



Exploring the Factors Contributing Towards Teacher Workplace Bullying Across the Teaching Ranks: Focus on Selected South African Public Schools

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Abstract

Teachers are among those professional groups that are at the substantial risk of becoming victims of workplace bullying, yet the knowledge base on why they turn upon one another remains scantily explored. The present qualitative paper, positioned within an interpretivist paradigm, set out to give adequate attention to Teacher Workplace Bullying (TWB) by empirically exploring its contributory factors in South African public schools. To attain the aim, convenient and purposive sampling techniques were used to identify the 16 participants from whom primary data were collected through separable face-to-face interviews. Data were analysed through a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) process, by means of an inductive reasoning. Steered by Johnson's ecological model of workplace bullying, data revealed that greatest number of the participants confirmed various factors triggering bullying across the teaching ranks, namely, a lack of mutual respect, and competition for promotional teaching posts was a prominent factor in most of the nine researched schools. The findings further signalled the vulnerability of temporary and newly appointed teachers in comparison to the long serving staff members, and thus present TWB as a territorial phenomenon. In contemplation of preventing TWB, it is recommended that principals take the lead in changing the organisational culture from top down, where mutual respect is normalised, since a change in behaviour and practice may yield desirable results. Principals and teachers' trade unions should refrain from interfering in the promotion appointments processes as their undue influence perpetuates TWB. This paper augments the restricted knowledge base on TWB and hope to create alertness to the educational policy-makers, scholars, and practitioners about this disparaging form of bullying.

Keywords: *Teacher Workplace Bullying; Teaching Ranks; Interpretivist; Ecological; Public Schools; South African*

Introduction

The factors contributing towards teacher workplace bullying are multifaceted and complex, and the consequences of this type of violence are strikingly dire since they demoralise and paralyse the affected teacher. Teachers are among those professional groups that are at the substantial risk of becoming victims of workplace bullying (World Health Organisation, WHO, 2019), yet the knowledge base on why they turn upon one another remains scantily explored. This is due to vast literature focuses on bullying between the learners, (e.g., Longobardi, Badenes-Ribera, Fabris, Martinez, & McMahon, 2018; Espelage, Anderman & Brown, 2013; Espelage, Low & De la Rue, 2012). For the same reason, (Jacobs & De Wet, 2018; Coetzee & Steyn, 2017; McMahon, Reeves, McConnell, Peist, Ruiz and APA, 2017) maintain that bullying among teachers has been studied in different settings, but it is still rife globally. The widespread may be attributed to the insufficient empirical data that tackle its root causes, hence it is the objective of the present paper to address that lacuna. A stance backed by (Bernstein & Batchelor, 2022; Solomon, 2021; De Wet, 2020; Batchelor, 2019; Jacobs & De Wet, 2018; Mollema, 2018; De Wet & Jacobs, 2013) who acknowledged a need for further exploration of bullying among teachers within the South African setting.

Bullying is one of the supreme disparaging forms of behaviour which any teacher can undergo in the workplace, but in the past, it was overlooked as a research topic. Yet teachers are emotionally tearing down one another, rather than working together for the splendid good. (De Wet & Jacobs, 2013). At this stage on the international front, there is considerable research evidence available with regard to bullying among teachers (e.g. Prpic, 2021; Sitoyi, 2020; Ariza-Montes, Muniz, Leal-Rodriguez, & Leal-Millan 2016; Sorrell, 2015; Talentino, 2016; Sinha & Yadav, 2017; Fahie, 2014; Malahy, 2015; Mazzarella, 2018; Kleinheksel, 2018), but very few pay attention to the factors contributing towards TWB, (e.g. Scheeler, Markelz, Taylor, Deshpande, & Wolfe, 2022; Čech, Kvintova, & Cakirpaloglu, 2018; Orange, 2018; Čech, Cakirpaloglu & Kvintova, 2017; Sasson and Somech, 2014).

With specific reference to South Africa and the teaching profession, studies have indicated that SA teachers are three times more likely to experience workplace bullying than their peers in other parts of the world, (Solomon, 2021; Jacobs & De Wet, 2018; Mollema, 2018; De wet & Jacobs, 2013). This assertion is alarming and makes the present paper well-timed and more significant to explore the factors contributing towards TWB in South African public schools and suggest preventive measures. Moreover, (Mollema, 2018; Sorrell, 2015) purported the scarcity in the number of research studies done regarding the phenomenon in public schools. Concurring with this observation is Santos and Tin (2016) who observed that there is a limited but growing number of studies that have shown that teacher-targeted bullying is a grave issue worldwide. The recent example is the research conducted by Bernstein and Batchelor (2022) who found excessive demands with ever increasing workloads and a lack of supportive resources escalating the perpetration of teacher workplace bullying acts among teachers in South African schools.

Authors hold opposing views regarding the classification of bullying taking place among teachers, Jacobs and De Wet, (2018) labelled it, teacher-targeted workplace bullying, (De Wet, 2020; Santos & Tin, 2016; Jacobs & Teise, 2019; De Wet, 2010a), regard it as teacher-targeted bullying, Martinez, McMahon, Espelage, Anderman, Reddy and Sanchez (2015) , labelled it colleague-generated bullying, (Sasson & Somech, 2014; De Wet, 2011) branded it teacher-on-teacher bullying, and (Kleinheksel & Geisel, 2019; Kleinheksel, 2018; Mazzarella, 2018) classify it as adult-to-adult bullying. The above array of classifications was one of the hurdles stumbled upon in the review of literature on bullying among teachers. Conversely, several authors have also attempted to define bullying among teachers but at the time of authoring the present paper there is still no consented definition, but a respectable number of authors concur that it is detrimental to the successful teaching and learning process.

As a result, throughout the present paper, bullying among teachers is classified as teacher workplace bullying (TWB). The South African Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act 181 of 1993 (Subsection (1)(iv)) defined a workplace as any premises or place where a person performs work in the course of employment. Since the bullying is confined within the school as the workplace for teachers, the classification was deemed appropriate. Furthermore, the definition of TWB is drawn from (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003 & 2011) as, 'a series of negative offensive behaviours carried out regularly and over a lengthy period, mostly against an individual employee by his or her colleagues or supervisor'. Offensive behaviours may include, humiliation, excessive monitoring, rumours, and gossip, being ostracised and openly undermined. All conducted to harm and gain power (Gradinger, Strohmeier & Spiel, 2017). In the context of this paper, the employee refers to the teacher and their colleagues on the same level, and supervisors are members of the School Management Team (departmental heads, deputy principal and principal). After all, teachers experience TWB from other school staff members, rather than just other teachers.

Bearing in mind the need for research on the factors contributing towards TWB across the teaching ranks, the present paper looked into two main questions.

1. What are the factors contributing towards TWB across the teaching ranks?
2. How can TWB be prevented across the teaching ranks?

The two specific aims of this study were to:

- i) Investigate the factors contributing toward TWB across the teaching ranks.
- ii) Identify measures to prevent TWB across the teaching ranks.

The present paper drew on Johnson's (2011) ecological model of workplace bullying, as a roadmap for developing arguments on TWB, and as a basis for interpreting and analysing the results, (Vinz, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

The ecological model by (Johnson, 2011) is a useful model that was adopted as a theoretical framework to guide the exploration of factors contributing towards TWB. Even though the model was developed for the nursing profession to guide among others, intervention, and empirical research on workplace bullying, it was deemed appropriate because workplace bullying cuts across various occupations.

The model is heavily underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology of human development, a theory which states that human development is shaped by factors in a nested layer of hierarchical systems. Relatedly, this model depicts the work environment as a series of nested, interconnected layers that exist within society as a whole. These layers are society (macrosystem), the organisation (exosystem), the co-workers and supervisors of the bully and target (mesosystem), and the bully and target (microsystem), (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Therefore, understanding factors that contribute towards TWB behaviour in school necessitates a closer examination of the complex inter-relationships between the individual and the environment, (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Moreover, causes or antecedents of workplace bullying can be found at societal, organizational, departmental, and individual levels, (Johnson, 2011).

