



**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
SCHOOL OF APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES**

**A Victimological Analysis On The Experiences Of Educators In Government  
Schools As Victims Of Workplace Bullying In Pietermaritzburg**

By

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**A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Social Science in Criminology & Forensic Studies, Howard College Campus**

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**December 2024**

## DECLARATION

I, Xolisile Charnelle Hlungwane (217013287), hereby declare that this thesis is my original work. It has never been submitted to another university for a qualification or any other reason. All sources that I used or quoted were acknowledged and properly referenced.

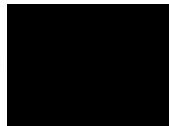


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X.C. Hlungwane

6 December 2024

Supervisors Signiture



## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved daughter, Inaminkosi Zanengcebo, who is my greatest blessing and my source of inspiration. Mama loves you!

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATTWPB	Anti-Teacher-Targeted Workplace Bullying
Bed	Bachelor of Education
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements
DH	Departmental Head
DoE	Department of Education
EAPSA	Employee Assistant Programs of South Africa
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
EST	Ecological Systems Theory
HOD	Head Of Department
HR	Human Resources
HSSREC	Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
ILO	International Labour Office
LIFO	Last In-First Out
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SADTU	South African Democratic Teacher's Union
SAPS	South African Police Service
SGBs	School Governing Bodies
TTB	Teacher-Targeted Bullying
TTWP	Teacher-Targeted Workplace Bullying
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
WHO	World Health Organisation

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES & TABLES .....	xi
ABSTRACT.....	xii
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.1 Background to the study.....	1
1.2 Problem statement .....	5
1.3 Aim and objectives of the research .....	7
1.4 Research questions .....	8
1.5 Significance of the study .....	8
1.6 Rationale for the study .....	9
1.7 Motivation for the study.....	10
1.8 Overview of the methodology .....	11
1.9 Definition of key terms .....	12
1.10 Outline of Chapters.....	13
1.11 Summary .....	15
.....	15
CHAPTER 2 .....	16
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	16
2.1 Introduction .....	16
2.2 Workplace bullying as a global phenomenon.....	17
2.3 Workplace bullying in a South African context.....	22
2.3.1 Bullying perpetrated by learners on educators .....	25
2.3.2 Bullying of educators by parents .....	27
2.3.3 Bullying of educators by the management.....	29
2.4 Factors Associated to Workplace Bullying.....	30
2.4.1 Age and workplace bullying .....	31
2.4.2 Gender .....	32
2.4.3 Level of education.....	34
2.4.4 Exposure to job demand and limited resources .....	35

2.4.5 Power relations.....	36
2.4.6 Personality traits.....	38
2.4.6.1 Pessimism.....	39
2.4.6.2 Neuroticism.....	39
2.4.6.3 Assertiveness .....	40
2.5 Various forms of workplace bullying .....	40
2.5.1 Exclusion/ social isolation .....	41
2.5.2 Unfair treatment.....	42
2.5.3 Verbal abuse/ public humiliation.....	43
2.5.5 Psychological bullying .....	45
2.6 The effects/ consequences of workplace bullying.....	45
2.6.1 Psychological effects of bullying .....	46
2.6.2 Economic effects of bullying .....	47
2.6.3 Physical health effects of bullying.....	48
2.6.4 Social interaction effect .....	48
2.6.5 Work performance.....	49
2.7 Strategies to reduce workplace bullying.....	50
2.7.1 Primary interventions .....	51
2.7.1.1 Develop a healthy culture .....	51
2.7.1.2 Make changes in the leadership .....	52
2.7.1.3 Conduct awareness programmes on workplace bullying.....	52
2.7.2 Secondary interventions .....	53
2.7.2.1 Reporting bullying incidents .....	53
2.7.2.2 Writing of warnings.....	54
2.7.2.3 Encourage social support.....	54
2.7.3 Tertiary Interventions .....	55
2.7.3.1 Provide onsite or distance counselling .....	55
2.7.3.2 Taking all reports of bullying seriously .....	55
2.8 International interventions to tackle workplace bullying.....	56
Policy interventions .....	56
2.9 National interventional measures .....	57
2.9.1 Legislations concerning workplace bullying.....	58
2.9.2 Legislations on workplace bullying .....	58
(a) South African School Act 84 of 1996.....	59
(b) The Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace	
59	

(c) Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 .....	60
(d) Promotion of Equity and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 .....	60
(e) The Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011 .....	61
(f) The Occupational and Health Safety Act 85 of 1993.....	61
2.10 Conclusion.....	62
CHAPTER 3 .....	63
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	63
3.1 Introduction .....	63
3.2 Theoretical overview of victimisation of educators in the workplace.....	63
3.2.1 The Karl Marx Conflict Theory .....	64
3.2. 1.1 Historical context of the Conflict Theory .....	64
3.2.3 Understanding workplace bullying through Karl Marx’s Conflict Theory.....	65
3.3 The Ecological Systems Theory .....	67
3.3.2 Application of Ecological Systems Theory (EST) on workplace bullying within a school setting .....	69
3.3.2.1 Microsystem.....	69
3.3.2.2 Mesosystem .....	71
3.3.2.3 Exosystem .....	72
3.3.2.4 Macrosystem.....	72
3.4 Summary .....	73
CHAPTER 4 .....	74
METHODOLOGY .....	74
4.1 Introduction .....	74
4.2 Nature of the study.....	74
4.3 Research methodology .....	75
4.4 Research paradigm .....	76
4.5 Study location .....	77
4.6 Target population .....	78
4.6.1 Inclusion criteria.....	78
4.6.2 Exclusion criteria.....	78
4.7 Sampling and sampling techniques .....	78
4.8 Methods of data collection .....	80
4.9 Semi-structured in-depth interviews.....	80
4.10 Recruitment strategy .....	81
4.11 Data collection procedure.....	82
4.12 Data analysis .....	82

4.13 Trustworthiness .....	83
4.13.1 Credibility .....	84
4.13.2 Transferability .....	84
4.13.3 Dependability .....	84
4.13.4 Confirmability.....	85
4.14 Ethical considerations .....	85
4.14.2 Ethical approval.....	86
4.14.3 Informed consent.....	87
4.14.4 Anonymity and confidentiality.....	87
4.14.5 Harm to the participants.....	88
4.14.6 Deception .....	89
4.15 Limitations and challenges of study.....	89
4.16 Summary .....	90
CHAPTER 5 .....	91
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	91
5.1 Introduction .....	91
5.2 Background information of the participants .....	91
5.3 Analysis of the one-on-one interview data: Educators.....	94
5.3.1 Factors driving workplace bullying .....	94
5.3.2 Forms of workplace bullying experienced by educators .....	99
5.3.3 Educators as victims of workplace bullying .....	102
5.3.4 The effects of workplace bullying on educators .....	108
5.3.5 Addressing workplace bullying .....	112
5.4 Intervention strategies and preventive measures for workplace bullying.....	116
5.5 Summary .....	118
CHAPTER 6 .....	119
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	119
6.1 Introduction .....	119
6.2 Summary of the findings .....	120
6.2.1 The motivating factors of workplace bullying in the selected schools .....	120
6.2.3 The effects of workplace bullying on educators .....	121
6.2.4 Strategic measures to address workplace bullying.....	122
6.3 Recommendations by the researcher.....	122
6.3.1 Training programmes on school safety and security .....	122
6.3.2 Strengthen a positive relationship with learners and the parents .....	123
6.3.3 Public awareness about workplace bullying and its consequences .....	124

6.4 Recommendations for further studies.....	124
6.5 Study limitations .....	125
6.6 Conclusion .....	125
REFERENCE LIST .....	127
APPENDICES .....	142
Appendix A: Interview Schedule .....	142
Appendix B: Imibuzo ngxoxo yo Thisha .....	143
Appendix C: Consent Letter .....	144
Appendix D: Incwadi yemvume .....	147
Appendix E: Ethical clearance approval letter .....	150
.....	150
Appendix F: Counselling Services.....	151
Appendix G: Gatekeepers letter from the school principals .....	152
Appendix H: Gatekeepers letter from DOE.....	153
Appendix I: Language editor's certificate.....	154
Appendix J: Turnitin similarity report.....	155

## LIST OF FIGURES & TABLES

Figure 2.1: Thematic approach to the literature review.....	16
Figure 2.1: Intervention measures in tackling workplace bullying .....	52
Table 2.1: Primary International Interventions.....	57
Figure 3.1: The Ecological Systems Theory on human development .....	64
Figure 4.1: The map of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg.....	77
Table 5.1: Demographic data of the participants.....	93
Table 5.2: Sequence of findings.....	94

## ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying is not a recent phenomenon, extensive research has been conducted to examine this form of violence. However, while there has been an increase in research on workplace bullying, far too little attention has been paid to the impact of workplace bullying on South African educators, particularly in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, and the challenges they face on a daily basis. Workplace bullying persists as a pervasive issue worldwide, impacting both unorganised public sectors and educational institutions. This violence poses a significant threat to peace and security and infringes upon the human rights of affected individuals. In recent years, this problem has increased, and its exploitative and manipulative nature has destroyed the lives many educators. The aim of this study is to investigate the experiences of educators in government schools as victims of workplace bullying in Pietermaritzburg. It determines the motivating factors that contribute to workplace bullying. It explores the various forms of workplace bullying experienced in these schools, it determines the effects on the victims and examines strategic intervention measures to successfully tackle this violence. To accomplish the study's goals and objectives, the researcher used the qualitative data method of research, which offered a methodical framework for data collection techniques. The study explored the authentic views of the educators using semi-structured interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 participants who were sampled using a non-probability sampling technique. The interviews were held in July 2024. All the participants were from Pietermaritzburg and were sampled using a purposive sampling method. Thirteen educators were females and two were males. The participants shared their views on the motivating factors and forms of workplace bullying, and the effects these factors have on them. According to the study, the majority of educators in the government schools being investigated have been victims of emotional, verbal, psychological, and neglectful bullying. The study finds that educators suffer long-term consequences from bullying, and the majority of this violence goes unreported. In this context, South Africa's approach to workplace bullying should be focused on developing a system that can guide practices to completely eradicate it. This could be done by strictly enforcing existing laws and utilising cooperative strategic measures. The Department of Education (DoE) and the South African Police Service (SAPS) are two examples of agencies that should not be complacent in dealing with this violence.

**Keywords:** *Bullying, Educators, Government Schools, Perpetrators, Victims, Violence, Workplace, Workplace bullying*

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Background to the study

Workplace bullying has emerged as a major global issue due to its rising incidence, health risks, and related medical costs for victims. Workplace bullying is a criminal offense that affects millions of employees across diverse organisations globally, with the teaching profession identified as being the highest-risk profession. Bullying of educators in South African schools adversely impacts their dignity and overall well-being. According to Bernstein and Batchelor (2022), following the end of apartheid in 1994, South African schools experienced significant political and social changes, resulting in ongoing, ineffective changes to the government's educational policies. According to Johnson (2005), prior to 1994, the Department of Education's internal management structure used a cascading style to disseminate instructions and information, with school inspectors informing principals, who in turn informed their heads of departments, who then relayed the instructions or information to the level one teacher. Principals were forced to modify their management styles in order to deal with the change. Management styles could either contribute to the prevalence of workplace bullying in schools or improve the environment of teaching and learning and foster positive relationships among all stakeholders (Kalloo 2014).

A number of factors such as ignorance and poor reporting of bullying incidents, absence of policy to deal with bullying, and a lack of reliable information, have contributed to the inability to determine the extent and prevalence of workplace bullying among educators. Previous research has centred the focus on bullying in various occupations and among learners in South African schools, with only a few studies investigating workplace bullying among educators working in violent environments (Kõiv 2015; Pyhältö, Pietarinen and Soini 2015; Shelton 2015). As De Wet and Jacobs (2013) state that, following a thorough review of the literature, only a few studies that focus on bullying in schools have been found. This prompted the researcher to the need to investigate the effects of workplace bullying in government schools, as little research had been conducted in this area. This study will explore the experiences of educators who have been victims of workplace bullying in KwaZulu-Natal government schools. The aim of this research is to contribute to the limited body of knowledge on the

phenomenon within the South African schooling setting. Mokgolo (2017) defines workplace bullying in the South African context as an act where powerful employees repeatedly direct hostile and harmful actions toward less powerful colleagues. These actions, can be verbal or non-verbal, overt or covert, persist over time and cause distress, intimidation, manipulation, humiliation, or degradation.

Educators in South Africa face enormous pressure for a variety of reasons, including inappropriate learners' behaviour and school violence. They also face an extremely high level of workplace bullying, particularly bullying related to their field of work (Jacobs and Teise 2019). Cowie et al. (2002) hold the view that workplace values and norms influence how bullying is defined, how employees interpret situations, and whether bullying is recognised as a problem. Jacobs and Teise (2019) state that, the end of apartheid witnessed extensive transformations in schools in South Africa, resulting in continuous dramatic changes in government educational policies that impacted educators' job demands and the education sector had become more market-driven and competitive, with the mandate of education focussing on achieving economic goals, serving the economy, and providing a skilled labour force to benefit the local and global economies.

In education, post-apartheid policies and legislation thrive in an environment of fear: fear of the consequences of poor performance, fear of excessive surveillance and monitoring, and fear of being denied a salary increase (Mouton, Louw and Strydom 2013). This practice in new management forced principals to change their leadership behaviour, creating an environment that resonated with workplace bullying. For instance, principals had to do whatever it took to improve learners' and educators' performance, even if it meant ruining their personal and professional lives, because they were afraid of department officials visiting their schools frequently or of being publicly named and shamed for their school performance results (Jacobs and Teise 2019).

Bullying in the workplace is detrimental to both the organisation and its employees. Cunniff and Mostert (2012) discovered that bullying is frequently exacerbated by organisational diversity dynamics in South Africa. In essence, employees of various races, ideologies, genders, and ages experience bullying in both positive and negative ways depending on their perceptions of status, rank, or level (Makgolo and Chigo 2024). Victims of bullying may have serious problems with their physical and mental health. The victim may experience psychological harm such as a lack of enthusiasm, inability to concentrate, poor performance,

depression, panic attacks, and anxiety (Jacobs and De Wet 2018). According to Kruger (2011), if workplace bullying is not adequately addressed, it may become a problem for schools, resulting in lower productivity and the complete collapse of the learning and teaching process. This study will thus look into the recommendations and intervention strategies that can be used to help prevent, protect, and assist victims, as well as combat workplace bullying within a school setting. In light of the arguments proffered so far, very little research has been conducted on the experiences of educators as victims of workplace bullying, particularly in government schools.

The majority of published studies focus on workplace bullying and its effects on organisations rather than on the victims (Einarsen and Skogstad 1996; Lutgen-Sandvik, Hood, and Jacobson 2016; Hoel, Cooper, and Einarsen 2020), to name a few. Much of the research was conducted in international countries around the world, including France, the United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, and the United States of America (Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen 2010). In 2018, workplace bullying researchers conducted a study on the complexity of teacher-targeted workplace bullying and found that teachers are often the targets of bullies and that South African teachers are three times more likely to experience workplace bullying than their peers in other parts of the world (Jacobs and De Wet 2018). Workplace bullies most often target people who pose a perceived threat on them or their authority. According to Jacobs and De Wet (2018), workplace bullying is a phenomenon that has been studied in many different contexts, but it still seems to be endemic. Similarly, Batchelor (2019) holds that extensive studies have been done on workplace bullying within organisations with very little research in the South African schools on teacher bullying utilising the workplace demands, resources and the implications these have for individual and organisational well-being.

Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, and Alberts (2006) concede that identifying the emotional and physical effects of workplace bullying, as well as the material effects on the organisation, is a critical step in persuading national and organisational policymakers to address the issue. They further state that such knowledge may increase sensitivity to vulnerable groups. According to earlier research carried out nationally as well as globally, there is an increase in teacher-targeted bullying (TTB) in South African schools. (Tracy et al. 2006; Bernstein and Batchelor 2022). These studies demonstrate that teacher-targeted bullying is a serious issue in schools that requires immediate intervention (Sambo and Govender 2023). Workplace bullying affects educators all over the world, and it appears to be prevalent in South African schools, with little

attention paid to the experiences and challenges that its victims face (Batchelor 2019). The researcher's goal in conducting this study is to provide and/or report on the experiences of educators who have been bullied at their workplaces in Pietermaritzburg. The researcher chose to conduct this study because there is little data and/or literature on the violence experienced by educators in government schools in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal Province. Scholars such as Pyhalto, Pietarinen, and Soini (2015); Woudstra (2015); Jacobs and De Wet (2018); and Sambo and Govender (2023) found that teacher-targeted bullying is defined as a type of aggressive behaviour in which educators are victimised by learners, co-workers, and members of the school management team (such as the principal and administration staff) on school grounds.

This chapter will further present the discussions on what follows: the problem statement, the study's aim, the study's objectives, the research questions, the significance of the study, the rationale and motivation for the study, the design and methodology of the research employed, the definition of key terms, and a structural summary to conclude the chapter. The terms teachers and educators, workplace bullying and violence; bully and perpetrator, the victims and educators will all be used interchangeably by the researcher. The following section discusses the study's background.

Workplace bullying in educational settings has become an increasing concern worldwide, impacting educators' well-being, job performance, and the broader school environment (Jacobs and De Wet 2018). In South Africa, government school educators face unique challenges within the workplace, often characterised by high-stress levels, overcrowded classrooms, and limited resources. These pressures, coupled with instances of workplace bullying, exacerbate an already demanding profession. Educators in KwaZulu-Natal, a province grappling with socio-economic disparities and resource constraints, are particularly vulnerable, making it crucial to explore the nature and effects of bullying within these school contexts.

Research shows that workplace bullying can manifest through various forms, including verbal abuse, intimidation, social exclusion, and manipulation by colleagues or administrators (Matthiesen and Einarsen 2010). Such experiences lead to detrimental effects, not only on the victims' mental and emotional health but also on their ability to maintain a positive and effective learning environment for learners (Esterhuizen and Van der Westhuizen 2017). The consequences of bullying include increased stress, decreased job satisfaction, and even a desire

to leave the teaching profession entirely—trends that ultimately undermine the quality of education (Bernstein 2022).

This study draws on victimology to analyse the experiences of educators as victims within the professional sphere, recognising that workplace bullying reflects broader issues of power dynamics, institutional culture, and policy enforcement within schools (Eirnasen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper 2005). By focusing on government school educators in Pietermaritzburg, this study sought to document their experiences, explore the impact of bullying on their professional lives, and provide a framework for addressing these issues. The researcher argues that understanding these factors is essential for developing effective anti-bullying policies and support systems that protect educators, promote their well-being, and improve the quality of education in South Africa's public schools.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

Bullying is pervasive in the corporate corridors of this nation, where job opportunities are scarce and people are obsessive about what they have. Workplace bullying is characterised by a pattern of unwelcome, negative behaviours aimed at a particular person or group of people. These behaviours can include insulting remarks, unnecessary sarcasm, mocking, belittling, and more. Other negative acts may include physical harm to the individual being targeted, the imposition of unrealistic target expectations, and extreme forms of work observation that may cause unnecessary stress (Langos 2012). According to the research conducted by Steinman (2003), there is currently no international consensus on a definition of workplace bullying. However, the majority of researchers believe that these hostilities are ongoing and prolonged; perpetrated by one or more people against one or more targets; deliberate behaviour intended to harm the target; negatively impacting the targets or victims; and causing havoc on this group's emotional well-being. On this note, Vartia (2001:64) points out that “workplace bullying can be seen as a process comprising several phases, from aggressive behaviour to the victim’s exclusion from the workplace and several trauma in which all members of the work unit play a role in this process, often as an observer or onlooker”.

According to surveys on workplace bullying (e.g., Vartia 2001), (74%) of targets reported being bullied for the first time. One out of 5 targets of bullying reported having been bullied previously at other workplaces, (15%) had been bullied before and (6%) had been bullied more than once. Compared to people who were bullied for the first time in their lives, those who had

been bullied once or more in the past reported feelings of low self-confidence. A broader perspective has been adopted by Cowie et al. (2002) who found that bullying in the workplace is similar to bullying in other contexts, such as schools. Organisational climate and working arrangements, for example, the presence and effectiveness of anti-bullying policies in schools, as well as the quality of the workplace environment, all contribute to the prevalence of bullying. Individual factors, such as low self-esteem, physical weakness, shyness, a lack of friends, and social rejection are likely important in school and workplace contexts (Coyne, Gopaul, Campbell, Garland, and Cousans 2019; Monks and Smith 2000). Workplace bullying research confirmed that high job demands, low job control, and low social support at work all contribute to health problems in various occupational groups, including teachers (Ijomeh 2017). According to Devonish (2013), the study of workplace bullying and its effects on employee performance has emerged as a significant area of research that has received scholarly attention.

Workplace bullying in the school environment has a negative impact on educators, who may view themselves as victims, which affects their work-related performance. Stressful working conditions have an impact on educators' personal health, resulting in poor performance and a negative attitude towards their profession and the learners they teach. Empirical research has shown that effective states of psychological well-being may mediate the effects of workplace bullying as a stressor on job performance. For example, in terms of job satisfaction, employees portray a sense of enjoyment with their job tasks and responsibilities, which is accompanied by positive feelings and thoughts about their experiences at work; however, employees with high levels of work-related depression experience a depleted level of mental health which manifests as negative emotions, a sense of deprivation, and low confidence and self-worth (Spector 1997; Warr 1990; Devonish 2013). Conversely, Samnani, Singh and Ezzedeen (2013) reported that the victim's performance is likely to improve or deteriorate depending on whether the victim perceives bullying as work- or non-work-related, and whether the victim perceives bullying as person- or context-driven. When the victim uses a positive thinking and positive attributions about the bullying behaviour, the work performance may increase.

According to Pauksztat and Salin (2019), the factors exacerbating the vulnerability of the victimisation of educators to workplace bullying include social interactions as social relationships play a role in motivating or instigating workplace bullying; competition; socio-demographic factors (such as age, gender and level of education); power relations, personality traits, and high exposure to job demands with limited resources. As pointed out by Kristen et

al. (2005), South African teachers work in 'toxic' schools characterised by resentful, overworked, and stressed teachers, and when despair and disrespect prevail, teachers frequently turn against one another (De Wet and Jacobs 2013). Bullying has a negative impact on its victims and may cause health problems for some; others may avoid the areas where the bullying occurred in order to reduce their chances of being victimised again. This disrupts their lives by restricting some of the basic human rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution (Sambo and Govender 2023). The findings of the study by Sambo and Govender (2023) found that teachers who are the victims of teacher-targeted bullying experience feelings of disrespect, hurt, disappointment, anger, fear, stress, and confused about going to work the next day. Bullying behaviours have the power to obliterate teaching and learning taking place in the classroom, which is something South Africa cannot afford.

As part of the new Code of Good Practice on the prevention and elimination of harassment in the workplace, which came into effect in South Africa on March 18, 2022, employers now have an obligation to assist in preventing bullying in the workplace. According to the Code, depending on the seriousness of the behaviour reported, employees who engage in bullying or are found guilty of it may, in some cases, face summarily termination (EAPSA 2022).

An investigation into the experiences of educators becoming victims of bullying in their respective places of work and how this problem can be addressed was therefore necessary. It was important to understand if educators of Pietermaritzburg know when they are bullied and if they take serious action in reporting the bullying acts. In light of the aforementioned issues, the Department of Education should work to improve safety by encouraging a supportive school environment and lowering the likelihood of violence by providing crisis management training to staff members. Furthermore, Sykes and Gachago (2018) contend that creating supportive environments for educators to enforce effective teaching and learning in schools also requires the provision of therapeutic services following a tragedy at schools and collaborating with law enforcement units to combat incidents of workplace bullying.

### **1.3 Aim and objectives of the research**

The current study aims to investigate the experiences of educators in government schools as victims of workplace bullying in the KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. The study will assist future researchers develop initiatives and strategies to reduce violence in the school setting. To accomplish this goal, the researcher observed that workplace bullying remains a social issue in

today's society, and that educators are subjected to various forms of this violence. Therefore, in view of the aim of the study, the research objectives were to;

1. Determine the motivating factors of workplace bullying in the selected schools.
2. Explore the various forms of workplace bullying the educators experience in these schools.
3. Determine the effects of workplace bullying on educators.
4. Examine intervention strategies and recommendations that educational institutions can implement to effectively tackle workplace bullying.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

In light of the argument that workplace bullying has a variety of negative effects on workers in organisations, including job dissatisfaction, mental health issues, chronic illnesses, and performance issues (Devonish 2013). De Wet (2014), a South African researcher on workplace bullying in an educational setting, discovered that bullying has a negative impact on the professional and personal wellbeing of teachers who are the targets of workplace bullying, as it also negatively affects their ability to provide their vital services (Batchelor 2019). The following key question was asked:

Are the victims of workplace bullying in government schools aware that they are being bullied and if so, how do they deal with the violence?

The main topic of study gave rise to the following four questions:

1. What are the motivating factors of workplace bullying experienced in the selected schools?
2. What are various forms of workplace bullying experienced by educators in these schools?
3. How are educators affected by workplace bullying?
4. What intervention strategies and recommendations can educational institutions implement to effectively tackle workplace bullying?

#### **1.5 Significance of the study**

Workplace bullying is a disturbingly prevalent issue and is not limited to a specific industry or profession. It is therefore important to provide in-depth discussion on the nature and conceptualisation of workplace bullying on educators. It is important to discuss these issues as

the silence surrounding the bullying committed towards the educators is alarming. The effects of workplace bullying in South Africa, particularly in the KwaZulu- Natal remain poorly understood. No formal studies on negative impacts on personal and professional lives of the educators or on the teaching and learning have been undertaken thus far. In this study, the researcher endeavoured to understand the motivating factors of workplace bullying in government schools and the effects workplace bullying have on the victims. The findings of this study will provide valuable insight in understanding and addressing workplace bullying, which is essential for creating supportive and productive educational settings. Moreover, the findings of this study will encourage the educators who experience workplace bullying to report all bullying incidents. Ultimately, the significance of this study will be related to the contributions of the efforts being implemented to foster positive, bully-free workplaces that empower educators, enhancing their ability to fulfil their roles as mentors and role models in KwaZulu-Natal's education system.

### **1.6 Rationale for the study**

Workplace bullying has been identified to be a serious problem across different nations with devastating consequences on the victims. This study was prompted by the fact that few scholars have focused on the impact of workplace bullying within an educational context. South African schools display a high incidence of workplace bullying among secondary and primary school educators. Learners frequently challenge educators and principals by displaying violent behaviour. The researcher attempts to conduct a victimological analysis of educators in government schools as victims of workplace bullying in Pietermaritzburg. The researcher's motivation for conducting this kind of research was twofold: first, there is a lack of literature on this population, especially pertaining to educators in Pietermaritzburg; and second, many educators face extreme bullying in the workplace. Workplace bullying in government schools must be addressed immediately. The purpose of this study is to report on the experiences of government school teachers who have experienced violence in their places of employment. As mentioned, the research provides with discussion on the extent of workplace bullying effects on educators, particularly working in government schools. The researcher observed bullying of educators in schools and identified the need for increased research, as well as the consistent application of research findings about workplace bullying in the educational context, to ensure that schools remain safe for educators to teach. It is critical to understand why workplaces exist in schools. Victims of this act are worried considering the emotional, physical and psychological effects they suffer. Therefore, the anti-bullying interventions could be more

effective or productive when the reasons for workplace bullying are understood. It is very valuable to make an effort to research workplace bullying within a school context in that it will help to bring into the limelight the major types of bullying and describe educator's experiences about being bullied in their places of work. The researcher will help to clarify the role learners as bullies play, the parents or the management, and the victims' co-workers as the perpetrators of this violence. Bullying often leads to greater and prolonged violence in the schools that, not only harms its intended victims, but it also negatively affects the learning and teaching process and the opportunities for all children to achieve their desired goals of receiving quality education and deprives educators of their rightful entitlement to teach in an environment that is safe, caring and just. This research is necessary because of its social value and importance. It is because of the above-mentioned information, coupled with the researcher's personal interest in this topic that the desire has risen to contribute to finding ways of preventing workplace bullying in the government schools. The study findings could also assist in filling the gaps on the existing literature since there is very little research conducted on this issue thus far. This research will provide the findings from reviewed papers and relevant documents on the possible responses that the educational institutions and the government can work on to fight workplace bullying in South Africa.

Findings and recommendations of this study will assist in understanding the sensitivity of workplace bullying occurring in this country school's corridors and the effect this may have on the future leaders of this country (the learners). Findings of this research could provide the school principals and the victims in better understanding the legal frameworks associated with preventing workplace bullying. The access the researcher has to the two selected schools, the school principals, and to the educators is an added advantage that contributes to making this project a success.

### **1.7 Motivation for the study**

Sibisi (2021:11) argues that "quality education can only be offered in a safe environment that is conducive for learning, this means that for learners to be equipped with the necessary skilled and requirements needed in the job market, the learning environment have to be conducive enough for them to unleash their full potential". This can only be achieved in a schooling environment that is free from all forms of violence. However, with educators in South Africa experiencing exceptionally high levels of victimisation in their workplaces, this seems impossible. As many educators in previous studies reported to having decreased motivation to

do their work, spent a lot of time away from the bullying environment through sick leave and reported feelings of psychological stress such as depression and suicide. The issue of workplace bullying within the school setting is a matter of urgency. The study addressed a social problem that is causing mental distress, low self-esteem, unproductivity, and severe harm to the targeted educator's well-beings. The experiences of educators of Pietermaritzburg in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, working in environments prone to violence is under-researched, it is thus for this reason that this study was conducted. Previous research on workplace bullying has focused on the causes and effects on individuals and organisations in municipalities, manufacturing industries, universities, and religious organisations (Vartia 2001; Dhar 2012; Leymann 1996). With little research conducted that studies workplace bullying on educators in South Africa, particularly working in public schools. The motivation for this study was thus underpinned by the researcher's increasing awareness that educators in South Africa experience extreme unfavourable behaviours in their respective places of work and the bullying incidences go unreported. This study was thus motivated by a desire to contribute to the success of educational institutions' implementation of workplace bullying prevention strategies.

### **1.8 Overview of the methodology**

To address the research questions that motivated this study, the researcher used a qualitative research approach within the realm of an explorative-interpretive research paradigm, as the primary goal is to investigate the phenomenon (i.e. workplace bullying experienced by educators in government schools). The researcher chose this design to investigate and gain a better understanding of the lives and experiences of educators working in government schools who have been victims of workplace bullying in Pietermaritzburg. The qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to identify the problems faced by educators and provide their perspectives and experiences as victims of workplace bullying. The researcher conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with fifteen (n=15) educators who were selected by means of a purposive non-probability sampling technique. The researcher used this technique to select the most relevant or knowledgeable respondents for the topic under study. The researcher did not gather data from the entire population of educators working in government schools, but rather from those who were chosen and agreed to participate in the study. The information provided by participants was analysed thematically. This process involved analysing the collected data in order to reach structured, reliable, and valid conclusions. This study was

carried out in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal Province. Chapter four of this study presents a more in-depth discussion on the research methodology.

The following are the definitions of the conceptual terms used in this study.

## **1.9 Definition of key terms**

### **(i) School**

The term school, refers to “an educational institution at which education as well as training, including pre-primary education, is catered for and which is sustained, managed and controlled or subsidised by a provincial department” (The Employment of Educators Act 1998). According to the South African Schools Act of 1996, the concept school means “a public school or an independent school which enrolls learners in one or more grades between grade zero and grade twelve. Universities and other tertiary institutions are not included under the concept,” writes Maphumulo (2019:7).

