

## Article

# Violence Perpetrated by Learners and Management Towards Early-Career Educators in South African Township Schools

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**Abstract:** The reality in South Africa is that township school environments are not safe for early-career educators. According to South Africa's Constitution in the Bill of Rights, every learner has the right to a free, reputable education. Although educators are obligated to facilitate this free education, the right to education does not supersede the right to safety because, without protection, more rights will be violated. This study aimed to explore forms of violence perpetrated by school management teams and learners against early-career educators in township schools in Soshanguve, South Africa. A qualitative research method was used to access deeper information on the topic. Clarke's six steps of thematic analysis were used to analyse the data. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information. The major findings of this study revealed four forms of violence experienced by early-career educators, which included physical and verbal violence, financial violence and sexual violence. This study recommends that parents should make a habit of checking their children's schoolwork. This will hold learners accountable for their work. Parents should minimise engaging in conflict in the presence of their children, as this can have adverse emotional and psychological effects on them. They should provide a supportive environment for their children, which can foster a positive parent-child relationship. In addition, the community should play a proactive role in combating substance abuse by ensuring that substances are not accessible to children.



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**Keywords:** violence; early-career educators; township; learners; school management teams; abuse

## 1. Introduction

According to Grobler (2018), the term violence denotes the use of physical force to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy. Violence is also defined as the intentional use of corporal vigour of power towards a group or a community, oneself or another person, which might lead to injury, death, maldevelopment or psychological harm (Springer 2019). In the context of this study, school violence refers to the deliberate distress caused by management (post level two to post level four early career) and learners towards early-career educators known as post level one educators. Early-career educators, also known as post level one educators, are defined as the entry-level position for educators in the South African public school system (Brown 2021). In this study, early-career educators hold entry-level positions in South African public schools. In South Africa, the term township refers to areas that were selected under apartheid legislation for restricted under-resourced and under-serviced occupation by people categorised as blacks, coloureds, and Indians. This study aimed to

explore forms of violence perpetrated by school management teams and learners against early-career educators in the selected township schools in Soshanguve, South Africa. This study aimed to bring an end to some of the violations experienced by early-career educators in the selected township schools in Soshanguve, South Africa. This will be achieved by recommending strategies that, when implemented, will work as a three-way intervention to curb violations between learners and educators, between educators and management, and among the learners themselves. The study hopes to benefit schools regarding a learners' code of conduct. What forms of violence do early-career educators in township schools in Soshanguve experience? How can violence towards early-career educators in the Soshanguve township be addressed?

## 2. Background of Study

According to [Dlamini \(2022\)](#), teachers are prepared to enter the classroom through the higher education sector. Prior to entering the education system, teachers undergo practical work where they are assigned a mentor to guide them with teaching practice. In the South African context, pre-service teachers are trained most in lesson design, which is crucial for planning lessons that enhance the quality of teaching and learning ([Marais et al. 2019](#)). In teacher preparation programs, educators are taught to foster a positive classroom environment. This is done as a way of preparing teachers to deal with school violence ([Backes et al. 2022](#)).

Globally, during COVID-19 times, when contact learning between teachers and learners had reduced, the American Psychological Association released a report that stated that educators were still violated by learners physically and verbally even when there is minimal contact ([McMahon et al. 2020](#)). The report stipulated that in 2020, 33% of educators reported verbal abuse; as a result, about 43% were willing to quit or transfer from their jobs ([McMahon et al. 2020](#)). The results of being violated within school premises go far deeper than educators just quitting their jobs; they can end up being depressed and having suicidal thoughts due to the humiliation they endure ([Turanovic and Siennick 2022](#)).

In Canada, principals tend to create a highly competitive working environment where educators struggle to cope with stress levels, leading to teacher burnout ([De Klerk 2020](#)). [Arar \(2016\)](#) notes that many school managers use destructive and unethical leadership in the institutions of learning, and they face minimal accountability for this kind of leadership. [Holt and Birchall \(2022\)](#) report that educators and teacher assistants experience many violations in the United Kingdom. In 2021 alone, 53% of educators have reported experiencing verbal threats from learners, while 60% have reported having experienced other forms of verbal abuse and cyberbullying ([Holt and Birchall 2022](#)). [White \(2019\)](#) asserts that due to a lack of discipline, female educators have reported more cases of violation than male educators ([Holt and Birchall 2022](#)). According to [White \(2019\)](#), learners utter words that can be interpreted as the sexual harassment of female educators and their fellow female learners.