However, throughout this paper factors contributing towards TWB will be explored concentrating on the microsystem, mesosystem, and the exosystem. The reason being that the focus is on elements that are in direct contact with the individual (micro & meso), precisely the personal traits of targets and perpetrators, and factors linked to the working environment (exosystem). After all, interrelated socio-

ecological factors can vary across multiple levels, from three to five layers, (Sato, Inoue, Du, & Funk 2019). Factors emanating from the community and the society (macrosystem) at large are excluded since the focus is on the workplace. Rowe, Shilbury, Ferkins, and Hinckson (2013) are in accord and maintain that, although certain factors at some levels can be conceptually included or omitted, the three basic environmental factors that should be considered are individual (age, gender, and self-efficacy), social (family, peers, and social support) and environmental (safety and community design). The layers of influence are briefly explained below.

Microsystem

The microsystem is composed of the bully and the target, or in some cases multiple bullies and targets, (Johnson, 2011). TWB does not happen in seclusion, hence at the microsystem, the individual teacher's traits will be explored. The reason being, the micro-level recognises biological and personal factors that influence how individuals behave and thus increase their chances of becoming a target or a perpetrator of TWB, (Johnson, 2011). For example, individuals in leadership positions are often accused of bullying when they simply conduct reasonable instructions to their subordinates.

Equally, some leaders label active teachers who normally question their authority as being disrespectful and bullies. It is through these dynamics at a micro-level that a target or perpetrator of bullying emerges. Rendering bullying in the workplace as a serious ethical issue, which impacts the personality of the teacher-victim and the teacher's work performance and private life, (Cech et al., 2018)

Mesosystem

In the context of the present paper, the mesosystem refers to the relationships between the teachers at the same level and their supervisors (departmental heads, deputy principals and principals). Perpetrators of bullying are also a diverse group, ranging from coworkers, supervisors, and subordinates, either from the same or a different department (Johnson & Rea, 2009). These individuals can also attempt to intervene to prevent TWB or make it flourish by being bystanders. Managerial style is a key contributing factor of bullying at the mesosystem level, (Johnson, 2011). Principal's leadership styles characterised by a lack of consistency in settling conflict among colleagues and playing favourites may contribute to the realisation of TWB. Research further shows that individuals in stressful environments with little support often are at elevated risk of committing or experiencing school bullying (Tolentino, 2016; De Wet & Jacobs, 2013); thus, the present paper seeks to explore the factors contributing towards TWB and produce preventive measures.

Exosystem

The exosystem includes the school as an organisation as a whole as well as teacher unions that represent workers within the school, (Johnson, 2011). It is the social context within which the individual does not have direct contact, but which affects him or her indirectly through the micro-systems, Espelage et al. (2013). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner demonstrated that this ecosystem includes not just elements that are in direct contact with the individual (represented by the microsystem and mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's model) but also elements that are external to the individual's immediate environment, (Newman, & Newman, 2020). These elements within the setting of the present paper are specific government and school policies, and social support systems that the school can offer to the teacher-victim. The exosystem represents all such elements that though not intimately connected to the individual, exert a determining influence on their psycho-social development, (Newman, & Newman, 2020).

Literature revealed that some forms of workplace bullying relate to the organisation and organisational work culture, (Jacobs & Teise, 2019), and the authors further argue that organisational culture can either inhibit or promote bullying (Jacobs & Teise, 2019). Hence within the exosystem, the

school remain the focal point in exploring on how some of the environmental factors such as nepotism and favouritism contribute to the promotion of TWB. It is worth noting that all the layers of the model are interconnected and as a whole shape the human behaviour, their inter-linkage make it difficult to address bullying behaviour without encompassing most of the layers of influence. De Wet (2020), is of the view that, the rarity of qualitative inquiries on TWB results in a one-dimensional understanding of the phenomenon. Consequently, employing a qualitative approach, and located within the interpretivist paradigm, the paper presents the literature review.

Literature Review

Executing the literature review was useful in that the author acquired an array of theories and empirical studies bearing on TWB. Conducting a review of literature, the author was able to demonstrate knowledge in information-seeking, which concerns searching for and identifying only relevant sources which are applicable to the study; and critical assessment, which involves analysing, summarising, and integrating the sources so as to identify reliable, valid, and credible material, as suggested by Howard (2014).

Teachers in South African public schools experience remarkable levels of bullying across post levels, school size and diverse settings (Solomon, 2021; Jacobs & De Wet, 2015), that is considered an extreme type of social stressor at work (Tolentino, 2016). This is in addition to school-based violence that has become widespread resulting in far too many teachers experiencing their workplace as unsafe. The rampant violence has rendered TWB a lesser-known phenomenon despite it being an equally debilitating problem (Scheeler et al., 2022). Hence, the present qualitative paper set out to give adequate attention to TWB by empirically exploring its contributory factors since less attention has been devoted to this type of bullying let alone its triggers. Public schools are not immune from this type of bullying and the contributory factors may vary depending on the culture and the relationship dynamics across the teaching ranks. As a result, in examining literature, the contributing factors cannot be considered separately, but multifaceted factors need to be considered (Cech et al., 2018), given the various layers of influence (microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystems) adopted by the present paper.

Expounding on the international front, two separate studies shed light on TWB in the Cech Republic. The first study by Čech, Cakirpaloglu and Kvintova, (2017) reported that 43.3% of teachers were subjected to bossing for a period exceeding a year. The subsequent study (Čech, Kvintova, & Cakirpaloglu, 2018) established that about thirteen teachers in the elementary schools had been exposed to regular bullying by their colleagues or senior executives for at least 6 months. Feeling of threat and competition were among the major factors. After deploying a sample of 517 Kaunas (Lithuania) teachers from thirteen secondary schools, findings from (Bernotaite & Malinauskiene, 2017) study revealed workplace bullying was prevalent among the Kaunas teachers, 8.3 % occasional and 2.9 % severe, with low social support at work identified as the main factor. Similarly, from the United States, unsatisfactory administrative support was also established as the most significant factor contributing to workplace dissatisfaction (Scheeler, et al, 2022), after surveying 173 general and special education teachers to determine the extent that teachers report workplace bullying by other teachers and administrators. Additionally, Ariza- Montes et al. (2016) study described workplace bullying prevalence rate of 4.4 % among education employees. The low frequencies may be misleading given that TWB tends to remain hidden and as by its very nature it is subtle and difficult to identify as argued by (Mahome, 2021; De Wet, 2011).

Furthermore, Sorrell (2015) examined the lived experiences of elementary school teachers facing workplace bullying within the public school system settings from various States in America. Results revealed that all the six participants from the study experienced bullying after taking medical leave due to

pre-existing health issues. The participants felt that nepotism and favouritism served as environmental factors contributing to workplace bullying. Still, new research from Dublin Anti-Bullying Centre has found that over one-third of teachers and senior management have been targets of bullying from time to time by other teachers and staff members, with exclusion and being ignored the most common experiences, (Sargioti, Kuldass & Foody, 2023). Though subtle and covert in nature, the author posits that TWB has far-reaching consequences for the school as an organisation, for the teachers, and for the culture of teaching and learning, thus warranting an investigation.

Probing deeper on the local front, only a few studies attempted to delve into the phenomenon, more precisely the factors that contribute towards TWB perpetrated by colleagues on the same level, and School Management Teams (SMTs). For example, De Wet (2011) only dealt with bullying of teachers from the same level and Binduko (2013) examined bullying of teachers, by the SMT. This is despite literature revealing that teachers may be bullied on one or more levels, which may include horizontal bullying such as colleague-on-colleague bullying, and vertical bullying such as principal-on-teacher and/or a member of a school management team-on-teacher bullying, among others (Jacobs & De Wet, 2018; Bradshaw, 2015; Crawshaw, 2009). As far as the author could ascertain, Mahome's (2021) study incorporated all the levels when investigating the perpetrators of staff victimisation within the teaching ranks in one of Gauteng provincial district. Again, De Wet's (2014) study considered all the post levels when she investigated teachers' understanding of workplace bullying involving fifty-nine participants furthering their educations at the University of Free State, South Africa. It is worth noting that both studies did not address the factors that contribute towards TWB. Other factors contributing towards TWB are elucidated below.

