



Exploring the School Management Team's Perspectives about the Challenges of Addressing Learner-on-teacher Violence in Secondary Schools: Implications for Invitational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Addressing learner-on-teacher violence remains a severe challenge to school management Teams worldwide. School violence is a worldwide challenge, and it also seems to be getting worse in South Africa, where it is not sufficiently reported or addressed. Thus, this study aims to explore School Management Teams' perspectives on the challenges of addressing learner-on-teacher violence in selected South African secondary schools. The paper adopted the Invitational Leadership theory to guide and interpret the findings. A qualitative research approach was used to understand leadership challenges in addressing learner-on-teacher violence in secondary schools. Eight participants were purposively selected for the study. The data was generated through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with principals, Heads of Departments, and teachers. The findings revealed that the challenges SMTs face when addressing learner-on-teacher violence include inadequate policies, lack of parental involvement, insufficient Department of Basic Education support, and lack of support from other stakeholders. Therefore, this paper recommends that the Department of Basic Education capacitates SMTs in reviewing policies and supporting them in implementing them.

KEYWORDS

Challenges; discipline; invitational leadership; school violence.

INTRODUCTION

Learner-on-teacher violence remains a vastly spread calamity that school leaders continue to battle globally, with manifestations increasing alarmingly. Learner-on-teacher violence is all acts of malice or violent behavior that learners use to disempower teachers' professionalism and humiliate them in the process (Anderman et al., 2018). This phenomenon is an issue that may better be understood from the perspective of school violence. De Wet (2010) defines learner-on-teacher violence as a sub-category of school violence committed by learners against teachers within the social contexts of schools. These violent acts are perceived to be multi-systemic since they include various variables that affect teachers. From a global perspective, learner-on-teacher violence manifests differently from one country to another (Igu & Ogba, 2019). Kolbe (2020) asserts that the serious form of learner-on-teacher violence that school leaders in the United States of America (USA) face is school gun violence, which is perceived to make the school environment hostile. A study conducted by Chen and Chen (2019) found that Asian countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China have experienced and continue to experience various forms of school violence. In Africa, Igu and Ogba (2019) argue that Nigeria's political diversity and long history of mistrust account for being one of the most violent nations in Africa. In addition, Ogba and Igu (2019) assert that school violence is a product of violent communities in Nigeria, which has serious implications for schools since learners are aggressive and violent.

Like other nations, South Africa is not exempt from school violence. Makhasane and Mthembu (2019) argue that South Africa is one of the world's most violent nations, so its schools are inevitably exposed to violence. Similarly, Lunneblad (2019) argues that violence, which continues to be the most pressing contemporary issue, is a persistent concern in South Africa. In the same way, Singh and Steyn (2014) assert that violence is a catastrophe that can happen in both public and private settings, the South African National Department of Basic Education (DBE) has been working to address an increase in violent incidents that are occurring in schools at alarming rates.

Accordingly, the leadership responsibility of the school management team (SMT) in South African schools is to address various challenges in the school, including learner-teacher violence. From a South African perspective, SMT comprises of the principal, deputy principal(s) and the department heads (Department of Education, 2000). To ensure that schools are free from violence, SMTs must take the lead in addressing violence perpetrated by learners against the teachers (Bipath, 2017). Ntuli (2018) points out that SMTs should consult several national policies and a learners' code of conduct to warn learners who perpetrate violence against teachers. They must oversee the practical application and execution of such policies. Although SMTs members employ policies to address violent incidents, Grobler (2018) argues that such incidents continue to manifest in schools, showing that policies and procedures are insufficient to address learner-on-teacher violence. Moreover, Ngidi (2018) contends that the current regulations and rules only apply to post-violent acts, making it appear they are failing to avoid the issue.

Netshitangani (2018) warns that creating free violent schools is not easy and that all role players must be involved. Teachers should be part of stakeholders partaking in addressing learner-on-teacher violence. DeCordova et al. (2020) state that teachers are offered several preparation training programs to address the phenomenon. However, teachers can use only a few guidelines and directives to deal with the catastrophe.

