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Strategies to Prevent Learner-on-Educator Violence in South African Schools

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Abstract. School violence is singled out by many researchers as an area of salient concern, both nationally and internationally. Moreover, learner-on-educator violence has become a phenomenon of great concern in schools worldwide; and no school is ruled out of this challenge. Various studies in the field of school violence focus on the safety of learners at schools, with inadequate attention paid to violence perpetrated against educators in school environments. Although some local studies on school-related violence do focus on educator-on-learner violence and the causes thereof, little or no studies have been conducted on coping strategies to deal with this concern. This literature study focused on learner-on-educator violence in South African schools and the coping strategies that educators use or can use to manage and restrict violence perpetrated against them. Located in the constructivist research paradigm, this study emanated from an empirical study by the authors on how educators, as victims of school violence, experience and understand learner-on-educator violence in the school environment. The findings of the current study revealed that South African educators use different coping strategies such as departmental directives; collegial support; in-school training programmes; monitoring of classroom access; collaboration with the school environment and participation of parents. It is concluded that these strategies are pertinent in stimulating the reduction of learner-on-educator violence in South African schools.

Keywords: learner-on-educator violence; coping strategies; South African schools

1. Introduction

Extensive studies have been conducted on school violence in South African schools over the past decade (cf. De Wet, 2016; Mncube & Netshitangani, 2014; Payne & Smith, 2013), but a very limited number of studies have been conducted locally on learner-on-educator violence (cf. Baruth & Mokoena, 2016; Cornelissen, 2016; Grobler, 2018; Mncube, 2014; Singh & Steyn, 2014). None of these studies however suggests effective counter-strategies to negate the impact of learner-on-

educator violence. In their recent publication, *The Teachers Handbook*, the South African Council for Educators (2020) stress the importance of introducing more effective coping strategies for the reduction of learner-on-educator violence in local schools.

Learner-on-educator violence is deeply embedded in school violence. Educators are at the heart of delivering national education goals and their well-being is essential for the continuity of sound educational practices. In many instances, educators are at the receiving end of physical attacks by learners. In an earlier study, the Centre for Disease Control in the United States found that more than 5% of educators were physically attacked by learners in 2013 and 2014 (Linda et al., 2015). This finding is widespread, as reported in countries such as Taiwan, Turkey and Israel (cf. Chia et al., 2013; Espelage et al., 2013; Reddy et al., 2018). In 2014, for example, the rate of violent actions against educators in the aforementioned countries was almost double that of the United States. Almost a quarter of all nonfatal injuries and illnesses that caused educators to miss work, stemmed from violent actions against them at schools (APA, 2016).

This scenario is by no means any better in South African schools as they seem to be under siege because of the scourge of learner-on-educator violence (Grobler, 2018). School principals and educators find themselves in an unpleasant situation. They do not only have to pay attention to ineffective schools and learner underachievement but are also under pressure to find a means of responding to violence against them by the learners they teach and to reinstate schools as safe havens (Singh & Steyn, 2014). Among the most dominant problems faced by educators is the fact that they are not adequately equipped to counter violent incidents; thus, they have reacted similarly in violent and obnoxious means (Davids & Waghid, 2016). The aftermaths of violence against educators are serious and have a negative bearing, not only on educators, but also on learners, taxpayers and school systems alike (Baruth & Mokoena, 2016). In addition, facing hostile conditions in a working environment cannot be industrious or reassuring, specifically if it embraces violence (Makhasane & Khanare, 2018). Teacher maltreatment may result in a loss of income; teaching time and productivity; amplified damages and compensation costs; lawsuit costs; negative publicity for schools and negative learner behaviour (Le Mottee & Kelly, 2017; Singh & Steyn, 2014).

When looking at this holistically, the school environment should not only afford learners academic knowledge, but also the prospect of personal development and socialising skills (Baruth & Mokoena, 2016). Violence in schools has a negative influence on all aspects of personality development. This in itself renders school environments where young people learn to mistrust and fear; develop a distorted cognition of their individuality and character and where their confidence is destroyed and antisocial behaviour rewarded (Collet 2013).

