked similar questions to see whether answers will be the same) to come to a deep understanding of the participants and their experiences. Triangulation is the process of using many sources of data collecting (such as interviews and personal reflection) (see Flick, 2018).

The following triangulation methods was employed:

- Feedback was received after peer reviewing by colleagues and a critical reader.
- Regular debriefing sessions took place with the researcher's supervisor. Between each round of data collection, the researcher and her supervisor conducted debriefing meetings.

#### **4.7.1.6 Dependability**

Dependability is the development of the process of interpretation that occurs throughout data gathering techniques, data analysis, and the themes developed from the data (Collis & Hussey, 2003). For a study and its findings to be reliable, the researcher must be competent, cautious, and free from assumptions that are not

supported by the participants' responses (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Du Plooy-Celliers et al., 2018; Shenton, 2004).

The researcher conducted a pilot study before employing the interview schedule to determine whether the questions were pertinent and appropriate for obtaining the information required to meet the objectives of the current study. In addition, the researcher enlisted the assistance of prominent researchers and industry professionals to help assess the suitability of the questions (see above on 4.7.1.2 on pilot and 4.7.1.3 expert views). Further discussions with the supervisor and colleagues took place to ensure the research was done correctly.

#### **4.8 THE ROLE OF A RESEARCHER IN A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

In the context of this qualitative study, I approached the research process with a willingness to be vulnerable, allowing participants to openly share their experiences of violence. However, I remained mindful not to let my emotions cloud my judgment. Serving as the primary data collection instrument, I recognised the importance of following established research protocols and maintaining objectivity during the data analysis phase. Informed by both the existing literature and my personal insights as a resident of the Mopani West District, I approached the interviews with a deep understanding of the local context. Creating a supportive and trustworthy environment was essential to building rapport and encouraging participants to share their stories. By fostering an atmosphere of openness, I facilitated meaningful exchanges that enriched my understanding of their lived experiences.

#### **4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS**

Any research that is carried out must adhere to a set of ethical principles that inform participants about the research while also protecting their data. Getting ethical approval from one's university is one of the most crucial things the researcher should do when conducting research. For the current study, permission was obtained from Unisa to do the research (see Appendix A). The ethical clearance helped establish rapport with the participants. They were made aware that participation in the study was

optional, and that the study was done for academic purposes only. Further permission was granted by the Mopani West District to access the schools (see Appendix B).

The principals of each of the six schools in the Mopani West District also gave their written consent. After that, a suitable time was set aside for the researcher to talk to the participants, i.e. the educators who were victims of learner violence.

All educators who volunteered to participate in the study received an information sheet to read (see Appendix C) followed by the informed consent form (see Appendix D) requiring signatures accompanied by an interview guide (see Appendix E) to provide a framework for conducting interviews. The participants were reminded that their participation was optional and would not have any negative consequences. Care was taken to guarantee that no educator could be identified when the results were released to protect the participants' confidentiality. Participants were recorded using a mobile phone, and the recordings were kept in an encrypted Dropbox folder. No one other than the researcher and the research supervisor had access to the recordings.

According to Grove and Gray (2020), human rights are claims that people feel are supported by their beliefs. These rights were preserved in the current study. According to this perspective, it is critical to have strong ethical principles because ethics are a crucial component of any study the researcher plans to conduct. According to Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018), ethics are the researcher's moral and professional behaviour, which sets standards for his or her conduct and attitude.

The researcher adhered to ethical standards, such as avoiding plagiarism by citing all materials and sources used, and so adhered to the fundamental principles of research. Several ethical concerns of which the researcher was aware and followed during and after the research procedure are discussed below, along with significant ethical recommendations outlined by Higson-Smith and Kagee (1995).

**Bias:** The researcher was continuously keeping a lookout for bias and avoided it throughout. This was accomplished by the researcher using a self-reflective notebook and conducting a consent debriefing with the supervisor. In addition, the researcher relied on the information provided by the participants rather than making any assumptions or allowing personal opinions to cloud her judgment.



**Informed consent:** Participants have a right to information about the research, including what it is about, how they will be affected, the benefits and drawbacks of participation, and what would happen if they opted out (Jefford & Moore, 2008). In the current study, participants had consented to participate in the study; they were not coerced. Their consent was vital for the study and highly appreciated; thus, it was treated with respect. The consent form (see Appendix D) allowed for voluntary participation and required their signature as confirmation.

In her conduct, the researcher adhered to the research protocols in collecting data, such as avoiding conflicts of interest and not exerting undue influence on the participants. Integrity, openness, professionalism, and honesty in all conduct were highly valued. In the current study, professionalism and matters of proper care were thought to be important. As a result, the researcher continued to develop the professional knowledge and abilities necessary to meet the norms of worldwide research.

The researcher kept the data collected private, confidential, and anonymous. Issues of participant confidentiality and privacy were at the centre of ethical issues. The data obtained were kept in a safe, closed location.

**Avoidance of harm:** In research studies, harm could come in the form of physical, psychological or emotional suffering. The researcher therefore tried to keep participants safe by ensuring the location for the interviews was safe. During the interviews, the researcher was careful in the way she questioned the participants about the nature of the violence experienced, she did not ask the participants to discuss the traumatic event in depth, and she did not focus on the traumatic event. If participants needed to express emotions, the researcher was prepared, with assistance available and could arrange counselling services if required by calling the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) at 0800 567 567 (Mental Health Matters). Only one participants who did not take part in the study contacted the group for counselling or debriefing.

**Avoidance of misleading:** In the opinion of Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018), misleading or deception is defined as concealing information about which participants should know for them to make an informed choice regarding participation. The

researcher ensured that participants were informed about the aims of the study, and participants received an information sheet with details about the study (see Appendix C).

**Discontinuity:** The possibility to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason to the researcher was made clear to participants. The subject of voluntary participation was emphasised in prominent characters on the consent form. In addition, the researcher orally advised participants to stop if they felt uncomfortable.

The research was centred on optimism and cultivating a sense of dependability. As a result, the researcher had to abide by ethical standards and professional practices of compliance while carrying out the investigation responsibly. The results of this investigation are reported here in an unbiased and truthful manner. According to Neuman and Guggenheim (2011), individuals still have the option to decline participation at this stage, and researchers must respect this choice. To this end, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point before the write-up of this dissertation.

#### **4.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

In this chapter, the researcher presented an outline of the research methodology employed in this study. The researcher elucidated the interpretivist research paradigm embraced for this research, and elaborated on the research questions that guided the investigation. The sampling methods were explained to show how the researcher arrived at a sample of eleven educators from six schools in the Mopani West District of Limpopo. Data collection was explained, including the role of the researcher and the steps taken to ensure the quality of data collected. Finally, ethical considerations were presented as a crucial part of the research process.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Data analysis comprises an attempt to organise data and to arrange it into practicable and manageable themes derived from participants' meanings of their circumstances (Evans & Lewis, 2018). This chapter is structured around the research questions and will present the research findings. The focus of this study – undertaken in the Mopani West District of Limpopo, South Africa – was to investigate the effects of learner violence on educators (i.e. teachers and principals), and their use of coping mechanisms. The study utilised a qualitative exploratory design (see section 4.4 with non-probability purposive sampling, see section 4.5) to select participants. The sample comprised eleven educators from six public secondary schools, as illustrated in Table 5.2. This district has the highest violence rate in Limpopo (Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the research questions as guidelines to understand victimised educators.

#### **5.2 BRIEF DATA COLLECTION PROCESS AND RESPONSE RATE**

At the time when the interviews were conducted, learners had just returned to school under Level 3 COVID-19 restrictions. The interviews took place in the principal's office and empty classrooms offered to the researcher by the leadership of the schools. This space also helped assure some security and an environment suitable to conducting interviews, especially since the researcher did not know the participants before the interviews. The researcher had made appointments with the school principals to arrange dates to address all the educators in the staffrooms across all six schools. The researcher left her contact details at the schools so that anyone who wanted to take part in the study could make contact. The participants then contacted the researcher to participate voluntarily in the study. After that, an appropriate date was arranged for the researcher to access the participants, and informed consent form was given to participants to read through and sign. The initial plan was to interview 12 educators, but only 11 educators could participate in the study.

The participants agreed to participate without any problems, although they wanted to ensure their identity would be well protected. The researcher guaranteed their anonymity. The researcher also explained that the research was for academic purposes and that any confidential information given would be kept confidential. The recordings were to be stored in a secure folder.

After being sent the ethical clearance form, the participants, indicated their willingness to assist in participating in the study (by participating in interviews). The participants were informed that they were free not to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable. No challenges were faced in the data collection process. The participants were open and willing to respond to the questions. Table 5.1 shows the distribution of the participants.

**Table 5.1**

***Response Rate and Distribution of Participants, Gender Distribution (N=11)***

<b>Participants' Position at School</b>	<b>Number Interviewed</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Principals	1	Females	10
Heads of Departments (HoDs)	3	Males	1
General teachers	4		
Student teachers	3		
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>		

There were 12 expected responses. Eleven participants participated in the interview process because one participant could not attend the interview due to events outside her control. The participants interviewed comprised a principal of a school, three HoDs, three student teachers and four general teachers. There were one male participant and ten female participants, as depicted in Table 5.1.

### **5.3 THE PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

The participants' age distribution was as follows: three participants were between the ages of 20 and 30; four were between the ages of 31 and 40; and there were two in each age group, 41 to 50 and 51 to 60.

The distribution of participants' educational backgrounds was as follows:

- three of the eleven participants were learners' educators, each with a degree (NQF7) and pursuing certification;
- three educators' held a postgraduate diploma in education;
- four teachers held a post-graduate certificate in education; and
- one participant had a master's degree in education.

Table 5.2 details how long the participants have worked for the SA DoE.

**Table 5.2**

***Years Employed at the Department of Education in South Africa***

<b>Number of Years</b>	<b>0–10</b>	<b>11–20</b>	<b>21–30</b>	<b>31–40</b>
Number of participants	3	3	4	1
<b>Total number of participants</b>	<b>11</b>			