The manifestation of learner-on-teacher violence has various implications for victims, perpetrators and school leaders. However, this phenomenon is severely understudied, especially from a school leadership perspective. This is evident through increased school violence that makes news headlines regularly, especially learner-on-teacher violence. Netshitangani (2018) cautions that a conducive school climate promoting effective teaching and learning is unattainable: school violence remains a national concern. In that light, Nhambura (2020) notes that schools experiencing learner-on-teacher violence exhibit poor learner performance, which conflicts with the goals of the DBE. Petso (2021) agrees that many teachers resign from the teaching profession due to insecurities in the teaching profession, which will have severe repercussions in the long term as illiteracy, difficulty in recruiting teachers, and the struggle to retain the best teachers become prevalent.

Woudstra et al. (2018) maintain that most school violence victims suffer emotional and financial trauma, eventually affecting the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers. Apart from the consequences of failing to address the manifestation of learner-on-teacher violence, a study conducted by Davids and Waghid (2016) revealed that school principals are not trained to deal with violent encounters. Thus, they tend to respond against perpetrators with harshness, verbal abuse, and sometimes equal violence, creating more problems. Therefore, this study aims to explore various challenges facing SMTs in addressing learner-on-teacher violence. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are school management teams' perspectives on the challenges of addressing learner-on-teacher violence in secondary schools?
- What invitational leadership implications can be drawn from the school management teams' perspectives about the challenges of addressing learner-on-teacher violence?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Given the significance of addressing learner-on-teacher violence, studies conducted by Botha and Zwane (2021), Nhambura (2020), Grobler (2018) Govender (2015) suggest that school leaders' coping strategies to prevent or address learner-on-teacher violence are limited. In the same way, De Cordova et al. (2020) further contend that despite several preparation training programs offered to teachers, few guidelines or directives exist that can be used to address learner-on-teacher violence. In that light, the literature suggests that addressing learner-on-teacher violence remains challenging due to various shortcomings resulting from insufficient policies, lack of parental involvement, inadequate departmental support, and lack of support from other stakeholders.

Inadequate policies

As per the SACE (2020), school leaders utilize various policies to promote discipline and high ethical standards. Manamela (2021) asserts that responsible personnel use the learners' code of conduct and the school safety policy concerning learner discipline. In the same way, Mohlala (2021) found that among the identified policy challenges, the main loophole was linked to the implementation due to various factors, including limited powers. In agreement, Hanslo (2020) highlighted that in terms of implementing sanctions as per the learners' code of conduct, learners get away with many misconducts since there are no proper structures in place. In this light, a gap between policy and implementation hinders attempts to address learner-on-teacher violence.

On the other hand, Du Plessis and Mncube (2018) found that principals become dictators in disciplinary procedures as per policies and sometimes make unilateral decisions. Makhasane and Khanare (2018), who argue that leaders with positions, including principals, struggle to establish and preserve a climate where teachers encounter less learner-on-teacher violence. In the same light, Mkandla (2021) shares that, in other instances, the same policies contradict each other. Hence the identified loopholes in addressing various learner behavioral problems at school remain challenging. For example, the learner's code of conduct and safety policies have sanctions that include expelling learners; however, this is a contravention of *The Children's Act* 38 of 2005, which addresses issues relating to children's right to care, including safeguarding them from any prejudice, exploitation, moral, physical, and other physical risks. This finding is consistent with the findings by Segalo and Rambuda (2018), who indicate that responsible people are not sure how to discipline learners due to human rights principles outlined by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, South African Schools Act, and the South African Council of Educators' Act 31 of 2000. Another known factor linked to complicating leadership's ability to address learner-on-teacher violence is outdated school policies. Hanslo (2020:84) reports that policies are not reviewed as expected in some schools for various reasons.

Lack of parental involvement

Studies have suggested that addressing learner-on-teacher violence cannot only be done at school, as parents are believed to have the power to change this problem significantly. This idea is supported by Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017), who contend that involving parents in handling various issues at school is directly linked with the outcome of positive behavior of learners. In the same way, Seoka (2019) believes that teachers struggle with learners who instigate violence against them due to a lack of parental discipline at home. Moreover, according to SASA, parents must support the school by monitoring their children's behavior. In other words, parents must play a role in the discipline of their children.

