

South African English newspapers' depiction of learner-on-teacher violence

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on findings from a qualitative content analysis on South African English newspapers' depiction of learner-on-teacher violence, and the effects thereof on the victimised teachers' private and professional lives, as well as teaching and learning. Lindner's humiliation theory underpins the study theoretically. The author uses a relational lens to focus on the destructive, humiliating relationship between teachers and learners in schools where learner-on-teacher violence is problematic. SA Media is the databank, and the data source is 57 newspaper articles that report on the incidence of learner-on-teacher violence. The findings indicate that newspapers depict learner-on-teacher violence as the physical, verbal, sexual and psychological abuse and humiliation of teachers. The analysed newspapers highlight the physicality and humiliating nature of attacks against teachers. The study finds that the disintegration of teaching and learning and the degradation of teachers' private and professional lives are serious negative effects of learner-on-teacher violence in schools where violence is rampant. An important and recurring discourse in the newspapers' construction of teachers as disempowered, humiliated and vulnerable individuals is that learners' rights in South Africa supersede teachers' rights. The study highlights the important role newspapers play in informing the public, education and community leaders and policymakers about learner-on-teacher violence as a serious problem that must be addressed.

Keywords: educator-targeted violence; humiliation theory; media analysis; newspapers; school violence.

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INTRODUCTION

It is common for adults to “value”, “respect” and fondly “remember” teachers who crossed their paths and made a valuable, positive contribution to their lives (Furlong, 2013:76). This may be expected if taken into consideration that teachers act in loco parentis and are “fulfilling the role of the parent of each of their learners” (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018:1). The opposite, however, often seems to be the case. The South African public is regularly confronted with newspaper headings such as “Teachers at the frontline of a battle with hostile pupils” (Govender, 2018a:1), “Teachers go to school, but live in fear” (Govender, 2018b:5) and “Pupils’ reign of terror at school” (Petersen & Mpofu, 2018:1). These headings highlight the dire working conditions of some South African teachers. While these headings may shock readers, violence directed at teachers is not a new or typical South African phenomenon. Prudentius’s poem *Peristephanon* 9 describes the death of Cassian of Imola, a teacher of stenography, at the hands of his students during antiquity. “Countless” boys, between the ages of seven and 15, stabbed and pierced Cassian of Imola’s body with little styluses (Laes, 2019:92). While ancient literature can be seen as a treasure trove for students of teacher-learner relationships during antiquity (Laes, 2019), modern-day news media informs the public on what is presently happening in schools (Jacobs, 2014).

The media coverage of school violence has enjoyed the attention of academics worldwide. A few examples will suffice. Using discourse analysis, Avgitidou and Stamou (2013) have studied the construction of school violence in the Greek daily press. De Wet (2013) has written about reporting on school violence in South Africa in *Rapport*, an Afrikaans Sunday newspaper. Jacobs (2014) has studied the framing of school violence in South Africa in the printed media. Numerous academics have written about the media’s construction of school shootings in countries such as Australia (Wondermaghen, 2014), the United States of America (USA) (Altheide, 2009; Muschert, 2007a), Germany (Neuner et al., 2009) and the counties of the United Kingdom (Jemphrey & Berrington, 2000).

It is safe to say, against the background of the regularity with which newspapers report on the incidence of school violence, that school violence is an important and newsworthy social issue (Jacobs, 2014). Jacobs (2014:2) argues that newspapers have the “power to shape the view of readers regarding what is of importance, and the concomitant public awareness has the potential to influence policy making”. Stewart and Robles-Pina (2008:10) likewise found that “teachers’ fears of danger generally lies in the media portrayal of school safety issues. People, including school personnel, judge the level of school violence as reported by mass media outlets”. The media studies mentioned in the previous paragraph focused on learners as the perpetrators and victims of school violence. The aim of the current study is to expand the existing body of knowledge on the (printed and electronic) media’s construction of school violence by seeking for answers to the following overarching research question: How do English newspapers in South Africa depict the incidence of school violence in which teachers are key role players, either as victims or as perpetrators? This paper reports on findings from a qualitative content analysis on (1) what English newspapers in South Africa construe to be

learner-on-teacher violence and (2) the newspapers' depiction of the effects of this form of school violence on teaching and learning and the private and professional lives of victimised teachers.