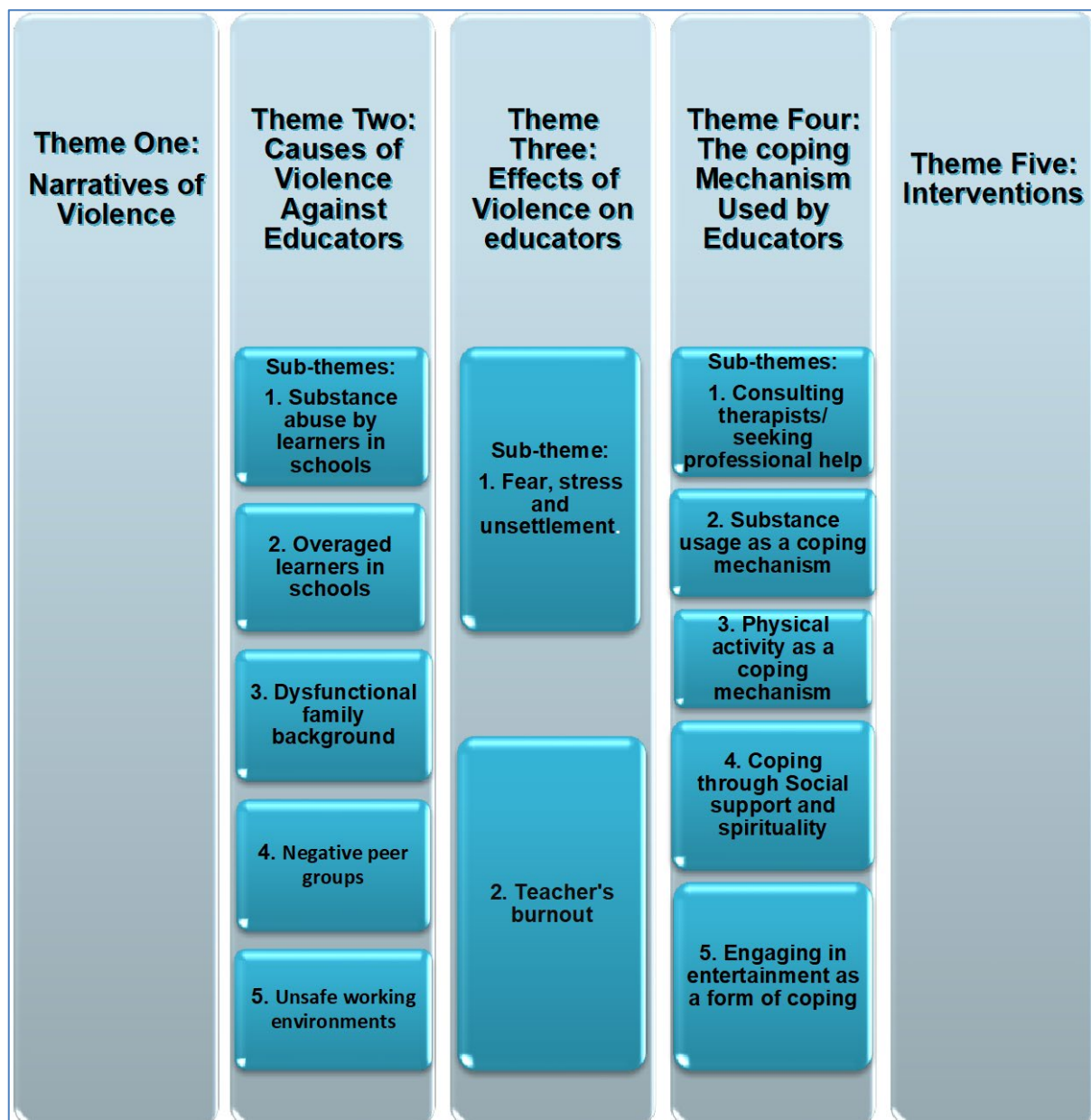
Table 5.2 shows the number of years the participants had been employed. These ranged from three who had been employed for 0 to 10 years, three had been employed for 11 to 20 years, four had been employed from 21 to 30 years, and one participant had been employed for 35 years.

The results of the study are presented in section 5.4 below.

#### **5.4 THE KEY THEMES AND SUBTHEMES EMERGING FROM THE FINDINGS**

From the data analysed, five key themes have emerged, providing a comprehensive insight into the core aspects of the effects of learners' violence on educators and their coping mechanisms. These emerging themes highlight key patterns and trends that were identified from the data. The five themes together with the subthemes are arranged in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1

*Key Themes and Subthemes*

Source: Researchers own compilation

The themes were determined based on the participants' replies to the interview questions and by using the process of coding. Participants' responses are presented in the form of direct quotations below. Please note that all responses are reproduced verbatim and unedited.

It is important to understand that participants reacted to the violence in various ways. Participants adopted two or more coping strategies to cope with traumatic, stressful, and depressing situations.

#### 5.4.1 Theme 1: Narratives of Violence

The participants were prompted to provide a broad discussion of what they believed might be the causes of learner violence. In this context, out of the eleven participants, seven deviated from the question and instead shared their personal experiences and stories related to the topic. Seven educators interviewed reported physical attacks from learners (such as slapping, pouring water on them, and pointing fingers). Some reported being subjected to emotional and verbal abuse by learners who used vulgar language. The following excerpts are narrations of violence in the participants' words:

*I always felt ashamed as a senior member in the school that I could be attacked by a student who had quarrelled with one of my staff members even to the point of using deep vulgar language not acceptable by school rules and wanted to stop such kind of behaviour ... The young man pushed me to the chairs and ground, then threatened to deal with me in his way, and he walked away, leaving me lying on the ground ... I cannot give further details, but I felt embarrassed, and at the same time I was shaking uncontrollably. [Participant 1]*

*It was during exam time when I handed out question papers to the Grade 11 learners. When they were about to start writing, another learner asked a question pertaining on of the questions on the exam paper. Because I was not teaching that subject, I had to step out to enquire about it. The minute I step back from the staff room, a learner poured a bucket full of water on me. The odour of the water, you would swear it was from the sewage. I was soaking wet from my hair to the clothes inside and my shoes. You know I am aware that the learners can be very disrespectful, but what I have experienced that day I will never forget. [Participant 2]*

It can be noted from the above excerpts that the educators talked about feelings of shame and embarrassment with regard to learners' behaviour, as most learners used vulgar language and behaved in a way that reduced or destroyed the educator's confidence and freedom to teach well. Participating educators further explained and shared their experiences with learners, focusing on the nature or form of the violence.

*To be honest with you, we are not safe here at school. I always tell my husband how I want to leave this school or teaching. Can you believe that one day another learner came with panga [wood cutter or large knife] to school? Honestly, I did not see how it all started, but another learner came to the staff room to report the incident. Guess what? The learner with a panga had chopped half of the learner's ear, I was so terrified that day I had to rush to call other educators to come and assist as I went to call an ambulance and the police. The experiences I had since I came here are horrific, honestly. Just three months back, another learner was stabbed by a Grade 12 learner because he believed the other boy is taking away his girlfriend. [Participant 3]*

*I tried to reprimand her in front of everyone in class, but she was very much aggressive, trying to fight with me, pointing a finger at me, and she also was trying to justify her behaviour. [Participant 4].*

*The minute I asked one learner did you understand what I was teaching, or you have any questions? He replied by saying why are you worried about me? It is not like you are paying for my school fees masepa a gago (meaning you piece of shit) [he used a vulgar word] and said I must go teach my disabled child. That broke my heart. I was literally crying deep inside. [Participant 5]*

Fear of violence and bad or arrogant behaviour of learners polluted the school environment and appeared in most interview transcripts. This violence posed a challenge to how these educators were executing their duties at school. The presence of violence in each school affected the educators to the extent that they feared to correct the learners whenever they were wrong, as they feared for their lives and being harmed.

The reviewed literature shows that educators are subject to various types of abuse and violence by their learners (Espelage et al., 2013; Martinez et al., 2016). Physical, emotional, and verbal assaults are all possible. This type of violence not only violates the rights of educators but also violates school rules (Espelage et al., 2013). Learners in SA schools have aggressively grabbed educators by their necks; bitten, kicked and scratched educators, and had thrown objects at them, with some even killing them (Grobler, 2018; Petso, 2021). Bardos et al. (2022) and De Cordova et al. (2019) advance our understanding of educators' difficulties and offer insightful information for researchers, policymakers, and educators working to establish secure



and encouraging learning environments. The stories of teachers are important in understanding the nature of violence in school contexts. These stories may also provide context when developing interventions.

#### **5.4.2 Theme 2: Causes of Violence towards Educators**

The data analysed revealed a key theme that underpinned the causes of violence towards educators, shedding light on the intricate factors contributing to these distressing incidents within educational environments, namely substance abuse by learners in schools, overaged Learners in schools, dysfunctional Family background, negative peer groups and unsafe working environments.

##### ***5.4.2.1 Sub-Theme 2.1: Substance Abuse by Learners in Schools***

This sub-theme refers to the prevalence of substance abuse<sup>1</sup> among learners. The main substances learners used, as reported by educators, are beer, *matekwane* (marijuana) and tablets, which learners crush and mix to form a powdery substance. Learners use such mixtures in different ways, mainly smoking it or in liquid form, after pouring the powder into water or beer.

The excerpts below are presented to reflect the issue of substance abuse in order to understand this sub-theme related to violence in schools better. The researcher asked one of the participants what she saw as the causes of violence against educators. She responded as follows:

*Many students around this place drink beer excessively, and many also smoke matekwane [marijuana] or what we sometimes call zolo [marijuana]. [Participant 6]*

These sentiments were echoed by one of the senior teachers. Participant 4, who had been in the teaching profession for more than 30 years, responded by saying:

*Drinking is problematic here in our area; even very young students around the age of 12 are into different substance abuse, but the highest substances abused are beer and matekwane [marijuana] ...*

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<sup>1</sup> Three terms are used in this sub-section in terms of substances: **use**, **abuse** and **misuse**.

In addition, Participant 7 linked drug use to learners acting violently towards their educators:

*Matekwane ... matekwane [marijuana] ... is the main reason why these students have become so violent as they become disrespectful and disturbing smooth running of learning.*

Participant 3 had this to say about the causes of violence:

*Smoking zolo [marijuana] has become the reason why most of the schoolboys and now also schoolgirls tend to be rude and very arrogant when you try to talk to them in classes ...*

In addition to the above concern, Participant 8 said:

*The highest contributor is the influence of drugs these learners take daily. It is disturbing to witness 15-year-old learners coming to school already intoxicated ... Eish ya ne [Oh dear, Oh no, or Oh my], South Africa. They will refuse to take instructions and will be influencing other learners to be disrespectful to a particular educator.*

Participants were asked about the experiences they had encountered at school with regard to violence. The study found that educators referred to the causes of learners' violence in their respective schools rather than to recount their experiences of the violence. According to the findings, several interactions might result in school violence. There is a connection between substance abuse among children and several criminal behaviours, including violence and bullying. Substance abuse may be connected to behavioural issues in the classroom, such as hostile behaviour and other issues with classroom management (Mokwena & Setshego, 2021).

From the participants interviewed, it was evident that they believed learners' violence towards them was stirred by drug and substance use or abuse. They mentioned that this behaviour disrupted the teaching and learning process. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2017, para 1), "substance abuse refers to harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs". Drug abuse is the excessive use of any medication whether prescribed or not

prescribed by a doctor (Holloway & Bennett, 2012). Prescription medication can be misused if one is not following a doctor's instructions.

The most disturbing trend revealed in the interviews was that learners between the ages of 14 and 17 abuse alcohol and drugs. The EST illustrates that learners are influenced by the values and behaviour in the community where they live (Nhambura, 2020). Furthermore, this behaviour is an indictment against communities where learners copy specific societal values (Nggela & Lewis, 2012). The prevalence of substance use in the immediate surroundings of learners could inadvertently influence their behaviours and attitudes, as they are immersed in a social environment shaped by community norms and practices. Substance abuse profoundly affects emotional regulation and diminishes cognitive abilities, leading to impulsive and potentially violent outbursts (Hodder et al., 2017).

Scholars have pointed out that, in addition to substance misuse, several other factors contribute to violence in educational environments (Hodder et al, 2017; Kriesberg & Kriesberg, 2016). These factors include the potential for learners with inadequate conflict resolution skills to exhibit violent behaviour, as highlighted by Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) and the suggestion by Nissimov-Nahum (2021) that some learners may display aggression in an effort to gain recognition or approval from their peers. This recognition leads to the importance of considering the sub-theme "Overaged Learners in Schools" (see section 5.4.2.2), indicating that substance abuse cannot be singled out as the sole determinant of violence.

The crucial interrelationship between social influences and learner conduct emphasises the vital importance of thoroughly investigating the effect of substance misuse, peer pressure, and economic inequities on the broader school environment, including the implications for violence within educational settings. Most educators, as quoted above, have voiced concerns about learners arriving at school while under the influence of substances or participating in smoking activities on school grounds, highlighting considerable anxieties within the educational community.

