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# Teachers' lived experiences of school violence and their coping strategies

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## Abstract

*School violence<sup>1</sup> perpetrated against teachers is becoming a scourge in South African schools, and as a result, teachers feel stressed, depressed, unsafe and demotivated to continue teaching. This problem, which has had a severely negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning, has also permeated the entire educational system in South Africa. Hence, the emergence of this study, which applied the routine activity theory also to investigate factors influencing perpetrators (learners) to target their victims (teachers) in the absence of capable guardians. This qualitative study adopted a phenomenological case study design to establish teachers' lived experiences of school violence and their coping strategies to improve teaching experiences. The sample size comprised eight purposively selected high school teachers who had experienced at least one form of violence at a school in the Free State Province. Data were collected via audio recordings during face-to-face semi-structured interviews, which were then transcribed and analysed following Braune and Clarke's thematic analysis approach. The findings indicate that the teachers interviewed were emotionally stressed and demotivated by their experiences of school violence. Additionally, data revealed that the teachers in the study expressed strong feelings of insecurity and disappointment with the teaching profession. Regarding teachers' coping strategies, the findings indicate that school-based counselling services and sharing experiences with colleagues help to alleviate the influences of school violence. It is recommended that incidents of school violence experienced by teachers be reduced or even eliminated if all relevant stakeholders consider the coping strategies.*

**Keywords:** *coping strategies, lived experiences, routine activity theory, school violence*

## 1. Introduction

School violence simply means violence that occurs within a school setting. It can transpire inside and outside the classroom, in the school environment, and to and from home and school (Ferrara *et al.*, 2019). According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019), school violence is any form of physical, psychological and sexual aggression among

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<sup>1</sup> School violence in this study predominantly focused on learner-to-teacher violence.



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learners, teachers and/or school personnel towards learners and/or teachers. School violence can be physical (beating or kicking), sexual (rape or harassment), psychological (emotional and verbal abuse), cyberbullying, and drug and alcohol abuse (Meyer & Chetty, 2017; Botha, 2018; WHO, 2019; Van Niekerk *et al.*, 2022). It can be committed by learners, parents, teachers, or other school members (Botha, 2018; UNESCO, 2019). Serious school violence constitutes acts such as brutal threatening, possession of weapons, committing aggravated assault, robbery, sexual assaults and shootings (Turanovic & Siennick, 2022; Van Niekerk *et al.*, 2022). Being a victim or an offender of school violence has been linked to various individual, family, school, social and community factors (Botha, 2018; Arhuis-Inca *et al.*, 2022).

Some common causes of school violence include the lack of sound societal norms and values, race and ethnicity, poor parental upbringing, media exposure, poor socioeconomic background, abuse of authority by teachers, delinquent and antisocial behaviour, poor performance, low academic achievement, and substance abuse (Turanovic & Siennick, 2022; Van Niekerk *et al.*, 2022). According to Veriava, Thom and Hodgson (2017) and Botha (2018), additional factors include peer pressure, gangsterism, aggression, frustration as a result of not coping with class activities, and poor relationships within the classroom. Sibis (2021) adds that substance abuse and physical confrontations are among the most common causes of school-based violence.

Furthermore, school violence against teachers correlates with teachers' gender, age, personality, self-presentation, novice status, lack of experience in learner discipline, possessing poor communication skills (Fakunde, 2022), displaying negative attitudes towards learners, the use of corporal punishment, misuse of authority (Meyer & Chetty, 2017; WHO, 2019), inability to manage the classroom, lack of insight into learners' personal problems, interference in learners' fights, and failure to report school violence (Botha, 2018; Fakunde, 2022; South African Principals' Association (SAPA, 2023). Meyer and Chetty (2017) maintain that school violence is intensified by teacher attitudes and behaviour such as absenteeism, leaving classrooms unsupervised, and regularly taking leave during official hours. In agreement, Moon and McCluskey (2020) associate teacher victimisation by learners with teachers' unsupportive and unfriendly behaviour in the classroom.