Power and the Rank of the Perpetrators

The bullying of teachers by their colleagues and superiors is a reality in South Africa despite the country's liberal constitution entrenching human rights (Rutherford, 2009). Mazzarella (2018) found that, in spite of the focus on learner bullying in schools, little attention is paid to bullying among school adults and that there were few, if any persons to whom the target could safely speak; and the power of the bullies was a significant factor. Regardless of how this power is exercised, bosses and others who inflict psychological abuse on their co-workers constitute one of the most common and serious problems facing employees in today's workplace (Kleinheksel & Geisel, 2019: 92; Sinha & Yadav, 2017). The school as a workplace for teachers is also not insusceptible from this colleague-on-colleague bullying. The varying ranks make TWB to prevail where teachers are not working as unit, thus, a happy school can only be realised if all members of staff work together towards that common goal (Fahie, 2014).

Reporting on the experiences of adult-to-adult bullying in New Jersey's public high schools in the United States of America, Mazzarella (2018) noted that most bullies used their rank and position to undermine individuals who had demonstrated work success by countering their opinions, ignoring their efforts, challenging their responsibilities, and frequently writing negative observation and evaluation reports which were in contrast to highly positive earlier reports. Such findings resonate with Orange's (2018) study where supervisors displayed jealousy by not appreciating the successes of the teacher targets. The individuals occupying high ranking positions are the principal and the deputy, while teachers at the lowest level across the rankings do not hold any position and are at the bottom of the hierarchy and are mostly at the receiving end of TWB. This is supported by (Bernstein & Batchelor, 2022) study where new teachers felt that the perpetrators who targeted them were more often senior teachers, and this is further reinforced by (Fahie & Devine (2014; Vveinhardt, Zukauskas & Rivera, 2014) who identified large employer-employee status gaps as contributory factors. Bringing to the assertion that, the rank of the perpetrator is one of the personal factors that influence how individuals behave and ultimately contribute to TWB, as identified by the microsystem. In the view of Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012), it is in such organisations where leaders disregard or minimise the mistreatment of workers, often leading to the

intensification of TWB. Given the framework adopted by the present paper, it is at the meso-level where those in power and long serving make bullying flourish by downplaying it as the problem. Consequently, when teacher-supervisor relationship is not conducive bullying may flourish further and the teacher would bear the brunt given the power gaps that characterises the nature of the relationship.

Work Overload

Reporting on their mixed methods study, De Wet and Jacobs (2013) revealed that South African teachers are working in toxic environments characterised by disgruntled, overworked, and stressed teachers. This is despite the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM,2016) policy document clearly outlining the workload of each and every teacher, from the lowest to the apex position. Literature further exposed that the work overload factor is not peculiar to the South African shores, but a worldwide factor contributing to TWB.

The online survey conducted by Bently, Catley, Forsyth and Tappin (2014) involving 86 New Zealand organisations found that rates of workplace bullying in New Zealand were notably higher among employees working in education, health, public transport, and postal services. Skogstad, Torsheim, and Einarsen (2011) identified factors such as time pressure, work overload and communication are key factors in the risk of violence, suggesting that poorly organised workplaces may be more prone to experiencing psychosocial problems such as violence and bullying. Work overload was also a finding in the qualitative study by Sasson and Somech (2014) on 29 subject-related departments in schools in northern Israel. The study identified perceptions of injustice and a sense of work overload as major factors contributing to TWB. A south African study by De Wet's (2014), further corroborated the findings, her results indicated that teachers complained about work overload, as well as harsh demands (De Wet, 2014).

The factor of work overload, amongst others was later corroborated by Fahie and Devine (2014) and Vveinhardt, Zukauskas and Rivera (2014). The studies found that work overload, and a tension-laden organisational climate, contribute to the bullying of workers by their employers. Using telephonic semi-structured interviews on a sample of voluntary bullied teachers, De Vos and Kirsten (2015) found that principals also purportedly made prejudiced alterations to a victim's workload, initiating a harsher workload or one assigning meagre duty to targeted teachers. The provision of workload to teachers in South African public schools it is a function designated to the departmental heads, however, in most instances their (DHs) decision is not final until the principal approves. Therefore, the author argues that the involvement of principals who are in most cases not having the subjects knowledge precipitate disagreements and tension in various departments where departmental heads are bullied to alter and infuse changes imposed by the principal.

The principals are required to be impartial and treat all staff members as equals. The author of the present paper holds the view that the unfairness emanates from the power that principals possess and use to settle scores against teacher targets where the latter are also assigned subjects that they are not qualified to teach. However, Jacobs and Teise, (2019) presented a different view and argue that autocratic management style pressure on principals seems to force them to revert to autocratic management styles upon their subordinates. Suggesting that at the exosystem, TWB may spill over to the workplace from various avenues connected to the schools, such as the district and provincial offices, as elements that are external to the individual's immediate environment.

Job Competition

In a cross-sectional study conducted by Martinez, McMahon, Espelage, Anderman, Reddy, and Sanchez (2015) in the United States, it was found that colleague-generated bullying may be goal-oriented (e.g., job competition), and individuals who are less likely to respond behaviourally may become

susceptible targets that can give colleague perpetrators an advantage. This is not surprising because at microsystem the personal traits of targets and perpetrators determine the existence of TWB. More above that, (Pahad & Graham, 2012; Sasson & Somech, 2015) studies, confirmed that teachers often fight to gain positions of power or promotions by sabotaging one another, destroying each other's reputations, and making them really unpopular. Such evidence is supportive of the view that teachers on the same level, (horizontal) from the same school do bully and sabotage one another (i.e., bad-mouthing each other) to gain positions. These findings are corroborated by the basic education Ministerial Task Team (MTT) (2016) report, which also found teachers fighting for promotional vacancies across some of the South African provinces. In a view of (Sasson & Somech, 2015), they (teachers) vilify and belittle each other especially when there is a promotional vacancy. At the centre of these infightings are learners whom their education is compromised. Promotion should be regarded as an opportunity for growth for deserving individuals, it should not be a contestation for power. Hence The author further argues that TWB is embedded in school politics and used as a mechanism for upward mobility.

Literature further revealed that the bullying may escalate further when a stranger or outsider is appointed, and Fahie (2014), is in accord and contended that a dominant discourse may be displayed through the interconnection of a group which is threatened by the appointment of an outcast to the school. Further affirming that when the rewards are high, and a certain group is disgruntled TWB may be discharged in a 'besieging' format. A concept coined by Mahome (2021) as "mass victimisation and mistreatment of an individual with the intention of intimidating and disempowering the targeted individual". New appointees should be assisted during the transition period instead of being embroiled into territorial battles of job competition.

Conversely, Lind, Glaso, Pallesent and Einarsen (2009), maintained that colleagues may target those who perform well at work so that they stop over performing. However, (Tepper, Moss, and Duffy (2011) presented a different view and found that low-performing workers are more at risk for bullying from their superiors. The contrasting views clearly indicate that TWB has no boundaries, and it may be regarded as a display of power to the targeted teachers irrespective of their performance levels. Thus, the present paper advocates for its prevention, and further purport that TWB affect the teaching and learning culture negatively, where good and hardworking teachers are demoralised and discouraged to excel, by first, their colleagues and supervisors.

Communication Breach

Khunou (2006) purported that conversation helps to create a context within which ideas can be shared to improve teaching and learning practices in the school. Therefore, communication plays a meaningful role not only in improving the schools' achievement, but also in shaping a healthy professional relationship of the SMT and the teachers. However, communication may be used as a tool by some leaders to practise unfair means of selectively disseminating information to the colleagues, resulting in communication breach. In Cemaloglu (2007) view, communication breach can lead to bullying amongst teachers, fond of incompetent and unprincipled managers abusing formal, bureaucratic structures to entrench TWB. Such an environment is not conducive for learning and teaching, and it is for this reason the author maintains that; the teachers within their workplace share space with young children in the name of learners, thus it becomes meaningfully paramount to identify the sources of TWB amongst the teaching staff, so that they are curtailed before bullying is witnessed by the learners and negatively affect the already tainted image of the teaching profession. Klein and Bentolila (2018) suggested that when internal communication is effective and positive interaction is evident amongst all parties, the organisation remains healthy, and employees are protected from external pressures that include TWB. The following segment pay attention to the preventive measures.

