
Teacher-on-learner violence as norm violations: Findings from a qualitative media study

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Abstract

This qualitative study uses 68 carefully selected South African English language newspaper articles as textual data to investigate teacher-on-learner violence in South African schools. This article is underpinned by the norm violation theory and positioned within an interpretivist research paradigm. The article aims to answer two research questions: (1) What is interpersonal teacher-on-learner violence? (2) What are the reasons for teacher-on-learner violence? The findings indicate that some South African teachers are guilty of physical, sexual and emotional teacher-on-learner violence. The study additionally found that stakeholders justify the administration of corporal punishment on cultural and religious grounds as well as their unfamiliarity with alternative disciplinary strategies. The perpetrators of sexual violence place the blame for their transgressions on their victims' alleged provocative demeanour and attire. Findings furthermore suggest that consensual sex between teachers and their learners are acceptable in some South African communities. I argue that the destructive interpersonal relationship between South African teachers and their learners is a violation of Christian and secular norms and values guiding teacher-learner relationships. Implications and recommendations for research and practice are suggested.

Opsomming

Onderwyser-op-leerdergeweld as normskending: Bevindinge van 'n kwalitatiewe mediastudie

Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie gebruik 68 noukeurig gekose Suid-Afrikaanse Engelstalige koerantartikels as teksdata om navorsing oor onderwyser-op-leerdergeweld te doen. Die artikel word deur die normskendingteorie begrend en binne die interpretiewe navorsingsparadigma geplaas. Die doel van die artikel is om twee navorsingsvrae te beantwoord: (1) Wat is interpersoonlike onderwyser-op-leerdergeweld? (2) Wat is die redes vir onderwyser-op-leerdergeweld? Die studie het bevind dat sommige Suid-Afrikaanse onderwysers hulle skuldig maak aan fisieke, seksuele en emosionele onderwyser-op-leerdergeweld. Die studie het ook bevind dat deelhebbers die toediening van lyfstraf op grond van kulturele en godsdienstige redes, asook hulle gebrek aan kennis van alternatiewe dissiplinêre strategieë regverdig. Diegene wat skuldig is aan seksuele misdrywe teen leerders, plaas die skuld vir hulle oortredings op hulle slagoffers se beweerde uitlokkende houding en kleredrag. Bevindinge dui voorts daarop dat konsensuele seks tussen onderwysers en hulle leerders in sommige Suid-Afrikaanse gemeenskappe as aanvaarbare gedrag beskou word. Ek voer aan dat die afbrekende interpersoonlike verhouding tussen onderwysers en hulle leerders 'n skending van Christelike en sekulêre norme en waardes wat onderwyser-leerderverhouding hoort te rig, is. Implikasies en aanbevelings vir navorsing en praktyk word uitgelig.

Keywords:

content analysis; corporal punishment; norm violation theory; school violence; South Africa

Sleutelwoorde:

inhoudanalise; lyfstraf; normskendingteorie; skoolgeweld; Suid-Afrika

1. Introduction

Education is fundamentally an enabling, equipping and guiding process. Thus, it is important for teachers to create and

hold open, a dialogic, dialogic and safe pedagogical sanctuary for their learners where they can enable the learners each to choose a personal way of realising what they value in themselves and in other (Van der Walt, Wolhuter & Potgieter, 2015:7).

Van der Walt *et al.* (2015:8) emphasise the need for teachers “to establish a community that shares inspiration, passion and compassion”. They (*ibid*) argue that “without compassion that breeds understanding, teaching and learning cannot enable, liberate, transcend, and capitalise on the vitality of young lives”. According to Wolhuter, Van der Walt and Potgieter (2013:3) a compassionate teacher is a “typically excellent teacher”. Such a teacher may, among other things, be aware of the emotional needs of learners, exhibit charismatic characteristics, uphold discipline and order, are non-threatening in the classroom and are able to guide learners to develop to their fullest potential. From a Christian perspective Oosthuizen, Wolhuter and Du Toit (2003:460) write that the “true” teacher is “prepared to lead their learners through the process of modelling”. According to them, the teacher must model “discipleship in order to invite learners to follow along” (Oosthuizen *et al.*, 2003:460). South African teachers hold an *in loco parentis* position towards learners under their supervision. Acting “in the place of a parent ... they have a duty of care to ensure the safety of learners under their supervision” (Serame, Oosthuizen, Wolhuter & Zulu, 2013:1).

Research on school violence (Aras, Özan, Timbil, Semin & Kasapci, 2016:303-309; Da Silva & Da Silva, 2018:472-473; Longobardi, Orino, Fabris & Settanni, 2019:49-58; McEachern, Aluede & Kenny, 2008:3-6), annual reports by the South African Council of Educators (SACE) (2018a:19 & 2019:21) and newspaper articles (Dawood, 2017:2; Naki, 2018:6; Selapisa, 2017:3) highlight the fact that teachers are failing to create a safe, empathetic pedagogical sanctuary for learners who are placed under their care. Teachers are not only failing to protect learners from their peers, but they are the perpetrators of acts of violence. Journalists use words such as “shocking ... unacceptable” (Dawood, 2017:2), “outrage” (Ishmail, 2019:1), and “disgust and pain” (Kgosana & Hlatshaneni, 2017:5) when they write about teacher-on-learner violence in South African schools. During 2018-2019 SACE (2019:21) reported 295 incidences of corporal punishment and 141 acts of sexual misconduct by teachers against learners. The numbers for the previous year (SACE, 2018a:19) were 253 and 78 respectively. Thus,

there seems to be a discord between what is supposed to be the relationship between the empathetic, “typical excellent teacher” and his/her learners, and what is happening in some schools. This discord has a serious negative influence on teaching and learning (Mncube & Harber, 2012:4-5).