#### **5.4.2.2 Sub-Theme 2.2: Overaged Learners in Schools**

This sub-theme concerns the ages of learners accepted in school, especially overage learners. Nine of the participants revealed that overaged learners were creating problems in schools, particularly the violent behaviour that they showed to educators. One participant stated:

*I am a Grade 10 teacher, and I had an experience of violence with one big girl [referring to age] who I got the information that she was not coming to school because she was involved in a sexual relationship ... [Participant 4]*

Among the nine participants who emphasised overaged learners as contributors to violence in schools, Participant 8 was quick to say:

*Overaged boys – or should I call them men – are the ones who even influence young learners to be very stubborn and violent ... These big boys are our centre of fear when it comes to violent incidences in our schools.*

Participant 9 similarly reflected:

*The principals through the Department of Education should get rid of these old boys who are the reason behind this challenge we are facing as teachers ... the overaged boys are our concern, especially us young women new to the profession ...*

Another participant voiced similar sentiments about the overaged learners. She showed deep concern and fear as she expressed her fear this way:

*I don't feel safe at all when it comes to these big and overaged boys in particular ... the way they look at and talk to me makes me feel like pondering not going to class the next day ... [Participant 2]*

Educators confirmed the presence of several older learners who continue to attend school. Notably, one of the participants, a teacher, affirmed that the oldest learner in their school was 20 years old and still enrolled in Grade 10.

If it holds true that certain learners are engaged in acts of violence towards educators, this could potentially escalate into a significant concern within the context of Limpopo. The involvement of overaged learners in such incidents raises questions

about the appropriateness of their placement in certain grades, their influence on the school environment, and the need for tailored interventions to address this complex issue.

Despite the significant concerns expressed by the participants, addressing these issues may require actions extending beyond school level and into the realm of national policy. For example, the admission policies for regular public schools, as outlined in Notice 2432 of 1998 by the DBE, along with the National Education Policy Act of 1996) (RSA,1996), and the SA Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) as discussed by Woolman and Fleisch (2006), do not explicitly specify the maximum age at which a learner should complete high school. Government also does not specify the minimum age to enrol in school, according to Barbeau (2010) and Van der Berg et al. (2011). According to the above policy, a learner who has repeated one or more years of school is exempt from the age–grade norm. In cases where the learner is three years older than the normal age for a grade, the HoD must however make a decision. The HoD needs to decide whether to admit the learner to the grade, or should suggest other options, such as Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) schools (Van der Berg et al., 2011).

Considering the concerns voiced by educators regarding violence perpetrated by some learners, the deficiencies in education policies concerning the management of overaged learners thus underscore the necessity to advocate for amendments in policy.

#### ***5.4.2.3 Sub-Theme 2.3: Dysfunctional Family Background***

Different factors contribute to families being dysfunctional, for example, a family that is characterised by physical and emotional abuse. This abuse could be among the parents or towards the children. Dysfunctional families have constant conflicts, where individuals yell, scream, and use vulgar words. There are also families where parents and/or family members abuse any form of substance and end up being uncontrollable and misbehaving in front of the children (Farrington, 2010).

One of the themes that became apparent in the interviews was dysfunctional families. Participant 1 was open to responding on this topic as the following excerpt reveals:

*[T]he most disturbing cause of violence by students is dysfunctional families. Many learners are raised by single parents in the neighbourhood, and some are raised by their grandparents. Some of these learners' parents separated at an early age, and those kids were never ok afterward. Those who are raised by their grandparents tend to be very disrespectful because I would like to believe they are used to having things their way, so when they are here at school, they tend to struggle in obeying the rules. They have shown serious disrespectful tendencies, i.e. behaviours like taunting teachers. Many of them beat teachers, as some two boys and girl did to me.*

The excerpt below supports the above statements, as Participant 5 said:

*Families with those parents that always quarrel, fight and have differences that are observed by their children tend to bring similar behaviour here at school ... these students proudly say that if they do anything to the teacher, their parents won't say anything because it is part of their lives ... parents are no longer together and such students who come from such families as I observed behaviour badly towards teachers ...*

When the researcher posed the question about the experience of violence at schools, Participant 11 quickly responded by saying:

*[T]hus I learned that the parents were no longer together and none of the parents were staying with the boy. I discovered that the parents separated when he was 12 years old ... I have also learned that the boy's friends seem to come from a dysfunctional family as well ... You know what, most of our learners around here do not stay with their parents, its either they stay with their grandparents or relatives.*

The above observations were consistent with EST in that family background have a bearing on creating violent individual behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The above findings reaffirm previous research findings that socioeconomic conditions in families have an effect on learner violence (Nhambura, 2020). For instance, change in the status of a family due to the loss of employment in the household also contributes to learner violence (Almeida et al., 2022). It was found in the literature that the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak was another factor contributing to family dysfunction in South Africa. According to a study by Almeida et al. (2022) conducted after COVID-19, the

well-being and mental health of families were negatively affected by the pandemic. The authors found that some parents became frustrated when they lost their source of income, which contributed to constant conflicts and abuse in families. According to Fegert et al. (2020), increased domestic violence and child maltreatment were reported during the lockdown. Such trauma can harm the learners, causing them to retaliate when triggered either at school or in the community.

Similarly, DeCamp and Ferguson (2017) and Kim (2020) emphasise that family background can significantly influence the individual's propensity for violent behaviour. Exposure to domestic violence, dysfunctional family dynamics, and a lack of positive role models could contribute to the development of aggressive tendencies. Family background thus plays an important role in a learner's behaviour in school. Families are regarded as the primary source of steering violent behaviour (microsystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Different risk factors for domestic (family) violence are therefore identified within the family, considering things such as family conflicts, criminality brought on by criminal parents, large family sizes, low parental education, poor family administration systems, harsh and/or erratic disciplinary practices, and poor monitoring and supervision of the activities of children (Chen et al., 2020). Another study on children exposed to domestic violence concluded that these youngsters are prone to behave badly in all facets of society (Peterson et al., 2019). Such children are therefore inclined to disobey their teachers and classmates.

It is thus thought that the microsystem (family) is one of the key socialising contexts that influence adolescents (Chen et al., 2020). Neglect, a lack of parental involvement, poor parental disciplinary methods, and households headed by a single parent are significant factors in families at risk (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Furthermore, the current study found that the lack of constructive parental involvement in children's education plays a role in the behaviour of such children. Mthimkhulu (2015) postulates that the family contributes to learner violence against educators. Lachman et al. (2017) found that, in South Africa, lifetime incidence rates for physical abuse were 56%, and lifetime incidence rates for emotional abuse were 36.1%. The ability of adults to regulate and manage their emotions has been said to be compromised by such victimisation, which is attributed to acts of community violence (Shareefah et al., 2015). After experiencing or witnessing communal violence, parents may feel unprotected and

undeserving of protection, resulting in depression and increased anxiety (Lachman et al., 2017). In a SA setting, the exposure of parents to community violence jeopardises their ability to carry out their parental responsibilities and constantly instils fear and vulnerability in them. This then filters down to their children and indirectly to educators, and ultimately has an effect on the learners.

A few participants mentioned that some parents do not attend meetings at school because most of the learners stay with their grandparents, who are also unable to attend. There is, therefore, a breakdown between the family and school settings, which indicates a disintegration in the mesosystem (which shows the interactions between the two environments in which the child lives). It was also noted from the current findings that children also disobey their parents. This suggests a great need for effective collaborative interventions between the families and the school system.

#### ***5.4.2.4 Sub-Theme 2.4: Negative Peer Groups***

The participants revealed that gang-like groups of boys and girls who move together are influential groups, persuading each other to act rudely and disrespectfully. They conspire in harassing, shouting insults, and acting violently towards educators. The groups are seen drinking and smoking in public spaces to provoke the educators, as they know that such behaviours are unacceptable. Participant 3, a school principal, said:

*I always see these students roaming around in groups during break time, lunch, and many times on weekends, and such peer groups, as I gathered from other students, are into smoking and drinking but also influence each other to harass teachers, and one boy who pushed me was part of these gangsters ... sometime they fight among themselves, and when called to stop the fight they end up acting violently at you ... a lot happens in these peer groups, and teachers feel very unsafe with the groups.*

Participant 2 presented her observation and experience with this issue. She said:

*There is so much influence in the gangster-like groups of these students ... some good students after moving in these groups I have been seen them changing in a bad way ... even these peer groups have influenced brilliant students who are no longer performing as before.*



Participant 6 confirmed the same cause of violence when she said:

*Most of the time, I have seen that the informal groups that the students have created tend to be the main reason we have been having this challenge of violence ... in those groups, I believe there are so many bad things that the students share among themselves leading to bad behaviour ... they seem to encourage each other on wrong things as mostly they smoke weed and drink beer.*

The emergence of peer influence or peer pressure as one of the factors contributing to learner violence against educators is no surprise. A substantial body of research consistently demonstrates that peer pressure plays a significant role in shaping learners' behavior, including acts of violence (see Burdick-Will, 2017; DeCamp & Ferguson, 2017; Kornienko et al., 2018; Magwa, 2014; Maman et al., 2019). For example, the above findings are consistent with the literature that easy access to illegal substances, such as alcohol and drugs, is usually facilitated through peer pressure and may contribute to violence against educators (Magwa, 2014; Makhasane & Khanare, 2018). Similarly, Kornienko et al. (2018) found that peer influence is undoubtedly a key factor in motivating violence against teachers, especially in situations where there has been bullying, harassment, or other disruptive behaviour in the classroom.

Despite the above observations by educators in the Mopani West District, it is however crucial to remember that the literature also refers to some complications and paradoxes. Although peer pressure can play a role, not all acts of violence against educators can be attributed entirely to such pressure. Personal motives, family history, life experiences, and other contextual factors are also very important (DeCamp & Ferguson, 2017; Kimmel & Rowe, 2020). The environment in which learners are raised plays an important role in terms of the causes of violence (Burdick-Will, 2017; Makhasane & Khanare, 2018). EST should thus be applied in to grasp the problem fully and to develop interventions considering the interaction of the different contexts in the environment of the learner and the educator.

#### **5.4.2.5 Sub-Theme 2.5: Unsafe Working Environments**

Unsafe working environments appeared as a sub-theme because most educators mentioned how the school environment plays an important role in moulding learners. Below are excerpts from participants:

*It is quite demotivating or rather depressing to work under an unstable situation where you know that results are always compromised by a factor you do not have control over. For now, it is very tough to control the violence in this school. My morale is seriously affected in the given circumstances of a violent environment. You do not know how it feels to come to school daily, knowing that something might happen to you or your car. I mean, if our school doesn't have proper security, what are the possibilities of theft? I mean our cars are easily accessible. Let alone us as individuals, community members or learners after school can easily assess the school premises and can assault you in any way, hai [ oh my trust me when I say every day I fear for my life. [Participant 7]*

*You would swear we are running a tuckshop without rules put in place that we should abide by. As you saw when you walked in, there are posters all over, even at the main gate that states clearly that no alcohol, drugs, or weapons allowed at school. ... Now anyone has access to the gate. There is no proper trained security to guard the place. [Participant 4]*

The comments of these two participants indicate that educators struggle to uphold the code of conduct of the school. The code of conduct that is in place to decrease or stop learner violence against educators was either improperly synchronised with school policy or is inadequately implemented. This was alluded by Participant 3 by saying:

*You know what? Sometimes we blame the learners for bad behaviour, but what does our government do with regards to the dysfunctional community members that have free access to the school premises because of improper security, fence and gates?*

The following participant raised similar issues of proper security regarding fixing the school fence or upgrading it to one that was more secure:

*As dedicated and passionate we are the minute you enter the school premises, trust me, you will just lose the momentum. Community members have easy access to the school premises, so you do not know what could happen to you, especially from angry parents or the local gangers [sic] that wants to sell drugs to our learners. During school breaks learners are allowed to go eat at home. Some eat and drink. They come back to class intoxicated ... [Participant 2]*

The literature also showed a significant concern about the school infrastructure as one of the contributing factors to violence in schools. According to Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) and Kabir et al. (2022), unsafe working environments could have a considerable adverse effect on employees' well-being by elevating stress levels, lowering job satisfaction, and compromising general mental and physical health. The participants interviewed in the Mopani West District spoke of their concerns about working in an unsafe environment due to the violence they experienced from learners. Jahanshahi et al. (2019) also refer to the notion that unsafe work environments could significantly diminish employees' job satisfaction, as concerns about their well-being and safety overshadow their overall work. The literature review supported the statement made by a participant in the findings when she said that the school premises also play a role because gangers [sic] from the neighbourhood have easy access to the school premises. The participant hinted that the situation worsened after the vandalising experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The statement she made supports Banda (2022a), who indicated that more than 200 schools were burgled and vandalised, and some of them have been set alight. These left the school vulnerable and easy access to the premises was made possible. It is evident from both the literature review and the data collected in the current study that an unsafe working environment indeed plays a role as one of the contributing factors to learner violence against educators. The findings above are evidence enough that educators are not well equipped to combat the effects of a violent nature within school environments. The lack of proper security at the school, such as proper fences, also makes the educators and learners become victims of gangsterism (Banda, 2022a). Alarming security concerns continue in many SA schools, even though schools should be places of effective teaching and learning to develop future citizens (Ngidi, 2018).