The South African Council for Educators (SACE, 2011) regards school violence as a significant challenge to the government, the teaching profession, and civil society. Le Mottee and Kelly (2017) state that lacking learner discipline also contributes to teachers' victimisation. Okeke (2020) concurs that school discipline and safety management aspects collapse the moment teachers lose the authority to discipline deviant learners, especially after the abolition of corporal punishment. Studies reveal that this leads to teachers experiencing anxiety, fear, health problems and frustration (Sibis, 2021; Turanovic & Siennick, 2022). According to the SACE (2011), Botha (2018) and the WHO (2019), depression, post-traumatic stress, anger and hardening of attitudes (worthlessness, helplessness and disappointment) are consequences of teacher victimisation. These are exacerbated by classroom disorder (sometimes exhibited in violent forms) and insecurity in schools (Hlatshwayo, 2018; Arhuis-Inca *et al.*, 2022). Alarmingly and unfortunately, school officials feel embarrassed to report incidents of school violence to the relevant authorities (SAPA, 2023). Unfortunately, these challenges have resulted in professional disengagement and mass resignations among teachers.

Moreover, school violence not only negatively influences teachers' demeanour personally and professionally, but also continues to disrupt the education system. Against this background, this study aimed to answer the two research questions below:

- What are teachers' lived experiences of school violence?
- What are teachers' coping strategies to deal with school violence?

## 2. Literature review

The results of a review of teachers' experiences of school violence and their coping strategies, followed by the theoretical framework, are discussed below.

### 2.1 Teachers' lived experiences of school violence

The South African Principals' Association states that 358 teachers were exposed to physical abuse in the Limpopo Province. 151 learners, 31 of whom were accused of assaulting teachers and other school staff in the Gauteng Province, were expelled, and three teachers were assaulted by learners at two schools where a female teacher in the Free State Province had had her clothes torn off (SAPA, 2023). Nieuwenhuizen (2018) also raises concerns about teachers being assaulted by learners in the Free State Province following numerous reports and incidents at schools, adding that most incidents in South Africa are not simply a matter of learners venting their frustration, but that they also stem from deep-rooted causes. School violence has increased teachers' job dissatisfaction, resulting in frequent absenteeism and a high turnover rate (Sitoyi, 2020). According to Grobler (2018), many teachers suffer from physical distress, occupational distress (e.g. burnout), or psychological distress such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder caused by school violence. Terzoudi (2020) claims that psychological distress can affect people's relationships with their family and friends due to victimisation experienced at work. As indicated above, school violence can leave teachers frustrated and aggressive towards learners, colleagues, and even family members, which may emanate from learners' insults, intimidation, and opposing teachers' authority at schools (Botha, 2018; Marolen, 2019). Hence, teachers develop a negative attitude towards violent learners, become demotivated to assist them in academic activities, feel overwhelmed and frustrated, experience fear and guilt, and develop low self-worth (WHO, 2019; Moon & McCluskey, 2020; Turanovic & Siennick, 2022).

Teachers who have witnessed significant learner aggression and violence – particularly physical and verbal violence – are affected to the extent that their sense of well-being and professional attitude are totally eroded (Ferrara *et al.*, 2019; WHO, 2019). Additionally, studies reveal that numerous violent physical and psychological attacks happen in schools, including slapping, threatening, throwing chairs at teachers, the use of obscene language, stabbing and shooting teachers, gangs of learners beating up teachers, teachers being assaulted in class, learners walking out of the classroom, and learners shoving teachers around (SACE, 2011; SAPA, 2023). Lamentably, these have left teachers with post-traumatic stress disorder, accident proneness, anxiety, worry, neurosis, shyness, suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem, humiliation, paranoia, and poor relationships (Turanovic & Siennick, 2022; Van Niekerk *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, a study by Mahaye (2023) confirms how learners act disrespectfully towards teachers, disrupt lessons, plan illegal protests, and engage in gangsterism by bringing deadly weapons to school to inflict severe bodily harm on teachers or other learners on the pretext of self-protection. Consequently, teachers experience guilt, sleep deprivation, stress and