1. RESEARCH ON LEARNER-ON-TEACHER VIOLENCE

1.1 *The nature and extent of learner-on-teacher violence: A literature review*

A comprehensive literature study by Reddy et al. (2013) suggests that research on learner-on-teacher violence started during the late 1980s. Using data from the Safe School Study Report of the National Institute of Education, Dworkin, Haney and Telschow (1988) established that learners in American urban public schools emotionally and physically victimised their teachers. In 2005, Kondrasuk et al. (2005:640) observed that “teachers may be three times more likely to be victims of violent crimes at schools than are students”. Nearly a decade later, Espelage et al. (2013:77) emphasised the need for empirical studies and “meaningful” discussions “within academic circles” on violence against teachers. Since then, there has been a growing awareness among school violence researchers that teachers, and not learners, are often at the centre of incidents of school violence. Researchers acknowledge that teachers can be either the victims (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran, Viano & Fisher, 2019; Jevtic, Petrovic & Stankovic, 2014; Türküm, 2011) or the perpetrators (Chen & Wei, 2011; Jevtic et al., 2014) of school violence.

Anderman et al. (2018:623) define violence directed against teachers as “multi-systemic actions perpetrated against teachers within the social contexts of schools, neighborhoods, and social media. Acts of violence are multi-systemic because they involve complex dynamics that affect teachers and other school personnel as well as students, parents, and the entire community”. The ensuing synopsis of findings from research studies shows that learner-on-teacher violence is a multifaceted, worldwide phenomenon. Research on learner-on-teacher violence show a preference for quantitative research methods, the use of close-ended questionnaires as a survey instrument, the absence of a standardised questionnaire on the topic, different wordings of questionnaire items and differences among researchers about what precisely constitutes learner-on-teacher violence. The synopsis also shows that findings regarding the prevalence rates differ due to, among other things, the use of different time frames, different participants (teachers and/or learners; observers, victims or perpetrators; school levels) and different wordings in questionnaires.

Wei et al. (2013) studied learner-on-teacher violence among 4 731 licensed kindergarten teachers through to Grade 12 teachers in Minnesota in the United States of America (USA). They found that 7.87% and 38.86% of the participants were subjected to physical and non-physical violence respectively during the 12 months preceding the study (Wei et al., 2013). A large percentage (80%) of the American teachers who took part in a study by Wilson, Douglas

and Lyon (2011) indicated that they had been victims of learner-on-teacher violence at least once during their teaching careers. “Personal insults and name calling” were the most common forms of violence (72.2%) directed at the participants. Only 2.1% of the participants indicated that they had been subjected to “actual physical violence with a weapon” during their careers (Wilson et al., 2011:2359). In the study of Curran et al. (2019:25) among American teachers (n = 104 840), 8% of the teacher participants reported being “threatened by a student in the previous 12 months”, while only 4% reported being physically attacked by a learner during the same time frame.

A study under the auspices of the American Psychological Association (Reddy et al., 2013) gives valuable insight into published research on violence against teachers. They identified 21 articles on this topic published in 20 different journals. Across the 21 studies, they found that verbal aggression was the most common type of learner-on-teacher violence. Results from a meta-analysis that included 24 studies on learner-on-teacher violence indicate that 53% of teachers report experiencing learner violence directed at teachers within a two-year period (Longobardi, Badenes-Ribera, Fabris, Martinez & McMahon, 2018:11). This meta-analysis identified the following common forms of learner-on-teacher violence (in descending order): “obscene gestures (44%), offensive/objective remarks (29%), verbal violence (29%), damage or theft of personal property (17%), intimidation (10%), physical attacks (3%) and sexual violence (3%)”.

A relatively large percentage of learner respondents (43.3%) who took part in a study by Jevtic et al. (2014) on teachers as victims and perpetrators of school violence in Serbia indicated that they had witnessed teachers being subjected to verbal aggression, and 9.3% of the respondents had witnessed learner-on-teacher physical aggression. A study on school violence among 360 teachers in a “middle-sized” city in Turkey (Türküm, 2011:646) found that 4.4% of the participants were subjected to “backbiting” by their learners, while 2.8% were mocked by their learners. Overall, 30.1% of the learners (n = 14 022) who took part in a study on violence against teachers in Taiwanese schools indicated they had been involved in “at least one aggressive act against their school teachers during the year preceding the study” (Chen & Astor, 2009:8). Khoury-Kassabri, Astor and Benbenishty (2009:159) surveyed the perpetration of violence against teachers by Israeli Grade 4 to 11 learners (n = 16 604). The learners indicated that they had been guilty of the following forms of violence against their teachers at least once during the preceding month: “cursed or humiliated a teacher” (14.0%), “threatened to hurt a teacher” (3.87%), “shoved or hit a teacher” (3.68%), “bitten or used a chair to hurt a teacher” (2.13%) and “destroyed personal belongings of a teacher” (6.93%). The 364 Slovakian teachers who completed Dzuka and Dalbert’s (2017:155) survey had to report on their experience of five incidents of “harmful” learner behaviour in the preceding 30 days. “Harmful verbal behaviors” were indicated most often by the respondents (35.4%), followed by social coercion (16.8%) and “manipulative behaviors aimed at socially isolating the victim” (16.55%). A small percentage

(12.4%) of the teachers indicated that learners damaged their personal property. Only 4.9% indicated that they were subjected to “harmful physical behavior”.