### 5.4.3 Theme 3: Effects of Violence on Educators

Theme 3 reflects the aftermath of violence in educational settings, highlighting the severe effects experienced by educators. Understanding the effects of violence on educators is pivotal for addressing the broader implications within the educational community when the ramifications of violence become clear.

#### 5.4.3.1 Sub-Theme 3.1: Fear, Stress, and Unsettlement

The participants indicated how fearful they were every time they had to go to a specific location where the incident took place. They mentioned how they tried to avoid going to specific classes.

*I always avoid going to Block B because the learners who have witnessed the incident now call me 'Mommie water' [Mermaid] and I would like to emphasise how embarrassing that makes me feel. I no longer have the excitement of coming to school like before. I believe this whole situation is stressing me out and makes me feel uncomfortable. [Participant 4].*

Some participants mentioned how uncomfortable and reluctant they are to engage with the learners during a lesson because they have noticed that some of the learners do not like to be put in the spotlight during a question-and-answer session. Participant 9 stated the following:

*You know what? I have refrained from asking questions individually because you will never know who you will offend. I just ask the whole class, and whoever wants to participate will raise their hands then I will pick them. This thing of showing concern and having to ask individually if the student understand or have any questions will put you in trouble.*

Participant 3 added to the above participant's sentiments as follows:

*I have concluded that whoever wants to learn will cooperate. You cannot force someone to participate in class. At the end of the day, it is the learners' responsibility to make sure they understand what we teach and ask questions. So, to avoid being physically violated by them, I do not ask anyone any questions. I believe if they are interested, they will play along. We are fearful for our well-being.*

Participant 7 added:

*You can hear by how the learners are responding to you that they are running their households. If their parents fear them, who are we to be able to reprimand them? We are afraid ... Hai [hey], we just sit and watch while they are throwing their future away. I do not want to find myself being beaten by a 16–20-years-old child because of how disrespectful they are.*

Most teachers who participated in the study mentioned that they were afraid even to ask the learners questions in class because they were scared the learners would attack them. Participants mentioned how fear had affected their teaching skills since they were reluctant to engage fully with the learners. Some participants mentioned how they had developed anger towards their families, especially their children. Educators indicated experiencing exhaustion and a sense of helplessness from the complexities of learner violence against them. The current study revealed that educators' determination and optimism as school leaders were affected negatively. This finding was supported by the literature reviewed.

Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014) concur with Wilson et al. (2011) that teachers become less interested and avoid any events or activities related to the trauma after encountering violence. Affected educators will thus show signs of fear of the school environment and demonstrate behaviours that reflect avoiding dealing with learners. Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014) state that educators may further show signs of avoidance through absenteeism or sometimes tendencies of being unpunctual in coming to school.

Educators who had experienced learner violence reported feeling hopeless and lacking dedication. It was revealed in the findings that the educators' work performance had decreased, which in turn affected the learners' performance (Robarts, 2014).

#### **5.4.3.2 Sub-Theme 3.2: Teacher's Burnout**

Burnout is a state of fatigue brought on by protracted stress or stressful situations (Shahsavarani et al., 2015), and is a frequent side-effect of work stress (Koutsimani et al., 2019). Burnout may cause people to lose interest in their work, making it harder to meet performance standards. Some people may even desire to leave their occupation

(Shahsavarani et al., 2015). According to LeBlanc et al. (2012), stress causes a variety of emotional states, the most common of which is anxiety. Educators who experience violence may end up being stressed and could experience burnout. As a result, such educators resort to consider leaving teaching as a profession.

The educators whose opinions were sought thought that leaving the teaching profession would be a way of coping with the violence they were experiencing and with the ongoing fear about what lies ahead. Every time they considered leaving, however, they drew on their positive coping mechanisms to be optimistic. They endeavoured to feel less anxious by using positive coping mechanisms. Some participants explained that they would stop teaching as soon as they had found an alternative form of employment. In this instance, the researcher again draws on a few of the participants' direct quotations to illustrate how participants felt about leaving their jobs, and how complex this issue is.

Participant 11 said:

*I don't have a coping mechanism that I can say is working for me well, but when I think that one day, I am going to leave this job ... because I am planning to do so ... I find that this idea especially consoles me.*

Similarly, participant 2 added:

*Above all, I fear for my life and my safety. I mean it seems like the Department of Education is so relaxed about this whole ordeal. We are not safe at all, anytime violence can occur, and I worry that we do not know how severe or intense it will become the second time around. So, I believe one should just leave teaching and pursue a career that will protect one's safety.*

Participant 4's response reflected on the complexity of the role of a teacher. She said:

*To be honest, leaving teaching has once or twice crossed my mind, especially now that I am old ...*

The findings in this study showed that educators who had experienced violence from learners and were dealing with learners' disrespectful behaviour had come to a point of helplessness about their future as educators and ways to manage the learners

in terms of learner discipline and control. This is again consistent with the findings of the literature review. Church (2011) and Valente and Lourenço (2020) point out that educators exposed to learner-on-teacher violence often experience exhaustion, which could further increase the risk of violence against them due to the negative effects of exhaustion on the school environment and learner–educator interactions. Most educators therefore want to leave the teaching profession, and previous studies support this (see (Grobler, 2018; McMahon et al., 2020). In 2011, the General Secretary of SADTU cited the large number of teacher resignations in South Africa, due to learner violence and challenges with school management (Maseko, 2013). The literature review and the participants in this study revealed that educators felt and still feel that the DBE does not value their efforts in the education sector. The courage in leading the National Curriculum in SA schools is not appreciated by the DBE either. Educators therefore fear for their safety and well-being because they are expected to deal with the violent behaviours of learners daily (Nigidi, 2018; Sibanda, 2018).

Based on participants' views, the current study found that most participating educators were thinking of leaving teaching as a career. They indicated that they loved teaching; however, it came with more than they had expected in terms of their safety and well-being. Some of the participants mentioned that their safety came before passion.

The literature reviewed showed that burnout might also affect workers who have been diagnosed with anxiety or depressive conditions, and it was evident that violence against educators could lead to depression and anxiety (Eurofound, 2018; Koutsimani et al., 2019). According to Maske et al. (2016), at the time of their study, 59% of those with a burnout diagnosis also experienced anxiety, 58% had a depressive disorder, and 22% males and 27% females had a somatoform disorder, which could result in physical symptoms, such as pain and nausea.

Participating educators showed a deep element of what the researcher referred to as 'teacher's burnout', and a sense of being overpowered by the rights of the learners, especially now that corporal punishment had been banned.

#### **5.4.4 Theme 4: Coping Mechanisms Used by Educators**

Even though this theme was one of the main focuses of the study, many educators indicated that they had challenges coping, or did not have any specific coping mechanisms. The sub-themes provided below were presented as ways participants tried to find ways to deal with the post-violence trauma and challenges.

##### ***5.4.4.1 Sub-Theme 4.1: Consulting Therapists – Seeking Professional Help***

Participants expressed concern about how to deal with post-violence trauma as some of the experiences were still frightening. One participant shared how she tried to deal with the violent experience that she had encountered by saying:

*Look, my dear, after seeing dreams that were more of the same experience I went through when a boy threw a book on my forehead, and I fell, and I became so confused and worried that at night I was fearing of next day in class ... I decided to see a professional counsellor privately, and I started feeling much better though I still have moments I just feel afraid and powerless. Counselling made me remain and continue working as a teacher; otherwise, I wanted to resign a week after the incident. [Participant 11]*

Participant 6 also had the same approach in dealing with a post-violence experience. She was upset about the expense she had to lay out to see a professional counsellor, but it was vital to her well-being. She said:

*I decided to search for a counsellor to help me understand what was happening to me ... I was travelling privately to meet a counsellor in Pretoria until I felt much better, but that was after attending many sessions with the counsellor.*

Three more educators indicated resorting to a counsellor as the best way to deal with post-violence fears and challenges. Among these was Participant 3, a principal of one of the schools in the district, who explained that it is regrettable that it may sometimes not be easy to share your experience openly after the violence.

*I must say speaking helps. The little support you get from either the counsellor or a loved one gives you hope to soldier on.*



The findings suggested that educators often lack the necessary support and resources for effective coping mechanisms following victimisation. Although the participants had received some support from colleagues and family members, there seemed to be a gap in the provision of formal counselling or stress management training. The existing training programmes for educators appear insufficient to address their well-being and to cultivate effective coping mechanism after victimisation (Kapusuzoglu, 2010; Smith et al., 2015). Moreover, Flower et al. (2017) found that approximately 62% of programme coordinators included courses focused on classroom or behavior management. Remarkably, a significant percentage of college and university certification programmes obtained by educators (e.g. bachelor's degree in education, postgraduate certificates in education) – including both general and special education provided by the DoE via the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) – offered specific courses or skills in behaviour and classroom management (e.g. Crisis intervention training, conflict resolution and mediation training, and classroom management) but no training on how educators could cope after victimisation. Various SETAs appointed by the DoE supplement these programmes, operating under the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) (see South Africa, 1998) (as amended by the Higher Education Laws Amendment Act [No. 26 of 2010]) (see South Africa, 2010) and the Skills Levies Act (No. 9 1999) (see South Africa, 1999; also see Paterson et al., 2014; Powell, 2013). However, it should be noted that the above training focused on reducing and controlling violence within the school environment; it did not address adequately how educators can cope with the aftermath of being victimised (Gibbons, 2010). This deficiency in the training framework brings into question the effectiveness of teacher-training programmes in equipping educators with the necessary coping mechanism to intervene effectively in school violence situations.

If educators are expected to manage and address violence directed towards them, it is crucial to consider the impact of the existing school-violence training framework on the well-being and coping abilities of educators. In addition, their experiences regarding preparedness, perceptions of coping and intervention skills related to school violence, and their levels of self-efficacy should be carefully examined. As advocated by the practical restorative justice system (see Hopkins, 2002), teacher training has been identified as a critical element in preparing educators

to deal with school violence (Reddy et al., 2018). Restorative justice emphasises components such as risk assessment, problem solving, and prevention models as viable alternatives to zero-tolerance policies in responding to violence against educators (Hopkins, 2002). Research supports implementing prevention models that incorporate teacher-training features to reduce violence against educators (Skåland, 2016). The ultimate goal of these intervention programmes is to decrease violence toward educators. A well implemented teacher-training programme may enhance the learning environment and even lessen learners' violence against teachers by encouraging good communication, conflict resolution, and general classroom management skills. These programmes include some training components integrated into the classroom curriculum to achieve this objective (Espelage et al., 2013; Reddy et al., 2018). It remains crucial however to assess whether these programmes adequately address the well-being and coping needs of educators who have experienced victimisation because at the time of writing, this did not seem to be the case.