discomfort, making them distance themselves from learners, as teaching has become no longer pleasurable (Garcia-Silva & Lima Junior, 2022). Moreover, teachers suffer from chronic health problems such as depression, stress, fear, sadness, shame, substance abuse, career changes, withdrawal, disengagement, resignation, anger, and the hardening of attitudes (Botha, 2018; WHO, 2019; Turanovic & Siennick, 2022).

## 2.2 Teachers' coping strategies regarding school violence

According to Martínez Ramón and Morales Rodríguez (2020), an individual's coping strategies involve a set of behaviours to deal with a perceived problem. Teachers and education authorities employ different coping strategies to deal with learner-on-teacher violence in schools (Le Mottee & Kelly, 2017). Sibisi (2021) states that counsellors, psychologists and social workers can identify and provide the required assistance (before they harm other learners or teachers) to learners who pose a danger to schools. According to Botha and Zwane (2021), South African teachers cope better when there is a prevention programme offering emotional support and workshops on conflict management to equip them with the necessary skills to manage school violence. Moon and McCluskey (2020) emphasise that in such circumstances, teachers need psychological assistance from healthcare professionals such as counsellors, psychologists and alternative mental-health specialists to address their problems.

In managing school violence, teachers rely on colleagues to support and console them, on religious leaders for pastoral care, on community members and school governing bodies (SGBs) for intervention, collaborating and strategising to manage school violence, and on working with the police to monitor, detect and curb incidents of violence in time (Netshitangani, 2018; WHO, 2019). Netshitangani (2018) argues that teachers cope well when a firm policy on school violence is in place. The WHO (2019) agrees that developing a school policy to deal with violence can help the school plan and share a vision to tackle violence in schools. The SAPA (2023) suggests a protection policy against physical harm from learners and parents for principals and teachers, in addition to the mandatory establishment of security guard posts at all schools. Lastly, Meyer and Chetty (2017) suggest a holistic approach to personal transformation to eradicate violence in schools, while Turanovic and Siennick (2022) advocate that conducting a threat assessment, reporting threats, and curbing weapons access and possession are promising practical coping strategies.

## 2.3 Theoretical framework

This study adopted the Routine Activity Theory (RAT) developed by Cohen and Felson (1979) to establish the motives for school violence against teachers. This theory indicates that crime is likely to occur when the potential offender meets a suitable target in the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Kitteringham & Fennelly, 2020). Cohen and Felson formulated the RAT in 1979 to elucidate the contextual factors influencing and shaping crime in the world (Kitteringham & Fennelly, 2020). The RAT is known as an opportunity theory, as "opportunity is the root cause of crime" (Pimple, 2016). This theory propositions that crime mainly occurs once the 'motivated' offender identifies a suitable target in time and space where the capable guardian is unavailable (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In other words, the potential offender (learner) meets the vulnerable target (teacher) opportunely in the absence of a capable guardian (security guard) within the school premises with the intention of causing harm (school violence).

A possible offender, according to Turvey and Freeman (2013), is someone motivated by both internal and external factors to commit a misdemeanour against a target who is perceived to be vulnerable, while the capable guardian is a person whose presence or proximity dissuades offenders from committing crimes. Importantly, this theory establishes that opportunity or space in the absence of a figure(s) of authority within the school setting creates a conduit for school violence against teachers. This implies that learners usually attack teachers once there is no security on site.