Despite a great need for parental involvement, Segalo and Rambuda (2018) caution that parents are deliberately absconding from their responsibilities regarding disciplining their children. Zwane (2021) shared the same sentiments that lack of parental involvement was portrayed as uncaring because educators believe that wealthy parents add salt to their wounds

as they disrespect and treat them as lower class. In agreement, Josiah et al. (2018) reported that when disciplinary measures are implemented against their children, some parents have a history of threatening school leaders, particularly those in positions of authority in the community. This means that parents with influence make it difficult for leaders to implement disciplinary measures against learners who instigate violence against teachers.

Sitoyi (2020) argues that parents do not guide their children; they do not want to intervene. Instead, they leave everything to teachers. Parents' resistance to supporting schools is believed to contribute to the prevalence of learner-on-teacher violence. Knowing that their parents will defend them can encourage learners to disrespect teachers. Nhambura (2020) indicates that instead of supporting schools, parents are defensive and always side with their children. Manamela (2021) also shares the sentiment that in instances where disciplinary measures are implemented, parents question the process and claim they were unaware of such measures, which indicates that parents do not fulfil their role of disciplining their children and supporting teachers is contributing to the problem.

Insufficient departmental support

The [South African] Department of Basic Education (DBE) supports the schools in achieving their educational mandate. However, Manamela (2021) asserts that there frequently appears to be a breakdown in communication between the DBE and schools and insufficient school leadership preparation for implementing policies. Manamela (2021) further contends that school leaders fail to enforce disciplinary policies due to inadequate training in school leadership, indicating that the communication breakdown between schools and the DBE is one of the reasons why implementing policies still presents several gaps.

Biyela (2018) states that although the DBE, in partnership with the Crime and Prevention Institute and Human Research Council, provides statistics on school safety and security issues, these organizations never address the problems directly. Mohlala (2021) believes that the DBE must provide trained security personnel to minimize the incidents of teachers being victimized by learners; however, this is not possible as schools are under-resourced. Furthermore, Zwane (2021) states that the general mindset of learners becomes compromised if they learn without extra mural activities. Still, schools lack adequate sports facilities, and the DBE is slow to respond to these needs meaning that learner-on-teacher violence is inevitable in schools where sports are not supported.

Lack of support from other stakeholders

According to Manamela (2021), school leaders must collaborate with educators, support staff, the school community, SMTs, and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) by developing connections and networks to deal with various violence at school. This means that all relevant stakeholders, including educators, support staff, the school community, SMTs, and SGB need to play a role in addressing learner-on-teacher violence.

To maintain law and order, which may lead to minimizing the prevalence of learner-on-teacher violence, mutual participation of all relevant stakeholders and the school must occur. However, Obadire and Sinthumele (2021) caution that society and media have normalized acts of violence, making the instigation of violence against teachers by learners inevitable. Apart from that, Manamela (2021) reports that in addressing disciplinary problems, some stakeholders start questioning the approaches without approaching school leaders, instead complaining through the media. Other than media influence, political interference is also seen as a challenge. Due to that, Josiah et al. (2018) state that sometimes principals fail to use appropriate disciplinary measures because politicians use their influence and intimidate principals. Aman, Moorad and Mukhopadhyay (2020) found that school leaders fail to discipline learners because they fear parents will take them to court. In this light, Josiah et al. (2018) argues that the rule of law costs school principals their respect and honor when cases are decided in favor of learners and their parents, thus making it more challenging to address the ill behavior of learners.

METHODOLOGY

Interpretive paradigm

The study used an interpretive paradigm because its goal was to explore SMTs' challenges in addressing learner-on-teacher violence in secondary schools. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2017), a research paradigm is a set of beliefs, agreements, and assumptions that direct human action to comprehend questions for in-depth research. Rahi (2017, p.1) describes an interpretive paradigm as "real knowledge acquired via greater understanding and interpretation of a phenomenon under inquiry". The interpretive paradigm was pertinent to this research since it enabled an understanding of the multiple realities that the participants highlighted about the challenges of addressing learner-on-teacher violence.

Qualitative research approach

In this paper, a qualitative research methodology was employed. According to Merriam and Grenier (2019), qualitative research focuses on narrating, comprehending, and examining phenomena utilizing classification and subjective measurement techniques. Williamson et al. (2018) define a qualitative method as a tool to explore and research people's understanding and perspectives of a specific human situation. According to Tracy (2020), a researcher can use qualitative research to make an effort to understand a phenomenon in a variety of settings, including interviews, company meetings, and public events.