In this article I argue that the destructive interpersonal relationship between South African teachers and their learners is a violation of Section 7 of the Bill of Rights (Van der Walt & Oosthuizen, 2014:6), core Christian values (English Standard Version Bible (ESV), 2016: Galatians 5:22-26) as well as norms guiding teacher-learner relations (Apressyan, 2016:456; Van der Walt & Oosthuizen, 2014:4). I present the argument against the background of an elucidation of the concept interpersonal teacher-on-learner violence, a short overview of research on teacher-on-learner violence and findings from a qualitative media analysis aimed at answering the following two research questions: What is interpersonal teacher-on-learner violence? What are the reasons for teacher-on-learner violence?

2. Concept clarification

Nkuba, Hermenau, Goessmann and Hecker (2018:1) define violence against children as “any act that is intended to cause some degree of pain for the purposes of correction or controlling children’s behaviour”. The literature distinguishes between emotional, physical and sexual teacher-on-learner violence. The ensuing paragraph gives insight into the diversity of negative acts researchers associate with the three groupings of teacher-on-learner violence. The variety of negative acts emphasise the evolving nature of this subset of school violence. Teacher-on-learner violence is not restricted to specific negative acts. On the contrary, it seems as if amoral teachers are continuously looking for and finding new ways to abuse learners and deprive them of their dignity.

Aluede, Ojugo and Okoza (2012:29-39) investigate emotional teacher-on-learner abuse. They list the following as examples of emotional teacher-on-learner abuse: rejection, discrimination, domination, degradation, terrorising children, isolation, ignoring children and verbal attacks. Aras *et al.* (2016:306) differentiate between emotional and physical teacher-on-learner violence. They list the following as forms of emotional teacher-on-learner violence in their questionnaire: shouting, scaring, discrimination, humiliation, “finding [the respondents] insufficient compared to their friends”, mocking or teasing and “being called by an undesired nickname or name”. Aras *et al.* (2016:306) include the following as examples of teacher-on-learner physical violence:

pulling ears, “hitting with a ruler, stick, etc.”, beating, “locking [the respondents] somewhere or throwing them out” and throwing “something” at the learner. Da Silva and Da Silva (2018:473) analysed 92 masters’ and doctoral dissertations on school violence in Brazil. They found two broad groups of teacher-on-learner violence: physical violence and verbal abuse. Da Silva and Da Silva (2018:480) identified the following as examples of teacher-on-learner violence: “threats, humiliations, prejudice, authoritarianism, punishment, discrimination, insults, intimidations, constraints, coldness, exclusion, curing, bad language, omission, teachers bullying, neglect, and values imposition.” Longobardi *et al.* (2019:56) distinguish between physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Their questionnaire included 19 items denoting acts of physical, 12 of emotional and 10 of sexual violence. The following are three examples of physical learner-on-teacher abuse included in Longobardi *et al.*’s (2019:56) survey: “Twisted your ear as a punishment”. “Washed your mouth with something like soap or put something like pepper in your mouth”. “Made you stand/kneel in a way that hurts to punish you”. The following two examples of emotional abuse included in Longobardi *et al.*’s (2019:56) sufficiently illustrates this type of violence: “Threatened you with bad marks that you didn’t deserve”. “Shouted at you to embarrass or humiliate you”. Only two of the 10 items of sexual abused included in Longobardi *et al.*’s (2019:56) survey got a positive response from the learner-participants: “Showed you pictures, magazines, or movies of people or children doing sexual things”. “Opened or took their own clothes off in front of you when they should not have done so”. Chen and Wei (2011:386) distinguish between physical (“hit, beat or slap” and “kick”), emotional (“mock, insult or humiliate” and “curse”) and sexual (“make sexual comments/jokes” and “touch/kiss or try to touch/kiss”) teacher-on-learner violence.

3. Research on teacher-on-learner violence

Most research on school violence focuses on learner-on-learner violence. However, since the 1980s there was a growing awareness among researchers that teachers are abusing children placed under their care. Krugman and Krugman (1984:284-286) and Olweus (1999:22-48) initially did research on the topic. Consequent research shows that teacher-on-learner violence is a worldwide problem. Researchers found that teacher-on-learner violence is prevalent in countries such as South Africa (Mncube & Harber, 2012:1), Turkey (Aras *et al.*, 2016:303), Cyprus (Theoklitou, Kabitsis & Kabitsi, 2011:64-67), Italy (Longobardi *et al.*, 2019:49–58), Norway (Olweus, 1999:22), United States of America (USA) (Krugman & Krugman, 1984:284-

286), Brazil (Da Silva & Da Silva, 2018:472), Tanzania (Nkuba *et al.*, 2018:2), Nigeria (Aluede *et al.*, 2012:29-39), Zimbabwe (Shumba, 2009:19), Ethiopia (Altinyelken & Le Mat, 2018:651), Israel (Khoury-Kassabri, 2012:128; Khoury-Kassabri, Astor & Benbenishty, 2008:1-8) and Taiwan (Chen & Wei, 2011:382-390).