#### ***5.4.4.2 Sub-Theme 4.2: Substance Use as a Coping Mechanism***

While the use of substances may not be the best approach or strategy when individuals lack support and find themselves caught up in a traumatic and stressful situation, as they may use anything available as a coping mechanism. In the interviews, some participants revealed that they used alcohol as a coping mechanism, particularly on weekends and after work. Other participants used medication. In most cases, the participants would take one or two beers to refresh their minds as they indicated heavy drinking would not be suitable for an educator since the next day would be a teaching and learning day. This information was supported by statements from some participants.

*I find drinking one or two beers after work or during weekends periods my way to cope with this bad experience. [Participant 6]*

*I want to be truthful with you ... I have never liked taking beer before I was harassed ... I used to take a glass of wine or two with my friends, but beer only came into the picture, as I said, after the verbal abuse and painful insults from a student I was trying to help ... I began to take some beer with friends and at a time alone when relaxing at home. [Participant 1]*

*I am not that beer drinker as such, but a friend brought some beer as she had come to cheer me up, and I took three glasses ... and that was the beginning of me wanting to take one glass before I rest and when I feel unhappy and sort of depressed ... I can say beer has been keeping me less worried in those moments when I am confused trying to think why I was attacked by my student. [Participant 7]*

In the current study, the findings revealed that some educators had turned to substance use as a means of coping. Coping mechanism vary among individuals, and the perception of whether a coping mechanism is positive or negative depends on its effectiveness for that specific individual.

The literature suggests that excessive use of any form of substance is seen as a negative form of coping as it does not bring about positive results (Heffer & Willoughby, 2017). According to Lewis et al. (2011), coping mechanism can be good or detrimental. For example, mindfulness practices, such as meditation and yoga, optimistic thinking and self-talk, and cognitive behavioural therapy are some examples of promising strategies (Larson, 2021). Larson (2021) argues that self-harm, harsh self-talk, excessive exercise, eating disorders, alcohol, drugs, and gambling are examples of harmful coping mechanisms.

An unhealthy coping mechanism may appear beneficial, but it numbs and suppresses the pain. The root of the matter is never resolved. This type of coping mechanism is concerning and may lead to issues in the educational system.

Some participants indicated they took tablets to help them reduce stress and worries about the violent experiences. The researcher, recognising the sensitivity of this coping mechanism, did not ask about the type of tablets used and whether this was a recommendation from doctors, counsellors, or therapists. In response to questions on using medication, Participant 2 said:

*I only feel better when I take some special tablets. Then after some time, I feel the courage to withstand the fear ... The only problem is I cannot take it during working hours as I feel like sleeping any time.*

Participant 9 remarked about this coping mechanism:

*I ended up getting some tablets to be able to sleep ... I am still taking them though not every day as I used to do in the first days when experienced the violence.*

Participant 11 confessed the same use of tablets when she said:

*I took some tables to reduce the tension and depressive situations ... in those lonely times when I am alone, and everyone is busy with their activities ....*

Educators who have been victimised by learners may use both positive and negative coping mechanisms to deal with their traumatic experiences. These negative coping strategies may be used by educators to lessen their emotional anguish momentarily, but these negative coping mechanisms do not address the underlying problems and may even be harmful (Larson, 2021).

According to the statements above about positive and negative coping mechanisms, people might employ different coping mechanisms. Some of these might be advantageous to their well-being. Participants in this study however also made use of harmful coping mechanisms that could be dangerous in the long term. For instance, abusing medication because it numbs the pain is detrimental to one's health and does not necessarily treat the main issue. Since this coping mechanism does not address the underlying cause of the issue, it can be classified as a negative form of coping.

#### ***5.4.4.3 Sub-Theme 4.3: Physical Activity as a Coping Mechanism***

According to Picken et al. (2019), different people utilise different coping mechanisms to assist them in dealing with the suffering caused by loss, sadness, or other difficult emotions. When using physical coping mechanisms, people can make use of exercise. In this study, most of the educators utilised this positive coping mechanism. This will not only benefit their mental health but will also reduce the risk of developing conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity, thus enhancing the body's ability to resist infections and diseases. as explained by Granero-Jiménez et al. (2022).

In their attempt to keep their minds off the violence they had experienced, some participants decided to exercise in the house and/or outdoors. The participants indicated that, with exercise, they were able to feel refreshed. Seven participants talked

about this coping mechanism, explaining how it helped make them feel better. To reflect on this strategy, Participant 3 had this to say:

*I am presently using the exercises as the best way to cope with the stress that started after the abuse by this student ... with the exercises, I can forget about those bad moments, which normally come when I am alone.*

Six other participants also used this coping mechanism. Among these was Participant 6, who expressed her satisfaction using this strategy, saying.

*You know what, the exercises have helped me a lot in that whenever I start thinking about the incident or, let me call it, the fateful day of the violence ... I know that I need to do 10 or 20 sit-ups ...*

Participant 2 agreed with this participant, saying:

*I have realised that my stress and worry can be reduced by body exercises ... mostly I run or do sit-ups as well as walk with a friend just to keep myself busy ... I also have become very active in school extracurricular activities, such as playing netball, which I used to like during my high school days.*

Participant 9 responded by saying:

*I had dropped this idea of exercises a long time ago after completing my high school ... I felt very lazy to do simple exercises like jogging or push-ups, but a friend came up with the idea of jogging to avoid thinking too much ... sometimes [I] failed to sleep as I kept thinking about the harassment I experienced a year and eight months ago when this male student taunted me and pushed me to the ground.*

Participant 5 presented her coping mechanism in this way:

*[B]ut when I started engaging in body exercises ... I could see great improvement, and I am still using it as my best mechanism to deal with the memories of violent experience.*

Most participants mentioned that physical activity assists them to cope and sleep better. Physical activity can be viewed as a positive way of coping because when we

exercise, our bodies release endorphins, which are natural mood lifters, leading to improved feelings of well-being and reduced stress levels (see Nagata, 2019).

The WHO (2022, para 2) defines physical activity as “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure”, for example, walking, cycling, aerobics, yoga, any form of sports and playing. According to Granero-Jiménez et al. (2022), physical activity could help prevent or manage diseases such as heart disease, maintain a healthy body, and improve mental health and overall well-being. Physical activity is crucial to the well-being of individuals as it reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety (Granero-Jiménez et al., 2022).

#### **5.4.4.4 Sub-Theme 4.4: Social Support and Spirituality**

In the current study, social support encompassed the significance of close relatives, school principals, and intimate friends as crucial sources of solace for the participants. These sources provided a platform for educators to share and alleviate the burdens stemming from challenges in their personal life and the aftermath of violent encounters. In addition, using prayer as a coping mechanism introduced a unique dimension to their coping strategies. Despite its unconventional nature, prayer and active engagement in church-related activities were highlighted by a number of participants as instrumental in managing their stresses and anxieties. Both personal and communal prayer practices were found to be uplifting and instrumental in their coping journey. Six participants mentioned these coping mechanisms.

*Besides visiting the counsellor for assistance in this matter, I shared my fears and violence experiences with the principal and a close friend ... [Participant 5]*

*My greatest strength was my colleague and friend Bruce [pseudonym], who tried to give me hope and talked in an encouraging and very positive manner. ... I could see that Bruce wanted me to realise that he was there for me as a true and concerned colleague as well as friend. [Participant 7]*

*My friends were very supportive as a coping mechanism, especially my best two friends. They made me cope with the situation that I know alone I could not make it .... [Participant 4]*

*I must say that my brother I am staying with has been so helpful and very much encouraging after the violent experience ... He comes even at late night to check on me ... [Participant 2]*

*Honestly, I do not think I could have been able to handle this haunting experience ... if it was not for my husband and firstborn daughter and her siblings' support who are always being there when I need them ... I think one needs someone to talk to when you experience violence, especially when it happens at your workplace, and you continue to go to the same school or class. ... [Participant 3]*

*I preferred sleeping at my friend's place ... she is very accommodating and a friend indeed ... She is always positive about life even when sometimes I feel so depressed, she does things that make me forget this experience ... [Participant 8]*

According to the current findings, most participants used social support as a coping mechanism. Because of assistance they received from friends or relatives, they were able to handle the stress, allowing them to flourish.

Social support plays an important role to an individual who is facing personal crises and in need of immediate assistance, or perhaps when such person feels empty and just wants to spend time with people who care about him or her. This form of support encourages good psychological health and often gives people the strength to carry on and thrive (Dailey et al., 2023; Daly & Baumeister, 2023). In agreement with the literature, the EST attests that the microsystem and macrosystem influence people's behaviour. The support offered by family members or colleagues might therefore play a positive role in how educators cope. In this instance, the fact that the educators benefited from social support from their family and peers suggested that they might have found it easier to deal with the trauma they had experienced on a regular basis (Dailey et al., 2023; Daly & Baumeister, 2023).

The participants also reported coping through prayer and involvement in church-related activities. While it may initially seem unconventional, prayer emerged as a significant strategy employed by several educators to manage the impact of school violence. The act of prayer, whether in communal settings during church gatherings or individually during Sunday and home prayers, served as a source of comfort and upliftment for the participants. They found solace and strength in these spiritual

practices, enabling them to address their stresses and worries stemming from the traumatic experiences within the school environment.

To show some of the responses given by participants about this coping mechanism, the researcher presents the following excerpts:

*I normally go to church and have prayer moments alone and sometimes with my church mates ... [Participant 6]*

Participant 4 also highlighted that prayer or attending church had been the very method that she used to calm herself when stressed. She said:

*Prayer is a powerful tool and source of my stress reliever ... When I feel down and bothered as I start thinking about the physical abuse that happened to me ... if at school, sometimes I just move away from people and use a toilet or any private place to have a prayer ...*

Participant 9 confirmed:

*Prayer has been something I have taken seriously of late even though I have been seeking counselling ... I also listen to gospel music and go to church to cope with the violent experience ...*

Participant 7 had this to say about prayer as a coping strategy:

*[M]oments of prayer and going to church has helped me so much ... I have an opportunity to go for prayers with some church members who stay close to this place on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. I must admit that both exercises and prayer have been working very well for me.*

Based on the interviews conducted in the Mopani West District, it was apparent that some educators utilised spirituality as a coping mechanism, a concept supported by the literature indicating that spirituality can positively affect an individual's behaviour (see Joubert & Grobler, 2013; Ozcan et al., 2021). In addition, this observation aligns with the EST as the macrosystem can indeed exert influence on an individual's behaviour, as seen in how educators are affected by their spiritual journeys, such as gathering at church and engaging in spiritual activities (Ozcan et al., 2021; Zerbetto et al., 2017). Attending church or participating in religious activities is typically considered



part of the exosystem or macrosystem as found in the EST. Involvement in religious practices can yield diverse effects on an individual's well-being. It can, for instance, nurture feelings of inclusion and unity by providing social backing and a sense of communal belonging. Such support could contribute to heightened feelings of acceptance and understanding among individuals within their religious circles, potentially leading to enhanced emotional and psychological wellness. According to Fife et al. (2021) and Ozcan et al. (2021), individuals who use spirituality as their primary defence against obstacles do so because they have faith and hope that anything is possible with God, and thus they are able to cope better. This faith and hope motivate them to keep working toward their goals. They hold that spirituality enables one to feel connected to the world, which in turn frees them from attempting to handle everything on their own (Dill, 2017). It is simple for people to comprehend that they are not responsible for everything in life and that it will pass when they feel part of a larger whole. Spirituality is a form of emotional support (Scortegagna et al., 2018). It is a coping mechanism, allowing individuals to feel cared for, loved, and reassured. It is evident from the study that most participants have resorted to making use of this form of coping because they find it effective.