### **(ii) Government School**

The South African Schools Act of 1996 established a national schooling system and defined two types of schools: public and independent. Independent schools are privately governed, whereas public schools are state-controlled. A state or public school is a primary or secondary institution that provides free education to all students. According to the Bernard (2014), government schools are funded by the government, which are sometimes supplemented by governing body funds, and these schools must adhere to the CAPS curriculum.

### **(iii) Educator**

The South African School Act (SASA 1996) defines this term as any person who teaches, educates, or trains others at a school, with the exception of those appointed solely to perform extracurricular duties.

### **(iv) Workplace**

A workplace is a specific location or environment in which people carry out tasks and responsibilities assigned by their employer or organisation. This environment can differ greatly depending on the nature of the job, ranging from indoor to outdoor construction sites. Each

industry has unique demands and requirements, which influence the type and structure of the workplace that is appropriate for its operations (Occupational Health and Safety Blog 2023).

#### **(v) Bullying**

Bullying is defined by the Employment Equity Act of 1998 as unwelcome behaviour in the workplace, whether ongoing or a single, serious incident, that degrades, demeans, humiliates, lowers self-esteem or confidence, or creates a hostile or intimidating environment. It also includes the use of coercive power by an individual or group of people in the workplace, either internally or externally, or by an outside client.

#### **(vi) Violence**

According to McKendrick and Hoffmann (1990:3), “violence involves the use of strong physical force against another person. Destructive harm including not only physical assaults that damage the body but also the many techniques of inflicting harm by mental or emotional means”. The researcher is of the view that violence is thus defined as harmful intentional acts that involve the use, threat of use, or actual use of physical force or power against an individual or group of individuals with the potential to cause harm, psychological distress, or even death.

#### **(vii) Workplace bullying**

The definition of workplace bullying provided by Eirnsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper (2003) describe it as “harassing, offending or socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work behaviour, that occurs repeatedly and regularly, e.g., weekly and lasts for a period of time, e.g., about 6 months”. Hoel and Copper (2017) also affirm that workplace bullying is defined as any aggressive, harassing, or intimidating behaviour that leaves the target feeling scared, defenceless, or degraded. The recipient's confidence is damaged by this persistent behaviour, which can also be stressful.

### **1.10 Outline of Chapters**

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study**

This chapter provides an introduction and background of the study. The study's aim, objectives, and key research questions are presented. This chapter provides additional context for the study's motivation and concludes with a summary of the report's structure.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

This chapter comprise of the literature that was reviewed to explain the phenomenon of educators in government schools as victims of workplace bullying. The chapter also provides definitions for the study's key concepts. A historical perspective on workplace bullying as a global phenomenon is presented to compare timelines related to workplace bullying in schools and identify gaps in the literature from other scholars that this study should fill. This section investigates the various types of workplace bullying experienced by educators.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical framework**

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the study and explains the theory's relevance to the study. The chapter discusses Karl Marx's conflict theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. These theories were adopted to outline the prevalence of workplace bullying in schools, as well as to address and explain the research questions and objectives.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

The focus of this section is on the study's research design. The chapter describes the methods for gathering and interpreting data, the instruments used to collect data, and the various ethical guidelines that direct and guide the study's implementation.

## **Chapter 5: Data presentation and analysis**

This chapter offers an in-depth evaluation of the data that was gathered. Thematic data analysis is employed to thoroughly examine and verify the information obtained from the participants.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations**

This is the final chapter, and it highlights the study's findings. This chapter provides a summary from which the conclusion is drawn and examines the recommendations for future research.

## **1.11 Summary**

The first chapter provided an overview of the phenomenon under investigation, clearly illustrating and expanding on the problem statement. The study's motivation paved the way and defined the need and rationale for the current study to be conducted. The concepts used in the study were clearly defined. The research questions and objectives were clearly stated, and the chapter outline provided insight into the thesis' structure. The research design and methodology used were briefly explained. This chapter also highlighted the aim, objectives, and research questions, which provided direction and impetus to the study. The next chapter presents details of the study's literature review.

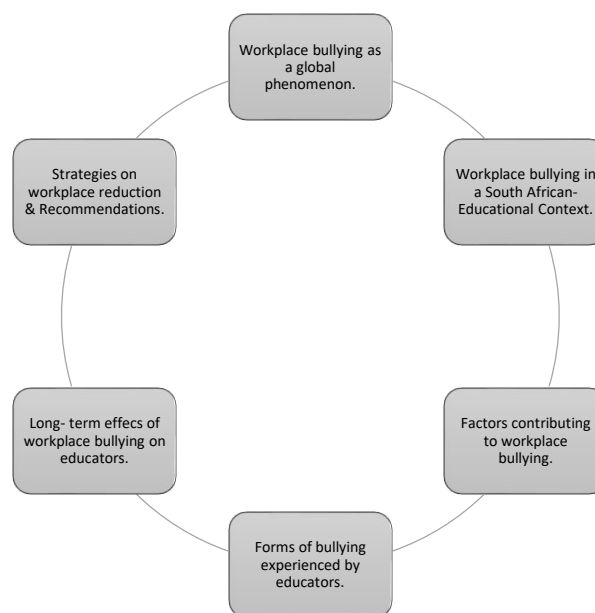
## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of relevant literature that focuses on the themes in the context of the existing body of knowledge on workplace bullying. It was critical for the researcher to find out what other researchers had discovered about the topic under investigation. As a result, the primary goal was to gather information from other scholars about how they conceptualised and theorised the issue of workplace bullying directed at educators. This chapter examines and discusses the nature and conceptualisation of workplace bullying in educators. It is critical to address these issues as the silence surrounding the abuse committed against educators is concerning. The first section of this review will seek to examine workplace bullying as a global phenomenon. The second section explores workplace bullying in South Africa within the education sector. In addition, the discussion of the contributing factors that perpetuate this violence is given. Followed by a brief discussion of the different forms of workplace bullying experienced by educators and the long-term effects of workplace bullying on the educators. The chapter is concluded with the intervention strategies and recommendations that educational institutions can implement to effectively tackle workplace bullying.

**Figure 2.1: Thematic approach to the literature review**



**Source: Author (2024)**

## **2.2 Workplace bullying as a global phenomenon**

Humans are capable of verbally and physically abusing one another, threatening one another with harm, and engaging in a variety of other inappropriate behaviours. In an increasingly diverse workplace, respectful behaviours offer a motivating place of work where the workforce focuses its energy to offer their best (Michetti, Irbah and Bezancon 2020). This is significantly argued to minimise work-related stress while encouraging employees to undertake their tasks diligently and improving productive work-relationships with minimal time used to resolve conflicts and misunderstandings among workers (Kemp 2014). Disrespectful behaviours such as bullying exists in the workplaces despite the clear policies for offering guidelines concerning the code of conduct in some organisations. Kemp (2014) further state that workplace bullying can include intentional or persistent attempts to control, intimidate, torment, or demean an individual mentally and physically, isolating or harming them. In a 2013 study by Branch, Ramsay, and Barker, it was reported that the topic of workplace bullying gained attention more than thirty years ago, with significant research conducted by scholars worldwide in the last two decades. Workplace bullying has a negative effect on individuals worldwide, leading to consequences such as leaving the profession, physical health issues, and the psychological effects. According to Langeveldt (2013), researchers at the International Labour Office (ILO) found that the phenomenon had reached an epidemic level in Thailand, Australia, Sweden, Austria, and the United States of America, many employees had high absenteeism, spent a lot of money on medical expenses, and took sick leave because of a bullying environment (Chappell and Di Martion 2006).

Drawing upon data from research studies and reports, one could contend that, in spite of advancements in protecting employees from forms of bullying specific to race, sex, and age, workplace bullying persists with little or no laws to protect employees unless they fall under special groups (Kaplan 2010). According to a survey conducted in 2010 by the Workplace Bullying Institute, the trend of bullying in the United States steadily increased to a level of 37% of the workforce, which equates to 54 million victimised Americans, causing an alarming loss of 21 to 28 million workers (Bame 2013). As stated by Kaplan (2010), statutory and common laws do not protect employees from workplace bullying because 77% of bullying cases reported involved personnel who did not belong to a protective group defined by race, gender, religion, or age. As a result, current laws consider workplace bullying to be discriminatory only if the target employee belonged to one or more of these groups and the bully did not (Sitzman 2004).

In 2012, Roberts et al. demonstrated that while laws and policies against workplace bullying have been implemented in several countries and academic institutions (including the United Kingdom and Canada), it is up to the heads of these institutions to enforce them. Workplace bullying has been reported to be a global issue reaching across national boundaries. According to Ijomeh (2017), as a result of strained interpersonal relationships brought on by challenging conditions at work, prior research has shown that workplace bullying frequently results from stressful work environments. Since the early 1980s, researchers have examined workplace bullying, and they have developed a number of terms to characterise it, such as emotional violence, mobbing, hostile behaviour, and psychological abuse.

The definition of workplace bullying provided by Hoel and Cooper (2017) describes it as a form of violence, intimidation, or harassment that makes the victim feel vulnerable, threatened, or degraded. When the victim is repeatedly subjected to severe oppressive behaviour over an extended period of time, they lose the ability to defend themselves. It involves an unequal distribution of power between the victim and the offender. Researchers discovered that women reported experiencing more workplace victimisation than men did in countries such as United States of America and France (Neidhammer et al. 2007). Drawing on the concept of gender and age differences, international studies have been able to show that the younger the employee, the higher the chance of encountering harassment and bullying (Einarsen and Rakness 1997; Namie and Namies 2009; Hollis 2014; Awai, Ganasegeran and Abdul 2020). Similarly, Mageroy, Lau, Riise and Moren (2009) found that bullying is more observed among younger age groups (i.e. 34 years and younger).

In a study by Bulut and Hihi (2021), it was found that the reasons for being bullied in the workplace include; undoubtedly being the best person in the workplace in which the target of the bully has certain qualities that make him/her distinguished or loved by everyone at work, except the bully. The policy and demands of the company may make some employees in a competitive environment which is a suitable environment for bullies. In addition, some bullies target the colleagues prejudicially based on their race, gender, or even age, as they tend to bully the ones different from them. Studies on workplace bullying across occupations have shown an over-representation of persons from the teaching profession in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Ireland (Leymann, 1996; Fahie and Devine 2012).

Waasdorp, Fu, Perepezko and Bradshaw (2021) mention that bullying is not a new concept in schools, and it is viewed from various perspectives. Matsela (2014) reports that teachers' workplace bullying experiences are primarily caused by school administration, followed by colleagues of equal status and, to a lesser extent, by parents, the community, and learners. This is supported by phonological data interviews with victims of workplace bullying, which indicate that teachers encounter various forms of workplace bullying in the schools where they work (Matsela 2014). Earlier studies on workplace bullying found teaching to be a high-risk profession (Adewusi 2021; De Wet 2014; Jacobs and De Wet 2018). According to reports, bullying can occur in a variety of social contexts, including schools, which serve as a mechanism for developing and strengthening positive citizens with pro-social behaviour and preparing individuals for their roles in society (Adewusi 2021). Bullying in the workplace is a problem in organisations with a dense social network. Schools, as organisations, are an ideal setting for workplace bullying as a result of their hierarchical structures, active power dynamics, and social relations (Darling-Mohammond et al. 2020; Adewusi 2021).

According to Adewusi (2021), data on safety from the National Centre for Education Statistics in the United States Department of Education revealed that 5% of public school students verbally abused teachers on a daily or weekly basis, while 8% of secondary school teachers (139,400) were threatened with injury by a student. The study also revealed that 70% of teachers were bullied on a regular basis during classroom interactions, learners displayed behaviours of being disrespectful, insubordinate, and unruly, and 40% of the teachers were said to have left school as a result of bullying attitudes experienced in the workplace which later affected the staff and teacher's determination, negatively impacting the learners as well. According to research, ongoing bullying of teachers in schools has resulted in the resignation of some teachers from the teaching profession, lost wages, retrenching and replacement of teachers, lost days at work, payment of medical and psychological care (Zapf and Gross 2001; Fahie and Devine 2012; Bernstein 2022; Langeveldt 2023). Correspondingly, Matthiesen and Eirnasen (2004) reported that bullying in the workplace creates an extended form of social stress, which is responsible for a more cobbling and crushing problem for employees compared to other work-related stressors combined, affecting the personal lives of teachers, the teaching and learning process within the classroom and the interpersonal relationships in the community.

An empirical study by Yaman and Koeabasoglu (2011), revealed that teachers in Turkey were mostly bullied by their secondary school students. It was discovered that these students'

problems are primarily caused by their family background, the media to which they are exposed, and, most importantly, the social environment in which they find themselves (Yaman and Koeabasoglu 2011). According to the researcher, such a background may lead to bullying from students towards teachers in the workplace. In addition to the incidences outlined above, a study conducted by Cook et al. (2010) revealed that with the advent of sophisticated modern electronic communication devices and widely available instant internet access, cyberbullying has emerged as the most common form of student victimisation of teachers. According to Cook et al. (2010), Dublin educators were subjected to online smear campaigns, which included a fake Facebook page claiming that the teachers were interested in and enjoyed underage sex with both girls and boys. The scenario occurred in a secondary school in 2012, resulting in the expulsion of four students and the detention of 40 other students for posting vulgar and unfounded statements about a male and female teacher. According to Matsela (2014)'s research based on investigations of teacher's experiences and impact of workplace bullying on their health in Lesotho, revealed that workplace bullying against teachers is widespread. It was also discovered that workplace bullying against teachers originated from five sources: management, colleagues, subordinates, learners, and parents, with the majority of experiences coming from the school's management (Matsela 2014). Furthermore, he found that teachers reported to have experienced verbal and physical aggression from management. It was also found that teachers observed favouritism towards other staff members, which entails preferential treatment afforded to some people that one likes and not others in the same setting. The respondents pointed out that favouritism towards other staff members by the management was a problem for them (Matsela 2014:484):

*“Favouritism is rife here. For instance, if I attend workshops and travel with the teacher that she likes she will give him taxi fare and she will not give me, so I no longer attend these workshops. My salary was withheld for six months because the principal wanted me to resign wanting to employ her favourite teacher in my post”.*

In some instances, teachers experienced workplace bullying from their colleagues of equal status. One participant from Mastela (2014)'s study reported having experienced isolation and not being accepted. This included a range of acts as expressed in the following examples outlined in this study:

*“I felt isolated in the workplace to a point where I no longer went to the staffroom and decided to stay in the department’s office alone. Teachers in the school could not accept me as of their own, I felt like a loner. I feel like an outsider among my colleagues, one of my co-workers had problems accepting that I am a teacher like her, and I have recently qualified and therefore, I am bringing new ideas to the subject. Who are you to reprimand students? Were common from this colleague”.*

Bullying is a major concern among educators worldwide as it has serious consequences for teachers and everyone else in the academic environment. Tolentino (2016) found that most school principals do not believe workplace bullying occurs on their premises, which may explain why they are more likely to take no action in response to reported workplace bullying incidents than to address the problem directly. Target teachers who are subjected to harsh public scrutiny and taunting from workplace bullies may feel humiliated, losing self-confidence and doubting their abilities, resulting in an abnormal fear of their school functions and maintaining relationships with students and colleagues (Tolentino 2016). This is evidenced by a chairman of the Teacher’s Dignity Coalition, Basaswho who reported that cases of students bullying their teachers have increased in the aftermath of a student stabbing and killing a teacher in the Philippines (Tolentino 2016). Tolentino (2016) indicates that bullying incidents experienced by teachers are not limited to one type but can take many forms and shapes, including emotional bullying. His study's findings confirmed that a person is subjected to emotional bullying or abuse when he is subtly or bluntly accused of wrongdoing, repeatedly humiliated, and, ironically, the victims are portrayed as at fault. Furthermore the findings of the study indicated that almost all teachers had experienced bullying from their school principals, they started to be victimised when they questioned the decisions or policies of their school heads. Bullying instilled in the targeted teachers a sense of power and authority that should not be questioned. The participants also claimed that they did not submit any complaint or a lawsuit in court against their abusers, just because they were afraid of revenge (Tolentino 2016).

From a study conducted on teacher’s experiences of conflict with school principals: the impact on teachers, teaching and learning, Kaloo (2014) revealed that one participant confirmed some of the very demeaning experiences where principals employed tactics that were unprofessional such as shouting and scolding which made the teacher’s feel like being treated as a child. Moreover, the participants reported that the principal would indulge at any time he feels like,

even during their free time and personal space refusing to accept any reasoning coming from the teachers. Sibisi (2021) claims that incidents of learners bullying teachers have grown to be a major worry in both primary and secondary schools. Violent behaviour is one form of victimisation of teachers that hinders their ability to teach and learn effectively. According to Sibisi (2021), learners intentionally ignore their teachers' instructions, swear at them, and cause damage to their property.

Consequently, Hungwe (2010) argues that for a long time in Africa, sexual harassment at work was met with silence because the practice was more or less tolerated, resulting in victims failing to report due to a lack of a legal framework governing sexual harassment issues. Sexual harassment occurs in a variety of workplaces and government organisations, including universities and schools. According to Hungwe (2010), while the first reported case of sexual harassment in South Africa occurred in 1989, a culture of silence persists in Malawi today. Sexual harassment in the education sector is a major concern not only in South Africa and other African countries, but around the world (Smit and Du Plessis 2011). According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC 2010), the tertiary institutions and schools are no longer the ivory towers of the past, but rather breeding grounds for sexual discrimination and victimisation. Gender stereotyping is a major contributor to the high number of sexual harassment cases reported in Africa and other continents' education sectors. Most women experience sexual harassment in their workplaces in different forms, such as through jokes and for job security and promotions (Mapuranga et al. 2015).

### **2.3 Workplace bullying in a South African context**

Workplace bullying is a serious issue that is causing a widespread concern about the overall well-being of South African employees and educators, with long-term detrimental effects on their physical job satisfaction and mental health (Fahie and Devine 2014). Scholars such as (Einarsen et al. 2011; Jacobs 2015; Jacobs and De Wet 2018; Badenhorst 2022) state that the education sector is one of those sectors which tends to have the highest levels of workplace bullying incidences. Workplace bullying is seen among educators, a group of educators to another educator, a learner, or a superior to an educator as a stable phenomenon in South Africa (Langeveldt 2023). In South Africa, educators state that bullying in their places of work is a norm, and their experience of the phenomenon seems to have long-term effects on their psychological well-being, professional lives as well as their personal self-esteem (Langeveldt 2023). Workplace bullying occurring in school environments poses a significant challenge for

the education system in South Africa, with poorly underperforming teachers, poor work ethics, and poor support for teachers who are victims of bullying, all negatively impact the standard of education and affects the quality of teaching. Literature shows that previous research only focuses on the effects of bullying in schools among learners and bullying of learners by teachers; thus a limited number of studies have explored how workplace bullying adversely affect educators (Keashly and Neuman 2010; Einarsen et al. 2011; Jaun 2018; Chatty 2020).

There are several reasons why studies on workplace bullying within school settings have not been embraced fully on a large scale and almost absent in South Africa. The following factors by Field (1996) cited in Kaloo (2014) are believed to be the reasons for this topic to be a relatively new area of study:

**(a) Secrecy and embarrassment**

Many adults feel ashamed and embarrassed to admit that they are bullied. Most bullying occurs in private, so there are no witnesses or records of evidence. It is usually the educator's word (the victim) against the other colleague (the perpetrator), and if they are in a higher position than the victim, as is usually the case, the odds are stacked against the victim.

**(b) Fear**

Bullies maintain their dominance by instilling fear. Fear in the workplace refers to the possibility of losing one's job, position, status, or livelihood. Outside of the workplace, the bully maintains or strengthens his or her grip through intimidation and threat, both psychologically and physically. The latter is most commonly manifested by shouting at and humiliating the victim in public, though physical assault has been reported on occasion.

**(c) Ignorance**

Fear and ignorance (not knowing what to do) have paralysed the victims. Most educational departments have not yet expanded their personnel and grievance procedures to include bullying, which, like harassment, is a specific, clearly identifiable, and unacceptable behaviour.

**(d) Mental Illness**

Denial of mistreatment stigmatises the abused person, bullying significantly increases stress levels, and the most common consequences of high stress, particularly negative stress, are symptoms of depression.

According to Adewusi (2021), the students' behavioural pattern is questionable in terms of how they interact with one another and with teachers and school authorities. Some students are found misbehaving and violent, which constitutes a concern for the practice of education in South Africa, resulting in the high possibility of teachers being bullied in such an environment. Jacobs and De Wet (2015) in their study investigating the effects of workplace bullying on a school level of educators at the University of Free State, contend that workplace bullying continues to be a problem in South Africa. Their findings revealed that among the 999 research participants in their study, 850 indicated being victims of workplace bullying with 30-39% victims having struggled to be productive in their work. More so, in a study conducted by Jacobs and Teise (2019) investigating the educators subjective experiences of workplace bullying on South African employees among them were educators. Findings indicated that within a neoliberalism environment, the organisational culture and management style in the education system resembled workplace bullying (Jacobs and Teise 2019).

Furthermore, Bernstein and Batchelor (2022), investigated bullying among teachers in South African schools, focusing on the exploration of workplace demands and resources, a sample of 13 teachers indicated that they had experienced workplace bullying. According to Bernstein and Batchelor (2022), following the end of apartheid in 1994, South African schools experienced significant political and social changes that resulted in ongoing, ineffective changes to the government's educational policies. Surveys such as that conducted by the South African Democratic Teachers Union SADTU (2018) on workplace bullying against educators, showed that 62% of the participating educators had experienced bullying and harassment at work. The experienced educators reported having been victims of bullying for years in their careers, and they anticipated that newly appointed educators would become easy targets.

When examining the South African context, Sun and Shek (2012) argue that learners today appear to be more exposed to sophisticated communication devices, and that, combined with the effects of the internet and information dissemination systems, schooling is taking on a different dimension than it once did. Many learners nowadays appear to be too lazy, unwilling to learn, unfocused, and rude, which greatly influences how students interact with their teachers

at school. De Wet (2010), who emphasises on learner drug addiction and school violence in South Africa, reported that teachers were attacked on the street, stones and eggs were thrown at their homes, and their private property was also damaged with writings. He further argues that learners use drugs in school and get violent with an educator if the educator tries to instruct them, in some cases teachers are pointed at with guns. In such instances, the teacher's wellbeing is compromised and very difficult to carry out meaningful professional activities. Other research findings show that learners are overprotected by the government policy safeguarding the rights of learners within and outside the school (Matsebele 2019; Moremi and Themane 2024). In a study on learner-teacher targeted bullying in South African high schools, participants stated that giving or focussing too much on learner rights without corresponding responsibilities places learners on a pedestal to be uncontrollable by school authorities, which is vested in teachers and principals (Adewusi 2021).

### **2.3.1 Bullying perpetrated by learners on educators**

Workplace bullying targeting educators and committed by the learners refers to various forms of aggressive behaviours that may include insults, inappropriate comments, disrespect, shouting and yelling, verbal threats, and harassment through the internet, damage to or theft of personal property, physical assault and ignoring instructions from the educators (Mangena and Matlala 2023). Legotlo et al. (2002) cited in Adewusi (2021) found that some learners are ill-disciplined and out of control; they intimidate teachers, deliberately ignore instructions, walk out on teachers while they are teaching, and arrive late to school. These students abuse their right to be in school in order to avoid being corrected or punished. Reddy et al. (2019) found that educators experience bullying in their workplaces, and that new educators joining the system may become victims of the same violence.

According to Myers (1999), the most violent institution in our society is the family, because family problems are frequently resolved through aggressive and violent behaviour. The learners who bully others grow up in families with similar characteristics. At-risk families also exhibit a lack of structure, a limited set of family rules, and inconsistent limits. When a few established rules or limits are not consistently enforced, aggressive behaviour may be perceived as acceptable (Oliver and Oaks 1994). When rules are inconsistent and unpredictable, children only learn to function once the parental mood has been established. It is important to note that what children learn at home affects how they behave at school. For instance, in a classroom, children may not express their attitudes until after the teacher's mood has been established

(Chen 2020). Similarly, peer pressure has a significant impact on many aspects of youth behaviour, and when the peer norm is violent behaviour, there is a strong link between an individual's tendency to be violent. For example, shyness may make a learner feel out of place among his peers, leading him or her to be disobedient or try to get noticed by bullying an educator (Manten 2020).

According to Mangena and Matlala (2023), learner-to-teacher workplace violence and harassment is a challenge in South Africa. The harassment perpetrated by learners on educators has been reported repeatedly in the media. For example, The Witness (2023) reported incidents in which learners assaulted educators, one learner was heard in a video shared on social media saying offensive remarks towards a male teacher and threatening him. In another report by The Witness (2022), a learner punched a teacher in the face and threatened him with a knife when the teacher was enforcing classroom discipline. Another media report is that of teachers who survived stabbings by learners, one which was by a learner who failed the grade (Mangena and Matlala 2023). In another study, De Wet and Jacobs (2006) found that bullying against teachers was common in the Free State and Eastern Cape. According to the study, 79.7% of the 38 teachers who participated in the survey reported being subjected to bullying at some point during their careers. In the Western Cape Province, a Grade 9 learner set fire to the hair of a young female teacher. This demonstrates that schools, both primary and secondary, are becoming unsafe workplaces for teachers attributed to various forms of workplace bullying and violence perpetrated by learners.

In a study conducted by Govender (2015) on primary school teacher's experiences of violence perpetrated by learners found that primary school teachers experience workplace bullying and harassment committed by learners in the form of verbal and physical abuse. In the KwaZulu-Natal Province, a study conducted in some high schools showed that teachers experience physical and sexual violence and harassment by both male and female learners, the teachers report that learners threaten them with violence and swear at them (Fakude 2022) cited in (Mangena and Matlala 2023). Fakude (2022) also found that a female teacher reported that a learner threw a paper at her while she was writing notes on the chalkboard which led to other learners in class laughing. Both male and female teachers report being sexually harassed by both male and female learners, where whistling at some female teacher while walking on the school ground, male learners asking female teachers for sex, learners uttering unwelcomed and offensive words to teachers, some female learners seducing and making sexual gestures

towards male teachers. Some teachers report that some learners move in and out of the classroom during lessons and teachers find this as form of disrespect and a display of undermining the teachers' authority (Fakude 2022).

The number of cases of educators being bullied by learners has become a serious concern in both primary and secondary schools. Learners are on record for assaulting their educators and embarrassing them in front of their colleagues and other learners. In serious cases, educators abandon classes for fear of being harassed and victimised by their learners. Some schools fail to retain educators who have to leave due to fear for their lives. Educators who remain in such schools do so only for a few months before transferring to other schools (Hagedorn 2017). Educators who remain in these schools do not perform to the best of their abilities because they are constantly scared of learner violence. Some educators become discouraged and stop putting their honest effort into the education of learners, in such circumstances, it is unlikely that effective teaching and learning can take place (Hagedorn 2017). According to De Wet (2010), teachers who feel unsafe due to intimidation often take extended sick leave due to problems related to stress. This has a negative impact on the quality of teaching provided by these teachers, as well as their dedication and enthusiasm for their profession. Absenteeism and fear of victimisation eventually have a negative impact on the academic achievement of their learners. It could thus be argued that learners' disruptive behaviour is cause for concern as it poses a serious challenge to school management and learners' academic outcomes.

### **2.3.2 Bullying of educators by parents**

Based on the ecological model of bullying, employees' informal social relationships with other members of their organisation are expected to influence their risk of being bullied. According to Ojala and Nesdale (2004), workplace bullying is a group process in which all parties involved act in predictable ways. The ecological model of bullying contends that the influence of social relationships exacerbates the bullying phenomenon. The effects of individual's relationships with others can be analysed at the dyadic level (i.e., a relation between two individuals may affect the likelihood of bullying between those two individuals) or based on their position in the informal social network that consists of the employees in the organisation and the relationships or ties amongst them (Johnson 2011). A key aspect of an individual's position in a network is their centrality, or the extent to which they interact with other people (Wasserman and Faust 1994). In line with this, research on workplace bullying in a school

setting shows that parents may be a contributing factor in having an additional effect of work demand and increasing the risk of bullying on educators.

According to Batchelor (2019), the primary role of teachers is to conduct lessons, which includes all educational, administrative, and disciplinary functions. Outside of the formal school day, teachers are expected to be involved on the school governing body as well as interact with parents and the larger communities in which they work. Teachers in this role continue to face behavioural challenges from their learners. Learner indiscipline is a major issue in South African schools, and it contributes to the interpersonal stress experienced by teachers. One participant from his study reported that the learners are disrespectful and frequently disrupt the learning and teaching process, and that contacting their parents is a waste of time as they do not care what their children do to them, as teachers (Batchelor 2019). One study by Ndamani (2008), cited in Sibisi (2021), found that a lack of parental involvement and support in schools is the primary reason why learners misbehave. Some parents are unwilling to take responsibility for their children's behaviour, and as a result, these children become delinquent (Sibisi 2021). According to Sibisi (2021), parents become reluctant to participate in their children's education and tend to delegate the role of instilling good morals in their children to educators, which causes problems for educators as they require parental support in dealing with disciplinary problems.

In the same vein, De Wet (2014) in his study on educators' understanding of workplace bullying notes that one participant stated that her colleagues spread vicious rumours about her assessment methods among parents. As a result, parents approached her at school or called her to criticise her marking and request that she reassess their child's work. A parent may abuse the educator in a variety of ways because he or she has developed feelings of hatred and anger for no apparent reason. According to Clarke (2019), teaching is one of the most important jobs anyone can have. After all, teachers are responsible for educating and nurturing learners by providing them with the necessary tools, knowledge, and skills. However, an increasing number of teachers are leaving their profession due to abusive parents (Clarke 2019). According to Bartlett (2019), a reporter for a *speed 60 minutes* education report on Channel Nine, reported one of the teachers who witnessed first-hand the effects of abusive parental bullying stated that he left the teaching profession for a variety of reasons, including physical, verbal, and electronic bullying and harassment.

The former teacher, George Allertz, also stated and recounted how parents' behaviour has changed throughout his teaching career, escalating from voicing concerns to displaying physical violence, which resulted in the police being involved and parents being escorted off school grounds, *"You are going home after being abused by a parent because they did not agree with something that you taught or the way that you taught it"* (former teacher George Allertz says).

### **2.3.3 Bullying of educators by the management**

The public humiliation of educators in front of others is disempowering and may have long-lasting effects on them, including embarrassment, a loss of respect from their learners and colleagues, also health related problems such as headaches, stress and depression (Blasé and Blasé 2004). Managers and leaders tend to over-rely on positional authority. Mangalothi (2022) argues that it is not surprising that supervisors, irrespective of gender or race, tend to be the main perpetrators of bullying. Most definitions of workplace bullying focus on the superior-subordinate relationship between the parties involved in a bullying relationship. Lutgen-Sandvik (2003: 473) describes workplace bullying, for example, as “a repetitive, targeted, and destructive form of communication directed by more powerful members at work at those less powerful”. School principals are perceived to be the main perpetrators of workplace bullying and that they target those with lesser power or statuses.

Workplace bullies strive to tarnish the professional image of their victims. De Wet (2014) argues that the withholding of important information, such as departmental circulars, memorandum, workshops and appointments with learning facilitators are some of the ways used by bullies to create the impression that they are not capable and/or diligent educators. Bullies furthermore set their victims up for failure interrupting their classes or regularly changing the grades and/or learning areas they have to teach. The latter prevents them from becoming experts. According to De Wet (2014), a female educator, for example, was told by the deputy principal that she was incompetent and cannot teach, despite the fact that she had a 91% Matric pass rate the previous year for accounting. Her teaching responsibilities for accounting was taken away from her and given to a person with no teaching diploma. Kaloo's (2014) study revealed that the managers of the school such as principals and deputy principals have the responsibility to address bullying in the workplace, however they are the ones who perpetuate this violence.