### 3. Research methodology

This qualitative study adopted a phenomenological case study design, which is an in-depth exploration of an issue (a phenomenon) experienced by a particular individual or group (Mourlam *et al.*, 2019). Phenomenological studies mainly concern human experiences and general explanations of a phenomenon in a specific location (Gill, 2022). This design was purposefully employed to extract information from teachers on their experiences of school violence and coping strategies in a setting. Eight teachers in the Senior and Further Education and Training (FET) Phases who had experienced one form of violence or the other at one high school located in the Free State Province participated in this study. The participants involved four males and four females between the ages of 27 and 56 with teaching experience of five to 34 years. Their qualifications range from a Higher Diploma in Education (HDE) to a Bachelor of Education Honours (BEd Hons). The participants were selected via purposive sampling, as they had personally experienced school violence and thus were rich in possessing relevant information to share for this study.

Data were collected by conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews after gaining participants' full written permission. The researcher audio recorded (with consent) all interview proceedings using a mobile phone. The interview sessions and recordings lasted approximately one hour with each participant, which included probes for accessing thick and rich data to answer the research questions in line with the aim and objectives of the research. During the interviews, counselling services were provided via a professional social worker on standby for emergencies. This was implemented to protect the participants from any psychological or emotional discomfort (Okeke, Omodan & Dube, 2022), since the study dissected sensitive information on school violence. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by engaging the services of a professional transcriber. The transcripts were then repeatedly read by the researchers and later analysed to establish themes and subthemes by following Braune and Clarke's (2021) six thematic analysis steps, which entail familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Lastly, data trustworthiness in this study was ensured by complying with the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (De Klerk & Van Wyk, 2022).

### 4. Ethical considerations

Before approaching this study's gatekeeper (the school principals) and participants, ethical clearance and permission from the University of the Free State (reference no: UFS-HSD2021/1981/22), the Free State Department of Education, and the Xhariep Education District were obtained. The school principal also permitted the researchers to interview the participants. Moreover, the eight selected participants voluntarily consented to participate

in the study and signed the informed consent forms before data collection. The teachers' identities and responses were protected using codes (T1 – T8) for confidentiality during research. This study preferred alphanumeric codes to pseudonyms because pseudonyms sometimes collide with participants' identities (Okeke *et al.*, 2022). Also, during the pandemic, COVID-19 protocols such as sanitising and social distancing were observed during this study.

## 5. Findings and discussion

This section uses two themes and five subthemes to discuss the findings emanating from teachers' lived experiences of school violence and their coping strategies.

### Theme 1: Teachers' lived experiences of school violence

Three subthemes addressed teachers' lived experiences of school violence, and they were presented and discussed under this theme.

#### *Subtheme 1: Emotional challenges*

Six teachers who responded to this subtheme lamented facing emotional challenges such as stress, posttraumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, anxiety, and demotivation resulting from school violence. They lucidly revealed that school violence had had a negative impact on their personal lives and professional attitudes about the teaching profession. The teachers' responses below resonate with the above assertions:

*T1: School violence produces so much stress in a person. It even becomes difficult to wake up in the morning and come to work, simply because you know you must deal with some sort of violence from learners. It is like we are being tortured by our own children, and that is so bizarre.*

*T3: I have posttraumatic stress disorder because of the incidents I have dealt with and been exposed to. I become anxious when I observe an argument between a learner and teacher because I have first-hand experience of how quickly it can escalate into something serious.*

*T4: The experience makes you feel stuck in a rut, and you cannot get through that. It is terrible because something I have loved for many years has been ripped away. The trauma is hectic, especially the panic attacks that are triggered by the smallest of events at school. I stress a lot, even when I am at home.*

*T5: Teachers start developing low morale; they are scared and anxious because learners are violent and aggressive towards them. People need to understand that school violence does not only affect your profession but also your personal life.*

*T6: Sometimes, you don't even want to go to work. You wake up and think, oh my goodness, I have to go teach those kids, or I have to go teach that child today. I have to kind of suppress my emotions so that I can just get through the day. So, in my professional life, sometimes I feel like I don't want to do this; I become so demotivated.*

*T8: And I think it is also bad to see other colleagues suffering because they are not motivated. They start slacking at school because they are not motivated to teach and do not want to be here. So, they are almost just floating, and you know, there are no consequences for these learners, and teachers have nothing they can do about the situation, so it is bad.*

From the above responses, it is evident that school violence stresses and demotivates teachers to perform their teaching duties effectively. The participants were vociferous when they expressed their low morale and a lack of interest in teaching. These experiences impeded the teachers' ability and enthusiasm to perform their teaching duties and deliver interesting and quality lessons. The participants further stated that school violence influenced both their personal and professional lives negatively as, generally, they are reluctant and disinterested in performing their classroom duties.