Different types of school violence are associated with bullying with verbal attacks such as yelling, screaming and cursing, which teachers suffer almost every day of their working careers. Mental violence is a type of abuse characterised by the use of words or actions to manipulate, control or instill fear in another person. It can manifest in various ways, such as verbal abuse, threats or intimidation ([OASH 2024](#)). Mental violence is often underestimated but is an extremely dangerous part of school violence, which is caused by all the different types of violations teachers experience ([Islam and Azizzadeh 2023](#)). [Hollis \(2024\)](#) argued that managers in public schools are not placed in positions by their level of qualifications but rather by their level of experience, which can then affect their level of professionalism towards other educators. In the wake of rising unemployment in South

Africa, young graduates find themselves seeking and fighting for the few employment opportunities in the employment world (Grobler 2018). While some educators would willingly do anything for a job opportunity, some are coerced into these sexual activities in return for employment, and others are taken advantage of in exchange for money because of the delay in payment in the education system (Nachinguru and Mwila 2023; Muzokura et al. 2020).

Unwanted sexual behaviour that interferes with an educator's work or involvement in school activities is considered a sexual violation (Dube et al. 2024). Consensual sexual interactions between people of different positions of influence might be considered harassment due to the inherent power imbalance (Zatalini 2024). In an educational setting, sexual harassment manifests in three primary ways: through visual/non-verbal, verbal and physical means (Mabetha and De Wet 2018). Non-verbal/visual harassment is the most common, followed by verbal and then physical harassment (Mabetha and De Wet 2018). In some incidences, teachers could find themselves in situations where high school learners wearing short school skirts sit inappropriately while a male teacher is teaching and portraying inappropriate gestures, such as licking their lips or even writing inappropriate messages in their books to their teachers (Yousaf et al. 2024).

In the school environment, educators are exposed to physical violence from different stakeholders, including learners and parents. Many educators in high schools can be and are deeply distressed by the felonious or violent victimisation occurring in township schools (De Cordova et al. 2019). The extent of trauma experienced may vary based on the type of violent incident occurring at the school (De Cordova et al. 2019). Some experts suggest that exposure to traumatic situations can trigger previous encounters with stressful life events (Kramer et al. 2022), as noted by the classical conditioning of Ivan Pavlov (Cambiaghi and Sacchetti 2015).

There have been cases where learners have attacked teachers physically on school premises (Mabetha and De Wet 2018). There have also been incidents of physical aggression to which teachers have been subjected involving objects, such as books, erasers, fruits, rocks, chairs, or brooms thrown at them in classrooms (Mabetha and De Wet 2018). According to Venketsamy (2024), some cases of physical violence were discovered to be more serious than originally believed, necessitating medical attention.

Financial abuse involves withholding certain privileges from victims and demanding money or extorting overly excessive amounts of money for a low fee or free service or product (Haifley 2021). Some forms of financial abuse in the education system are due to financial mismanagement, which involves using school funds for unintended purposes, leading to later shortages (Nachinguru and Mwila 2023; Sebidi 2023). New educators entering the education system have little-to-no knowledge of contesting and complaining about the unfair allocation of new or promotional posts (Yekini et al. 2017). Due to this knowledge gap, some SGB members and the management in some schools take advantage of early-career educators, demanding money from them to hire them, make them permanent or promote them to post level two. Though there is a delay in payment for new educators, some delays are caused by the late submission of documents by the principal, which puts the new teacher in a financially vulnerable position (Islam and Azizzadeh 2023).

Verbal abuse, which can lead to or include emotional abuse, refers to an array of words used to control, terrorise and claim power over someone (Fairuzza et al. 2023). Learners raised by verbally abusive parents are often verbally abusive to other people in turn, including their educators (Chauke et al. 2021; Chauke 2021). Teachers are often exposed to verbal violence from both learners and their fellow colleagues, which is a common form of aggression on the schoolgrounds. Many students engage in verbal violation without fully realising its impact (Cabillo and Julius 2020). There are rules in place to prevent

teachers from verbally harassing learners, encompassing teasing, name-calling, and using inappropriate language (Yunita and Isnawati 2024). However, teachers do not consistently receive the same level of respect in return (Yunita and Isnawati 2024). It is typical for learners and their parents to engage in name-calling, harassment and threats directed at teachers (Michailidou and Mavromoustaki 2023).

When a learner abuses a teacher verbally, it undermines the teacher's authority and compromises their ability to lead the class (Bialowolska et al. 2020).