Kaloo (2014) maintains that principals who engage in the aforementioned behaviour are short-sighted in their understanding of the consequences, which could include high absenteeism, high staff turnover, low morale, low productivity, and the breakdown of an often-excellent rapport between teachers and learners. The effects of principal bullying extend into the classroom, affecting the effective delivery of a lesson to learners, and with time and the continuation of this violence, the school's culture is eventually destroyed, and collegiality among staff diminishes. Kaloo (2014) emphasises that such treacherous behaviour by principals is not reported in the media, so it remains an elusive problem. The principal may deny the ongoing abuse, assuming that such treatment is the way the world works (Blasé and Blasé 2003). In a study by De Wet (2014) participant reported that some principals threatened educators that they were going to lose their jobs because they reported some principals at the Department of Education (DOE) for some things that he did wrong at the school. This study found that verbal abuse of educators by their principals occurred in their classrooms in front of their learners thereby interrupting teachers as they conduct their classes by correcting what they will be teaching in front of the learners by ways of even shouting at the teacher (De Wet 2014).

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (75 of 1997) establishes minimum employment conditions, including the right to a safe working environment and the prohibition on workplace discrimination. Human resource policies and strategies are responsible for protecting and ensuring the safety of educators in the workplace. However, workplace bullying is frequently not viewed as extreme enough, resulting in everyday mental distress that goes unreported and hidden. The Republic of South Africa's Constitution (1996) guarantees the right of all people to be free of violence. Section 7(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996a) states that everyone has the right to democratic core values such as freedom, equality, and human dignity. This includes the right to be free of torture in any form. The Employment of Education Act (RSA 1998a) also includes provisions for the protection of educators from all forms of violence.

The following discussion explores the factors associated with workplace bullying.

#### **2.4 Factors Associated to Workplace Bullying**

Every occurrence and social problem have contributing factors and repercussions. According to Williams (2011), bullying is believed to occur in workplaces where managers and staff feel empowered to act in an abusive and disrespectful behaviour since they have the support of their

superiors. The study's findings confirm the general assumptions that socio-demographic factors (such as age, gender, and level of education), high exposure to job demand with limited resources, power relations, and personality traits all contribute to workplace bullying of educators. These are just a few of the many complex and various factors discovered to influence workplace bullying in several studies.

#### **2.4.1 Age and workplace bullying**

Previous international research identified age as a significant factor contributing to the occurrence of workplace bullying (Einarsen and Skogstad 1996; Cunniff and Mostert 2012; Lange et al. 2019; Awai 2021). These studies indicated that younger employees are targeted more severely than older colleagues. In a survey study conducted by Rayner (1994) to establish the incidence of workplace bullying, discovered that bullying is a part of many people's working lives, with bullies being generally older than their targets. Badenhorst and Botha (2022) in a study that was conducted among the University Business School staff, the findings revealed that bullies were generally over 30 years old, while their victims were under 25 years old. Conversely, a study conducted in Lesotho by Matsela (2014) discovered that older staff members sabotaged staff relations, younger employees reported to experiencing higher rates of bullying. For example, one participant in the study reported that she shared the same subject with an older teacher. As a new teacher, she would teach some topics to the students and the older teacher would go to that class and teach them the same thing again, simply because she is her former student and cannot accept that she is now a professional like her who happens to know the recent developments in the subject area. Furthermore, the participant articulated that other colleagues would go to her students and ask them what they think of her teaching (Matsela 2014).

Some scholars (see Cortina et al. 2001; Salin 2003; Career Builder 2011) cited in Cunniff (2011), report that a young person joining the workforce between the ages of 20 and 29 may be perceived as having low status in terms of income and job stability, which leads to a power imbalance that encourages bullying. Similarly, in the South African study conducted by Cunniff and Mosert (2012) a study conducted on 13911 employed individuals from different sectors, such as finance, government, call centres, manufacturing, mining, and academia, revealed that younger employees were more likely to encounter workplace bullying, whereas older employees experienced significantly lower instances of bullying. Aligned to a qualitative study conducted by Batchelor (2019) on the experiences of workplace bullying amongst

teachers, this study also revealed that younger teachers were the victims of workplace bullying. These teachers reported being picked on by older colleagues, who would yell at them and make them feel inferior to their jobs. They would also receive comments along the lines of *"the position is not suitable for you" or "you are not doing the job right"*.

As Regunanan (2019) in Mangolothi and Mnguni, (2021) believe that being an academic remains a challenge for Black women academics, especially for young Black women academics who do not receive adequate support, whether through resourcing or mentoring. Mangolothi and Mnguni (2016) discovered that co-teaching had its challenges, with young Black academics being disregarded or assumed to be incompetent. They were told what and how to teach. While some were forced to teach sections that should have been taught by their colleagues, they were assumed to be young and without child-rearing duties in order to justify the additional workload.

#### **2.4.2 Gender**

Cunniff (2011) points out that one of the main factors being looked into in relation to the experience of bullying at work is gender. In Blasé and Blasé (2003) empirical research findings on principal's uncivil behaviours in the workplace revealed that the harm caused by principals varied from teacher to teacher. Physically, principals resort to making sexual undertones to female teachers. Howitz (2008) observed similar results in terms of the teacher and principal bullying, with the principal squeezing the arm of the female teacher for coming 15 minutes late to school. According to the educator, the principal after inflicting the physical abuse reminded her not to be late again. Through an examination of educator's experiences, the researcher hopes to highlight the role that gender plays in the persistence of workplace bullying in the educational setting.

Studies conducted in South Africa and internationally confirm that gender is a persistently growing factor that needs to be addressed (Salin 2015; Mollema 2018; Eriksen 2016; Rosander 2020). Salin and Hoel (2013) found that a large number of students indicate ambiguous or conflicting results for the association between gender and workplace bullying. A study conducted at the University Business School in the United Kingdom on male and female differences in workplace bullying found that the lower percentage of women who bully others in the workplace can be attributed to the country's lower female managerial employment rate (Chan et al. 2019). According to reports, women make up approximately 25-30% of managers

in the United Kingdom (Chan et al. 2019). Additionally, Mapuranga et al. (2015) conducted a study focusing on the sexual harassment of female employees at a State University in Zimbabwe and found that sexual harassment of female employees is predominant in a university setup and under reported. MacKinnon (1998), stated that sexual harassment by male university lecturers to their female counterparts, secretaries and other administrative staff is a fact of campus life and that the silencing thereof is part of the reason for the historical invisibility of the problem, silence promoted by the fear that somehow the victims are responsible for their sexual harassment in one way or the other. The International Labour Organisation (2003) explains that different people have different forms of power over subordinates in commercial and non-commercial organisations and are able to abuse that power within those limits. According Mapuranga et al. (2015) this organisational power perspective can explain the sexual harassment of students by lecturers, it is this potential abuse of power that links sexual harassment in education to the workplace. A study on workplace bullying in the South African educational system conducted by Jacobs and Teise (2019) discovered educators reported on unfair demands and expectations, as well as gender roles. One female participant stated that she is required to teach extra classes every afternoon, every day, and that she feels she is treated differently than her male colleagues and male managers perceived that, it was acceptable to expect women to work harder than male counterparts (Jacobs and Tesie, 2019). Mangalothi and Mnguni (2021) state that workplace bullying is a common dynamic in academia and affects different groups of women differently

It is important to note that because of workplace bullying in a school setup may result in feelings of alienation in women from previously disadvantaged groups exiting the sector. Young black women are not forced to leave their jobs because of racism only but also by longing for intangible benefits such as collegiality, rapport with department leaders, career advancement opportunities, teaching and assignment opportunities, research opportunities, and influence in the department. Research conducted by Mangalothi and Mnguni (2021) reveal that workplace bullying on black women included getting an unappealing or a remote office or not getting an office at all. Teaching materials and stationery were not provided, and no proper departmental orientation was done. Denial of access to resources and withholding information was also common. Black women academics reported that they were not the preferred candidates as they were expected to teach undergraduates, whilst White male staff members who were less qualified than them were allocated postgraduate classes. The same research revealed that African women academics experienced isolation, exclusion, invisibility, having

their decisions overruled, the flaunting of status and power by colleagues, attacks on their professional status, excessive monitoring, unfair criticism and assessment of their work were common (Mangalothi 2021).

Johnson-Bailey (2015) found that workplace bullying does not exist in a vacuum, rather it was affected by a societal structures along the lines of race, gender and heterosexuality and there are still subtle, unspoken tensions between racial groups in post-apartheid South Africa. Such tensions are likely to escalate in the work environment and lead to workplace bullying. African women were treated as tokens, their qualifications, titles and positions meant nothing because they did not receive the same respect afforded male academics, especially by White male colleagues who bullied and viewed them as not to be trusted or presumed them incompetent.

### **2.4.3 Level of education**

There are numerous published studies that describe the relationships between education level and workplace bullying. According to Moreno-Jimenez et al. (2008), employees with elementary education reported higher levels of bullying than those with medium or higher education. This suggests that the prevalence of bullying at work is influenced by an employee's level of education. It has conclusively been shown that bullying occurred more frequently among workers with lower education or low-level skills than among those with higher qualifications (Niedhammer et al. 2007). According to a study by Cunniff and Mostert (2012), South African employees with tertiary education reported fewer instances of bullying at work than those who only had secondary education. Drawing on an extensive range of sources, within the academic setting, workplace bullying is on the rise and has multiplied over time for obvious reasons: the competition for intangible resources. It has been also emphasized that more skilled workers are the targets as they receive attention from others frequently for the appreciation of their achievement which makes the bully inferior (Bulut and Hihi 2021). Young and qualified newly hired educators may be more vulnerable because they are perceived as a 'potential disrupt' to the social setting of the older staff members. Awai et al. (2021) subsequently argue that employees with less than ten years of experience reported higher rates of bullying than those with more than ten years of experience.

Badernhorst (2022) in his study, gathered data from 282 academic and support staff across a higher education institution, his findings revealed that educators who had participated indicated that the less qualified they were, the more they were subjected to more acts of belittling and

humiliation. The study also found that the less qualified the respondents were, the more likely they were to consider leaving the organisation if workplace bullying occurred.

#### **2.4.4 Exposure to job demand and limited resources**

According to Waghid (2008), the establishment of an education policy and a rise in corporate culture in South African educational institutions have increased partner's responsibilities for children's education. Instead, managers at the provincial, district, and school levels took on the role of resource allocators and data gatherers, driven by the need to guarantee that goals are reached, and that educators' activities are appropriate and in accordance with the requirements of the educational system. Bottery (2004) argues that education managers may be forced to act in ways that are demanding, unsympathetic, and anti-democratic because their main goal is to meet the targets that have been set. In South Africa, teachers face a great deal of pressure due to a variety of issues, including learners' misbehaviour and school violence (Grobler 2019). Every year, the pressure on learners and schools involved in Grade 12 examinations increases. District and school results are compared, and those who do poorly on national examinations face criticism and frequently humiliation in the media and on social media. In a study conducted by Jacobs and Teise (2019) in analysing workplace bullying on four educators in a public school, findings indicated that the participants believed that the demands placed on teachers to teach large classes were unjust, and that the school was significantly overcrowded relative to its intended student body. As educators are under pressure to produce good results, the responsibility of students passing their classes falls solely on the teacher. Jacobs and Teise (2019) discovered in their study that participants felt the provincial education department sometimes failed to provide correct information on time, resulting in schedule changing and workload.

Neoliberal education unfairly focuses on 'failing' schools and views the teacher as the problem because the educator was insufficiently competent (Angus 2017). The political and social changes that have occurred have resulted in extremely demanding working conditions for South African teachers (Montgomery et al. 2005). It is expected of educators to be able to adjust and take on new challenges as societies continue to change. Nonetheless, these demanding requirements are frequently not met by the job descriptions of teachers or the necessary resources. Batchelor (2019:19) argues that “ teachers are required to complete the basic roles they are assigned to in terms of Section 4 of the Employment of Educators Act 1998, amidst significantly higher learners numbers; increased diversity in school populations,

learners ill behaviour due to social economic conditions, an increase in departmental accountability measures, curriculum changes, an increase in curriculum and assessment requirements, performance appraisal systems and an increase in demands of unions”. Mollema (2018:16) states that “job demands, and job resources play a role in fostering (boosting) and mitigating (buffering) workplace bullying, that is; job demands can increase the potential of workplace bullying while job resources can reduce the potential of workplace bullying”.

Bullying is typically thought to be characterised by work demands. According to earlier studies (De Wet and Jacobs 2013; Montgomery et al. 2005; Simbula et al. 2012), teaching is a profession with multiple job demands and limited access to resources. According to Badernhorst (2022) unreasonable deadlines and unmanageable workloads are what drive bullying behaviours in the workplace, such as pressuring workers to put in extra hours and closely observing them. In a study conducted by De Wet and Jacobs (2013) in the South African teacher’s exposure to workplace bullying, found that constantly evaluating the victim’s performance (54.2%); making the victim responsible for more work than he/she can manage (54.1%); and constantly finding mistakes and errors in the victim’s work and the results of the victim’s work (47.6%) are the most common acts of workplace bullying related to undermining the professional status of the victims.

According to De Wet (2014), educators are expected to do so much work to the detriment of their families. They are forced to complete the work or else, they will be dismissed. It furthermore became evident that bullying principals demand that educators perform tasks that may be detrimental to their health and safety (De Wet 2014). Whereas one participant wrote that she was forced to attend a school function that started at 18:00 in an area that she perceived to be unsafe at night, another participant wrote that she was once bullied by the principal into taking learners to the funeral of the parent of a fellow learner (De Wet 2014).

#### **2.4.5 Power relations**

Bullying is commonly thought to be characterised by an imbalance of power. As previously stated, bullying is perceived to occur in organisations where employees and managers believe they are supported by their superiors in engaging in abusive and disrespectful behaviours. When bullying occurs at the highest levels of an organisation, the consequences can be far-reaching. In such cases, the overall productivity of the organisation may suffer. Furthermore,

new managers will quickly accept the view that bullying and other disrespectful behaviours are acceptable in an organisation after witnessing their colleagues engaging in it and being rewarded. This has serious consequences for the targeted employees because the bullies might offload their stress on them (Einarsen et al. 2010).

Jacobs and Teise (2019) emphasise the issue of power relations further by contending that pressure on principals appears to force them to revert to autocratic management styles. In support of this argument, they found that educators who had complaints about the school's limited resources were convinced that the principal would publicly humiliate anyone who confronted him and that no legal action would be taken against him. According to Steyn and Fuller (2023), school principals face enormous pressure from the department of education to ensure that academic standards are met, quality teaching and learning takes place, and that continuous education changes are implemented successfully. This pressure causes stress for the educational sector which leads to teacher mistreatment, as the principals may take out their frustrations on the educators. Tehrani (2003) asserts that when there is an inequality in the balance of power and this is used by the more powerful individual or groups to undermine or subjugate another individual, this is bullying. Managers tend to be the main source of power in an organisation.

Researchers are seen to agree that leaders are the primary perpetrators of workplace bullying (Vartia 2001; Tehrani 2003; Rayner 2019). It can be argued that most employees experience various forms of workplace bullying when they change jobs or get a new manager. Rayner (2019) notes that a surprising number of people (19%) are bullied almost immediately after starting their new jobs. A recent job change and a change in management account for 82% of the offered events relating to the onset of bullying. Bullies exploit differences in relative social class status and occupational positions of their victims (Roscigno et al. 2009). Poorly paid employees are easy targets for bullying by abusive supervisors who sometimes abuse their discretions in informal and abusive ways, transforming them into workplace bullies (Loya 2017). Many principals accused of bullying struggle to recognise their own bullying or aggressive behaviour towards their employees. According to De Wet (2010), principals hold a position of power in a school setting, for example, if they feel threatened their bullying tactics may take the form of ignoring a teacher's ideas, thoughts, feelings, or accomplishments. The school principals may verbally abuse staff members, be extremely critical, and set teachers up

for failure. The bullying of educators by their superiors is a reality in South African schools despite the country's liberal constitution establishing human rights.

Most principals who are bullies use their power ranks and positions to undermine educators who had demonstrated work success by countering their opinions, ignoring their efforts, challenging their responsibilities and blatantly ignoring them when they want to say something during meetings or casual conversations. According to Bernstein and Batchelor (2022), the individuals occupying high ranking positions are the principal and the deputy, while teachers are the lowest level across the rankings do not hold any position and are most likely to be at the receiving end of workplace bullying. This is further supported by Kaloo (2014) who identified that principals who employed tactics that were unprofessional, these included shouting and scolding which made the teacher feel like being treated as a child. Principals who resort to adopt this type of behaviour do so in order to subdue their victims and thus believe that they have the upper hand. This type of behaviour is tantamount to heavy handed tactics which is unprofessional.

#### **2.4.6 Personality traits**

One may also become a victim of workplace bullying due to personal circumstances. Personality is characterised as a dynamic organisation inside the individual that creates the individual's characteristic patterns of behaviour, thoughts and feelings. According to Cowie et al. (2000), these include low self-esteem, physical weakness, social rejection, shyness, anxious personality, lack of friends, and disability. Personality is an important variable in the current study as there is strong evidence for a relationship between workplace bullying and certain personality traits. People who are being bullied may not always report the incident and may only gradually realise that their unhappiness stems from their experience of being bullied, as noted by Crick and Grotpeter (1995), cited in Cowie et al. (2000). This is especially true if the bullying is indirect or if the victim is being socially isolated or excluded. Individual traits such as personality interact with the environment to influence adjustment to the environment. Therefore, individuals with the inability to adjust to their environment portray maladaptive traits which may lead to depression, anxiety and ultimately victimisation. According to a 1994 study by Einarsen et al. with 2200 Norwegian workers, the victims of bullying exhibited low self-esteem, high anxiety, and poor social competence. On the other hand, Coyne et al. (2000) discovered that, of the 60 Ireland bullying victims they examined, the victims exhibited lower emotional coping mechanisms, were less assertive, and were more suspicious and nervous

(Michetti et al. 2020). It has been argued that the victims of workplace bullying are selected on the basis of their personality traits due to the bully seeing certain weaknesses within the personality of the victim, for example, tendency to avoid conflict and the inability to cope.

Personality act as a resource that may lead to individuals being the targets of bullying and thus affects their levels of dealing or coping with workplace bullying. As mentioned, victims of bullying display certain personality traits which make them more susceptible to bullying and the manner in which they perceive bullying. Omar (2017)'s study identifies a number of personality variables of the victims that contribute to the way they perceive bullying which in turn contribute to the implications of their work performance. For example, individuals that display higher levels of pessimism, neuroticism and lower on assertiveness are perceived to view workplace bullying as harmful and negative and will therefore show decreased levels in work performance (Nielsen and Knardahl 2015). Omar (2017) lists the following different personality traits as more susceptible to victims being bullied:

#### **2.4.6.1 Pessimism**

Pessimism is defined as a risk factor in individuals and is related to poorer psychological and physical health (Kubanzansky et al. 2001). In these few words, these authors summarize the pessimistic style as seen to link to the helplessness in employees and is marked by the idea that the problems that these employees are faced with are permanent and that there is no solution to such problems. Furthermore, Kubanzansky et al. (2001) contend that employees who have a pessimism personality seek avoidant and escaping strategies when faced with stressful situations, they give up on themselves and their goals and tend to withdraw completely from life by becoming anxious and depressed. Added to this, these employees tend to show low levels of self-esteem and have been shown to lack self-determination and motivation as they tend to withdraw from any task that requires them to put in effort toward reaching a certain goal. It is perceived that employees with the pessimistic style personality may experience higher levels of workplace bullying because they are less likely to be able to effectively cope with situations, they find stressful and harmful.

#### **2.4.6.2 Neuroticism**

Neuroticism as a personality trait that makes employees vulnerable to a wide range of victimisation. Calvete et al. (2016) argue that employees who have high levels of neuroticism may respond to perceived bullying behaviour or perceived victimisation with higher levels of

distress which causes them to develop depressive and social anxiety, vulnerability and fearfulness. According to Neilsen and Knardahl (2015), neurotic employees are perceived to be emotionally unstable and unable to deal effectively with stressful situations making them more likely to be victims of workplace bullying. Workplace bullying flourishes in high-strain environments as exhausted employees become 'easy targets'. These employees offer little resistance against workplace bullying because of their depleted energy levels and their wellbeing (Omar 2017). In this sense, employees can become victims of workplace bullying because they violate established organisational norms due to their depleted energy levels. This is a result of ineffective coping with work-related strain. This process posits that workplace bullying can arise when employees passively and inefficiently cope with frustrations, stemming from a stressful working environment (Omar 2017).

#### **2.4.6.3 Assertiveness**

Assertiveness is defined by Bernstein and Trimm (2016), as the quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive to defend a right point of view or a relevant statement. Assertiveness on the part of the victim may infuriate the perpetrator, resulting in destructive and excessively confrontational interactions. This may lead to a cycle of workplace bullying behaviours and as a result, aggression between the victim and perpetrator (Nielsen and Knardahl 2015). Moreover, Bernstein and Trimm (2016) indicate that assertiveness can be seen as a productive coping strategy; however, if it becomes excessive it will deteriorate into aggression, which may result in victims suffering from mental, physical, and psychological effects of workplace bullying which are ultimately long term. In order to cope with perceptions of bullying, employees on low assertiveness manifest bullying in a way that is less visible making them too scared to speak out (Omar 2017).

### **2.5 Various forms of workplace bullying**

Workplace bullying can be categorised into two subgroups, namely direct and indirect workplace bullying. Direct bullying is when there is direct contact between the target and the victim, such as verbal threats or physical abuse (Bartlett and Bartlett 2011). In most cases, direct bullying is usually done face-to-face and is visible to anyone who witnesses it. This includes verbal abuse, threatening behaviour, and intimidation, as well as bullying tactics ranging from belittling remarks to public humiliation and false accusations.

According to the Employee Assistance Programs of South Africa (EAPSA 2022) indirect bullying is defined as hurtful or humiliating behaviour that is often more covert and subtle. It is not always immediately recognised as bullying and is carried out through emotional manipulation. These are bullying tactics that are more difficult to identify and can be done anonymously and discreetly in a ‘digital world’, where the target may not immediately become aware of the bullying. Mollema (2018:19) argues that “verbal abuse, public ridicule, unwarranted criticism, social and professional isolation, lack of empathy, and favouritism are just a few indicators of workplace bullying carried out by school principals”. The following describes the various forms and/or types of workplace bullying perpetrated against South African educators, particularly in government schools.

### **2.5.1 Exclusion/ social isolation**

De Wet and Jacobs (2013) found that the most frequent cause of bullying in the workplace that South African educators experience is related to their line of work. The expression of social manipulation, isolation (e.g., denying opportunities, physical or social isolation, and withholding of information), and indirect bullying is common in rational and indirect bullying (Cowie et al. 2002). According to a survey on workplace bullying among teachers in South Africa, the majority of respondents reported that their experiences with bullying at work resulted in isolation (De Wet 2013). This was followed by requests to meet, and talk being ignored (39.5%) and others acting as though the victim was not present or visible in the classroom (46.4%). Furthermore, the study discovered that acts such as acting as if the victim is not seen or present and failing to respond to the victim's requests to meet and talk are experienced by a relatively large percentage of respondents (De Wet 2013).

According to De Wet and Jacobs (2013), workplace bullying includes assigning work to educators that is below their level of competence. These authors contend that these accountability regimes require teachers to engage in reduced and behaviourist activities. Based on the responses of participating teachers in a De Wet study conducted in 2013, the study discovered that acts such as taking away work that is the responsibility of the victims and giving it to people in lower positions are unacceptable. Similarly, a South African study on the experiences of workplace bullying amongst teachers, Batchelor (2019), found that perpetrators of workplace bullying were said to have ignored targets’ contributions as well as their general presence.

On a similar note, the participants in Batchelor (2019)'s study reported that, as victims, their contributions and feedback in meetings are ignored and not respected (Batchelor 2019). Further, participants indicated that perpetrators go as far as not acknowledging their presence by greeting them. According to Batchelor (2019:63), a greeting is "an act of communication in which individuals make their presence known to one another, show attention to, and suggest a type of relationship between people meeting each other". According to (De Vos 2013), ignoring targets can be categorised as a form of isolation. It is apparent from the experiences of participants, that by being ignored, participants were left feeling alienated and were unable to access essential information. These behaviours made the victims feel constantly shut down and non-existent.

### **2.5.2 Unfair treatment**

Exploitation, unfair treatment and giving staff members more work than they can manage are regarded as workplace bullying (De Wet and Jacobs 2013; Namie and Namie 2011; Simon and Simon 2006) cited in Jacobs and Teise (2019). The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 was established to ensure the equal and fair treatment of employees and employers of South Africa. The Act also aims at eradicating discrimination from employment and promoting equal opportunity by eliminating unfair discrimination in the working environment. Despite the implementation of the Employment Equity Act in December 1998, unfair treatment on the working environments is on the rise with no clear law against workplace bullying in South Africa (South African Labour Guide 2020). This is evidenced in a study by Jacobs and Teise (2019) who contend that unfair treatment was an issue discussed by research participants in their study.

Blasé et al. (2008) argue that the most common acts of mistreatment and/ bullying from their study were: A study on the bullying of teachers, in a sample of 172 teachers who completed an online questionnaire were found to be the victims of workplace bullying. The most common acts of mistreatment for the victims were as follows:

- (i) failure to recognise or praise an educator for work-related achievements
- (ii) 'favouring of select teachers
- (iii) 'intimidation

- (iv) ‘failure to support one another (i.e. abandonment ) in difficult interactions with students and/or parents

### **2.5.3 Verbal abuse/ public humiliation**

In any work environment verbal abuse is the most common type of bullying behaviour (Batchelor 2019). In addition, Blasé and Blasé (2007) argue that verbally abusing teachers in public to humiliate them has been reported as a common bullying tactic. Verbal abuse according to De Wet and Jacobs (2018) is an act of mistreatment by virtue of either spoken or written words. This is a form of direct bullying which includes behaviours such as making threats, name-calling, making fun of a person, insults and spreading rumours. Leymann (1996) believed that the effects on the victim’s possibility to communicate adequately within the organisation and sub-departments is characterised by management not giving the victims any possibility to communicate, alongside abusive and negative verbal communications between management and employees.

A study conducted on the prevalence of workplace bullying in schools worldwide, among a sample of 475 Lithuanian teachers found that (32%) had been shouted at in the presence of colleagues; (19%) being shouted at in the presence of learners, and (17%) receiving verbal or non-verbal threats (De Wet 2013). Badenhorst (2022), revealed that the longer educators had worked for the institution, the more they experienced instances of managerial misconduct, humiliation and belittlement. Similarly, Batchelor (2019) showed that, one research participant as the victim of verbal abuse and public humiliation reported receiving improper rude remarks about the work completed, and further stated that the verbal abuse often extended outside of the private realm to public spaces where rude insulting comments were dropped in the staffroom, directed to the respondent and shouted in front of everyone.

### **2.5.4 Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is a type of workplace bullying that is carried out indirectly on the victim. According to Palaghia (2019), cyberbullying is any technology-mediated bullying behaviour recognised in social media, websites, and instant messaging that includes repetitive behaviour such as mailing, posting, messaging, sending images, and videos with abusive content; intentionally prohibiting a person in the online space; spreading false information, and hacking of private accounts such as email. According to Rajbhandari and Rana (2023), cyberbullying,

which is frequently overlooked by academic organisations and policymakers, has become one of the most difficult challenges for teachers to manage alongside traditional teaching and learning. The use of social media has been observed to promote cyberbullying in addition to face-to-face bullying in the workplace. Teachers can be potential victims of it. Cyberbullying is no longer limited to learner-to-learner relations; it can also elicit public criticism from parents, parent groups, and learners (Ecclesiastical research 2021). With increased access to electronic and online communication, cyberbullying has become the most common form of bullying among learners and is no longer limited to school grounds (Juvonen and Gross 2008; Williams and Guerra 2007). According to Ecclesiastical research (2021), 29% of teachers have been reached by parents through social media. Furthermore, 31% believe that the parents used social media to intimidate them. The most common forms of electronic abuse experienced by teachers include publishing obscene and edited images and audio-visual clips on fake Facebook pages, spreading abusive, hurtful, and embarrassing statements about them, hacking their email accounts, sharing viruses, and disseminating offensive comments through email, text messages, or chat rooms (Eden et al. 2013; Garrett 2014; Kauppi and Pörhölä 2012; Tolentino 2016).

De Wet (2010) found that teachers' inability to handle and discipline students, strict behaviour, and low grades are major causes of student bullying. According to Vogl-Bauer (2014), students use digital platforms to vent their frustrations and exact revenge on their teachers. Bullying on various online platforms is motivated by attention-seeking behaviour and a desire to be in the spotlight (Chang et al. 2018). According to Rajbhandari and Rana's (2023) study, teachers reported experiencing cyberbullying from their fellow learners. They were cyberbullied in a variety of ways, including receiving repeated abusive and insulting messages, having their reputation harmed by spreading lies about them, hacking their Facebook, receiving unethical requests and sexual aggravation, sabotaging their publicly shared documents, and circulating videos that mimicked them (Rajbhandari and Rana 2023). Cyberbullying may have more negative and longer-lasting consequences on the victims than face-to-face bullying, as anything written online can be persistent and can therefore torment the victim later in life. The worst part of negative messages and images posted online is that, even after they have been deleted by the individual that posted them, several people might still have the content of the message (Sibisi 2021). Cyberbullying by teenage learners through Facebook Messenger caused humiliation and mental disturbances in teachers, resulting in a

loss of efficacy, confidence, job satisfaction, and self-esteem, as well as an increase in self-aversion, anxiety, stress, fear, and tension (Rajbhandari and Rana 2023).

### **2.5.5 Psychological bullying**

Recently, psychological bullying has been examined by different researchers as another form of bullying in the workplace. Researchers such as Hlophe, Morojele and Motsa (2017) argue that psychological bullying refers to harming an individual through emotional abuse, therefore causing significant stress and interfering with an individual's capability to develop healthy and stable patterns of relating to other people. Psychological bullying is when the perpetrator of this bullying strokes an individual up emotionally to make him or her uncomfortable, disturbed and mentally destabilised. According to Sansone and Sansone (2015), psychological bullying can be tough to spot, and even tougher to deal with. It is any repeated or vexatious behaviour that causes psychological stress or suffering. This unwanted conduct may include things like threatening or intimidating behaviour, repeated name-calling or put-downs, and purposeful isolation.

Micro-management is one example of psychological bullying that involves a manager or supervisor closely controlling and monitoring an employee's work, this includes behaviours such as checking too frequently to offering constant criticism towards an employee (All voices 2021). Intimidation, manipulation and stalking of an individual are also part of psychological bullying. Blasé and Blasé's (2003) study found that teachers were forced to use the chalk and talk method of teaching thus, any innovative thought and practice were renegaded. Teachers were monitored as to how they maintained discipline in the classroom. Hence, teachers became impersonal to the learners which resulted in them less caring, less tolerant and being impatient.