#### ***5.4.4.5 Sub-Theme 4.5: Engaging in Entertainment as a Form of Coping***

One of the sub-themes that emerged from the data was the use of relaxation while one is listening to music, watching television, and sometimes watching interesting movies. The participants highlighted that they would feel much better and more relaxed, moving away from fear and worry after doing one or two of those things. Four participants' views on this strategy are presented below. Participant 5 expressed herself by saying:

*I use my earphones as I play my favourite music, and if I am home, I prefer watching some interesting videos which in the end I find myself well relaxed and less stressed ... I also love and enjoy watching sports on television and by the way ... I am also a great basketball player ... and netball player as well.*

This strategy or approach was echoed by Participant 2, who had this to share:

*I find listening to music as the best way of relieving myself from stress ... I have moments I even dance in my room just to excite myself, you know ... at school*

*when marking students' work, I use my phone and connect my earphones to listen to my favourite songs ...*

*Participant 9 said:*

*Some music on both radio and television are just a healing power to my soul ... when frustrated and depressed, particularly as I think of the violence experience, and I prefer listening to some gospel and soul music ... My friends normally join, and we mimic and loudly sing as the music is played on the radio or sometimes on television.*

Participant 1 had this to say about using relaxation as she listened to music:

*Generally, I like music so much ... especially gospel music makes my spirit uplifted ... with my big body I can also dance ... and this has helped me when depressed or feeling bored as I start thinking about the violent incident ...*

The literature review substantiated the coping mechanism discussed above (Algorani & Gupta, 2023). Although a positive coping mechanism is a good way of overcoming a problem or a situation, many people choose a negative way instead. Some use both. This is done because, while these mechanisms do not offer long-term solutions to problems, negative coping mechanisms produce an immediate effect, one that reduces stress in the short-term. Sadly, using a negative coping mechanism only masks the stress and difficult emotions for a short period. These negative strategies cause the dysfunction to increase over time by maintaining and strengthening it (Heffer & Willioughby, 2017).

The findings above showed that some participants used positive coping mechanisms, for example, prayer and going for counselling. In contrast, others made use of coping mechanism that could be addictive, for instance substance misuse or excessive use of medication such as prescribed tablets. It is believed that addiction can take numerous forms. Some can be harmful, such as having to depend on substance abuse and medication used excessively as not instructed by the health profession.

#### 5.4.5 Theme 5: Intervention

Participating educators mentioned that they were aware of the Education Laws Amendment Act (No. 31 of 2007) (RSA 2007; also see Msezane, 2015) promulgated to counteract violence in schools. They were aware that this law gives schools full power to conduct searches for drugs, illegal substances, and dangerous weapons on the school premises. During the interviews, some of the educators suggested that the school involve the SAPS to assist with law enforcement. Even though the educators interviewed were aware of the law, they had conflicting views about practising it because it is time-consuming, and some learners complain that the educators are mishandling them. Most of the interviewed educators requested that the SAPS intervene.

To reflect on the intervention matter, Participant 11 said:

*I believe we need a holistic approach in combating the violence against educators at schools. First, educators need to be empowered. Not only self-empowerment/colleague-to-colleague kind of empowerment but also from the department. We need programmes where we would be motivated and [could] vent out our frustrations. Secondly, whosoever is involved in the development of the country's policies should bear in mind that educators are also human beings first before becoming instructors. Therefore, we need to be trained on how to handle the learners' frustrations, how to interact with learners freely. Then we can talk of lesson delivery and handling the content knowledge.*

Participants 4 and 8 mentioned that intervention by either SACE or the DoE could do justice to the issue of learner violence against educators.

*Rules must change. Let educators also be protected by the Department of Education. Maybe it can change the status quo. Who knows? [Participant 8]*

Echoing this viewpoint, Participant 4 said:

*The school and all the teachers are aware of the National School Safety Framework Strategic Guidelines. The document is well formulated, and it emphasises the importance of safety and security at schools. However, there is practically nothing that is said about how they will protect educators from violence against learners.*

Participant 9 agreed, and said:

*As educators honestly speaking, we so not feel protected, and nothing is said about how we will be protected against our learners.*

The results of this study indicated that the participants possessed knowledge of the strategies provided by the National School Safety Framework (NSSF) Strategic Guidelines. Nonetheless, participants expressed concerns regarding the protection of educators' safety, as the law promotes safety and security in schools overall. It might be beneficial to consider the development of a specific law that delineates measures for safeguarding educators from violence perpetrated by learners.

The NSSF is a strategy introduced by government to safeguard the rights of all children in South Africa. In addition, it is employed to guarantee safety and equal access to high-quality education across the nation (Makota & Leoschut, 2016). The problem with this is the focus on learners, while neglecting other actors in the education context at schools, such as educators, caterers, and cleaners. Over and above the protection of rights outlined in the Constitution, a comprehensive strategy needs to be put in place to protect educators and other key players in the school. A plan is needed that is practical and effective, and which deals with all the key players in the school, not just learners. According to Garner (2014), at the exosystem level, government interventions do not directly relate to learners but can still affect their lives. The government (exosystem) is attempting to eradicate violence in schools through the NSSF plan. The NSSF plan may benefit educators by improving safety in schools, but then learners who continue to be violent should be dealt with appropriately. Nevertheless, this is not a direct plan to assist educators.

It is evident from the above that the six schools participating in the current study did not systematically apply the search and seizure policy. The codes of conduct of these schools outline the rules and regulations, which learners need to adhere to and stipulate the expected behaviour from the individuals. The practical implementation of these codes is however a challenge worth exploring. As stated in the literature, poor management by the schools also plays a role in increasing the acts of violence in schools (Terzoudi, 2020). Schools need to toughen up the rules and other interventions since corporal punishment was banned. As one participant proposed:

*Perhaps educators can be appointed at schools to operate exactly like the law enforcement agency and work together with the local police as the intelligentsia of some kind within schools, will help to detect any form of violence before it takes place. [Participant 7]*

Another participant who supported police intervention said:

*If we can at least have one police officer patrolling the neighbourhood at all times, maybe the community members will be afraid to enter the schools and also sell substances to our learners, even the learners might start to have a better behaviour knowing that there is a police officer on standby waiting for any form of action. [Participant 3]*

The participants spoke of the importance of having the DoE intervene in the schools. It was believed by most of the participants in this study that the educational policy favours the learners more than the educators. Furthermore, the researcher noted that the schools visited had a policy in place that prohibited any form of substance, e.g. alcohol or drugs, from entering the school premises. This is however difficult to enforce, and not much can be done about learners who attend classes intoxicated.

According to Mokwena and Setshego (2021), it does not seem that the DoE is taking any specific measures to address the problem of violence in schools or substance abuse. The authors contend that rather than focusing on a single learner, the department relies on the Life Orientation (LO) learning area, which aims to address a variety of learner development areas. Since it shows that little is being done at school level to address the critical issue of substance abuse among learners, the fact that the DBE policy on controlling substance misuse in schools is not effectively implemented and this raises serious concerns (Mokwena & Setshego, 2021). Further research could therefore focus on the effective implementation of interventions in terms of reducing the causes of violent behaviour to educators.

In this study, participating educators believed that another effective intervention that could be used is protective factors, such as making use of the police service to assist in combating violence in schools. Educators interviewed believed that it is important to involve the SAPS to reduce learner violence toward educators because it

will decrease learners' engagement with gangsterism and any form of criminal act that is believed to be contributing to learner violence. The SAPS could assist school management in their efforts to build a safe, healthy and constructive environment. Most of the educators interviewed in the study believed that, if the SAPS rendered services, such as assisting in patrolling the area surrounding the school premises, searching for dangerous weapons, searching for alcohol and drugs and preventing intoxicated learners from entering the school premises, the level of violence would be decreased in schools.

## **5.5 SUMMARY CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented the research findings. The participants' demographic data were included in the first section to help the reader understand their backgrounds. The findings were presented thematically using participants' verbatim quotations. The exploration of the major themes and their underlying sub-themes referring to the literature review provided insight into educators' experiences of violence by learners. Direct quotations were used to reflect the real views and opinions of participants and the way the participants understood the issue of violence in their schools since they were victims of this hostile behaviour by learners. The EST proved to be a suitable theory that understands the causes of violence and the effect it has on educators better. This is because the EST theory reveals a deep understanding of how humans interact with each other. Human interaction and background could play a vital role in role in the upbringing of a human being. The discussion in chapter 5 showed that the environment in which learners are located and where they interact plays a significant role in how they behave. The theory of Bronfenbrenner (1994) was therefore utilised in the study, specifically in terms of how the environment (microsystem and mesosystem) may contribute to the learner's violence on educators as discussed in chapter 3.

The primary findings underscore the persistent prevalence of school violence, with educators remaining frequent targets of learner-inflicted violence. The themes and sub-themes emerging from these findings illuminate the adverse effects of learner violence on educators. Within these themes and sub-themes, educators delineated various coping mechanisms employed by the participating educators, expressing their belief in the effectiveness of these mechanisms. Some educators noted that their

coping mechanisms relied on the support they received from both their families and colleagues, while others acknowledged resorting to substances to facilitate sleep. As a resident of the Mopani West District, the researcher found the profound influence of learner violence on educators deeply disconcerting.

Conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 6, together with the relevant contributions of the study, the limitations, and focus areas for further research.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

A broad summary of the research study is provided in this chapter. The research questions and the method used to address the problem are taken into consideration while evaluating the study. The limitations of the study are examined, and the chapter ends with recommendations for future investigations.

#### 6.2 OVERALL SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

**Chapter 1** presented an overview of the research study on the causes and effects of learner violence against educators, and the coping mechanisms used by educators. The overview included discussions of the statement of the problem, the outline of the questions, and the aim of the study.

**Chapter 2**, a comprehensive literature review, provided the reader with an overview of the literature that was consulted for this study. The review was done both nationally and internationally to understand the cause, the effects, and the coping mechanisms of educators who had either experienced or witnessed learner violence better. Violence in the SA context – specifically at learner-educator level and educators' coping mechanisms – was considered and discussed.

**Chapter 3** presented the theoretical framework based on psychological theory and practice, indicating the merits of the current research study. The Ecological systems theory was used, as the researcher believed it to be applicable. The theory was used to understand the causes of violence, and the effects it has on educators and their coping mechanisms.

**Chapter 4**, the methodology chapter, focused on the research design and methods that allowed the researcher to answer her research questions. The qualitative method, with its benefits and drawbacks, was considered in this chapter. Furthermore, the justification for the procedures or techniques used to locate and analyse the



information applied to comprehend the research problem, came under consideration. This information allowed the reader to assess the general reliability and credibility of the study critically, and to consider the ethical elements applicable to the study.

**Chapter 5** presented the findings. The researcher made use of thematic analysis, and described the results and conclusions based on the data obtained through semi-structured interviews. The researcher discussed the findings under each theme and sub-theme, aligning the discussion with the literature reviewed and the theoretical framework of the study. The goal was to explain the findings from the semi-structured interviews held with eleven teachers from six schools.

**Chapter 6** presented a general summary of the research study. The research issue and the method used to address the problem were considered while evaluating the study. The advantages and disadvantages of the study were examined, and the chapter ended with suggestions for additional research.

