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The experience of workplace bullying amongst teachers: a qualitative study

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Abstract/Summary

Over the years, researchers have found the teaching profession as being one of the most stressful occupations, as it is characterised by excessive job demands and limited job resources. Recently, news reports and social media accounts have also highlighted the toxic environment which exists within schools, as there has been an increase in workplace bullying reports between teachers and teachers and learners. This is a very serious situation as decades of research done on the workplace highlights the detrimental effects of workplace bullying, as it is regarded as a psychological and physical stressor that severely affects the wellbeing of individuals as well as organisations.

Considering this research, the present study utilised the Job Demand-Resource model (JD-R model) as a theoretical approach to contextualise and gain a more in-depth understanding of workplace bullying amongst South African teachers. The research method used was qualitative and the data was collected using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Thirteen teachers in Gauteng were interviewed and a thematic content analysis (TCA) was used to analyse the data collected. The main findings of this study indicated that the participants perceived the teaching profession as being characterised by high job demands and low resources, and that these conditions negatively affected the wellbeing of participants. Participants expressed feeling stressed, frustrated and fatigued. Further, the participants perceived their stressful working conditions and the poor wellbeing that it has caused, as contributing to the increase of workplace bullying reports within schools. Being exposed to bullying behaviors over time led to participants feeling immense emotional trauma, with participants expressing feelings of depression, stress and incompetence. Further, participants expressed how workplace bullying negatively effected the functioning of schools, leading to an increase in turnover intentions, absenteeism, and a breakdown in working relationships.

The implications of the study's findings are that they contribute to the awareness of the environmental conditions of teachers and how this may be promoting workplace bullying that occurs amongst teachers within South African schools.

In doing so, this study may encourage governmental departments to improve environmental conditions within schools and thereby protect teachers from the escalation of workplace bullying and its concomitant individual health impairments. National legislation and support networks could also be developed and implemented to protect teachers from bullying at work. The results of this study therefore contribute to a knowledge base bringing awareness to the importance of effectively managing working conditions and thereby reducing the possibility of workplace bullying.

Keywords: *Teachers, Workplace Bullying Experiences; Job Demands; Job Resources; Job Stress; Wellbeing*