Emotional abuse of teachers can be characterised by a teacher isolating themselves from friends, family or coworkers and making threats to hurt themselves, their partner, children or the partner's family or friends (Alade and Ala 2022). More subtle forms of emotional abuse include insults, putdowns, arbitrary and unpredictable behaviour and gaslighting (denying that past abusive incidents ever happened, for example) (Alade and Ala 2022). With the development of contemporary technology, abusive behaviours have spread online, encompassing texting and cyberbullying, which damage one's emotional state publicly (Stark 2015). Koller and Darida (2020) state that it may be more challenging for young and new teachers without work experience to recognise or avoid potentially abusive situations when they arise.

The goals of any institution should include attracting new energetic workers and retaining them within a healthy working environment (Paller and Quirap 2024). The challenge of gaining and keeping new teachers might become problematic as young teachers seek opportunities to work abroad due to a lack of support in the South African educational system (Don and Raman 2019). The lack of support experienced by teachers in a work environment that is highly compromised and forever changing, such as the education profession, can be viewed as a form of violence towards teachers (Kalane and Awelani 2022). At the school level, policy documents such as a code of conduct, committee policies, and uniform policies can be designed to protect and support educators as long as they are in line with the country's Constitution (Schlebusch and Schlebusch 2022). Parents and community members can play vital roles in the fight against school violence through their active involvement Liu et al. (2020); Motshusi et al. (2024).

Building on JB Watson and Ivan Pavlov's work on behavioural theory, BF Skinner developed operant conditioning through reinforcement. Skinner believed that previous actions influence human behaviour through the consequences experienced (Malone 1975). In his theory of reinforcement, he outlined that when the results of an action are undesirable, the likelihood of engaging in the action again decreases (Malone 1975). Conversely, the probability of repeating the action increases if the outcomes are positive. This theory supports withdrawing positive reinforcement when a person exhibits undesirable behaviour. For example, a Grade 12 learner can be denied the right to wear the special Grade 12 uniform for a certain period (e.g., one term) if they violate an educator. During this behaviour-correcting period, educators teaching that class can keep emphasising the advantage of being a unique Grade 12 learner and the respect it earns in the school. This might condition learners to see being denied the right to wear a Grade 12 uniform as a punishment, and they might behave well to avoid the removal of the positive reinforcement (Grade 12 uniform). Furthermore, wearing a Grade 12 special uniform will be associated with good behaviour in the school.

### 3. Materials and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. According to Taherdoost (2022), the qualitative research approach focuses on the in-depth meanings of topics through life experiences, routine-orientated stories, and case studies. To obtain a comprehensive understanding, qualitative research is typically carried out within various inquiry traditions

([Taherdoost 2022](#)). The qualitative study approach helped to acquire and understand data from early-career educators in their work environment. This study adopted interpretivism as the upholding paradigm that guided this study. Interpretivism refers to the sociological process of research in which an act or event is examined based on the values and beliefs of the culture of the society in which it takes place ([Ma and Ma 2022](#)). It assumes that reality is multiple, subjective and socially constructed. In this study, the researchers uncovered the reality of early-career educators on the notion of violence experienced in the township schools of Soshanguve in Gauteng Province, South Africa. The educators' reality regarding the violence inflicted on them is different from one school to another and from one teacher to the next.

In this study, the primary focus was on employing the case study approach. This approach arranges and structures the sequence of steps effectively, starting with a small number of individuals, creating a coherent whole. Using a case study approach allows for a deep understanding of each participant's individual experiences, leading to a comprehensive and impactful assessment of a given situation. For instance, two educators from the same school may offer accounts of their experiences with violence or student–teacher interactions within the school. The case study approach was used to identify similarities among the experiences of post level one educators in the problematic township schools of Gauteng.

For this study, the population included all the early-career educators from Soshanguve in the Tshwane North District. Twenty educators from five selected schools participated from the larger population. This study employed purposive sampling, also known as non-probability sampling. Purposive sampling, sometimes called judgmental selection, is designed to provide richer insights into research cases ([Shaheen et al. 2019](#)). Researchers choose what is appropriate for their studies and convenient for them. In this study, suitable participants were early-career educators from the Soshanguve township schools in the Tshwane North District, Gauteng Province in South Africa. The sample consisted of twenty educators from four Soshanguve Tshwane North District high schools. Five educators were interviewed at each school, and at least two males and two females were part of the sample. In selecting the sample, the researcher considered participants who had experienced some form of violation within the school premises and were willing to participate in this study. The early-career educators were asked to share personal experiences in a pilot interview to select those who had experienced violence in schools. The researcher excluded managerial educators because they might have been part of the perpetrators investigated in this study. Learners were also excluded because of their age and for ethical reasons. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in (Table 1) below.