Violence is a serious problem in South African schools (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Haber & Mncube, 2017). Yet, little research has been done on violence against South African teachers (De Wet, 2010; De Wet & Jacobs, 2006; Shields, Nadasen & Hanneke, 2015). South African teachers (n = 544) who took part in De Wet and Jacobs's (2006) survey, indicated that they were subjected to the following types of learner-on-teacher bullying at least once or twice a month: verbal abuse (18.4%), physical abuse (8.6%), vandalism of private property (7.3%) and sexual harassment (6.2%).

The consulted literature has shown that learner-on-teacher violence is a worldwide phenomenon. The research approach for all the articles I have referred to in this subsection was quantitative. Notwithstanding the different wordings used in the various survey instruments, it can be concluded that learner-on-teacher violence includes verbal, physical and sexual attacks or threats of attacks against teachers, as well as vandalism against their property. Despite the different wordings and timelines used in the survey studies used in my literature study, it is safe to say that verbal violence is the most common type of learner-on-teacher violence

1.2 The negative effects of learner-on-teacher violence

Researchers have found that learner-on-teacher violence may have a profound negative effect on the victims' (teachers') private and professional lives. Victims of learner-on-teacher violence suffer from “battered teacher syndrome” (Stewart & Robles-Pina, 2008:12), a “fear of recurring assault ... frustration, anger, fear/anxiety/stress, and sadness” (Wei et al., 2013:81). Studies by Espelage et al. (2013), Garland, Lecocq and Philippot (2007), Moon, Morash, Jang and Jeong (2015) and Wilson et al. (2011) likewise found that victims of learner-on-teacher violence suffer from anxiety and depression. In addition, teachers who retire early or leave the profession because of such victimisation may suffer financially (Stewart & Robles-Pina, 2008).

Researchers highlight the following effects of learner-on-teacher violence on teaching and learning: diminished work performance among targeted teachers (Wei et al., 2013); deterioration in teacher-learner relations (Espelage et al., 2013); professional disengagement (Garland et al., 2007; Le Mottee & Kelly, 2017); and increased absenteeism (Wei et al., 2013). Furthermore, Le Mottee and Kelly (2017:51) note that teachers “often spend time focusing on problem behaviour and safety issues, instead of on effective teaching and learning issues”. Researchers (Stewart & Robles-Pina, 2008; Wei et al., 2013) emphasise the fact that victimised teachers often leave the profession after a traumatic or violent incident. This may result in the loss of dedicated, gifted and experienced teachers.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Lindner's (2007) humiliation theory underpins the present study theoretically. Humiliation is "excessive overt derogation that occurs when a more powerful individual publically reveals inadequacies of a weaker victim, who feels the treatment is unjustified" (Evans & Smokowski, 2016:370). Lindner's (2007) humiliation theory focuses on global humiliation, for example the humiliation of the German people after the First World War and Hitler's consequent rise to power. Lindner (2007:18) conveys that the modern-day emphasis on human rights introduces "a new moral framework, a moral prerogative that stipulates that every human being deserves to be treated as equal in dignity". Lindner argues that in societies where human rights are emphasised, human beings "deserve" dignity, recognition and respect. However, humiliation, which involves the "putting down and holding down" of humans (Lindner, 2006:xi), "violates this fundamental human right, resulting in eroded interpersonal relationships and disrupted social cohesion" (Lindner, 2007:19). Evans and Smokowski (2016:371), in their discussion of the relevance of Lindner's theory to research on bullying, point out that bullies humiliate their victims and relegate them to "a lower social status in an effort to establish power". In my discussion of SA newspapers' depiction of learner-on-teacher violence, I shall use a relational lens to focus on the destructive, humiliating relationship between teachers and learners in schools where violence is on the rampage (cf. Hartling & Lindner, 2016). Newspapers depict teachers, who are supposed to act in loco parentis and be revered by their learners, as humiliated individuals. I argue that the public humiliation of teachers may result in the breakdown of teacher-learner relations, the disintegration of teaching and learning and an advocacy for the reinstatement of corporal punishment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is positioned within an interpretivist research paradigm. The main activity of the interpretivist researcher is "to understand the subjective world of human experiences" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009:21). This paper, therefore, focuses on journalists' depictions of learner-on-teacher violence, and aims to give insight into the phenomenon through an analysis of selected newspaper articles (cf. Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2011).