### **2.6 The effects/ consequences of workplace bullying**

Like any other bullying, bullying in the workplace is also associated with a number of negative consequences, affecting the economical, psychological, physical and socio-functional wellbeing of a victim (Bernstein 2016). Workplace bullying has diverse effects on educator's productivity and emotional well-being with an increase in desire to leave their jobs. According to Bernotaite and Malinauskeine (2017) numerous investigations conducted within recent years in the field of mental health support the conception of mental health as an integral and essential component of health. The definition of mental health provided by the (WHO 2022) describes it as a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises his or her own potential, may cope with

the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. Bernotaite and Malinuaskeine (2017) further explained that the results of a number of studies assent that school-teachers fall into the of professionals who may experience a huge number of work-related stress, which may lead to a sustained physical and mental health problems, and that one of the co-workers' group most affected by psychological problems namely include teachers.

### **2.6.1 Psychological effects of bullying**

Several studies have verified that increased stress and mental distress are possible psychological effects of workplace bullying (Sansone and Sansone 2015; Giorgi 2016; Chenevert 2022; Anasori 2023). Bernotaite and Malinuaskiene (2017) argue that high job demands coupled with limited resources, low social support and social exclusion constitute one of the risks for poor mental health on the victims. Thus, workplace bullying results in teachers experiencing an array of psychological effects, due to bullying behaviours Batchelor (2019). Workplace bullying is argued to consist of psychological trauma coupled with anxiety, stress and depression as commonly reported by research participants under her study. Similarly, Badenhorst (2022) suggests that the psychological effects of workplace bullying on the individual are similar to the physical effects, as they also cause great harm to the individual's way of life and psychological well-being. Employees such as educators who have high job tasks and responsibilities, high levels of work-related depression, experience a depleted level of mental health which is evidenced by negative emotions, feelings of low self-worth, confidence, and a sense of deprivation (Badenhorst 2022). The victims of workplace bullying experience negative effects such as; fear, anger, hopelessness, lack of joy, and declining self-confidence related to feeling silenced, discounted discredited, and isolation (MacIntosh et al. 2010).

Mollema (2018) in his study found that participants reported to having a variety of negative emotions which not only affected their personal lives, but also their health. The educators reported having low self-esteem and questioning themselves and emotionally drained. These negative feelings are inclined with Blasé and Blasé (2007) who found that 26.7% of the participants suffered from depression, 54.4% from headaches and 47.3% from insomnia. Substance abuse as a result of workplace bullying was recorded in 16.7 % cases. De Vos (2013) argued that victims of workplace bullying may lose their passion and loyalty towards teaching and that they may also psychologically withdraw from professional activities. The researcher

is of the view that workplace bullying can take a toll on an individual's mental well-being. Being subjected to persistent harassment, intimidation, or humiliation can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem.

### **2.6.2 Economic effects of bullying**

According to Giga et al. (2008) victims of workplace bullying sometimes experience increased economic pressures which include, a loss of income, human costs and additional costs. The targets of workplace bullying may experience loss of salary due to absenteeism, the victims may experience income reduction, and bonus reduction as they may be perceived as having poor work performance (Giga et al. 2018). Furthermore Giga et al. (2008) argues that employees experiencing workplace bullying may leave their place of work before securing another employment elsewhere, resulting in the loss of income. Loss of additional costs is seen when victims need to pay for medical costs such as appointments, medicine and hospital treatment for dealing with workplace bullying. Harvard (2020) found that on average, workers who experience one or more types of bullying spend as much as twice the amount of money on mental health care than those who are unexposed.

When bullying occurs within an organisation, the physical and psychological effects of bullying manifest in absenteeism, excessive sick leaves and the intentions to leave the company. In a study conducted by Vartia (2001) on the consequences of workplace bullying with respect to its target and the observers of bullying found that 18% of the victims of workplace bullying reported that they had been away from work once or several times due to bullying. According to People Management (2006) cited in Cunniff (2011) bullying influences the commitment of employees to their jobs as well as their morale, which leads to costly productivity losses as these individuals are more likely to quit their jobs. In contrast to Michetti et al. (2020) argues that workplace bullying if left unchecked, it can lead to devastating impacts, including a toxic demoralising, and unproductive workplace that is caused by an increased turnover of absenteeism, and failure of an organisation to accomplish long-term goals.

In addition, Batchelor (2019) argues that the teaching profession may be crippled by workplace bullying as it increases sick leaves, staff turnover, lack of employee loyalty and overall teacher commitment. Researchers at the International Labour Office (ILO 2022) reported that the phenomenon of workplace bullying has reached epidemic proportions in several countries and the global costs exceeded several millions in losses from medical expenses, absenteeism, and

sick leaves. Fowler (2023) suggests that high-stress levels can have a real impact on the health of employees, perhaps in the form of medical issues related to high blood pressure, depression or anxiety. This can cost an employer in the form of sick leaves, and health insurance costs, it is notable that if a bullied employee chooses not to leave the company, the employer may be forced to pay rehabilitation costs such as, counselling fees to help the employee remedy any emotional damages they may have incurred.

### **2.6.3 Physical health effects of bullying**

A study conducted by De Vos and Kristen (2015) on the nature of workplace bullying experienced by teachers and the bio- psychosocial health effects found that various physical, psychological and social effects were associated with the stress that stems from being bullied in the workplace. It was noted that these physical health symptoms included difficulty falling asleep, nightmares, a lack of rest, fatigue, headaches, sexual problems, weight gain, musculoskeletal pains, gastro-intestinal problems, as well as cardiovascular-related problems, such as hypertension and a rapid heartbeat (De Vos and Kristen 2015). Ghassan et al. (2023) in their study on the effects of workplace bullying and fatigue in school teachers indicated that fatigue is one most of the frequently reported effects of workplace bullying. According to the study, it was revealed that teachers who experience higher level of workplace bullying showed higher levels of fatigue.

Shimizi, Wada, and Wang (2011) demonstrated that teacher's experiences of workplace bullying, which is defined as a state of psychological and physical fatigue, allows them to exhibit less favourable social behaviours towards learners and to be less involved in the lesson planning. This is evident in a study conducted by Klusmann et al. (2016) on teacher's emotional exhaustion which is negatively related to student's achievement. The results showed that when teachers report high levels of exhaustion, they are expected to become more critical and more discouraging of their learners who might feel less competent and more demotivated impacting their learning experience. As such, it is concluded that a teacher's experience of exhaustion is a contributing factor to learner's underachievement.

### **2.6.4 Social interaction effect**

De Vos and Kirsten (2015) reported that workplace bullying especially affected victimised teacher's professional and social relationships as victims withdraw from professional relationships mostly due to feelings of exclusion and distrust, and/or efforts to avoid the bully

or potential bullying. As pointed out by Paukstat and Salin (2020), bullying occurs within a social context, and it is reasonable to assume that this context plays a role in enabling, motivating or precipitating workplace bullying. Inefficient coping with frustration and stress associated with negative relationships and interpersonal conflicts, can lead individuals to reduce their work effort, complain and withdraw from social interactions (Labianca et al. 1998). Being bullied is considered a sign of social rejection, as it involves ‘negative reactions from other people’ that ‘have the potential to lower people’s perceived relational value’ which is the degree to which they believe that others value having relationships with them (Kiefer 2021).

Alternatively, some scholars argue that individuals who may feel rejected may seek to cope by disengaging and withdrawing from interactions with the perpetrator and/or other people physically, mentally or socially. (Twenge et al. 2001; DeWall et al. 2010; Rajchert and Winiewskie, 2017; Rajchert et al. 2019) Being bullied can cause emotional or behavioural changes that may lead to problems at home. De Vos (2013) states that experiences of bullying may cause uncharacteristic anger in victims and this is usually projected towards their children and their spouses.

### **2.6.5 Work performance**

Workplace bullying has severe negative consequences on individual perception and levels of engagement with their work. Work stress arises from the prolonged exposure to psychosocial hazards in the workplace, which as a result affects work performance (International Labour Office 2016). Additionally, the education system suffers because of victimisation of educators which result in sickness, absenteeism, reduced morale and diminished productivity (Law et al. 2011). Work performance is an important factor to determine productivity, efficiency and effectiveness in teaching and learning. Educators that have been exposed to workplace bullying are worn out and as such show a decrease in their work performance (Park and Ono 2016). Such employees, when faced with certain negative situations in the workplace such as bullying; their energy turns into exhaustion, involvement becomes cynicism, and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness (Bakker et al. 2008).

The consequences of workplace bullying on an individual is detrimental in that victims of perceived workplace bullying cannot protect themselves from negative behaviours and stress in the workplace, which results in a decrease in job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Park and Ono 2016). As a result, this will lead to a decrease in work performance. As

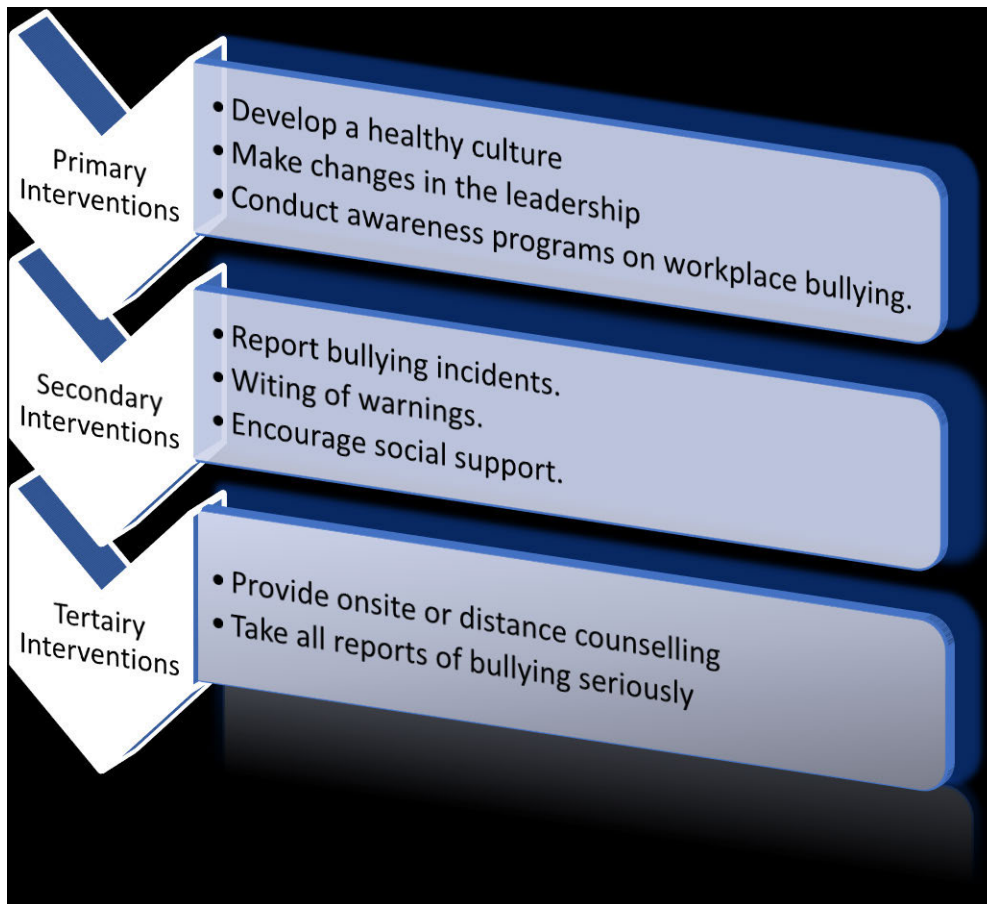
previously mentioned, workplace bullying correlated positively and significantly with psychological complaints and poor physical health, and these symptoms are strongly related to decreased work performance (De Wet 2010). Given that educators who experience workplace bullying tend to show heightened amounts of withdrawal due to mistreatment, the well-being of the educator who is bullied is adversely affected and results in decrease work performance (Matthiesen and Eirnasern 2011). Therefore, how an employee performs at work is dependent on their level of well-being relative to their work environment.

Work performance and stress are an interdependent construct; and bullying is seen as a major stressor in the work environment (Chen 2022). It is nearly impossible to expect an employee to engage in a working environment that has stressors above the workload that is experienced by the employee (Chen 2022). The victims of workplace bullying as mentioned previously, have reported feelings of anxiety, helplessness and fear which lead to depression and low self-esteem. This in turns affects the mental ability of an educator to perform at an optimal level in their job and can thus affect the teaching and learning process.

## **2.7 Strategies to reduce workplace bullying**

Understanding and addressing workplace bullying is critical to counteract this problem in organisations. The longer the phenomenon is left unattended, the worse it will become and the more difficult it will be to combat. The researcher emphasises on the necessity of proper prevention and intervention measures to be put in place to protect educators against the workplace bullying phenomenon. Employers can play a pre-emptive role in the prevention of and intervention in workplace bullying, through the use of intervention measures as both proactive and reactive to workplace bullying. The following elaborates on the different measures that can be followed to prevent workplace bullying and to manage incidences of workplace bullying that have already manifested within the school-working environment. Furthermore, the international and national interventional measures are provided.

### **Figure 2.1: Intervention measures in tackling workplace bullying**



**Source: Badenhorst (2022)**

The measures are divided into three different parts; primary, secondary and tertiary interventions (see Figure 2.1).

### **2.7.1 Primary interventions**

The primary interventions are preventative measures used in relation to workplace bullying they are proactive in nature and aim at preventing the harmful nature of workplace bullying by reducing the risks associated with it (Vartia and Leka 2011) cited in (Badenhorst 2022).

#### **2.7.1.1 Develop a healthy culture**

The development of a register for teachers and the creation of a code of conducts are often associated with the provision of high quality, relevant knowledge and skills, as well as the protection of the physical and emotional well-being of learners, teachers and parents (Jacobs and De Wet 2018). The authors further argue that the South African Council for Educators (SACE) has to promote, develop and maintain the professional image of the teaching profession by laying down rules regarding acceptable relations between teachers and each of learners, colleagues, and parents. For instance, by focusing on the relationship between the teacher and colleagues that a teacher should refrain from undermining the status and authority

of other colleagues; refrain from sexual harassment; use accepted appropriate language and behaviour in interacting with colleagues and avoid any form of humiliation and refrain from abuse of any kind towards colleagues.

### **2.7.1.2 Make changes in the leadership**

Changes in leadership has been highlighted as a primary intervention measure to combat workplace bullying. Leadership in the working environment has an influence on how employees perceive their actions and the actions of other employees with whom they work with. When managers lack leadership skills, the victims feel that management does not provide opportunities for communication, and as a result the victims get silent with their abuse. Woodrow and Guest (2017) note that, the effective leaderships enable managers to prevent the mistreatment of employees and prevent simple conflicts from turning into workplace bullying. The authors further argue that poor management skills and low levels of organisational support can lead to destructive leadership and staff bullying each other.

Destructive leadership styles are associated with poor leadership, incompetent, narcissistic leaders and these can lead to management bullying employees or management allowing bullying to be tolerated in the workplace. Apt to note is that organisational leadership needs to take accountability, protect vulnerable employees and police abusive conduct such as workplace bullying (Eirnasen, Skosstad et al. 2017). Those who are in power, who bully other employees in the organisation will continue to do so unless the working environment and the leadership in charge thereof are held legally accountable for bullying behaviours of perpetrators (Hollis 2017). There is therefore a need for leadership to adopt a constructive management approach to deal with workplace bullying through formal or informal means.

Constructive management is defined by (Mediation and Training Institute 2021) as including an understanding of the conflict from both points of view, exploring all alternatives to resolving the conflict, authentic communication with both parties to establish trust, re-engaging with employees regarding individual contributions to the conflict, and contemplating the best possible outcome to the conflict.

### **2.7.1.3 Conduct awareness programmes on workplace bullying**

Bullying is frequently not reported or confronted by co-workers who witness it, victims, or managers who are witnesses to such behaviour. Suggala et al. (2020) discovered that bullies' realisation and awareness of their actions offending or harming other individuals at work is

very low, and thus their chances of stopping are slim. According to Branch and Murray (2015: 24), “a comprehensive awareness programme would include training on what constitutes bullying and what does not, as well as more subtle and insidious forms of workplace bullying, the escalating nature of bullying, and how it correlates with a decline in organisational output and work ethic”.

In addition, Ferris et al. (2021:18) point out that, “the 21st-century workplace's technological advancements can be leveraged as a tool to ensure that workplace bullying awareness becomes an everyday part of work life. Mail, social media podcasts, virtual online workshops, and training are some examples of technological advancements.” One measure to ensure that employees are aware of workplace bullying and the procedure associated therewith is to require from employees to sign that they have read and understood the code of conduct of the organisation, signing of the document could ensure that employees are aware of behaviours that constitute bullying behaviour in the workplace (Ferris et al. 2021). The school principals must intervene to stop bullies by sending a clear and consistent message that bullying behaviour is unacceptable and needs to stop. Batchelor (2019) argues that it is hoped that by raising teacher awareness of the implications of workplace bullying, the Department of Education will be able to take action to reduce the levels of workplace bullying experienced by teachers in schools. It is thus argued that if no interventions are in place to prevent or reduce workplace bullying, bullying will continue to escalate.

## **2.7.2 Secondary interventions**

Secondary interventions are carried out at the workplace level with the goal of reducing harm through early intervention. According to safety, wellbeing, and rehabilitation experts (2022), it is widely believed that training can help employees become more aware and knowledgeable about work-related stress, harassment, and bullying, allowing them to address these issues more effectively. The interventions listed below can be implemented by an organisation's department in an attempt to address inappropriate behaviour in the workplace.

### **2.7.2.1 Reporting bullying incidents**

While it is clear that workplace bullying is a persistent issue, it is also widely underestimated. Underreporting of workplace incidents makes it difficult to determine their true scope and impact. According to Branch and Murray (2015) who argue that victims of bullying should keep a diary of their behaviours and experiences, as well as a list of any witnesses to the

incidents, in order to launch an investigation into the bullying allegations. In addition, Hoel et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of written procedures in ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the investigation process are clearly defined and that the investigation is fair. This type of intervention allows individuals to seek advice from confidential counsellors and seek medical and psychological help from therapists and doctors, approach supervisors and managers, and file formal internal complaints.

#### **2.7.2.2 Writing of warnings**

When workplace bullying already exists, formal sanctions, such as written warnings, may help to resolve the situation. According to the South African Labour Guide (2021), a written warning is a document used by an employer to formally notify an employee of concerns about a capacity or conduct in the workplace. For example, the perpetrator may receive a written warning to stop their current behaviour towards the targeted employee. Educators who are accused of bullying at work may be given written warnings as part of a formal intervention to resolve the bullying situation.

#### **2.7.2.3 Encourage social support**

According to Batchelor (2019) the Department of Education could create and implement interventions to combat workplace bullying, allowing teachers to cope more effectively with their jobs and potentially improving teacher well-being. Furthermore, there is a need for increased social support from management and colleagues, which could be accomplished by allowing teachers to raise concerns and discuss any problems they are experiencing at work with management. The principles of transparency and accountability must be implemented in practice. Raising transparency will reveal wrongdoing, such as workplace bullying. If the perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, there will be no question about what is permissible and what is not. In doing so, professionalism and a sense of coherence would lead to stability, reducing the likelihood of teachers being even if they are vulnerable or newly employed. The findings of the study conducted by Jacobs and De Wet (2018) suggested that teachers who experience bullying at work should receive support from the teacher's union. Trade unions must have well-defined grievance procedures, training programs for all staff, and school union representatives in order to support teachers who are the targets of bullying at work.

### **2.7.3 Tertiary Interventions**

According to Hershcovis et al. (2015), Tertiary interventions aim to reduce the negative consequences of bullying. It is considered critical that organisations respond appropriately when bullying is reported. One way the organisation can respond is to take any reports of bullying seriously. A different, or complementary, strategy is to provide counselling to perpetrators. Organisations may also consider imposing sanctions on perpetrators, such as demoting, firing, or transferring them to a different department.

#### **2.7.3.1 Provide onsite or distance counselling**

Another form of employee support that can be given to targets is counselling. It can be used to repair broken assumptions, externalise blame, change unpleasant experiences such as bullying, or encourage practicable solutions of changing careers. A common tertiary intervention strategy for workplace bullying is counselling, which is highly recommended for both the victim and the perpetrator. According to Mawdsley (2012), employers who want to avoid dealing with bullying within their organisations may abuse this practice by providing counselling before looking into the specifics of bullying complaints. This effectively "skips" the "intervention" stage of the organisational response to bullying. This approach involves the victim or target communicating to a professional with regard to what happened, and the professional then walks the victim through a number of potential solutions (Herschovis et al. 2015).

#### **2.7.3.2 Taking all reports of bullying seriously**

According to Suggala et al. (2020) bullying is frequently not reported or confronted by colleagues, victims, or managers who witness such behaviour. Sometimes a senior manager ignores bullying and turns a blind eye to it. One possible explanation is that they do not want to get involved in the situation, or that the manager believes that only weak people are bullied and should learn to stand up for themselves. According to international employment regulations, anti-bullying policies and rules with zero tolerance for workplace bullying protect employees by providing mechanisms for reporting and punishing bullies (Gillen et al. 2017; Michetti et al. 2020). Over half of bullying incidents go unreported, but there are clear reporting procedures in place, and managers, supervisors, and employers are encouraged to respond to complaints of harassment and bullying, either formally or informally, by conducting a bullying investigation. This will help to reduce workplace bullying (Kemp 2014). According to a research study by Keashly and Neumann (2009), formal incident reports could be used to address bullying behaviours, but these should be supplemented by a focus on more informal

modelling of appropriate behaviours by as many people as possible within the organisation. When this violence is witnessed or reported, the bullying must be stopped immediately.

## 2.8 International interventions to tackle workplace bullying

Gillen et al. (2017) reported that, organisations should institute anti-bullying policies and rules with zero-tolerance to workplace bullying as suggested by the international employment regulations. The intervention policies or regulations may vary from various organisations, but they serve the same purpose, to ensure that employees are covered and offer mechanisms for reporting and who to punish the perpetrators. Tehrani (2011) argues that it is clear that workplace bullying, and its prevalence, manifestations, and consequences has been the subject of a growing body of research throughout the world. There is an increasing number of organisations that provide employee assistance programmes, including counselling, as a means of dealing with the consequences of bullying.

The following are primary international interventions by Vartia and Leka (2011) cited in Gillen et al. (2017) and these have been identified as preventative measure of bullying in the workplace.

**Table 2.1: Primary International Interventions**

Intervention(s)	Explanation
<b>Policy interventions</b>	These interventions are normally law regulation based. They set the standards of accepted behaviour, which are cascaded to employers who are actively encouraged to implement them.
<b>Organisational level interventions</b>	These interventions are workplace specific and deal with the organisation’s policy, aims, and expectations for the culture of the workplace, setting out clearly expected and agreed levels of behaviour. Policies such as the Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at

	Work are often the first step that workplaces take when trying to influence workplace bullying.
<b>Job interventions</b>	These interventions relate specifically to the job that employees are expected to do and the psychosocial environment in which they work. A risk assessment, including the identification of antecedents of bullying within an organisation, is used to inform a risk-reduction intervention.
<b>Individual level interventions</b>	These interventions relate specifically to training, such as assertiveness training, or educational interventions aimed at altering behaviour or perception.

**Source: Vartia and Leka (2011)**

The above-mentioned interventions may be targeted at individuals, in particular managers or supervisors, using a prevention perspective (Gillen et al. 2017). The authors further highlight that these interventions may work by strengthening the policies and culture of intolerance of bullying in the workplace by processes of engagement with employees; providing a safe environment within which mediation and negotiation may take place when problematic behaviour is first identified; undertaking risk assessments of job-related precursors to bullying; and providing awareness-raising or education sessions that will encourage employees to reconsider their behaviour and how they interact with colleagues.

## **2.9 National interventional measures**

Jacobs and De Wet (2018) argued that the Anti-Teacher- Targeted Workplace Bullying (ATTWPB) programmes should be comprehensive; focus on the entire school as an organisation and be based on participatory principles. Members of the staff from all levels in school, as well as learners should be involved in setting goals, the implementation and the evaluation of the school's anti- teacher -targeted workplace bullying programme. Furthermore,

in their study, they suggested that the South African Council of Educators (SACE) and the South African Teachers' Union (SADTU) could play a part in establishing and facilitating the national processes and platforms, as many studies found school principals as perpetrators of workplace bullying within the school context. The following discussion details the legislations as the intervention measures that can be implemented by the educational institutions in combating workplace bullying.

### **2.9.1 Legislations concerning workplace bullying**

Apart from the aforementioned strategies, alternative legislations pertaining to workplace bullying may also prove to be efficacious in encouraging a secure and proficient work environment for South African educators, specifically in government schools. Within the framework of teacher bullying, it is imperative to protect educators in public schools from bullying at work and to amend the bullying behaviours by staff members towards educators.

### **2.9.2 Legislations on workplace bullying**

Jacobs and De Wet (2018) found that there are no laws in place in South Africa that explicitly protect employees from workplace bullying. However, workplace bullying may be taken into consideration under certain legislative Acts and case laws. According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, (1996) freedom and security are a basic human right, including freedom from all forms of violence from private or public sources, and that everyone has the right not to be treated in a 'cruel, inhuman, or degrading way'. In addition, everyone has a right to the protection of their privacy. The Constitution emphasises that educators have the same rights as everyone else, including the right to have their dignity respected and protected. Furthermore, it is stated that everyone has the right to a basic education. Nevertheless, bullying of teachers has a detrimental effect on their work thus, negatively affecting the learner's right to an education in the classroom. The constitution further stipulates that in Section 9, according to the Department of Justice (2020: 9) "all people in South Africa are equal before the law and have equal benefit and protection from the law". This section does not address discrimination against individuals on the basis of race, sex, gender, ethnicity, social origin, age, or any other basis that the state or one of its organs may unjustly use against another person. The preamble, which opens the constitution, emphasises the principles of justice, freedom, equality, accountability, transparency, and human dignity. A key viewpoint in this section is expressed in the preamble, which holds that everyone who lives in South Africa is entitled to it because we are all united in our dignity.

The Republic of South Africa's Constitution, as well as later laws like the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, the Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace, the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000, the Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993, have all been instrumental in the search for a consistent response to bullying in the workplace.

**(a) South African School Act 84 of 1996**

As was previously mentioned, bullying at work is not specifically prohibited by any law in South Africa. On the other hand, public school governing bodies are required by the South African School Act 8 1996 (SASA) to create a code of conduct that the school has to adhere to. There should be defined protocols in place in schools to address bullying incidents and administer appropriate punishments. According to Jacobs and De Wet (2018), the school governing body (SGBs) have a role to play to curb teacher-targeted workplace bullying, as the SGB is in position of trust towards the school they must promote the best interests of school and support effort curb workplace bullying targeted to the educators.

**(b) The Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace**

The Government Gazette (2022) states that the goal of this code is to end harassment in the workplace and in any activity that is related to or arises outside of work. Employers should create a harassment policy that considers and is guided by the provisions of this code, subject to any applicable statutory provisions and collective agreements that may already be in place. According to the Code of Good Practice, in situations of severe harassment where the employee needs trauma counselling according to medical advice and their provided sick leave has been used up, the employer must seriously consider providing additional paid sick leave. When necessary, employers may consider helping to pay for the medical advice, trauma counselling, and treatment, even if no applicable medical aid programme covers the full cost of these services. A harassment policy from the employer should specify the range of disciplinary actions that can be taken against the offender. For example, the warnings that are given to the offender need to outline the main points of the disciplinary violation. When someone is found guilty of harassing someone, they may be moved within the company or to another location, and the victim of the harassment has the right to file a criminal charge or start civil proceedings against the alleged harasser.

### **(c) Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998**

According to the Government Gazette (1998), the Employment Equity Act acknowledges that there are differences in employment, occupation, and income across the country's labour markets as a result of apartheid and other discriminatory laws and practices. These differences cause such severe disadvantages for certain groups of people that they cannot be addressed by simply repealing discriminatory laws. No one may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee in any employment policy or practice on one or more grounds. This is the mandate of Chapter II of this Act, which applies to all employees and employers. Employers are required to take action to promote equal opportunities in the workplace by eliminating unfair discrimination in any policy or practice. Section 6 (1) of the Employment Equity Act of 1998 prohibits harassment of employees on any grounds or on a combination of grounds that constitute unfair discrimination. Furthermore, the Act states that no one may treat an employee who exercises any right provided by this Act, unfairly.

### **(d) Promotion of Equity and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000**

This Act aims to promote the transition to a democratic society that is united in its diversity, characterised by human relations that are caring and compassionate, and led by the values of equality, fairness, equity, social progress, justice, human dignity, and freedom. It does not specifically address workplace bullying. This Promotion of Equity and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act prohibits the advocacy of hatred based on race, ethnicity, gender, or religion, which is considered an incitement to cause harm. It does this by interpreting Section 9 of the Constitution, which allows for the enactment of national legislation to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination and to promote the achievement of equality. The Government Gazette (2000) states that in Chapter II, which addresses the prevention, prohibition, and elimination of unfair discrimination based on gender, moreover, section 6 states that no one may unfairly discriminate against anyone on the basis of gender-based violence that restricts women's access to social services or benefits, such as health, rights, finance, and social security; that denial of opportunities, including contractual opportunities to render services for consideration or the failure to take reasonable steps to accommodate the needs of such persons; and that there is systemic inequality of women's access to opportunities as a result of the sexual division of labour. Subject to section 12's prohibition on hate speech, no one may publish, propagate, advocate for, or communicate words against any person based on one or more of the prohibited grounds that could reasonably be construed to show a clear intention to cause

harm, incite hatred, or otherwise be hurtful (Promotion of Equity and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 2000: s12).

#### **(e) The Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011**

The South African government has used many methods throughout the years to defend the rights of the vulnerable population from acts of violence, intimidation, and harassment. One unique method is the implementation of the Protection from Harassment Act (Vermaak 2023). The primary goal of this Act is to provide victims of alleged harassment with an effective solution. In general, it entails developing procedures for promptly issuing Protection Orders to victims of harassment. The Protection from Harassment Act, which went into effect on April 27, 2013, paves the way for a reduction in the number of harassment incidents in the country (Vermaak 2023). This is the most recent addition to the legal framework that protects and enforces the rights of bullying victims. According to Vermaak (2023), if harassment occurs in the workplace and the victim's complaint is ignored or the employer dismisses it as minor and fails to take prompt action to prevent harassment from worsening, the employer will be held liable for damages. Furthermore, the employer's failure to assist with the complaint may result in a claim for constructive dismissal (Vermaak 2023).

According to the Government Gazette (2011), if a person feels harassed, they should file an application for a protection order in court. If a minor is the victim of abuse at the hands of another student, they may be able to seek a protection order against the offenders. While this can be done by a parent or legal guardian, section 2(4) of this Act states that a child can apply for a protection order without the parent's assistance. If issued, the bully cannot continue to harass the victim or ask anyone else to do so on their behalf; if this continues, the court may order the bully to attend therapy for the purpose of rehabilitation. According to the Vermaak (2023), a person may file an application on behalf of a complainant if the complainant is unwilling to pursue a protection order. This could be any individual who has a stake in the security and welfare of the complainant and who is willing to submit an application along with a signed contract.