Prevention of Teacher Workplace Bullying

At the micro-system layer, teachers' behaviour plays a critical role in preventing violence from any source within the school community, in particular TWB. Sharing this view is Netshitangani (2014) who suggested that the manner in which teachers conduct themselves in and outside the school premises can encourage violence in schools or the positive effects of violence reduction measures employed in schools. Suggesting preventive measures, McMahon, et al. (2017) recommended the exploration of the division between the principals and teachers and their perspectives regarding the issues in their relationships. They suggested that support and policies would facilitate shared understanding and resolution of issues.

Consequently, the SACE Code of Professional Ethics expects and advocates for teachers to behave in a professional manner that seek to uphold the profession, (SACE, 2000). It is for this reason that Kollapen (2006) and Fahie (2014) urged the DBE to provide reporting mechanisms for teachers who feel they are at risk of violence from learners, other school staff or individuals from outside schools, because, in the majority of cases, there was no formal mechanism for recording and reporting cases, or for feeding data back to the districts and provincial authorities (Burton, 2008).

In regard to the prevention of TWB, Le Roux, Rycroft and Orleyn (2010) reasoned that existing legal remedies to deal with workplace bullying, for instance, the Employment Equity Act (55 of 1998), the Labour Relations Act (66 of 1995), and the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (130 of 1993) do not protect employees from bullying. This could be one of the reasons why teachers are not reporting bullying. Conversely Fox and Stallworth (2010) proposed that the following approaches may lead to the prevention of bullying of teachers by their colleagues: individual solutions (e.g., therapy, turnover); organisational solutions (e.g., internal policies and programmes, alternative dispute solutions); and union intervention and public policy solutions (e.g., legislation prohibiting violence and harassment). However, literature indicates that in South Africa, there is no law dealing with workplace bullying in particular nor is there any clarity on the continuum of which the matter is placed (Smit, 2014). Coinciding with Smit's view, Le Roux et al (2010) maintained that South African labour legislation lacks an explicit definition of workplace bullying. This has resulted in the situation where South Africa does not have a code of good practice dealing with bullying as such as can be found in England (Smit, 2014).

The above narrations highlight the need for a clear policy that can be used to address the challenge of TWB. Thus, (Martinez, McMahon, Espelage & Anderman, 2015) suggested comprehensive policies that promote a positive school climate and address different forms of violence across multiple levels are needed. They emphasised that these policies should be clear and communicated to all members of the school (e.g., learners, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators). It is important for any policy or regulation that is suggested to be clearly worded. Vagueness might create confusion during the implementation phase; in addition, the author suggests that any policy that speaks to TWB should be context-related, due to the larger environmental systems within the mesosystem, with which the teacher interacts, directly or indirectly. As a consequence, this study pushes towards the creation and sustenance of a positive work culture where people are treated with respect by management and co-workers, where good work is recognised, and where conflict is dealt with as it arises, as accentuated by Dillon (2012).

The exceeding depositions highlight the attempts that have been made locally and abroad to expose TWB and further exhibit the relevance and the significance of the present paper. There is a need to explore the phenomenon within the South African public schools setting so that institutions of learning become safer spaces for everyone. Therefore, the present paper aimed to explore the factors contributing toward TWB to create a greater understanding of the phenomenon and come up with preventive measures. Most of the South African public schools are embedded in communities where violence has become a daily occurrence and bullying can range from extremes such as violence, and manifest into

TWB and in the view of (Tolentino, 2016) that negatively affect all facets of the teachers' lives, their physical, psychological, and social health. It is therefore essential that teachers are protected from all forms of bullying because they are multi-targeted persons (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; Martinez et al. (2015). The research strategy to explore the factors contributing towards TWB is outlined in the following segment.

Materials and Methods

Using primary data collected by the author, this paper is positioned within an interpretivist paradigm (which is also known as the humanistic, constructivist, or naturalistic paradigm). It is the lens through which the author viewed and analysed the inquiry, as supported by Jacobs (2012) who observed that stating a research paradigm in any publication allows the reader to read and understand the work through the lens that is provided. Thus, deploying interpretivist paradigm, the author engrossed themselves in the participants' real world in order to understand their varying realities and experiences pertaining to the phenomenon under study.

The present paper used the qualitative approach to explore the factors contributing towards TWB. One of the reasons behind the choice of the qualitative approach is that it allows for the inductive interpretation of data. Given the interpretive nature of the study, the discussion focused on the personal viewpoints of the teachers, whose assessment of the factors contributing to bullying at work was based on their subjective perception of interpersonal relationships in school and not on an objective analysis of the situation, as purported by Klein and Bentolila (2018). Therefore, a case study design comprising nine public schools from District No. 10 (D10) was adopted to investigate TWB. The author decided to use a case study, since, according to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delport (2011), qualitative researchers are primarily interested in the meaning subjects give to their life experiences by immersing themselves in the activities of a single person or small number of people.

Population and Sampling

The target population of this study consisted of all principals, deputy principals, departmental heads and Post Level 1 teachers from all ordinary, public primary and secondary schools within the Johannesburg North District. Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013) caution that; It is essential to describe target population accurately, and in attaining that, the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) 2018 statistics revealed that the JN district comprises 94 ordinary public schools, 65 being primary and 29 secondary. The total number of officially appointed teachers is 3 461. That translates to, 94 principals, 141 deputy principals, 470 departmental heads and 2756 Post Level 1 teachers. Significantly, the population was identified before selecting the sample.

The sampling techniques that are mostly used when conducting qualitative research, namely, convenient, and purposive sampling were adopted. Subsequently, the study's sample consisted of 16 participants, (eight females and eight males), made up of three school principals, one deputy principal, two departmental heads, nine PL1 teachers and a lone clinical psychologist. The nine schools and the sampled 16 participants in this study are not a representative of a larger population since the aim of this qualitative study was not to generalise the findings but intended to inductively explore the factors contributing to TWB from the interpretations and the lived experiences of the participants.

Table: 1.1 Biographical data of the sample of the study

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
GENDER			HIGHEST ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION		
Women	7	47%	Diploma (e.g., Teaching Diploma)	2	13%
Men	8	53%	Degree (e.g., B.A. or B.A. Honours, Masters)	13	87%
AGE			YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE (TEACHERS)		
30-39	5	33%	5-9 years	6	40%
40-49	3	20%	10-14 years	1	7%
50+	7	47%	15+	8	53%
RACE			POST LEVEL OF PARTICIPANTS		
Africans	11	73%	Post level-1 Teachers	9	60%
Whites	4	27%	Departmental Heads	2	13%
			Deputy Principal	1	7%
			Principals	3	20%
SCHOOL LOCATION			SCHOOL TYPE		
Township	6	67%	Primary (Grade 1-7)	6	67%
Urban	2	22%	Secondary (Grade 8-12)	3	33%
Farm	1	11%	PRACTICE EXPERIENCE (CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST)		
			0-9 years	1	

Data Collection

After identifying the sample, the researcher commenced the data collection with primary aim of responding to the research questions. As stated earlier, the nature of the study is qualitative, and with this approach, interviews were used as a method of data collection. Sharing the same view, Greeff (2013) stated that interviewing is the predominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research. Data were collected from a total of 16 participants through separable face-to-face interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the author. The interviews were conducted at various locations chosen by the participants and ranged from 45 to 65 minutes depending on the delivery of each participant. Considering the sensitivity of the topic, the author established a rapport of reciprocal confidence and deference by asking unbiased questions that made participants feel at ease and able to share their experiences in relation to TWB, whether as victims or perpetrators.