I used SA Media as a database for identifying newspaper articles on violence between learners and teachers. SA Media comprises the "original SA Media" archive of news articles from 1977 to December 2014. The "original SA Media" formed part of the Unit for Contemporary History of the University of the Free State (UFS). The "new" SA Media database, consisting of 37 publications, is available on the Sabinet Reference Platform (Sabinet, n.d.). No articles from the period of 1 January 2015 to 31 May 2015 are included in the SA Media database. This is "the period during which the UFS stopped adding articles to SA Media until the time Sabinet took over the SA Media archive" (Sabinet, n.d.). While under the auspices of the UFS, users had to use assigned

keywords. Since Sabinet took over SA Media, “the full text of articles is fully searchable and no keywords are assigned” (Wiltz, 2019). If a specific word, for example, “violence”, occurs in an article, the user’s search results will reflect it. Using “teacher” and “violence” as keywords, 9 528 newspaper clippings were identified during an initial search during December 2019. The enormity of the number of clippings and the need to do present-day research on teachers’ involvement in school violence, as well as the change in ownership and maintenance of SA Media by Sabinet, motivated my decision to limit my study to articles published after Sabinet’s takeover of the database. I limited my search to articles published during the period 1 June 2015 to 30 November 2019. This left me with 1 730 articles. The database organises articles “in order of relevance”. I speed-read through the first 620 newspaper articles, and downloaded only the 126 articles that I perceived to be relevant to my topic, namely newspaper articles focusing on violence in schools where teachers are either the perpetrators or the victims. I worked through the downloaded newspaper articles. The majority (65) of the downloaded articles report on teachers as perpetrators of violence against learners. In 54 of the articles, teachers are the victims of violence involving learners. Three articles focus on both teacher-on-learner and learner-on-teacher violence. One article reports on workplace bullying in schools. Three of the articles describe incidents of violent crimes against teachers outside the realm of schools, for example gangsters or criminals threatening teachers (e.g. Sobuwa, 2017). The findings from this paper, in line with the aim of the paper, originate from the 54 articles that focus on learner-on-teacher violence and the three articles that report on teachers as both victims and perpetrators.

Merriam (2006) argues that using documentary material such as newspaper articles as data is not much different from using, for example, interviews as data. The data source for this paper is the above-mentioned 57 newspaper articles that report on the incidence of learner-on-teacher violence. It is common for media researchers to consult a relatively large number of newspaper articles when researching newspapers’ depiction of topical issues such as the Columbine shooting (Altheide, 2009), the Amish school shooting (Gutsche & Salkin, 2017) and post-election violence in Kenya (Somerville, 2009).

Using qualitative content analysis, a reliable and established qualitative research approach, I worked through my data (the 57 newspaper articles focusing on teachers as victims of school violence). Qualitative content analysis is “a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarises message content” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:101). I followed Henning et al.’s (2011) guiding principles to reduce, condense and group the content of the 57 articles. I immersed myself in the data and awarded codes to different “segments or units of meaning” (Henning et al., 2011:105). After that, related codes were categorised and thematically organised. Initially, I identified four broad themes: what is learner-on-teacher violence; the effects of learner-on-teacher violence on victims’ private and professional lives; the antecedents of learner-on-teacher violence; and possible solutions to the problem. In line with its stated

aim, this article focuses on two of the four broad themes, namely: what is learner-on-teacher violence, and the effects of learner-on-teacher violence on teachers' private and professional lives.

To enhance the credibility and quality of my study, I attempted the following: I facilitated transferability by presenting thick descriptions that may "enable judgements about how well the research context fits other contexts" (Li, 2004:305). I avoided generalisations (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). I placed the findings from the current study within the existing body of knowledge on learner-on-teacher violence, as well as media studies on school violence (Patton, 2002).

4. FINDINGS

4.1 What is learner-on-teacher violence?

Newspaper reports on learner-on-teacher violence emphasise the physicality of this type of violence. Newspapers report on teachers being stabbed to death (Govender, 2018b; May, 2018a; Tshehle, 2018), cut in the face (Wicks, 2017), spat on (Govender, 2018a), stoned (Macupe, 2018; The Herald, 2018), pelted with avocados (Wicks, 2017) and having guns pointed at them (Govender, 2018b; May, 2018a; Zwane, 2018). Learners punched their teachers on their bodies (Masuku, 2017) and/or faces (Govender, 2018a; Masipa, 2017), shoved (Tswana, 2019) or slapped them (Govender, 2019) and even poured hot water over their faces (Govender, 2018b; Mahlangu, 2017). Newspapers also report on learners throwing chairs (Govender, 2018a) and books (Molosankwe, 2018) at their teachers.