**Table 1.** Outline of information on early careere educators.

| Participant Number | Schools  | Gender       | Age | Educational Background | Experience in Years | Subject                    | Grades |
|--------------------|----------|--------------|-----|------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|--------|
| 1                  | School 1 | T1<br>Female | 26  | BEd Honours            | 2                   | Maths and LO               | 8–10   |
| 2                  | School 1 | T2<br>Male   | 24  | BEd                    | 2                   | Physical sciences          | 10–12  |
| 3                  | School 1 | T3<br>Female | 39  | BEd                    | 14                  | Maths and Natural Sciences | 8–10   |
| 4                  | School 1 | T4<br>Female | 33  | BEd                    | 9                   | English and Creative Arts  | 9–11   |

**Table 1.** *Cont.*

| Participant Number | Schools  | Gender    | Age | Educational Background       | Experience in Years | Subject                 | Grades |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|-----|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------|
| 5                  | School 1 | T5 Male   | 52  | Diploma in Education and ACE | 30                  | Life Sciences           | 10–12  |
| 6                  | School 2 | T1 Male   | 29  | BEd                          | 5                   | History                 | 10–12  |
| 7                  | School 2 | T2 Male   | 61  | Diploma in Education and ACE | 33                  | English                 | 10–12  |
| 8                  | School 2 | T3 Female | 35  | Bed Honours                  | 2                   | English and LO          | 9–11   |
| 9                  | School 2 | T4 Male   | 29  | Bachelor in History and PEGC | 5                   | History                 | 10–12  |
| 10                 | School 2 | T5 Female | 59  | Diploma in Education and ACE | 29                  | History                 | 10–12  |
| 11                 | School 3 | T1 Male   | 55  | Diploma in Education and ACE | 22                  | Maths and Math literacy | 9–11   |
| 12                 | School 3 | T2 Male   | 30  | BEd                          | 5                   | Tourism                 | 10–11  |
| 13                 | School 3 | T3 Female | 36  | BEd                          | 8                   | Isizulu HL              | 9–11   |
| 14                 | School 3 | T4 Female | 51  | Diploma in Education and ACE | 16                  | Sepedi and Technology   | 8–11   |
| 15                 | School 3 | T5 Female | 26  | BEd                          | 3                   | Business studies        | 10     |
| 16                 | School 4 | T1 Male   | 48  | Diploma in Education and ACE | 19                  | Economics               | 10–12  |
| 17                 | School 4 | T2 Female | 35  | Bed Honours                  | 12                  | Accounting              | 10–12  |
| 18                 | School 4 | T3 Male   | 37  | BEd                          | 14                  | Setswana HL and EMS     | 8–10   |
| 19                 | School 4 | T4 Female | 45  | BEd                          | 12                  | Sepedi HL               | 9–11   |
| 20                 | School 4 | T5 Male   | 55  | Diploma in Education and ACE | 29                  | Geography               | 10–12  |

The semi-structured interview data collection method was used to acquire the primary data for this study. Semi-structured interviews are used in social sciences to explore and search for deeper meanings (Ruslin and Alhabsyi 2022). The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to narrate their experiences clearly. They created an opportunity to develop trust between the researchers and the participants and allowed the researchers to identify some commonalities between the participants. Being on the school premises has allowed the researchers to observe how the learners and managerial educators interacted with early-career educators. These semi-structured interviews took between 25 and 35 min and were audio-recorded. The participants were asked the following questions:

- What do you understand about school management team-to-early-career educator violence in school?
- Explain to what extent you have ever experienced sexual violence or harassment at the hands of learners.
- Explain to what extent you have witnessed sexual violence or harassment at the hands of school management teams.

- In your opinion, what form of verbal abuse have you suffered at the hands of learners/school management team?
- Can you describe a recent incident of physical violence that you suffered at the hands of the learners/school management team?
- How often do you experience or witness financial abuse as a form of violence from learners/school management teams within the school premises?
- What are some of the violent experiences you have encountered within this school as an educator?
- What are the strategies that could be put in place to address violence towards early-career educators in the Soshanguve township schools in South Africa?

The six steps of the thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke were utilised for this study to analyse collected data. These steps included the following.

### *3.1. Familiarising Oneself with the Data*

In this step, we engaged deeply and actively with the collected data by transcribing the communications, re-reading the transcripts, and re-listening to the interviews' recordings. We documented the original ideas. Gaining an extensive understanding of the content communicated and becoming familiar with all aspects of the data were of fundamental value. This step laid the foundation for the follow-up analysis.