#### **(f) The Occupational and Health Safety Act 85 of 1993**

According to the Department of Labour (2022), the Occupational and Health Act mandates that employers create and preserve, to the greatest extent reasonably possible, a work environment that is safe and without risk to health of the workers. This Act requires that workplace dangers

be addressed through communication and cooperation between workers and employers. Employees and employers must share responsibility for workplace health and safety. The Occupational Health and Safety Act of 1993, as it is now known, is founded on the idea that, in order to create a safe workplace, employers and employees must actively identify potential risks and implement preventative measures. By doing this, both sides participate in a system that allows health and safety representatives to conduct routine workplace inspections and then report their findings to a committee that may then make recommendations to the employer. Act No. 85, 1993 lays forth the general responsibilities of employees. Firstly, they must take reasonable precautions for their own health and safety as well as the health and safety of others who may be impacted by their actions or inactions. Secondly, if they become involved in an incident that could endanger their health or cause them harm, they must report it to their employer, anyone authorised by them, or their health and safety representative as soon as possible, but no later than the end of the shift. If circumstances prevent reporting the incident, then they must report it as soon as possible afterward.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

Workplace bullying is a growing concern that has detrimental effects on the individuals and organisations as a whole. The education sector is not immune to this violence. When educators are humiliated, embarrassed either by other colleagues, the management in front of their learners or co-workers, they feel helpless as they cannot take any decisive action against their perpetrators. In such instances, effective teaching and learning is disrupted. Educators who feel unsafe due to intimidation in their workplace often spend a lot of money on sick leave, avoiding a stressful environment. Thus, negatively impacting the quality of teaching delivered by these victims as bullying affects their commitment to and passion for their profession, simultaneously affecting learner's academic performances. In light of this, this chapter described and examined steps that should be taken to address workplace bullying. Because the literature review was organised in accordance with the study's objectives, the researcher was able to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and what has already been covered as well as what still needs to be covered. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework the researcher employed in shaping this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

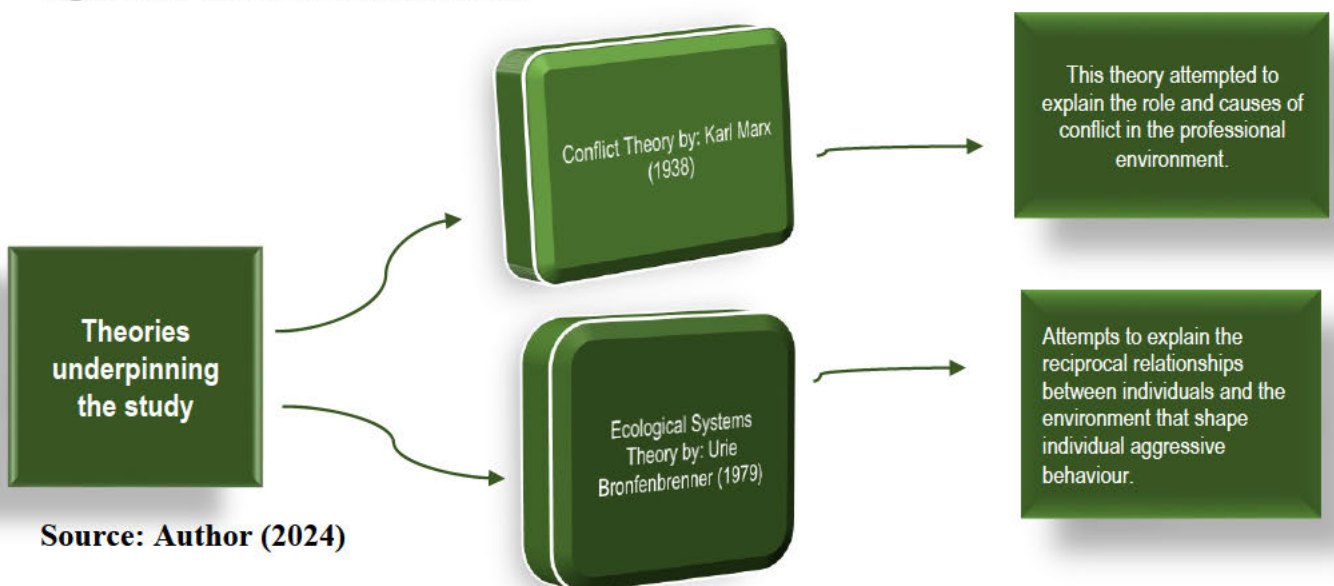
#### 3.1 Introduction

Theories adopted in this study contribute to a better understanding of workplace bullying in schools. Bullying among educators in government schools is a major issue that is still considered difficult to understand. The two theories employed were Karl Marx's Conflict Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The rationale for applying these theories was based on the assumption that workplace bullying is a widespread problem. As a result, a single theory attempting to explain this problem will be insufficient. The integration of theories will facilitate a comprehensive explanation of workplace bullying encountered by educators in government schools in Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal.

#### 3.2 Theoretical overview of victimisation of educators in the workplace

The conflict theory emphasises that bullying is caused by societal inequalities that lead to conflict. According to this theory, society is always made up of fundamental conflicts of interest, and the social order is maintained through a balance of power. While the ecological systems theory emphasises on how the ecological environment influence individual development and behaviour. An important aspect of the ecological model perspective is that an individual is inseparably linked to multiple, interconnected systems, and their development is influenced by complex interactions between intra- and inter-individual characteristics.

**Figure 3.1: Theoretical Framework**



Source: Author (2024)

### **3.2.1 The Karl Marx Conflict Theory**

Karl Marx developed the Conflict Theory in 1938 to better understand the role of conflict in the professional environment. The conflict theory is based on the sociological clue that struggles for power, dominance, and limited resources lead to conflict (Paige and Frederick 2014). According to this viewpoint, there is always a scarcity of resources, which leads to conflict because not everyone can get the resources they desire. This theory views conflict as a necessary and natural part of society that helps it integrate and function. A fundamental premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups in society will strive to maximise their wealth and power. Thus, the emphasis is on the competition among groups within society for limited resources. Social class inequality is deeply entrenched in our society. This disparity affects all aspects of life, including educational institutions (Omer and Jabeen 2016).

This theory states that between two classes in the social system (proletariat and the bourgeoisie); the proletariat or those who sell their labour for a living and the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production by exploiting the proletariat -by keeping them dependent on them for the wage they offered by low payment then they gain profits from their work (Brooks 2011, in Tolla 2017). According to conflict theory, these two groups are constantly in conflict with one another for power and control over how power is organised and distributed.

#### **3.2. 1.1 Historical context of the Conflict Theory**

According to Hayes et al. (2023), the historical development of the conflict theory can be traced back to the mid-19th century with the contributions of German philosopher Karl Marx and sociologist Max Weber. Both Marx and Weber laid the foundation for understanding the dynamics of social conflict and power struggles within society. The conflict perspective, or conflict theory, derives from Karl Marx's ideas, who believed society is a dynamic entity constantly bringing change driven by class conflict. In addition to this, Hayes et al. (2023) states that Mills known as the founder of modern conflict theory; in his work, he argued that social structures are created as a result of conflicts between differing interests and Weber (1974) expanded the scope of conflict theory to include power struggles based on social identities, gender, and race, while Marx focused on the class struggle in capitalist societies.

Marx predicted that the bourgeoisie, a minority in the population, would use their power to oppress the proletariat, the majority class (Hayes et al. 2023). It was projected that the bourgeoisie would use ideological coercion to keep society's uneven distribution intact; the

proletariat would be forced to put up with the status quo. The theory states that to maintain their dominance and keep others from joining them, the elite will erect legal frameworks, cultural customs, and other frameworks. More powerful organisations will typically use their power to maintain dominance and take advantage of less powerful organisations (Butler 1991; Payne 2015).

Important to note is that inequality is viewed as a natural consequence of capitalism. According to Marx (1848), there are two classes (ruling and subject); the first maintains its position over time due to economic superiority, while the proletariat experiences limited social mobility (Omer and Jabeen 2016). Marx anticipated that with the rise of capitalism, the bourgeoisie, a minority of the population, would use their power to oppress the proletariat, the majority class. This way of thinking is linked to a common image of conflict theory-based social models. A small group of elites at the top of the pyramid controls an excessive amount of power and resources, forcing them to impose their will on the majority of society (Hayes et al. 2023).

### **3.2.3 Understanding workplace bullying through Karl Marx's Conflict Theory**

Karl Marx's conflict theory is centred on the idea that society is structured around inequality and the perpetual struggle between groups with competing interests-most notably the bourgeoisie (owners of production) and the proletariat (working class). Workplace bullying can be examined through this lens by focusing on the dynamics of power, exploitation, and resistance inherent in organizational settings. So, using the conflict theory to give a better and informed understanding of workplace bullying allows one to understand it not merely as an interpersonal issue but as a symptom of deeper systemic inequalities within capitalist structures.

#### **3.2.3.1 Power imbalances and exploitation**

The conflict theory posits that the workplace is a battleground where power disparities are maintained and reinforced by those in control (managers or employers). Workplace bullying often arises from and perpetuates these power imbalances. Supervisors or higher-ranking employees may bully subordinates to assert dominance, maintain control, or suppress dissent, mirroring how the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat for economic gain. Bullying others at work is also seen as a means of regaining control in situations where one feels overwhelmed. The literature provides evidence to support this claim by pointing out that power imbalances allow those in higher positions to target those in lower positions. By focusing on juniors or

those they believe to be weak and vulnerable, they are better equipped to handle the rage and frustration that arise from unreasonable expectations and a lack of resources (Branch, Ramsay and Barker 2013; Samnani 2013; Van den Broeck et al. 2011). For instance, a manager humiliating an employee publicly to discourage challenges to their authority.

### **3.2.3.2. Economic pressure and competition**

According to Marx, capitalism creates a competitive environment that pits workers against each other to maximize productivity and profits. Workplace bullying can be a by-product of this competition, where individuals or groups engage in bullying behaviours to secure promotions, avoid layoffs, or gain favour from those in power. For example, colleagues undermining each other to gain recognition or resources, reflecting the alienation and rivalry fostered by capitalist systems.

### **3.2.3.3. Alienation and workplace discontent**

Marx argued that workers in a capitalist system often feel alienated due to their lack of control over their labour and the workplace environment. Alienation can exacerbate workplace bullying, both as a response by frustrated workers who feel powerless and as a means for the ruling class to fragment solidarity among workers. For instance, employees venting frustration by targeting peers rather than addressing systemic issues, which benefits those in power by preventing collective action. Using the conflict theory, one can see how an increase in feelings of competition for resources can fuel a bullying relationship. To achieve social success, many people believe they must eliminate potential threats to their social status. For example, while educators compete for better positions and other resources such as social status, work recognition, and attention. Those with social status who lack the qualities to benefit from these resources will work to maintain their social success in any way they can, including exploitation and bullying of colleagues who threaten their control of these resources.

### **3.2.3.4 Resistance and class struggle**

Marx emphasized the inevitability of resistance and rebellion as workers become aware of their exploitation. Bullying victims may resist by forming alliances, organizing unions, or seeking legal recourse, representing a form of "class struggle" within the workplace.

Example: Employees collectively reporting bullying behaviour to Human Resource (HR) or advocating for policies to address workplace harassment.

### **3.2.3.5 Institutional reinforcement of bullying**

Marx highlighted how societal institutions often reinforce the dominance of the ruling class. Workplace policies, or the lack thereof, may implicitly condone bullying by prioritising productivity and profit over worker well-being, reflecting the structural inequalities inherent in capitalism.

Example: An institution ignoring complaints of bullying to protect a high-performing manager, reinforcing the systemic prioritization of economic outcomes over employee rights.

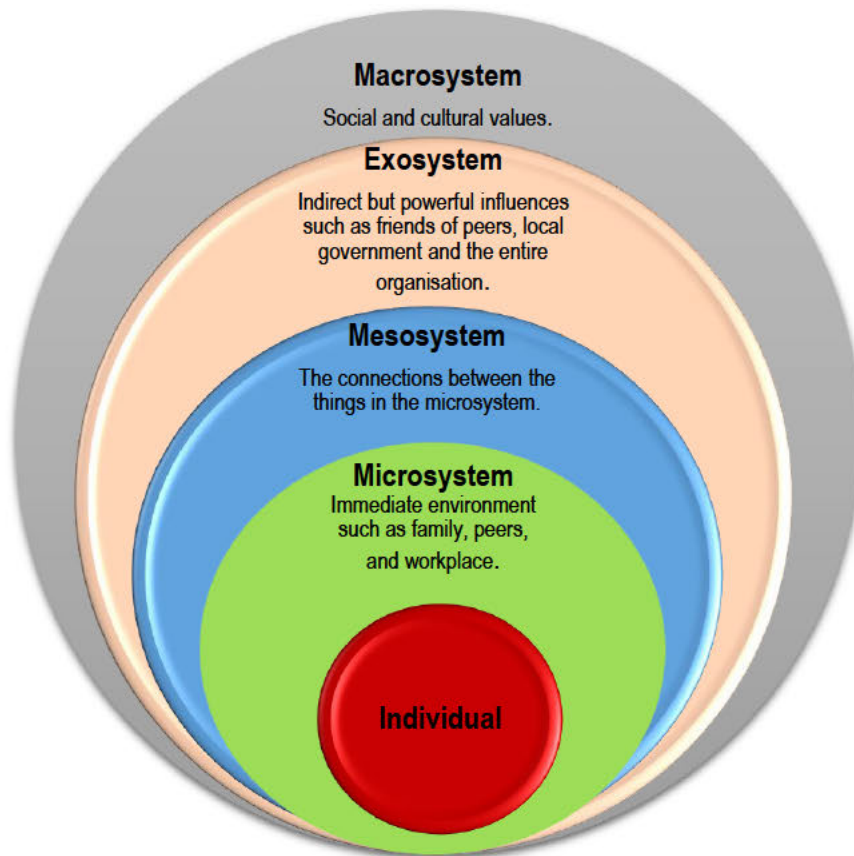
### **3.3 The Ecological Systems Theory**

The ecological systems model is a psychological theoretical approach that was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979. The central argument of the ecological perspective model is that individual's development is shaped by the ongoing qualities of various social settings in which the individual is embedded. This theory is another theoretical approach that was deemed relevant to this study. This theoretical approach served to explain the environment and the setting of an individual that contribute towards the individual's hostile behaviour. Furthermore, it explains the issue of workplace bullying by stating that workplace bullying is perceived as a dyadic challenge between people i.e. the victim and the bully. However, the environment has a significant part in enhancing bullying. This theory states that workplace bullying is an outcome of individual, social, departmental and organisational variables.

According to Olivia (2024), the origins of ecological systems theory was derived from the separate frameworks of ecological theory, systems theory, and Bronfenbrenner's bio ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's research focused on the impact of social interaction on individual development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), a person's development is influenced by everything in the surrounding environment and social interactions within it. The theory stresses out that an individual is shaped by their interactions with others and the environment. The ecological systems theory has four complex environmental systems ranging from personal interaction to the influence of wider social interactions. Bronfenbrenner calls these systems as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that an individual's development is influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems, ranging from the immediate surroundings (e.g. family) to broad societal structures (e.g., culture) (Olivia 2024). According to Harkonen (2008), the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasises the quality and context of the individual's surroundings. Bronfenbrenner's theory is suited for the description of human socialisation. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) development and socialisation are influenced by the different width rounds or circles of the environment with which a person is in active inter-relation. The ecological systems theory is based on three significant assumptions: 1) person is an active player, exerting influence on his or her environment, 2) environment is compelling person to adapt to its conditions and restrictions and 3) environment is understood to consist of different size entities that are placed one inside another, of their reciprocal relationships and of micro-, meso-,exo-, and macro-system (Bronfenbrenner 1979). In order to give a distinctive description of Bronfenbrenner's ecological development theory. The following figure below illustrates how the four systems interact with one another.

**Figure 3.1: The Ecological Systems Theory on human development**



**Source: simplypsychology.org (2014)**

### **3.3.2 Application of Ecological Systems Theory (EST) on workplace bullying within a school setting**

The ecological framework of workplace bullying emerged from the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) on human development ecology. The theory comprises four interrelated structures that involve a series of events considered as bullying. The ecological framework consists of microsystem (the victim and the bully), the exosystem (the organisation), and the mesosystem (the work team or the manager, and macrosystem (the society).

#### **3.3.2.1 Microsystem**

The first system is the microsystem. The microsystem as the innermost system is defined as the most proximal setting in which a person is structured or where the individual directly interacts face to face with others. "A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by developing person in a given face-to-face setting with

particular physical and material features, and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief” (Harkonen 2007:7). According to Olivia (2024), the microsystem is the most influential level of the ecological systems theory. Relationships in a microsystem are bi-directional, meaning other people can influence the individual in their environment and change other people’s beliefs and actions. The interactions the individual has with the people and environments directly impact development. For example, individuals with friends who bully them at work might develop self-esteem issues. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that at this level the relationship between people happen in two ways- from the individual and towards the individual. For instance, an individual’s peers influence his or her behaviour and beliefs, but the individual can as well influence the peers’ beliefs and behaviour.

The microsystem comprises of individual, family and peer characteristics. Individual characteristics such as differences in age, gender, and level of education are often used as tools for bullying at the workplace (Analisah and Indartono 2019). For example, the senior employee staff apply discriminative behaviour to the junior staff during the process of new appointment of employees. The causes vary from wanting to be considered powerful, revenge because it was once done to them previously, jealousy or just want to make their junior staff miserable. For example, a 2014 study conducted by Matsela found that educators reported having experienced workplace bullying among other colleagues simply because they have recently qualified and therefore, they bring new insights on the subjects. In addition, the research conducted by Mapuranga et al. (2015) shows that the differences in gender as well are related to sexual violence and bullying at work. According to this study, it is because there is a desire to show dominance from the male colleagues towards female educators. Similarly, Mangalothi and Mnguni (2016) found that African women in academics face a number of challenges such as not receiving adequate teaching resources to being told and forced on what to teach and sometimes being closely monitored and their teaching deemed incompetent.

The microsystem consists of an individual's immediate surroundings. In the educational context, learners, parents, and co-workers can form a microsystem for the educator, with the educator as the target (Sarrinen et al. 1994; Harkonen 2007). In this case, the target is the educator's relationship with learners, parents, and colleagues). In the educational context, learners, parents and co-workers can also be a microsystem for the educator- where the educator is the target. In this case, the target is the relationship of the educator to the learners,

the parents and the colleagues. In addition, in chapter two of this thesis the influence of parents, learners, and colleagues on the victimisation of educators was outlined.

Moreover, the colleagues who are bullies have a strong support system both inside and outside of school, as well as a high social standing (De Wet 2011). The strong support comes from their close relationship with the school principal, to whom they spread misinformation about other colleagues (De Wet 2011). According to Tehrani (2013), workplace bullying can lead to psychological problems such as depression, sleep disorders, panic attacks, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, workplace bullying can have a negative impact on the victim's physical health, causing fatigue, headaches, and nightmares. As a result, prevention strategies are required to stop bullying behaviour and mitigate the negative effects on educators who encounter bullying in the workplace

### **3.3.2.2 Mesosystem**

The term "mesosystem" refers to the interactions between two or more microsystems, each of which contains an individual (Bronfenbrenner 1977). The antecedents of the mesosystem include the victim's or bullies' colleagues, as well as their managers. These individuals try to be passively involved in various activities that promote bullying by paying no attention to what is going on or even enthusiastically supporting the bully against the victim. According to the literature, school principals tend to ignore the bullying behaviour if they see that the educator being bullied is a threat to them; they also deny the ongoing abuse since they consider bullying behaviour to be the way the world works (Kaloo 2014). According to the literature, school principals are often bullies, particularly those who are judgemental and resistant to change (De Wet and Jacobs 2017). Principals abuse their power in terms of development opportunities, refuse leave applications, and oppress those who try to speak up, oppose them, or have a progressive and innovative approach to teaching (Blasé and Blasé 2006; Sorrell 2015; De Wet and Jacobs 2017). According to Johnson (2011), a workgroup's psychosocial characteristics, such as mockery, gossip, and rudeness, can foster bullying. Other precursors of the mesosystem include conflicts, poor working conditions, limited work resources, high job demands, low social support, favouritism, and poor leadership skills (De Wet 2011). The mesosystem has several consequences, including low job satisfaction, poor commitment, decreased productivity, and decreased teamwork and creativity (Michetti 2020).

### **3.3.2.3 Exosystem**

Analisah and Indartono (2019) suggested that the exosystem incorporates other formal and informal social structures, while not directly interacting with the individual, the exosystem still influences the microsystem. Exosystem occurs when experiences in other settings (where an educator does not play an active role) affects the experiences of an educator in their own context. For instance, because schools are part of the work environment, an unsafe or toxic work environment can influence bullying behaviour because of poor adult behaviour or negative social influences. For this reason, a social control is needed, which is not only the colleagues who play an active role, but also the work environment as a place where educators get along every day (Analisah and Indartono 2019). Furthermore, Michetii (2020), argues that the exosystem's antecedents encompasses the entire organisation coupled with the unions representing the workers. Organisational antecedents of bullying can include highly rigid and restructuring or downsizing the entire workplace, competitive workplace culture and job insecurity. The outcomes of exosystem include a decline in productivity, more sick leaves and poor academic results (Johnson 2011).

### **3.3.2.4 Macrosystem**

The macrosystem is regarded as the final level of the ecological framework. According to Mishna and Brennestuhl (2010), the macrosystem focuses on how cultural elements affect an individual's development, consisting of cultural, ideologies, attitudes, and social conditions that individuals are immersed in. This system differs from the previous exosystem as it does not refer to the specific environment of one developing individual but the already established society and culture in which the individual is developing. In this case, its antecedents of bullying include the cultural and societal values of behaviour and the rules regulating workplace bullying (Michetti 2020). Analisah and Indartono (2019), argue that oppression, like other forms of aggression, varies in an intercultural context. Workplace norms can perpetuate inequality, isolation, aggression and oppression among educators in relation to their ethnicity, gender, age, and socio-economic background. For example, educators from different cultures have values that serve as their life guidelines and sometimes the feeling that one culture is better than other cultures underestimate the values contained in other cultures can encourage mocking behaviour that lead to bullying behaviour.

### **3.4 Summary**

To understand bullying behaviour, one must consider the victim's characteristics, the social context of the behaviour, and their interactions. To achieve this goal, this chapter investigated the applicability of the conflict theory and the ecological systems theory, which argue that workplace bullying is the result of two converging factors: the social interactions in the surrounding environment and competition for limited resources. The theoretical framework was used to contextualise this study within the existing body of knowledge on workplace bullying. This chapter focused on the theoretical approaches that were relevant to this study. The rationale for using the conflict theory on the one hand was based on its relevance, as it investigates motivating factors such as power and dominance that are associated with controlling and bullying behaviour. It aims to explain a wide range of social phenomena related to workplace bullying, such as competition, war, and structural inequality. On the other hand, the ecological systems theory argues that the individual's development is influenced by everything in the surrounding environment and social interactions within it. Those environments influence human development in many aspects, such as how they act and interact, their physical maturity, personal characteristics, behaviour, and others.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the data collection process, focusing on the methodology and research design used to carry out the study, as well as the sampling method used to select the participants. According to Khuzwayo (2021), a research design is a plan or procedure used to conduct the study. It is a description of how the study will be carried out, as well as the researcher's selection of one suitable plan that fits the chosen worldview in order to generate the data needed to answer the research questions. As a result, every research project requires a clearly defined research design that explains how data will be collected and analysed (Maxfield and Babbie 2009). The study intended to explore the experiences of educators on workplace bullying in government schools in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. The research study's goals and objectives were met through a variety of data collection methods that are explained in this chapter. The data analysis tool and ethical considerations are discussed in detail.

#### **4.2 Nature of the study**

According to Sarantakos (2005), qualitative research focusses on people's lives, stories, and behaviours. This type of research approach enables the collection of rich, descriptive data in the form of detailed information from story owners who share their own spoken or written words or observable behaviour. The researcher chose a qualitative research design as it was capable of illuminating educators' perceptions of workplace bullying and share their experiences. This approach enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of how participants interpret meanings regarding workplace bullying in their natural settings. The qualitative approach was appropriate as it enabled a favourable environment in which the participants could be interviewed and in which they could adequately express their full insights about their experiences working in schools characterised by bullying. The researcher chose this research design to allow for flexibility in conducting research interviews. According to Ugwu and Eze (2023), qualitative research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena in their natural settings by relying on people's direct experiences as meaning-making agents in their daily lives. In other words, qualitative research seeks to understand how people perceive their surroundings. Thus, the researcher considered the qualitative approach to

be appropriate for the study because it allowed the researcher to interact with the participants in a natural setting to gain a better understanding of their perceptions and experiences regarding bullying at their workplaces. In this context, a qualitative research design addressed the requirements that this study had to meet, which was that the perceptions of the educators and their experiences on workplace bullying had to be obtained and compared. In this process, the researcher was able to explore the nature of the relationships of educators, which the participants could describe and explain by exposing their feelings and narrating their experiences, which were key factors in achieving the aim and objectives of this study. To further study and understand the participant's perceptions of workplace bullying, the researcher drew from the ecological systems theory and conflict theory, as elaborated in Chapter Three. The participants served as a primary source of information, providing authentic personal views and perceptions as victims, in alignment with the study's research objectives.

### **4.3 Research methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research approach because the main aim was to understand the experiences, perceptions, opinions and attitudes of educators as victims of workplace bullying. Such an approach seeks to understand the problem by exploring it from the views of people who experience the phenomenon in real-life situations. According to Sibanyoni (2018), qualitative research is a type of scientific research that attempts to interpret experiences of participants in a way that reflects not only the analyst's view, but also the views of the participants since it is their experience that is being described. This suggests that this type of approach is chosen with the purpose of explaining what the social reality of a study is, critically analysing it, and subsequently coming up with recommendations on how it can effectively be dealt with (Makhaye 2016). The design of this study was qualitative and explorative. The qualitative nature of the study offered the opportunity to uncover a better understanding of the experiences of educators in government schools as victims of workplace bullying in KwaZulu-Natal which is little known. The purpose of this exploration was to attempt to identify new knowledge, new understandings, and new meanings and to explore motivating factors related to the topic from the educators in government schools.

The qualitative approach was therefore appropriate for this study because it facilitated a deeper analysis as the researcher was able to insightfully record the attitudes, feelings and behaviors of the study participants. Thus, the researcher perceived the approach as suitable for the study as it is typically more flexible than the quantitative study, that is, the qualitative approach

allows greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the researcher and the study participant. Ugwu and Eze (2023) state that in qualitative research open-ended questions are the foundation of this technique, participants are free to be who they are throughout the research process as opposed to being asked questions with only predetermined answers. There is no right or wrong response because it is an open-ended process, which makes gathering data much simpler.

#### **4.4 Research paradigm**

According to Cresswell and Plano Clark (2007), paradigms or worldviews of any research mean how people view the world, thus, influence the research design and how researchers will conduct research. Guba and Lincoln (2005:192) argue that “the paradigm contains a basic set of beliefs and assumptions that guide our inquiries”. In support of this statement and in the mission to meet the objectives and answer the research questions, the interpretive research paradigm was employed as a qualitative method to understand human behaviour. The interpretive paradigm is placed on the view that, while reality can be viewed in multiple forms, it can also manifest itself through individuals' experiences that differ across time, culture, and place (Bhattacharjee 2012). The interpretive approach in this context aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how educators perceived and made sense of workplace bullying, specifically in schools affected by violence. By focusing on the personal experiences and perspectives of the educators, this approach sought to explore the meanings they attach to bullying within their work environment. Interpretive paradigm emphasizes understanding the subjective realities of individuals, in this case, the educators, and how their experiences shaped their perceptions of workplace bullying.

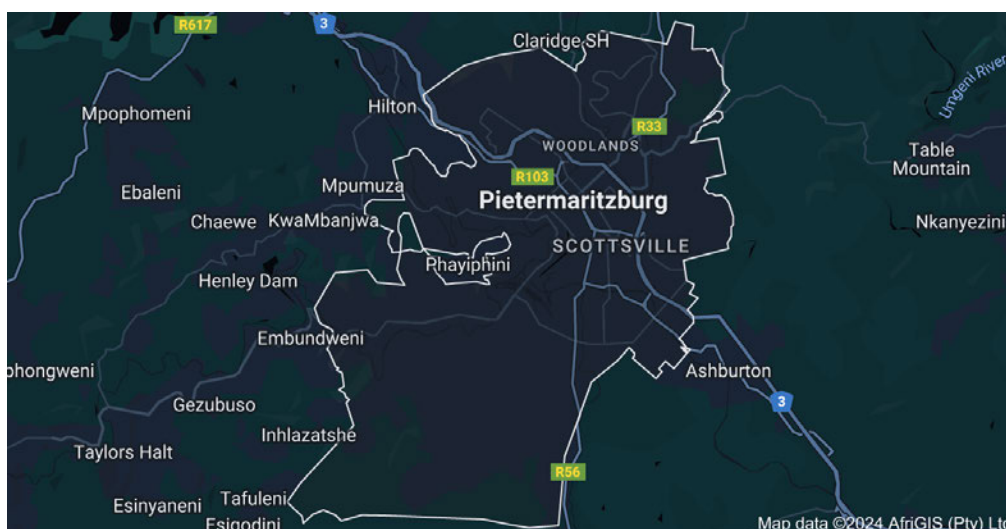
This approach was highly suitable for this study as it enabled the researcher to interact with the participants in their natural settings, which were government schools that are notorious for bullying incidents. The interpretive paradigm was instrumental in enlightening the perceptions, feelings and behaviours of educators in their workplace and also allowed the researcher to better understand the challenges that the educators experienced in their endeavours to adapt to a life-threatening situation and in an environment that could reportedly be both hostile and violent at times. The interpretive research approach enabled the researcher to probe the everyday working experiences of educators. To make sense of their experiences, the researcher interacted with the study's participants in order to capture the essence of their reality of workplace bullying. As Guba and Lincoln (2015) argue that, by using an interpretive paradigm,

the researcher recognises that the reality is socially constructed as people’s experiences occur within socially, cultural, historical and personal contexts.

#### 4.5 Study location

The study setting was situated in the two selected government schools located in Pietermaritzburg, a city, capital of KwaZulu- Natal Province, South Africa. Pietermaritzburg serves as the second largest city that was founded in 1838, and is now governed by the Msunduzi Local Municipality. The Zulu name uMgungundlovu is used to refer to the district municipality. Pietermaritzburg is known for having elevated incidences of crime and violence within surrounding communities (Perrot1989). This area was selected as the study site because of the high prevalence of bullying among educators; therefore, the researcher attempted to identify the factors that led to these high rates and the effects they had on both educators and their work performance. Due to ethical considerations, to maintain the anonymity of the schools the researcher referred to the two selected schools as “School X and School Y”. The names of the schools and the exact demographic details were not provided throughout the study for the protection of the participant’s identities. According to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (2023), School X is a secondary school that is comprised of nine hundred and nineteen (919) learners and twenty-six (26) educators and School Y, a primary school comprised of a total number of one thousand, one hundred and seventy-eight (1178) learners with thirty-eight (38) educators. The schools are both suited in a rural location.

**Figure 4.1: The map of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg**



Source: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/Evjkez3SrHS3rWhQ7>

## **4.6 Target population**

According to Burns and Grove (2005), population refers to all of the elements (individuals, objects, or substances) that meet specific criteria for inclusion in a given universe. The authors also claim that the population definition is based on sampling criteria and participant similarity in various contexts. The target population in this study consisted of all the selected educators who worked in violence-ridden government schools of Pietermaritzburg and aged above 18 years.

### **4.6.1 Inclusion criteria**

Makhumisane (2024) describes the inclusion criteria as identifying the study population in a consistent, reliable, uniform, and objective manner. Inclusion criteria are the characteristics or attributes that prospective research participants must have in order to be included in the study. The selection criteria included educators who had previously experienced workplace bullying in a school setting, either directly or indirectly. The sample comprised both female and male educators aged above 18 years, who had worked for more than 5 years and were willing to participate.