The newspaper articles abound with examples of verbal abuse, including life-threatening threats. Learners hurl insults at their teachers (Manyane, 2018; Masuku, 2019) and often threaten them with serious bodily harm (Govender, 2019; Manyane, 2018). Tshehle (2016:2) reports on five learners from a school near Zeerust who threatened to set a teacher alight ("necklacing"), and Msila (2019:10) mentions that teachers in the Western Cape "experience terror from children who dare them to fisticuffs".

In the preceding two paragraphs, I have barely moved beyond mentioning the different types of learner-on-teacher violence. I shall now turn to five newspaper articles in which the journalists provided sufficient details to give readers insight into perpetrators' total disregard for their teachers in their efforts to humiliate them physically, sexually, emotionally and verbally.

(1) Diale and Tshikalange (2018:1) interviewed three teachers from Gauteng "who all said that they were stuck between a rock and a hard place". One of the teachers explained this dilemma as follows: "If you retaliate, you face dismissal; if you don't defend yourself they could kill you." This teacher told Diale and Tshikalange (2018:1): "I have been pulled by my braids ... called a

b***h, had water thrown in my face and had my tyres slashed for trying to discipline pupils”.

(2) Govender (2019:8) describes the reign of terror of a 14-year old learner at a Northern Cape school against four teachers: The learner told one of the teachers she “wants his blood on her hands”. She “terrorized” another teacher by “writing comments about [the teacher’s] sex life on the girls’ bathroom wall”. The girl also used homophobic slurs. This girl physically attacked one of her teachers by slapping her. The girl threw stones at the classroom of another of the teachers while there were about 30 learners in the classroom.

(3) Learners from a Pietermaritzburg school “threw stones and condoms filled with urine, faeces and eggs” (The Herald, 2017:2) at their teachers, and damaged their teachers’ vehicles under the guise that it was part of the annual celebration for the Grade 12’s last day of attending classes.

(4) An Ekurhuleni teacher was the victim of sexual abuse. The perpetrator phoned the victim’s husband and told him that she was having a sexual relationship with the teacher. The perpetrator stole the teacher’s cell phone. She then sent a message to all the teacher’s WhatsApp contacts, telling them, “I was sleeping with everyone” (Manyane, 2018:6).

(5) Molosankwe (2018:4) reports on a learner from a special school in Soweto who threw a brick at a teacher then kicked the teacher (he fell while ducking the brick). This learner told a colleague of the teacher, “I have been patient with him for a long time, today he will s**t himself” (Molosankwe, 2018:4).

Indicative of learner-on-teacher violence is learners’ disrespect for their teachers and the public nature of the violence and humiliation. According to Petersen and Mpofu (2018:1), “a new trend” in learner-on-teacher violence is that learners would start a fight, and “when an unsuspecting teacher tries to break it up, he or she gets punched and kicked by everyone in the circle”. This worrying new trend creates a divide between the isolated, victimised teacher and the unruly mob. Another trend that came to the fore from the analysed articles is learners holding teachers hostage in their school’s staffroom (Macupe, 2018; Masuku, 2019).

Violence against teachers extends to more than the verbal, physical, sexual and emotional attacks on teachers. Learners vandalise teachers’ homes (Diale & Tshikalange 2018), vehicles (The Herald, 2018; Wicks, 2017) and classrooms (Macupe, 2018). Newspapers also inform their readers that while most of the incidents of learner-on-teacher violence are taking place on the school grounds or in classrooms (The Herald, 2018), teachers are also being attacked in their residences – a place that is supposed to be a safe haven. Diale and Tshikalange (2018) reported on an incident where a learner vandalised a teacher’s home in the early hours of a Saturday morning. When the teacher went outside to investigate, the learner attacked him.

Govender (2018b) reported on an incident where a 15-year-old learner, who accused his teacher of failing him, fatally stabbed the teacher at his home.

In the preceding paragraphs, mention was made of the different weapons learners use to do bodily harm to their teachers. These include items that are usually associated with violence, such as knives (Tshehle, 2018), stones (The Herald, 2018) and guns (Phunfula, 2019). Learners also use their fists, hands and bodies to attack their teachers (Govender, 2018a). In addition, learners use everyday objects, such as textbooks (Diale & Tshikalange, 2018), chairs (Govender, 2018a) and fruit (Wicks, 2017) as weapons. Whereas these weapons may cause a victim bodily harm, the hurling of condoms filled with urine, faeces and eggs at teachers (The Herald, 2015) can only be seen as an effort to disgrace the teachers. Social media has also been used as a platform to scandalise a teacher (Manyane, 2018). Through their emphasis on the different types of weapons used during attacks, newspapers construct learner-on-teacher violence as a serious problem that can either be planned (availability of deadly weapons) or unpredicted (the use of everyday objects).