Given these significant challenges, immediate solutions are required that will allow for a comprehensive understanding and approach to the phenomenon of violence perpetrated against educators in South African schools. To this end, this

article focused specifically on the phenomenon of learner-on-educator violence and coping strategies which can be pertinent in stimulating the prevention and/or reduction of learner-on-educator violence at schools.

This literature study focused on learner-on-educator violence in South African schools and the coping strategies that educators use or can use to manage and restrict violence perpetrated against them. Located in the constructivist research paradigm, this study emanated from an empirical study by the authors on how educators, as victims of school violence, experience and understand learner-on-educator violence in the school environment. Against this background, the purpose of the research was to answer the following research question: What entails learner-on-educator violence and what coping strategies can educators use to counteract violence against them in South African schools?

2. Evidence and Theories Overview

2.1 The concept, overview and possible causes of learner-on-educator violence

Learner-on-educator violence, according to previous studies (cf. De Wet, 2016; Mncube & Netshitangani, 2014; Payne & Smith, 2013), is a subcategory of school violence since it manifests in learners who are violent towards educators. Such conduct can have several consequences. Therefore, the literature describes it as a result of aggressive behaviour, be it physical or emotional (or both), where the aim is to harm the educator or cause pain by bullying, insulting, raping or even killing the educator (De Wet, 2016). Learner-on-educator violence can take on any form (verbally, emotionally or physically) with the express purpose to cause harm in any form. In light of the explanation by Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) and for the purpose of this study, the concept refers to all forms of physical and verbal abuse conducted by learners aimed at educators.

Even though much attention has been devoted to training programmes for educators to better equip them for their work, there are few or no guidelines or directives that can be used to combat violence against educators (De Cordova et al., 2019). According to Martinez et al. (2016), school violence perpetrated by learners is currently a general phenomenon worldwide, while approximately 40 years ago it was something unusual. Although this phenomenon is largely viewed superficially, school violence can actually be seen as an expression of socio-ethnic needs that can be harmful with damning psychological consequences (Berg & Cornell, 2016). This condition is, for example, similar to post-traumatic anxiety (a condition where someone does not recover after having gone through or witnessed a terrifying experience); and, consequently, it may also have detrimental physical consequences (Avunduk, 2021; Bass et al., 2016; Buonomo et al., 2017). Violence in the school context also brings with it psychological problems for educators and this is exacerbated daily by the increase in school violence (Rapoport, 2009; Reddy et al., 2018; Benevene et al., 2019).

As confirmed by Bass et al. (2016), there is a clear link between social aspects relating to the youth and violence in schools. The school ground is a place that is beset with all sorts of related crimes and is therefore the ideal place where learners and educators can be exposed to fighting, abuse, antisocial behaviour, bullying,

the possession of weapons, drug abuse and hooliganism perpetrated by groups (Kent & Simkins, 2018; Won & Chang, 2020). It is required of educators to maintain discipline and manage their classes when learners are distracted; furthermore they also have to promote the safety and security of everyone at school in the interest of the learners. According to Petlak et al. (2019), learner-on-educator violence negatively affects the quality of teaching and learning in schools and should therefore be dealt with urgently.

The effect of learner-on-educator violence on the safety of educators differs from one country to another and depends on diverse personal, environmental and other interactive influences (Benevene et al., 2019). It is therefore helpful and essential for the purpose of this study to investigate and compare the experiences of violence against educators of some countries to find local solutions. International studies categorise learner-on-educator violence under the umbrella term “school violence”. This categorisation makes it difficult to define the concept and researchers therefore have different views of the term (Bounds & Jenkins, 2018). According to various reports (cf. Ajaps & Obiagu, 2021; Bass et al., 2016; Espelage, et al., 2013), school-based violence is on the increase worldwide and there could be many reasons for this trend. It could be linked to poorly managed education systems; poor organisation of infrastructure (for example poor facilities or a lack of facilities); incompetent and inexperienced educators and/or the ongoing marginalisation of the youth.