### **4.6.2 Exclusion criteria**

Exclusion criteria, according to Patino and Ferreira (2018), are characteristics used to identify potential research participants who should not be included in a study. Garg (2016) contends that the exclusion criteria include factors or characteristics that make the recruited population ineligible for the study. The current study excluded educators who were currently experiencing bullying in their places of work. This exclusion was to avoid the re-victimization of the educators. Furthermore, educators who had been at the school for less than 5 years were excluded from the sample study since they may have limited knowledge of the school's agendas and had not experienced workplace violence, either directly or indirectly.

## **4.7 Sampling and sampling techniques**

Sampling is the process by which researchers select a portion of the population to participate in the study (Silvermann 2013). Thus, a sample is a group of people, objects, or items selected from a larger population for measurement. So, to obtain accurate results, sampling takes place. According to Bhardwaj (2019), sampling is a procedure that involves selecting a sample from an individual or a large group of people for a specific research purpose. Furthermore, Samkange (2009) emphasises that in order to collect meaningful and deep data, a sample should

consist of people who possess the characteristics required for the study and who represent the entire population. A formal invitation was sent to the school principals of the two selected as the study site. The school principals held a meeting with the educators for the researcher to present her study's aim and objectives to the educators. Educators who were interested and understood the topic came forward and volunteered to partake in the study. The interested educators met the research sample criteria. The selection criteria included educators who had directly or indirectly experienced bullying at their respective workplaces. These participants were chosen based on their extensive knowledge of the school and experience of teaching for five years or more at the school. The researcher recruited 5 educators from the senior primary school and 10 educators from the secondary school teaching grade 10 and grade 12. The selection for higher grades was based on the assumption that educators compete for minor things such as teaching grades; for example, one may believe they are better than their colleagues simply because they teach grade 12 or senior primary learners. This was also motivated by educators' desire to teach 'older learners', who are thought to be more civilised and easier to discipline.

To avoid bias, the researcher attempted to maintain a gender balance in all samples. However, the majority of participants were female educators, which is understandable given that the education sector is dominated by women. According to Bhardwaj (2019), sampling is one of the most important factors in determining a study's accuracy. In research, various sampling techniques are used, including probability sampling, which includes simple random sampling, systematic random sampling, and stratified random sampling, and non-probability, which includes quota sampling, self-selection sampling, convenience sampling, snowball sampling and purposive sampling. When selecting research participants from the population, the researcher can use either a probability sampling or a non-probability sampling design (Sibanyoni 2018). The current study employed a non-probability sampling method. "Non-probability sampling is often associated with case study research design and qualitative research, whereby a sample of participants or cases does not need to be representative of the population or random but a clear rationale is needed for the inclusion of some cases or individuals rather than others" (Taherdoost 2016:21). Nonprobability sampling is a type of sampling in which each member of the population has an unknown probability of being selected in the sample. For example, to better understand the impact of workplace bullying on educators in Pietermaritzburg government schools, the researcher specifically selected and interviewed educators who had been subjected to workplace bullying.

Purposive sampling, according to Turner (2020), is used by researchers to target certain individuals with study-relevant characteristics. Likewise, Maxwell (1996) defines purposive sampling as a strategy in which particular settings, individuals; or events are deliberately selected in order to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other options. The researcher selected this sampling method as participants were selected based on their ability and willingness to provide information as a result of their knowledge or experience. Participants were selected based on their extensive knowledge of the issue that the study aimed to address. Thus, educators were purposefully selected based on their years of teaching at the school and their assumed experiences of working with both victims and perpetrators of workplace bullying.

#### **4.8 Methods of data collection**

Data collection is the most crucial step in the research process as it determines the quality and validity of the findings (Kumar 2011). Klopper (2008) states that in this section of the research procedure, the researcher describes what he or she seeks to find out and how the data will be collected. The researcher conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews that were semi-structured in nature. The questions were the same for all 15 participants and were listed on an interview schedule (see Appendix A). The interview schedule was generated after a comprehensive literature search was conducted to establish the knowledge gap on the phenomenon under study.

#### **4.9 Semi-structured in-depth interviews**

In qualitative research, there are various approaches that can be used to conduct successful research interviews. The main source of the primary data that were obtained for this study was in-depth interviews with the participants. The in-depth interviews were deemed appropriate for this study because it permitted the researcher to determine, explore the participants' perceptions and understanding of the topic, providing the researcher with rich and thick information data. According to Ugwu and Eze (2023:27), one-on-one in-person conversations between the interviewer and the interviewee are the best option if researchers want to collect a significant amount of accurate data because they allow them to learn more about people's behaviours, attitudes, and opinions. One-on-one interviews typically yield higher response rates than other interview formats. One-on-one in-depth interviews were used to gather information on educators' experiences with workplace bullying. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research

technique that involves conducting extensive individual interviews with a small group of participants to gain knowledge with regard to their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce and Neale 2006).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 15 participants who were purposely selected for the study to share their experiences. The interviews were conducted in July 2024. Before conducting in-depth interviews, the researcher first collected some biographical information of the participants. The researcher used open-ended questions that were formulated using the research objectives. The interviews took place in the participants' classroom venues in the school buildings during school hours. The researcher was mindful that teaching time was not compromised. The interviews took about 30 minutes each to complete. The researcher found semi-structured interviews useful since they allowed for the elicitation of detailed information about the educator's views, feelings, and experiences with workplace bullying in the schools under study. Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study, as it required an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions. Since the questions were open-ended, participants had the opportunity to freely express themselves in their own words and share their experiences without feeling intimidated. Semi-structured interviews allowed for face-to-face contact with the participants, providing the researcher much scope to explain or help clarify questions, thereby increasing the likelihood of useful responses from the participants (educators). This technique was useful for this study as the participants voiced their experiences and feelings in an environment that they felt safe and comfortable in. The researcher wrote field notes while conducting the interviews as this allowed her to capture the richness of the interview experience and provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of the data when analysing later. The researcher paid attention to her participants and applied attentive listening skills.

#### **4.10 Recruitment strategy**

For ethical purposes, it is critical to obtain permission to enter a research site and ensure that participants understand the nature of the study (Marshall and Rossman 2006). After obtaining the gate keepers letter from the Department of Education in March 2024, the researcher approached the school principals and requested permission to address the educators on the study and conduct the interviews. Permission was then granted by the school principals and thereafter the researcher approached the educators, as the principal held a staff meeting for the researcher to explain her study to the educators. The educators who were willing to participate

were then asked to write down their details. The interviews were conducted based on the participant's availability. Participation in the study was voluntary to avoid any ethical risks in conducting the interviews.

#### **4.11 Data collection procedure**

Before commencing the interviews, the researcher briefly explained the study's objectives and the interview method to be used. The researcher also emphasised the study's anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary nature. Each participant was given a consent form to read and a chance to ask for clarifications on anything that they may have found confusing. The participants then willingly agreed to participate in the study and signed an informed consent form written in both English and IsiZulu (Appendix C). At the end of the consent form, participants were asked if they were willing to be audio recorded and informed that they were not compelled to be recorded. During the interviews, the researcher used an audio recorder to collect data. Participants were informed that recording the discussion was only to ensure the accuracy of the discussion's content and had no other purpose other than research. The participants were assured that no one, except the researcher's supervisor, would have access to the recorded data. They were also assured that after transcription, they would receive a copy of the interview transcripts to authenticate the recording. According to Smith (2003), recording conversations is one method of generating data for personal experiences.

Ten participants agreed to be audio recorded while five did not consent to be recorded as some educators feared for their voices being played and shared to their management, even after the researcher had assured them about confidentiality being maintained. The participants were still scared and opted for no voice recording option. Notes were taken by the researcher during the interviews of those who did not consent to be recorded. The voice recording technique afforded the researcher the opportunity to replay and validate the data containing accurate and exact words of the participants. The interview questions were both written in English and isiZulu and the participants chose their preferred language, one that they felt comfortable to engage and speak freely.

#### **4.12 Data analysis**

According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), data analysis is critical to conducting credible qualitative research. Dawit (2020) defines data analysis as a process of changing the collected raw data into meaningful facts and ideas to be understood either qualitatively or quantitatively.

He further states that it involves breaking down existing complex factors into simpler parts and putting the parts together in new arrangements (Dawit 2020). This study adopted a thematic analysis approach to analyse gathered data which is a qualitative research method that researchers use to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is theoretically flexible for identifying, describing, and interpreting patterns or themes within a data set in great deal. By employing this process in the current study, recurring opinions or experiences were automatically discovered, coded and recorded. The six stages of thematic analysis which include familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, and final report production, were all followed in this study. The researcher read the transcribed and translated data and repeatedly listened to the audio recordings and re-read the transcripts carefully, for several times and highlighted all the interesting information. The researcher took notes, searched for initial codes and highlighted potential themes. The researcher relied on direct quotes from participants as means to keep as close as possible to the participants' original words, and for the write up of this thesis.

The researcher searched for themes in the generated codes and organised them using a mind map. The codes combined the themes to form central themes that accurately represented both the data and their meanings. The themes were then refined and defined, and the researcher thoroughly examined how they contributed to understand the overall data. Finally, the researcher selected the themes that contributed most significantly to answering the research questions and accurately conveyed the information from the data, as expressed by participants.

#### **4.13 Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is defined as validity and reliability. To determine the trustworthiness of any qualitative study, one must examine the data analysis, findings, and conclusions reached by the researcher (Marre et al. 2017). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Nowell et al. 2017), trustworthiness is one of the ways that researchers persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are noteworthy. The trustworthiness criteria are practical choices for researchers concerned about the acceptability and usefulness of their research to a variety of stakeholders (Nowell et al. 2017). These are used to ensure that the researcher measures what is supposed to be measured and that the study's findings are credible, confirmable, dependable, and transferable. The following four criteria of trustworthiness are briefly explained and how they were met in this study.

#### **4.13.1 Credibility**

According to Stahl and King (2020), credibility is centred on how closely the results match reality. Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed several methods to deal with credibility, such as prolonged involvement, persistent observation, and member checking to test the results and interpretations with the participants. Internal validity is a key criterion addressed by positivist researchers, which ensures that their study measures what it was designed to measure. Along these lines, one seeks to understand how the reported findings fit together, assuming that the ideas are related to one another. To ensure that the findings were consistent with reality, the researcher in the current study employed an interview research method, which is an appropriate and widely recognised method for addressing workplace bullying. This method enabled participants to share their real-world experiences in an authentic way. Thus, credibility was ensured by the study's validity, which stemmed from the study's aims to investigate and address the issue of workplace bullying with Pietermaritzburg educators.

#### **4.13.2 Transferability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose a second factor for trustworthiness, transferability, which refers to the generalizability of the inquiry. The concept of transferability focuses on how to determine the extent to which the findings of one investigation can be applied in another setting. Transferability is important because it refers to how well the phenomenon or conclusions presented in one study can be applied to theory, practice, and future research (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The researcher cannot know which sites they wish to transfer the findings to; however, the researcher is responsible for providing detailed descriptions so that those who wish to transfer the findings to their site can assess transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Nowell et al. 2017). In the current study, transferability was achieved by providing background data that established the study's context. A detailed description of workplace bullying on educators from previous researchers was provided, allowing the researcher to compare what previous researchers discovered to what the researcher achieved.

#### **4.13.3 Dependability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), researchers can achieve dependability by ensuring that their study process is logical, traceable, and documented. Connelley (2016) emphasizes that dependability refers to the ability of findings over time, such as participants and research recommendations, to be supported by data gathered from study informants. The researcher ensured dependability as the data collection, recording, and analysis methods are logical,

traceable, and well-documented. The researcher ensured keeping records of raw data, field notes, a reflective journal, and transcripts. Since this was not a new phenomenon to be investigated, the researcher observed the phenomenon from the perspective of other researchers and achieved similar results.

#### **4.13.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that the researcher's interpretations and findings are clearly derived from the data, and it requires the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations were reached (Tobin and Begley 2004; Nowell et al. 2017). This is the fourth perspective on trustworthiness, which emerges when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all met. Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to authenticate that the data represent the opinions and responses of the research participants rather than the researcher's own subjective opinions and responses (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Nowell et al. 2017). In this study, the researcher ensured confirmability by describing how conclusions and interpretations were established by using direct quotes from the participants as examples that the findings were obtained directly from the data and not the researcher's viewpoints.

#### **4.14 Ethical considerations**

According to Seiber (1993), the ethical conduct of human research involves more than a caring researcher and a strict adherence to federal standards. He adds that ethical behaviour needs adequate planning and management of concerns arising from the research relationship; communication, risk and perception risk, and benefits to everyone who have an interest in the relationship and outcome. Klopper (2008) stipulates that ethical considerations refer to the protection of the participant's rights, obtaining informed consent, and ethical approval. Therefore, it is very important that the researcher takes special care in ensuring that ethical standards are met. In this study, the researcher ensured that the Ethics policy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal was adhered to. The researcher acknowledged that due to the sensitive nature of the study identities of participants would have to be protected. In doing so the researcher ensured no names were revealed throughout the study.

##### **4.14.1 Procedure followed**

Authorisation to conduct the study among educators of two selected Pietermaritzburg schools was granted by the Department of Education and the school principals. The researcher drafted

a letter requesting permission and contacted the Department of Education to obtain their consent to access educators within their District (Appendix H). Immediately after receiving the ethical clearance approval from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Department of Education, an application for conducting the study was submitted to the school principals of *School X* and *School Y*. The school principals accepted the application and granted permission without any complications. The researcher requested from the school principals that the participants who were willing to participate in the study leave their details in the principal's office. Having realised that only a few educators came forward to leave their details in the principal's office, the researcher then recruited the educators the following day during their lunch breaks and then arranged the appointments with the educators and discussed the informed consent form. Moreover, the interviews were then conducted during non-teaching periods to avoid disrupting the teaching and learning process.

#### **4.14.2 Ethical approval**

Research has become an intrinsic aspect of everyday health, education, and social science practice (Mc Fadyen and Ranklin 2016). According to Mc Fayden and Ranklin (2016), the researchers must engage and involve the gatekeepers early in the research process. Before conducting this investigation, authorisation and gatekeeper letters were obtained. Gatekeepers are the adults who control or limit researchers' access to participants. For example, the top management or senior executive in an organisation, or the individual within a group or community who makes the final decision on whether to permit the research. Any research involving human subjects at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) must be approved by the Research Ethics Committee. The researcher thus applied for Ethical clearance in April 2024 from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and ethical approval was granted in June 2024. The reference protocol number is HSSREC/00006818/2024 (Appendix E). Authorisation to conduct the study was also granted by the Department of Education and the principals of the two selected schools who acted as gatekeepers. In addition, the researcher contacted the social worker working in the same area where the two selected schools were situated and requested for counselling services in case participants needed a professional referral, and a letter of approval was received (Appendix F). The researcher conducted the interviews with the participants after seeking permission from the relevant authorities and received approvals after following the necessary procedures. The following ethical considerations were observed.

#### **4.14.3 Informed consent**

According to Bos (2020), informed consent is a trust obligation that is essential for any research involving human subjects. Participants need to be informed about the study's objectives, what is expected of them, and how their data will be used. Consent is based on four prerequisites: it is given voluntarily (without coercion), the participant is a legally competent actor, is well informed, and understands what is expected of them (Bos 2020). The consent letter form of this study detailed the study's purpose and explained that their participation was entirely voluntary. Furthermore, the form highlighted what the participants should expect, as well as the freedom to withdraw from participating at any time without any consequences.

#### **4.14.4 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Any information relating to the private sphere of a person that they wish not to be shared with others is considered 'confidential'. According to Bos (2020), in research ethics, the crucial principle of confidentiality entails an obligation on the part of the researcher to ensure that any use of information obtained from or shared by human subjects respects the dignity and autonomy of the participant and does not violate the interests of individuals or communities. This author further states that confidentiality pertains to the understanding between the researcher and participant that guarantees that sensitive or private information will be handled with the utmost care. Ultimately, confidentiality is rooted in trust (Bos 2020).

To protect the participants' well-being the researcher ensured the participants' right to privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and the right not to be harmed in any manner. The participants were assured that all the information gathered would only be used for academic research purposes. The researcher thus emphasised to the participants that their names or their school names would not be revealed throughout this study. The names of the two selected schools were not revealed in the research, as these schools were referred to as School X which is a secondary school and School Y a primary school. The educators are referred to by use of pseudonyms, for example Educator A, B, or C. Moreover, participants were made aware of the process of collecting data and instrument tools to be used for gathering information. The researcher informed the participants that the interviews would be audio-recorded to ensure sufficient transcription of information communicated by them. The recorder was then made visible to the participants during data collection. The other participants who refused to be audio- recorded, shared their experiences without being recorded and the researcher took down notes. The researcher assured participants of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the data collection process to the

reporting and publishing of the research. This was ensured by making the participants aware that the voice-recorded data will not be used in any presentation that may reveal their voices, and all the interview data will be safely stored away in a secure password-protected computer in which only the supervisor and the researcher will have access to.

All the raw data and transcriptions will be safely stored in a USB on a locked cupboard in the supervisor's office in which only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to. The data will be stored for a period of five years, after which it will be destroyed. The participants were made aware that no information provided by them will be used against them now or in the future. Once the study had been completed, the participants and the school were told that should they require a copy of the research to confirm the accuracy of the study findings as a true reflection of their opinions, this was to be arranged and made available. Further, the interviews were conducted in the participants' classrooms which were considered as safe and secure venues where the participants felt comfortable and where no interruptions disturbed the interviews. Upon conducting the interviews, a note was placed on the locked door clearly stating 'Do Not Disturb'. The interviews took about 30 minutes to complete, keeping in mind that teaching and learning time is not compromised.

#### **4.14.5 Harm to the participants**

Human participant-based research must benefit society, with risks to participants balanced against potential benefits to the community at large. The study did not appear to have the potential to harm the participants, as there were no reported incidents of harm. All of the participants who agreed to be interviewed did not require social worker assistance. In certain instances, sensitive information was shared, that required additional attention from the researcher. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They were also informed about the availability of counselling sessions should they require them. While views on work-related issues were required from the participants which included criticising the organisation and its management, the researcher ensured that the interview questions were in line with the ethical concerns such as excluding the demographic information of the participants. This was done to prevent the issue of disciplining or dismissing the educators by the Department or their school principals.

#### **4.14.6 Deception**

When researchers give participants inaccurate or partial information to deceive research subjects, deception results. Deception in research can be defined as the researcher's intentional choice to create in participants a deliberate misperception about an important aspect of the experiment (Henningsen 2017). In social research, the pursuit of knowledge frequently requires meticulous and ethical behaviour. Neuman (2014) points out that the ethical rule is to not lie to research participants unless necessary for legitimate research purposes, as researchers may misrepresent actions or intentions for methodological reasons. Deception in research is the intentional act of misleading participants or withholding information during a study. The researcher avoided deception by informing participants about the study's objectives and ethical integrity before enrolling in the study. This was done by handing out the approval letter from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee which permitted the conduction of the study. The participants were also shown a letter from their school principals which allowed them to participate in the study, voluntarily if they wished to (see Appendix G). It was also important for the researcher in this study to adhere to the University of KwaZulu- Natal plagiarism policy and by signing a declaration stating all the work used is properly referenced. This was done to prevent research misconduct. Moreover, the researcher avoided copyright infringement by avoiding using illegal sources, and used the library search and library database to find sources.

#### **4.15 Limitations and challenges of study**

There were several limitations to the study, however, the researcher cautiously monitored these challenges making sure that they did not compromise the validity and reliability of the study.

The first limitation was that the researcher had no funding or any source of income and therefore travelling to the schools and the Department's offices was a challenge. The material for this study had to be printed in a local library as the researcher could not go to town due to financial and time constraints. Secondly, the study's initial number of participants that the researcher aimed to interview was twenty ( $n=20$ ), but due to the difficulty of finding participants, the study consisted of 15 participants. Although the sample size seemed small, with the use of the qualitative research method the researcher was successful in gathering quality data. The total of 15 participants consisted of 2 males and 13 females. Insufficient representation of males may also have impacted the richness of the data negatively as it was not known whether male educators were less or more likely to be the victims of workplace

bullying than their counterparts. Lastly, educators were at first reluctant to share information or agree to participate in the study because of fear that their identities will be revealed and in fear that their employment may end if they were to expose their school's private matters. To address this limitation, the researcher assured the principals and the educators that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. The researcher had to explain again thoroughly to the participants the purpose of the study and how it would be conducted. In essence, all the challenges listed above during the process of the study were overcome, which contributed to the reliability and validity of the study.

While the study had its challenges, it was also beneficial. One of the potential benefits of the study is that, it provided important information in identifying various forms of workplace bullying and the impact it has on the affected individuals. The part of the aim of the study was mainly to raise awareness of workplace bullying and some of the issues surrounding the phenomenon. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the scholarly knowledge in terms of workplace bullying on educators and be used as a call for awareness from the Department of Education and school authorities to provide with efforts in preventing workplace and protecting educators.

#### **4.16 Summary**

In this chapter, the focus was on the research methodology employed in this study. The study location where interview data was collected was clearly defined, that is two government schools of Pietermaritzburg under the KwaZulu-Natal Province. The study employed a qualitative study design, and the researcher motivated and explained the reasons for adopting this research design. The qualitative methodology comprised in-depth one-on-one interviews to address the objectives of the study and to answer the research questions. The method of sampling was also discussed. The study was of a sensitive nature and the ethical considerations guiding the research study were presented. The researcher's methods for ensuring the study's trustworthiness were also discussed. The chapter concluded with the limitations and challenges that the researcher encountered during the data collection process and how these challenges were overcome. The next chapter presents the findings of this study.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the study and a discussion of the findings that emerged from the data that were collected from participants in the current study. The researcher used in-depth one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to collect rich and in-depth data. Furthermore, the researcher analysed the data using thematic analysis, which was beneficial, given that this was a qualitative study. This chapter discusses the research findings on the victimological analysis of the experiences of workplace bullying among educators in government schools in Pietermaritzburg. The data that were obtained are also discussed in relation to other sources in the literature, which is a process that adds validity to the study. The findings align closely with the study's objectives, each contributing to the systematic pursuit of the study's main aim. First, this chapter provides relevant background information about the participants. The purpose is to provide insight into the brief demographic information of the participants. This is essential because it contextualizes the findings by providing insight into who the participants are. Next, the analysis of the themes that emerged from the data will be presented. The presentation of the results includes the use of quotes from the participants to indicate the exact opinions expressed by the research participants.

The direct quotations are presented in italics. In keeping with the purpose of the study, the focus of the results and discussions will be on how the participants perceived bullying of educators in their workplaces, and the impact this form of abuse had on affected educators and the teaching and learning process. The names of the participants and their schools are not revealed throughout this report, for the protection of their identities. This was done also to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants or the schools in accordance with the ethical requirements in Chapter Four.

#### **5.2 Background information of the participants**

The table presented below illustrates the characteristics of the participants in the study. A total of fifteen participants were recruited in July 2024 for this study, including 2 males and 13 females from the government schools of Pietermaritzburg, aged between 25-55 years.

Background information of the participants, including details such as age group, gender, years of experience, level of education, and the name of schools were collected.

**Table 5.1: Demographic data of the participants**

Participant	Age Group	Gender	Years of Work Experience	Level of Education	Name of the School
<b>Educator A</b>	35-44 years	Female	9 years	Master of Commerce	School X secondary
<b>Educator B</b>	45-54 years	Female	17 years	Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	School X secondary
<b>Educator C</b>	45-54 years	Female	14 years	Bachelor of Education Degree (Bed)	School X secondary
<b>Educator D</b>	55+ years	Female	12years	Level 4 in Education	School X secondary
<b>Educator E</b>	55+ years	Female	32 years	Bachelor of Education	School X secondary
<b>Educator F</b>	35-44 years	Female	7 years and 8 months	Bachelor of Education Degree	School X secondary
<b>Educator G</b>	25-34 years	Female	5 years	Bachelor of Commerce Honours in business management	School X secondary
<b>Educator H</b>	25-34 years	Male	5 years	Bachelor of Education Honours	School X secondary
<b>Educator I</b>	35-44 years	Female	13 years	Bachelor of Education Degree	School X secondary
<b>Educator J</b>	45-54 years	Female	10 years	Bachelor of Education Degree	School X secondary
<b>Educator K</b>	35-44 years	Female	13 years	Bachelor of Education Honours	School Y Primary
<b>Educator L</b>	25-34 years	Female	5 years	Bachelor of Education	School Y Primary
<b>Educator M</b>	35-44 years	Female	7 years	Bachelor of Education	School Y Primary
<b>Educator N</b>	25-34 years	Male	5 years	Post-Graduate Certificate in Education	School Y Primary
<b>Educator O</b>	45-54 Years	Female	7 years	Bed in Intersen (Intermediate and Senior Phase)	School Y Primary

**Source: Author (2024)**

**Table 5.2: Sequence of findings**

Objective	Research question	Theme
1. To determine the motivating factors of workplace bullying in the selected schools	What are the motivating factors of workplace bullying in the selected schools?	<p>Factors driving workplace bullying in government schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Power relations</li> <li>• Home-upbringing</li> <li>• Individual differences</li> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Gender</li> </ul>
2. To explore the various forms of workplace bullying the educators experience in these schools	What are the various forms of workplace bullying experienced by educators in these schools?	<p>Forms of workplace bullying experienced by educators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal Abuse</li> <li>• Psychological bullying</li> <li>• Cyberbullying</li> <li>• Public humiliation</li> <li>• Social exclusion</li> <li>• Emotional Abuse</li> </ul>
3. To determine the effects of workplace bullying on educators	How are educators affected by workplace bullying?	<p>The effects of workplace bullying on educators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological effects of bullying</li> <li>• Emotional effects of bullying</li> <li>• Physical health effects of bullying</li> <li>• Poor work performance</li> <li>• Low motivation</li> <li>• Poor social interactions</li> </ul>

<p><b>4. To examine intervention strategies and recommendations that educational institutions can implement to effectively tackle workplace bullying</b></p>	<p>What intervention strategies and recommendations can educational institutions implement to effectively tackle workplace bullying?</p>	<p>Strategic measures to address workplace bullying and recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a healthy culture</li> <li>• Reporting bullying incidents</li> <li>• Signing of warnings</li> <li>• Present social services (psychologist, therapist or social worker)</li> <li>• Strengthen positive relationships with learners and educators</li> <li>• Training programmes on school safety and security</li> <li>• Public awareness on workplace bullying and its consequences</li> </ul>
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**Source: Author (2024)**

### **5.3 Analysis of the one-on-one interview data: Educators**

Bullying has been recognised as a serious work and social problem with negative effects on educator’s well-being and safety (De Wet 2014). According to Mahome (2024), the factors that contribute to workplace bullying among educators are multifaceted and complex. The consequences of this type of violence are strikingly dreadful, as they demoralise and paralyse the affected educator. The literature review indicates that workplace violence has devastating effects on the victimised educator’s productivity, emotional and psychological health (Fahie and Devine 2014).

#### **5.3.1 Factors driving workplace bullying**

The educators expressed different views when asked to name the factors that trigger workplace bullying. According to Mgyue (2024), the perpetrators of bullying in the workplaces evaluate the conditions surrounding the potential bullying act, prior to deciding whether to proceed or

not with committing this violent act. The perpetrator then chooses the victim based on what the victim has that will benefit him or her, a perpetrator and he or she will then accurately or incorrectly measure the likelihood of a successful bullying activity. This behaviour can be explained by the conflict theory and the ecological systems theory. The conflict theory states that society is not harmonised, and that society is rather defined by ongoing conflicts that often surface due to the unequal distribution of many factors including power, opportunities and popularity. Conflict theory assumes that individuals and groups in society will strive to maximise their wealth and power. Thus, the emphasis is on the competition among groups within the society, for limited resources (Paige and Frederick 2014). In this case, the victim becomes a suitable target to the potential offender- that is, when one party perceives that the other person has, or is about to have something that he or she cares about. For example, the perpetrator may exhibit abusive and violent behaviour towards the victim for limited resources such as promotions, attention from the superiors, and for control over.

The conflict theory further assumes that workplace bullying is caused by differences in perceptions, and personality differences. Intrapersonal conflict and interpersonal conflict are assumed to contribute to violence within the entire staff members in the workplace. As Kaloo (2014) state that intrapersonal conflicts arise within an individual due to clashes between their thoughts and interpersonal conflict is perceived as the most frequently occurring in schools and concerns the quality of interactions between two or more individuals that work together in groups or teams. The conflict theory complements with the ecological systems theory in explaining workplace bullying. The ecological systems theory views interpersonal conflict as the outcome of interactions among many factors at four levels that influence on behaviour including, the individual, the relationships of the systems, the organisation and the social. The ecological systems theory posits that educator's behaviour and well-being is influenced by the social systems in which educators find themselves embedded. According to Botha (2019), bullies are insecure due to their low self-esteem, and see any perceived threat as threat to themselves, personally as well as professionally. Bullies belittle others in order to boost their own self-worth and ego.

To gain a better understanding of the topic at hand, participants were asked to explain how they understood the causes of workplace bullying among educators. Most participants' understanding indicated that the causes for the conflicts in the workplace include, competition, jealousy, and differences in personalities, power hungry colleagues, age, and the level of

education. The reader should be mindful that the participants' responses are presented verbatim for the sake of authenticity and may include inadvertent linguistic errors. As noted above in the table, due to ethical considerations and the interest of confidentiality, participants will not be mentioned by their real names, but by letters of the alphabets. The participants were also requested during the interviews not to mention the names of the schools or their perpetrators' names when responding to the questions, in line with the principle of confidentiality. Nine out of the 15 educators had a similar understanding of the factors that contribute to workplace bullying amongst educators. They expressed views that educators bully each other out of jealousy, competition, and maybe when one is power hungry. One out of 15 educators did not know what factors cause the educators to bully each other.

For example, Educator H stated:

*“Eh, perhaps what I can mention first that make educators to bully each other is the matter of competition. Eh, the educators, they compete for things that are unnecessary like, my car is better than yours, then from there bullying starts. Another point, it is completion about who performs well than the other person, then that results to bullying”* (Educator H, School X).

Power relations was mentioned by most participants as factor contributing to workplace bullying. Looking down on each other, treating other persons as unimportant and lack of respect are the behaviours of most educators who are in the seniority positions towards the educators in lower positions. Many of the participants under study spoke in one voice that educators in senior positions are the most perpetrators of workplace bullying. To support this statement, Educator F shared the following insight:

*“Sometimes it could be because of power dynamics that perhaps there is someone who holds more power, they want to show that they hold more power and are in powerful positions. Like they want other educators to feel that they are in senior positions. People in higher positions or educators in higher positions they normally bully the ones in lower positions”* (Educator F, School X).

According to Bernstein and Batchelor (2022), workplace bullying may increase when individuals experience frustration and insecurity. Within such circumstances, where people experience a range of emotions, it is possible to distinguish between perpetrators and victims,

noting that those who perpetuate bullying are more likely to be in positions of seniority, bullying junior staff, or to have a large cohort of individuals supporting their behaviour. Furthermore, Bernstein and Batchelor (2022) argue that workplace bullying is a defence mechanism used by perpetrators to express their frustrations or gain some control over their current circumstances. These individuals resort to workplace bullying to cope with their own negative feelings.

Ditch the Label (2016) asserts that being the victim of bullying is one particular stressful event that raises the prevalence of bullying. People bully others since they believe it will save them from being bullied themselves, or they may bully others in order to prove themselves and others that they are superior to particular groups. This can be viewed as a defence mechanism. This aligned with Educator A's response, which stated:

*"I think it is because of their family background, maybe they are bullied at home, so now they are trying to take out their frustrations on other people. Even with the learners, some of them they experience bullying and abused at home through physical or emotional abuse. So, they get to school and try to express their feelings and emotions on the teachers by bullying them"* (Educator A, School X).