### **6.3 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY**

The existing literature provided limited insight into the experiences of educators facing learner violence and the type of coping mechanisms utilised by educators after experiences of violence, especially within the unique context of the Mopani West District. The aim of this research was to attempt to fill this gap and contribute valuable knowledge to the field.

**The objectives below fulfilled the aim of the study.**

- to explore the effects of learner violence on educators; and
- to explore the coping mechanisms that educators after victimisation.

**The study answered the following questions:**

- What is the effect of violence on educators?
- What are educators' coping mechanisms following victimisation?

The first research question – what is the effect of violence on educators – sought to understand the effects of violence on educators through a comprehensive

examination of educators' experiences and perceptions. In doing so, this study found that participating educators had indeed experienced significant adverse effects as a result of violence perpetrated by learners. These effects related to the physical, emotional, and psychological dimensions, indicating that violence in educational settings has a profound and multifaceted effect on educators' well-being.

In the Mopani West District, 11 educators were engaged in semi-structured interviews, during which they candidly shared the profound effect of violence on their daily lives. Specifically, in terms of Theme 3, titled "Effects of Violence on Educators", a substantial percentage of participants expressed feelings of fear, stress, and profound embarrassment.

Existing literature consistently highlights that the effects of learner violence could erode educators' interest in teaching and instil a pervasive fear that impedes their ability to carry out their duties effectively (see Ali et al., 2020; Beilstein, 2023). The findings in the Mopani District affirmed that educators are not immune to these deleterious effects, with many participants explicitly stating that they avoid interacting with learners by asking questions in class, and they refrain from entering certain classrooms, which they perceive as posing threats to their safety.

This situation presents a dual challenge. First, it threatens the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, which could lead to less-than-ideal educational outcomes for both educators and learners. Second, it has a serious negative effect on the health of educators who have been victims of violent offences or who have witnessed these acts. Immediate and thorough interventions should be launched to address this pressing issue, protect the educational environment, and improve the well-being and morale of educators who are essential in raising the next generation.

The second research question – what are educators' coping mechanisms following victimisation – aimed to determine the coping mechanisms that educators employ in the aftermath of victimisation. The study found a spectrum of coping strategies utilised by educators, encompassing both positive and negative approaches. Some educators, regrettably, resorted to negative coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse and excessive medication use, to navigate their daily lives in the wake of victimisation. These detrimental coping strategies, as identified in

Theme 4, titled “Coping Mechanisms Used by Educators”, could significantly compromise the quality of work that educators contribute to the education system. It is essential to underscore the urgency of providing counselling and robust follow-up support to facilitate educators’ transition towards positive coping mechanisms. conducive

On a more positive note, certain educators recognised the value of positive coping strategies, such as seeking counselling and garnering support from colleagues and family. Research literature consistently reinforces the benefits of positive coping mechanisms, not only for the individual’s well-being but also for fostering a positive environment for those around them (Garrido, 2018). This assertion aligns with the EST, emphasising how deeply our immediate interactions and coping mechanisms influence our daily lives.

It is however crucial to highlight the negative coping mechanisms that emerged within this study, including the use of substances as a coping mechanism, also. In addition, there was mention of excessive medication used to alleviate tension and depressive feelings at times when educators were alone. It is imperative to recognise that research literature, such as by Heffer and Willoughby (2017), consistently classifies excessive substance use as a negative coping strategy, as it fails to yield positive outcomes. This highlights the necessity for targeted interventions and support systems to guide educators away from detrimental coping methods toward healthy and effective strategies that not only safeguard the well-being of educators but also enhance their contributions to the education system and the lives of the learners they serve.

In light of this, the researcher emphasises the importance of educators resorting to constructive coping strategies, particularly those supported by research and professional guidance. Seeking professional help, such as counselling, emerged as a recommended approach to enhance the well-being of both educators and those around them. This shift towards positive coping mechanisms not only holds the potential to improve educators’ personal lives but could also enhance the quality of education they provide to their learners.

In conclusion, this research study shed light on the detrimental effects of learner violence on educators by focusing on the Mopani West District in Limpopo. It highlighted the diverse coping mechanisms participating educators employed to navigate the aftermath of victimisation in this context. It is evident that violence in educational settings poses significant challenges to educators' physical and emotional well-being. Comprehending these effects and the coping mechanisms educators may employ is essential in finding and implementing efficient support structures and interventions to tackle the intricate problem of school violence and its repercussions for educators. Further research and initiatives should aim to enhance the support mechanisms available to educators, and to promote environments that are safe for all stakeholders and conducive to learning. The theoretical framework (see chapter 3) showed the importance of understanding the intersecting systems within which learning occurs, as well as the role of these systems in the victimisation of educators and their coping.

#### **6.4 EVALUATING THE STUDY**

The researcher sees the study as successful in examining the effect of learner violence on educators and in exploring their coping techniques, because there were themes that emerged from those findings as discussed in chapter 5 that stated exactly the effects and the coping mechanism used by educators. The study aimed to give the 11 participants a safe forum to discuss their experiences as victims of learner violence in classrooms. In this research study on a topic that has not been studied extensively in the SA setting before, the participants were given a space to voice their experiences. School violence is considered an issue of concern by both government and society at large. It was found that the effects violence has on educators are being neglected. The current study therefore also aimed to explore the coping mechanisms of the educators after victimisation. Although the experiences shared by the participants were unique, the thematic analysis revealed commonalities in the stories presented by the participants. It is however worth noting that the individual experiences of the participants were unique in their specific social context, and the findings can therefore not be generalised to all educators who are victims of violence and who suffer the same effects.

## 6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher encountered a few limitations while undertaking this study. Most notably, the small number of participants meant that the researcher had to be cautious in generalising the findings. In a qualitative study such as this one, the issue of generalisation is more controversial than in a quantitative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Generalisation can be defined as an act of reasoning that involves drawing broad inferences from a particular observation. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), the purpose of a qualitative study is to provide a rich, contextual understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of cases rather than generalising. Moreover, in qualitative interviews, the emphasis is placed on collecting individual, detailed, in-depth information, while a quantitative study is more concerned about the number of participants (Wolstenholme, 1999). When conducting any type of research, it is beneficial to research on a larger and in-depth scale to allow a comprehensive analysis of the data. The use of semi-structured interviews proved very useful in gaining in-depth and meaningful data from the participants.

Although conducting interviews takes time, it has proved to be a highly effective method for getting people to be open and honest about their experiences (Roulston & Choi, 2018). As a result, the researcher was able to gain invaluable insight into the participants' personal experiences of how violence affected them, and their coping mechanisms.

The researcher aimed to interview twelve participants; however, one participant was unable to participate. The participant explained that she could not trust her emotions when opening up and having to speak about the incident. The proper referral was done for the participant, and she engaged with (SADAG) at 0800 567 567 (Mental Health Matters).

Another limitation of the study was the once-off interview and the duration of the interviews. The researcher had not been in contact with the participants before the interviews, resulting in limited time to build rapport enough to make them open up in detail.

The interview setting was another limitation observed by the researcher. For safety reasons, the interviews took place on the school premises in the principal's

office and in the staff room. In the case of two interviews in the principal's office, people however occasionally walked in to fetch items. Although they immediately walked out, this may have been disturbing for the participants.

## **6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

As the dissertation draws to a close, the imperative to propose tangible solutions becomes increasingly apparent. Recommendations serve as a vital bridge between research findings and actionable steps, offering a roadmap for addressing the identified challenges and fostering meaningful change within the context of the study.

### **6.6.1 Recommendations for Policy and Interventions**

From the findings above and from what was reviewed in the literature, it was clear that violence against educators drastically affects them. The DoE and SACE may need to come up with a plan or strategy for reducing learner violence towards educators. Educators are very important in our society, as they prepare our future leaders and all citizens to be productive members of society. It is unhealthy for society, including the education system, if the effect of violence leaves educators traumatised, helpless, and stressed.

The researcher strongly believes that, based on the findings, the DoE, together with SACE, need to implement a policy that protects the rights of educators against learner violence. In line with this, the following are recommended:

- The study suggests that the DoE should consider employing school counsellors who can assist the victims of violence and refer them to other professionals if necessary. This positive coping mechanism needs to be available free of charge.
- Each school should be provided with a social worker who will be able to address family and/or community factors that contribute to learners becoming violent. In addition, if learners are being violated at home, the social worker can intervene.
- The study suggests that teachers could be trained to deal with violence in schools. This may include a protocol to be followed in cases of learner violence.

- The study further suggests that the SAPS should be engaged by school authorities to present seminars on anti-violence at schools, where school authorities and the police speak to learners about the disadvantages of violence and discuss how learners and educators can report violence.

### **6.6.2 Recommendations for Future Research Studies**

The following recommendations are provided:

- From the findings, it is recommended that a follow-up in-depth study be conducted on this topic but with a more diverse sample in terms of age and culture, and where more males are represented.
- It is further recommended that future research be conducted to examine whether there is an initiative in place to reduce violence against educators, i.e. research can be done on the strategies to develop interventions and policies to reduce violence in schools.
- It is also recommended that a study with a larger data set, that would show patterns of violence, be conducted.
- Lastly, a study that will examine the effect of violence on educators might be useful to understand either how to prevent violence or how to assist teachers to heal after encountering violence.

## **6.7 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY**

This chapter concluded the dissertation by providing an evaluation of the study concerning the research questions outlined, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

Due to the nature of the study being exploratory and qualitative, participants' perceptions were questioned to learn about their coping mechanisms following learner violence. Six schools in what may be described as semi-urban townships in the Mopani West District were studied. The data were coded into themes and sub-themes using thematic analysis and were analysed drawing on the literature reviewed.

Participants thought that, because what happens in schools is influenced by what happens in society, it implies community violence. Since schools are microcosms of society, they reflect almost everything that is happening in society. This means that some of the violent behaviours of learners portray what they have learned from the community or at home. Educators interviewed believed that the location of the schools and the school premises was not secure because, during break time, learners can go outside the school premises to eat and come back intoxicated. People from the community also have access to the school.

The types of violence that were mentioned by the participants included but were not limited to physical attacks, bullying, verbal abuse, vandalism, and theft. Physical attacks involved pushing, stabbing, kicking, shoving, and pouring water onto educators, and many other acts of aggression. It was found that most fights at schools are started by learners who abuse substances. Overaged learners are also violent towards educators. Violence at schools against them leaves educators feeling vulnerable and scared.

The researcher found that even though the study focused on the effects of learner violence on educators, educators' coping mechanisms and the causes of violence also emerged and played a role in the findings. The primary instigators of violence in the schools under study were linked to the communities in which they were situated, such as peer pressure and familial backgrounds. These factors were substantiated by the literature and the EST used, which showed how the environment affects the social life of the learners and influences how they interact with other people.

The study especially found that violence affects educators, which is disturbing and needs special attention, since it is now affecting the school system. It was found that most educators want to leave the profession of teaching since they were not safe at school. The participants in this study (educators) also believed that the DoE or SACE does not provide much support or protection. There are policies on learners' safety and protection, but it is noted that learners are the perpetrators of violence. Policies are therefore needed that focus on learner violence towards educators.

Regarding coping mechanisms used by the participants, it was found that most educators sometimes use negative coping strategies rather than positive ones. The



study concluded that participating educators were not coping after victimisation; hence, most of them wanted to leave teaching. This finding was substantiated by the literature study.