Recent data on school violence and learner safety in the United States undeniably indicates that public schools experience more problems in this regard than private schools (Sorlier & Ogden, 2018). Problems relating to aspects such as quality of teaching, learner performance, educator-learner ratios, resources, gang activities, hate speech, hate-based graffiti, poverty, greater levels of incompetence and drug-related problems are greater in public schools than in private schools (Musu et al., 2019). Research has shown that school violence flourishes in public schools where these factors are present (Bass et al., 2016; Berg & Cornell, 2016). In a similar study about crime and safety in schools in Norway the same tendency, as described above, was observed (Montuoro & Mainhard, 2017).

Lastly, several international studies have further shown that education is a stressful vocation that makes immense psychological demands, including the need to develop positive relationships with learners and their parents; relationships that eventually play a significant role in the development of educators’ self-esteem and sense of self-preservation (Skaland, 2016). The effect of any violence perpetrated against an educator by a learner or even a parent, is often very serious and is a typical example of the material vocational wellness anxiety educators are increasingly exposed to each day (Reddy et al., 2018).

2.2 The extent of learner-on-educator violence in South African schools

Despite the fact that schools are supposed to be places that promote effective teaching and learning, security in many South African schools is currently a matter of grave concern (Ngatane, 2019). Several local schools have deteriorated into places of violence and crime where assault, drug abuse, sexual violence and

gang activity is the order of the day (Riaan, 2019). Local media very often report on incidents in which educators are the victims of violence (cf. Naidu, 2019; Seleka, 2020). According to Waghid and Davids (2020), educators have very often accepted that they have lost control over their classrooms; very often they do not know of methods that can be used to replace corporal punishment with other non-violent corrective techniques.

Although the main focus of a South African study by Burton and Leoschut (2013) is not on violence against educators, it is found in their study on violence in schools that as many as three out of five educators have been verbally abused by learners and one out of ten educators have already been sexually assaulted by learners. It is also found that educators in primary schools and secondary schools feel unsafe in the classroom and that classrooms are usually the place where school violence occurs. Although the study emphasises that it is disconcerting that educators are increasingly becoming the victims of violence, the study does not offer possible solutions that can help to combat this type of violence.

Other local studies conducted in this regard (cf. Coetzee, 2017; De Wet, 2016; Grobler, 2018; Magwa & Ngara, 2014; Mncube & Harber, 2013; Mncube & Netshitangani, 2014), have all indicated that a huge percentage of educators have already experienced learner-on-educator violence during their careers. Sibisi (2016) has, among others, also found that one in every five educators in South Africa fall victim to learner-on-educator violence each year. He has also determined that instances of threats of violence, assault, sexual assault (including rape) and robbery of educators in local schools are still on the increase.

2.3 The link between learner-on-educator violence and society

Violence in communities is a phenomenon which, as indicated earlier, occurs worldwide, specifically in conflict-riddled countries. It is thus by its very nature a multidimensional problem which includes several dimensions and variables. Educators and learners have no control over such violence and can do very little to stop it from further increasing in intensity. Such violence potentially has serious consequences for educators (Grobler, 2018; Robarts, 2014). According to Williams (2020), community violence can usually be linked to aggression among the youth, especially in low-income areas. According to Opic et al. (2013), not all learners who experience community violence display aggressive behaviour at school. Magwa and Ngara (2014) found that factors such as poverty; a lack of resources as well as access to alcohol and unlawful drugs that are linked to violence in communities can be associated with learner-on-educator violence.

Pas et al. (2015) emphasise the importance of schools developing a strong and healthy relationship with the broader community in which it functions. Good, healthy relationships can contribute positively towards improving learners' behaviour towards educators. Such school-community relationships create a positive bond of unity between schools and their surrounding communities. Healthy relationships between the school and its community and between learners and their parents will create an environment in which violence against educators would be discouraged. This, in turn, could lead to a stable and more

peaceful school environment (Barnes et al., 2012; Coetzee 2017). In this regard, Nako and Muthukrishna (2018) refer to a few “opposing forces” which are those community factors that encourage violence against educators, such as poor parenting, drug abuse and inadequate safety measures.

3. Discussion

3.1 Coping strategies to manage learner-on-educator violence

The research literature reveals that different countries use different approaches to prevent violence and maintain safe schools (cf. Bounds & Jenkins, 2018; Reddy et al., 2018). Various forms of legislation, policy documents, training programmes and other means had been introduced, but the problem of learner-on-educator violence has yet to be eradicated and are actually getting worse (cf. Dicke et al., 2015; Petlak et al., 2019).