This response also resonated with the Educator's G response that workplace bullying act as a displacement which is a psychological defence mechanism that involves shifting a negative emotion from its source to someone who is less threatening.

*"Educators bully one another for various reasons including work stress or pressure, classism, and hierarchical rankings. Educators bully each other due to the pressure they are getting either from their superiors or fellow educators. In other instances, older educators sometimes portray a superiority complex towards the younger educators and educators also weigh one another according to social class and status"* (Educator G, School X).

The other three participants shared different views from the rest of the participants when asked about their understanding of factors that contribute to educators to bully each other. One of the educators believed that was a result of thoughts by perpetrators that they are better than others:

*“Okay, I think educators bully each other because some think they are clever than others and sometimes those who are more educated than others, they think they know more” (Educator D, School X).*

Educator N explained how differences in home upbringing are likely to be a cause for workplace bullying amongst colleagues, he had this to say:

*“Umh, it is because of personal problems, yeah, it is personal problems and not being able to view the world the same way, you see... because I mean, we are raised differently even when we are still young, and so some things you grow with them. So, one of the reasons is home upbringing and some fail to live with other people peaceful in the workplace. For an example, when you know that you are always right, like you are always right, like your environment has taught you that you are always right, everything you say is right. You end up failing to take other people’s views because you believe that you are right and that leads to acts of bullying” (Educator N, School Y).*

Educator H mentioned that differences in places of origin contributes to workplace bullying:

*“Another contributing factor, we can mention that as educators we come from different communities and families, so the way of speaking to other educators, sometimes it happens that it causes conflict and bullying”.*

Lastly, Educator M stated:

*“In my opinion, workplace bullying among educators within a school setting is caused by a lack of work unity, togetherness and a lack of understanding and empathy for one another” (Educator M, School Y).*

In relation to the above responses, Prayogi’s (2023) explanation of the conflict theory highlights that individual differences, such as attitudes and feelings, are the root causes of workplace conflict. Every human being is an individual, which means that everyone at work has different perspectives and emotions. Differences in attitudes and feelings about something can be a factor causing workplace bullying, because in carrying out social relationships, a person is not always in line with his group- this means that the person will not always agree to

everything his or her group does. Therefore, at the same time, individuals have different upbringing, cultural backgrounds and different interest. Individuals are likely to be influenced by the patterns of thought of others. These various thoughts and stances will eventually result in individual differences, which can lead to conflict. Similarly, a study by Calvete et al. (2016) found that personality can be understood as relatively steadfast characteristics within individuals that influence their feelings, thought patterns and behaviours. It is suggested that certain characteristics or a combination of particular personality attributes influence the perpetration of workplace bullying.

Most of the participants from the above responses also reported that their bullies were older than themselves. Few of the female educators and only one male educator in the study reported being victimised because of their age, with younger educators being victimised more than older educators. These findings are supported by Cunniff and Mostert (2012), who researched workplace bullying across six different industries and discovered that younger employees were bullied on a large scale, compared to the older employees. These participants described that they were bullied because of their higher achievements and being appointed into roles at a young age. This suggests that young participants were considered a threat to the older participants in respect of their competence and achievements. In summary, the responses above highlights the factors that contribute to workplace bullying understudy. It was raised during the interviews that competition, individual differences and power relations are the most precipitating factors of workplace bullying.

### **5.3.2 Forms of workplace bullying experienced by educators**

Within the South African context, Smith (2014:45) developed five categories of workplace bullying behaviours: “(1) work-related bullying; (2) social isolation and exclusion; (3) direct and indirect personal attacks or attacks on the lives of victims; (4) being yelled at in public; and (5) physical violence or threats thereof”. In understanding the various forms of workplace bullying perpetrated on educators working in government schools of Pietermaritzburg in the KwaZulu-Natal, the researcher had to ask the participants about their understanding of workplace bullying. The researcher was interested in understanding the way educators define and understand workplace bullying within a school setting. Most participants defined the phenomenon and made examples that explained the form of bullying without necessarily mentioning the term. The researcher was able to understand the meanings and interpret the type of bullying in the participants’ explanations. The results from the participants’ interviews

reveal that the participants were familiar with workplace bullying and they know when they are being bullied. The participants expressed almost similar views. The definition of workplace bullying was also confirmed by Eirnasen et al. (2011) in whose study found that workplace bullying is defined as persistent interpersonal mistreatment driven by power imbalances and hurting with the intent to harm an individual through the use of inflicting pain, hurtful remarks, and damage to the victim's well-being. It is considered harassing and socially eliminating the individual repeatedly. Most of the participants provided examples of the forms of workplace bullying through their explanations.

Educator K stated:

*“It is the abuse or violence directed to educators as the employees. Mostly, this violence happens between the educators, they are also subjected to bullying by the management and sometimes the learners and their parents play a role in abusing the educators. All of this violence happening in the school grounds”* (Educator K, School Y).

Educator A shared a similar view with the above response, and commented:

*“I would define it as a situation whereby a teacher or one of the colleagues is being bullied by a learner or colleagues bullying each other, or even the parent bullying one of the teachers because remember education sector is made up of the three legadal approach which is the teacher, the learner, and also the parent. So, bullying would actively take place within these three legs”* (Educator A, School X).

Educator G narrative supported these above views of workplace bullying:

*“Bullying within a school setting could be learners or educators treating with one another in an uncouth manner, including the use of foul or derogatory language or causing physical harm to one another”* (Educator G, School X).

It was evident from the participants' responses that workplace bullying was generally perceived the same way by different participants. They all understood workplace bullying as a violent behaviour that takes place within the school premises, in which all the persons involved in the education sector play a role. Furthermore, the forms of workplace bullying mentioned by the participants are discussed below. Educator F, who was bullied as a newcomer and as a junior

educator reported that she experienced negative bullying acts in her workplace which resulted to self-isolation and poor social interactions, as her social relationships with friends and family were negatively impacted. Having experienced workplace bullying from a senior staff who is in the management position, she defined the phenomenon in relation to her experience, she asserted the following:

*“I would say workplace bullying is unfair treatment or behaviour that is usually performed by people in higher positions to intimidate or humiliate other educators. So, in a school setting or in a school environment, it usually occurs among teachers and sometimes the (stutters)...the support staff. For example, the cleaners, the parents, and so on. So it happens in any way, it could be through name calling, eh... sometimes psychological maybe being excluded in certain activities or even physical. So, it’s just unfair treatment or behaviour that is usually performed by people who hold higher positions at work”.*

Educator H had this to say:

*“Eh, in a school setting, the bullying is very very high, more especially in a high school where I teach, it is very high. The rate of bullying is very high, eh we can define it as whenever in the workplace happens that as us, as educators whenever it happens in a case where you discipline the learner, the learner would want to be aggressive towards you. Eh, sometimes threatens you that he or she will do something to you, eh which is eh... dangerous, maybe threatens you by saying he or she will hurt you or say he will catch you after school, so all the time you are intimidated” (Educator H, School X).*

An important distinguishing criterion of workplace bullying is that it violates the fundamental human right to dignity contained within the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). The interviewed participants understood workplace bullying as a phenomenon that entails exposure to verbal aggression, physical intimidation, being attacked personally and professionally, having one’s work obstructed, and being socially isolated from the rest of one’s work group. Workplace bullying affects the psychological well-being and mental health of the bullied individuals which in turn causes serious negative outcomes for organisations, as victims’ experience reduce job satisfaction and an increased desire to leave the organisation (Bernstein and Trimm 2016).

### 5.3.3 Educators as victims of workplace bullying

To gain a thorough understanding of the various forms of workplace bullying that the educators encountered, the researcher had to ask the participants to share their experiences with workplace bullying in a school setting. The theme that emerged suggests that the study's educators are victims of various forms of workplace bullying. The information provided by participants under this theme clearly demonstrates that workplace bullying is prevalent in these schools. According to the participants, workplace bullying encompasses a wide range of behaviours, from verbal insults to more aggressive actions. According to Jaun, Zuze, Hanaan, Govender, and Reddy (2018), workplace bullying can take two forms: direct and indirect. Physical bullying (causing bodily harm by pushing, hitting, and kicking) and verbal (such as name-calling, hurtful teasing and intimidation) are considered to be direct bullying, whereas relational bullying refers to indirect form of bullying such as social exclusion and spreading rumours about others.

The participants were asked if they had experience bullying in their places of work. Most of the participants reported that they had experienced workplace bullying from their colleagues. There is also evidence that the participants present their responses to shame (*"I started to doubt myself, maybe there is something wrong with me"*), a lack of self-esteem (*"maybe there is something wrong with the way I teach"*) and withdrawal from others (*"I do not go to the staff room where we normally have our lunch breaks"*). Few participants reported that they had been bullied by learners. Some of the participants reported that they had experienced bullying from their superiors, the management. One participant mentioned having experienced bullying from the learner's parents.

The following are some of the verbatim the researcher selected to express the views of the participants who agreed to having experienced workplace bullying:

*"I experienced bullying from an older educator who possessed a superiority complex and was of the assumption that young educators think they know better, and they are there to replace them. The educator would barge into class during my teaching time and make belittling comments"* (Educator G, School X).

Cyberbullying is the type of workplace bullying that is perpetrated indirectly to the victim. According to Sambo and Govender (2023), the perpetrators of cyberbullying use social media

to express harmful intentions reflected in numerous repetitive behaviour such as posting, sending messages and images or videos with abusive content. One female participant indicated that she had been a victim of cyberbullying by her colleagues:

*The first bullying behaviour I encountered was in 2014. There was this teacher who was teaching the same class grade as me. The difference was that I was a newly graduate and bagged this permanent position, whereas, she had been working at the school for years as an SBG teacher who is paid by the school. The bullying did not happen directly but rather indirectly, through the socials. I was cyber bullied, this teacher bullied me by gossiping about me, and body shamed me and made other colleagues to turn against me. There was a gossip group chat on WhatsApp whereby my name was mentioned daily from the way I walk to the clothes I wear, I was discussed” (Educator K, School Y).*

According to Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, as stated by the Government Gazette (1998) in the literature, employers are required to take action to promote equal opportunities in the workplace by eliminating any discriminatory laws and practices. Additionally, the act states that no one may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee in any employment policy or practices on one or more grounds. The Employment Equity Act acknowledges that the differences in employment, occupation, and income across the labour markets as result of discriminatory practices, need to be exterminated.

An employee’s personality can influence the prevalence of workplace bullying. Drawing from the literature, one may become a victim of workplace bullying due to personal circumstances such as low self-esteem, shyness, and lack of friends (Cowie et al. 2000). For instance, Educator C was bullied by her colleague who held the same qualification as her by suggesting to her and the principal that Educator C should teach the lower grades and leave the higher grades to her as she is more deserving and qualified. Educator C stated:

*“Yes, I have been bullied when I started my career in teaching. There was one colleague of mine who was competing with me and wanted me to teach the lower grades while she taught the higher grades so that she could go to the marking centre during the end of the year. We both had the same qualification, however she felt more deserving to*

*teach higher grades such as grade 12 and she saw my teaching style as not good enough, as she wanted me to use her teaching style”.*

Studies conducted in South Africa and internationally point out that gender is a persistently growing factor that needs to be looked into and addressed in relation to workplace bullying (Cunniff 2011; Mapuranga 2015; Mollema 2018; Chan et al. 2019). A female participant, Educator E reported to have been bullied by her male colleague when asked if she had been bullied at her workplace. She had this to say:

*“Yes, there was a teacher but I cannot say he was bullying me but he was just on my case. He thought the principal was ‘soft’ on me, to discipline me. He thought the principal was ‘afraid of me’, I do not know where he got that from. So now that he thought the principal was not disciplining me, he would be disciplining me, and in one way or the other it is like he was bullying me” (Educator E, School X).*

The responses from the participants support the findings of Oade (2009) that in the workplace employees are guilty of not being emotionally matured, lacking personal and intrapersonal skills, less effective handling of workplace responsibilities and undermining their colleagues instead of handling their work issues. In addition to this, underperforming educators’ resort to workplace bullying towards their co-workers because they fear that they are more capable and will get more admiration. Hence, they start to undermine, abuse and bad mouth their colleagues.

Bullying in schools is not just about learners victimising each other, but also about the bullying of educators. South African research concurs that bullying of educators by their learners is a considerable problem for teachers (De Wet and Jacobs 2006; De Wet 2010). According to De Wet (2010), the lack of discipline in some schools, the absence of a culture of teaching and learning, conflicting work ethics of the victims and their colleagues, are some of the reasons why some educators are bullied by their learners. The author further states that learners often target educators whom they perceive to be too strict. The following are some of the verbatim the researcher selected to express the views of participants who said they have experienced workplace bullying in the hands of their former learners:

*“Yes, I have been bullied previously by a learner. It was in 2007 when I started teaching. One of the learners saw that I was a young teacher and took advantage. Whenever I was in class, the learner would not correspond, would not listen, but raised only the inappropriate sexual comments towards me. For an example, he would comment sexually about my body, how my buttocks looked. He would say all of this in front of other learners. I was young back then and undermined”* (Educator B, School X).

Educator H had this to say:

*“Eh, yes, I once experienced workplace bullying whereby, I was disciplining the learner and he refused to take the punishment and threatened to hurt me and told me that my workplace is not in my hometown. So, after school, the learner was indeed by the school gate with his other friends carrying sharp objects such as axes and dangerous weapons. So, it was compelled that my superior to call the police”* (Educator H, School X).

Furthermore, the four participants who reported to having been bullied by the management were asked to share their experiences. Educator D stated:

*“Mmh! I am going to be honest; I was once bullied but I don’t think I need counselling for that. When I first came here at school, there is this thing of first in something called LIFO in education, ‘last in- first out’. If learners’ enrolment at the school decreases, some educators get deployed to other schools. So, I was once bullied because I came last among other educators of the same language I am teaching. I was deployed to the different school but lucky because the senior, my deputy principal discovered that I am the one who is qualified to teach this subject and that this other person who is teaching the language is not”*.

Educator I shared the following:

*“Not exactly in me particular but in all staff members who are in level one who have to do their job and even do the SMT’s job since they do not want to invigilate and having less duty load than other staff”* (Educator I, School X).

*“During examination time, the management would put my subject at the end of the exam timetable every time. And when they have finished marking and I have not, they would say I am slow. The management with some colleagues would jump in first and make the timetable”* (Educator O, School Y).

As it is evident from the literature review, workplace bullying and power relations occurs across all organisational levels. Researchers are seen to agree that leaders are the primary perpetrators of workplace bullying, as they tend to be the main source of power in an organisation (Vartia 2001; Tehrani 2003; Rayner 2019). A misuse of authority was described by most participants in the study as a contributing factor for workplace bullying. These findings are consistent with those found by Botha (2010) and Peng et al. (2019) who found that middle and senior management by virtue of their positional power were identified as perpetrators of workplace bullying who inflicted abusive supervision on their subordinates. The participants in the study described abusive leadership to include bullying by the School Management Team (SMT), this was further illustrated Educator F as follows:

*“I experienced verbal bullying and psychological bullying in most cases because I was being named called, being shouted at by the senior staff in the management and being excluded from other activities. For example, eh... there was a time since I recently joined the team, I am not sure if it is sort of, they usually call it ‘ukufikisa’ (abusing the newcomers) when you first join the team. So, I am not sure if that is what was also happening to me since it did not last for that long, it only took 4 months. So, you would find that sometimes, I would be told to do duties that are beyond my role or responsibilities of what I should be doing as teacher, and also you would find that I am being shouted at in front of the learners. That resulted to learners losing respect for me because they could see that there is no need to respect this person because she is just a minor, especially if you recently joined the team and believe that you need all the support you can get from the senior staff members. So, it was the instances of I would shout at for nothing, maybe you made a minor mistake. Instead of being corrected privately, you would find that the issue would be addressed in front of the learners and be shouted at and also being called names, told ‘uyathithiza’ (inattentive) and always excluded in the school activities, perhaps there is something that needs planning, I would not be included but everyone else would. For example, let us say there are sports activities that need to be planned or may be fundraising activities that need to be*

*planned, you would find that everyone contributed or shared their opinions but as for me, I would just receive a full report of what is going to happen whereas everyone was involved in the discussion”.*

The above response from the participant supports Matthesien and Eirnasern (2010) argument that bullying of workplace newcomers, comprises an old type of workplace bullying, known for centuries. In such cases, newcomers in the workplace are met with intimidating behaviour as a kind of hazing. This conduct can of course be regarded as a cultural tradition, in which the new person is "tested". Yet, the behavioural acts may be so intense or so long lasting that they may qualify to be perceived as bullying. Furthermore, the participant described herself as having low self-efficacy and limited social support which contributed towards being targeted for bullying. Similarly, a study by Salin and Hoel (2020) found that low levels of social support exacerbate the social isolation experienced by the victim of workplace bullying and increased risk to subsequent workplace bullying incidents. Some of the participants experienced victimisation and undermining as forms of workplace bullying. Victimisation included lot of workloads, conducting invigilation on behalf of others, being deprived to have a voice, as well as having insufficient time to prepare for marking and proper preparation for paperwork due to workload and unreasonable tasks deadlines.

The below quoted female participant said that workplace bullying led to a difficulty of disciplinary problems in the school yard or in the classroom. The participant said she initially decided to ignore all the learners including misbehaving learners after being bullied by one of the learner’s parents. She explained that:

*“In my class, in grade 12 class I was trying to discipline a learner who was not achieving as per standards and norms of the department. Unfortunately, the learner went back home and said I was bullying her and I was not saying appropriate stuff to her. Hence the parents came and tried to fight me and caused a scene in my school. I was not happy about that in such a way that I took an initiative to deviate from the seven roles of the teacher. One of them says that we must be able to play a parental role, hence I no longer act as a parent to the learners that I teach” (Educator A, School X).*

The findings of this study show that the educators that were interviewed had experienced different forms of workplace bullying in a school setting where they teach. They had directly

or indirectly experienced the workplace bullying that targeted them. All the ten educators from the secondary school and five educators from the primary school had experienced workplace bullying occurring in their schools. The participants also reported that the threats of bullying from the perpetrators and fear of being victimised again made it difficult for them to discipline misbehaving learners.

### **5.3.4 The effects of workplace bullying on educators**

Recent literature on workplace bullying has focused on the persistence of this phenomenon in the school context. In South Africa, increasing cases of educators being subjected to workplace bullying have been noted in the media. The persistent and unwavering increase in this form of violence and the resulting effects is one objective that the current study sought to illuminate through an analysis of the experiences of educators under study. With regards to the question of the forms and effects of workplace bullying in the two selected schools of KwaZulu-Natal, most of the participants revealed that workplace bullying negatively affected their productivity in the workplace and their personal lives outside of the workplace were also affected. In relation to the participants' perspective on the effects of workplace bullying, Jacobs and De Wet (2015) state that the effects of workplace bullying are more psychosocial, physiological rather than work related, and the most frequent effects on workplace bullying are headaches, extreme sadness, anxiety, fatigue, and stress. Sambo and Govender (2023) explain this problem noting that bullying has destructive influence on its victims. Regardless of the type of bullying that an individual has experienced, they all tend to have a negative influence on victims. Bullying may cause health problems for some victims and some victims of bullying may end up avoiding the places where they experienced bullying in order to minimise the chances of being bullied again. The participants shared different perspectives regarding the impact of workplace bullying on their job performance and personal lives.

Some participants explained that:

*“It certainly does affect our performance at work because, remember I said to you, the minute I felt like I was bullied by the parents, I had this mode of saying, this defensive mode telling myself that I am no longer going to say anything to the other kids. Remember, the other kids did not do anything to me, but I ended up punishing those who are not involved fully in the matter. It definitely does have an effect on the personal level as well because the minute you are bullied, you get affected emotionally here at*

*work. You go home and you are no longer yourself, even to the kids you are not okay emotionally. You have to deal with these omissions so that they do not affect or your emotions do not affect your kids back at home” (Educator A, School X).*

Educator B, who was a young female educator and had recently started in the industry of teaching, she explained how the young boy in her class made her everyday life miserable as she was no longer excited about going to her class and teach learners because the young boy would shout inappropriate comments about her body structure, in front of other learners. When asked if this behaviour affected her work performance and if so, how. She stated:

*“Yes! It did affect my work performance; I was afraid to go to class by that time. Therefore, my fear of going to class affected my work performance, I was no longer performing the way I should have been performing, and also I had this fear of wondering what the learner will say if I were to attend the class on the day. It also did affect me personally because at that time I lacked self-confidence and had a low self-esteem. I would ask myself what this boy sees in me and that if I am walking, there is something these learners see or maybe it is me who is wrong, or maybe it is the learner who is wrong of which I did not feel okay at that time”*

Negative and stressful work conditions may also generate stress, which renders employees more likely to behave in ways that violate social norms and rules (e.g., withdrawal, uncivil behaviour, reduced work performance), making them more vulnerable to retaliation and coercive behaviours from others (Baillien et al. 2009; Notelaers, De Witte, & Einarsen 2010, in Trépanier et al. 2021). In addition, Educator E raised the issue of having stress when it comes to one’s work:

*“It does because every time you go to work you are thinking that there is this person who does not like me and sometimes you know your performance gets affected. Yes, it does, it did because you start to doubt yourself like why this person does not like me? I am a hard worker, I put in some work, so you think if you put in some work you are going to be recognised and you are going to be appreciated, and so if they are in your case you are like ‘what is the problem now?’” (Educator E, School X).*

According to Shar and License (2023) stress is a common psychological outcome of workplace bullying. This finding was evident in the current study where most of the participants reported

that stress developed and was a common occurrence for them. Shar and License (2023) further state that stress is a universal experience that people from many walks of life face. When under a lot of stress, some may find it hard to concentrate, make decisions, and feel confident. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (2018), stress can also have long term impact on physical health, for example, headaches and fatigue are common symptoms of being under stress. People are also more likely to get sick or experience a decline in their health (Canadian Mental Health Association 2018).

Research investigating the antecedents of workplace bullying proposes that harmful work conditions enable bullying to flourish (Salin and Hoel 2020). The presence of job demands such as work overload, role conflicts as well as the absence of job resources such as job control and social support create stressful work conditions that may foster bullying through different processes (Salin and Hoel 2020). In the context of this study, the participants reported high workload as another contributing factor to workplace bullying. They also demonstrated how they are negatively affected by this factor. When asked if workplace bullying affected their personal lives as well, Educator I shared this perspective on the issue of workload and the effect this has on the victim:

*“Yes, while teaching so many classes there is no time for paperwork or proper preparation. You get affected on your personal life because you have to fight for your rights every time when your work is overloaded”.*

In addition, Educator O had this to say about workload:

*“Of course! This goes straight to heart because at my school I am seen as the last comer, I get to be labelled as ‘emvakwezinye’ (lagging behind) because of the workload I get to do as my subject is always last in the examination timetable. I am affected because I sleep early at home, sleepless nights, anger issues have developed and I take out stress to others”.*

The findings reveal that the impact of workplace bullying on personal relationships was less damaging than on the professional life. Only few participants mentioned having their social lives affected because of workplace bullying. These participants explained how they isolated

themselves from colleagues, family, and friends. The participants articulated their experiences as follows:

*“There was a time where I experienced stress, where I was depressed, and you would find that with my family and with my friends I am no longer okay. Sometimes I would take out my frustrations on them and also in my workplace, as I had mentioned that I was excluded in other things, like even during free time we normally share the staff room that is where we usually have our lunches. So, you would find that at times I am being excluded and that did not sit well with me, I was affected even on my personal relationships that I had with my family and my friends...yeah”* (Educator F, School X).

The participants expressed some negative views when asked to describe how workplace bullying affects their personal and professional lives. For example, Educator J from School X secondary school explained her challenges of workplace bullying and how it affected her work performance and social relationships with her colleagues. Educator J shared an experience that caused her great stress:

*“I was affected by bullying in my workplace because I would come late at school and sometimes be absent because I was sharing the transportation with my bullies. I was bullied to a point where I resigned, I distanced myself from other colleagues”.*

Educator G, who is a young female educator, explained that her experience of being a victim of workplace bullying affected her emotions and psychologically. She further explained how her work performance was impacted:

*“Yes, it leads to anxiety and depression, and it is difficult to perform to the best of your abilities when your mental health is not in a good state. At times you lose your temper and snap at learners, or you are unmotivated to smoothly facilitate the teaching and learning process. Yes, it strips you off your humanity and self-esteem. You lose confidence and no longer find pleasure in the things you used to love. When I experienced bullying, I was in a constant state of panic and anxiety and that affected my everyday living as I was constantly thinking of the worst”* (Educator G, School X).

As noted in some of the participants' experiences, workplace bullying does not only affects the educators as professionals but may also lead to the disintegration of teaching and learning. Data extended from the interviews reveal that workplace bullying may lead to a lack of enthusiasm and their teaching profession has changed as a result of their own negative experiences. A male participant who was bullied by a learner that he was disciplining in the classroom, acknowledges that the victimisation negatively affected him and his ability to trust learners as well. He shared the following information:

*“My work performance was affected a lot because I was no longer able to conduct extra classes because I was scared. Eh... I was no longer able to conduct classes in the mornings at 7ams and during weekends. I always made sure that when I want to conduct extra classes I need to make sure someone else will be there as well teaching, I would also make my time slots same as theirs so that we could be many at school. Even the rate of the results dropped. It also did affect me personally, like I started there to see the need of having a gun eh... also because it started there for me to start taking the kids seriously, that they can be dangerous because I saw that they can mobilise one another and attack you” (Educator H, School X).*

The findings of the study revealed that workplace bullying affected teaching and learning process as educators were victimised in their classes while teaching. As a result, teaching and learning activities were put on hold as educators had to resolve the disputes emanating from workplace bullying. The frequent occurrence of workplace bullying demotivated educators and was considered to be the reason for poor academic results for learners as educators had high rates of absenteeism due to a toxic work environment. In this study, it was evident that the presence of bullying behaviours in the school had negative emotional, social as well as physical effects on educators such as low self-esteem, insomnia, anxiety, panic attacks, prolonged fearfulness, stress, depression, and low social interactions.

### **5.3.5 Addressing workplace bullying**

One common realisation for all the participants was that there is an urgent need to address workplace bullying. Participants expressed varying views regarding their perceptions on addressing workplace bullying. Most of the educators indicated that they reported matters

related to workplace bullying to their superiors and after reporting bullying to the superiors, the matters were resolved. For example, Educator H said:

*“The matter was taken serious since I...I reported directly to my principal then he call police, they came to school and then when they came eh... they took the learners to the nearby police station eh... and the situation forcefully required the these learners to be removed from my school to another school... eh I will be honest with you, even though the matter was taken serious I never felt safe again, I was not safe because life does not begin and end in the workplace”.*

Kõiv’s (2015) study found learners as the main culprits of the bullying of educators compared to colleagues, administrative staff, parents and maintenance staff. Kauppi and Porhola (2012: 16) define learner-on-teacher bullying as “a communication process in which a teacher is repeatedly subjected, by one or more students, to interaction, that he or she perceives as insulting, upsetting, or intimidating. Bullying can be verbal, non-verbal, or physical in nature”. During the interviews, the victims of workplace bullying by the learners described what may be seen as incidence of verbal and emotional abuse. The participants moreover recalled how they were publicly threatened and humiliated by some of their learners during school and after school hours.

Educator M shared the same sentiments:

*“My situation gotten worse day by day, I was bullied so bad that even when I walked past people laughing, I would think they are laughing at me. My work performance dropped with more absenteeism and the principal interfered. After the principal was aware of the situation, I was faced with he provided with psychosocial support services, I attended counselling and SACE played it role however it was not enough as the bullying behaviour never stopped, which contributed to my resignation”.*

The information provided by the participants under this theme clearly indicate that the principal and the school at large should create a safe environment at school. The literature review emphasises among other things, the need to acknowledge that workplace bullying is a reality in schools, an encompassing anti-bullying policy and anti-workplace bullying legislation. The involvement of trade unions to look after the interests of their victimised members and the need for the schools to develop anti-bullying policies that clearly stipulate what workplace bullying entails and that such negative behaviour will not be tolerated. Furthermore, The Code of Good

Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the workplace, as stipulated in Chapter Two, states that employers should create a harassment policy that considers and is guided by the provisions of this code to end harassment in the workplace (Government Gazette 2022).

However, some of the participants explained that even though some of the cases of workplace bullying are reported to the management, nothing is done to prevent the bullying acts from continuing or escalating. According to Vermaak (2023), the South African government implemented the Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011 as a method to pave a way of reducing in the number of harassment incidents and defend the rights of the vulnerable population from acts of violence, intimidation, and harassment. The Protection from Harassment Act mandates that if harassment occurs in the workplace and the victim's complaint is ignored or the employer dismisses it as a minor and fails to take prompt actions to prevent harassment from worsening, the employer will be held liable for damages (Vermaak, 2023). Educator E for instance stated:

*“The principal was aware that this particular teacher does not like me but then I told my husband about this and since I was not reporting to him directly (my bully) I just disregarded him. The principal did not take the matter seriously as he was trying to maintain peace within our workspace, he told me to ignore him and his behaviour”*  
(Educator E, School X).

Educator K mentioned the following:

*“I told the principal, and he tried to address them, indirectly as he was generalising”*  
(Educator K, School Y).

Educator C asserted the following:

*“My superior who is my DH (Departmental Head) saw the bullying happening to me but he would usually say I should keep quiet and let it be, to maintain peace because not all the challenges that you are faced with needs you to talk, some things need to be ignored and disregard them”* (Educator C, School X).

It was clear that the above participants during individual interviews felt that the school was not doing enough to assist them. For instance, when they experience acts of bullying, they are told

to keep quiet for the sake of peace maintenance in the workplace. The participants alluded that the school management failed in fulfilling its roles of attending various people in bullying scenes, being the target trustworthy listeners, impartial investigators, and management advisors and facilitators in the bullying cycle.

The following are some of the selected verbatim of those participants that did not report the bullying to the school management. For example, educator D, who was bullied by his colleagues said that he purposely ignores misbehaviour by his bullies. He stated the following:

*“I never reported it, I just left it alone, you know I like to choose peace in things, so I just left it alone”* (Educator D, School X).

Two of the female educators who were interviewed revealed that they did not report their abuse as the perpetrators were in the senior positions and that would cause unnecessary tension in the workplace and on themselves. De Wet (2010) states that bullying among teachers seems to take place at times because they bully is envious of victim and also because the perpetrator often has power through their close relationship with the management. Educator F and G shared the following sentiments:

*“Umh... umh, dealing with this behaviour of being bullied has not be easy or it wasn't easy, and I didn't report the perpetrator to my superiors because the perpetrator was also a superior to me. Eh...so, as much as I would eh...report maybe to the principal because the perpetrators were like the HoD's, eh... but it's not easy for someone who is new who recently joined the team that your arrival has brought troubles eh... you report people who have been working here for years that there are bullying you. So I just had this thought of even if I report, nothing will happen because these people have been here for years as compared to me, eh... it would be hard for me to trust me everything that I am saying also because my worst fear is joining people in a team that they have been working together at for ages and what if I report and at the end of the day I would find that the way the situation is being handled won't be the same way I had thought it to be, that bullying maybe will escalate even more. So, I didn't see the need of reporting this until it stopped by itself”* (Educator F, School X).

*“I did not report to the superiors as I felt it would bring unnecessary attention to myself”* (Educator G, School X).