The following summary of research findings of a few studies on the prevalence of teacher-on-learner violence underline the seriousness of the problem as well as researchers' preference for survey studies. A small-scale survey study among Turkish learners found that 59.4% and 42.9% of the respondents (n=434) were subjected to teacher-on-learner emotional and physical violence respectively (Aras *et al.*, 2016:306). A large scale (n=27 316) Israeli study found that 28.3% of the learner-participants were victims of emotional teacher-on-learner violence. A small percentage reported being victims of physical (14.9%) and sexual (7.6%) violence (Khoury-Kassabri *et al.*, 2008:4). A third of the 382 Arab homeroom teachers, who took part in Khoury-Kassabri's (2012:130) survey, acknowledged that they were guilty of physical and one fifth of emotional teacher-on-learner violence during the month preceding the study. A study on the physical and emotional abuse of primary school children in Cyprus (n=1 339), found that learners were subjected to neglect (52.9%), as well as emotional (33.1%) and physical (9.6%) teacher-on-learner abuse (Theoklitou *et al.*, 2011:67). Da Silva and Da Silva's (2018:476-480) bibliographic research revealed that in nearly 20% of the studies teachers were found to be guilty of acts of violence against their learners. A study among 1 559 Nigerian secondary school learners found that large percentages of the participants were subjected to the following forms of teacher-on-learner emotional abuse: terrorizing learners (86.2%), domination (83.3%), discrimination (82.8%), rejection (74.7%) and verbal abuse (74.1%) (Aluede *et al.*, 2012:34). A study by Chen and Wei (2011:385) among 1 376 junior-high school learners in Taiwan found that 26.9% of the respondents were victims of teacher-on-learner violence. More than a fifth (21.6%) were victims of some form of physical violence while 11.6% and 5.1% were victims of emotional and sexual violence respectively. Being hit, slapped or beaten by teachers was the most frequent form of teacher-on-learner violence.

4. Norm violation theory

This article is underpinned by the norm violation theory. According to this theory “norm violation occurs when an individual’s behaviour falls outside of the range of acceptable behaviour and is inappropriate or deviant relative to the context” (McPherson, Kearney & Plax, 2003:77). Norms are by definition “situationally-based standards for behaviour that prescribe certain actions” (McPherson *et al.*, 2003:77). Standards of behaviour for teachers are often entrenched in teachers’ codes of conduct (SACE, 2018b:4), legislation (RSA, 1998: Article 17[1] & RSA, 2007: Articles 14 & 16), and/or presented in lists of what is supposed to be the characteristics of the ideal teacher (Predoiu, Tüdös, Predoiu, Grigore & Popescu, 2018:32-33). These standards of behaviour often focus on teacher-learner relations. Within a broader South African context, Section 10 of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996: Section 10) should guide teacher-learner relations: “everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected”. Van der Walt (2015:85) notes that “respect” is a synonym for human dignity, and argues that “in a democracy, even the lowliest criminal or beggar is worthy of respectful treatment”. This supports the notion that teachers should treat their learners with respect. If not, they are in violation of the norms that should guide their behaviour towards those whom they are supposed to be in an *in loco parentis* relationship. Teachers have a duty of care toward their learners. This duty “demands” teachers to protect learners from “possible harm”, including physical, emotional and sexual violence perpetrated by themselves, colleagues or fellow learners (De Wet, 2013:27). In this article, I argue that perpetrators of teacher-on-learner violence are violating secular norms of trust and respect (Van der Walt & Oosthuizen, 2014:2), the Golden Rule of Ethics, treat others as you wanted to be treated (Apressyan, 2016:461), and the Christian command “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (ESV, 2016: Matthew 7:12). From a Christian perspective, I additionally argue that teacher-on-learner violence is violations of the core Christian values found in Galatians 5:22-26 (ESV, 2016):

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

5. Research methodology

This qualitative research study is positioned within an interpretivist research paradigm. As an interpretivist researcher, I believe “reality is subjective, multiple and socially constructed” (Dean, 2018:3). This article focuses on journalists’ reporting of incidence of teacher-on-learner violence and aims to give insight into this phenomenon through an analysis of selected newspaper articles.

I used document collection as a data collection technique. I used newspaper articles as textual data to investigate teacher-on-learner violence in South African schools. Newspaper articles are important public records that convey news that has a current interest (Jacobs, 2014:2). I used South African (SA) Media as a database for identifying newspaper articles on violence between learners and teachers. Using “teacher” and “violence” as keywords, I identified 1 730 English language newspaper articles published during the period 1 June 2015 to 30 November 2019. The database organises articles in order of “relevance”. I sped-read through the first 620 newspaper articles. I downloaded only the 126 articles that I perceived to be relevant for my topic, namely newspaper articles focusing on violence in schools where teachers are either the perpetrators or the victims. I worked through the downloaded newspaper articles. Most of the downloaded articles (65) report on teachers as perpetrators of violence against learners. In 54 of the articles, teachers are the victims of violence involving learners. Three articles focus on both teacher-on-learner and learner-on-teacher violence. One article reports on workplace bullying in schools. Three of the articles describe incidences of violent crimes against teachers outside the realm of schools, for example, gangsters or criminals threatening teachers (e.g., Sobuwa, 2018:2). Findings from this article, in line with the aim of the article, originate from the 65 newspaper articles that focus on teacher-on-learner violence and the three articles that report on teachers as victims and perpetrators; thus, the total number of articles used for the data analysis was 68.