Ethical Considerations

Research ethics is fundamental to the research process, with many variables involved. Such variables may include seeking permission to research participants and/or institutions and upholding the integrity of the research process (Okeke, Omodan & Dube, 2022). In upholding the research process, the first step was to seek consent from the gatekeepers. Subsequently, ethical clearance was obtained from the university's ethic committee and official permission to conduct the research was requested and also obtained from the Gauteng Department of Basic Education. The other predominant aspects of research

ethics that were followed included, informed consent, freedom of participation and protection of identities. After selecting participants informed consent was obtained by using a conventional form that contains information such as the purpose of the study and the benefit for the participants among other things (Nijhawan et al., 2013). Through the freedom of participation, the participants were further informed of their right to or not to participate in the research study. A valid consideration was taken to protect the identities of participants, by not identifying their schools and names.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed through a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) process, by means of an inductive reasoning. Qualitative content analysis is a valuable alternative to more traditional quantitative content analysis, when a researcher is working in an interpretive paradigm (Patton, 2002). As a result, recorded data were transmuted into written text and read to obtain the sense of the whole on the factors contributing to TWB. Data were clustered together into large piece and then allocated them to larger categories of connected meanings such as ‘constantly belittled’ and ‘always disrespectful’. Subsequently thorough careful preparation data were structured into codes which were inductively merged and categorised. In doing so, similar categories were collapsed into one, and sufficiently different from each other remained as stand alone. QCA is usually supported by a computer program that provide a measure of convenience and efficiency and increasing the overall level of organisation of a qualitative project (Bassett, 2004). Based on that, throughout this process, ATLAS qualitative data analysis software was used in the analysis. As a result, comprehensive themes were generated and applied to all the text, as heightened by Bezuidenhout and Cronje (2014).

Results and Discussion

The study explored the factors contributing towards TWB, and largely qualitative collected data revealed that greatest number of the participants confirmed various factors triggering bullying across the teaching ranks. The bullying is unleashed by all the members of the teaching staff, depending on the contraposition of each individual teacher. As a result of the QCA process, the factors brought forward generated twofold comprehensive themes, to be precise: i) Teachers’ thoughts on predictors of TWB across the teaching ranks; and ii) The identified measures to prevent TWB across the teaching ranks. They are discussed alongside the sub-themes that arose since TWB is a multi-layered phenomenon. The segment mirrors participants’ views and are discussed, interpreted, and analysed in congruence with the adopted framework of the study, that is; Johnson’s (2011) ecological model of workplace bullying. As stated at the outset, the discussion depicts the three layers of the model, that include aligning the respective themes and sub-themes to the three factors adopted by the present paper, which are, the personal factors (micro), the environmental factors (meso), and the organisational factors (exo). To sequence the discussion, during the analysis, the codes of the participants (P1-P16) as well as their rank, (T=Teacher, DH=Departmental Head, DP=Deputy Principal=P, and CP for Clinical Psychologist) are used when verbatim excerpts are presented since it is uncomplicated and clear for the reader to track.

Table 1.2 provides the codes for each participant – these codes are used in the analysis of the data collected.

Table 1.2: Codes allocated to the sample of the present paper.

Code	Gender	Age	Qualifications	Experience	Post-Level	School Type	School Code
P1-Teacher	Male	32	B.Ed. Degree	5 years	1	Primary	A
P2-Teacher	Male	30	B.Ed. Degree	5 years	1	Primary	A
P3-Teacher	Male	33	B.Ed. Degree	7 years	1	Primary	B
P4 Teacher	Male	32	B.Ed. Degree	5 years	1	Primary	C
P5-Teacher	Female	45	B.Ed. Degree	9 years	1	Primary	D
P6-Teacher	Male	35	B.Ed. Hons	6 years	1	Secondary	I
P7-Teacher	Female	53	Diploma	9 years	1	Secondary	F
P8-Teacher	Male	62	B.Ed. Hons	33 years	1	Primary	G
P9-Teacher	Female	47	Diploma	10 years	1	Primary	D
P10-D. Head	Male	62	B.A Degree	33 years	2	Primary	D
P11-D. Head	Male	52	B.Ed. Degree	21 years	2	Secondary	F
P12-Deputy P	Female	59	B.A Degree	21 years	3	secondary	E
P13-Principal	Female	46	B.Ed. Degree	14 years	4	secondary	F
P14-Principal	Female	55	B.Ed. Hons	22 years	4	Primary	H
P15-Principal	Female	54	MEd Degree	21 years	4	Primary	D
P16	Female	38	(MSc Clinical Psychology)	8 years	Grade2 (level 11)		

Theme 1: Teachers' Thoughts on Predictors of TWB across the teaching ranks

This theme highlights various factors contributing to TWB.

Sub-theme: 1.1 Lack of Mutual Respect (Environmental Factor)

Collected data revealed that teachers' interactions are often characterised by disrespect and lack of good manners resulting in disharmony. When probed about what is creating tension amongst teachers, (P12, DP) attributed the strain to the newly appointed teachers: *"they don't want to go through the ranks ... they just want to be in power without acquiring proper growth and this normally lead to tension amongst colleagues. They just want to be promoted no matter what."* The view that is supported by (P11, DH) who conceded that... *"young teachers don't want to accept authority; they seem to challenge everything. They walk in and they want to be in charge. You sometimes have to remind them in a nice subtle way what they still have to learn. Sadly, they are power hungry and always disrespectful, they don't understand respect."* P7 agreed and stated that... *"they don't have respect to each other, whatever each one thinks must be heard."* In similar vein to the narrative of these teachers' experiences, (P13, P) described how she was constantly belittled. *"One male teacher once told me that my style of leadership is too rural, you know according to me he was undermining and bullying me. This male teacher went to an extent that in staff meetings he wanted people to rally behind him...when I raised issues as the head of the institution, he would disrespectfully interrupt me."* (P8, T) gave an account of a lady teacher who did not respect departmental heads and other teachers. He disclosed the following: *"if something happens to her, she doesn't follow protocol; she just goes straight to the office to lay whatever complaint ... because she feels that by being in love with the principal or deputy, she is just operating at that level."* ... *"I have seen that happening,"* he stressed. These above narrations confirm previous findings by various scholars (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Parzefall & Salin, 2010), that a disrespectful manner is the predominant predictor of workplace bullying.

Teachers are disrespecting one another across the teaching ranks. The disrespect is revealed in their interactions since the school is a place of social interactions. It is where the co-workers and

supervisors of the bully and target (mesosystem) interact, and as such squabbles and tensions will forever be present. People differ in the way that they view themselves and others, connect in relationships, and cope with harsh conditions, because of personality traits that are part of regular language, teachers may quarrel.

a) Varying Personalities Traits (Personal Factor)

Given the hierarchal nature of the teaching profession, teachers hold different responsibilities and positions that compel them to interact at various levels, and in the process, misunderstandings and clash of personalities may occur. (P5, T) attested that *“there was an incident at the school whereby a temporary teacher was shouting at another teacher,”* and in her view she thought it was a clash of personalities: it was not really bullying. In alignment with the views of (P5, T), (P13, P) alluded to inadequate training: *“we are not trained on how to treat each other at the school level.”* When (P16, CP) was asked what caused bullying amongst teachers, she indicated that had observed and also dealt with in therapy with teachers were mostly complaints about personalities at work. Expressing her observation, (P16, CP) divulged the following: *“I think personalities at work do contribute so much that whenever they work together in the same space, you find that there are those individuals who come out very strong and when they talk, you find that they are reckless with the words they use, and it ends up in conflict amongst teachers. Others might perceive that as being bullied by their colleagues.”*

The view was supported by (P11, DH) who affirmed that... *“the principal is not deliberately bullying teachers, [but] if you say something [like] ‘the principal likes giving instructions’, sometimes you get other teachers off guard.”* Such behaviours were substantiated by Coetzee (2017) where she accentuated that desire for control is a particular common personality traits and characteristics found in workplace bullying and school violence. Part of the challenge with teachers is that they end up in duplicate relationships whereby they are both colleagues and friends, and they end up sharing personal and work-related issues within that space of work. In her assessment, (P16, CP) validated that, *“what transpires over time is that when now they have to deal with work-related issues, they are being unable to separate being professionals and being friends at the same time and it results in issues of trust and confidentiality and they end up in a lot of conflicts which again interferes with their work, and in that process you find that now they are starting to fight, they are starting to gossip and others would also regard it as another form of being bullied at the workplace.”* Lending support to this, De Vos and Kirsten (2015) indicated that teacher-colleagues often engaged in malicious gossip and disclosed victims’ personal information, shared in confidence, to the other colleagues and or principals. The study can thus confirm that an encounter of personalities can lead to misinterpretations that manifest TWB. The other contributory factor that was prominent in most of the nine researched schools was the competition for promotional teaching posts.

