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The nature and extent of teachers as targets of bullying by their learners in a high school

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates and addresses the issue of bullying of teachers by learners, which is also referred to as teacher-targeted bullying (TTB). The purpose of this study is to obtain data relating to the nature and extent of teacher-targeted bullying in a High School in Gauteng West. The setting is a former Model C, co-educational school, consisting of 1 354 learners (Grade 8 to Grade 12). The ethnicity of the School is predominantly Black, with 60% Black learners to 40% Caucasian, and the gender ratio of learners in the school is 706 girls to 648 boys.

The current teacher population consists of a staff quotient of seventy-five teachers (75), twenty (20) male and fifty-five (55) female teachers, who are employed at the school, which will also be known as "the workplace" for the purposes of this research. The procedure for this research entailed using a teacher group of seventy (70) teachers, of whom fifty four (54) volunteered to complete the questionnaire, allowing an in-depth response by establishing factors contributing to the difficulties of learner bullying experienced by teachers; the effect on teacher performance, morale and student learning; and the support needed from education management for teachers experiencing bullying by their learners. From these questionnaires, the process was extended to a semi-structured interview, in order to follow up on the questionnaire. This allowed an understanding of the teacher's life experiences or situations as experienced in their own words, for the twelve (12) volunteer teachers who had experienced bullying by learners. In this mixed method design, quantitative results enhanced generalizability, and qualitative results helped to explain how teachers experienced teacher-targeted bullying by learners in this Gauteng West High School.

The research findings indicated that, prominent in this study, is the stress reported by teachers relating to the disciplining of learners. The level of reported learner-on-teacher-bullying was more evident in the classroom. It was also reported that all Grades were problematic for teachers, but the level of reported stress was more evident with Grade 9 male learners in same-gender classes. Furthermore, difficulties within this school environment, as well as the effect on teachers' performance, morale and support from school management were established.

In an effort to respond to the epidemic of learners who target and bully teachers, a reconceptualisation of the learner-on-teacher-bullying construct in the School under review, as well as other schools in South Africa, is needed. Thus bullying of teachers by learners

must be tackled as a whole-school issue, with the focus on positive learner behaviour, good support structures, and active leadership, ensuring that staff are not only supported, but are also seen to be supported, by the various role players.