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EDUCATOR EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE AND PERCEIVED EFFECTS ON THE TEACHING ENVIRONMENT IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS IN SOWETO, SOUTH AFRICA

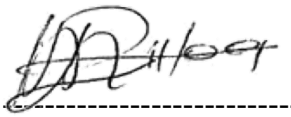
By Motshidisi Leah Ramadi

This research project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Master of Public Health in Social Behaviour Change Communication to the Faculty of Health Science, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

University of the Witwatersrand, September 2025

DECLARATION

Motshidisi Leah Ramadi declares that this research report, *Educator Experiences of Violence and Perceived Effects on the Teaching Environment in Public High Schools in Soweto, South Africa,* is my original, unaided work. This report is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Health at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This represents the first publication of this research within the Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Public Health.



Motshidisi Ramadi

744662

07 October 2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate this master's degree to my beloved mother, Mrs. Caroline Mamathibe Ramadi; my late father, Mr. Philip Ngake Ramadi; all my offspring; and everyone who believed in me and walked this bittersweet and challenging journey with me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my deepest gratitude to the Almighty God for granting me the opportunity, strength, and perseverance to pursue and complete my Master's degree. I am profoundly thankful to my supervisor Dr. Daphney Conco for her invaluable support, encouragement, and dedication. She was my greatest motivator and strongest support system throughout this journey. Despite my challenges, she stood by me as my pillar of strength and hope.

I would also like to thank my manager, Rev. Bafana Khumalo, and my colleagues, Tshepo Mahuma and Dr. Jacob Segale, for their continuous support and motivation during this journey, not forgetting my dearest friend, Dr. Tefo Sekgweleo, for his unwavering support and encouragement during my research project's peak time.

To my beloved children, Gaolatlhe Ramadi, Olerato Mudau, and Tlholo Ramadi, they have been my source of strength and inspiration. Finally, I am grateful to my mother, among her five children, I was the only one who had the privilege of walking through the doors of tertiary education and had achieved this milestone. I have reached this point because she instilled a profound love for education in me, and I never took her desire for me to succeed academically for granted.

ABSTRACT

Background

School violence poses a persistent threat to educational quality and equity in South Africa, particularly in township schools where educators face daily exposure to aggression, intimidation, and disruption. Despite formal safety frameworks, high-density environments in Soweto continue to report frequent incidents that undermine teaching and learning.

Township schools, shaped by historical inequalities and contemporary socioeconomic disparities, face challenges, such as overcrowding and gangsterism, which contribute to unsafe learning environments. Educators in Soweto public high schools navigate complex roles as both responders and victims, often without adequate institutional support. Community violence, overcrowding, and governance gaps further strain the instructional environment.

Most research on school violence focus on learners, with limited documentation of the educators' lived experiences.

Aim

This study aimed to examine the multifaceted roles of educators in Soweto public high schools as both responders to and victims of school violence. It seeks to explore how community factors such as violence, overcrowding, and governance deficiencies, affect the learning environment, educator well-being, and pedagogical practice.

Methods

A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed involving semi-structured in-depth interviews with 13 purposively selected educators from schools identified as having high levels of violence. This study was framed using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), which enables a nuanced understanding of how various environmental factors contribute to school violence. Thematic analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, supported by MAXQDA software for data organization and coding.

Results

The study identified four key themes. First, profiles of participating schools and educators provided contextual grounding. Second, educators reported varied experiences of school

violence, including frequent learner conflicts, high incident visibility, and their dual roles as responders and victims. Third, they highlighted contributing factors such as gangsterism, socio-economic hardship, policy enforcement gaps, and leadership challenges. Fourth, educators described the impact of violence on school safety, infrastructure, emotional well-being, and learner engagement. Finally, they proposed solutions including stronger policy implementation, improved security, enhanced psychosocial support, and collaborative school cultures.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the pivotal role of educators in addressing school violence in Soweto. Their experiences reveal the interplay of historical, socioeconomic, and systemic factors that create unsafe school environments. These findings call for targeted interventions, including trauma-informed pedagogy and conflict resolution training, to foster safer educational environments in township schools. Addressing this issue requires collaboration among educators, learners, policymakers, parents, communities, and researchers. Educators' opinions must be prioritized in school safety policymaking, as their insights are crucial for developing context-specific solutions.

Keywords

Educators’ experiences, Soweto, school safety, school violence, teaching environment, township schools, trauma-informed pedagogy, qualitative research.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

DBE: Department of Basic Education

DOE: Department of Education

EFA: Education for All

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GDE: Gauteng Department of Education

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

CSTL: Care and Support for Teaching and Learning

GSHS: Global School-based Student Health Survey

HREC: Human Research Ethics Committee

ISHP: Integrated School Health Programme

LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual (and Related Identities).

LMICs: Low- and Middle-Income Countries

MAXQDA: (Qualitative data analysis software)

NSSF: National School Safety Framework

PIS: Participant Information Sheet

PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

SACE: South African Council for Educators

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SANCA: South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence

SAPS: South African Police Service

SASA: South African Schools Act

SGB: School Governing Body

SBST: School-Based Support Team

SMT: School Management Team

SRGBV: School-Related Gender-Based Violence

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

VAE: Violence Against Educators

WHO: World Health Organization

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Bullying: Repetitive, unwanted, aggressive behavior by a learner or educator toward another learner or educator. This may involve positional power, emotional force, or physical strength to intimidate or harm others.
(South African Council for Educators [SACE], 2021)

Corporal Punishment: Any act by an educator or adult that inflicts physical pain on a learner as a disciplinary measure. Corporal punishment is prohibited in South African schools.
(South African Schools Act, 1996; Equal Education Law Centre, 2020)

Cyberbullying: The act of sending, posting, or sharing harmful, false, or mean content about another learner or educator through digital platforms.
(Milligan, Doss, & Zungu, 2024)

Disability Harassment:Victimization of a learner or educator based on their disability by another learner or educator. *(Section27, 2022)*

Educator: Any person who teaches, educates, or trains others, or who provides professional educational services, including therapy and educational psychological services, at a school.
(South African Schools Act, 1996)

Ethnic Harassment: Victimization of a learner or educator based on race, colour, or national origin. *(Hlongwane, 2022)*

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Violence directed at individuals due to their gender identity or sexual orientation. School-related GBV (SRGBV) includes physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual abuse in or around schools. *(UNESCO, 2022; Equal Education Law Centre, 2020)*

Gender Harassment: Victimization of a learner or educator based on their gender identity, including LGBTQIA+ individuals. *(UNESCO, 2022)*

Harassment: Persistent and unwelcome actions, including malicious remarks, ethnic slurs, sexual comments, or unwanted attention directed by a learner or educator toward another individual. *(Equal Education Law Centre, 2020)*

Learner: Any person receiving education or obliged to receive education in terms of the Act. This includes learners in basic education, particularly children aged 7 to 15, as part of compulsory schooling. *(South African Schools Act, 1996)*

Physical Abuse: Physical acts such as pulling clothing, slapping, punching, stabbing, and kicking by a learner or educator. Includes corporal punishment and physical bullying. *(Department of Basic Education, 2015)*

Psychological Abuse: Repeated verbal or emotional mistreatment that undermines a learner's self-worth, including humiliation, threats, or isolation. *(Milligan, Doss, & Zungu, 2024)*

Restorative Discipline: A non-punitive approach to school discipline that focuses on repairing harm, restoring relationships, and reintegrating learners into the school community. *(Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention [CJCP], 2021)*

School Safety: A state in which school-related activities provide a safe environment free from violence, bullying, harassment, and substance abuse. *(Department of Basic Education, 2015)*

School Violence: Any verbal or physical act that induces intended physical or emotional pain in a member of the school community, including educators, learners, support staff, or management. *(Department of Basic Education, 2015)*

Sexual Harassment: Unwelcome and inappropriate comments, sexual advances, or promises of rewards in exchange for sexual favours by a learner or educator toward another individual. *(Equal Education Law Centre, 2020)*

Sexual Violence: Threats or coercion to engage in unwanted sexual activity, including assault or exploitation, perpetrated by a learner or educator. *(Equal Education Law Centre, 2020)*

Substance Abuse: The use of drugs or alcohol by learners or educators, contributing to unsafe school environments. *(Milligan, Doss, & Zungu, 2024)*

Verbal Abuse: Harmful or offensive verbal actions, including nasty comments, jokes, or swearing, directed by a learner or educator toward another individual. *(Milligan, Doss, & Zungu, 2024)*

Violence: The intentional use of physical force or power threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group, resulting in or likely to result in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. *(World Health Organization [WHO], 2002)*

Weapon Possession: The carrying or use of dangerous objects (e.g., knives, guns) within school premises, often linked to gang activity or intimidation. *(Hlongwane, 2022)*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

School violence remains a salient constraint on educational quality and equity in South Africa, with mounting evidence that its forms (physical assault, bullying, intimidation, weaponization, and cyberaggression) undermine educator well-being and the school climate in disproportionate ways in township contexts. Recent analyses across sub-Saharan Africa situate bullying and aggression as routine exposures that impair participation and learning while also straining staff who must respond with limited institutional support (Aboagye et al., 2021). In Gauteng, applied policy and monitoring studies describe persistent safety deficits despite formal frameworks, including reports from township high schools of daily disruptions and frequent post-incident spirals that erode morale (Basson, 2020).

Educator-centred accounts show that exposure to threats and incidents correlates with reduced efficacy and professional engagement, along with higher stress and intent to leave (Yang et al., 2021). Emerging qualitative work in Soweto further documents that educators are both first responders and targets, highlighting the compounding effects of community violence, overcrowding, and governance gaps on the instructional core (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). Building on these converging strands, the present study centers educators' lived experiences in three Soweto public high schools, interrogates perceived effects on the teaching environment, and positions the analysis to inform both practice and policy at the school and district levels.

1.2 Background to the study

According to international and regional data, low-resource urban children and staff are disproportionately exposed to aggressiveness and coercion in classrooms and halls (Aboagye et al., 2021). Practitioners regularly report class sizes exceeding 40 and learner–educator ratios above 35:1, which amplify low-level disturbance into recurring episodes requiring staff involvement in Johannesburg's high-density townships. Access restrictions, hotspot regions, and inconsistent codes of conduct enforcement make educators spend more time managing conflict than teaching, according to recent Gauteng assessments (Basson, 2020). Many students report weapons and fear of peer retaliation in the National School Safety Framework (NSSF)

questionnaires, which educators believe generates surveillance fatigue and burnout (Kutywayo et al., 2022).

A qualitative study showed how localized gang identities, neighbourhood drug economies, and limited inter-agency cooperation degrade school discipline and normalize confrontation (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). Educators must balance de-escalation, case management, and curricular leadership (McMahon et al., 2020). Thus, staff risks, control procedures, and emotional labour to keep classes moving affect the teaching environment and pedagogy (Mosito & Sitoyi, 2024). This study documents educators' perspectives on school violence forms, frequency, causes, and impacts and how they shape practice in response to these contextual contours.

1.3 Problem statement

Violence in South African public high schools is a persistent issue, affecting not only learners, but also educators, who are often overlooked in both discourse and policy initiatives. Educators increasingly face various forms of violence, including physical assault, verbal abuse, threats, and intimidation, perpetrated by learners and, in some instances, by parents or community members. These incidents can significantly affect educators' sense of safety, psychological well-being, and professional efficacy. Despite growing concerns, there is limited empirical research that captures educators lived experiences and examines how such violence influences the teaching and learning environments in the South African context. This study sought to explore and document these experiences to better understand associated implications for classroom management, overall educational outcomes, and educator morale. This study sought to expand the evidence base by examining educators lived experiences in three Soweto high schools, explaining their effects on teaching and learning, and identifying context-fit levels for school-level practices and district policies.

1.4 Rationale for the study

South Africa's education system grapples with the entrenched challenges arising from historical inequalities, socioeconomic disparities, and community-level violence. Public high schools, particularly those situated in resource-constrained areas, often reflect broader societal issues. While considerable attention has been directed towards student violence, the experiences of teachers, who are integral to school educational outcomes, have not been comprehensively

examined. Understanding the impact of violence on educators is essential for mental health support mechanisms and, developing effective policies, and interventions that promote safe and supportive teaching environments. This research is therefore imperative not only to safeguard the rights and well-being of educators, but also to ensure the sustained provision of quality education in public schools.

1.5 Research question, aim, and objectives

1.5.1 Research question

What are the lived experiences and views of educators working in Soweto secondary schools known to be prone to school violence?

1.5.2 Aim of the study

This study aimed to generate in-depth, contextualized insights into educators' experiences of school violence and examine educators' perceptions of how such violence reshapes the teaching and learning environment in three Soweto public high schools.

1.5.3 Objectives

To achieve this aim, the study focuses on the following objectives:

1. Profile the participating schools regarding their location, infrastructure, educators, and educators' demographic characteristics.
2. To explore educators' experiences of school violence, including witnesses, first responders, and victims.
3. To explore educators' perspectives on the factors predisposing schools to violence.
4. To describe the effects of school violence on teaching and learning environments from the perspective of educators.
5. To explore educators' ideas about practical and context-specific solutions to address school violence.

1.6 Outline of the report

This report comprises the following chapters:

- Chapter One presents the introduction and background of the study.

- Chapter Two reviews the literature on school violence, its prevalence, and its effects, focusing on educators.
- Chapter Three describes the research design and methodology, including the study site, sampling strategy, data collection, and ethical considerations.
- Chapter Four presents the study's findings, organized into key themes that reflect the research objectives.
- Chapter Five discusses the findings of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks, highlighting implications for policy and practice. This thesis concludes by summarizing the findings and providing recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on school violence, focusing on its prevalence, contributing factors, and its impact on educators and broader educational environments. First, it defines and conceptualizes school violence, traces its historical development, and examines key theoretical frameworks to understand its causes and manifestations. This review explored structural violence through an analytical lens, emphasizing how systemic socioeconomic inequalities and broader societal factors contribute to violence in schools. Additionally, it considers the interaction between individual experiences of violence and wider community conditions, particularly in marginalized areas such as Soweto.

Furthermore, this chapter examines the professional and psychological impacts of school violence on educators, including its effects on their mental health, job performance, and retention. A review of the literature on the long-term effects of violence on educators and learners was conducted to elucidate its implications for teaching and learning. This chapter synthesizes relevant studies and theoretical perspectives to establish a foundation for analyzing the experiences of educators in public high schools in Soweto. The insights acquired from this review inform the research methodology and analysis presented in the subsequent chapters.

2.2. Conceptualizing school violence

School violence has evolved to reflect its complexities and repercussions. Today's complex circumstances are not captured by the traditional definitions of school violence such as fights, assaults, and vandalism (Shields et al., 2015). Later studies added bullying, intimidation, and verbal abuse, which can be as harmful as physical violence (Richter et al. 2018). The long-term impact of covert psychological violence in sub-Saharan Africa includes lower academic performance and educational efficacy (Aboagye et al., 2021). However, physical hostility frequently occurs. This expanded perspective stresses the need to perceive school violence as both an isolated incident and a continuum of harmful behaviours influenced by structural inequities and community circumstances (Basson 2020).

Galtung's idea of structural violence in education studies explains how institutional arrangements perpetuate the risk of school violence. Owing to past injustices and financial inequalities, South African educators face more violence in overcrowded classrooms, poor facilities, and minimal emotional support (Astor et al., 2010). School disputes in deprived areas, such as Soweto, are exacerbated by socioeconomic factors including gang involvement, drug use, and significant unemployment (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). There is scant quantitative research linking structural deficiencies to educator-targeted violence because most of these data originate from qualitative case studies with little generalizability. Ecological analyses demonstrate that systemic inequities, including unequal funding and insufficient governance mechanisms, promote student-teacher violence (McMahon et al., 2020). This illustrates that classroom violence requires more than punishment, which demands cultural changes. The WHO (2019) considers school violence a public health issue that requires multi-sectoral responses. This therapy treats physical injuries and psychological stress such as depression, anxiety, and burnout (Ferrara et al., 2019). The Department of Basic Education of South Africa's National School Safety Framework (NSSF) recognizes violence as a systemic issue requiring prevention, protection, and response (DBE, 2016). NSSF policies are progressing, but township schools have reported poor monitoring and discipline (Makota & Leoschut, 2016). Most schools have learner codes of conduct, but hardly half enforce them, leaving educators susceptible to repeated threats (Kutywayo et al., 2022). These gaps demonstrate the necessity for context-specific policies by contrasting intellectual creativity with reality.