Sub-theme: 1.2 Competition for Promotional Posts (Environmental Factor)

The majority of the participants fortified TWB based on competition for promotional posts. Confirming the strain around promotional posts, (P4, T) revealed that *“there are usually tensions around individuals and whoever get promoted to a post that is advertised.”* The interviewed (P11, DH) acceded to TWB due to promotional posts, he authenticated his observations *“is because of people being selfish. You know when the post is advertised, it does not have a name and people start attaching names to it like; ‘I want to be there’ not having a room that says others want to be there and they can even be in better positions. Once you go with that mind...once you do not get that position, you become negative.”*

In demonstrating negativity, (P5, T) reported that *“there was a teacher ... before she resigned, she was very angry with everything at the school ... she was angry about change of leadership ... a new principal, departmental heads and everything ... sadly she was not chosen to be one of the leaders...then she resigned.”* Corroborating what this teacher said, (P12, DP) divulged that *“since January, one*

aggrrieved teacher has been coming to school to simply bask in the sun because he never got the departmental head promotional post. Today he will complain about head-ache, tomorrow about stomach-ache.” Concurring with the other participants, (P14, P) disclosed the following: “there was a person who had applied for the same post, and he did not get it and became negative by slowing down his work rate, being passive, you know, you could see that you are dealing with a bitter group.” Presenting another viewpoint, (P4, T) mentioned that “when teachers have different qualifications but earn the same salary, this is a factor contributing to TWB”. Substantiating his own viewpoint, he noted that “we can’t all be principals – that is why you find people fighting for positions. The better qualifications you have must put more weight on your incentive, even if you are a PL1 teacher,” he concluded. Tensions that emerge as a result of competition for promotion are not surprising given that promotion goes with financial gains where the defeated candidates become desponded and dejected.

The study can confirm that the fight for promotional posts has even escalated to teachers’ trade unions, for instance, (P3, T) said that “when you look at instances of branch level, you find that teachers are fighting for promotional posts within the branch, they want to control a particular school” ...some branch leaders because they feel they are powerful they instigate bullying amongst colleagues.” Expressing his concerns and views, he further said teachers fight because of ambition and greed which was accompanied by wanting power. Teachers want to be glorified as powerful leaders within a teachers’ trade union branch. Sharing similar experiences, (P14, P) indicated that “teachers fight for promotional posts which they know they can’t even sustain...I don’t know ... it’s really wrong, it tarnishes the name of the union.” These findings are consistent with those of Pahad and Graham (2012) and MTT (2016) report. It can be concluded that promotion is linked and associated with power, regrettably in the process of assuming promotion eligible competitors are targeted, in some instances using union affiliation as a vehicle for the upward mobility. The findings further revealed that the anger and animosity surges when an outsider is appointed.

b) Appointment of an Outsider

(P14, P) revealed that “the deputy principal asked for a meeting with me, arguing that they are not happy about the new appointee we acquired from outside. The deputy was attacking me for appointment made forgetting that the vacant post is advertised to anybody whether from within or not.” The reaction of the aggrrieved deputy principal is not astonishing since it coincides with the previous enquiry by Fahie (2014). In one of the schools under study the appointment of an outsider led to a nasty scene, where a teacher drew a gun against the principal for placing him in an acting departmental head position while ultimately someone known as the principal’s friend was eventually awarded the post.

Explaining what transpired, (P7, T) gave the following details... “the aggrrieved teacher pulled out a gun against the principal. Fortunately, no blood was spilled.” Similarly, such responses were recorded in the MTT (2016) report, which found teachers fighting for promotional posts. This also concurs well with Sasson and Somech (2015) who posited that principals, who are in a position of power, control allocations, dismissals, promotions, and school tasks. However, it has to be highlighted that promotions are not finalised by the principal and the school governing body, they only recommend a suitable candidate, and the final appointments are made at the provincial level. Though principals usually have influence on who is appointed, there is no justification for bullying and attacking them because there is a legal recourse when one is aggrrieved. This substantiate previous findings in literature that all the teaching ranks are susceptible to TWB.

c) Temporary and New Appointees

Readers are reminded that newly appointed teachers were not interviewed for this present paper. Only those with a minimum of five years’ teaching experience were considered. However, the evidence of how the teachers were treated when they entered the teaching profession for the first time remains

significant based on the interpretive paradigm underpinning the paper. Furthermore, the interpretive methodology is directed at understanding a phenomenon from an individual perspective and its historical and cultural contexts, as accentuated by Creswell (2009). Evidence of being bullied as a consequence of being a new appointee emerged. (P2, T) explained that principals want you to feel their presence and the power given to them by the DBE. He revealed the following: *“So, they mistreat you because you are a newly appointed teacher. So, either you are with them or against them. When I raise a point and say this is not the correct implication, by so doing, I become a victim.”* The author found many studies reinforcing these findings, where the bullying was meted out to the SGB appointees and temporary teachers (De Wet, 2010a; De Wet, 2010b: 108; Salin, 2003). Weighing in on the bullying of newly appointed teachers, (P6, T) reported that TWB is a very serious problem in his school and teachers are bullied in many ways. He indicated the following: *“for example, a teacher is recently appointed, and her contract has to be renewed or extended and it is not. If you dig deep just to find out what could be the problem ... within corridors you find out that a bribe was needed for the contract extension.”* These findings signal the vulnerability of temporary and newly appointed teachers in comparison to the long serving staff members, and present TWB as a territorial phenomenon. Amassed data further revealed that personal and professional jealousy contribute towards TWB.

Sub-theme: 1.3 Personal and Professional Jealousy (Personal Factor)

Expressing his concern, (P8, T) noted that professional jealousy plays a role in TWB. Giving an example, the participant indicated that *“I am more qualified than the principal himself, but I know because of that professional jealousy and also based on the fact that you are more knowledgeable than them, more experienced, they make sure that you don’t get promotion, they are threatened by your qualifications.”* Sharing the same view is (P11, DH) who added that, ... *“This type of jealousy exists... You hear teachers saying...I cannot be led by someone younger than me... some of the teachers will even go to the extent of resigning. If you don’t take things positive you will be angry at all times,”* he remarked. Further analysis showed that teachers would do anything to challenge your professional status and backing P11, is (P13, P) from the same school who maintained that *“they make sure that they pull you down...because they cannot be led by a woman, especially by then they thought I was younger than them “they were not taking instructions...it was so difficult for them to adhere.”* This supports the claim by Orange (2018) that age and gender dynamics may render victims susceptible to TWB. These findings also tie in well with a previous review by Kiriakidis (2011) who posited that with bullying there is typically an imbalance of power; physically, (the victim may be smaller or weak); numerically (the number of bullies may be many); or psychologically (the victim may be less tough than the bully).

Conversely, (P7, T) relayed her experiences on professional jealousy, affirming that *“it is there. You cannot run away from it...you can see with your eyes that these people dislike you simply because of the promotion. I am a PLI teacher but acting as a departmental head. It was not possible for them to accept that I am now acting. These are my fellow PLI teachers that are unhappy about what I may call temporary promotion.”* Certain commonalities prevail between the current study and previous literature with regard to how qualifying teachers are overlooked for promotion due to professional jealousy Sasson and Somech (2015). (P1, T) was asked on his views based on Henning’s (2004) emphasis that the interpretive paradigm seeks to produce a descriptive analysis that emphasises deep, interpretive understanding of social phenomenon. Explaining, (P1) conceded that *“there is too much gossip around here ... a lot of negative things were said about me after I registered for my B.Ed. Honours Degree ... they were saying things like; ‘I think I am a better person’; you know such things ... ‘what will that qualification assist you with, you will remain a PLI teacher until you die.’”* Weighing in on the same aspect, (P6, T) related his experiences and disclosed that *“we are not given the vacancy list for promotional posts on time. They will give it just before the closing date ... meaning we are victimised in a way ... so that you should not get enough time to go through the advertised posts, that is jealousy at its worst”* he concluded.