Multiple case studies of two schools

The paper used a multiple-case study research design. Case studies are verifiable investigations that incisively explore an existent phenomenon (Tracy, 2020). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a multiple case study examines a current issue employing participants from various

research settings. Two secondary schools in the eastern Free State served as the case studies for this investigation.

Selection of the participants

Participants were selected from two South African secondary schools to explore SMTs' challenges in addressing learner-on-teacher violence in secondary schools. The two secondary schools were purposively selected with a focus on geographical location, as one is in a rural area whilst the second one is in a township. The decision was informed by an underlying view that teachers in township schools experience learner-on-teacher violence compared to their rural counterparts. In addition, both schools were close to the domicile of both researchers, making it convenient and cost-effective to collect data. The sample included eight participants. They are divided into two groups, Five SMT members and three teachers. Secondary school teachers were included in the study to elicit data from non-SMT members. Their participation and responses informed researchers of the challenges seen when SMTs deal with cases of learner-on-teacher violence. The diagrammatic table below summarizes the information of participants from the two case study schools that served as research sites. The composition table displays the participants' school roles, work experience, and gender.

Table 1

Breakdown of sample participants.

School	Participant position	Participant role	Experience in current position	Gender	Code
A	Principal	School head	3 years	Male	PSA
A	HOD	HoD	1 year	Male	HSA
A	Teacher	Member of disciplinary committee	2 years	Male	TSA1
A	Teacher	Member of disciplinary committee	32 years	Male	TSA2
B	Principal	School HoD	5 years	Male	PSB
B	HOD	HoD	3 years	Male	HSB1
B	HOD	HoD	24 years	Male	HSB2
B	Teacher	Class teacher	17 years	Female	TSB

Data collection methods

semi-structured and individual interviews were used to generate data. According to Leavy (2017), semi-structured interviews enable participants to provide in-depth responses to topics

that were not predefined. For this study, semi-structured interviews are regarded as appropriate since they are adaptable and use open-ended questions to encourage unexpected and genuine responses. Howitt (2019) defines one-on-one interviews as a method in which the interviewer investigates and poses pertinent questions to one participant to learn more about a particular subject of interest.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data for the study. Howitt (2019) defines thematic analysis as a method that involves categorizing collected data into descriptive categories of themes. Through thematic analysis, a professional transcriber's transcription of interview recordings is done in stages to ensure that no vital information is omitted. As per the recommendation by Lester et al. (2020), the process of thematic analysis was done by adopting the stages that include becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing those themes, defining the themes, and writing up the report.

Trustworthiness

The study adhered to the principles of trustworthiness concerning credibility. Since the study used semi-structured interviews, information on the audio recorder was transcribed and sent to participants to verify all information. Moreover, to abide by the principle of honesty, data was only collected from participants willing to share information freely.

Ethical considerations

Obtaining ethical approval from the University of the Free State Ethics Committee was necessary before beginning the data collection procedures. It was also done according to protocol by asking the Free State DBE for authorization to conduct the research in the selected free state schools. Additionally, the research was explained to the principals of the two school, who were then asked to grant permission for undertaking research in their respective schools. The participants were adequately informed about data security, sensitivity, confidentiality, and privacy. Before the interviews, a consent form was provided. All information was stored electronically on a password-secure iCloud account only to be accessed by the researchers.

FINDINGS

The participants from the two selected schools agreed that while different leadership practices are utilized to address learner-on-teacher violence, they are limited since they have several challenges. These challenges include parents who refuse to support schools, ineffective policies, constrained support networks from other stakeholders, and a lack of departmental support. We now turn to present the findings regarding the identified challenges.

Parents unwilling to support school.

According to empirical evidence, parents do not provide SMTs with enough support to address the challenge of learner-on-teacher violence. The Participants stated that addressing the prevalence of learner-on-teacher violence cannot be a one-way street, as parents are expected to support school leaders and teachers. The participants lamented that when a learner commits

misconduct, and parents are called in to intervene, parents become defensive, side with their children, curse at teachers, and refuse to be corrected. PSA from School A said:

You'll sometimes give a learner a letter to summon the parent, but then the learner will always give only her side or his side of the story and then the parent will come here being angry without even giving us a chance to present our own story and once you start coming with a sanction, the parents start becoming defensive.