Newspapers depict learner-on-teacher violence as physical, verbal, sexual and psychological abuse and humiliation of teachers. The analysed newspapers highlight the physicality and the humiliating nature of the attacks against teachers. The emphasis on the physical nature of the violence is understandable: Journalists write about newsworthy (Wondermaghen, 2013) and popular topics (Jacobs, 2014). The analysed newspapers may thus create the perception among their readers that learner-on-teacher violence is mostly physical. The findings from the literature on the nature and scope of learner-on-teacher violence as presented in this study, have shown, however, that verbal abuse is the most common type of learner-on-teacher violence. Newspapers have an important role, namely to inform their readers about social problems, such as learner-on-teacher violence; they are, however, not an objective data source.

4.2 Negative effects of learner-on-teacher violence

It came to the fore from the data analysis that the disintegration of teaching and learning and the degradation of teachers' private and professional lives are serious negative effects of learner-on-teacher violence. Indicators of the disintegration of teaching and learning are, firstly, the suspension of schools for a few hours or even a few days during incidents or after incidents of violence have taken place (Macupe, 2018; The Herald, 2018). Secondly, teachers were absent from their schools, either because they "boycotted" their classes after learners had run amok in the school (Motha, 2016:2), were "forced to leave the classroom" because they were being attacked by learners (Sowetan, 2018:14), or had to take leave of absence to recuperate from their injuries (Masuku, 2019). Thirdly, some schools were leaderless. A KwaZulu-Natal school principal, for example, was absent from his school for more than a year due to head injuries sustained during an attack on him by a group of learners (Wicks, 2017). The director of

the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) told Child (2018:2) that after the stabbing of a school principal by one of the learners at his school, the school was leaderless: "The principal has left and no one wants to replace him. You must be slightly soft in the head to take the job".

In numerous newspaper articles, it is mentioned that victimised teachers had left or considered leaving the profession (e.g. Khanyile, 2018; May, 2018b). These may be beginner teachers ("the young ones") (Khanyile, 2018:6) or early retirees (May, 2018a), some of whom are "committed and experienced" teachers (Caluza, 2018:12). Such retirements or resignations may negatively influence a school's ability to do its core business, namely teaching.

Furthermore, learner-on-teacher violence has serious negative consequences for the physical and emotional well-being and finances of teachers. A KwaZulu-Natal teacher who was assaulted by a learner was injured in the eye and his glasses were damaged (Masuku, 2019). A teacher who was the victim of learner-on-teacher violence told Diale and Tshikalange (2018:1) that teaching was "a never-ending traumatic experience". A colleague of a teacher who was stabbed to death told Govender (2018b:5) that she was "terrified of being at school". "I can't sleep at night," she said. Early retirement or career change of victimised teachers (Khanyile, 2018; May, 2018b) may have dire financial consequences for the teacher and his or her family.

An important and recurring discourse in the newspapers' construction of teachers as disempowered, humiliated and vulnerable individuals is that learners' rights seem to supersede teachers' rights. A spokesperson of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) told May (2018a:6) that "a learner's right to be educated overshadowed laws aimed at protecting teachers". This has left teachers "feeling vulnerable". The spokesperson is quoted as saying, "at the end of the day, the suspended pupil comes back to the school and the teacher has to stomach that, so ... teachers leave their jobs". Similarly, Diale and Tshikalange (2018:1) quote two teachers who emphasise that teachers are being disempowered. The one teacher said that the "law was totally against teachers"; the other one said, "A child can just stand up and hit you and you cannot defend yourself or do anything because they have more rights than you." To add insult to injury, classmates often make light of an attack on a teacher, record the incident on their smartphones and place it on social media (Sowetan, 2018:14). The commonness of smartphones on which incidents of learner-on-teacher violence are recorded and consequently distributed through social media on platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp results in further public humiliation of teachers (Masuku, 2019; Sowetan, 2018).

To avoid public humiliation, be it the naming of a victimised teacher in a newspaper article, an official investigation or a posting on social media, victimised teachers often suffer in silence. The president of the NAPTOSA told Khanyile (2018:6) that "teachers are embarrassed to report

such cases. They don't want their colleagues to know that they have been smacked by a child". This silence results in education authorities not realising the magnitude of the problem. Another reason why teachers keep quiet, according to a spokesperson of the South African Council of Educators, is that they "see no point in reporting" incidents of violence (Diale & Tshikalange, 2018:2). A possible reason for this silence is teachers' perception that learners' human rights supersede teachers' right to work in a safe environment.