To prevent school violence, safety audits, police cooperation, and community groups have been used; however, the results have varied. Restorative practices, parental involvement, and learner-led safety committees have reduced Gauteng school violence over time (Lodi et al., 2022). A recent study (Mosito & Sitoyi, 2024). Unfortunately, data show that educators arbitrate disputes without training, which increases stress and reduces teaching quality (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). Thus, the South African government's reaction must be evaluated in terms of its framework and classroom impact.

South Africa's sociopolitical history informs this research on the physical, psychological, and institutional aspects of school violence. High schools frequently fight and attack people (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Teachers and students can experience long-term emotional harm from bullying, harassment, or verbal abuse (Ferrara et al., 2019). Infrastructure and socioeconomic

inequality contribute to school violence (Basson, 2020). By contextualizing educator experiences within this complex framework, this study critically explores individual, institutional, and social challenges. This approach is superior for researching educator narratives and evaluating policy frameworks, such as the NSSF, in marginalized schools (Leukes et al., 2021).

2.3. School violence as a public health issue

School violence affects the psychological, social, and economic wellbeing of individuals and communities; hence, it is considered a public health issue. The WHO considers school violence a global epidemic that requires preventative, multi-sectoral approaches that target individual and systemic factors (World Health Organization, 2019). In marginalized townships in South Africa, underfunded schools reflect community vulnerabilities such as high crime and unemployment. Studies in Gauteng and Eastern Cape show that violence causes physical harm, chronic stress, depression, and social disengagement in students and educators, thereby reducing learning outcomes (Ferrara et al., 2019). Survey data were used in these quantitative studies to demonstrate the links between exposure and psychosocial harm; however, educators' perspectives are generally ignored. Public health research shows how violence impairs youth development and educational efficacy, requiring systemic intervention rather than piecemeal disciplinary tactics (Pillay et all, 2023).

The National School Safety Framework (NSSF) in South Africa prioritizes violence prevention as a public health issue (Department of Education, 2016). This framework promotes whole-school prevention, protection, and support methods in conjunction with the South African Police Service, community safety forums, and civil society groups. Following the implementing NSSF standards, some schools with active safety committee reported minor declines of violent events, no difference was observed in some schools due to insufficient enforcement and inadequate funding (Kutywayo et al., 2022). The study revealed implementation gaps, highlighting structural hurdles to policy efficacy. DBE's Safer Schools Programme promotes health and learner wellness; however, township schools report a dearth of psychosocial professionals to support students and educators. Progressive policy formulation and implementation in resource-constrained situations is at odds.

Classifying school violence as a public health issue highlights its economic impact on the state and the community. Injuries, psychological care, and lost teaching time drain school finances, stretched by competing needs. Basson (2020) noted that Gauteng School Violence causes long-term productivity losses due to instructor and student absenteeism. This report is mostly policy-analytic, although community-level research shows how fear of violence affects student attendance and interrupts teaching continuity (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). Critics argue that this study measures expenditures without addressing the secondary health consequences of instructor stress or early retirement. This omission highlights the need for more refined methods to capture hidden economic and health effects of school violence on educators.

Government responses to school violence have increasingly used restorative justice and trauma-informed techniques to reduce the impact on public health. According to Lodi et al. (2022), restorative techniques in school discipline strengthen peer relationships and reduce repeated violent events. Based on thorough literature evaluations, these findings show that localized non-punitive treatments work. Leukes et al. (2021) emphasized the necessity of safety training and psychosocial assistance for educators in high-crime schools. Their participatory research handbook showed how preventative health strategies boost teachers' morale and resilience. Critics state that these promising techniques are intermittent and unfunded, relying on external funders rather than DBE. This indicates that South African policy frameworks struggle to meet the systemic need for school violence as a public health priority.

School violence is framed within individual, social, community, and societal influences by ecological systems, supporting a public health approach. Sibisi (2021) shows that family violence, neighbourhood crime, and ineffective institutional responses increase the risk factors for KwaZulu-Natal high school students and teachers. McMahon et al. (2020) demonstrated through teacher interviews that educators often respond to violent occurrences without trauma management or conflict resolution training. These qualitative methods illuminate the lived realities underlying statistical prevalence data, explaining why violence persists despite strong policies. Recognizing school violence as a multilevel public health issue, and funding programs that address each layer remains a deficit. Thus, while government and international frameworks provide valuable conceptual underpinnings, their translation into sustainable practices is unequal, leaving educators in Soweto and other comparable areas vulnerable.

2.4. Global perspective of school violence

Nearly 246 million children and adolescents worldwide encounter bullying or violence (UNESCO, 2017). According to international surveys, bullying is the most widespread form of bullying, reaching 48% in some sub-Saharan countries (Aboagye et al., 2021). European and North American studies have addressed psychological abuse, including cyberbullying, highlighting the expanding importance of digital technology in violence (Yang et al., 2021). However, lower- and middle-income countries emphasize physical violence and structural inequalities that create hazardous schools (Barnes et al., 2012). Large-scale surveys provide quantitative insights, but they typically ignore educators, who are crucial for understanding the wider effects of school violence. As most global assessments foreground learner experiences based on teacher and school staff views, cross-national scholarship has fallen short.

Historical research has shown that school violence has always been known, although its definitions have changed. Olweus (1993) showed that bullying is a systemic issue that influences mental health and academic success in Scandinavia, thus setting the groundwork for global studies. Later research included verbal, sexual, and psychological abuse, which often go unnoticed in school (Smith, 2011). Recent research criticizes these early studies for favouring European contexts and ignoring the role of poverty, crime, and community violence in school dynamics elsewhere (Astor et al., 2010). Recent cross-country surveys have sought to close this gap by comparing the prevalence and types of violence, although methodological discrepancies restrict comparisons (Aboagye et al., 2021). These limitations emphasize the necessity for context-sensitive techniques to identify universal and culturally specific factors.

Since the late 20th century, UNESCO and the World Health Organization have reconceptualized school violence as both a public health issue and a human rights concern. This perspective underscores the intrinsic link between student safety and the realization of quality, inclusive education for all, and positioning safe learning environments as foundational to educational success (World Health Organization, 2019). Global advocacy efforts, such as UNICEF's #END violence campaign, have further illuminated the socioeconomic and developmental consequences of persistent school violence (UNESCO 2017). Italy and South Africa have found that violence-exposed students and educators experience long-term psychological trauma including stress, burnout, and poor performance (Ferrara et al., 2019; Mosito & Sitoyi, 2024). Critics say that these studies focus too much on prevalence statistics

rather than on how violence affects classroom operations and teacher-student interactions. Moving from narrow disciplinary definitions to systemic approaches is positive, but also presents methodological difficulties for global research.

Early international research focused on learners, but the current programs have expanded to include educators and other stakeholders. The Violence Against Educators (VAE) experiment in multiple countries found that roughly one-third of teachers reported verbal, psychological, or physical abuse (McMahon et al., 2020). South African research shows that educators often respond to violent occurrences without psychosocial assistance or training (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). European teachers report more psychological harassment, whereas African educators report more physical harassment (Yang et al., 2021). These data illuminate educators' perspectives, although most focus on prevalence rather than on the institutional circumstances that enable violence. This constraint emphasizes the need for theoretical frameworks that incorporate educators' perspectives into global school safety discourse.

Global perspectives have revealed that cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds significantly influence school violence and its responses. Township schools in South Africa often reflect societal issues, including gang involvement, unemployment, and substance addiction, which increase violence (Richter et al. 2018). Hendricks (2019) found that community and school violence harms students and teachers, continuing a cycle of aggression and insecurity. Comparative studies have shown that although cyberbullying dominates policy debates in high-income nations, low-income regions struggle with infrastructure and security (Kutywayo et al., 2022). The uneven distribution of resources worldwide affects how violence is addressed. It also shows the limitations of "one-size-fits-all" interventions, emphasizing the need for contextually grounded techniques that consider the lived circumstances of learners' and educators.'

2.5. Understanding school violence in Soweto

2.5.1 The historical context

Over the decades, historical, political, and socioeconomic pressures have affected South African education, including Soweto school violence. Black schools are purposely underfunded by apartheid, resulting in congestion, poor resources, and authoritarian discipline (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). This unequal distribution of possibilities fosters institutional

violence by setting a framework for current Soweto school issues (Astor et al., 2010). The South African Council of Educators (2011) also noted that apartheid-era policies perpetuated teacher–student marginalization. A recent study showed that township schools with high learner–educator ratios and weak security infrastructure increase exposure (Basson, 2020). This research implies that Soweto's schools mirror historical imbalances that foster violence.

The 1976 Soweto Uprising established schools as venues for resistance and violence. Student protests against Afrikaans as the language of instruction led to state-sanctioned violence that killed hundreds of people (Ndlovu, 2004). This event normalized violence in schools by linking them to political struggles (Shields et al., 2015). Subsequent investigations showed that rebellion had lasting psychosocial effects on students and teachers, creating a school culture of conflict (Richter et al., 2018). Recent accounts suggest that the uprising still shapes conceptions of schools as disputed environments, especially in Soweto, where community conflicts often flow into the classroom (Khumalo, 2019a). These historical narratives are important, but they typically use descriptive stories without examining how the legacy of the uprising affected the school violence.

The post-apartheid reforms sought to eliminate fundamental disparities, but school violence failed. The National School Safety Framework (DBE, 2016) has been inconsistently implemented in marginalized groups. Kutywayo et al. (2022) showed that township school learners continue to have greater violence rates than urban, well-resourced learners. Leukes et al. (2021) also revealed that teachers are prone to verbal and physical abuse, indicating systemic issues. Additionally, McMahon et al. (2020) emphasized that educators in poor situations are often required to police, which lowers their professional engagement and increases stress. These findings imply that policy frameworks exist in Soweto. However, historical disparities and structural flaws have hindered their efficacy, requiring context-specific initiatives that integrate community and institutional views.

2.5.2 Current landscape of school violence

Township schools are subject to violence despite post-apartheid reforms such as the South African Schools Act (1996), which banned corporal punishment and promoted democracy. Overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and underfunded classrooms continue to plague many Soweto schools (Richter et al., 2018). Shields et al. (2015) found that teachers in dangerous situations experience many obstacles and often feel unsupported by the authorities. Leukes et

al. (2021) indicated that insufficient institutional processes jeopardize teachers' safety and security. Basson (2020) added that socioeconomic divides cause school violence in Gauteng, thus limiting national policies. These findings imply that Soweto educators' daily lives have not changed, despite legislative improvements.

According to previous studies, community violence shapes South African schools. Kutywayo et al. (2022) found that township school students felt insecure within and outside the school, correlating safety concerns with community instability. Barnes et al.(2012) found that community violence reinforces student aggression and animosity. Hendricks (2019) stated that violence lowers students' psychological well-being, causing worry and decreased academic motivation. According to Astor et al. (2010), school-based interventions alone do not resolve community-level inequities. These data show that soweto school violence is linked to community socioeconomic vulnerability.

Schools experience violent assault, bullying, verbal abuse, and educator intimidation. Bullying is the most widespread type of school-based violence in sub-Saharan Africa with long-term academic and psychological effects (Aboagye et al., 2021). Mboweni and Taole (2022) found that teacher harassment lowers morale, absenteeism, and the likelihood of teachers leaving the field. McMahon et al. (2020) used a social-ecological perspective to demonstrate how weak school governance increases learner-to-educator violence. According to Mosito and Sitoyi (2024), many educators experience burnout and stress-related illnesses that are caused by violence. These results indicate that school violence includes educator threats and student-to-student aggression.

School violence has systemic and institutional issues that persist despite government action. Despite its comprehensive violence reduction approach, the National School Safety Framework (DBE, 2016) has had a poor impact on townships. According to Makota and Leoschut (2016), many schools are unable to integrate the framework fully. Chauke (2024) claimed that interventions generally prioritize crisis management over violence prevention. Lodi et al. (2022) noted that restorative justice initiatives can re-establish trust between students and educators but require school leadership commitment. These studies demonstrate that resource shortages, a lack of training, and insufficient accountability systems weaken government initiatives.

2.6. Educators' experiences of school violence

Most research on school violence focuses on students; however, emerging evidence suggests that educators are vulnerable to assault. Leukes et al. (2021) explained that teachers are generally seen as discipline enforcers yet suffer intimidation and aggressiveness that undermines their authority. According to Yang et al. (2021), teachers exposed to violence lose professional engagement and classroom performance. According to McMahon et al. (2020), educators find these encounters to be mentally draining, with many suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) noted that cumulative exposure caused burnout and emotional fatigue. These data indicate that violence against educators is a pervasive occupational hazard that affects teaching and learning.

Historical and social legacies shape educational victimization in South Africa. According to Polonyana and Moosa (2024), township schools have high violence rates because of entrenched inequalities and poor institutional capabilities. Hendricks (2019) found that violence in impoverished communities affects teachers' psychological well-being and retention. Kutywayo et al. (2022) showed that township school educators feel unsupported when reporting violent situations, with many complaints unaddressed by the administration. Chauke (2024) confirmed that teachers adopt informal tactics, such as peer support, because institutional frameworks are unreliable. These studies demonstrate that systemic flaws in school administration increase educators' vulnerability in Soweto, underscoring the insufficiency of government remedies.

According to previous research, verbal abuse, physical attacks, and intimidation are the most common types of educational violence. Thobane et al. (2023) found that learners most commonly insult and threaten, often resulting in physical conflicts. Mboweni and Taole (2022) found that hostility lowers morale, leading to absenteeism and lower teaching commitment. Aboagye et al. (2021) found that African schools experienced learner-to-teacher hostility and learner-to-learner bullying. Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) found that overcrowded classrooms increase these risks by escalating small conflicts. These data show that educators' verbal and physical abuse is pervasive and affects professional efficacy.

Violence has serious psychological and professional impacts on educators. According to Herman et al. (2018), aggression often causes stress and burnout in teachers. McMahon et al. (2020) noted that socio-ecological effects include learner disengagement and a decline in the

classroom atmosphere. Leukes et al. (2021) found that some educators felt insecure in staff rooms and schools, which encouraged isolation. Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) noted that when educators see violence as routine, they consider quitting, causing attrition and shortages in underfunded institutions. These studies have shown that teacher attrition is a structural effect of chronic violence that weakens the stability of the education sector.

Educators' interpretations and responses to violence are crucial for understanding their effects. Behre et al. (2002) found that leadership support and safety protocols influence teachers' interventions in violent situations. According to Barnes et al. (2012), some high-risk schoolteachers normalize violence. According to Shields et al. (2015), institutional responses are inconsistent, leaving educators frustrated and reluctant to report cases. Chauke (2024) indicated that conflict resolution training could boost teacher resilience and educate teachers on how to deescalate conflict. These studies have shown that educators' experiences are shaped by violence, institutional reactions, and school safety.

Township settings exacerbate Soweto educators' challenges. Basson (2020) showed that Gauteng school gangsterism and poverty increase classroom aggressiveness. Kutywayo et al. (2022) found that Soweto high school students bring community tensions to school, increasing instructor risk. Polonyana and Moosa (2024) noted that Soweto teachers face threats from students and others because of weak school boundaries. Hendricks (2019) found that these factors made teachers anxious and reluctant to chastise their students. Based on this information, Soweto educators must manage classroom violence and external community pressures that destabilize the school environment.

2.7. The impact of school violence on learners, schools and teaching

Violent exposure of educational institutions is a global issue. The prevalence and severity of violence are particularly alarming in South Africa, where learners and educators are victims, bystanders, and even perpetrators of violence. This exposure has enduring ramifications in the school environment that affect safety, morale, and overall educational outcomes. (Khumalo, 2019). Understanding the experiences of those exposed to violence is crucial for developing informed interventions that address their root causes and mitigate their impact.