In the same school, TSA2 spoke about cases in which parents failed to play their part because their children are very disciplined at home but at school become the opposite:

Learners tend to play double standards by being very disciplined at home but the opposite at school, but parents always jumping the gun when they are summoned to school due to ill-behavior of their children makes it hard to deal with the prevalence of learner-on-teacher violence.

Another participant from School A revealed that parents do not want to take accountability and responsibility for their children. HSA said:

Parents don't have time, you call the parent, and the parent is not there. It's like they have decided that these children are for teachers; therefore, every morning, they should come to teachers, but at the end of the year, parents are marching at the school gate demanding their children to pass.

The problem of parents not being prepared to support the school is confined to School A, as the issue resurfaced when School A participants were interviewed. HSB1 shared: *"We also involve the parents, but unfortunately, most parents do not support the effort because they are summoned to the school; they don't pitch."*

When parents are summoned to schools to intervene in School A, they swear at teachers. TSB highlighted:

But here at the school, when let me say, for example, sometimes you call in a parent when they get here, they start swearing at us. Parents swear at us, and when they are like that, we must at all times remain calm and humbled and not swear or even shout back because if you, as a teacher, can shout back, it's going to be regarded as unprofessional behavior.

The principal PSB took the idea further by referring to an incident involving some parents who did not want to be corrected:

We once had an incident where we called parents to intervene in discipline issues concerning their children, but parents did not want to listen, and they told us that we cannot come now and tell them what they've been doing for the past 20 years is wrong.

The role of parents in addressing various school issues, including the prevalence of learner-on-teacher violence, is critical. However, parents' unwillingness to play their part makes it difficult for school leaders to address the issue. According to participants from both schools, one of the challenges of addressing learner-on-teacher violence is that parents do not support school

leaders. Participants also revealed that parents shield their children and become defensive instead of supporting schools and teachers in dealing with learner-on-teacher violence.

Empirical data from School A suggests that efforts to address learner-on-teacher violence were hampered due to parents' resistance to support school leaders in an effort to address learner-on-teacher violence. These findings are in line with Petso's (2021) contention that a lack of appropriate parenting and involvement in School activities contributes to increased learner-on-teacher violence. The findings are also similar to Botha and Zwane's (2021) belief that close relationships between teachers and parents promote learner self-discipline and reduce the prevalence of learner-on-teacher violence. In the absence of such close relationship learner-on-teacher violence is likely to prevail.

Inadequate policies

The participants from the two selected schools revealed that SMTs and the teachers use learners' code of conduct, safety policies, and classroom rules policies to address the prevalence of learner-on-teacher violence. However, the participants indicated that these policies do not help alleviate the problem of learner-on-teacher violence for various reasons, including the lack of regular amendments and school leaders' inability to review the policies. Participant PSA shared:

I must say that in our schools, particularly township schools, we don't usually amend policies because we concentrate on catch-up and results. We don't have time, and we sometimes find ourselves using very old policies and don't even refer to them.

HSA said their school policies are not reviewed regularly: *"I got here last year in July. And from then until now, the policy is still the same; it has not been reviewed this year."*

The HSA has been revealed:

Sometimes we are not capacitated to work on amendment of policies that align with the South African Schools Act or the Constitution. Furthermore, we don't have a straight policy that addresses learner-on-teacher violence. It's a general policy; we don't have a specific policy; we only have a code of conduct for learners.

Despite the PSA and HSA outlining that their policies are not reviewed, the TSA from the same school highlighted: *"Policy amendments are normally dependent on situations. For example, if there's a new arising challenge which is not covered by policies, then that would force policy review."*

On the other hand, although PSA from School A complained that they are not capacitated to deal with the amendment of policies, in School A, HSB2 reported: *"We attend workshops, where we are trained and equipped, and people are invited, consultants, to come and train us on an array of issues."*

HSB1 further outlined that in School A, policies are reviewed: *"We review them annually; if it's not annually, it can be when necessary, but we have to amend them."*

HSB2 shared the same sentiment: *"By bi-annually, we come together and review policies because you, in other instances, reviews are being attended to by other authorities in high positions where new policies are enacted."*

Although the code of conduct is clear that when addressing severe misconduct, including learner-on-teacher violence, learners must be suspended or even expelled, PSB advocates:

My role in a disciplinary hearing, in a law language, they call it to adduce evidence. When you adduce evidence, you don't sit as a constant member of a disciplinary committee, even the prescripts of the law. So once the HOD receives a message that the principal was sitting in the disciplinary hearing, they know that the learner wins the case; it is thrown out. It's scrapped because we are instructed even if you have suspended that learner, the supervisor of that school is instructed to ensure that the learner the next day sits in class. After all, the process becomes flawed.