### *3.2. Generating Initial Codes*

Upon becoming acquainted with the data, we began to identify preliminary codes. These were the sections of data that were significant and piqued our interest. The codes were specific and frequently used, but they also provided clues about the background of the conversation.

### *3.3. Searching for Themes*

We started this step with an interpretive analysis of the collected codes. Then, using broad themes, we extracted and classified pertinent data. Following that, the data were combined or separated based on the themes. In doing so, the relationships between codes and themes were taken into account (Naeem et al. 2023).

### *3.4. Reviewing Themes*

We thoroughly analysed the themes identified in this step and refined, distinguished or discarded the original themes. There was a discernible difference between themes and significant data coherence within themes (Kawulich 2004). To do this, themes related to the coded extracts were examined, followed by an examination of the entire data set.

### *3.5. Defining and Naming Themes*

In this step, the themes and potential subthemes within the data were "defined and refined" (Ejjami 2024). The identified themes were developed through ongoing analysis (Kawulich 2004). We gave each theme a name and provided concise, useful descriptions that effectively convey the essence of each theme. A combined data narrative has surfaced from the themes.

### *3.6. Producing the Report*

In this step, the researchers used convincing and understandable extract patterns related to the themes, literature and research questions to turn the analysis into an interpretable piece of writing (Ejjami 2024). Here, we wrote a report that discusses the analysis's findings, provides evidence to support the analysis's validity and answers the research question.

Ethical considerations were taken into account in this study. The researchers clearly explained the data collection process to the participants and requested that they sign a consent form to confirm that they were clear about all the information. To protect the data, researchers used password-protected files and even basic locks on the doors of drawers where the data were kept. To protect the identity of the participants, the researchers did not use the participants' real names. The researchers ensured that everyone involved understood what kind of information was being collected, why it was being collected and how the researcher planned to use it. The data collection process occurred in empty classrooms where only the researcher and the participant were present.

In this research, the researchers were granted ethical clearance from the University of South Africa with the reference number 2024/09/12/000000145/04/RB; upon approval, the researcher approached the Tshwane North district to seek permission to conduct the study within the district and specified the selected schools; the researcher then asked permission from the principals of the schools.

## 4. Results

This section aims to explore the violence perpetrated by learners and management towards early-career educators in the township schools in the Soshanguve Tshwane North District.

### *4.1. Violence Perpetrated by Learners and Management Towards Early-Career Educators in the Township Schools in the Soshanguve Tshwane North District*

#### *4.1.1. Physical Violence Perpetrated by SMT Members and Learners Towards Early Career Educators in the Township Schools in Soshanguve*

The participants were asked what they understood about the violence experienced by early-career educators concerning the physical aspects of either the learners or the SMT. In response, the participants explained that learners were habitual physical violators of educators and other learners. The commonly perpetrated violent acts included slapping, punching, pushing and throwing things while the teacher was writing on the board. Though some participants noted that direct physical violence was not common from the SMT, most of these participants complained about being overworked by the SMT. In two schools, some educators shared their experience of direct physical violence inflicted on them by the SMT.

P11 mentioned that: "Post level one educators experience physical violence more than it is spoken about. On my side, in 2023, my learners in grade 10 failed Mathematical Literacy, and the percentage was 40%. My departmental head threw the scripts at me and told me to make a plan about the marks. Mind you, this is happening in class where learners are watching'. This is a young departmental head disrespecting me in the presence of my learners; I had to laugh it off and pretend to be okay. I had to remark 238 scripts for paper one and 238 scripts for paper two. Generally, my workload is too high because learners in the general stream are too many in one class. I suffered fatigue after all the work I had to remark".

The above utterance from Participant 11 reflects their perception that certain early-career educators feel overwhelmed by the workload assigned to them. According to this participant, even after completing their tasks, they are sometimes required by the school management team (SMT) to repeat the same tasks. This repetition reportedly contributes to feelings of fatigue. Additionally, the participants shared their view that SMT members may not always demonstrate respect towards early-career educators, as they occasionally address them in a manner perceived as inappropriate or dismissive, even in the presence of learners. It is important to note that these observations are based solely on the experiences of this particular participant and may not represent the experiences of all early-career educators.

P15 stated, “In this school, learners are violent, and they gamble a lot. I once found boys gambling in my class; I walked up to them and took the money they were playing with and the dice they used. I told the boys to follow me to the staffroom, and when I turned around, I just felt a hot slap on my neck; when I asked, ‘Who did that?’ they all said they didn’t know. The boys were suspended for seven days but returned to school as normal”.