2.7.1 The effects of violence on learners

School violence has serious consequences for student growth and academic progress, especially in South Africa, where socioeconomic disparities are severe. A multi-country study by Aboagye et al. (2021) found that bullying victimization in sub-Saharan Africa increased the incidence of depression and disengagement in adolescents. Richter et al. (2018) observed that violence-exposed Johannesburg-Soweto students had lower motivation levels and delayed academic achievement. Rudzani (2024) noted that violence in South African secondary schools reduces student participation in classroom discussions and group activities. Herrero Romero et al. (2018) found that violence in poor neighbourhoods demotivates adolescents from studying, resulting in chronic absenteeism. These studies have demonstrated the cumulative influence of violence on students' educational participation and confirmed its systemic nature.

According to previous studies, violence has a long-term psychological effect on students. Yang et al. (2021) found that violence reduced students' engagement with educators and diminished professional commitment and academic resilience. Hendricks (2019) claims that classroom violence causes worry, reading, and low self-esteem. McMahon et al. (2020) found that students internalize powerlessness when educators or leaders fail to address violence and sustain institutional indifference. Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) noted that psychological stress often causes students to drop out of school. These findings show that, without focused interventions, violence's psychosocial damage endures throughout adulthood, reducing personal and intellectual potential.

Academic interruptions caused by violence have been extensively documented. Herman et al. (2018) found that educator stress and burnout interrupted classroom management and lowered students' focus. Leukes et al. (2021) found that when teachers feel uncomfortable, their teaching time is impaired, lowering structured learning opportunities for students. Barnes et al. (2012) found that schools with inadequate safety and discipline cultures scored worse academically. Chauke (2024) added that repeated violent situations make students fearful, hindering their cognitive processing and memory. These studies have shown that violence disrupts classroom dynamics and jeopardizes academic performance.

School violence disrupts peer and authority relationships and social development. Aboagye et al. (2021) found that bullying victims disengage from peer networks, thereby reducing their

classroom trust and cooperation. Thobane et al. (2023) noted that gender-based violence in schools perpetuates power imbalances and silence. Sibisi (2021) claimed that violent schools in KwaZulu-Natal encouraged violent dispute resolution by modelling it. Polonyana and Moosa (2024) found that Soweto educators normalized chronic violence by alienating students. These findings show that violence erodes the school's social fabric, making it difficult for students to form healthy relationships.

Although varied, the government and institutional responses to school violence aim to reduce these outcomes. The DBE (2016) introduced the National School Safety Framework as the main policy tool to promote safe and inclusive learning environments. The framework is structured; however, Kutywayo et al. (2022) found that educators and learners view it as poorly executed with minimal training and supervision. Leukes et al. (2021) found that township school educators were exposed to poor safety enforcement. Restorative justice approaches may help address the relational aspects of school violence, according to Lodi et al. (2022); however, their use in South Africa is restricted. Evidence shows that policy tools exist, but require contextual adaptation and regular funding, especially in Soweto.

The following shows that school violence affects students' educational, psychological, and social development beyond the immediate injury. Many studies have failed to rigorously evaluate intervention mechanisms, even when they capture the consequences with sufficient empirical backing. In marginalized groups, trauma-informed and whole-school solutions are regularly mentioned, but rarely examined for sustainability (Chauke, 2024). This lack of critical involvement underlines the need to investigate treatments and how they work in poverty and structural inequality. The literature shows that while learner impacts are well established, there is a gap in linking this knowledge to responsive, contextually grounded solutions that address Soweto's specific difficulties.

2.7.2 Educators are affected by school violence

South African schoolteachers are increasingly being perceived as both authoritative figures and victims of violence. Mboweni and Taole (2022) found that students intimidate, insult, and threaten their teachers, thereby lowering their morale. A social-ecological analysis by McMahon et al. (2020) found that teachers underreport victimization because they regard violence as a job risk. According to Mosito and Sitoyi (2024), violence reduces educators' efficacy by increasing their tension, worry, and emotional exhaustion. According to Polonyana

and Moosa (2024), Soweto educators see violent incidents as inevitable in impoverished schools. These findings suggest that the deeper consequences of violence on teachers' professional identity and capacity are not widely recognized.

The climate of fear generated by repeated violence undermines educators' ability to provide safe learning settings. According to Leukes et al. (2021), insecure educators are less likely to punish or fix their problems. Rudzani (2024) found that teachers who see their schools as dangerous opt out of their cocurricular, hindering student development. Thobane et al. (2023) noted that gender-based violence against educators weakens their authority and exposes safety system flaws. According to Aboagye et al. (2021), in violent situations, teachers place self-preservation on educational tasks and school effectiveness.

School-community violence upsets teachers. Richter et al. (2018) observed that Johannesburg-Soweto children exposed to violence brought these behaviours to school, creating a continuum of animosity that affects teachers. Chauke (2024) revealed that historically disadvantaged teachers must educate themselves and respond to violence related to community instability. Basson (2020) said that Gauteng schools' normalization of violence shows structural failures where high crime and poverty breed an enmity. According to Titi et al. (2022), these spillover effects obfuscate school safety and public health, making violence a systemic issue beyond educational control. This convergence shows that school violence demands community-wide solutions, rather than classroom solutions.

For educator-targeted violence, the Department of Basic Education created the National School Safety Framework (NSSF) in 2016. Kutywayo et al. (2022) state that educators need training and resources to implement a framework that organizes safety. According to Leukes et al. (2021), many teachers are unaware of reporting processes, limiting accountability. Lodi et al. (2022) noted that restorative justice programs tried in some schools may reduce violent incidents but require significant investment and teacher buy-in. Chauke (2024) claimed that whole-school methods work, but provinces apply them differently. Policy goals and operational reality disagree, especially in Soweto Township Schools.

Critics claim that this study lists the consequences of violence on educators, without considering resilience or resistance. Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) noted that some teachers use informal peer support systems to cope with violent outbursts, although such strategies have

rarely been tested. McMahon et al. (2020) found that teacher departure after violent occurrences influences student outcomes. However, few studies have examined institutional responses. Polonyana and Moosa (2024) found that educators normalize violence, creating issues of systemic dysfunction. Quantitative surveys reflect prevalence, but qualitative insights show educators' lived experiences and agency according to Aboagye et al. (2021). These arguments suggest nuanced investigations of educators' coping, resistance, and advocacy in violent schools instead of descriptive reports.

2.7.3 The impact of school violence on teaching and learning environment

School violence creates worry and insecurity and lowers teaching and learning quality. Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) discovered that prolonged exposure to violence makes educators defensive rather than developmental. Basson (2020) noted that Gauteng teachers spend more time handling violent disturbances than teaching, thus reducing teaching time and academic outcomes. Chauke (2024) found that classroom disruption was greater in impoverished schools, causing teacher stress and tiredness. McMahon et al. (2020) found through social-ecological research that teachers feel unsupported when addressing violence, which leads to professional disenchantment. These data show that school violence causes systemic pedagogical rather than disciplinary issues.

When schools lack the systemic assistance to combat violence, teachers' morale and performance suffer. Herman et al. (2018) found that violence-exposed teachers burn out and miss classes, thereby impeding their learning. Mboweni and Taole (2022) noted that low teacher morale may lead to authoritarian management, which can increase classroom tension. Thobane et al. (2023) observed that gender-based harassment causes educators to react negatively, thereby inhibiting student participation. According to Leukes et al. (2021), inadequate safety training makes teachers feel vulnerable, and reduces their faith in school safety practices. These studies showed that low educator morale lowers teaching quality and creates hostile learning environments.

Violence in the classroom affects trust and collaboration in teaching–learning interactions. Yang et al. (2021) found reduced professional involvement among educators exposed to violence in different countries. Rudzani (2024) observed that such exposure hinders collaborative teaching and reduces educators' willingness to adopt learner-centered practices. According to Aboagye et al. (2021), bullying and intimidation in African schools hinders

teachers' ability to connect with students. Shields et al. (2015) noted that educators in Cape Town view learner violence as culturally rooted, which affects their interactions with learners. These data show that a breakdown in educator-student trust worsens classroom atmosphere and achievement. Violence changes schools' institutional culture, fragmenting communication and governance.

According to Barnes et al. (2012), a weak school culture escalates conflict, leaving educators isolated in coping with violence. Cowell (2013) found that schools with poor staff-parent coordination struggle to build sustainable safety systems. Kutywayo et al. (2022) found that the National School Safety Framework helps establish safer schools, but its inconsistent implementation leaves many teachers uninformed of its standards. Lodi et al. (2022) found that restorative justice programs in some schools improve school culture, but require wider adoption. Systemic action is needed to strengthen institutional cultures, in which violence destroys cohesion.

The South African government has implemented initiatives to reduce classroom violence as a public health issue. The DBE (2016) established the National School Safety Framework as the main school-based violence policy tool. Leukes et al. (2021) found that teacher handbooks supported a framework to standardize school safety. Titi et al. (2022) noted that national child protection efforts have been integrated into school health initiatives since violence affects student well-being. Chauke (2024) found that multi-stakeholder approaches, especially school-social worker-law enforcement partnerships, reduced incidences. Basson (2020) identified chronic resource restrictions and uneven monitoring in Gauteng, thus limiting its policy impact. These findings show that school-level implementation and community relationships are necessary for government programmes to work.

2.8. Implementation of policy, challenges and gaps

South Africa recognizes school violence as a public health and educational issue and prioritizes policy implementation. The Department of Basic Education introduced the National School Safety Framework (NSSF) in 2016 as the foundation for its policy response, promoting it as a comprehensive framework for safer schools (DBE, 2016). Kutywayo et al. (2022) noted that the NSSF allows student reporting, early risk assessment, and psychosocial intervention. Leukes et al. (2021) found that educator handbooks and training modules were aligned with

the NSSF, showing that the government recognizes teacher well-being as a safety factor. Titi et al. (2022) added that the Child Gauge includes school violence as a child health issue, placing it in a public health context. Polonyana and Moosa (2024) found that Soweto educators saw insufficient enforcement, with gaps between the policy's vision and its everyday implementation. These data show that South Africa has advanced frameworks but inconsistent policy implementation.

Globally, school responses to violence are often dominated by punitive approaches such as zero-tolerance policies. Gregory and Cornell (2009) argued that, while suspension and expulsion are intended to maintain order, these measures disproportionately impact students from marginalized backgrounds. A comprehensive review by Lodi et al. (2022) found that restorative justice practices that focus on communication and harm repair are better at addressing the fundamental causes of violence. Basson (2020) found that Gauteng schools using punitive methods experienced repeated occurrences of student aggression, indicating that deterrence was ineffective. Aboagye et al. (2021) found in multiple countries that structural issues such as poverty and inequality promote violence, demonstrating that punitive approaches fail to address these dynamics. The key finding is that global evidence supports preventive and rehabilitative measures for disciplinary exclusion, especially in marginalized South Africa.

Despite its extensive design, the NSSF is difficult to execute in township schools. According to Makota and Leoschut (2016), policy efficacy is hindered by capacity restrictions, particularly in school staff training. The effectiveness of the NSSF depends on multi-stakeholder engagement. However, according to Cowell (2013), many schools struggle to incorporate parents and communities. In McMahon et al. (2020), educators cited a lack of institutional support with school administrations failing to provide resources or safety practices. Mboweni and Taole (2022) found that teacher morale decreases when teachers are given safety responsibilities without training in resource-poor schools. These studies demonstrate that progressive policy frameworks fail when contextual inequalities and institutional gaps persist.

The government's "whole school" approach has had mixed results. In schools with resources, Leukes et al. (2021) found that NSSF-aligned teacher training enhanced conflict management. A historically underprivileged school saw a reduction in teenage violence after multidisciplinary interventions by social workers and educators by Chauke (2024), demonstrating the significance of context-driven approaches. Lodi et al. (2022) found that

restorative practices strengthened student-teacher relationships when piloted with school leadership assistance. Hendricks (2019) found that schools with safety precautions and psychosocial programs increased student well-being in violent communities. However, Basson (2020) found that many Gauteng schools lack consistent monitoring and dilution policies. According to this data, success stories are limited to schools with strong leadership and external connections.

Addressing community school violence is also an important issue. Richter et al. (2018) demonstrated that longitudinal community violence in Soweto shaped school student conduct, highlighting the difficulties of school-only interventions. Barnes et al. (2012) suggested aligning schools, community policing forums, and social services to prevent violence. Gast (2018) found that symbolic violence and inequities affect learner–teacher relationships; therefore, policy approaches should address these social systems. Sibisi (2021) found that ecological system techniques that place school violence in family and community contexts work better in high crime areas. Thus, without social development integration, policies such as the NSSF risk-treating symptoms while leaving structural factors unchanged.

2.9. Synthesis of reviewed literature

The presence, causes, and effects of school violence have been thoroughly documented, yet educators' voices are absent. While Aboagye et al. (2021) revealed considerable student victimization in multi-country research, their quantitative study did not include teachers who manage violence daily. Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) employed qualitative methods to show how violence impacts educators mentally; however, their study was limited to one province and was not applicable to Soweto. McMahon et al. (2020) examined US teacher-targeted violence from a global social-ecological perspective, but South African township schools require localized research. Polonyana and Moosa (2024) examined schoolteacher violence in Soweto, focusing on its prevalence rather than coping. These findings suggest that educators' life experiences are underrepresented in learner-focused discourse.

Policy responses such as the National School Safety Framework (NSSF) consider school violence a public health and educational issue. The Department of Education (2016) called the NSSF a whole-school strategy that involves learners, educators, and community stakeholders. Leukes et al. (2021) found that government handbooks increasingly address teacher safety and

well-being by acknowledging school violence as a professional risk. Kutywayo et al. (2022) found that township schools have good policy awareness, but an uneven distribution. According to Chauke (2024), NSSF-aligned educational interventions reduce adolescent violence when correctly implemented. Despite these efforts, Basson (2020) noted that Gauteng's unequal enforcement and funding restrictions made many Soweto schools vulnerable. It is difficult to operationalize progressive policy frameworks.

Social inequality and neighborhood dynamics complicate school violence. Herrero Romero et al. (2018) discovered that community violence strongly predicted learner disengagement, showing how structural disadvantages affect classroom behavior. Gast (2018) revealed that class- and race-related symbolic violence affects student–teacher interactions and continues educational inequity. According to Maphalala (2021), gangsterism fosters violence in Western Cape schools, illustrating school-community interactions. Petrus (2021) found that gangs recruit targeted schools, proving that schools are sociopolitical. These dynamics converge in Soweto; thus, interventions must address school-level events and structural inequality. The literature recommends context-specific solutions that recognize township schools' impoverishment and crime roots.

A limitation of the current study was its short- or cross-sectional design. Herman et al. (2018) assessed teacher burnout and learner disengagement immediately but not long-term psychological or professional effects. Richter et al. (2018) used longitudinal data to show how childhood-to-adolescent violence increases the risk of poor educational and health outcomes in students, rather than in teachers. Yang et al. (2021) linked school violence to teacher disengagement in a cross-national study; however, survey data may not reflect actual experiences. Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) demonstrated how violence hurts educators, although their study was not longitudinal in nature. There is little longitudinal data on how persistent school violence affects teachers' mental health, career paths, and ability to stay in the industry.

Restorative justice and trauma-informed justice are alternatives to punishments. Lodi et al. (2022) found that restorative practices reduce conflict and improve school climate by emphasizing accountability and reconciliation. Chauke (2024) found that trauma-informed teacher interventions reduce violence in underprivileged schools. According to Hendricks (2019), integrated community- and school-based programs improve students’ psychosocial outcomes. Leukes et al. (2021) found that professional development of teacher safety boosted

institutional violence. McMahon et al. (2020) observed that without institutional and leadership support, such projects rarely grow. Restorative and trauma-informed methods must be tested in South African township schools such as Soweto to establish their long-term efficacy and adaption.

2.10. Theoretical Framework: The Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) provides a multifaceted lens through which to understand how environmental systems affect school violence. At its core, the theory highlights the interplay between the individual and the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In education, this concept has been used to study how relationships and institutional dynamics affect student and teacher conduct. Studies in South Africa show that violence is not only interpersonal but also socio-economic and political (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). Sibisi's (2021) ecological approach links school violence in KwaZulu-Natal to home instability and community risk factors. Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) found that microsystem violence and systemic neglect harm educators. These data show that Bronfenbrenner's concept applies to Soweto schools, where different ecological pressures converge.