The findings suggest a glaring discrepancy between policies and their implementation. The Constitution protects the learner by stating that they must be protected and that suspending them would violate their constitutional right to attend school. Participants at School A revealed that their policies are not reviewed, in contrast to participants in School A who highlighted that their rules are reviewed annually or bi-annually.

Participants from School A indicated that although their policies are reviewed as appropriate, the fact that the principal defends learners when sanctions are applied revealed the inconsistent and contradictory ways in which policies are put into practice. This result supports the findings of Du Plessis and Mncube (2018), who contend that principals take on a dictatorial role in disciplinary procedures and make arbitrary choices. The results also agree with Hanslo (2020), who warns that even if the learner code of conduct needs to be revised at least once a year, responsible individuals fail to do so.

Lack of support from other stakeholders

Data suggests that all stakeholders, including SGB members, parents, the government, politicians, and community structures, must be included to address the learner-on-teacher violence in the participant schools. Empirical evidence, however, showed that these stakeholders are a part of the issue, not the solution. Regarding SGB members who are tasked with assisting SMTs in updating various policies to verify their applicability, PSA from School A reported: *"One of the responsibilities of the SGB is to represent all parents and amend school policies, but they are not literate can go to the extent of being able to amend the policies."*

Regarding the role performed by community members, PSA emphasized that they keep quiet when schools struggle with various problems, such as incidents of learner-on-teacher violence. However, they begin to take a defensive stance when leaders implement sanctions as outlined in policies. He said: *"And as it is of now, we've got suspensions of learners due to various misconducts, and I will not be surprised if next week I might see the politicians taking this up instead of supporting us."*

TSA1 shared the same sentiments and added:

These learners are well informed with politics more than school-related information because of influence. They know how the system protects them over us through community political leaders, and because of that, they do as they please.

In instances where school support structures are active, PSB states:

The unfortunate thing is people serving in various committees and those who are school-based supportive coordinators; are ordinary teachers trained to be ordinary teachers. Only a few who majored in psychology are appointed as school-based support coordinators, and that's where we are also missing the point. For example, you cannot take a nurse and say that because you have a nursing qualification now, we want you to be a doctor and operate on a patient.

These results showed that the neighborhood where School A is located has a lot of politically active families. These families are thought to use their political clout to assist children in getting away with various offences, including learner-on-teacher misconduct, following Aman et al. (2020), who found that School Administrators don't punish learners because they fear legal action from parents. Participants from School B were silent on the subject, but they concurred that the community should do more to promote order at home so that the school may expand on what it has already begun. Aman et al. (2020), who emphasized that school discipline can only be maintained if parents at home instill valuable skills and morality in the children, reiterated this sentiment. The empirical data also showed that there are various coordinators for school-based support at School B. The fact that its employees did not pursue psychology degrees makes them unable to address the pervasiveness of learner-on-teacher violence. The results further confirm Nhambura's (2020) assertion that schools cannot solve the issue of violent learners without the help of social workers, psychologists, legislators, and law enforcement.

Lack of departmental support

The participants from the two participating schools suggested that school leaders take the DBE policies' approach to addressing learner-on-teacher violence and apply it to discipline. Participants disclosed that the DBE does not assist them with learner-on-teacher violence problems. Participants also reported a lack of infrastructure, teachers, security personnel, and psychologists who work in schools. In School A, HSA stated:

The department does not support us; I know it will be like I'm anti-department, but they are doing nothing to support us with addressing violence. The only time the district officials come to us is when we were underperforming as a school or as a particular subject teacher, but they do not come to support us.