The findings from the current newspaper analysis of the effects of learner-on-teacher violence, namely that learner-on-teacher violence may result in the disintegration of teaching and learning and the degradation of victimised teachers' physical, emotional, financial and professional well-being, are in line with published research (see the literature review).

5. DISCUSSION

In modern democracies, newspapers have an important role in informing the public about social problems that need to be addressed (Johnson, 2014). My study found that the analysed newspapers informed the public about a serious reality in South African schools, namely learner-on-teacher violence. This study also shed light on newspapers' construction of the effect of learner-on-teacher violence on teaching and learning, as well as the victims' private and professional lives. This study identified the following forms of learner-on-teacher violence: verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse and humiliation. Even though I attempted to place the findings from the current study within the greater body of knowledge of learner-on-teacher violence to enhance the trustworthiness of my findings, it should be emphasised that the current study is qualitative in nature. The findings can thus only be juxtaposed and not compared. There may also be a mismatch between the frequencies of the different types of learner-on-teacher violence reported on in research articles compared to the frequency with which newspapers report on different types of learner-on-teacher violence. Whereas researchers (Wilson et al., 2011) found that verbal abuse was the most common type of learner-on-teacher violence, newspaper articles focus on fatal attacks on teachers (Diale & Tshikalange, 2018), learners throwing bricks at teachers (Molosankwe, 2018) or other dramatic, unusual threats, such as to "necklace" a teacher (Tshehle, 2016:2). This mismatch may be attributed to the often biased and sensationalist reporting by newspapers of learner-on-teacher violence.

Furthermore, this study found that newspaper reports on learner-on-educator violence are often biased. The argument that journalists intentionally or unintentionally, through emphasis and selection, determine which aspects of a news event are more important than others and who should carry the blame for the violence (De Wet, 2013) is in line with findings from the current study. The analysed newspapers portrayed teacher victims sympathetically as hardworking, dedicated professionals who were pitilessly humiliated by unruly, amoral learners. Even though

the majority of journalists will not blatantly falsify news (Jacobs, 2014), the need to boost circulation figures in a “profit-orientated industry” (Muschert, 2007b:60) may result in journalists emphasising sensational and dramatic incidents. The comment by Mills and Keddie (2010:428) that issues related to school violence and “youth out of control” are “media staple” holds true for the current study. Reference to two examples of what might be described as “sensationalist constructions of [the] ‘youth today’” (Mills & Keddie, 2010:428) will suffice: Molosankwe’s (2018:4) report on the conduct of a learner from a special school in Soweto and Govender’s description of the reign of terror of a 14-year-old learner at a Northern Cape school. Journalists depicted the perpetrators of learner-on-teacher violence as amoral, evil and cruel individuals or groups who go out of their way to defame their teachers by spreading malicious untruths about their teachers’ sex lives by means of WhatsApp messages, telephone conversations and graffiti on bathroom walls. Teachers had condoms filled with urine, faeces and eggs, as well as stones, bricks and fruit thrown at them. Learners shoved, kicked, spat at, punched and attacked their teachers with knives. The victimised teachers, on the other hand, were sympathetically depicted as hardworking, dedicated, experienced professionals, whose responsibilities moved beyond teaching: “I’m being forced to become a social worker, psychologist and referee all in one” (May, 2018a:6). Newspapers, however, also portrayed victimised teachers as disempowered, humiliated individuals, whose right to dignity and safety is denied in a working environment where learners’ rights supersede those of their teachers. The statement by Jones (2005:153) that “every journalist knows intuitively which terms to use when characterising the favoured and unfavoured players in a situation” holds true for the current study.

Subjectivity does not mean that the news in the consulted newspaper articles is fabricated or so-called “fake news” (Gorea & Gorea, 2019:55). The journalists of the analysed articles went to great lengths to give credence to their reports on learner-on-teacher violence. Journalists interviewed and quoted family members or guardians of the victims and, sometimes, the perpetrators, teachers (colleagues, witnesses and victims), learners (witnesses or friends of the perpetrators), trade union or community leaders, academics and spokespersons for the provincial and national departments of education. Some of the journalists used statistics to give credibility to their articles. Newspapers’ policy and editors, however, determine from which perspective or angle a news story will be told, whether statistics should be used or not, and who should be given a voice. It is a known fact that the media uses news framing to “create or define social problems by framing an issue in a way that triggers attention, shaping our sense of the nature of the problem” (Wondermaghen, 2014:697).