In the South African context, there is no single coping strategy employed by educators and education authorities (Le Mottee & Kelly, 2017). This explains the complexity of the problem and the need for a multipronged and a continuous approach in dealing with learner-on-educator violence (Mishna et al., 2006).

The next paragraphs take a closer look at some learner-on-educator violence preventative strategies available to South African educators.

3.2 The introduction of prevention programmes

One of the best strategies to cope with learner-on-educator violence is to introduce and implement violence prevention programmes (Dicke et al., 2015). The increase in incidents of school violence against educators over the past ten years have drawn the attention of governments world-wide to develop programmes designed to prevent and reduce the problem (Siegle, 2010). The success of specific programmes against school violence include a few interventions that have been tested and implemented globally to tackle verbal and low-level physical victimisation, classroom abuse and school violence incidents in general. The violent incidents at schools also relate to learner-on-educator violence. Programmes introduced in schools focus on aspects such as emotional harm to the victims; the rights of learners and educators; the educator’s ability to teach and the learner’s ability to learn; the negative effect on surrounding communities; the negative impact on a country’s growth objectives and financial costs for the country (cf. Birolim, et al., 2019).

According to Peña-López (2009), the review of the specific school violence programmes has been analysed in the context of countries affiliated to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD is a forum where the governments of 36 member states worldwide with similar market economies work together to promote and encourage economic growth, prosperity, safety, security and sustainable development of member states (Yaffe, 2017). The analysis of these intervention programmes is important for the purpose of this study, to understand the broader global school violence regulatory strategy by the OECD member states. This will help to create a more concrete understanding of educator victimisation by identifying the characteristics that

distinguish threats against educators and an understanding of deep-seated intimidation and/or attacks against educators. Some of these intervention programmes deal with more serious types of school violence, such as sexual abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, armed assault and physical violence against educators, for example, stabbing and assassinating educators in that they focus on the origin, effects, intervention and prevention of school violence.

Martinez et al. (2016) describe three common intervention programmes implemented globally to reduce incidents of school violence perpetrated against educators, namely surveillance (metal detectors and security guards), deterrence (rules, regulations and zero tolerance policies) and psychosocial intervention (integrated trauma healing and recreation activities, evidence-supported interventions, such as cooperative play and cognitive behavioural therapy). The discussion below is a summary of the effectiveness of the three types of intervention programmes to counter learner-on-educator violence at school to protect educators and school community members. It is important to focus attention on the effectiveness of these intervention programmes because reduced school violence incidents also means a reduction and/or elimination of violence against educators at schools.

a) Surveillance programmes

Surveillance strategies have been imported from criminal justice and the military into education (Petlak et al., 2019). Most frequently, the use of surveillance methods have been introduced locally amid fears of escalation of school violence and a growing realisation that, school safety is becoming a major public concern (Reddy et al., 2018). According to Petlak et al. (2019), surveillance means to watch (someone or something) closely, specifically to prevent or detect a crime for the sake of proper direction or control.

Internationally, the use of surveillance in schools has been established as a critical approach to help schools perceive crimes and offences occurring in schools timeously before they actually cause havoc in the school social climate (Collins, et al., 2020; Kitzmiller, 2013). For effectiveness of surveillance, most OECD countries seem to encourage the formation of school and law enforcement partnerships (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Kitzmiller, 2013). As part of curbing school violence, governments from the OECD member states are expected to fund schools by providing financial assistance to schools to remunerate school resource officers (SROs). SROs are officers who are permanently stationed at public schools where part of their duty is to establish a 'school-police' partnership that focuses on law enforcement (Simon, 2007). They have three roles namely, law enforcement, counselling and teaching duties. These duties differ from one country to another (Wodtke & Parbst, 2017).