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## Appendix A: Ethical Approval



### COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

01 February 2022

Dear Mrs Thobile Pertunia Badimo

**Decision:**  
Ethics Approval from 01 February  
2022 to 01 February 2025

NHREC Registration # :  
Rec-240816-052  
CREC Reference # :  
59102950\_CRECHS\_2021

**Researcher(s): Name:** Mrs Thobile Pertunia Badimo  
**Contact details:** [59102950@mylife.unisa.ac.za](mailto:59102950@mylife.unisa.ac.za)  
**Supervisor(s): Name:** Ms. I Masisi  
**Contact details:** [masisim@unisa.ac.za](mailto:masisim@unisa.ac.za)

**Title:** The effect of learners' violence on educators and their coping mechanisms:  
A qualitative exploratory study of educators in Mopani district of Limpopo  
Province, South Africa

**Purpose:** MA

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for three years.

The *medium risk application* was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the



confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (01 February 2025). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

**Note:**

*The reference number 59102950\_CREG\_CHS\_2021 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,



Signature:

Prof. KB Khan  
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson  
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za  
Tel: (012) 429 8210



Signature: PP

Prof K. Masemola  
Executive Dean: CHS  
E-mail: masemk@unisa.ac.za  
Tel: (012) 429 2298



## Appendix B: Permission to Conduct Research



**LIMPOPO**  
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**

MOPANI WEST DISTRICT

REF: 2/2/2 ENQ: Mpenyana M. B CEL: 082 954 0919 DATE: 10.04. 2022  
Email:mpenyanam@gmail.com

**TO: NDLHOVU THOBILE BADIMO**

**SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: "THE EFFECTS OF LEARNER'S VIOLENCE ON EDUCATORS AND THEIR COPING MECHANISMS."**

1. The above matter refers.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research on the above mentioned topic has been approved.
3. Your focus should only be limited to the principals and 2 (two) educators of the following selected sampled schools: Motsheudi, Mocubatse, Kgapanane, Sekhukhumele, Mameriri and Mohumi.
4. The following conditions should be considered:
  - 4.1 Arrangements should be made with the affected schools
  - 4.2 The research should not be conducted during examinations.
  - 4.3 During research, applicable research ethics should be adhered to, in particular the principle of voluntary participation in the study.
  - 4.4 Upon completion of the research study, the researcher shall share the findings and recommendations with the Department of Education.

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27 peace street, Private Bag X4032 Tzaneen, 0850 Tel 015 306 6800 Fax No. 086 517 7632

**The heartland of South Africa: development is about people!**

## **Appendix C: Information Sheet**

**Very Important - Precautionary measures during this COVID-19 pandemic:** Since it is COVID-19 pandemic period this study will be done taking precautionary measures by adhering to the COVID-19 regulations which is to practice constant hand hygiene, always wear a mask that covers the mouth and the nose properly. Conduct the research in an open space or if it is indoor, we will make sure that the windows are opened for fresh air to circulate. Both the researcher and the participant will have to keep a social distance of a minimum of 2 metres apart.

### **1. Title of the dissertation:**

**The effects of learner violence on educators and their coping mechanisms in Mopani West District of Limpopo Province, South Africa**

This dissertation is an attempt to investigate the effects or impact of students' violence against their educators. Many educators are going through a lot of challenges after experiencing violence from their learners. The focus of this study is to understand the deeper things that are experienced by educators and the coping mechanism they use after learners act violently against them.

### **2. Who are we?**

This study is going to be done under the University of South Africa (Unisa). The principal researcher of this study is Thobile Pertunia Badimo and the supervisor who acts as a core researcher is Ms Masisi Itumeleng.

### **3. The purpose of this study: Why this research is being done?**

As indicated above the purpose of this research is to explore the effects of students' violence against their educators, and it is expected that the challenges faced by educators after experiencing violence from their students will be determined. It is also assumed that specific solutions to these problems are going to be found. The benefit of this study is twofold. First, the educators are going to be able to use suggested solutions and mitigations revealed from this study to deal with violence challenges such as psychological traumas among other challenges. Second, the community may benefit through a peaceful and harmonious environment if solutions are found through

this research. A better learning environment may be experienced as violence may be reduced and educators finding ways to deal with stressful violent conditions.

#### **4. Why you are chosen to participate.**

This study focuses on educators in Limpopo province, specifically in Mopani District, and therefore educators in schools found in Mopani are to be chosen as the participants. This is because the violence has happened to these educators, and they have got first-hand experience of violence and therefore, they are the appropriate and relevant people to give candid information about effects of violence. Educators will be identified through the school management as they are aware of specific educators who have experienced violence at the schools. Only those who have been involved in attacks by students (violence) would be the only ones to be selected and participate in this study.

#### **5. Nature of participation**

Please note that even after being identified and selected individuals who are going to participate will be doing this on a voluntary basis. In addition, it should be very clear that those who would have been selected to participate are free to withdraw at any time without explaining their reasons for doing so and furthermore, withdrawing from participation will not have any negative consequences or repercussions.

#### **6. What you are asked to do**

The participant in this study is requested to provide candid information to the best of their knowledge pertaining to their experiences and how they have been affected by violence by students. Although the questions will be asked individually, please be informed that the results and conclusions will be based on collated information from all the participants. No individual view or information will be considered as final, as the gathered data will be processed to give an overview and general outcome of the effects of violence experienced by the participants. You are requested to be honest and truthful in your answering and be assured that any information given will be protected and will be taken as private and confidential. The researcher will arrange with the management and the participants to agree on the convenience time and appropriate place that can provide the privacy to the participants. The participants are requested to give their consent to the use of an audio machine to record information during the

interviews. As indicated above the participant is voluntarily allowing this recording without any coercion or doing it under force or under duress.

#### **7. Any reimbursement/gains/gifts**

Please note that all the participants will not get any gift of any kind during or after the study. This study is an academic endeavour only and is not supported financially or otherwise by any organisation.

#### **8. Preserving participants' Emotional Well-being**

This study is premised on the view that there will not be any risks likely to be associated with the study if any, it may be very low as the questions to be posed about the violence will be focusing on personal experiences without invoking any stressful conditions. However, it is important to note that psychological and emotional feelings may arise in the process of the interview and the participants are advised to quickly indicate their unwillingness to respond or answer questions that they deem invoking their emotions and psychological tension. It is also believed that the nature of the questions and how they are going to be asked will be done in a friendly and cautious manner to avoid any emotion and/or psychological harm. It is reiterated that the participant's right and respect will be well-guarded to avoid any embarrassing questions that may create an unfavourable feeling to the participants.

#### **9. Participants' privacy and confidentiality**

This study was done under all international ethical standards which require the privacy and confidentiality of data obtained from participants. Thus, the researcher tried try by all means to keep private and confidential both the participants' identity and the data gathered was kept secretly and safe. The researcher has a specific secure folder (Dropbox) that no one can access except the researchers only. This is to say all data collected, either written or recorded through a recording machine will be kept in the lockable drawer for three weeks. The data will be discarded (destroyed) after the data analysis which will be done within or earlier than three weeks. The data gathered are only meant for this research, except only that other researchers may use it as secondary data or for reference purposes only.

**10. Publishing of this study report**

The university of South Africa is the custodian of this report as it is done under the requirement of a master's degree and researcher is fulfilling that requirement. Therefore, the publishing of the report will only be done after all necessary processes for writing a dissertation are fully adhered to as per the standards and conditions expected by the university. Participants may be free to contact the university. The report will be in a form of bounded book form which can be accessed through the library and participants are free to ask for access to read the final report.

**11. Who to contact in case of anything important?**

In case of any concerns, complaints or any other dissatisfaction, participants may contact the university of South Africa that is, the ethics committee and/or university management which will specifically deal with the case until everything is finalised.



## Appendix D: Informed Consent



To whom it may concern

My name is Thobile Pertunia Badimo. I am a student at the University of South Africa (UNISA), pursuing a master's degree in psychology. As a requirement for this degree, I am conducting a research study. **The aim of the study is to explore the effect of learners' violence on educators and their coping mechanisms in Mopani district of Limpopo Province, South Africa.** The data gathering is essential to fulfil the above study at UNISA. The findings of this study are important and will help to understand the effects of learners' violence on educators and thereby attempt to find solutions to this challenge. Subsequently, this may improve the learning environment as educators work to full capacity when not psychologically and/or emotionally distressed as they would be able to deal with the depression.

I kindly request your participation in this study by accepting an interview to be held on the date and time to be finalised after your interest in participation is known. Please know that you have the right to withdraw from participation in the study at any time and you can ignore questions you feel uncomfortable to answer without any repercussion. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this research project.

The interview questions may take approximately 25-30 minutes to complete.

Please be assured that your responses/ answers will be treated as confidential and private as possible and protection of your identity and any information you provide will be done with the strictest condition it deserves. For any further information or clarification please kindly contact me on +27 78119 6831.

Thank you for your time and effort in participating in this study.

Kindly show your consent by signing below

Name (Participant).....Contact Details.....

Signature..... Date...../...../ 2022

Sincerely

Pertunia Thobile Badimo



University of South Africa  
Pretoria Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 592, UNISA 0008 South Africa  
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[www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za)

## **Appendix E: Interview Guide**

The following questions will guide the research study in finding answers to the research questions.

- 1) Tell me about your experience of violence in the school?
- 2) How do you feel about sharing your experience?
- 3) How has the experience of violence affected you?
- 4) Have you ever thought of leaving teaching? Motivate your answer please.
- 5) How did you cope with stress before violence?
- 6) Did this experience of violence change your general or specific way of operating as an educator for example, towards your family, friends, and colleagues etc?
- 7) How did you deal (or how are dealing) with the experience of violence just soon after and later in life?
- 8) How are you coping now after violence?
- 9) What kind of support have you received after the incident (either from the Department of Education /school/home or colleagues)?
- 10) What support would you recommend for teachers who experience or witness violence?
- 11) Through your own experiences, what ways (mechanisms) would you recommend if any, as a way to deal with violence?
- 12) Do you have any suggestions in preventing violence by learners against their educators?

**Thank you very much for your participation in this study.**

## Appendix F: Declaration of Language Editor

Jackie Viljoen  
Language Editor and Translator  
16 Bergzicht Gardens  
Fijnbos Close  
STRAND 7140

Accredited member of the South African Translators' Institute  
No APSTrans No. 1000017  
Member of the Professional Editors' Group (PEG) No. VIL003  
Member of Safrea No. SAF03316

☎ 082 783 0263

Postal address: 16 Bergzicht Gardens, Fijnbos Close, STRAND 7140 South Africa

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### DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the dissertation by **THOBILE PERTUNIA BADIMO** was properly language edited but without viewing the final version.

The track changes function was used and the author was responsible for accepting the editor's changes and for finalising the reference list.

Title of dissertation:

**THE EFFECTS OF LEARNER VIOLENCE ON EDUCATORS AND THEIR COPING MECHANISMS: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY OF EDUCATORS IN THE MOPANI DISTRICT, LIMPOPO**

The editor did not write or rewrite any part of the dissertation on behalf of the client, including passages that may have been plagiarised. The academic content is the sole responsibility of the client as author of the work. The editor could not and did not test definitively for plagiarism, nor is there any explicit or implicit guarantee that the content that was edited contained no material used without consent. The editor accepts no responsibility for any failure on examination of the dissertation by the university.



JACKIE VILJOEN  
Strand  
South Africa  
14 November 2023

## Appendix G: Turnitin Report



### Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

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THE EFFECTS OF FARMER VIOLENCE ON EDUCATORS  
 AND THE NEED FOR CHARACTER-  
 QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY OF EDUCATORS  
 IN THE YOPAK DISTRICT LINDPOC

BY

T. P. BADIMO

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DEPARTMENT

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**THE EFFECTS OF LEARNER VIOLENCE ON EDUCATORS AND THEIR COPING MECHANISMS: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY OF EDUCATORS IN THE MOPANI DISTRICT, LIMPOPO**

by  
**THOBILE PERTUNIA BADIMO**

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