Participant 15 shared their perception that some learners exhibit physically violent behaviour toward educators when reprimanded. According to this participant, these learners may resist taking accountability for their actions and, in some cases, respond with violence instead. The participant also expressed their opinion that the consequences imposed on such learners for their behaviour may be disproportionately lenient in comparison to the severity of their actions. It is important to acknowledge that this account reflects the experiences and perspectives of one individual and may not be representative of the experiences of all educators or learners.

P19 explained: “When I started working in this school, I came in the middle of the year, which made it difficult for me to learn the learners’ names on time. When I was writing on the board, learners would throw papers at me. When I asked who did that, the naughty boys would call out the wrong name. When I told other educators about this, some said all learners behave like that. In the same class, one learner threw a buddy case full of textbooks; the buddy case tore my skin, and I had to be stitched. This learner was apologetic, but because they always throw things at me in this class, it is still difficult to believe that the learner didn’t mean to be malicious”.

Participant 19 expressed their concern that some educators may perceive acts of learners violating teachers as a normalised occurrence. This perception was reportedly reinforced when other educators shared with the participant that it was “normal” for learners to throw objects at teachers in the classroom. The participant highlighted that normalising such behaviour can create a challenging and unsafe environment for educators. For example, the participant recounted an incident where they were injured and were unsure whether the injury was accidental or intentional, which they attributed to the broader normalisation of such behaviour. It is important to note that this account represents the experiences and perspectives of this particular participant and may not reflect the experiences of all educators.

#### 4.1.2. Verbal Violence Perpetrated by SMT Members and Learners Towards Early-Career Educators in the Township Schools in Soshanguve

The participants were asked to explain the forms of verbal violence they had experienced from SMT members and learners within their working environment. In response, some participants shared that some learners talk back when they are reprimanded, make disrespectful remarks and shout curse words. Some participants explained that, at times, SMT members speak to them disrespectfully during staff meetings and one-on-one meetings.

P2 mentioned: “Our principal shouts at us so much that every term after the results are made public, if your subject has not performed well, you live in anxiety waiting for the accounting session to come to pass. I teach physical science, and in most cases, it doesn’t perform like subjects such as Geography and Life Sciences. In one accounting session, the principal said to me he didn’t understand which institution would give a qualification to an incapable educator like me. In a morning briefing at another time, our deputy principal told one of my colleagues that he must dress as if he was getting paid; he was a teacher, not a gardener. This educator was decently dressed even though their sense of style is old school. On the side of learners, there are a few naughty learners who talk back when we try to call them to order; one day, one learner said to me, ‘You are not my mother; even my mother doesn’t tell me what to do’”.

Participant 2 shared their perception that some school management team (SMT) members use harsh language when addressing early-career educators. According to the participant, SMT members do not always provide the necessary support to help early-career educators achieve desired results but may instead criticise their work and, in some cases, their qualifications. The participant expressed that this behaviour contributes to an environment where early-career educators feel apprehensive about being addressed by SMT members due to a fear of verbal mistreatment. Additionally, the participant reported instances where verbal criticism extended to matters unrelated to work, such as their personal sense of fashion. These observations are based on the participant's personal experiences and may not reflect the experiences of all educators.

P20 stated that: "Verbal violence is very prevalent in this school; there is a group of boys who call themselves Masixteen. This group uses so much vulgar language concerning the educators, as well as the learners, and some of them to their parents when we call the parents. Just last week, during my period in Grade 10C, one boy belonging to this group shouted from outside through the window into the class, 'Msono wa teacher' (teacher's asshole) and ran off. When he was called later, he said I didn't specify the name of the teacher; I just said teacher, and there are many teachers on earth".

Participant 20 described a situation in which some educators reportedly experienced challenges related to gangsterism in schools, including the presence of a gang self-identified as "The Sixteens". According to the participant, some learners associated with this gang have used offensive language, including curse words like "asshole", when addressing educators. The participant shared that such incidents could undermine the dignity of educators, particularly when such behaviour occurs in the presence of other learners. It is important to note that this account reflects the experiences and perspectives of one individual and may not represent the experiences of all educators or schools.

#### 4.1.3. Financial Violence Experienced by Early-Career Educators in Township Schools in Soshanguve

One of the factors that all participants agreed on was that their salary was too low to manage their commitments. Some participants stated that even on their meagre wages, they had to cover some work-related expenses and would suffer if they did not cover the costs with their own money. Some participants shared that the Gauteng Department of Basic Education takes a long time to pay new educators entering the system. This challenge was prevalent among the new educators. As a result, these educators suffered a financial crisis. The participants were asked to what extent they experienced financial violations in their workplace.