SROs work hand in hand with district and regional education officials. With the surveillance approach, district officials are obliged to pay weekly visits to schools to do classroom observation and check interaction between educators and learners, for example, hallway interactions between school breaks, at school canteens or cafeterias during lunch breaks and observations at school

playgrounds (Berg & Cornell, 2016). By observing such interactions, suspected learner aggressors can be identified and timeous decisions can be made to help school management control incidents of a similar nature and to curb the recurrence of such incidents in the future. By doing so, immediate intervention and prevention of an occurrence is sought and severe consequences diverted.

The focus of the SROs is to identify the type of school crime or offence, security measures that can be taken and possible learned experience for future reference (Maman, et al., 2019). The work of SROs take up a significant amount of time during the day and SRO officers are expected to be well-trained, disciplined, law abiding and fully committed (Berg & Cornell, 2016).

b) Deterrence programmes

“Deterrence” is a concept which refers to believe that people choose to obey or violate the law after calculating the gains and consequences of their actions (Shelton, et al., 2009). According to Doss et al., (2015), there are two basic forms of deterrence namely, general deterrence and specific deterrence.

General deterrence is a calculated notion of deterrence that is used for crime prevention in the population of a community or country (in this study reference is made to the school community). For example, a country’s punishment of lawbreakers works as an illustration for others who have not yet taken part in unlawful dealings (Doss et al., 2015). Thus, a country’s punishment order is enacted to create awareness of the state’s intentional terrors of authorised sanctions that are meant to deter wrongdoings for example, imposing the death penalty (Clark & Stancanelli, 2017). By state’s intentional terrors, it is meant what the state intentionally carries out to sanction a public sentence or penalty on wrongdoers (Petlak et al., 2019).

As people are logically self-absorbed, they will not commit crimes if the costs of committing crimes triumph over the profits of engaging in objectionable acts (Ungar et al. 2013). If the only purpose of punishment is to prevent crime in society, punishments are unjust when their harshness exceeds what is necessary to achieve deterrence (Evans et al., 2014). In other words, it means this will not reduce the effect of violence but will rather result in an increase in criminality.

An example of this in the school set up is the use of corporal punishment which was outlawed by many countries, including South Africa. Locally it was replaced by progressive corrective discipline and discipline management legislation. As general deterrence is intended to discourage people that witness the sanctions directed at the convicted from committing crime, corporal punishment was traditionally used and is still used in some countries to instil fear and witness the pain of committing criminal incidents (Kent & Simkins, 2018).

Some general deterrence factors such as ruthlessness and credibility of the threat; the problem of communication; type of offense; differences between individuals and nature of conflicting group norms are still evident and applied in most African countries and largely account for brutal forms of discipline rather than

counteractive ones (Global Initiative, 2016). This study sought for scientific and acceptable counteractive methods to combat violence against educators. Thus, violence in any form is a violation of the rights of children and educators and breaches the respect for human dignity and physical integrity (Maman et al., 2019).

Specific deterrence is intended to deter an individual offender from committing a crime in future (Shelton et al., 2009). Promoters of specific deterrence also believe that punishing wrongdoers harshly will make them disincline to re-offend in future. For example, a drunk driver would be discouraged from drinking while driving because of the unkind experience he/she had to endure during arrest, or having his/her driver's license confiscated or his/her car impounded. The state applies profuse discomfort to offset the extent of pleasure resulting from drinking (Clark & Stancanelli, 2017).

Deterrence places believe in that if people know that their undesirable acts will be reprimanded, they will refrain from offending in future. Furthermore, their reprimand must be swift to deter crime (Tresco et al., 2010). Likewise, the criminal justice concept, as borrowed by the education fraternity globally, has been implemented by most schools through policies and procedures aimed at deterring the more serious criminal conduct by learners (Tuppince, 2017).

c) Psychosocial intervention programmes

School-based psychosocial interventions have been in existence since the early 1900s (Evans et al., 2014). In the last decade, the development of positive psychosocial programmes have brought about new intervention models aimed at improving mental health and encouraging well-being in education for educators and learners alike (cf. Eiraldi et al., 2012). This epitomises a shift in the research direction in the educational psychological sciences where positive progress has resulted in major developments in understanding human disorders, impaired functioning and the prevention of all other psychosocial syndromes, but fundamentally excluding the development of human potential and well-being factors (Tresco et al., 2010).