One participant from School A then brought up a crucial point: if schools wish to keep disciplined students, they must also foster extracurricular activities that do not currently exist. Participant TSA outlined:

It is challenging to encourage learners to be disciplined without exposing them to extra-mural activities because. But we have what we call extra-mural activities so that learners can

play. But where will the learners play because we don't have governmental support to clean and maintain those grounds?

From the same school, TSA2 also shared that government does not want to be accountable for anything:

And in different issues at schools, the government always looks for loopholes to protect itself by making sure that principals take a fall, to the extent that government even presents new policies that we don't even know of when a trouble has presented itself at school.

Participant HSA voiced concern that, due to power limitations, teachers were powerless to defend themselves against violence committed against them, *"Teachers don't have power, we don't have power as teachers, our power has been stripped away by our same government. It's all about the learner. I mean, everything is all about the learner."*

In line with HSA's assertion that teachers' ability to protect themselves is constrained, HSB2 stated: *"The saddest part is that our Constitution has spoiled learners or children in South Africa. Teachers are so helpless nowadays; many feels like leaving this dear profession because they feel they are not protected."*

Moreover, TSB spoke about an incident where learners opened a case against him:

Most of the time, when you do anything to learners trying to discipline them, they go to the police station and open the case for us. Especially the learners of location B, they opened a case for me, and earlier today, the police were here looking for me because of the same thing.

Participant PSB believes that there is a gap as the department does not assist in addressing learner-on-teacher violence:

As township schools, we have realized that we are on our own, and thus, we continue to have disciplinary problems among our learners because even our department is not assisting in closing the gap, and I don't see a time where the gap would be closed.

The findings from the two participating schools showed how a lack of departmental assistance had aggravated the difficulty in addressing the pervasiveness of learner-on-teacher violence. School A participants reported feeling overworked and that the government provided inadequate support. This aligns with Nhambura's (2020) study, which claims that non-participation in sports, particularly for athletically inclined students, may lead to anger and violence. Participants in School A also bemoaned that teachers' authority is constrained while the government refuses to accept responsibility for tackling learner-on-teacher violence.

In the same way, participants in School B concurred that government regulations designed to discipline learners serve to shield them rather than bridge the gap in the discipline problem. Even though participants at School A never revealed anything about students filing charges against them, one participant in School A claimed that police had previously been seeking him due to a learner filing a case against him. This relates to the findings by Aman et al. (2020), who noted that school leaders refrain from disciplining learners because of fear that parents will sue them.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the finding about the SMTs' perspectives on challenges in addressing learner-on-teacher violence. In doing so, the paper also highlights the invitational leadership implications whenever such implications are apparent.

The primary goal of this study is to explore the perspectives of SMTs on the challenges of addressing learner-on-teacher violence. Participants from the two case study schools stated that learner-on-teacher violence poses several challenges for the school, including disrupting the smooth operation of the school and making it difficult to achieve its goals. Participants agreed that various leadership practices are used to address learner-on-teacher violence; however, due to several identified gaps, all measures are insufficient. The shared challenges of addressing learner-on-teacher violence in the selected secondary schools include some parents' unwillingness to support schools, inadequate policies, limited support from other stakeholders, and a lack of support from the DBE.

Participants expressed concern about some parents' reluctance to support school leaders in addressing learner-on-teacher violence, citing the belief that a better outcome can be achieved if parents are involved in disciplinary matters. Nonetheless, participants reported that parents interfere with disciplinary procedures by seeking help from influential community members. This finding is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Josiah et al. (2018), who found that when disciplinary measures are imposed on their children, some parents have a history of threatening school leaders, particularly parents in positions of authority in the community. The findings also revealed that parents do not want to be involved in their children's education. This finding is consistent with Zwane's (2021) assertion that a lack of appropriate parenting and involvement in School Activities contributes to increased learner-on-teacher violence at school. Because parents are thought to play an essential role in the disciplinary process, addressing the prevalence of learner-on-teacher violence is complicated. The view that school leaders invite parents to various School Activities, but some choose not to support these efforts suggests that school leaders in the two participating schools are invitational. According to this viewpoint, the challenge of some parents' refusal to participate in School Activities directly contradicts the ideals of invitational leadership.