P7 elucidated: "There is a considerable shortage of learning and teaching support materials in the school; if you wait for the management and the SGB to buy them for us, the term can go by without getting any work done. When the facilitators from the district come to the school and do not find work in the learners' books, they don't take the issue of lack of resources as a factor; they say we are making excuses. As a result, we use our money to buy materials such as Typek to photocopy work for these learners. The learners range between 70 to 90 in one class. Therefore, one box of type is nothing. At times, to go to informative roadshows, we use our own money for travelling costs. When I do my monthly budget, I have to save some money for LTSMs that I might need. Most of the time, we do not get paid back the money we used".

According to this participant, there is a perception that funds allocated for school learning and teaching materials might be mismanaged. As a result, the participant suggested that some educators feel compelled to use their own money to purchase necessary materials in order to avoid potential conflicts with facilitators. The participant shared that this situation places additional financial strain on educators, as they find themselves

having to budget for both personal and professional expenses from their own salaries. These observations are based solely on the experiences and perspectives of this individual participant and may not reflect the circumstances of all educators or schools.

P9 explained: “The biggest financial challenge I have experienced was to stay three months without getting paid when I first started working. I had to borrow money from friends and family, and I couldn’t even explain when exactly I would repay them. I was kicked out of the first place I was renting in the middle of the second month because I kept on saying I hadn’t been paid yet, and the landlord did not believe me. Though it was painful, I understood because there are a lot of chance-takers in this township”.

P6 enlightened: “When I started working here, I was on contract for a year. They renewed my contract every three months. It took two months to capture my documents; I would get paid in the third month. This made me feel like an outsider in the workplace because I was left out of many school activities. For example, the school’s bereavement committee makes monthly contributions to save for emergencies. I was not allowed to join this committee because they said what would happen if I did not get paid”.

The responses of Participants 9 and 6 highlight their perceptions of how financial challenges may leave educators vulnerable to various forms of violence. Participant 9 shared that being evicted from their place of residence in a township due to financial difficulties can expose educators to risks such as theft, robbery or being mugged. Additionally, the participant noted that delayed payments sometimes lead to feelings of social isolation. Participant 6 mentioned being allowed to join a bereavement committee, which may suggest efforts to engage socially despite these challenges. These accounts reflect the experiences and perspectives of these individual participants and may not represent the experiences of all educators.

#### 4.1.4. Sexual Violence Experienced by Early-Career Educators in Soshanguve Township High Schools in the Tshwane North District

Some educators shared that sexual violence is a sensitive matter which is individually relatable. Some raised opinions that what one might perceive as sexual harassment, another might not. Others suggest that learners do sexually harass educators, and when educators raise this matter, they are perceived as perverts. Some educators believe that some SMT members use their power to gain sexual favours from early-career educators. Participants were asked what forms of sexual violence they had experienced or witnessed in their workplace.

P1 explained: “I was on a growth post for two years, and two educators with the same majors who came later than me got permanent posts before me. When I asked the principal, he said let us book a hotel room for one afternoon, and my problems with my post will disappear. When I asked what he meant by that, he said I was an adult and that I knew what he meant. I walked out of the office, and he has been giving me the cold shoulder since then. I learned from the district human resource office that the system automatically absorbed me after a certain period. To this day, I ask myself, how did those two educators get the posts?”

P1’s statements suggest that principals could sexually exploit early-career educators seeking permanent posts. The principal and the P1 educator were adults; however, regarding the power hierarchy, PL1 educators were subordinate to the principal. This gave the principal an advantage, negating any fairness from the statements uttered by the principal towards P1. Furthermore, P1 was in a situation of need, making her vulnerable.

P8 said: “I was violated by a learner after a week of working in this school. Learners were wearing home clothes for fundraising; it was after the break, and I was on the veranda instructing the learners to go back to class. One learner spanked me on my butt area, I screamed, and he apologised, saying he thought it was another learner. Another day, when

I was walking around checking my work in class, I felt a hand inappropriately brushing my butt; when I turned around, the same learner was behind, asking to pass. After class, I privately called the learner and told him that I felt that he intentionally touched me in ways he should not have touched me. The learner replied, “I am seeing things he is not seeing; he is too young to touch an old lady like me. I explained this to my departmental head, and she laughed at me, saying I have a young husband; the DH called me by the learner’s surname. Luckily, the learner dropped out not long after these events occurred”.