These experiences are congruent with Grobler's (2018) findings, which reveal that teachers suffer from physical anguish, occupational distress such as burnout, and psychological suffering such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder caused by incidents of school violence. These findings resonate with previous studies, which refer to similar experiences such as anxiety, fear, severe headaches, anger and frustration (Sibis, 2016; Turanovic & Siennick, 2022). The hardening of attitudes by teachers was also mentioned by SACE (2011), Botha (2018) and WHO (2019), as it led to the underperformance of teachers as well as learners. Yang, Qin and Ning (2021) contend that school violence affects teachers by exerting stress, exhaustion, disengagement from teaching, low morale and decreased teacher performance. In this regard, Sibis (2020) advises that counsellors, psychologists and social workers can quickly identify learners who can potentially pose a danger to other learners and teachers.

### *Subtheme 2: Insecurity at school*

The teachers expressed feelings of insecurity about teaching at the school because, for them, it was becoming a warzone. This insecurity also disturbed other learners as it affected teaching and learning processes and their safety. Alarming, this insecurity extended to teachers' living spaces, reducing them to be on the lookout for assailants to and from work, and even at home. T2 elaborated on the feeling of insecurity that prevented teachers and learners from engaging in productive teaching and learning. T3 indicated how school was becoming dangerous, creating fear and a place where many weapons are kept, while the 56-year-old T5 explained how worrying it was for teachers to be vigilant even at home because of the 'unknown' spread of school violence. T7 expressed how disquieting the insecurity situation was becoming as they became tense, on edge and unsure about where and when the next violent incident would erupt. Also, T8 emphasised how teachers developed illnesses and quit their teaching careers because of the low morale caused by school violence. The following responses reinforce the impression that insecurity at school is a major challenge for teachers to remain in the profession:

*T2: School violence is having a significant impact on the safety of teachers, and the safety of learners. So, it is a big problem. And now, our learners are no longer learning, and our teachers are afraid to go to the classes anymore, so they are not as effective as they should be.*

*T3: You know, school is going to be like a warzone. If school becomes a warzone, you are running away from something you will find at school. And the worst part is that you will not have any weapons, and you are not even supposed to come with a weapon at school.*

*T5: You must always be alert, which is exhausting. Even at home, one becomes triggered by the smallest things, especially after a heavy day at work. I fear them as they are bigger and more powerful than me. I am old now and no longer have the strength to take them on.*

*T7: As a teacher, you are no longer performing at your best because you are always worried about the prevailing situation, and what will happen next.*

*T8: Teachers are developing sicknesses simply because learners are becoming so violent towards educators. Because, truly speaking, these traumatic events affect our home lives, and if you go to the streets, you do not know whether the child will attack you. We live in fear, honestly.*

School violence affects teachers' general health and work experiences negatively, as learner-on-teacher violence disrupts classes and, thus, the entire education programme. Teachers' inability to function in an unsafe and hostile work environment results in frustration, high rates of taking sick leave, and absenteeism. Teachers have lost their passion and commitment to the teaching profession as they are now being reduced to being 'security guards' at school and home. This insecurity, which impedes productive teaching and learning, is congruent with Moreroa's (2022) finding that stressful work environments affect teachers' health, work performance and attitude toward their professional activities. Moreover, Sitoyi (2020) reiterates that dealing with school violence disrupts academic activities, resulting in teachers becoming depressed, which increases the rate of teacher absenteeism.