The microsystem-level interactions between students and teachers include hostility, bullying, and intimidation. Hendricks (2019) showed that students exposed to family violence are more likely to act aggressively in class, affecting educator–student relationships. Through qualitative interviews, Shields et al. (2015) found that verbal abuse by students weakened teachers' classroom management. A multi-country survey by Aboagye et al. (2021) found that teenagers are bullied, but their design ignores educators' experiences, highlighting the gap that this study fills. Gast (2018) showed how class and race-based symbolic violence affect student–teacher interactions, especially in underprivileged settings. These findings demonstrate that microsystem dynamics can cause school violence and lower educators' morale and efficacy.

The mesosystem analyses how interrelated contexts increase or decrease violence. Chauke (2024) found that poor school-family communication worsens behavioural disorders, but collaborative intervention tactics reduce violence in impoverished schools. According to Leukes et al. (2021), safety perceptions improve when educators, learners, and parents work together through structured programmes. McMahon et al. (2020) examined teachers'

viewpoints worldwide and found that supportive mesosystem links reduced hostile learner stress. Basson (2020) found that fractured school-community links undermine collaborative safety strategies in Soweto. This shows that mesosystem interactions improve resilience but reinforce insecurity without them.

The exosystem emphasizes how external institutions and governing structures shape schools. South Africa's main policy response, the National School Safety Framework (NSSF), integrates conflict resolution and trauma-informed approaches into schools (DBE 2016). Kutywayo et al. (2022) found that, while students knew about safety policies, educators often lacked training to implement them. Without institutional support, teachers face violence without coping mechanisms according to Mosito and Sitoyi (2024). Leukes et al. (2021) noted that government teachers' security handbooks were underused in low-capacity schools. Chauke (2024) showed that structured external support lowers teenage violence. These findings suggest that exosystem structures can support or hinder school safety.

Cultural norms and systemic inequalities are important at the macrosystem level. Herrero Romero et al. (2018) found that normalized violence increased academic delays in poor teenagers. Gast (2018) stated that symbolic aggression in South African classrooms marginalizes students and teachers because of socio-political exclusion. Maphalala (2021) found that poverty and cultural acceptability of violence foster gangsterism and cultural hostility in schools. Petrus (2021) showed that Port Elizabeth gangs were recruited at schools, reflecting macro-level pressure on micro-level experiences. These viewpoints show how institutional inequalities fuel violence and limit educators' ability to build safe learning spaces in township schools, such as Soweto.

The effects of violence change over time; hence, the chronosystem emphasizes this. Richter et al. (2018) discovered that frequent exposure to violence in early life had long-term effects on students' educational trajectories, and indirectly on educators. Herman et al. (2018) found that prolonged violence causes chronic burnout among educators and reduces their ability to provide education. In a cross-national study, Yang et al. (2021) found that school violence reduces professional involvement and institutional stability. Leukes et al. (2021) noted that changes in teacher safety have been codified, demonstrating inconsistent government commitment. This temporal perspective emphasizes the need for adaptable policies to address social and institutional changes.

2.11. Conclusion

This chapter critically examines the literature on school violence, emphasizing its pervasive nature and its significant impact on educators and teaching environments. This review highlights global and local perspectives, drawing attention to the unique challenges in Soweto and the gaps in current research, particularly regarding educators' lived experiences and systemic barriers. Chapter 3 outlines the study's methodology, detailing the research design and approach used to explore educators' experiences of violence and their effects on Soweto's teaching environment.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodology of the study, which examined the experiences of educators in Soweto's public high schools regarding school violence and its effects on teaching. This study explored the participants' present-day perspectives using qualitative cross-sectional methods. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) explains, qualitative cross-sectional as a method which encompass research designs that gather and analyse qualitative data at a single point in time, as opposed to longitudinal approaches. These methods are particularly advantageous for examining perceptions, experiences, and meanings within a specific context or population. This design offers rich insights into lived experiences without requiring longitudinal tracking, making it particularly suitable for examining complex and evolving sociopolitical contexts such as school violence (Yang et al., 2021). The following provides a framework to guide the application or critique of such methods.

The exploratory design allows the researcher to explore understudied subjects, including how violence affects educators rather than pupils, filling a gap in the South African school safety literature (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). This study examined educators' lived realities through contextually embedded experiences in three high schools (Kutywayo et al., 2022).

This strategy also recognizes that larger polls often omit classroom violence-affected educators (Mosito & Sitoyi, 2024). Inductive qualitative research draws themes from participants' stories, rather than categorising them. Inductive methods bring findings close to the lived experience when educators' violent responses are unknown (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Qualitative cross-sectional research has found structural and cultural influences on educator well-being and classroom conduct across district schools (Leukes et al. 2021). School safety academics recommend methodological flexibility for complicated issues, such as violence (Chauke, 2024). The method cannot show causality, but provides a replicable framework for analyzing educators' vulnerability, enabling longitudinal or mixed-methods studies. This chapter's methodological clarity encourages replication, and explains how methodological inquiry can rigorously construct qualitative studies.

3.2 Study Design

Research design is defined as a strategic framework for action that links the research question to the implementation of research (Creswell 2007). An exploratory cross-sectional study design was used to examine educators' experiences of school violence. In alignment with the constructivist paradigm, the study recognized the absence of a singular, objective truth; instead, knowledge was socially constructed through the interactions of participants with their environment. An inductive style of inquiry was adopted to collect rich descriptive data, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, themes, and concepts emerging directly from the participants' narratives. (Creswell, 2007). The cross-sectional nature of this study facilitated an examination of school violence within a specific temporal and socio-geographical context.

3.3 Study Site

The study was conducted in Soweto, a township in Johannesburg, Gauteng, a historically popular area well-known for the student uprising on June 16, 1976, and a densely populated township comprising Black Africans and a colored community. In terms of the demarcation of Gauteng schools, Soweto falls under Johannesburg Central District, which oversees approximately 70 secondary schools. The average matric pass rate for the district over four consecutive years is 76.4% in 2021, 81.2% in 2022, 82.9% in 2023, and a substantial increase of 6.1% in 2024, at 87.2%. Schools face unique challenges, including socioeconomic disparities, overcrowding, and a high prevalence of school violence, making it a pertinent setting for this study.

3.4 Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of educators from three secondary schools in Soweto who were predisposed to violence.

3.4.1 Selection procedure

An official request to the Gauteng Department of Education for research approval in Soweto High Schools initiated the selection process. After district office approval, the researcher met the chosen school principals to discuss the study objectives and logistics. In accordance with

ethical norms and the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), participants' contact details were obtained only after informed consent was obtained, and transcripts were de-identified to maintain confidentiality (Department of Education, 2016). The researcher briefed the participants on the objectives of the study in the staff rooms of each school. Only willingly did the participating educators ask questions about clarification. By clearly communicating the study objectives and ensuring voluntary participation, the recruitment process fosters ethical engagement and strengthens trust between the researcher and participating schools (McMahon et al., 2020).

Three of the 70 Johannesburg Central District schools were chosen because of their documented history of recurring violence and accessibility to sustained participation. To avoid bias, the inclusion criteria required schools to be public institutions in high-density communities with high violence rates, whereas the exclusion criteria excluded schools that piloted safety interventions under the National School Safety Framework (Kutywayo et al., 2022). The study explored contextual elements in depth by focusing on three schools; however, its generalizability was limited. Qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth to provide nuanced insights into complex social phenomena (Mosito and Sitoyi, 2024). Participants were carefully selected to represent gender and teaching experience and capture varied viewpoints on violence. This strategy yielded a balanced sample of Soweto schools while retaining ethical and methodological rigor (Polonyana and Moosa, 2024).

3.4.2 Sampling

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants who could provide relevant insights into the phenomenon (Austin and Sutton 2014). Three public high schools in Johannesburg Central District, an area noted for high levels of violence, were chosen. The researcher recruited educators who had experienced violence either directly or indirectly. Similarly, three schools in Soweto, characterized by high violence and active management, were selected through purposive sampling. Of the 70 district schools, three were purposively selected based on their compliance with the School Governing Body (SGB) approval requirements, as outlined in Section 21 of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996.

These schools demonstrated readiness and capacity to support research activities, including the timely endorsement of SGB and adherence to institutional ethics protocols. The selection process considered the feasibility, geographic diversity, and alignment with the study

objectives. Although no formal threshold has been universally defined, the selected schools met procedural and governance standards for ethical clearance. This selection facilitated the examination of schools with significant violence issues, although this limited the generalizability of the results. The report recommends future comparative studies across different schools (Aboagye et al. 2021). Despite the narrow focus, the findings illuminate the systemic variations in stressful teaching environments.

3.4.3 Recruiting participants

The researcher briefed the first two staff members and third safety coordinator after the school-level agreement. These discussions revealed the study's goals, procedures, and ethics to all educators who could ask questions. To comply with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), consent forms stress voluntary participation, withdrawal rights, and data security. Personal data are never shared outside the research team (Department of Education, 2016). The violence and purpose of the study were explained to the interested educators through Participant Information Sheets. Only signed consenters were interviewed during the teaching commitment negotiations. This open procedure preserved participants' autonomy and ethics in school violence-stricken situations (McMahon et al., 2020). Clear-recruiting communication improves narrative quality and researcher-participant trust (Mosito and Sitoyi, 2024).

Due to exposure to recurring violence and its effects, full-time educators with at least one year of experience in the selected schools had to participate. To eliminate bias, short-term contract educators, administrative staff, and National School Safety Framework counsellors were excluded (Kutywayo et al. 2022). The recruitment process targeted both classroom and disciplinary educators. Volunteers may have excluded educators who felt unsafe in sharing their experiences; however, anonymity and private interviews may have decreased this. Gender and teaching experience diversity have introduced new perspectives (Polonyana and Moosa, 2024). Ethical compliance, rigorous criteria, and concentrated recruitment ensured that participants understood Soweto high school teaching (Chauke, 2024).

3.5 Data collection method

Educators described Soweto school violence through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. We used a flexible technique that allowed the researcher to pursue structured questions and let the participants address surprising subjects. The research objectives guided the interview schedule,

which addressed violent incidents, their perceived effects, and institutional reactions. To guarantee question clarity and relevance, educators outside the study population piloted the instrument before the fieldwork. The interviews were conducted in private schools to avoid distractions. Trust is needed to capture real participant narratives in qualitative research (Mosito and Sitoyi, 2024). Signing informed consent before participation ensures the Ethics Protection of Personal Information Act (Department of Education (2016). These safeguards protect participants' rights and ethically control their contributions (McMahon et al., 2020).
Participants consented to audio recordings of 35-80 minutes. Where consent was not granted, notes and reflective journals supplemented the data. Nonverbal cues such as tone and body language are used to mitigate data loss and enhance interpretation. While the study anticipated 18 educators, only 13 were interviewed: five from School A, three from School B, and five from School C. Several female educators declined participation because of emotional vulnerability. This limitation underscores the emotionally taxing nature of discussions of school violence (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). Sensitive topics can deter female participation due to the risk of re-traumatization (Chauke, 2024). This highlights the importance of considering participants' well-being when addressing representation.

To ensure sufficient exposure to recurring violent patterns, participants had to be full-time educators with at least one year of continuous service in the selected schools. Short-term contract educators, administrative workers, and safety interventionists were excluded to reduce the bias. To increase credibility, these metrics targeted school principals, head of the department (HOD), educators and educators who play a role of school safety coordinators and have been in the teaching profession for over a year and more. Three of the 70 Johannesburg Central District schools with violent histories were selected for in-depth assessment. (Kutywayo et al., 2022) mentioned that, purposive selection may restrict generalizability, but it creates a rich background for under-resourced violence Leukes et al. (2021) believed that qualitative studies with smaller targeted samples yield more nuanced results. This depth-breadth balance reflects the study's exploratory cross-sectional approach, which valued contextual depth over statistical representativeness.

The researcher noted their experiences, biases, and feelings in field journals. Keeping impressions grounded in participants' voices rather than preconceived preconceptions requires reflexivity. The combination of audio transcripts, field notes, and reflective journals has increased credibility. The members checked their response summaries for their accuracy and

credibility. This systematic attention to quality supports Braun and Clarke's (2023) contention that a rigorous thematic analysis requires transparency and iterative reflection. These techniques allow for ethical and methodologically sound data collection, thereby generating findings that advance the safety of South African school educators.

3.6 Data Analysis

Familiarisation with the Data: The researcher engaged in a comprehensive review of audio recordings and generated analytic memos to document initial insights (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Transcripts were meticulously read, re-read, and cross-verified with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. The process of memoing facilitated a deeper engagement with the data. In accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), which delineates lawful practices for data de-identification in research contexts (Swales, 2021), transcripts were anonymized using pseudonyms.

Generating Initial Codes: During the familiarisation phase, notable features were identified and recorded as memos. A variety of inductive codes were developed to authentically represent participants' perspectives, consciously avoiding presumptions (Mosito & Sitoyi, 2024). This process culminated in the creation of a codebook to systematically organise and refine the initial codes.

Searching for Themes Codes were iteratively classified to discern patterns and thematic groupings (Kutywayo et al., 2022). The educators' experiences were analysed inductively, and conclusions were drawn from their narratives. A codebook was finalised to structure the emerging themes.

Reviewing Themes: Themes were evaluated for coherence and originality across coded extracts from multiple schools (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Manual coding was employed during the pilot stage to ensure clarity before transitioning to MAXQDA software. MAXQDA facilitated the storage of codes, theme grouping, and data management, thereby enhancing transparency (McMahon et al., 2020). The relationships between themes and subthemes were examined using thematic and idea maps (Leukes et al., 2021). Reflexive diary entries were incorporated to acknowledge positionality and mitigate bias (Chauke, 2024).

Defining and Naming Themes: Themes were designated to elucidate concepts and align with educational objectives. Consultation with a supervisor aided in refining themes such as

educational experiences of violence, institutional barriers, and their impact on teaching environments (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). The analysis transcended mere description to critically examine policy implementation and systemic neglect across the three schools.

Producing the Report: The final phase involves presenting the findings in a structured and compelling report. This entails weaving a narrative using the defined themes and substantiating them with compelling data extracts or quotes. The final report interpreted participants' experiences in relation to theoretical and policy frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Patterns were identified, and their significance in South African education was underscored. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation across schools and deep engagement with participants enhanced credibility (Kutywayo et al., 2022). Transferability was supported by detailed descriptions of the schools (Leukes et al., 2021). An audit trail of coding decisions and supervisor interactions bolstered reliability (Mosito & Sitoyi, 2024). Reflexivity was embedded through journaling of assumptions and responses to sensitive narratives (Chauke, 2024).

3.7 Data Trustworthiness

To ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness, this study employs Lincoln and Guba's paradigms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Establishing rapport with educators from the three selected schools facilitated deeper engagement with sensitive experiences of violence, thereby enhancing credibility. Transparency was maintained using audio trials, coded transcripts, field notes, and analytic memos (Leukes et al., 2021). Multiple data sources, including interviews, reflective journaling, and researcher field notes, were utilized to mitigate bias and preserve the authenticity of participants' voices (Mosito & Sitoyi, 2024).

The research process necessitated that the researcher critically examine her own positionality and preconceptions regarding educators' experiences of violence. Reflexive journaling documented the evolving influence of subjectivity on analytic outcomes, as judgments and emotions shifted throughout the study (Polonyana & Moosa, 2024). Transparency was further reinforced through reflection on the researcher's professional history, training, and social identity (Rudzani 2024). Peer debriefing with an academic supervisor provides an additional layer of scrutiny, enhancing trustworthiness and reducing interpretive bias (Chauke, 2024).

Methodological consistency was strengthened through triangulation across gender identities and school contexts, which enriched the thematic development. The study adhered to ethical standards and remained grounded in the lived experiences of the participants rather than those of the researcher.