A number of schools worldwide have tried out different psychosocial interventions with the aim of improving their school climates (Eiraldi et al., 2012). Some of these programmes have been found to be effective in reducing the need for school disciplinary actions, decreasing the incidence of behavioural problems, consequently making those schools seem safer (Tresco et al., 2010). There are two major approaches to psychosocial interventions, which have been experimented to yielding better results: the Expert Behavioural Consultancy system (EBC) and the Effective Behavioural Support system (EBS). Both these systems aim at targeting the entire school climate (Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015).

Traditionally, school punitive practices were volatile and the marginalisation of learners were punished and often detached from instruction for behavioural infringements following the incident (Doss et al., 2015). Punitive practices fail to communicate the more socially accepted behaviours and are, atypically,

frequently the least effective for learners with challenging behavioural problems (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018).

In an attempt to deal with this problem, psychosocial experts designed the EBC system, which is a system that can be used by educators and behavioural health professionals (Evans et al., 2014). Expert consultants such as child and adolescent psychiatrists, school and clinical psychologists and other behavioural health specialists play a major role in implementing and reducing behavioural incidents which lead to violence against educators in the school environment (Eiraldi et al., 2012).

These experts can support school districts or regional officials with the improvement of existing systems or the creation of new ones where they are non-existent; and mechanise the use of EBCs and available training and support to behavioural teaching staff (Evans et al., 2014). For the sake of this study, EBCs provided a context for acquiring important skills that affect academic productivity, classroom behaviour and educator-learner relations. In this regard, EBCs provide an effective platform with psychosocial strategies that could be used to reduce learner-on-educator violence.

The EBS system is designed to deal with the behavioural performance of all learners in a school where they are charged with the responsibility of adjusting classroom habits and expectations with intention to decrease the effects of learner's shortfalls on performance hindrances (Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015). This is completed to assist an individual educator in staying on track with control of learners in his/her class. This is also understood to reduce or eliminate aggressive behaviour towards educators, because there is an increased healthy social interaction between the educators and the learners (Tresco et al., 2010). The programme is completed through an Adapted Instruction Plan (AIP), a plan designed to provide a context of special education and customised package that embraces adjustments to daily classroom habits such as class work, tests and puzzles and homework for learners (Eiraldi et al., 2012).

Collective special cases for the classroom embrace adapted seating plans where the learner identified to be a potential aggressor, sits closer to the educator and away from sources of potential environmental distractions (Evans et al., 2014). For example, learners with attention challenges are kept far from doors, windows or other learners with attention difficulties; and the educator makes use of isolated attention reminder to prompt the learner to stay on track with a given activity (Florian & Rouse, 2009).

With reference to this study on learner-on-educator violence, EBS could be applied to lay hold of strategies that reduce disruptive and other problematic behaviours. An increase in learners' exposure to tuition by decreasing disruptions during tuition; increasing the number of learners attending school by reducing out-of-school deferrals; and by decreasing the possibility of excluding learners from classrooms, for example, learners who are often referred to school offices for discipline referrals (Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015). The length of time spent on tuition

predicts academic achievement (Austin & Jones, 2016). So increased tuition time because of improved learner behaviour should consequently lead to improvement in academic achievement and less confrontations with educators that lead to violence against educators.

3.3 Prevention strategies through the culture of rights and responsibilities

As sites for championing human rights activism, schools should advocate and uphold an obligation to promote, protect and encourage the rights of learners and educators (Collins et al., 2020) and expedite a nontoxic teaching and learning environment. Preventive strategies designed to decrease acts of violence ought to be initiated from a human rights approach, with attention to growing awareness and understanding all fundamental human rights. In principle, learners in the South African context have the legitimate right to the maximum practicable protection. Yet, what seems to be frequently ignored, is the preparedness to equally educate learners to exercise responsibility along with their human rights. It is crucial to take into account that all human rights hold certain limitations and that one individual's rights may not violate or disregard the rights of others (Makhasane & Khanare, 2018).