I used qualitative content analysis, “a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarises message content” as research method (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:101). I followed Nieuwenhuis’ (2007:178) directives for qualitative analysis to reduce, condense and group the content of the 68 articles. I carefully read each article (data) and divided it into meaningful segments or codes. Thereafter I combined related codes into themes or categories. Subsequently I revisited all the articles to ensure that I have captured all the important insights and that I have “not added an incorrect slant or misinterpretation to the data” (Nieuwenhuis, 2009:101).

Initially, I identified four broad themes: what is teacher-on-learner violence, the reasons for teacher-on-learner violence, the effects of teacher-on-learner violence on the victims and possible solutions to the problem. In line with its stated aim, this article focuses on two of the four broad themes, namely what is teacher-on-learner violence and the reasons for teacher-on-learner violence.

Trustworthiness is “of the utmost importance in qualitative research” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:113). I did the following to increase the trustworthiness of my study: I chose my quotes carefully. If necessary, I contextualised the quotation and I avoided generalisations (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:115). I placed the findings from the current study within the existing body of knowledge on teacher-on-learner violence (Patton, 2002:556).

6. Findings and discussion

In my effort to answer the two research questions, I will present and interpret findings emanating from the data (newspaper articles) and place the findings from my study within the existing body of knowledge. The latter is an accepted qualitative research practice for the enhancement of the integrity of qualitative research.

6.1 *What is teacher-on-learner violence?*

Guided by the literature (cf. 2), I identified three broad categories of teacher-on-learner violence, namely physical, sexual and emotional violence.

6.1.1 *Physical violence*

The findings of this study indicate that teachers physically abuse their learners. Whereas the consulted newspapers focus on corporal punishment as a form of physical teacher-on-learner violence, the data additionally reveal that learners are subjected to physical violence that are motivated by something else than teachers’ desire to punish misconduct.

Corporal punishment is legally prohibited in most parts of Europe, the majority of states in the USA as well as countries such as Australia, Canada (Cheruvalath & Tripathi, 2015:127), Pakistan (Mirza & Ali, 2014:97), India (Malak, Sharma & Depeler, 2015:1325), Israel (Khoury-Kassabri, 2012:128) and South Africa (Mncube & Harber, 2012:1; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013:5; Rossouw, 2003:414). Notwithstanding this ban, studies (De Witt & Lessing, 2013:7; Ncontsa

& Shumba, 2013:5; Malak *et al.*, 2015:1328–1338; Mirza & Ali, 2014:103; Nkuba *et al.*, 2018:2) found that corporal punishment is still used as a disciplinary strategy all over the world. Findings from the current study is in line with the above-mentioned research findings. A reading of the newspaper articles revealed that corporal punishment is a common disciplinary strategy in South African schools (n=25 of 68 articles) (Adriaanse, 2017:3; Daily Dispatch, 2019:7; Davids, 2019:8; Hlati, 2017:2; Kubheka, 2018a:1; Maphumulo 2017:1; Mbabela & Butler, 2015:1; Wolhuter, 2017:5).

The following subthemes emerged from my data analysis regarding corporal punishment:

- *The ruthless nature of the thrashing of learners:* Several newspaper articles emphasise the severity of this form of teacher-on-learner violence (n=17 of 68 articles). In an article published in *Daily Dispatch* (2019:7) reference is made of a teacher beating an Eastern Cape girl so severely that both her legs were covered in purple, blue and red bruises. *Daily Dispatch* (2019:7) furthermore reports on a female learner who received 61 lashes from two teachers. They broke her hand in the process. A teacher at a primary school in Gugulethu brutally whipped a child with a pipe. A week later her fingertips were still swollen (Hlati, 2017:2). The pitiless nature of the thrashings highlighted in the newspaper articles is in line with findings by Mncube and Harber (2012:60). A relatively large percentage of the learners who took part in Mncube and Harber's (2012:60) study and indicated that their teachers beat them, namely 41%, were injured and had to seek medical attention.
- *The inability of the victims to defend themselves:* It seems from the data that some of the learners are at the mercy of their attackers (n=12 of 68 articles). In Maphumulo's (2017:1) article, he describes what he has seen on a video: a male teacher "repeatedly" caned a female learner who tries "to escape the onslaught". The teacher "drags the learner into the classroom ... and continues with the beating ... the victim is heard screaming in pain and being stripped of her jersey as she tries to make another escape from her teacher". Wolhuter (2017:5) likewise reports on a video in which "a male teacher [is seen] violently thrashing a child and throwing her around in his classroom".