3.8 Researcher's Background

The researcher was a qualified professional with 24 years of experience in violence prevention and social behavior change. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and a Honors degree in the Social Sciences. Previously, she managed a program that supported the Gauteng Department of Education in implementing training on the National Safety and Security Framework. This experience sparked her interest in understanding how educators cope with violence in schools and learners' delinquent behavior. She also completed modules for research report writing and qualitative research. Furthermore, she obtained certification through short ethics training courses, which enhanced her expertise in conducting ethical research. Against this background, she had to ensure that her past experience and involvement did not create any bias or influence during data collection. Despite her knowledge of the NSSF and how schools had to manage violence, she had to maintain a neutral position and not impose ideological beliefs on the participants.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study because of the focus on the sensitive issues of school violence. This research adhered to ethical principles, including respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice (Beauchamp, 2003). The University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) reviewed and approved the study protocol and ensured compliance with institutional and international ethical standards.

The participants received an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits before their consent. Audio recording consent was obtained, and handwritten notes were offered as an alternative. The participants could withdraw without any repercussions. Written authorization was obtained from the study sites, and the participants signed consent forms. A distress protocol was implemented to allow the participants to pause or withdraw if they were distressed. All participants received contact information regarding the psychosocial

support services. The researcher maintained a participant-centered approach throughout data collection.

Strict data protection measures were implemented. Pseudonyms were used to avoid identifying participants. Data were only used for the purpose of the study, in alignment with the participants' informed consent, reinforcing ethical integrity in reporting. In compliance with the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) guidelines and institutional data governance policies, all research data were handled with strict attention to privacy, confidentiality, and secure archiving. Participants' identities were anonymized using pseudonyms, and all electronic data were stored on password-protected devices that were accessible only to the principal researcher and academic supervisor.

Raw data, including audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes, are stored in an encrypted folder. No information was retained in any of the published or shared articles. The participants' contributions were used solely for the stated research objectives, and no secondary use was permitted without explicit ethical clearance. In accordance with HREC requirements, all research data will be retained for a minimum of five years following the completion of the study and any resulting publications. Thereafter, data will be securely disposed of using appropriate digital and physical destruction methods, subject to final approval from the Ethics Committee. These measures ensure transparency, ethical accountability, and protection of participant autonomy throughout the research life cycle.

3.10 Inclusion And Exclusion Criteria

In this study, it was imperative for participants to have direct, relevant, and authentic experiences of school violence in Soweto. The participants were required to be full-time educators at public high schools in the Johannesburg Central District. These participants had to work at their schools for two years to experience a teaching atmosphere and violence (Polonyana and Moosa 2024). For rich contextual narratives, educators must have witnessed, mediated, or experienced school violence (Mosito and Sitoyi 2024). Male and female educators from various disciplines were included to collect diverse viewpoints (Aboagye et al., 2021). Informed consent and audio-recorded interviews ensured ethical and methodological integrity (Chauke 2024).

Volunteers who could compromise the ethics or legitimacy of the study were excluded. Part-time workers, administrative staff, and educators with less than two years of teaching experience in the selected schools were excluded because they may not know enough (Leukes et al., 2021). Educators on leave or facing discipline were excluded to avoid data distortion and conflicts of interest (Kutywayo et al. 2022). Educators who were emotionally vulnerable during recruitment and uncomfortable discussing violent experiences were excluded to protect their mental health (Rudzani, 2024). Others who refused to sign the informed consent form or record interviews were omitted because of ethical and analytical issues. These criteria balance the inclusivity, scientific consistency, and improved study reliability.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to explore educators' experiences with school violence in Soweto. This study employed a qualitative cross-sectional design underpinned by meticulous data collection and analysis methods to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of this intricate phenomenon. Fundamental ethical considerations safeguarded the safety, dignity, and confidentiality of all the participants, thereby enhancing the integrity of the study. The following chapter presents the findings of the study, providing insights into the themes and patterns that emerged from the data and their implications for addressing school violence and its impact on the educational environment.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the study's findings, organized thematically to address the research questions and objectives outlined in earlier sections. It begins with the profiles of the study schools and participants, followed by an analysis of educators' experiences of school violence. The chapter also explores educators' perspectives on contributing factors, the impact of violence on teaching and learning, and the proposed strategies for addressing school-based violence.

4.1 Profiles and demographic of Study Schools and Participants

The study was conducted in three public high schools in the Gauteng Department of Education, located in Johannesburg Central District. For confidentiality, the schools are referred to as Schools A, B, and C. Schools A and B are situated in close proximity, whereas School C is located approximately 15 km away. All three schools had permanent classrooms; however, due to overcrowding, they resorted to using additional structures such as container classrooms and converted parking shelters.

School A employed 46 educators (11 men and 35 women), whereas School C employed 52 educators (24 men and 28 women). Demographic data for School B were not provided. School A had 103 Grade 12 learners and School C had 92, resulting in an educator–learner ratio of approximately 1:40. Although this ratio aligns with national averages, it exceeds the recommended threshold for optimal teaching and learning conditions (Yang et al., 2021). These figures highlight the demanding nature of educators' roles in maintaining discipline and teaching quality in overcrowded classrooms.

Table 1: This table below is detailing the demographics of the participants.

Variable	**Categories**	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	8	62
	Female	5	38
Age	22–30 years	4	31
	31–35 years	1	8
	36–45 years	3	23
	46–55 years	2	15
	56–65 years	3	23

Teaching Specialisation	English	3	23
	Mathematics	2	15
	Mathematical Literacy	2	15
	Life Orientation	2	15
	Technology, Afrikaans, Accounting, Economics	1 each	8 each
Years of Service	< 10 years	4	31
	11–15 years	2	15
	> 15 years	5	38
	Maximum (31 years)	1	—

The following section presents the first major theme emerging from the data: educators' perceptions and lived experiences of school-based violence. Drawing on rich qualitative explanations, the findings illuminate how violence manifests in the school environment, how frequently it occurs, and how educators respond to and are affected by such incidents. The narratives reflect a complex interplay between structural vulnerabilities, learner dynamics, and institutional responses, revealing violence not as an isolated disruption, but as a pervasive feature of daily school life.

4.2 Major Theme 1: Educators' Perceptions and Experiences of School Violence

This theme is explored through four interrelated sub-themes: (1) Forms and Triggers of Learner-Learner Conflict; (2) Frequency and Visibility of Incidents Across Schools; (3) Educators as Immediate Responders; and (4) Educators as Targets and Collateral Victims. Together, these sub-themes offer insights into the multifaceted nature of school violence and its implications for teaching, safety, and educational well-being. Note: Where participants declined audio recording, quotations reflected concurrent field notes, read back to, and affirmed by the participant prior to inclusion.

4.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Forms and Triggers of Learner-Learner Conflict

Across all three schools, educators consistently reported recurrent learner-on-learner confrontations, often triggered by seemingly minor provocations that escalated rapidly into verbal and physical aggression. Testimonies have frequently linked disputes over classroom

resources and routine peer interactions to sudden outbreaks of violence, with disagreements intensifying within minutes. In many cases, bystanders appear to normalize such incidents.

Participants noted that both male and female learners engaged in fights, although male learners were more frequently identified as instigators and escalators. Several educators have observed that these confrontations commonly occur during transitional periods, such as class changes and breaks, when supervision is minimal, and learners congregate around informal structures and building perimeters.

Gambling during break times has been cited as a recurrent trigger, with disputes often continuing into classroom sessions, suggesting a cyclical conflict pattern. Educators described a progression from verbal provocations—insults, threats, and shouting—to physical alterations such as pushing, striking, or wrestling. Peer reinforcement, including cheering, recording, and encouraging behavior, appears to erode informal behavioural restraint. Although a few incidents involved improvised weapons, the dominant narrative emphasized the speed at which irritation escalated into violence. The overarching pattern reflects low-threshold ignition points, limited peer inhibition, and the normalization of fighting as a conflict resolution strategy.

"This generation of learners do not know better; for them, engaging in a fight is a solution to every conflict. There was a time when the school did not have enough chairs, and there were male learners who felt entitled and bullied others over the chairs. Regardless of what time they arrive in class, they expect chairs to be waiting for them to occupy." Educator 3, School C

"Boy learners bully and threaten each other. It does happen that you walk into class and find them gambling during break time, and before you know it, they are fighting." Educator 5, School A

4.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Frequency and Visibility of Incidents Across Schools

While the frequency estimates varied across schools, the participants overwhelmingly reported that violent incidents occurred regularly, ranging from weekly to daily. These episodes were the most prevalent during lunch breaks and after formal teaching hours. Common hotspots included areas behind informal structures, along school perimeters, and corridors, where supervision was limited. Educators emphasized the need for constant vigilance and mobility to pre-empt or respond to alterations beyond the scheduled contact time.

Although some fights were perceived as minor, they often required first aid, disciplinary referrals, or classroom evacuation, thereby increasing their visibility. One participant, a school alumnus, contrasted past perceptions of "minor differences" with the current reality of tangible harm. Collectively, these testimonies suggest that violent episodes are embedded in the daily rhythm of school life, anticipated by staff, and are visible to the broader school community through sudden noise, movement, and crowd formation. These patterns reinforce the perception of violence as a normalized, rather than exceptional, feature of the school environment.

"Mam, in this school, learners do not give us a break. Violence occurs every during contact time, at lunch hours, and mostly behind informal structures. Learners flock to that side during lunch, hide there to bunk classes, and you often find them smoking or gambling." Educator 2, School A

"Incidents of violence between learners occur every second day, especially among boys. This is why educators cannot enjoy free time during lunch hours. Male educators have to patrol the school premises to monitor learners, and that is the only way we can reduce the incidence of violence." Educator 2, School B

4.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Educators as Immediate Responders

Most educators depicted themselves as immediate responders who break up confrontations, segregate students, and stabilize situations. Several instances have described educators blocking departures and spillovers by blocking doorways or moving into packed areas during growing disputes. Some participants mentioned the need to act overrode conventional instructional processes, necessitating on-the-spot safety and authority decisions in large classes.

Some found that aural cues—screams, abrupt running, or a surge of voices—prompted an urgent protective response and that procrastination could allow rapid crowding or the arrival of more students, further destabilizing control. Educators described shutting classroom doors during sessions to minimize movement and prevent mass departure during disruptions. A few acknowledged the personal risks of entering confrontations, such as being jostled or threatened, but insisted that non-intervention was impossible when learners were at risk. The depictions show educators as the first line of incident containment, adjusting access, situating themselves amongst learners, and restoring order before formal processes or external support can be mobilized.

"Yoooh! Sometimes, it happens that they start arguing in the middle of a lesson, you cannot just continue teaching you have to be interested in knowing what the issue is and pause the lesson because the worst can easily happen in front of your eyes." (Educator, school B)

"Mam, with learners you must always be alert to any noise, be it in class or outside during break time, we cant even allow them to be on their own without supervision because the fight can erupt anytime and we must immediately respond to separate them when they fight. You can look away when there is a noise you have to be ask what the noise all about because this kids fight over anything and everything, So we have to be alert all the time and immediately respond whether in a small misunderstanding because that can easily turn into a big fight." Educator 1 of school C.

"The minute learners hear other learners screaming in the school, it does not matter whether the lesson is in process; they want to storm out of the class to see what is happening outside their classes. If I am not quick to block the door, it becomes such a battle to keep them in class. you end up being injured because you are one against a big number of learners." Educator 3 of school A.

4.2.4 Sub-theme 4: Educators as Targets and Collateral Victims

In addition to being responders, educators also described experiences of direct victimization, ranging from verbal abuse and threats to physical assault. Several accounts have included hospitalization and long-term emotional distress. Learners have been reported to test boundaries through intimidation during invigilation, retaliatory taunting following disciplinary actions, and opportunistic harassment during lessons. These behaviours undermined professional dignity and heightened educators' sense of vulnerability.

Some participants also highlighted challenges to their authority from parents and community members, extending the scope of exposure beyond learner interactions. The cumulative impact of these experiences included social withdrawal among staff, requests for reassignment, and persistent anxiety when navigating school grounds. While most testimonies focused on learner behavior, the broader pattern linked educator victimization to enforcement roles and routine duties, particularly during efforts to uphold classroom and examination integrity.

"Yes, there were learners who violated an educator's dignity by attacking her with pepper spray. This affected her health to the extent that she was hospitalised. I don't recall how long

she stayed in hospital, but upon her release, she was never the same emotionally or mentally." Educator 2, School C

"Female learners aged 13 and 14 had a physical fight. While I was trying to separate them, a sister also a learner at our school came and threatened me, saying, 'Mam, if you get involved, I will show you who I am. It's going to be you and me now." Female Educator 3, School B

4.3 Major Theme 2: Educators' Perspectives on Predisposing Factors of School Violence

4.3.1 Sub-theme 1: The Influence of Gangsterism

Educators have consistently identified gangsterism in the surrounding communities as a significant driver of school-based violence. Participants reported that learners often joined local gangs and brought territorial disputes to their classrooms and playgrounds. These conflicts were frequently rooted in broader community rivalries rather than in interpersonal disagreements among peers. Drug-related alterations and external gang feuds routinely spill into school grounds, thereby transforming educational spaces into contested zones.

Educators described how learners introduced gang symbols, gestures, and slogans into the school environment, sometimes triggering confrontations. Several participants noted that students oscillated between academic responsibilities and gang affiliations depending on the context. Others have highlighted the impact of gang ties on disciplinary processes, where attempts to hold learners accountable were met with threats or retaliation from their community-backed peers. These accounts reveal that schools struggle to manage externalized rivalries that manifest in repeated fights, intimidation, and, in extreme cases, fatal outcomes.

"I tried to intervene in most of the incidents where learners were fighting. I do not recall where it started, but learners do fight, especially with the gangsterism happening in our school. We face recurring violence: gang activities, weapons, physical fights, and gambling-related conflicts. Authorities intervene but are met with resistance. Educators feel unsafe and unable to focus solely on teaching." Educator 1, School C

"Gangster 1 is from Extension Four, and Gangster 2 is from Extension Six. Both extensions send learners to this school; therefore, territorial disputes are common. If a learner from one

gang enters the other's 'area', a fight is almost inevitable. Even inside the school, this territorial mindset persists." Educator 2, School A

4.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Socio-Economic Hardships and Family Structures

Participants emphasized that socioeconomic disadvantages and dysfunctional family environments contribute significantly to learner aggression. Educators cited unemployment, overcrowded housing, and limited access to resources as factors that influence disruptive behavior. Learners from informal settlements were described as facing heightened challenges often resulting in classroom frustration and violence.

Many educators have observed that young parents lack authority and struggle to discipline their child. In some cases, caregivers actively defended misbehaving learners and undermined the school's efforts to enforce discipline. Poverty, family conflict, and inadequate parental guidance have been repeatedly linked to violent behavior. Several staff members argued that without addressing structural inequities in learners' home environments, school-level interventions would remain insufficient. These narratives underscore how socioeconomic and familial conditions silently reinforce violent patterns.

In this school, we have learners from the surrounding mshengo (new settlement) areas and from Township 1. Learners from Township 1 were more disciplined than those who stayed in the shacks. That alone reflects the inequalities experienced by learners from these two locations." Educator 2, School C

"These young parents don't know how to discipline their children. During disciplinary hearings, they remain quiet or side with the child, whether the child is lying. They fear difficult conversations. Honestly, these young mothers don't understand their children's socialisation and cannot guide them in the right direction." Educator 5, School C

4.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Systemic Gaps in Policy Enforcement

Educators expressed concern about the disconnection between policy frameworks and their enforcement. Participants reported that school codes of conduct and disciplinary panels often failed to address serious infractions. Offences such as weapons possession and violent behavior have been frequently overlooked. Some educators have described how school administrators downplayed incidents, thereby eroding their authority and weakening their deterrents.

Disparities in disciplinary outcomes were also noted, with some learners receiving minimal consequences for severe violations and others harshly punished for minor infractions. These inconsistencies contributed to the perception of institutional weakness, in which written policies lacked practical impact. Educators linked persistent violence to this failure in consistent rule enforcement, leaving staff demoralized and learners emboldened.

"The learner code of conduct outlines acceptable behaviour, yet learners still engage in prohibited activities. They bring drugs to school and sell them to others, this contributes directly to the violence we experience." Educator 1, School A

"A learner was stabbed during gang violence on school premises. Instead of reporting the incident to the police, the principal drove the injured learner around. No formal action was taken. The learners involved stayed home for seven days and returned as if nothing had happened." Educator 3, School B

4.3.4 Sub-theme 4: Leadership and Accountability Challenges

Several educators attribute the persistence of school violence to weak leadership and poor accountability. The participants expressed frustration with school leaders who either violated the rules or condoned unsafe practices. The reports included instances in which confiscated items were returned to learners, raising concerns about collusion or negligence. Some educators felt that violent incidents were deliberately minimized to protect the school's reputation, leaving staff unsupported and disillusioned.