The South African Constitution of 1996 (RSA, 1996) stipulates some enactments that safeguard the rights of learners and educators – that learners must learn in a conducive environment and educators ought to teach in an innocuous environment, devoid of all practices of victimisation, including learner-on-educator violence or paranoia. The Constitution (RSA, 1996) further provides other fundamental rights to learners and educators which include the rights to human dignity, equality, freedom of expression, protection, security and life. Such rights are, however, most often impinged on through the proliferation of school violence. Actions that are emotional, verbal or attacks of a violent nature all infringe the rights of the injured party to dignity and equality; the right to life; the right to freedom and security of the person; the right to protection from maltreatment; neglect and abuse or degradation (Sibanda, 2015).

Thus, the inability to handle educator victimisation, including learner-on-educator violence and cruelty of any form, seriously violate human rights. Regrettably, the rights of educators at schools seem to be continuously disrespected and experiences of learner-on-educator violence do not stop as the culture of disrespect in schools is growing; with a partially distorted promotion of human rights– that learners seem to have more rights than educators.

3.4 Prevention via strong collegial support at schools

In the South African context, educators generally work collaboratively through inventive methods that they find suitable for their unique circumstances. In this regard educators use collegial support to discourage learner-on-educator violence at school (Grobler, 2016). This strategy seemingly highlights the importance of unity and educators working together to promote synergy when running a school. Most educators believe that this strategy considerably reduces direct confrontation with learners. A female teacher who feels victimised by a learner will, for example, request the support of a male educator to address the threat

against her as learners most often have more respect for male educators and are more hesitant to confront them.

3.5 Parental and community engagements

A close relationship between parents and educators and collaborative functions ensure the development of self-discipline among learners and reduces the workload of educators and time spent on disciplining learners (Mishna et al., 2006; Lekalakala, 2019). When educators and parents form closer relationships with one another it closes the gap for learners to misbehave (Le Mottee & Kelly, 2017). Thus, involving parents and encouraging accountability in sustaining educators' endeavours is key in clamping down on the negative effects of violent disciplinary measures. Children who grow up in homes without parents have the potential to promote violence among children that spill over to schools. Thus, there is a dire demand for uniformity and regularity in the corrective model at home and at school for discipline to be successful. Preferably, as suggested by the South African Council for Educators report (SACE, 2020), corporal punishment ought to be articulated as outlawed at home and in schools. Thus, parents and caregivers require patronage and regulation on the use of substitute, nonaggressive methods of child-discipline.

The most critical position to consider is that not only parents, but all role players and stakeholders with a direct interest in education affairs communicate an undertaking that prevents and stops violence from being perpetrated against educators at schools (Lekalakala, 2019). This stresses the need for learners, educators and other stakeholders to work together towards a vision of fostering an environment in which everybody experiences safety socially, emotionally and physically (Le Mottee & Kelly, 2017). Building harmonious stakeholder relationships, specifically between educators and learners, is important to combat violence against educators. Their perception of one another is critical in this context. According to Espelage et al. (2013), forming healthy relations is a practice that amplifies and reshapes school discipline positively.

4. Conclusion

Although educators react to learner-on-educator violence in various ways, it is evident that different schools in South Africa do not have formalised learner-on-educator violence broad preventive programmes. In addition, educators in South African schools are not adequately trained in conflict management skills to protect themselves against violence in the school context. As a result, authority in schools continue to decline with a corresponding increase in learner-educator negative confrontations. This deteriorating status of authority seems to encourage learners to disrespect educators and being scornful towards authority.

With this in mind, the South African Department of Basic Education and the South African Council for Educators are starting with training initiatives to equip educators with coping skills and knowledge to counteract violence against them. However, the challenge is the inability of the training to provide focus on effectively managing interpersonal conflicts and violent episodes which might occur at schools. Equipping educators through training should be done by

precautionary engagements with learners as leading contributors to educator victimisation, by aiming to carry out and evaluate evidence-based examples appropriate to the specific environmental situation and context of the school involved. Training therefore necessitates the provision of non-violent teaching and disciplinary approaches. In principle, a practical and responsive approach to learner-on-educator violence proved inescapable for all schools. Educators need user-friendly prevention strategies and programmes. Although some schools do have such programmes, major modifications are required for the effectiveness of their strategies.

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