- *Bystanders as onlookers and interveners (n=13 of 68 articles)*: Maphumulo (2017:1) reports on the pitiless beating of a learner by her teacher. According to Maphumulo (2017:1) the thrashing continued until another teacher came into the classroom and prevented the continuation of the onslaught by standing between the teacher and the learner. Mtshali and Van Zyl (2015:6) report that three classmates who tried to help a victim, were “left bruised and their school shirts were torn”. A female teacher from Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) is seen on a video “laying into a teenage girl with a stick or pipe, as the rest of the class screams and shouts” (Wolhuter, 2017:5).
- *The public nature of the learners’ thrashings*: It emerged from the analysed articles that most of the thrashings of learners took place in classrooms in the presence of classmates (n=11 of 68 articles). Classmates, who captured these thrashings on their cell phones, posted their videos on social media (Daily Dispatch, 2019:7; Kgosana & Hlatshaneni, 2017:5; Mbabela & Butler, 2015:1; Mtshali & Van Zyl 2015:6; Rall, 2017:13; Kubheka, 2018b:1). The public nature of the thrashings intensifies learners’ humiliation.

Teachers’ merciless whipping of defenceless learners, the public nature of these whippings and teachers and learners’ unwillingness or inability to prevent the abusive conduct of the teacher, highlight the power imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator. The newspapers portray the whipping teachers as power-hungry, out-of-control individuals whose “behaviour falls outside of the range of acceptable behaviour and is inappropriate or deviant” (McPherson *et al.*, 2003:77). The teachers reported on in the analysed newspaper articles (data) have forsaken norms guiding teacher-learner relations (cf. SACE, 2018b:4) and have discarded secular and Christian norms guiding interpersonal relations.

This study found that corporal punishment is not the only form of teacher-on-learner physical violence. The following are examples of how teachers physically abused and humiliated their learners: Teachers angrily slapped (Davids, 2019:8; Germaner, 2018:4; Mashaba, 2016:1; Ramothwala, 2019a:2; Tswana, 2019:1; Ishmail 2019:1) or punched (Masuku, 2018:3) their learners in front of their classmates, stomped on learners’ feet (Germaner, 2018:4) and/or pushed learners onto the floor or against the wall (Masuku, 2018:3). I came across

two articles reporting on teachers stabbing their learners: Whereas the one teacher stabbed a Grade 12 learner in the chest (Monama, 2016:2), the other teacher stabbed and injured a 5-year-old Grade R learner (Ramothwala, 2019b:2). The following gives insight into the mercilessness, unloving nature of some of the attacks: A 10-year-old girl from the East Rand was allegedly “physically thrown out of class [and] on her fall, she hit the door frame and lost two teeth as a result” (Selapisa, 2016:3). Kunene (2017:15) reports on a teacher attacking a 12-year-old boy whom he found in an altercation with a fellow learner. Kunene (2017:15) quoted the mother of the boy: “The teacher walked in and grabbed my son by the collar, threw him across the classroom and kicked him before dragging him to his class teacher”. The inappropriate, out-of-control conduct of the teachers referred to in this paragraph is a violation of norms guiding teacher-learner relations (e.g. SACE, 2018b:4) as well as Christian values guiding my discussion (ESV, 2016: Galatians 5:22–25; ESV, 2016: Matthew 7:12).

The findings of this study indicate that there are teachers who are abandoning their *in loco parentis* responsibilities: instead of acting compassionately and looking after the best interest of learners, they are either instigating learner-on-learner violence or ignoring incidences of violence. A teacher allegedly forced a 12-year-old Grade 6 boy into a fistfight with a classmate in front of the entire class. After the fight, the teacher allegedly told the boys “that this was the way to solve problems” (Wildenboer, 2017:2). When the boy arrived home that afternoon his face was covered in bruises and blue marks (Wildenboer, 2017:2). Mbabela and Butler (2015:1) write about teachers who reward learners with money if they punched “a problem child”.

Countries worldwide banned corporal punishment as a disciplinary strategy. Yet this study found that teachers misuse their power and brutally beat those who they are supposed to care for under the pretext of disciplining misbehaving learners. This study moreover found that the thrashing of children is but one of many forms of teacher-on-learner physical violence. Whereas previous research (cf. 3) found that physical teacher-on-learner violence is not a serious problem, the current study placed physical teacher-on-learner violence on the forefront. This can be attributed to the type of extant data that I have used. Newspaper articles are not produced for the sake of research, but for its newsworthiness (Jacobs, 2014:2).

6.1.2 Sexual violence

Sexual violence is defined as

any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002:149).

The analysed newspaper articles abound with examples of teacher-on-learner sexual violence (n=27 of 68 articles). I identified four distinct subthemes, namely perpetrators targeted multiple victims (n=14 of 68 articles), teachers brutally raped their learners (n=21 of 68 articles), sex between teachers and their learners are allegedly consensual (n=5 of 68 articles) and the immortalisation of the perpetrators' sexual exploits on cell phone videos (n=4 of 68 articles). Two examples of each are given below:

- *Multiple victims*: Naki (2018:6) reports for example on a KZN teacher who “had impregnated five pupils from different schools in the region over the past five years”. A water polo coach molested more than thirty learners from Parktown Boys’ High School (Germaner, 2018:4).
- *Teachers brutally raped their learners*: An incident of a KZN school principal who allegedly “invited other teachers to gang-rape a learner” was captured on a cell phone video (Kgosana & Hlatshaneni, 2017:5). A Plettenberg Bay teacher was arrested for allegedly sexually assaulting a 10-year-old boy (Stander, 2018:4).
- *Claims of consensual sexual relations between teachers and their learners*: While Selapisa (2017:3) makes reference of teachers who were “romantically involved with pupils”, Dawood (2017:2) reports that parents told him that sexual relations between teachers and learners are common occurrences.
- *The immortalisation of teachers’ sexual exploits*: In some of the articles mention is made of the fact that the sexual exploits of the teachers were immortalised on cell phone videos. These videos went viral – thus increasing the victims’ humiliation (e.g., Kgosana & Hlatshaneni, 2017:5; Mashaba, 2018:2). The following is illustrative of the vulgarity of “sex pest teachers” (Govender, 2017:9; Mashigo, 2017:5): A teacher took photos of a primary school girl’s private parts (Hoo, 2017:5) and a 33-year-old teacher sent nude pictures of himself to a 14-year-old girl at his school (Dawood, 2017:2).

Sexual acts between a teacher and his/her learner are prohibited by law (RSA, 1998: Article 17[1] & RSA, 2007: Articles 14 & 16), as well as the Code of Professional Ethics (SACE, 2018b:4) whether or not it is consensual or the learner is over the age of 18. Yet, this study found newspapers often report on the sexual abuse of learners by their teachers. Fear of criminal charges or dismissal due to serious misconduct are not deterring teachers from committing sexual offences. Perpetrators of teacher-on-learner sexual violence disregard all norms guiding acceptable teacher-learner relationships.

6.1.3 Emotional violence

According to McEachern *et al.* (2008:4) there is not a generally acceptable definition of emotional abuse. They found that academics perceive emotional abuse to be relentless verbal abuse, intolerant criticism, belittlement, extreme demands on a child's performance and/or withholding affection and warmth. Theoklitou *et al.*'s (2011:64) definition encapsulates these negative acts and highlights the effects thereof on the child's growth. They define emotional abuse as

the production of psychological and social deficits in the growth of a child as a result of erroneous behaviour such as for example loud yelling, coarse and rude attitude, inattention, harsh criticism [and] the denigration of the child's personality.

The majority of the analysed newspaper articles reported on sexual or physical teacher-on-learner violence. This study, however, identified intimidations (n=2 of 68 articles), racism (n=3 of 68 articles), neglect (n=1 of 68 articles) and isolation (n=1 of 68 articles) as manifestations of emotional abuse.

- Whereas Mabena (2019:4) writes about a teacher who was wielding a gun in class while he was invigilating a Grade 11 examination, Mashaba (2016:1) reports on a female secondary school teacher threatening a boy with a knife: "I will stab you ... I will kill you, do you hear me?" Teachers who deliberately set off fear among their learners, deny learners a safe sanctuary in which teaching and learning can blossom.
- Despite the democratisation of South Africa, teacher-on-learner racism still seems to be an issue in some schools. A teacher from Parktown Boys' High school resigned "as a result of racist, derogatory, abusive and violence-inciting comments that he made (at a number of pupils) during a lesson" (Germaner, 2018:4). According to a former teacher of a Port Elizabeth primary school,

learners at that school are often subjected to “extreme racism” and hurtful name-calling (Mbabela & Butler, 2015:1). The SACE-report (2019:21) shows a marginal increase in the number of racism incidents in South African schools from nine to 11 when comparing the 2018 and 2019 reports (SACE, 2018a:19 & 2019:21). The 11 incidents of racism represent 1.4% of the 764 incidents of teacher-on-learner abuse reported during the 2018/2019 book years. Regardless of the small increase in incidence (SACE, 2018a:19 & 2019:21) and a scarcity of reports on racism in the analysed newspaper articles, any act of racism should be condemned. Racism is “a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2020). This belief or doctrine is in contravention of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996: Section 10) and the child’s right to dignity and respect.

- Mbabela and Butler (2015:1) identified neglect as a serious form of teacher-on-learner violence: Teachers send learners out to the field to play instead of teaching them. This often ended in fights breaking out under the unsupervised learners. According to the person with whom the journalists conducted an interview, the “staff are entangled in their own personal dramas and their school work is neglected”. A prerequisite for noteworthy teaching and learning to take place, are compassionate, dedicated and hardworking teachers who are willing to walk the extra mile for their learners, not lazy, negligent and/or disinterested teachers. The above-mentioned examples of neglect are in clear violation of professional norms guiding teacher conduct. The SACE’s *Code of Professional Ethics* (SACE, 2018b:4) states that teachers may “not [be] negligent or indolent in the performance of his or her professional duties”.
- Kunene (2019:1) writes about a teacher who locked an 8-year-old boy, who did not finish his homework, inside a classroom. The boy had to spend the night in the classroom. The teacher who locked the boy inside a classroom overnight, emotionally and physically abused the child. The fear of an 8-year-old boy, spending the night alone in a school, is inconceivable. It should be condemned and considered a violation of Christian and secular norms guiding teacher-learner relations as well as the core Christian values of love, kindness, goodness and gentleness (ESV, 2016: Galatians 5:22-26).