Safety committees and disciplinary structures were described as symbolic rather than functional, lacking the decisive leadership needed to uphold order. The absence of institutional support diminished morale and reinforced the notion that violence is inevitable. Without top-level accountability, educators are left to manage daily disruptions with limited resources.

"I don't know if I should say this, Mmmh I hope what I am going to say will not put in trouble. Ah, we suspect that the principal was involved in gangsterism as a gang leader. You know what happened. One day, we confiscated the learners' bags and placed them in his office. Within minutes, those boys had their backpacks back." Educator 1, School B

"Mmmh Mam, in this school learners are never held responsible. Even after reporting incidents that warrant disciplinary action, they continue to attend school without consequences. Mam,

one day we found learners having sex in the toilets yet they're still here." Educator 5, School C

4.4 Major Theme 3: Effects of School Violence on the Teaching and Learning Environment

4.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Impact on School Safety and Infrastructure

Educators have consistently highlighted the compromised safety of school environments, attributing this to deteriorating infrastructure, inadequate fencing, and ineffective gate control systems. Several respondents described how broken, vandalized, or incomplete perimeter barriers enabled unauthorized entry and exit by learners and outsiders. Reports have indicated that students frequently exploit broken gates or climbed trees along school boundaries to leave the premises during breaks. Additionally, some educators noted that security personnel stationed at the main entrances lacked both training and authority to regulate access, often allowing visitors to enter without verifying their intentions.

Accounts further revealed that inconsistent bag checks at classroom entrances created opportunities for weapons, including firearms, to be brought to schools. Educators described a context marked by external threats and unexplained intrusions that heightened their concerns about safety. These infrastructural deficiencies have eroded staff confidence in schools' capacity to maintain a secure learning environment. The participants concluded that physical conditions and security mechanisms failed to safeguard the teaching space, thereby enabling violent incidents to proliferate.

"It's not safe at all (at this school). I remember this one time when two boys came in; apparently, they had a gun. They rushed in as if they were visitors and went straight to attack the kids, but luckily, they were kicked out before anything could happen." Educator 2, School B

"They (learners) bring knives because they use them to fight or create weapons from pieces of metal taken from the old furniture. They even vandalise items like chairs to make makeshift weapons." Educator 1, School C

4.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Psychological and Emotional Effects on Educators

Daily exposure to violence in the school environment leads to increased levels of anxiety, fear, and emotional distress among educators. In particular, female staff members expressed apprehension about remaining on the school premises after hours, citing fears of hidden students or potential attacks. Others have described colleagues who had withdrawn socially, avoided staff gatherings, or resigned because of persistent worry. These recurring threats have significantly undermined morale, leaving educators feeling vulnerable and unsupportive.

Several participants recounted how traumatic incidents, such as direct threats or physical confrontations, had lasting psychological effects on their peers, diminishing their motivation and altering their interpersonal engagement. The narratives underscored that the emotional burden extended beyond isolated events, manifesting as ongoing psychological strain. Many educators perceive their rights and safety to be subordinate to those of learners, contributing to a pervasive sense of insecurity and deteriorating mental health in the teaching workforce.

"Even if I want to return to get something I forgot or need to use at home over the weekend, I can't return to school. I'm scared. After school, I make sure that if I leave, I don't return because I don't know if learners are hiding somewhere in the school." Educator 4, School C

"Ever since that incident, this educator was never the same. She is unhappy, and her socialisation at school has changed. She is so reserved that does not even want to talk about the incident. How I wish she could participate in these interviews!" Educator 3, School B

4.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Disruptions to Teaching and Learning Processes

Participants reported that violent episodes, both during lessons and break times, frequently disrupted teaching and learning processes. Fights occurring outside classrooms often drew students' attention, compelling educators to halt teaching as learners attempted to observe the commotion. Teaching time was routinely lost to conflict resolution and emotional support for affected students. In more severe cases, educators described incidents involving weapons or property vandalism, which necessitated emergency interventions and further interrupted academic activities.

To mitigate disruptions, some educators resorted to locking classroom doors during lessons in order to maintain their focus. Despite these efforts, external noise, smoking, and erratic

movements across school grounds continue to distract the learners. Participants emphasized that such disturbances undermined concentration and teaching continuity, ultimately impeding academic progress. The findings suggest that school violence replaces structured pedagogical engagement with reactive crisis management, thus destabilizing the teaching rhythm.

"Sometimes we find ourselves in the crossfire, but we just cannot turn a blind eye and allow the learners to fight while looking." Educator 3, School B

"The other time, I was busy working at the school library and smelled smoke. I immediately went outside to check where the smoke was coming from. Only to find that a group of boy learners had used rubbish boxes and papers to set a fire inside the class. If I had not been closer to that classroom, our lives could have been in danger, and the school could have caught fire." Educator 4, School C

4.4.4 Sub-theme 4: Learner Behaviour and Academic Engagement

Educators observed that exposure to violence contributes to increased aggression, fear, and disengagement among learners. Students involved in fights often normalized violent behavior, reflecting broader familial or community influences. Respondents recalled instances in which learners openly defied school authority, insulted educators, and disrupted formal engagements with administrators or external officials, indicating a breakdown in institutional structures.

The presence of drugs, firearms, and other substances such as marijuana on school premises further compromised academic engagement. Educators reported that learners prioritized peer conflicts and external confrontations over academic responsibilities, with injuries and disciplinary actions frequently interrupting classroom activities. The cumulative effect of these behaviours was a learning environment marked by diminished discipline, eroded teaching authority, and reduced academic participation.

"Following an incident of gang violence in our school, the premier, together with law enforcement visited our school, and some learners misbehaved and did not take it kindly that a stranger in a form of a police officer is calling them to order and started insulting law enforcement." Educator 2, School C

"There was a time SAPS conducted disruptive searches at school and found drugs, weapons, and condoms. Learners bring weapons (guns and knives) to school, which leads to violence

and attacks. A while back, 7 learners were involved in a fight; 2 of the 7 got critically injured because 2 learners had weapons (knife, machete)." Educator 2, School B

4.5 Major Theme 4: Educators' Proposed Solutions to Address School Violence

4.5.1 Sub-theme 1: Strengthening Policy Implementation and Accountability

The participants emphasized the critical need for consistent policy enforcement and disciplinary procedures. Despite the existence of guiding frameworks such as the Learner Code of Conduct and the National School Safety Framework (NSSF), educators have reported widespread implementation failures. Several accounts have described how misconduct charges are routinely dismissed, allowing learners to return to class without facing the appropriate consequences. Others have highlighted the inefficacy of disciplinary committees, noting that learners often re-enter classrooms following serious infractions without explanation or resolution.

These narratives reflect the collective call for uniform standards and transparent procedures to ensure that transgressions are met through proportionate disciplinary action. Educators underscored the importance of leadership consistency, advocated school leaders to model accountability, and uphold policy guidelines. Overall, the data reveal a strong desire for institutional accountability mechanisms that safeguard both the staff and learners.

"Schools have policies which should be guiding us on how to manage school violence. However, policies such as the NSSF are not fully implemented. We also have a code of conduct which learners should abide by. Another problem is enforcement and inconsistent application of the policy." Educator 3, School A

"Although the policy sets clear guidelines on how to manage incidents of violence in schools, management contravenes such policies. For instance, a learner reported for misconduct should be subjected to a disciplinary process, but they will stay home for a day. When you think they have been disciplined, shockingly you see them in school the next day without any explanation to the concerned educator." Educator 5, School C

4.5.2 Sub-theme 2: Enhancing Security Measures and Infrastructure

Educators identified inadequate infrastructure and security as significant contributors to school violence. Participants cited breaches in perimeter fencing, broken gates, and the presence of undertrained or unarmed security personnel as factors that make schools vulnerable to external threats and internal disruptions. Without robust physical safeguards, both learners and outsiders were reportedly able to bring weapons or drugs to the school premises, thereby compromising the safety of the learning environment.

The suggested interventions include fence repair, increasing the number of trained security personnel, and implementing stricter entry protocols to verify visitors. Educators also recommended routine bag searches and gate surveillance to prevent the entry of contraband. These accounts underscore the link between secure infrastructure and a conducive learning environment, with participants urging the Department of Education to prioritize safety investments alongside academic resources.

"All 13 educators raised concerns about the insufficient security measures, with too few professionally trained and unarmed guards stationed at the gate. Often, visitors are allowed entry without verifying whether the person they are looking for is aware of their visit." Educator 4, School C

"A recurrent concern at School A and School C was the poor condition of fencing meant to secure school premises. Sections of the fences were reported to be damaged, dilapidated, or completely removed, allowing for unauthorised access." Educator 1, School A

4.5.3 Sub-theme 3: Expanding Psychosocial and Community Support

A recurring theme among participants was the urgent need for sustained psychosocial support for both learners and educators. Although social workers and psychologists occasionally visit schools, their involvement is largely reactive, typically following incidents of violence. Educators expressed a preference for continuous engagement with professionals in counselling, conflict resolution, and substance abuse prevention.

Several participants lamented the withdrawal of NGO support, which had previously provided valuable psychosocial services. Others advocated for therapeutic interventions over punitive measures, suggesting that behavioural issues often stem from deeper emotional and social

challenges. These insights position school-based violence not merely as a disciplinary concern, but as a manifestation of broader psychosocial distress, thereby reinforcing the need for holistic and preventative support systems.

"In our school, we used to work with social workers from SANCA. They used to come and address learners on issues of substance abuse or refer learners with behavioural problems to them. This was such a great resource for our school, but SANCA has since moved from our neighbourhood, so we do not enjoy that support anymore." Educator 5, School A

"We get support from the department. I mentioned that psychologists and social workers come and calm us down, but that they are reactive and not preventative. They only come to school when there is an incidence of violence." Educator 2, School C

4.5.4 Sub-theme 4: Building Collaborative and Preventive School Cultures

Educators have advocated the cultivation of collaborative school cultures rooted in prevention and mutual accountability. While morning staff meetings provided a platform to raise behavioural concerns, participants noted that these sessions rarely translated into actionable strategies. There is a clear call for structured conflict-management training and collective disciplinary approaches among staff members.

Moreover, educators emphasized the importance of forging deeper partnerships with parents, community leaders, and external agencies. Such collaborations were considered essential for addressing the root causes of violence and promoting well-being. The data suggest that violence prevention must be embedded in the daily fabric of school life rather than being activated only in response to crises. This requires a shift from reactive enforcement to proactive relationship-driven practice.

"I am not aware of any form of support from the department. The support structure in our school is that every morning all educators meet in the staff room, and this is where we report and raise any behavioural issues encountered with particular learners. Although this seems to be a talk show because nothing tangible comes from those morning meetings." Educator 4, School B

"The boy is now attending these psychological sessions. They helped him psychologically. He's back in my class, and we're getting there." Educator 3, School C

4.6 Summary of Findings

The thematic analysis revealed four major themes reflecting educators' proposed solutions to address school violence, each grounded in their lived experiences and professional insights.

4.6.1 Strengthening Policy Implementation and Accountability

Educators have consistently highlighted the gap between policy and practice. Although frameworks such as the National School Safety Framework and Learner Code of Conduct exist, their inconsistent enforcement undermines their effectiveness. Participants described instances in which learners returned to class after serious infractions without facing formal disciplinary procedures, eroding their trust in school leadership. There was a strong call for transparent and uniform disciplinary processes and school leaders to model accountability.

4.6.2 Enhancing Security Measures and Infrastructure

Physical safety has emerged as a foundational concern. Educators reported broken fences, unsecured gates, and undertrained security personnel, making schools vulnerable to external threats and internal disorders. These infrastructural deficits enable the circulation of weapons and drugs, compromising the learning environment. The participants recommended perimeter repairs, stricter entry protocols, and deployment of professionally trained security staff.

4.6.3 Expanding Psychosocial and Community Support

These findings underscore the need for sustained psychosocial support. Educators viewed school violence not merely as a disciplinary issue but also as a symptom of deeper emotional and social distress. Although departmental psychologists and social workers are occasionally deployed, their interventions are largely reactive. Participants advocated for preventative mental health support, ongoing partnerships with NGOs, and therapeutic approaches to learner behavior.

4.6.4 Building Collaborative and Preventive School Cultures

Educators emphasized the importance of fostering an inclusive preventive school culture. While staff meetings provided a platform to raise concerns, they lacked strategic follow-through. The participants called for structured conflict-resolution training, collective disciplinary approaches, and stronger engagement with parents and community leaders. These

insights reflect the desire to embed violence prevention into daily school practices through relationship building, mutual accountability, and restorative support.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to explore school violence experiences, effects and contributing factors from the perspective of educators. In this chapter, the researcher interprets and contextualizes the findings, drawing connections to existing literature and theory, and highlighting the significance and implications of the research. In line with the study objectives the discussions expound on the structural context, educators' experiences and perceptions; educators perspectives on predisposing factors, the impact on teaching and learning; and the normalisation of violence; and the policy gaps.

5.1 Structural Context and Demographic Pressures

The demographic and infrastructural characteristics of Schools A, B, and C indicate systemic overcrowding and spatial limitations that adversely affect teaching and learning environments. While educator–learner ratios are consistent with national averages, they surpass the recommended levels for effective teaching and classroom management (Yang et al., 2021). The employment of container classrooms and repurposed shelters exemplifies spatial marginalization, which may contribute to learners' feelings of neglect and disconnection, potentially intensifying behavioural issues.

This finding is consistent with the assertions of Bester and du Plessis (2010), who argued that inherited structural inequalities in South African schools foster conditions conducive to school-based violence, particularly in urban public institutions. However, the spatial dynamics of violence, including the impact of informal and unsupervised structures, remain underexplored in existing literature. This underscores a gap for future research: How do physical learning environments influence behavioural norms and conflict thresholds?

5.2 Educators' Perceptions and Experiences of School Violence

5.2.1 Forms and Triggers of Learner-Learner Conflict

Educators from all three schools have reported frequent student conflicts, often initiated by minor incidents that escalate rapidly. These observations align with those of Venketsamy (2024), who identified an increasing acceptance of violence in South African schools.

However, this study provides additional insights by highlighting factors such as peer encouragement, gambling during breaks, and the destruction of informal behavioural controls as catalysts for disputes. While previous research has often associated school violence with broader socioeconomic issues (Burton & Leoschut, 2013), this study suggests that internal school factors, such as gaps in supervision and peer influence, exert a more direct impact. This challenges the prevailing macro-level perspective and advocates for micro-level strategies such as peer and buddy support, daily safety protocols, and feedback loops with learners to address social dynamics within school settings.

5.2.2 Frequency and Visibility of Incidents

Reports suggest that violent incidents occur frequently, often on a weekly or even daily basis, particularly in the absence of adequate supervision. This observation corroborates Malindisa's (2022) assertion that educators anticipate violence as a routine aspect of their professional experience. The manner in which these incidents transpire, marked by the assembly of crowds, loud disturbances, and sudden movements, indicates a performative dimension that transforms violence into spectacle. This performative aspect has not been extensively explored in existing literature and warrants further scholarly investigation. The findings imply that violence is not merely sporadic but intricately interwoven into the daily fabric of school life, thereby contributing to its normalization and complicating efforts to restore order.

5.2.3 Educators as Immediate Responders

Educators frequently find themselves at the forefront, instinctively and often physically intervening to de-escalate conflicts. This observation aligns with Bester and du Plessis's (2010) assertion regarding the necessity of acknowledging the emotional labor and frontline risks encountered by educators. However, this study highlights a significant tension: educators are expected to act without sufficient training, institutional support, or formal recognition. The literature addressing the ethics and risks associated with educators assuming quasi-security roles is limited. This study invites a critical examination of policy: Should educators be expected to physically intervene, and what safeguards are in place to protect them?