### *Subtheme 3: Disappointment with the teaching profession*

The teachers deeply regret embarking on teaching careers, as school violence has become intolerable. Teachers in this study sounded discouraged, frustrated, and disappointed with teaching careers, and today's learners' attitudes. As indicated in their quotes below, T3 & 8 regretted embarking on teaching jobs. However, T7, who had just over three years of active service, is putting up with and tolerating the violence purely for the salary, as her professional passion was dead. It was obvious that teachers were going through hell at the hands of ill-disciplined learners. The teacher participants admitted to lacking focus regarding their work as they no longer had the enthusiasm and energy to deal with learners. The quotes below suggest how they had lost their passion for teaching because of school violence:

*T3: Obviously, it discourages one, and you are not motivated to stand up in the morning, come to work, and be excited to teach the learners sitting in your classroom. I now doubt why I became a teacher because my initial reason was for the love of children, but now that they are so out of control, I do not know anymore.*

*T7: I never thought I would say this at this point, but I do not feel like a professional anymore. I am just here now to earn a salary. I think my passion for education is dead, which is a general feeling I also have. Personally, I am glad I will be leaving in 3 and a half years.*

*T8: Truly speaking, I feel like I have lost my passion for teaching because of the torture I experience from learners, I also do not feel like doing anything. I dread attending class and no longer put in my 100%. I used to have extra classes and purchase materials from my own funds to help my learners, but why would I do that for learners who do not respect me? Why bother about these learners? They simply don't care, so why should I put my all into teaching?*

The above evidence reflects the gravity of school violence, which affects teachers, innocent learners and the entire education system. School violence discourages teacher participants from doing their work to the best of their ability. Teachers merely go through the motions at work because they are no longer motivated to deal with errant learners and deliver their

professional duties effectively. It is evident that victims of school violence experience guilt, sleeplessness, stress and discomfort, which make them distance themselves from learners, as teaching is no longer their passion (Garcia-Silva & Lima Junior, 2022).

In addition, teachers suffer from long-term health problems, depression, stress, fear, sadness, shame, substance abuse, career changes, withdrawal, disengagement, resignation and anger, as well as the hardening of attitudes because of these violent experiences (SACE, 2011; Botha, 2018; WHO, 2019; Turanovic & Siennick, 2022). Furthermore, the above articulations concur with results from studies conducted by Moon and McCluskey (2020), and Turanovic and Siennick (2022), which reveal that teachers develop a negative behaviour towards violent learners, become demotivated to assist them with academic activities, feel overwhelmed and frustrated, and experience fear, guilt and low self-worth.

## Theme 2: Teachers' coping strategies with school violence

Two subthemes address teachers' coping strategies regarding school violence. These are presented and discussed under this theme.

### *Subtheme 1: School-based counselling services*

Five teachers strongly suggested the intervention of school-based counselling services as a coping strategy to deal with the traumatic experiences regarding school violence. They believed that having permanent counselling services at the school would support them better than mere part-time consultations. As indicated below, the teachers suggested immediate counselling treatment after a severely traumatic experience, especially one involving learner-on-teacher violence:

*T1: First, we need them to provide counselling sessions to our victim-teachers. There should be physical people who are appointed to deal with learners who are having those challenges or to deal with teachers who are having challenges in terms of violence. We are talking about a physical presence.*

*T3: The Department must immediately recruit a psychologist for every single school, or at least a counsellor at every single school, so that the counsellor can deal with the victim teachers but mostly with learners who are having problems.*

*T4: Victim teachers need a private breathing room when the day becomes difficult. They also need a counsellor who will be available to talk to. It will assist us if we get more support from the school, such as making counsellors and psychological services available.*

*T6: We need counsellors for teachers who are on-site and not someone far away who will visit now and again. We need counsellors who will deal with teachers daily and who are always available for teachers. It is important that teachers can talk to someone and ask for advice on how to cope, and so on because we also come with our own baggage to work.*