Even though a quantitative study by Aluede *et al.* (2012:35) highlighted the pervasiveness of emotional teacher-on-learner violence, McEachern *et al.* (2008:3-4) found that there is a scarcity of empirical studies on the topic. Data used in this study may also have understated the prevalence of emotional teacher-on-learner violence. This under-emphasis could be attributed to my data source (newspaper articles focus on what is newsworthy, are often sensationalistic in nature and do not focus on the frequency of occurrences) and the fact that I followed a qualitative rather than a quantitative research approach.

6.2 Reasons for teacher-on-learner violence

Guided by the literature and data, I identified three broad categories of teacher-on-learner violence, namely physical, sexual and emotional violence. In my search for answers to the second research question, namely what are the reasons for teacher-on-learner violence, I failed to identify any reasons for emotional teacher-on-learner violence. The ensuing exposition of findings on the reasons for teacher-on-learner violence accordingly concentrates on possible reasons for physical and sexual violence.

6.2.1 Reasons for physical violence

Newspapers reporting on teacher-on-learner physical violence (n=25 of 68 articles) exposed what seems to be the harsh use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary strategy (n=17 of 68 articles). Teachers often hold the victims and/or situation outside their control responsible for their decision to beat children. For example, this study found that teachers administered corporal punishment when learners did not attend extra classes (Daily Dispatch, 2019:7), failed to do their assignments (Ramohtwala, 2019a:2), were “caught talking during a lesson” (Selapisa, 2016:3), disregarded direct orders from teachers (Davids, 2019:8) or back chatting (Ishmail, 2019:1; Tswana, 2019:1).

The data analysis furthermore identified the following as a reason why some teachers still use corporal punishment as disciplinary strategy: Lack of professional training in the use of alternative non-punitive disciplinary strategies leave teachers with no alternative than to turn to corporal punishment when learners misbehave (n=5 of 68 articles) (cf. Adriaanse, 2017:3; Kgosana & Hlatshaneni, 2017:5; Kubheka, 2018b:1). Research supports this finding (Khoury-Kassabri, 2012:128; Mirza & Ali, 2014:98; Nkuba *et al.*, 2018:2-3). This finding resonates well with previous research. Numerous researchers (Cheruvath &

Tripathi, 2015:128; De Witt & Lessing, 2013:7; Malak *et al.*, 2015:1331; Mirza & Ali, 2014:98; Nkuba *et al.*, 2018:7) found that teachers perceive corporal punishment to be the most effective strategy to address misbehaviour. Rossouw (2003:413), however, found that learners who were subjected to corporal punishment often perform poorly in school, lack enthusiasm and show signs of dejection. Mncube and Harber (2012:15) moreover found that “there is no evidence that corporal punishment improves behaviour or academic achievement – quite the opposite – there is considerable evidence of its harmful effects, including physical harm and even death”.

The data analysis revealed that in addition to the above-mentioned reasons for corporal punishment there might be cultural and religious explanations (n=1 of 68 articles). The deputy secretary-general of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) told Kgosana and Hlatshaneni (2017:5) that even though he “condemned violence towards pupils as unethical, criminal and immoral, ... some teachers were ‘beating them out of care and love’”. Previous research supports the argument by the deputy secretary-general of the SADTU. Murriss (2012:46) writes that corporal punishment in South Africa is often justified “by reference to the Bible and an active Christian ethos”. Shumba (2009:22) moreover writes “most African parents believe that the use of corporal punishment is an acceptable part of the African culture of child-rearing ... parents believe that the caning of pupils in school so that they can do well in class”. It may accordingly be argued that statements that teachers are “beating [learners] out of care and love” (Kgosana & Hlatshaneni, 2017:5) are rooted in teachers’ religious and cultural beliefs.

It is worrying that some teachers, parents and education leaders are still in favour of corporal punishment. It seems as if they would rather justify this often extremely harsh disciplinary strategy on cultural and religious grounds, than change to more humane, proactive, educationally sound disciplinary strategies. The pitiless and humiliating manner in which teachers administered corporal punishment (cf. 6.1.1) creates a learning environment where fear rules, instead of care, respect, kindness and gentleness (ESV, 2016: Galatians 5). The justification and administration of corporal punishment is a violation of Christian and secular norms of respect, trust and care that should guide teacher-learner relationships.

6.2.2 *Reasons for sexual violence*

Even though the consulted newspaper articles reported extensively on teacher-on-learner sexual violence, the data referred to only a few rather diverse reasons for this objectionable type of teacher-learner relationship, namely the learner-victim's provocative attire and seductive demeanour (n=1 of 68 articles), poor school leadership (n=1 of 68 articles) and romantic, consensual relationship between the teacher and his/her learner (n=4 of 68 articles). In an article on sexual abuse at Adams College, the alumnus alleges on social media (quoted in Shaikh, 2018:5) that teachers "prey on young students and then blame it on the length of skirts or how they (the girls) throw themselves at them". The latter is a typical example of perpetrators blaming the victims for their wrongdoings (cf. Rollero & Tartaglia, 2019:210; Best & Jun, 2017:127). It seems from the data that consensual, romantic relationships between teachers and their learners or former learners are acceptable in some South Africa societies (Dawood, 2017:2; Selapisa, 2017:3). Parents from a KZN school told Dawood (2017:2) for example that they know of at least six teachers from a specific school who have married learners whom they have taught. Fengu (2017:10) writes in this regard that schools in which sexual violence was rampant are often, "poorly managed and existing policies were not being implemented".