5.2.4 Educators as Targets and Collateral Victims

Participants reported experiences of verbal abuse, threats, and physical violence, which included hospitalization and emotional distress. These findings corroborate Venketsamy's

(2024) research, which indicated that 20% of educators encounter direct violence, suggesting a broader spectrum of victimization. The extension of aggression from students to parents and community members illustrates that educators' authority is contested beyond the classroom environment. This erosion of professional respect contributes to burnout and turnover, thereby impacting the quality of education. However, existing research frequently prioritizes student outcomes, often neglecting the well-being of educators—a critical gap this study seeks to address. This research contributes to a grounded, context-specific understanding of school violence as a systemic, spatial, and relational phenomenon. By centering on educators' narratives, the discussion transitioned from theoretical considerations to concrete experiences.

Implications: Addressing school violence necessitates structural reform rather than relying solely on behavioural discipline. It is imperative for educators to receive formal training, psychological support, and institutional protection. Future research should investigate the spatial politics of violence, performativity and educational resilience.

Gaps: There is a scarcity of theoretical research concerning educators' victimization and their informal roles during crises. Additionally, the relationship between physical infrastructure and the escalation of disruptive and unwanted behaviours remains insufficiently explored. Policy frameworks that integrate educational safety into school governance are ineffective.

5.3 Educators' Perspectives on Predisposing Factors of School Violence

These findings elucidate the complex interaction between community gangsterism, socioeconomic deprivation, and institutional fragility as catalysts for school violence. These insights corroborate the findings of Ncontsa and Shumba (2013), who identified gangsterism, vandalism, and indiscipline as pervasive issues in South African schools. The participants' focus on the permeable boundaries between community and school environments, where gang conflicts infiltrate classrooms, extends this body of literature by illustrating how schools transform into contested spaces rather than secure sanctuaries. The literature characterizes school violence as a manifestation of societal dysfunction (Khumalo et al., 2025). The findings enhance this understanding by demonstrating how learners navigate between academic roles and gang affiliations, indicating a dual identity shaped by survival imperatives. This duality challenges simplistic behavioural models and necessitates nuanced psychosocial interventions. Socioeconomic and familial stressors, such as unemployment, overcrowding, and young

parental incapacity, are documented contributors to learner aggression (Lumadi, 2024). The data add depth by highlighting how caregivers sometimes undermine school discipline, revealing a breakdown in intergenerational authority and institutional trust. This suggests a gap in current interventions, which often neglect the family-school dynamics in perpetuating violence. The critique of policy enforcement and leadership accountability aligns with studies that criticize the symbolic nature of safety committees (Ncontsa and Shumba 2013). The participants' accounts of administrators returning confiscated weapons and minimizing infractions suggest institutional malaise bordering on complicity, raising questions about governance ethics, and school reputation management.

Implications: These deficiencies necessitate targeted systemic interventions. Enhancing disciplinary authority requires policy reforms and accountability mechanisms to bridge the gap between legislation and its implementation. Efforts should be expanded to include caregiver education and community-driven restorative justice to promote comprehensive support. Ethical leadership in schools that are susceptible to violence demands dedicated research to inform decision making and uphold professional standards. Importantly, this study amplifies the voices of educators by offering a grassroots perspective that challenges traditional policy narratives and supports practitioner-informed strategies.

Gaps: The current educational systems have several significant shortcomings in addressing violence and its consequences. Disciplinary authority is compromised by inconsistent applications, which highlights the gap between policy and practice. Interventions often narrowly focus on students, neglecting the essential involvement of caregivers and community participation. The ethical dilemmas faced by school leaders in unstable environments have not been sufficiently explored, resulting in a lack of leadership guidance. Moreover, prevailing policy frameworks frequently overlook educators’ lived experiences, relying on top-down assumptions that inadequately address the complexities of school-based violence.

5.4 Effects of School Violence on the Teaching and Learning Environment

The results demonstrate how deteriorating infrastructure and security deficiencies compromise educators' physical and mental well-being. This finding corroborates Lumadi's (2024) assertion that school violence disrupts teaching and induces anxiety. The data show how damaged fences and inadequately trained security personnel permit weapons and unauthorized individuals,

making schools unsafe. The emotional impact on educators, manifesting as withdrawal, fear, and resignation, reveals mental health crises among teachers. While research acknowledges psychological stress, our findings highlight gender-specific vulnerabilities, with female staff reporting heightened fears. This aspect remains insufficiently explored and requires targeted support. Disruption of teaching due to violent incidents, external noise, and unpredictable movements indicates a shift from structured teaching to crisis management. This finding aligns with Khumalo et al.'s (2025) observation that violence diminishes academic engagement. However, participants' coping mechanisms, such as locking classroom doors, suggest that pedagogical self-defence is rarely documented. Student disengagement, defiance, and substance abuse demonstrate how violence normalizes anti-academic behaviours. These findings challenge the belief that discipline alone can restore order, emphasizing the need for trauma-informed educational models and psychosocial support systems.

Implications: Integrating physical safety measures into training programs and establishing emergency protocols are imperative for protection. Mental health support should address gender-specific needs and include wellness initiatives for the staff. Educational frameworks must withstand crises to ensure learning continuity and stability. This study reconceptualizes school violence as a systemic issue that transforms the teaching profession, requiring structural rather than behavioural changes.

Gaps: Physical infrastructure often lacks integration with gatekeeper training and emergency protocols, which results in incomplete safety measures. Mental health support remains insufficient, particularly for gender-specific experiences and staff wellness programmes. Schools are inadequately prepared to maintain learning continuity during crises, and lack resilient teaching frameworks for violent events. Current narratives treat school violence as an isolated behavioural issue, overlooking its systemic nature and impact on the teaching profession.

5.5 Educators’ Proposed Solutions to Address School Violence

5.5.1 Policy Enforcement and Leadership Accountability

Educators in this study consistently emphasized the need for uniform policy enforcement and transparent disciplinary procedures. Despite the existence of frameworks such as the Learner Code of Conduct and the National School Safety Framework (NSSF), participants described

widespread implementation failures. Misconduct charges were frequently dismissed and disciplinary committees were perceived as ineffective, with learners returning to classrooms without resolution.

These findings echo Khumalo et al. (2025), who argue that while the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has adopted the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) framework, its operationalization is hindered by inconsistent leadership and limited institutional capacity. Similarly, Pillay et al. (2023) highlighted that adherence to the Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP) correlates with improved educator responsiveness to psychosocial challenges; however, uptake remains uneven.

The data suggest that policy frameworks alone are insufficient without leadership modelling and institutional accountability. Educators advocated that school leaders embody policy principles and foster ethical enforcement cultures.

Implications: Leadership development programs should prioritize accountability and restorative justice. Schools must transition from procedural compliance to value-driven enforcement.

Gaps: The existing literature underrepresents educators' lived experiences of policy failure. Future research should explore how leadership behaviours influence the efficacy of school safety frameworks.

5.5.2 Infrastructure and Security Deficiencies

The participants identified inadequate infrastructure and security as the key contributors to school violence. Accounts of broken perimeter fencing, unarmed security personnel, and lax entry protocols have revealed systemic vulnerability. These findings align with those of Khumalo et al. (2025), who underscored the role of the physical infrastructure in deterring violence and promoting safety.

However, much of the literature treats infrastructure as a technical fix, and overlooks its symbolic significance in communicating care and protection. Educators' narratives suggest that neglected infrastructure erodes trust and signals institutional disregard for safety.

Implications: Safety audits and infrastructure upgrades must be prioritized in the educational budget. Security personnel should be trained in surveillance and trauma-informed engagement.

Gaps: Research on the psychosocial impact of infrastructural neglect is limited. Future studies should examine how unsafe environments affect educator morale and learner behavior.

5.5.3 Psychosocial Support and Holistic Interventions

A recurring theme was the urgent need for sustained psychosocial support. Although social workers and psychologists occasionally visit schools, their involvement is predominantly reactive. Educators expressed a preference for continuous engagement with professionals in counselling, conflict resolution, and substance abuse prevention. These findings align with those of Pillay et al. (2023), who discovered that educators are often unaware of available psychosocial services under the ISHP.

The withdrawal of NGO support further exacerbated service gaps, leaving educators to manage complex behavioural issues without adequate resources. The data suggest that school violence should not be viewed merely as a disciplinary issue but as a manifestation of broader psychosocial distress. Educators advocated therapeutic interventions over punitive measures, recognizing the emotional and social roots of learner misconduct.

Implications: Psychosocial services must be embedded into school operations, with dedicated staff and formalized partnerships with NGOs and health departments.

Gaps: Longitudinal research on the impact of sustained psychosocial interventions is lacking. The emotional toll on educators who act as informal counsellors warrants further investigation.

5.5.4 Collaborative Cultures and Community Engagement

Educators have long championed the creation of collaborative school cultures that prioritize prevention and mutual accountability. While morning staff meetings provide a platform for voicing concerns, participants noted that these discussions rarely lead to actionable strategies. There is a clear need for structured conflict-management training and collective disciplinary approaches. These observations align with the findings of Khumalo et al. (2025), who advocate the development of school-community partnerships to prevent violence. However, the literature often overlooks the complexities inherent to collaboration, such as power dynamics and resource disparities. Educators have emphasized the importance of involving parents, community leaders, and external agencies to address the root causes of violence. They envision violence prevention as a proactive, relationship-driven practice seamlessly integrated into the daily operations of school life.

Implications: Schools should invest in participatory governance models and co-design violence prevention strategies for their stakeholders. Community forums and parent workshops foster shared accountability.

Gaps: Research on how educators navigate conflicting expectations from parents, communities, and policy mandates Models of inclusive governance in school safety remain under-explored.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Strength of the study

Providing a Confidential and Safe Space: The qualitative approach, specifically through semi-structured interviews, created a secure environment for educators in Soweto to share their personal experiences of violence in their school. This was crucial for gathering honest and in-depth accounts.

Revealing Detailed Narratives: The interviews allowed for the collection of detailed narratives that are often overlooked by quantitative surveys. This depth helps to better understand the real-world impact of violence on educational environments.

Enabling Inductive Research: The qualitative design permitted an inductive research process. This means that instead of starting with preconceived hypotheses, the study allowed themes and understanding of violence and its causes to emerge directly from the educators' own accounts.

Enhancing Credibility: Methodological practices like member checking and maintaining reflexive notes improved the credibility of the study's narrative and overall methodology. 3

Adding Contextual Depth: By focusing on the specific socio-political landscape of Soweto, the qualitative analysis gained depth and relevance. This made the findings more valuable for both academic discussion and the development of practical policies.

In essence, the qualitative approach was strong because it prioritized the voices and lived experiences of educators, which is critical for developing effective and context-sensitive interventions.

6.2 Limitations to the Study

Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations. These limitations underscore the need for future research to employ mixed methods approaches called methodological triangulation, larger and more representative samples, and comparative studies across districts to enhance the

robustness and applicability of the findings. Methodological triangulation' refers to the practice of using multiple research methods to study a single phenomenon. The absence of this approach is identified as a weakness of the study because relying on a single method can limit the overall strength of the research.

The study exclusively used semi-structured interviews as its data collection method. Methodological triangulation would involve supplementing these interviews with other research techniques and methods such as: Classroom observations: Directly observing interactions and events within the school environment. Learner surveys: Collecting quantitative data from learners to compare with the qualitative insights from educators. The lack of methodological triangulation is considered a weakness for several key reasons: 1) Limited Validity and Dependability: Using multiple methods helps to cross-validate findings. If data from interviews, observations, and surveys all point to the same conclusions, it increases confidence in the validity (accuracy) and dependability (consistency) of the results. The study acknowledges that not using triangulation may limit its validity and dependability. 2) Increased Risk of Bias: Relying solely on semi-structured interviews introduces the possibility of method-specific biases. The study specifically mentions self-reporting biases, where participants might have selectively recall certain events or underreport sensitive incidents. Triangulation with other methods, like direct observation, could have helped to verify or provide a different perspective on the self-reported accounts, thus creating a more balanced and comprehensive picture. Therefore, future research may look into adopting more than one method of data collection.

6.3 Recommendations for addressing school violence

Prioritize School Safety, Discipline, and Child Rights; This involves creating a positive school climate with mutual respect to reduce violent incidents. Practical measures include improving physical security with fences and surveillance cameras, especially in high-risk schools, and enforcing disciplinary codes that are transparent, rights-based, and aligned with restorative justice principles to tackle issues like gang activity and bullying. Additionally, structured campaigns on child rights and responsibilities can empower learners to resist negative peer pressure.

Strengthen Political Commitment and Leadership: Policy frameworks are not enough; there must be genuine government investment and political will to fight school violence. This includes providing adequate funding for security personnel, creating community-driven safety committees, and fostering partnerships with law enforcement. School safety should be integrated into national policies through coordinated efforts between government departments like Basic Education, Social Development, and the South African Police Service.

Provide Capacity Building and Psychosocial Support for Educators; Educators need professional development in areas like conflict resolution, restorative discipline, and trauma-informed classroom management to better handle disruptive learners and de-escalate conflicts. 9 Providing access to counselling and peer support groups is also crucial to help them manage the stress, anxiety, and exhaustion resulting from exposure to violence.

Strengthen External Ties and Collaborations: Effective school safety requires a collaborative effort involving educators, learners, parents, law enforcement, and civil society organizations. The document suggests implementing quarterly community forums for stakeholders to review safety strategies and using peer-led programs, where learners act as safety ambassadors, to enhance the effectiveness of interventions.

Address the Mental Health of Educators and Learners: It is essential to address the psychological well-being of educators, as continuous exposure to violence leads to poor mental health, absenteeism, and low morale. Schools should provide counselling services, either through on-site psychologists or community health specialists, and work to normalize help-seeking to reduce stigma. Integrating social-emotional learning and anti-bullying education into the curriculum can also help foster resilience and empathy amongst learners.

6.4 Conclusion

This qualitative, exploratory study illuminated the profound impact of violence on the professional lives and well-being of educators in three Soweto schools. By employing an ecological framework, the findings reveal a complex interplay of factors contributing to violence in educational settings, including structural socioeconomic inequalities, the normalization of gang culture, and inconsistent safety policy enforcement. The research corroborates that persistent violence fosters an atmosphere of fear, which ultimately reduces

educational effectiveness. Polonyana and Moosa (2024) further argued that inadequate infrastructure and community instability within townships contribute to the normalization of school violence. Yang et al. (2021) linked violence to learners' disengagement. The results show that educational violence is a global issue that requires comprehensive and replicable solutions.

Consequently, addressing school violence demands a multi-faceted approach that extends beyond the school gates. It requires robust political will and coordinated efforts among education, social development, and law enforcement agencies to create safe and equitable learning environments 4. The personal experiences shared by educators in this study are invaluable, as they ensure that proposed interventions are both feasible and context-sensitive. By bridging the gap between high-level policy objectives and the daily realities of violence, this research advocates for restorative, community-driven solutions.

To build upon this foundation, future research should employ mixed-methods designs that combine the depth of qualitative interviews with the breadth of quantitative surveys and observational data Kutywayo et al. (2022) . Such an approach would enhance the validity and applicability of findings, paving the way for more comprehensive and effective strategies to combat school violence across diverse contexts Mosito and Sitoyi (2024)

6.5 Reflexivity

I discovered my research journey to be a bag of mixed feelings and experiences. It was filled with learning by doing experience. Overall, this is a joyous and stressful academic journey. Above all, I had to ensure that I stayed on course in terms of maintaining ethical standards as stipulated in the methodology chapter. I experienced challenges in implementing the research activities as per the initial work plan, as when I had to adapt and adjust accordingly to ensure the completion of this research project. It is important to note how relevant stakeholders enabled my research by granting me the necessary permission and approval from the GDE and the Johannesburg Central District.

Although I worked with the GDE, I was intentional in navigating this process. Following the communication protocol was crucial for maintaining my research integrity. I applied self-awareness and remained critical at every step, starting by negotiating school entry via the

Johannesburg central district which was characterised by permission delays. The bureaucratic challenges, despite being internal, reflected the systemic issues and poor coordination that the recommendations identify as barriers to implementing rapid school safety interventions. I could not approach schools directly as it could compromise my relationship with the department and school leadership. Self-awareness helped me exercise patience, maintain follow-up, and seek help from my professional network about research focal persons to refine my approach.