The use of various policies, including the learner code of conduct and safety policy, to instill discipline and address learner-on-teacher violence cases was highlighted in empirical data from two participant secondary schools. Participants identified a policy-implementation gap due to various factors, including principals acting as dictators in disciplinary processes and policies not being reviewed. According to a study by Du Plessis and Mncube (2018), principals become dictators in disciplinary procedures and make unilateral decisions. Hanslo (2020) also highlighted that policies are not being reviewed as expected in some schools for various reasons.

Regarding policy review and implementation, participants indicated they were not trained to implement and review policies. In line with the findings, Manamela (2021) claims that there frequently appears to be a breakdown in communication between the DBE and schools

and insufficient preparation of school leadership for policy implementation. Participants stated that principals obstruct the process when a disciplinary committee has decided on implementing sanctions, particularly the suspension of learners. This finding is consistent with Hartnack's (2017) findings, who reported that the education district frequently pressures school leaders to return learners to school because learning is a priority, as stated in Section 7 of the Constitution. As a result of the factors mentioned above, it is generally believed that policies are insufficient, making it challenging to address learner-on-teacher violence. Policies are one of the tenets of ILT, and the emphasis is on policies communicating and inviting guidelines to all interested stakeholders.

On the contrary, in cases where policies were claimed to be inadequate in the two selected schools, the school leaders appear to be uninviting to some extent. In terms of policy implementation and review, ILT emphasizes that once policies are adopted, it is the responsibility of school leaders to train or communicate with all interested stakeholders. The realization that messages about how policies should be implemented were not communicated to participants is a contradiction of ILT, thus further revealing that the school leaders in the participant schools were not invitational.

One of the challenges in addressing learner-on-teacher violence in the selected secondary schools was a lack of support from the DBE and other stakeholders. Participants expressed a strong desire for a specialist to be permanently assigned to schools in this regard. Participants also revealed that politics interfere with disciplinary processes, making it difficult for school leaders to apply sanctions as specified in policies - consistent with Aman et al. (2020), who found that school leaders do not discipline students because they are afraid of being sued by their parents. Similarly, Manamela (2021) reports that when dealing with discipline issues, some stakeholders question the approaches without approaching school leaders, instead complaining through the media. The findings support Nhambura's (2020) assertion that school leaders cannot address the issue of violent students without the support and assistance of social workers, psychologists, politicians, and law enforcement.

Participants lamented that the DBE is not accountable for addressing learner-on-teacher violence. Participants, for example, revealed that it came to their attention that some incidents of learner-on-teacher violence are caused by the frustrations of pupils who excel in sports but do not have the resources to support extracurricular activities. This was also found by Nhambura (2020), who claims that non-participation in sports, particularly for gifted learners, can lead to frustration and aggression. Similarly, Zwane (2021) reports that learning without extra-mural activities compromises learners' general mindset, and thus the DoE is slow because schools lack adequate sports facilities. According to the scope of ILT, inviting leaders must be capable of developing programs that can distract learners from misconduct. In this case, participants acknowledged that combining sports and academics distracts students from engaging in inappropriate behavior, such as learner-on-teacher violence. However, the DBE's refusal to help with this effort contradicts one of the tenets of ILT.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study aimed to investigate the SMT's perspectives on the challenges of addressing learner-on-teacher violence in secondary schools. According to this study, addressing learner-on-teacher violence remains challenging for SMT members. Despite various efforts to address learner-on-teacher violence in the selected participant schools, schools continue to experience learner-on-teacher violence. In this regard, insufficient policies, parental support, support from other stakeholders, and a lack of support from the DBE are obstacles to addressing learner-on-teacher violence. Although the study identified inadequate policies, limited support systems from other stakeholders, and a lack of departmental support as challenges in addressing learner-on-teacher violence, the study also found a lack of support from some parents as a significant challenge for school leaders dealing with it.

Concerning policies, it was found that some principals and SMT members do not understand their roles outlined in policies for dealing with learner misconduct. Furthermore, some schools' policies are not reviewed to ensure their relevance in addressing issues such as learner-on-teacher violence. To address learner-on-teacher violence, school leaders must invite all key role players to participate in designing programs that will help address this issue. The DBE should make emotional intelligence one of the mandatory subjects in secondary schools because it can change learners learned violent behavior and thus help to address learner-on-teacher violence.

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