Teachers having superior qualifications and those who have assumed managerial positions seem to be the worst affected by jealousy meted out by their colleagues. It is used to stall the careers of the teacher targets. Still at the microlevel, and given the above narrations, the author purports that jealousy remains a strong contributing factor towards TWB, were the young and females are seen as easy targets. Findings showed that personal and professional jealousy often leads to favouritism.

Sub-theme: 1.4 Favouritism and Selective Treatment (Environmental Factor)

One of the factors contributing to bullying established by (Sargioti, Kuldass & Foody, 2023) study was favouritism of selected teachers, resonating with the outcomes of the present paper. When the participants were asked about the subject, majority commented on how the teachers are selectively treated by the supervisors. (P4, T) revealed the following: *“another female teacher administered corporal punishment on a learner, and the principal took the matter straight to the district, and another teacher (because she is a departmental head and a union representative) punished the learner, and the parent of the learner and the teacher were taken to the principal’s office and the matter was resolved.”* Similar views were also echoed by P8, confirming previous findings by Binduko (2013) where teachers raised major issues that included the selective treatment of some teachers at the expense of others.

Weighing in on how the teachers are selectively treated by the supervisors, (P1, T) *“there is a huge favouritism in our school... let me talk in terms of Quality Management Systems (QMS), certain individuals receive high appraisal scores, whereby everyone knows that this person does not deserve such points.”* Playing favourites, was the vice also displayed by some members of the SMT. (P14, P) complained about the teacher who was protected by some departmental heads who would cover for him when he did not do his work. She conveyed the complaint similar to P1. *“Even if he was not performing well...he received high score in QMS. When I raised it, it was like I am against him,”* she remarked. The findings are consistent with Mafora (2013) who found that teachers benefit unfairly if they belong to the principals’ union, ethnic group, friendship circle, or show blind loyalty. The rest of the teachers are usually belittled, humiliated, or censored.

The study also found favouritism at the district level, signalling how the interconnected layers of the adopted model are influencing each other, even without direct contact. (P14, P) indicated that *“there is also favouritism from the district, it depends on who you know at that level and then you will get assistance.”* When probed to elaborate further, she divulged the following: *“because you are reporting to the Institutional Development Support Official (IDSO) and the IDSO reports to the (CM) Circuit Manager, and they are not in good terms...they drag you in.”* In explaining how they dealt with favouritism, P8 highlighted the following: *“there is favouritism but to a minimal level because the union is very active here, and the union become very active if the union representative for instance is not one of the SMT,”*

It can be concluded that favouritism practised by some principals may lead to division amongst colleagues making the ground fertile for TWB. The position ties in with the author’s assertion that; playing favourites is not good for any organisation, and it is therefore, discouraged because it may manifest in cliques, cabals, and power blocs, either belonging to the principal or deputy principal. Favouritism is acceptable, until it is misused, abused, and used as weapon to vindicate others within organisations (Monyepao, 2017). The principals are required to be impartial and treat all staff members as equals. Furthermore, the analysis confirmed that, when employees are unionised or have good representation, some of the workplace ills, such as bullying in its various forms may be minimised.

Sub-theme: 1.5 Excessive Work Overload (Organisational Factor)

Previous research identified a sense of excessive work overload as one of the major factors contributing towards TWB. Equally, the present paper established that teachers are carrying excessive

work overloads and are unable to cope with the work demand. Supporting this position was P5 who complained about excessive work overload: *“teachers are absolutely overloaded; especially the administrative part...the teaching in the class is not the problem. It is the forms, reports for the department and all those things that contribute to so much stress.”* (P2, T) highlighted that *“we usually disagree because the beloved teachers are given less periods or are given their preferred subjects. For example, others would say; I want to teach mathematics only, not life skills because it has plenty of work.”* This finding supports previously reviewed literature, and further demonstrates how the factors contributing to TWB are multifaceted.

When probed, (P12, DP) has this to say...” *Honestly speaking excessive work overload leaves teachers frustrated and as a result they are going to vent their anger to whoever is closer to them, mainly their immediate seniors in a form of departmental heads, departmental heads will also vent their frustrations to the deputy principals. Leaving deputy principals with no choice but to find themselves fighting with the principal”.* (P1, T) confirmed the above commentaries, surprisingly when he had fewer teaching periods. He made the following remarks: *“they even verbally attacked me, saying; ‘how special are you’?”.* This shows that making unfair changes relating to teachers’ workloads may generate tension and manifest in adversarial relationships. Furthermore, excessive work overload has the potential to compromise the quality of teaching and learning, were affected teachers may avoid honouring certain periods. However, it is worth mentioning that no evidence was found in literature that substantiate TWB as a result of a particular teacher having fewer teaching periods.

Theme 2: The Identified Measures to Avert TWB

This theme focuses on the suggested measures in the prevention of TWB. The bulk of the participants mainly consent that behavioural change may play a huge role in the reduction of TWB.

Sub-theme: 2.1 Constant Training and Workshops (Organisational Level)

The bulk of participants concurred with what reviewed literature suggested. For example, (P8, T) presented the following remedies at the school level: *“the site can train teachers; for example, in my site I do workshops about teachers’ rights on labour issues.”* He suggested that those trainings should be streamlined; for instance, the Department of Labour needs to provide manuals that they can use, so that the content of the training is similar to that of the unions. He emphasised that *“labour issues are about bringing peace in the work environment. If teachers don’t know their rights, and are not trained, there would not be any peace at the workplace environment.”*

Presenting a matching view, (P1, T) proposed the following: *“the DBE must come up with developmental plans, because if teachers are not emotionally trained, they cannot handle work-related stress. Teachers’ voices are not as loud as that of the department...but if training is coming through the DBE it will work. Or if it comes amongst us collectively it might work, by saying as a school, TWB will not be tolerated.”* The participant suggested that TWB must be spoken about on a daily basis, not only when certain teachers are involved in a fight. This resonates with the findings by Mahome (2017) that meetings dealing with the challenge’s teachers are experiencing in schools should be ongoing. On the same issue of training, (P2, T) suggested that the department should provide some sort of workshops to the managers on how to prevent TWB. He further proposed that *“there must be an induction for every management to end this thing of favouritism and ethnic differences, I think it can work. We must have posters in staffrooms that warn against TWB.”*

Congruent with the above participants is (P16, CP): *“I think constant workshops that emphasise good working ethics may assist in minimising the behaviour. I also think workshops should encourage those experiencing bullying to seek help; active labour unions or site stewards may also play a significant role.”* The author argues that the suggestion of workshops by the participants to tackle TWB expose the

failure of the SACE in enlightening teachers about workplace bullying. For example, in the 2018/19 financial year report, SACE held workshops for teachers on the Code of Professional Ethics (SACE, 2020). Regrettably, the workshops did not address teachers' daily challenges such as teacher bullying and violence. In addition, with regard to the campaign launched by SACE (2019) on teachers' rights, responsibilities and safety, the draft handbook focuses mainly on learner bullying and falls short on TWB (SACE, 2020). The reviewed literature and some of the interviewed participants recommended that good working ethics and communication skills should be included in the training of teachers, as some of the measures to avert TWB.

a) Good Working Ethics

When probed on good working ethics, **(P3, T)** highlighted that some teachers and principals lack morals. He suggested the following: *"If the DBE can take them back to the drawing board, especially these seniors, take them through ethics, how to behave whenever they are around let say; junior staff members."* According to him, it is a matter of teachers conducting themselves in an appropriate manner which shows respect. He concluded by saying that *"teachers at this point are not respected in their communities, because they (communities) know that these teachers fight at schools...they stab each other. Hence, we are losing the value of being teachers."* The study can confirm that teachers are compelled to espouse and demonstrate a high level of professional and ethical conduct. This should trickle down to the learners and consequently school violence in any form could be reduced.

b) Decent Communication Skills

During the daily interactions, information is also shared through verbal and non-verbal communication, and, along the way, strain may arise, manifesting strained relationships. As a result, the interviewed participants suggested that teachers improve the manner in which they communicate with one another. Klein and Bentolila (2018) suggested that when internal communication is effective and positive interaction is evident amongst all parties, the organisation remain healthy, and employees are protected from external pressures. **(P16, CP)** agreed and suggested the following measures: *"more than anything if teachers, the DBE for one can invest in workshops on interpersonal skills it will assist a lot. Engage in workshops on communication training it will help because more than anything, everything gets lost in these dynamics of interpersonal relationships on how they communicate with each other."* This finding may be aligned to previous research by Fox, Gong, and Attoh (2015) who accentuated that it is important to foster strong interpersonal relationships between the principal and the teachers. The findings seem to suggest that every teacher is distinctive, and teaching is a networking practice, where different individuals converge and interact, therefore; improved communication skills may reduce TWB.