Whereas newspaper articles pay little attention to the reasons for teacher-on-learner sexual violence, researchers (Altinyelken & Le Mat, 2018:650) give insight into this type of norm violation. Altinyelken and Le Mat (2018:650) found that sexual violence is a multifaceted problem driven by a multitude of individual, relational, family, community and societal level factors. They list the following risk factors: poverty, economic deterioration, social change and government's disregard of human rights treaties. Altinyelken and Le Mat (2018:650) furthermore write that patriarchy, masculinity, hegemony and heteronormativity may perpetuate and "even" normalise sexual violence. Fengu's (2017:10) comment that schools where sexual violence is rampant are often "poorly managed and existing policies were not being implemented", is supported by previous research (Altinyelken & Le Mat, 2018:650). Findings from previous research (Altinyelken & Le Mat, 2018:650; Shumba, 2009:22), namely that gender relations, patriarchy and masculinity influence gender violence, is validated by the current study: male teachers have multiple victims whom they impregnated, they brutally raped and/or gang raped their learners and have

consensual relations with their learners – the latter sometimes with the blessing of the girl's parents. The SACE (2018b:4) and *Employment of Educators Act, Act no. 76 of 1998* categorically prohibits any sexual/romantic relations between teachers and learners, whether or not it is consensual. Teachers who enter into sexual relations with their learners, rape or sexually harass their learners disregard norms guiding teacher-learner relations.

7. Implications and recommendations for research and practice

Implications and recommendations for research: This study has illustrated the value of document collection as a data collection technique. The juxtaposing of findings emanating from the newspaper analysis with previous research, underlined the worth of extant data in researching teacher-on-learner violence. The growing volume of content published worldwide by millions of social media users on the Internet has created an abundance of data that is mostly public, permanent and searchable (Giglietto, Rossi & Bennato, 2012:150). Learners often post information on or videos of incidents of teacher-on-learner violence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Mashaba, 2018:2). It is recommended that researchers explore the use of social media when researching teacher-on-learner violence. In terms of implications of the current study for research, this study also found that the existing body of knowledge on teacher-on-learner violence mostly stem from surveys completed by learners. Qualitative media analysis gives researchers the opportunity to work with rich, multi-perspective data. Researchers should explore the use of newspaper articles as textual data to gain insight into sensitive, under-researched topics.

Implications and recommendations for practice: This study found that teachers, parents and other role-players justify the use of corporal punishment on cultural and religious grounds, and their unfamiliarity with alternative, preventative disciplinary strategies. Researchers have, however, found that there are numerous research-based preventive alternatives for harsh, punitive disciplinary strategies (cf. De Witt & Lessing, 2013:3; Oosthuizen et al., 2003:468; Serame *et al.*, 2013:5). It is therefore recommended that initial teacher training institutes as well as departments of education should endeavour to train future and practising teachers in positive, preventative disciplinary strategies. This study additionally found that there are teachers who have no qualms when they violate their learners' dignity

and safety for their own sexual gratification, lust for power, pent-up anger, racial prejudices and male chauvinism. Law enforcement agencies, the media, SACE, human rights activists, religious leaders, parents, teachers and learners (victims and onlookers) should work together to expose and persecute norm violating teachers to the full extent of the law. Findings from this study has important implications for Christian and secular teachers' day-to-day relations with their learners. Teachers should lead by example. They should enter into a "loving, caring, serving, guiding and 'disciplining'" relation with learners (Oosthuizen, Roux & Van der Walt, 2003:388). This means, according to Oosthuizen *et al.* (2003:388), that teachers will see themselves, in the spirit of self-sacrifice, as servants who will help learners to become "well-rounded and fully educated individuals capable of responding adequately to their calling in life and able to be true disciples, i.e. followers of Jesus Christ". This is only possible if Christian teachers are true to Matthew 7:12. Secular norms of trust and respect, and/or the Golden Rule of Ethics should guide non-Christian teachers. If not, teachers will be self-serving individuals who will not hesitate to violate classroom norms.

8. Conclusion

This qualitative media analysis of 68 carefully selected South African English language newspaper articles reveal that some South African teachers are guilty of physical, sexual and emotional teacher-on-learner violence. The study additionally found that stakeholders, including teachers, parents and trade union leaders justify the administration of corporal punishment on cultural and religious grounds as well as their unfamiliarity with alternative disciplinary strategies. The perpetrators of sexual violence place the blame for their transgressions on their victims' alleged provocative demeanour and attire. Findings furthermore suggest that consensual sex between teachers and their learners are acceptable in some communities. The perpetration, acceptance, justification and normalisation of teacher-on-learner violence are norm violations and a form of oppression in a country that has lost its moral compass. Ecclesiastes 4:1 (ESV, 2016) reads as follows "Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them". Myers (2013:1-2) highlights the following regarding the nature of the oppression described in Ecclesiastes 4:1 (ESV, 2016): The relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed are polemical, because an "us and them" has developed. The power is on the side of the oppressor. The oppressed are

isolated and made to feel alone. Emotional, sexual and physical abuse of learners by their teachers are extreme forms of power abuse and oppression. When teachers rape, assault and/or verbally abuse and belittle their learners, the disempowered victims seem to lose all control over their own bodies, dignity and even destiny.

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