Learner-on-teacher violence violates teachers’ need for recognition and respect. Humiliation undermines teachers’ standing among learners, parents, their colleagues and the community and causes social and professional isolation (Evans & Smokowski, 2016). Lindner (2007:20) believes that “feelings of humiliation and shame may lead to narcissistic rage and acts of aggression meant to lessen pain and increase self-worth”. Within a schooling context, this

may result in a revival of support for authoritarian disciplinary strategies (see Morrell, 2001 for debates for and against the use of corporal punishment). Teachers who have lost face in an era where human rights and equality are emphasised may become advocates for the reinstatement of corporal punishment in South African schools (Leverton, 2018).

Hartling and Lindner (2016) argue that any study on humiliation should move beyond the studying of the shaming of an individual. They suggest that researchers should use a relational lens. The use of a relational lens will ensure a more comprehensive, broad-based perspective, rather than an internalised, individualised experience (Hartling & Lindner, 2016). When using a relational perspective, my findings on the humiliating attacks on teachers by their learners can be placed within Hartling and Lindner's (2016:384) broad categories of humiliating experiences:

- "The internal impact of real or perceived humiliation", for example the effect of humiliating violent attacks on teachers' self-worth, mental health and job satisfaction.
- "The external interactions that trigger feelings of humiliation", for example interpersonal physical, verbal and sexual violence and bullying.
- "The systematic social condition that foster feelings of humiliation", for example unstable economic conditions and the distortion of the principles of equality and dignity in modern democracies.

Hartling and Lindner (2016:384) write that "a broad-based relational perspective brings the experience of humiliation out from under the shadow of shame". This may result in victims talking about their harrowing experiences and breaking the shackles of shame and self-blame.

A key feature of the majority of the analysed articles is the large number of quotations by leaders in the field of education, spokespersons of the different provincial departments of education and trade unions and persons directly involved in or affected by the violence, such as victims, colleagues and witnesses. According to Davidson and Wallack (2004:115), quotations may be an indicator of "the depth of coverage of a topic – when journalists perceive a problem as being important, they may be more likely to seek out credible sources for their opinions". The minute detail with which journalists describe incidents of learner-on-teacher violence, the extent of their research on the topic and their efforts to interview people directly and indirectly affected by the violence leave no doubt that journalists perceive learner-on-teacher violence as an important, newsworthy topic.

Despite the biased and often sensationalistic nature of newspaper articles, the juxtaposition of findings from the content analysis and findings from the mostly quantitative research publications has shown similarities with regard to the different types of learner-on-teacher violence and the effect of learner-on-teacher violence on victims' private and professional lives, as well as teaching and learning. It may therefore be concluded that newspaper articles can be

used as a viable data source to gain insight into learner-on-teacher violence. It should always be remembered that the primary role of newspapers is to inform the public about important socio-economic and political issues. The drop in newspaper circulation in South Africa by 49% over the past ten years (Omarjee, 2019) does not mean the end of the news media as a data source in South Africa. On the contrary, since the invention of the Internet, consumers are increasingly turning to digital platforms to get the news. Internet platforms, including social media, offer new data sources for researchers.

6. CONCLUSION

South African English newspapers depict learner-on-teacher school violence as a serious, escalating social problem. Newspapers portray learner-on-teacher school violence as physical, verbal, sexual and emotional in nature, with deviant learners attacking hardworking, dedicated and experienced professionals. Underpinned by Lindner's (2003) humiliation theory, this study has emphasised the public nature of teachers' humiliation. Learners attack their teachers in their classrooms, on the school grounds, on social media and even at their place of residence. Newspaper articles give insight into the dire economic, physical, emotional and psychological consequences of the humiliation for the victims, portraying teachers as disempowered, humiliated and vulnerable individuals. Newspaper articles also allude to the disintegration of teaching and learning because of learner-on-teacher violence.

While acknowledging the fact that "news media may not exert a direct and instant influence" (Kim et al., 2012:44) on public opinion and policymakers, I support McCauley's (2018:8) statement that newspapers create an awareness of what was once "a silent epidemic plaguing the education system", namely learner-on-teacher violence. An acknowledgement of the commonness or frequency of acts of learner-on-teacher violence may prevent the average person, education and community leaders and policymakers from distancing themselves from this form of learner misbehaviour. This may result in learner codes of conduct or disciplinary policies of schools stating emphatically that learner-on-teacher violence is a serious form of learner misbehaviour that must be addressed and eradicated. This will only happen, however, if topical news such as learner-on-teacher violence is reported in a more legitimate way and reflects real, not contrived sensationalistic, news. Explicit judgements, condemnation, personal feelings, assumptions and opinions should be avoided when writing about school violence. Media houses and editorial teams have an important role in encouraging and rewarding accurate reporting by journalists on topics that are "media staple". Emphasis on accurate rather than sensationalistic reporting will increase the credibility of both on and offline reporting.

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