Eventually, I was able to negotiate with the research unit and swiftly obtain written authorization to enter schools. Thereafter, entry into schools was much easier, and school principals immediately granted access to learners but with clear scheduling of when to conduct interviews, which was also negotiated with each participant. What I read and heard from the media about school violence in Soweto and the literature did not influence my positionality when interviewing the participants.

My professional social work background has the potential to go beyond my research role. I consciously reminded myself of my role as interviewer rather than social worker. This separation was critical to mitigating bias, ensuring that narratives captured reflected educators' authentic experiences of violence rather than a therapeutically guided account, thereby reinforcing the study's strength of elevating unfiltered educator voices. I had to check my cultural values and beliefs and reflect on how they may influence my interpretation of the data. I closely followed the methodological steps of data collection, cleaning, codebook development, codebook sharing with my supervisor, analysis, and write-up. I stated things as they were, without altering participants' words. I allowed qualitative in-depth research interviews to take their normal course, wherein some participants used these interviews to ventilate their frustration about learner behavior and the system, allowing them to do so within a safe space while reassuring them of confidentiality.

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APPENDICES

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Appendix 1: Declaration of Plagiarism

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION TO BE SIGNED BY ALL HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS

SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY: APPENDIX ONE

I Motshidisi Ramadi (Student number: 744662) am a student registered for the degree of Master of Public Health in the academic year 2025.

I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above degree is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.
- I have included as an appendix a report from "Turnitin" (or other approved plagiarism detection) software indicating the level of plagiarism in my research document.

Signature: _____ Date: 30.03.2025

1

Appendix 2: Turnitin Report

Final Research Report 06102025.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9%	7%	7%	%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	wiredspace.wits.ac.za Internet Source	1%
2	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	1%
3	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1%
4	health.uct.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
5	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
6	Mfundo Mandla Masuku, Nomakhosi Nomathemba Sibisi. "Combating School-Based Violence Using African Indigenous Knowledge Systems - Implications for Educational Safety", Routledge, 2025 Publication	<1%
7	core.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
8	scholar.ufs.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
9	repository.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
10	ujcontent.uj.ac.za Internet Source	<1%

Appendix 3: Data Collection Tool

Objective 1: Profile the participating schools regarding their location, infrastructure, educators, and educators' demographic characteristics.

1. **Participant Demographic information**

Age category:	22 – 30	
	31 – 35	
	35 – 45	
	46 – 55	
	55 - 65	
Sex:		
Home language:		
Residential area		
School name code		
Teaching subjects		
How long have you been in the school		
Date of the interview:		

1. **Have you ever felt threatened in this school? If yes, probe for:**
    a. The nature of the threat: bullying, harassment, violent & etc.
    b. Who was the perpetrator: learner, colleague, management?
    c. Details of the incidence.
    d. How the participant felt?
    e. How the participant handled that incident?
2. **Have you ever witnessed another teacher being harassed? If yes, probe for:**
    a. The nature of the harassment: bullying, physical, violent, etc
    b. Who was the perpetrator: learner, colleague, management?
    c. Details of the incidence.
    d. How was the incident handled?
3. **In the last three months, how often have you witnessed learners fight on the school campus? Probe for:**
    a. How prevalent are such incidences and the participant's explanation for such prevalence?
    b. Details of the incidence was it boys of girls, etc.
    c. How was the incidence handled and by who?

Objective 2: To explore experiences of school violence from the perspective of educators.

4. **How safe is your school environment?**

5. **Do you ever feel unsafe in your school?**

a. Probe for:
    i. areas in the school that makes the participants feel unsafe.
    ii. School events that make them feel unsafe.

6. **What kind of violence normally occur in your school?**
    a. **Probe for violence inside school premises?**

7. **Please explain any incident of violence you have experienced in the past 18 months**
    a. When last did you witness violence in the school?
    b. Tell me more about the incidence.
    c. Who was affected in the incidence? (probe for educators or learners and genders).
    d. Probe for other incidences that might have taken place within the timeframe.
    e. Probe for personal experiences of violence.
    f. Probe for threats.
    g. How did you deal with it?

8. **Have you ever experienced threats of violence from a community member regarding a school related issue? Probe for:**
    a. Details of the incidence (s) (bullying, physical, verbal)
    b. Who were the perpetrators?
    c. The nature of the grievance
    d. How the incidence was handled?
    e. Witnessed experiences of other school staff

Objective 3: To explore educators' views on factors predisposing their schools to violence.

9. **In your opinion what are the things that make the school unsafe for educators? Probe for:**
    a. Physical environment including gate, fence, buildings, etc.
    b. Relations including:
        i. Among educators/ staff.
        ii. Educator-learner relationships.
        iii. With community members.
    c. Is the experience similar for female and male educators?
    d. Is the experience similar for female and male learners?
    e. Elaborate on similarities and differences.

10. **When do you feel unsafe in the school and why?**

11. **How is the relationship between educators and learners in the school? Is there a trust relationship to report perpetrators of violence by educators and/or learners?**

12. **What factors get in the way of teaching in your school?**

13. **What safety measures does the school have? Please explain each measure the school has in place.**

Objective 4: To describe the effect of school violence on teaching and learning environment from the educators' perceptions.

14. **Can you think of a time when you had to stop teaching in class due to school violence?**
    a. Tell me more about that situation?

15. **Do you think school violence affects teaching and learning? Probe**
    a. How it affects educators' ability to do their work?
    b. How it affects learners?
    c. How it affects relations between educators and learners?

Objective 5: To explore the educators' ideas of appropriate solutions to school violence.

16. What do you think of the efforts towards dealing with violence in this school? Probe for:
    a. School efforts
    b. Department efforts
    c. The community efforts
    d. Or any other including the teachers' union.

17. What do you think of the school procedures for dealing with incidence of violence?

    Probe for:

    a. What works well?

    b. What does not work well?

c. How could these be improved?

18. What form of support did you receive and who offered you the support? How effective was it?

19. What support systems are offered by DoE? What are your experiences in accessing the services?

20. What are your suggestion and recommendation on how to improve safety?

21. Do you believe it is possible to make schools safer again? If yes, how can that be achieved and what blocks the measures from being implemented now?

Figure 2: School profiling

District name				Date of data collection			
DoE District name				School Principal's name			
Telephone number		Email Address					
Field worker		Telephone number					
Name of the school				Type of School			
Retention							
Learner – Teacher enrolment				Male		Female	
	Grade 12 Learners enrolled at the end Jan 2024						
	Learners enrolled at the end of Nov 2023						
	Total Number of teachers						
	Average number of learners in a class						
	Total number of grade 12 classes						
School Safety							
. National School Safety	3.1 Does the school have a safety committee. If yes, answer	3.1.1 What is the composition of the committee	3.1.2 Has the committee been trained	3.1.2(a) If yes, what were they trained on	3.1.2 (b) When was the last training (MM/YYYY)	3.1.3 Name of the school safety coordinator	Notes
	3.1.3 (a) Contact information of the school safety coordinator	3.1.4 Does the school have NSSF implementation plan	3.1.5 Was the NSSF Diagnostic 'audit checklist' conducted.	3.1.6 Does the school have an incident reporting file in place	3.1.7 Is the incident reporting file updated regularly	Notes	

Teachers experiences of violence from January 2019 to date.															
4. Incidence of violence	**3.1 Number of teachers who reported experience of violence in term - 3**		**3.1.2 Type of violence**	**3.1.3 Number of teachers deaths as result of violence**		**3.1.4 Number of teachers' hospitalised because of violence**		**3.1.5 Number of teachers of experiencing mental health issues because of violence**		**3.1.6 Number of teachers linked to services for care and support**		**3.1.6(a) Name organizations used for linking teachers**			
	M	F		M	**F**	**M**	**F**	M	**F**	**M**	**F**				
	3.2 Number of incidences of violence reported by learners at school		**3.2.1 Type of violence**	**3.2.2 Number of learners deaths as result of violence**		**3.2.3 Number of learners hospitalised as result of violence**		**3.2.4 Number of learners expelled from school because of violence**		**What is the procedure for dealing with incidence of violence by the learner to learner or learner to teacher violence?**					
	M	F		**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**						

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

Good day,

My name is **Motshidisi Ramadi, a Master of Public Health student from Wits University.** I am doing research on school violence in three selected public high schools in Soweto. In this research we would like to seek new knowledge and gather information about educators' experiences of school violence and what effects does it have on the teaching environment**.**

I am inviting educators to take part in the research study and those interested will be requested to provide a formal informed consent to indicate that they are voluntarily participating in this research study. You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.

Study title	Educator experiences of school violence and perceived effects on the teaching environment in public high schools in Soweto, South Africa
Research question	What are the lived experiences and views of educators working in Soweto secondary schools known to be prone to school violence?
Date of the study	February 2021 to December 2024
Summary of information about this study	**Aim of the Study:** The main aim of this study is to explore experiences, effects, and factors contributing to school violence as perceived by educators. **Objective of the Study** • To profile study schools in terms of the educator learner ratio; demographics of the educators; and school policies on violence and its implementation. • To explore experiences of school violence from the perspective of educators. • To explore educators' views on factors predisposing their schools to violence.

	• To describe the effect of school violence on the teaching and learning environment from the educators' perceptions/viewpoint. • To explore the educators' ideas of appropriate solutions to school violence **Study Design:** This is a cross sectional and qualitative study which seeks to gain an in-depth and holistic perspective of groups of people (educators), environments (school-based violence), programs (learning and teaching), events, or any phenomenon (school violence) one wishes to study by interacting closely with the people one is studying. **Study Site:** This study will be conducted in Soweto, Gauteng, which is in the education district named as Johannesburg Central District, under the provincial Gauteng Department of Education **Study Population:** The population of this study will be female and male educators from selected public high schools in Soweto, who have personally experienced violence and victims or observed another teacher being violated in the school.
Data collection	The researcher will conduct interviews with educators, who voluntarily agree to participate in this study. The interview process will comprise of semi-structured and probing questions. The researcher will also request permission to record the interview.
Risks of being involved in the study	Although no harm is expected, recall of unpleasant incidents can cause stress. A letter of informed consent and a letter containing the contact information of the researcher are provided, who will help in referring the participant to various organisations such as the South African Depression and Anxiety Group, the South African Police Service, The South African Council for Educators and the Gauteng Department of Education and the Gauteng Department of Education Health and Wellness Unit whose contacts are provided below, thus ensuring appropriate referral where necessary.
Benefits of being in the study	Participants will be given pertinent information on the study while involved in the project and after the results are available
Financial gain	The researcher does not anticipate any costs associated with educator's participation to the study as such there will be no reimbursement The researcher will not provide any money to those voluntarily participating in the study
Voluntary participation	Anyone participating in the study will be asked to complete an informed consent as a proof that she has voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.
Confidentiality	Normally personal information will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be available to the researcher and her supervisor.

	1. Personal information will not be disclosed to the Gauteng Department of Education and the schools 2. The Human Research Ethics Committees of the University may exceptionally require personal data to respond to a formal complaint, or for a compliance audit 3. All data collected during the study will be securely retained for two (2) years, if a scientific publication arises from the study and six (6) years, if there is no publication. Thereafter it will be destroyed accordingly.
Final Research Report	Upon completion of this study a research report will be compiled and examined by the university and the final approved report will be accessible to the participants and the Department of Education. `
Contact details of researcher/s	Researcher: Motshidisi Ramadi Email: gotshiamo@gmail.com Tel: +27 824435586
Contact details of HREC administrator and chair	This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg ("Committee"). A principal function of this Committee is to safeguard the rights and dignity of all human subjects who agree to participate in a research project and the integrity of the research. If you have any concern about the way the study is being conducted, please contact these numbers for complaint purposes 011 717 2301, 011 717 2700/1234
Dealing with distress	Should your participation in the study trigger some traumatic memories related to the research topic and question please feel free to contact the following agencies which will provide professional counseling at no cost. 1. Lifeline Johannesburg (011) 723 1331 2. South African Depression and Anxiety Group (0080) 0121314 3. The South African Council for Educators (012 663 9517) 4. South African Police service (08600 10111) 5. Gauteng Department of Education Health and Wellness Unit (0800611169)

Thank you for reading this Study Information Sheet.

Date: _____

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form

Title of project: Educator experiences of school violence and perceived effects on the teaching environment in public high schools in Soweto, South Africa
Name of researcher: Motshidisi Ramadi Master of Public Health (MPH) student at Wits University
Please note that:

- The interview will only be audio recorded using a tape recorder only.
- I will transcribe the audio recordings as soon as possible after the interview and then destroy the tapes.

I, ……...agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me, and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following: (Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
……(date)
…… (signature)
…… (name of person seeking consent)
…… (date)

Appendix 6: Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

R49 Ms ML Ramadi

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE NO. M220102

NAME: (Principal Investigator)	Ms ML Ramadi	**DEGREE:**	MPH
DEPARTMENT:	School of Public Health Medical School University		
PROJECT TITLE:	*Educator experiences of school violence and perceived effects on the teaching environment in public high schools in Soweto, South Africa*		
DATE CONSIDERED:	2022/01/28		
DECISION:	Approved unconditionally		
CONDITIONS:			
NOTE:	If contact information regarding student study participants is required, please contact the Registrar's office - <Nicoleen.Potgieter@wits.ac.za>		
SUPERVISOR:	Dr D Conco		
APPROVED BY:	Professor P Ruff, Chairperson, HREC (Medical)		
DATE OF APPROVAL:	2023/09/29	**EXPIRY DATE:**	2028/09/28

This Clearance Certificate is valid for 5 years from the date of approval. An extension may be applied for.

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATORS

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Research Office secretariat on the 3rd floor, Phillip Tobias Building, Parktown, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the above-mentioned research and I/we undertake to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research protocol as approved, I/we undertake to submit details to the Committee. **I agree to submit a yearly progress report**. When a funder requires annual re-certification, the application date will be one year after the date when the study was initially reviewed. In this case, the study was initially reviewed in **January** and therefore reports and re-certification will be due in the month of **January** each year. Unreported changes to the study may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Medical).

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

Appendix 7: GDE Research Approval Letter

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**06 November 2023**
Validity of Research Approval:	**08 February 2024– 30 September 2024** **2021/329A**
Name of Researcher:	**Ramadi ML**
Address of Researcher:	**42 Weavers Nest**
	268van Heerden Street / Midrand
Telephone Number:	**082 443 5586**
Email address:	**gotshiamo@gmail.com**
Research Topic:	**Educator experiences of school violence and perceived effects on the learning and teaching environment t in public high schools in Soweto, South Africa**
Name of University:	**Wits**
Type of qualification	**Masters**
Number and type of schools:	**3 Secondary Schools**
District/s/HO	**Johannesburg Central**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

06/11/2023

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix 8 : Director's letter - Johannesburg Central District

GAUTENG PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Enquiries: Mrs M. Chinian
Tel: 011 983 2135
Email: Marisa.Chinian@gauteng.gov.za
Directorate: ISSP

MS M L RAMADI
42 WAEVERS NEST
268 VAN HEERDEN STREET
MIDRAND

By email: gotshiamo@gmail.com

Dear Ms Ramadi

SUBJECT: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RESEARCH APPROVAL

Correspondence received from you on 30 January 2024 titled: *Academic Research on School Violence* refers.

Thank you for informing the Johannesburg Central District Office of your intended research in five secondary schools namely, Altmont Technical High School, Eldorado Park Secondary School, Lancea Vale Secondary School, Phafogang Secondary School and Silver Oaks Secondary School.

The following attachments are acknowledged and received:

1. GDE Research Approval letter from the Knowledge Management and Research Directorate at GDE Head Office – 06 November 2023
2. Letter to the District Director
3. Ethics clearance letter
4. Research Proposal
5. List of schools

You are welcome to proceed with your research however, in the execution thereof; kindly be reminded to heed the non-negotiable of being mindful of protecting contact time. In the interest of protecting the safety and well-being of staff, please be mindful of conditions 3 and 4 of the GDE Research Approval letter.

The District Office wishes you great success with your research and reminds you to comply with the terms and conditions against which approval has been granted by the Knowledge Management and Research Directorate.

Kind regards

Seate

MS BLT SEATE
DISTRICT DIRECTOR
DATE: 7/02/24