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The psychological impact of toxic leadership on teachers within South African schools: a scoping review

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ABSTRACT

Toxic leadership (TL) is a prevalent phenomenon within South African schools, yet is vastly under-studied. Abuse by leaders has a detrimental effect on the well-being of teachers, which may create barriers in the learning and teaching process. This study sought to assess the experience of educators who work under toxic leaders as well as the impact of toxic leadership on the psychological well-being of educators under principals/ heads of department, who hold a toxic leadership style, within in a South African context. This was done by conducting a scoping review, using the updated 2020 JBI methodology. The key words used in the review were: "toxic leadership", "workplace bullying", "teachers/educators", "schools" and "South Africa". From these key words approximately 1904 studies appeared. Further filtering, using BOOLEAN operators, was applied to these studies. Relevant studies, as well as their reference lists, were then screened. From these screened studies, 12 were applicable to the current review. This review found that there are a number of recurring psychological effects of toxic leadership in schools across South Africa, with the most common being stress, feelings of powerlessness, isolation, loss of self-confidence, humiliation, low morale, depression, and hopelessness. The study also found that common experiences of teachers under toxic leaders were that abusive superiors were overbearing and over-controlling of the victims, that the victims' personal (social and familial relationships) lives were negatively affected by the abuse they experienced, and that victims experienced public humiliation. Furthermore, victims were excluded from conversations and/or events, because individuals who were the favourites were given preference in these situations. Additionally, the common experiences reported by victims were being threatened, being the subject of malicious rumours, being ignored or given "silent treatment" and being verbally abused (e.g. swearing and insults). A number of gaps and limitations were identified, a primary limitation being the fact that the construct of TL was not sufficiently investigated

in schools. Consequently, the present study's reviewers needed to use workplace bullying, and other proxies of toxic leadership, to identify suitable studies.