The participants were asked if they had reported the incidents of bullying to the school management. They reported that they did not report the incidents either to the superiors or the police. They further reported that, as junior educators and newcomers, reporting a bully who is also a superior might bring unnecessary attention on them, thus causing the bullying to escalate even more. Power relations dynamics were identified by the participants under study, as a contributing factor for workplace bullying. This was supported by other studies (e.g. Vartia 2001; Tehrani 2003; De Wet 2010; Rayner 2019). These studies support Mokgolo and Chigo (2024)’s viewpoint that power dynamics can generate a hostile organisational climate and culture that permits bullying acts to occur and bullies to get away with their bullying acts, further rendering school management team incapable of preventing bullying. De Wet (2010) explains that many educators in South Africa are regularly exposed to acts of bullying by their superiors. Principals and deputies hold a position of power in a school setting. Most principals and people who are in the School Management Team (SMT) are bullies who use their power ranks and positions to undermine educators who had demonstrated work success by ignoring their ideas, feelings, or accomplishments.

#### **5.4 Intervention strategies and preventive measures for workplace bullying**

Understanding and addressing workplace bullying is critical to solve this social ill and make the workplace a safe environment. Workplace bullying, if not promptly addressed, can lead to serious consequences for individuals and organizations alike. It was clear that the participants in this study felt that the school managers were not doing enough to assist them in addressing incidents of workplace bullying. The findings of this study indicated that the educators felt that they needed psychosocial support services in the schools. The educators and learners came from diverse backgrounds and faced unique challenges, but they seemed to agree that psychosocial support services could effectively address the consequences of workplace bullying. The participants suggested that the schools should hire educational psychologists or social workers to provide the necessary services and safe spaces for victims to speak up on matters concerning their experiences and discomfort they find in the workplace. Educator D stated:

*“You know as teachers we go through a lot you know... with teaching learners of different races, different backgrounds it’s a lot, you know...it can be a lot. So, I think as much as the learners can be taken care of like having umh... them to see the therapists, I think the teachers deserve that as well, we need like a therapy at a workplace that is very important. Some people go through a lot, go through things they don’t even talk about, some have failing marriages, some have umh...through divorces, some are going through financial troubles, some family problems, some umh... it’s a lot, it’s a lot. I feel like if we can have advice and therapists that are available on call for the school, if not maybe not here but on call that can be called to come through and counsel us psychologically, some of us need that”.*

Most of the participants revealed that the schools have no interventions strategies in place to fight against workplace bullying behaviour. They demonstrated that, even though some of the cases are reported, nothing serious is done to control the situation. They also maintained that it is up to the school management’s discretion whether to inform the police or not of any bullying behaviour. The sentiment shared mostly amongst all the participants was that most cases do not reach the police, especially cases of bullying in the school premises such as verbal abuse and emotional abuse, as they are considered to be of lesser severity. Educator I stated:

*“There are no measures in place because the school management team is the one who is responsible for these bullying” (Educator I, School X).*

Similarly, Educator L stated that:

*“We do not have any measures in place to protect or even prevent bullying from happening in the workplace. However, I would suggest that the management should take the staff members’ complaints seriously, they should not wait for something bad to happen before they make a move. If it is the parents and learners who bully the educators, parents’ meetings need to be held with learners getting involved as well. They need to be warned and reminded the important role of the teacher in one’s life. If the abuse come from the colleagues, the perpetrators need to sign the warning letters and be arrested should the bullying behaviours continue” (Educator L, School Y).*

Educator G concurred with Educator L, as she stated:

*“The school does not have any policy for violence and bullying or does it stipulate a set of rules against bullying in the school code of conduct. Preventative measures I would suggest would be further emphasis in reminding staff and learners not to bully one another and set more clear consequences for people who go against the rule. I would encourage that safe spaces are created for people to speak up on matters concerning bullying and discomfort in the workplace”* (Educator G, School X).

One participant raised an important point which pertains the roles of the schools and the Department of Education in addressing the issue of workplace bullying. According to the participant, the responsibility to fight against workplace bullying cannot be solely placed on the school because they have limited authority and get instructions from the Department of Education. This is what the participant had to say:

*“I would not say the school does not have the measures. However, because the school remember, is guided by the Department, they cannot take actions on their own without being guided by the PAM (Personnel Administrative Measures) document from the Department of Education. So, I would suggest that in dealing with such epidemic, the school should align its policies with the Departmental policies that prevent bullying from colleagues, parents and the learners”* (Educator A, School X).

## **5.5 Summary**

This chapter presented a discussion of the main findings of the study. The study explored educators' experiences working in school environments affected by workplace bullying. These experiences were found to be primarily traumatic and harmful to the educators' mental and physical health. The negative consequences of workplace bullying jeopardised academic processes and compromised teaching and learning outcomes. Furthermore, the findings revealed that learners, parents, and the colleagues played a significant role in the prevalence and perpetuation of workplace bullying in schools. In this chapter, a diverse set of data collected from participants was presented. The findings were thoroughly interpreted to reveal patterns, insights, and nuances within the data. To authentically capture the participants' personal experiences, emotions, and perspectives, direct quotations were used. The next chapter provides a summary of the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study findings and relates them to the overall aims and objectives of the study. It also links the study's findings to broader literature on the same topic. Furthermore, this chapter provides some recommendations that are necessary to fill the gaps that were identified by the study. The study aimed to investigate the experiences of educators in government schools of Pietermaritzburg in the KwaZulu-Natal Province as victims of workplace bullying. The study objectives included: (1) to determine the motivating factors of workplace bullying in the selected schools, (2) to explore the various forms of workplace bullying the educators experience in these schools, (3) to determine the effects of workplace bullying on educators, and (4) to examine intervention strategies and recommendations that educational institutions can implement to effectively tackle workplace bullying. The Conflict theory and Ecological systems theory were utilised to explain bullying of educators in their respective places of work either by the parents, learners, colleagues, and or management. Workplace bullying could not be sufficiently explained using one single theory; thus, the researcher saw a need to employ two theories to identify and explain the phenomenon of bullying in government schools.

The conflict theory and ecological systems theory were employed to explain the findings and these theories suggest that workplace bullying is a result of several factors that include competition, the social interactions in the surrounding environment, and differences in personalities. This study was necessary, given the increasing rates of bullying in the workplace. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach. Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with educators of Pietermaritzburg who had been victims of bullying in their respective places of work. The results were presented in Chapter Five, the findings were integrated with other related scholarly literature and the theoretical framework. In the context of the findings, the limitations of the study will be discussed in this chapter.

## **6.2 Summary of the findings**

### **6.2.1 The motivating factors of workplace bullying in the selected schools**

The findings indicated that competition exists in the workplace owing to the scarcity of resources such as opportunities, promotions and attention. Most violence at work occurs because of conflict, as social interactions often lead to disagreements. Conflict is an inevitable part of working relationships, largely due to individual differences in attitudes and emotions, which frequently contribute to these tensions. This is because each person is unique and has a distinctive set of feelings and differences in opinions and feelings towards a particular topic or actual setting which can lead to conflict. It was revealed by the participants that one's upbringing is a motivating factor for conflict in the workplace. The mentality of wanting to be seen, heard and lust for power is rampant among educators.

The findings revealed that age plays a huge role in causing workplace bullying. Participants indicated that as young educators, they would be sabotaged by older colleagues. Moreover, the participants reported that the older staff would pick on them every chance they get, because of the fear that the young educators are employed at the school to replace them. Often the young educators receive belittling remarks, or in most cases, lies are made up about these educators to get everyone against them.

The study also revealed that an employee's educational background influences the prevalence of bullying in the workplace. A study by De Wet and Jacobs (2006) found that bullying occurred more frequently among workers with lower education or skill levels than those with higher qualifications. The present study found that workplace bullying was more prevalent in those individuals with higher level qualifications who were being victimised by those individuals with lower qualifications. Moreover, the study also revealed that those who possess higher qualifications were subjected to more acts of belittling and humiliation as they are labelled as 'potentially disruptive' (blocking of promotions), as the junior educators hold higher qualifications and have new knowledge on the teaching subjects. The findings also suggest that power dynamics is a factor contributing to workplace bullying. The mentality that the senior staff members are more dominant and superior to the newly employed is rampant among educators. It was revealed by the participants that personality traits also have an impact on acts of bullying. The findings suggest that low self-esteem, physical weakness, having a lack of friends, or being socially rejected can make one vulnerable to being bullied.

### **6.2.2 The various forms of workplace bullying experienced by the educators.**

This study found that the perceptions regarding the different forms of workplace bullying varied amongst the educators. This study found that the experiences of educators with their colleagues was in most instances, not pleasant. This perception was indicated by most of the educators who experienced being bullied in the hands of their co-workers. Most of the participants reported to have been victims of various bullying acts in their places of work such as public humiliation, social exclusion and psychological bullying.

### **6.2.3 The effects of workplace bullying on educators**

The study found numerous effects of workplace bullying on educators that included psychological stress, self-doubt, low self-esteem, low motivation, economic, emotional, and poor work performance. The researcher found that the participants under study reported that their professionalism was compromised as bullying incidents took place in front of their learners and that this humiliation and interruption of their teaching lessons diminished their professional image and affected their work performance. Poor work performance by educators affected learners' academic achievement. The most frequent or persistent negative acts experienced by educators under study are, for example, tasks set with unreasonable or impossible deadlines; acknowledgement and praise being withheld; excluded from decision-making; the lack of face-to-face discussions to take place; and exposure to an unmanageable workload.

The psychological impact of workplace bullying on educators as victims results in a loss of focus on their work as their psychological and mental functioning becomes overwhelmed by the violence. Many of the participants stated that they became undetermined and unmotivated to perform their best in the classrooms. Furthermore, they argued that as victims of workplace bullying, they were constantly stressed, living in fear and worrying about the possibility of being bullied at any moment. The experiences of being bullied were extreme such that one educator was compelled to make a transfer to another school. Because of being bullied the teaching and learning process was affected severely and as a result, the learners dropped academically.

Educator's personal lives were negatively impacted by acts of workplace bullying as some were traumatised, felt unsafe, and constantly in a state of panic and anxiety. This affected their everyday lives as they were constantly thinking of the worst that could happen to them. The

study also revealed that workplace bullying negatively impacted social relationships. The findings showed that the educators who were victims of workplace bullying were likely to lose self-confidence, avoid interactions with colleagues or participating in team activities or discussions due to a fear of public rejection.

#### **6.2.4 Strategic measures to address workplace bullying**

The findings indicate that to tackle workplace bullying and its effects, the schools should provide therapists for educators at the workplace, or they should be available on call at any time of the day. Many of the participants recommended having counselling sessions with the social workers or educational psychologists provided by the school or the Department of Education in assisting the victims of bullying. Moreover, it was suggested that all bullying reports or cases in the workplace should be taken more seriously. Schools should place greater emphasis on reminding staff and learners not to engage in bullying and establish clear consequences for those who violate this rule. The study findings point to the need to provide social support and counselling to both learners and educators as it is believed that learners may bully their peers or teachers because they are experiencing bullying at home. Social support and a safe space are essential for anyone who wishes to openly and safely discuss issues related to bullying in schools.

### **6.3 Recommendations by the researcher**

To improve workplace safety and comfort, interventions to lessen the impact of workplace bullying on educators are required. As a result, the researcher recommends the following interventions based on the findings of the study. The Department of Education must develop a variety of training programs on workplace safety and security. They must seek to reduce workplace bullying by implementing support structures for both the learners and educators. It is recommended that the schools should also work on creating and strengthening learner-teacher relationships and have a positive involvement with the parents. The recommendations include raising awareness of bullying and its consequences. It is recommended that the schools should also work on creating and strengthening learner-teacher relationships and have a positive involvement with the parents.

#### **6.3.1 Training programmes on school safety and security**

The findings show that there was a need for educators to be educated on the issue of workplace bullying. The Department of Education should implement education training programs on

school safety that are mandatory for all educators who join the school. This implementation of training programs could be an effective tool in addressing the issue of bullying directed at educators. South African educators should have the opportunity to receive training and education about the importance of their wellness, safety, and security in the workplace. To prevent workplace bullying, these training programs must include anti-bullying policies to protect educators from bullying and to eliminate the bullying behaviour of the learners, parents, and staff members. Having a mechanism to prevent workplace bullying is essential for educators, given its high incidence and the significant costs in time, money, and energy required to address such incidents. Only through appropriate training will educators be equipped with the necessary knowledge to carry out their duties in a manner that respects everyone. Most importantly, learning interpersonal communication skills will assist educators establish positive relationships with everyone in a school setting, lowering tension and resolving conflicts without using force.

### **6.3.2 Strengthen a positive relationship with learners and the parents**

The researcher recommends fostering positive relationships among learners, parents, and educators in the teaching and learning process. This relationship and involvement will aid in understanding and encouraging acceptable behaviours in the school setting. According to the exosystem, various systems contribute to workplace bullying, therefore in order to tackle this issue, positive relationships should be considered. Learners, parents, and educators should work together to determine the best way to deal with unacceptable behaviour. The inclusion of distinct points of view could help the school deal with bullying of educators. This is an effective strategy for addressing workplace bullying, as it ensures that everyone within the school understands that bullying is unacceptable and has serious consequences for both the victims and the educational process. If educators are impacted, teaching and learning will also be compromised.

The findings show that parents are also the perpetrators of bullying in schools. Parents would ignore their child's academic achievements, but when there is a problem with the child who is underperforming, they are quick to judge and blame the educators. According to Sibisi (2021), there is an urgent need for parents to adopt a positive attitude and take proactive steps to help their children with their education. It is recommended that parents take an interest in their children's well-being by communicating with the school about their child's behaviour and academic performance. Furthermore, parents should limit their aggression at home because this

is where children learn abusive and violent behaviours. Parents' involvement in their children's lives, as well as a positive relationship with the school, can help in correcting such behaviours.

### **6.3.3 Public awareness about workplace bullying and its consequences**

Creating public awareness of workplace bullying is critical to fostering an anti-bullying culture in workplaces. According to Suggala et al. (2020), bullies' understanding and awareness of their offending and harmful actions towards other individuals at work is very low, and thus their chances of stopping are slim. There are few people who understand the consequences of bullying, so educational institutions must raise awareness about workplace bullying and its consequences. Public awareness campaigns will educate people about bullying and its effects on victims, while also helping more individuals understand where to report such incidents. Educators who have been victims of workplace bullying and also those that have not experienced it must be made aware of the importance of reporting such incidents. Bullying against educators can be reduced by reporting it to the school or the appropriate authorities, such as SAPS. A lack of knowledge and education about bullying contributes to the escalation of this behaviour, as perpetrators may be unaware of the impact of their actions on their victims.

### **6.4 Recommendations for further studies**

Based on the findings of this study, some gaps in the workplace bullying research literature remain. While the voices of educators as victims are clearly heard in this study, studies from the point of view of those who are perceived to bully are necessary. Thus, there is a need for future studies to focus on evaluating the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies and laws, including determining whether anti-bullying laws and policies are effective in reducing bullying. Instituting laws and policies can help organisations and individuals strengthen their efforts to prevent, identify, and respond to workplace bullying. However, there is limited data on how these laws and policies affect the prevalence and consequences of workplace bullying. It is also recommended that further studies be conducted on public perceptions of workplace bullying. Such research should be conducted in deep rural areas, in which ignorance may appear to be the driving force behind workplace bullying. A study by Jacobs and De Wet (2015) indeed showed that teachers who teach in schools located in shanty towns and other deprived areas are more vulnerable to being bullied than those teachers at schools in established areas. Powell, Powell and Petrosko (2015) found that the category of school as an organisation can be a predicting factor, the researcher thus suggests that future researchers investigate workplace victimisation of educators in private schools to determine whether educators working in private

schools are prone to similar levels of workplace bullying as educators working in government schools.

### **6.5 Study limitations**

The present study had a small sample size thereby limiting the generalizability of the research findings. With fewer participants, the results may not accurately represent the larger population of educators, making it difficult to draw broad conclusions. Focusing on only two government schools restricts the diversity of experiences and perspectives represented in the study. This narrow scope may not capture the full range of dynamics that influence workplace bullying in other types of schools, such as private schools. Another limitation was that the study did not include the learners' and parents' perspectives or perceptions. It is widely acknowledged that parents as well as learners play a significant role in workplace bullying in schools. Future research is needed to address this limitation and contribute to the discourse in this area of research.

### **6.6 Conclusion**

While research on workplace bullying on educators is a relatively new field, much has been researched over the last few decades that has significantly improved evidence-based knowledge of the nature of workplace bullying and the contributing factors. The study's findings revealed that educators in government schools in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal Province, are subjected to several forms of workplace bullying, the most common of which are emotional and psychological bullying. This study found that workplace bullying has a negative impact on victims, causing physical and psychological problems such as anxiety, increased stress, sleep disturbances, depression, loss of self-esteem, and a risk of unemployment. Furthermore, workplace bullying affects educators' productivity, alters their relationships with co-workers, undermines their professionalism, and causes them to quit their jobs or transfer to other schools. High levels of workplace bullying have been found to have a negative impact on both teaching and learning. To effectively address workplace bullying and create a safer educational environment for educators and learners, interventions must be implemented at both the organisational and individual levels. The researcher made some recommendations based on the findings of the study. The researcher argued that school administrators and the Department of Education should take steps to address barriers to reporting workplace violence incidents, which would help to better understand, address, and prevent bullying and the accompanying consequences.

There is also an urgent need for counselling support, as most participants in the study consistently expressed the need for the involvement of social workers or provision of psychological services to educators. At the individual level, educators who experience workplace bullying should report all incidents, regardless of their perceived insignificance. As victims, they should get rid of the assumption that bullying is a normal part of the job and that, as a result, the perpetrator will not face any consequences. They should also get rid of the fear of negative consequences if they report bullying at work. Interventions aimed at reducing the harmful effects of workplace bullying on educators can foster a sense of safety and security, thereby enhancing the psychological well-being of those affected.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Schedule

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your highest qualification?
3. How long have you been working at the school?
4. How would you define work bullying within a school setting?
5. Why do you think educators bully each other?
6. Have you been bullied here at school and if so, for how long?
7. Could you please share with me what happened to you? When and where did it take place?
8. How did you deal with this behaviour of being bullied?
  - (i) Did you report the perpetrator to your superiors?
  - (ii) Was the matter taken seriously?
  - (iii) How did this make you feel?
9. Does workplace bullying affect your performance at work? Please elaborate.
10. Do you feel safe in your work environment?
11. Are you still experiencing this violence?
12. Does workplace bullying affect you on a personal level as well? If so, how?
13. Does your school have any intervention strategies in place to tackle workplace bullying? If not, what preventative measures would you suggest to your employers in trying to deal with this epidemic?

## **Appendix B: Imibuzo ngxoxo yo Thisha**

1. Ngabe buthini ubulili bakho?
2. Ngabe lithini izinga lakho lemfundo?
3. Usuneskhathi esingakanani usebenza ngaphakathi eskoleni?
4. Ngokwakho, ukucabanga luyini udlame lothisha ngaphakathi esikoleni?
5. Ngokucabanga kwakho ngabe yini edala loludlame kothisha?
6. Ngabe usuke wabhekana nokuhlukumezeka ngaphakathi eskoleni? Uma kunjalo kube isikhathi esingakanani?
7. Ngabe kwenzakalani, ungakwazi ukungixoxela? Kwakukuphi nendawo futhi nini?
8. Wenzenjani emvakwaloludlame?
  - (i) Ngabe wabazisa abaphathi bakho ngalendaba?
  - (ii) Ngabe bayithatha kanjani lendaba le?
  - (ii) Ngabe wazizwa unjani emvakokuyidlulisa lendaba le?
9. Ngabe uyathikimezeka emsebenzini wakho ngenxa lwaloludlame phakathi kothisha? Ngicela uchaze kabanzi.
10. Ngabe uzizwa uphephile ngaphakathi eskoleni?
11. Ngabe usabhekana nalo loludlame namanje?
12. Ngabe zikhona izingqinamba obhekana nazo zaloludlame empilweni yakho? Uma kunjalo, ngicela uchaze kabanzi.
13. Ngabe isikole sakho sinazo ezinyathelo zokulwisana nokuhlukumezeka kothisha? Uma kungenjalo, ngowakho umbono, yini engenziwa abaqashi bakho ekulwisaneni nalenkinga?

## Appendix C: Consent Letter



Consent Letter Form

July -2024

Name of the Researcher: Xolisile Charnelle Hlungwane

Student Number: 217013287

Contact details: [REDACTED]

Cell: + [REDACTED]

Name of Supervisor: Dr Nomakhosi Sibisi

Tel: +27312602401

Mail: [SibisiN@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:SibisiN@ukzn.ac.za)

DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINOLOGY & FORENSIC STUDIES

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Participation in the study on workplace bullying on Educators.

I am currently enrolled for a Master's degree in Criminology and Forensic Studies at the University of KwaZulu- Natal, Howard College Campus. Part of the requirements for awarding this degree is the successful completion of a significant research project in the field of Humanities. My research proposal is entitled "A victimological analysis on the experiences of educators in government schools as victims of workplace bullying in Pietermaritzburg". This study is therefore concerned with the investigation into the experiences of educators on workplace bullying. It is my great honour and privilege to be able to invite you as an individual to become a voluntary participant in this research project. Participation in this study would involve an interview that should take approximately 30 minutes of your time to complete. It must be emphasised that your wellbeing is of utmost importance. Therefore, while no harm is expected to happen to an educator that volunteers to complete the interview, the researcher will provide with counselling sessions that will help assist any educator who may have found the interview questions upsetting. The counselling sessions will be held by a local social worker who works close to the school who knows all the ethical aspects- that is to say, who knows that

confidentiality and privacy needs to be maintained and what is shared with them is strictly confidential and should not need to be shared to anyone else.

You will be able to withdraw at any time and will not be forced to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. Your participation is requested as you are representative of the population under study. Volunteering to take part in this research would be greatly appreciated as it will contribute to the study's findings by assisting and encouraging government institutions to improve environmental conditions within schools and, as thus, protect educators from workplace bullying.

Please note that I, as a researcher do not need to know your personal details such as names and physical addresses or telephone numbers. All information you provide in this study will be treated strictly confidential.

Please take note of and understand this;

- ❖ Your participation in this study is entirely VOLUNTARY.
- ❖ All information obtained will be treated confidentially, with no one, including the school, having access to raw data.
- ❖ When the data is published, your name or school will not be mentioned.
- ❖ The information you provide will only be used for scholarly research.
- ❖ There will be no negative consequences if you do not participate.

This research study presents a unique opportunity for you to participate in the process of exploring ways and means to improve relationships among educators, thereby preventing workplace bullying. If you decide to partake in this research study, kindly indicate this by completing the consent layout at the end of this letter.

Thank you.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION- DECLARATION**

I, -----(full name) hereby voluntarily and willingly give consent to participate as an individual in the research project introduced and explained to me by Miss X. Hlungwane, a registered Masters Student at the University of KwaZulu- Natal.

I hereby provide consent to the following:

Audio-record my interview (please tick)

YES	NO
-----	----

.....  
Signature of the participant

.....  
Date

## Appendix D: Incwadi yemvume



July 2024

\*

### Ifomu lokuvuma

**Igama lomncwaningi:** Xolisile Charlnelle Hlungwane

**Inombolo yesiskole:** 217013287

**I-imeyili:** [REDACTED]

**Inombolo yocingo:** +[REDACTED]

**Igama lomphathi:** Dr Nomakhosi Sibisi

**Inombolo yocingo:** +27312602401

**I-imeyili:** [SibisiN@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:SibisiN@ukzn.ac.za)

UMNYANGO WEZOBUGEBENGU KANYE NEZIFUNDO ZE-FORENSIC.

Mnumzane/ Nkosikazi

### Ukubamba iqhaza ocwaningweni ngokuxhashazwa koThisha emsebenzini.

Ngingumfundi owenza izifundo ze Masters ngaphansi komnyango wezobugebengu Kanye neze Forensic phecelezi, Master's degree in Criminology and Forensic Studies kwi Nyuvesi yakwaZulu-Natali. Ingxenye yokuthweswa leziziqu, kufanelekile ukuba umfundi enze ucwaningo thize ngaphansi komnyango wezemfundo akuwo. Ngenza ucwaningo **ngomthelela wodlame lokuxhashazwa ko thisha abasezikoleni zika-Hulumeni**. Ucwaningo luzokwenziwa ezikoleni ezimbili, isikole samabanga aphansi Kanye nesamabanga aphezulu. Kuyintokozo Kanye nogqozu olukhulu ukukumema kwami ukuba ungaba ingxenye yalolucwaningo. Ngithanda ukuzwa umbono wakho, okungenzeka uke wabhekana naloludlame lokuxhashazwa kothisha ngaphathi esikoleni okanye wathinteka kulona ngokulibonela kude kozakwakho.

Ngiyakuqinisekisa ukuthi imininingwane yakho ngeke ishicilelwe futhi amagama akho Kanye nesikole sakho azofihlwa.

Ngicela wazi ukuthi uma uvuma ukuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo, luzothatha isikhathi esilinganiselwa kwimizuzu engama- 30. Ukubamba kwakho iqhaza kulolucwaningo kuzosiza ekukhuthazeni izikhungo zezemfundo zika Hulumeni ekunakekeleni nokunyusa izinga lezimo zemvelo ezikoleni, kuphinde kusize nasekuvikeleni ekuxhashazweni kothisha emsebenzini. Ukuphepha kwakho kubaluleke kakhulu kumina njengomcwaningi, ingakho- ke izinsiza zokusiza laba abadinga ukusizwa emuva kokuthikimezwa imibuzo thize kuhleliwe no mluleki wezengqondo osebenza eduze kwesikole futhi owaziyo imithetho nokubaluleka kokufihlwa kwezinkinga zabantu Kanye namagama abo. Ngifisa uqonde futhi wazi lokhu, mina njengomcwaningi angidingi ukwazi imininingwane yakho egcwele, phecelezi amagama, inamba yocingo, okanye indawo ohlalakuyo.

Ngicela wazi futhi uqonde lokhu;

- ❖ Ukuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo akuphoqelekile.
- ❖ Yonke imiphumela yalolucwaningo izofihlwa.
- ❖ Yonke imininingwane eqoshiwe izogcinwa endaweni ephephile engeke ithintwe inanoma ubani ngaphandle komcwaningi Kanye nomphathi wakhe.
- ❖ Isikole Kanye namagama abantu ababambe iqhaza kuzofihlwa, lokhu kwenzelwa ukuthi kungabibikho owaziyo ukuthi ubani utheni.
- ❖ Unelungelo lokunqaba ukuba ingxenye yololucwaningo.
- ❖ Unelungelo lokunqaba ukuqala noma ukunqaba nanoma sekuqaliwe ngaphandle kokuthile okwenzeka kuwe.

Uma uvuma ukuba yingxenye yalolucwanincho, ngicela ugcalise ipheshane elingezansi kwalencwadi.

**Ngiyabonga.**

## IFOMU LOKUVUMA

Mina----- (amagama aphelele), ngiyavuma futhi mgiyazibophezela ukuthi ngibe ingxenywe okanye umhlanganeli walolucwaningo oluthulwe laphinde lachazwa kumina ngumfundi ongu, Xolisile Hlungwane owenza izifundo ze Masters kwi Nyuvesi yakwaZulu-Natali.

Ngiyavuma ukuthi:

Izwi lami liqoshwe (✓)

YEBO	CHA
------	-----

.....

Sayina

.....

Usuku

## Appendix E: Ethical clearance approval letter



07 June 2024

Xolisile Charnelle Hlungwane (217013287)  
School of Applied Human Sc  
Howard College Campus

Dear XC Hlungwane,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00006818/2024  
Project title: A victimological analysis on the experiences of educators in government schools as victims of workplace bullying in the KwaZulu-Natal  
Degree: Masters

### Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 31 May 2024 to our letter of 10 May 2024 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

**This approval is valid for one year until 07 June 2025**  
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours faithfully



.....  
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)  
/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Tel: +27 31 260 8380 / 4557 / 3587  
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## Appendix F: Counselling Services

### **KWA-XIMBA OUTREACH PROGRAMME**

PHYSICAL ADDRESS: KWAXIMBA ESIWENI AREA,

EMVITHINI STOP, CATO RIDGE, 3680

POSTAL ADDRESS: P.BOX 476

CATO RIDGE, 3680

REG.NO. 0

CONTACT DETAILS: [REDACTED]

"Asibathande, asibasize, asibanakekele -Loving, helping and caring for the community"

January 2024

### **TO WHO OT MAY CONCERN**

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter serve to confirm that as KwaXimba Outreach Programme has granted Xolile Charinelle Hlungwane approval to refer her participants for counselling sessions at our organisation under supervision of social worker Miss Simangele Thulile Mhlophe as she is conducting case study on work place bullying on educators working in the environment prone to violence.

For any enquiring please contact us on the following details email:

[REDACTED] Cell phone number: [REDACTED]

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours sincerely

**KWAXIMBA OUTREACH PROGRAMME:**

**P.O. BOX 476**

**CATO RIDGE 3680**

**DATE:** 12/01/2024

**SIGN:** [REDACTED]

## Appendix G: Gatekeepers letter from the school principals

**Approval to Conduct Research**

15 July 2024

Dear Ms Xolisile Hlungwane,

This letter serves to confirm that I, [REDACTED] (Full names of the principal) of [REDACTED] (School name) have read through the brief description of the focus of the research study you wish to undertake. I understand all the information I have received and explained to me and hereby permit you to conduct research with educators in my school and for the school to be part of the study. I understand that the educators of this school will be participating voluntarily in the study and that there will be no penalties for refusing to participate or withdrawing at any time should they desire to.

Signature of Principal: [REDACTED]

Date: 15/07/2024

[REDACTED] HIGH SCHOOL  
School Stamp  
2024 -07- 17  
[REDACTED]

Approval to Conduct Research

---July 2024

Dear Ms Xolisile Hlungwane,

This letter serves to confirm that, I, [Redacted] (Full names of the principal) of [Redacted] (School name) have read through the brief description of the focus of the research study you wish to undertake. I understand all the information I have received and explained to me and hereby permit you to conduct research with educators in my school and for the school to be part of the study. I understand that the educators of this school will be participating voluntarily in the study and that there will be no penalties for refusing to participate or withdrawing at any time should they desire to.

[Redacted Signature]

Date  
22/07/2024

School Stamp

[Redacted] PRIMARY SCHOOL  
2024 -07- 23  
[Redacted]  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## Appendix H: Gatekeepers letter from DOE



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**  
EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X 9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201  
Email: buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za Tel: 033 392 1051

Ref No.: 2/18/126

Enquiries: Mrs B. T. Ntuli

Ms Xolisile Charlnelle Hlungwane

3680

Dear Ms Hlungwane

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"A VICTIMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS OF IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS AS VICTIMS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING IN THE KWAZULU-NATAL:"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from **15 March 2024 to 31 August 2026**.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

**Mr G.N. Ngcobé**  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 15 March 2024

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

## Appendix I: Language Editor's certificate



Mufasa Research Consultancy

SERVING WITH DISTINCTION

02 December 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

**Re: Editor's Letter**

**A VICTIMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS AS VICTIMS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING IN PIETERMARITZBURG**

Below is the scope considered during language editing of the above titled manuscript:

- Grammar check
- Sentence construction
- Spelling check
- Punctuation
- In-text referencing
- Formatting/document layout

As a professional editor, I pledge that the above aspects of the dissertation were, to the best of my knowledge, meticulously and correctly done at the time the work was sent to the candidate. However, I am not responsible for any corrections that were made after the editing process finalised.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted Signature]

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Appendix J: Turnitin Similarity report

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