*T7: The Department must employ counsellors or psychologists for each school to address serious issues immediately. Psychologists and social workers should always be involved because what is happening now in the education system is that many teachers do not want to stay in the profession because of the violence.*

The above responses confirm that the teachers interviewed valued the importance of school-based counselling services to urgently attend to the scourge of school violence and any other psychological issues experienced by both teachers and learners. Teachers believe that talking to professionals or receiving support or advice from them reduces the effects of trauma, tension

and horrific experiences. Moreover, teachers acknowledged requiring the services generally to deal with their personal and professional problems, apart from school violence. Botha and Zwane (2021) agree that South African teachers cope better when a prevention programme offers emotional support and workshops on conflict management skills to equip them with the necessary strategies to manage school violence. Additionally, Moon and McCluskey (2020) suggest that teachers need psychological assistance from healthcare professionals such as counsellors, psychologists and alternative mental health specialists to address their problems and function optimally. Lastly, Botha and Zwane (2021) emphasise that teachers cope better when trained and equipped with conflict management skills.

### *Subtheme 2: Sharing the experiences with colleagues*

Five teachers revealed that sharing experiences that traumatised them with colleagues is a coping strategy. They indicated that using this method to offload and manage emotions surrounding school violence was beneficial to some degree. The following excerpts bear testimony to this:

*T2: Victim teachers also need other teachers' support, where teachers come together and share their experiences. It could help if a counsellor were there to facilitate, but the support groups will help teachers cope and heal better.*

*T3: I would get together with some of my colleagues at home to discuss it and get it out of our system. Having someone who listens to your frustrations has been an immense help because you get them out of your system so you can go on the next day. Otherwise, if you do not talk about it, it builds up, and one day, you will explode and do something that you will regret for the rest of your life.*

*T5: It is always good to talk to other people about it, like colleagues who have been through the same things. You must be open about it; that is what I have learned. You must not keep it to yourself, so I share my experiences so we can learn from one another.*

*T7: I went to talk to someone just to get my feelings out. I have learned that it helps to talk. So, seeking other teachers' advice about handling such situations helps. Because then you know you have support.*

*T8: I also think mentor support is necessary where teachers have specific mentors they can talk to and share with. Especially for the new teachers in the system, I think they can benefit from having a mentor who has been in the teaching system for a long time to guide them on what to do and what not to do in such cases.*

The above articulations substantiate that sharing negative experiences with colleagues is an effective coping strategy for teacher participants as it encourages victims of school violence to share their feelings with someone who will support and advise them. They also acknowledged learning from experienced colleagues through conversation and sharing ideas on school violence. This finding is similar to Okeke and Van der Westhuizen's (2020) study, which highlights the importance of professional conversation among colleagues. A study by Msomi, Van der Westhuizen and Steenekamp (2016) established how workplace conversations provide opportunities for novice teachers to learn and improve their teaching experiences with colleagues. Professional conversation, however, involves intentionally organised formal and informal talks between education professionals on educational matters (Timperley, 2015), which include aspects of deliberate reflection, inquiry, testing and sharing thoughts (Msomi *et al.*, 2016; Okeke & Van der Westhuizen, 2020).

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

This study focused on teachers' lived experiences of school violence and their coping strategies to minimise its effects. While the teachers' experiences and coping strategies were identified from a qualitative research viewpoint, the study's literature review and findings clearly indicate that school violence against teachers remains a scourge at South African schools. Teachers in this study revealed experiencing emotional challenges (stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, anxiety and demotivation), and insecurity at school, resulting in disappointment with the teaching profession. They suggested school-based counselling services and sharing their harrowing experiences with colleagues as helpful coping strategies. In line with the above findings, it is recommended that schools provide security guards as learners attack teachers mainly during the absence of capable guardians (authority figures). The study lastly recommends installing school-based counselling services to offer daily support to teachers on managing and coping with school violence, and for teachers to embrace professional talk platforms to exchange knowledge on teaching-learning challenges via the problem-solving approach.

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