P16 further stressed that over and above the DBE focusing on equipping teachers with curriculum and teaching skills, they also have to look at other skills that are needed to help them with carrying out their responsibilities on a day-to-day basis. She outlined these examples: *"in terms of how they interact and communicate with each other, and how they carry themselves within their workspaces and still remain professional even when they have relationships out of being professionals or out of being teachers."* This finding ties in well with De Wet's (2010b) assertion that workplace bullying manifests itself in interpersonal work relationships between individuals (principal and his or her victim). Therefore, communication plays a meaningful part not just in improving the schools' achievement, but also in shaping a healthy professional relationship of the SMT and the teachers.

Decent and polite communication amongst colleagues may manifest in regular meetings that forge understanding and ultimately curtail the scourge of TWB. For instance, when asked on how tensions can be eliminated, **(P11, DH)** said *"having meetings time and again so that we understand each other."* He emphasised that, *if you are not telling you wouldn't know what one is thinking until we start talking."* P6 agrees and suggested the DBE have regular meetings with PL1 teachers to establish if they are being

bullied. These proposals resonate well with the suggestion by McMahon, Reeves, McConnell, Peist, Ruiz and APA (2017) who maintained that communicating more effectively, resolving conflicts peacefully and developing healthy problem-solving strategies may lead to pro-social and harmonious workplaces. Given the aforementioned findings and discussions, it can be concluded that improved communication skills characterised by deference and courtesy have the potential to bring about harmony in the workplace.

Sub-theme: 2.2 Promotion of Mutual Respect (Environmental Level)

Section 18 of the South African Employment of Educators Act of 1998 stipulates that teacher commits misconduct if they display disrespect towards others in the workplace or demonstrate abusive or insolent behaviour. Regrettably, the study found that teachers are disrespecting one another across various ranks; for example, (P4, T) divulged that *“our principal doesn’t see us as professionals; he sees teachers as his children.”* Related to the narrative of this teacher’s experiences, P3 disclosed the following: *“our leaders are running the school as if they are running their households...these old teachers treat us like kids.”* The aforementioned accounts correspond well with Mafora’s (2013) study where the principal was viewed by teachers as running the school like his own house and treating teachers as his children who must agree with whatever he said. These findings are further indicative to the effect that no one is spared when it comes to the bullying of the teachers by the supervisors; however, the common trend as established by the study is that the younger teachers remain the most susceptible. As a result, some of the participants suggested that mutual respect has to be inculcated and entrenched. Weighing in on this, (P10, DH) suggested that *“we must have respect for each other, and you have to get your school to buy in this culture of respect.”* Likewise, the DBE (2015) emphasised the importance of creating safe schools that encourage respect for human rights. The foregoing is in commensurate with conclusions of (Fahie & Devine, 2014), namely that compassion and mutual respect foster a positive culture. Collaboration is essential in any organisation: in a school milieu, it has the potential to yield positive academic results. The study has established that several teachers are unaware that disrespecting a colleague is a punishable offence; hence, it is significant for schools to implement practices that respect individual wellbeing and dignity.

Conclusion

Steered by Johnson’s ecological model the present paper explored factors contributing towards TWB by considering personal, environmental, and organisational factors that were aligned to the three layers of influence adopted by the paper. Largely qualitative collected data revealed that greatest number of the participants confirmed various factors triggering bullying across the teaching ranks. The bullying is unleashed by all the members of the teaching staff, depending on the contraposition of each individual teacher. It should be emphasised that the aim of the paper was not to accuse a particular member of the teaching staff of TWB, but to explore its predictors across the teaching ranks. The study ascertained a lack of mutual respect across the teaching ranks as one of the contributory factors. At the same time, some principals were laid bare as disrespectful to their subordinates due to the power that goes with the position of Principalship.

The other contributory factor that was prominent in most of the nine researched schools was the competition for promotional teaching posts. Promotion is linked and associated with power, regrettably in the process of assuming promotion eligible competitors are targeted, in some instances using union affiliation as a vehicle for the upward mobility. The findings signal the vulnerability of temporary and newly appointed teachers in comparison to the long serving staff members, and thus present TWB as a territorial phenomenon. In addition, teachers having superior qualifications and those who have assumed managerial positions seem to be the worst affected by jealousy meted out by their colleagues. The author purports that jealousy remains a strong contributing factor towards TWB, with age and gender rendering

the targets more susceptible to attacks. In the process, most of the teachers also noted selective treatment and favouritism practised by some principals, may lead to division amongst colleagues making the ground fertile for TWB. Principals were identified as persons encouraging dissent between teachers, thereby preventing them from uniting and getting along with each other. Equally, the present paper established that teachers are carrying excessive work overloads and are unable to cope with the work demand. Whereby, making unfair changes relating to teachers' workloads may generate tension and manifest in adversarial relationships. However, it is worth mentioning that no evidence was found in literature that substantiate TWB as a result of a particular teacher having fewer teaching periods.

In preventing TWB, the bulk of the participants mainly consent that behavioural change may play a huge role in the reduction of TWB. Participants recommended that good working ethics and communication skills should be included in the training of teachers, as some of the measures. In fact, the training of all employees should be implemented for the purpose of recognising, dealing with, and preventing TWB (DE Wet & Jacobs, 2013). It can be concluded that improved communication skills characterised by deference and courtesy have the potential to bring about harmony in the workplace. These findings are further indicative to the effect that no one is spared when it comes to the bullying of the teachers by the supervisors; however, the common trend as established by the study is that the younger teachers remain the most susceptible. As a result, some of the participants suggested that mutual respect has to be inculcated and entrenched. A recognised limitation of the paper is that the author did not interview office-based practitioners, especially those in provincial and national education echelons. Their contribution might have reinforced the preventive measures given their vast experience in educational matters. However, this paper augments the restricted knowledge base on TWB and hope to create alertness to the educational policy-makers, scholars, and practitioners about this disparaging form of bullying.

Recommendations

In contemplation of preventing TWB, the following recommendations are put forward.

- Principals to take the lead in changing the organisational culture from top down, where mutual respect is normalised, since a change in behaviour and practice may yield desirable results.
- Principals and teachers' trade unions should refrain from interfering in the promotion appointments processes as their undue influence perpetuates TWB. Instead, it is recommended that they focus on conducting training and workshops on pro-social behaviour, peaceful conflict resolution and how teachers are supposed to protect themselves from retribution and threats. The provincial district officials have to play a leading role in turning schools into safe spaces.
- There should be equal distribution of workload according to the post levels, excessive work overload should not be weaponised to bully teacher targets.
- It is further recommended that the Department of Basic Education formulate a clear and coherent anti-bullying policy to tackle TWB, a policy that is teacher-centric and address gender-based bullying among the primary focuses.

Suggestions for Further Studies

- A large-scale study on the subject should be conducted so that the findings could be generalised.
- How the involvement of teacher unions in the awarding of promotional posts enhance TWB, an ecological perspective study focusing on the role of the branch and provincial union leaders.
- How excessive work overload affects teachers daily performance in carrying out official duties.

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