Participant 8 shared their experience of educators facing challenges related to sexual harassment by learners. According to the participant, handling such cases can be difficult within the education system, as learners may portray themselves as victims, complicating the situation for educators. The participant described an incident where a learner allegedly violated her but dismissed the claim, asserting that it was a misunderstanding due to his status as a minor. Furthermore, the participant expressed the perception that school management team (SMT) members may not always take such violations seriously when they involve educators. In contrast, the participant noted that if the roles were reversed and a learner reported a similar incident, the situation might be handled with more attention. These observations are based on the participant’s personal experience and may not reflect the experiences of all educators.

#### *4.2. Strategies for Addressing Violence Towards Early-Career Educators in the Township Schools in the Soshanguve Tshwane North District*

##### *Parental Involvement*

Educators act in loco parentis; though this is the case, children are still more attached to their parents. Strategies implemented by parents are more likely to work. Parents can monitor their children’s work to see if they are doing what they should do at school. Participants were asked to explicate how they would like to be helped by parents to reduce the violence of learners.

P1 held: “Parents must show interest in their children’s work. For example, some learners only collect their reports from term one to term three and don’t know how their children performed. Their books do not have the work, and some do not even submit tasks. If parents could demand to check their children’s work weekly, check their report cards and ask questions, children would do their work because they would know that parents would want to see it. Parents should withdraw privileges at home when children are not doing their schoolwork”.

Participant 1 expressed the belief that parental involvement might help reduce learner violence. According to the participant, if learners were aware that their parents would monitor their schoolwork and impose consequences, such as taking away privileges for not completing tasks, they might be more focused on their studies. The participant also suggested that parents might have a greater influence on their children’s behaviour than teachers do. These views are based on the participant’s perspective and may not necessarily reflect the experiences or opinions of all educators or parents.

P17 remarked: “I believe the community can help schools with the issue of drugs and substance abuse, late coming and street fights. Some learners are violent because of the influence of substances. If community members could stop selling such substances to underage children and reprimand children who are seen drinking alcohol and smoking in uniform, learners would not act out so much. The community members could also interrogate learners who are seen roaming the streets during school hours”.

The participant suggested that the community could play a role in making schools safer by refraining from selling substances to underage learners. Additionally, the participant noted that community members could contribute to promoting discipline by expressing concern if they see learners in school uniform on the streets during school hours rather

than being in class. These observations are based on the participant's perspective and may not reflect the views or actions of all community members.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that early-career educators in the Soshanguve township schools in South Africa experience physical violence perpetrated by the school management team (SMT) and learners. This study revealed that the forms of violence experienced in these schools include being slapped at the back of the head, being attacked and punched in the face and having objects and scripts thrown at them. This finding is supported by the work of [Mabetha and De Wet \(2018\)](#), who argue that learners physically abuse educators within school premises. The findings of this study further suggest that physical violence has become a normal issue in the working environment of early-career educators in this district, with most cases going unreported. In line with these findings, [Geleta \(2020\)](#) mentions that workers often experience both physical and non-physical violence in their workplace. Some educators believe that most violent acts perpetrated against them are intended to harm them. Furthermore, one act of violence can lead to prolonged effects on their lives and their careers in education. Contrary to the views of these educators, [Islam and Azizzadeh \(2023\)](#) believe that violence is the prolonged act of harm towards an individual, as opposed to the view held by the educators that even a single act of violence can have long-lasting effects. For instance, findings from this study outlined that one educator was hit by a buddy case in class and still carries a scar from this physical encounter. Findings from this study confirm that verbal violence is prevalent in the township schools of Soshanguve. Early-career educators are subjected to curse words from learners, insulting comments on their performance from the SMT, negative discussions from district officials and sometimes even critical comments on their fashion sense from the SMT. Scholars such as [Cabillo and Julius \(2020\)](#) and [Islam and Azizzadeh \(2023\)](#) agree with these findings, stating that those in higher positions often use derogatory language to instil fear and doubt in educators. This study also revealed that SMT members comment on educators' fashion sense during meetings, leaving them feeling demeaned. [Yunita and Isnawati \(2024\)](#) assert that while learners are protected by rules and policies in schools, some learners still engage in violent behaviour towards early-career educators. This aligns with the findings of this study, which revealed that learners verbally abuse educators, even using foul language such as "asshole". According to [Bialowolska et al. \(2020\)](#), the authority of educators is undermined when learners verbally violate them. Exploring financial violence through the perspectives of early-career educators, this study revealed both direct and indirect financial violence. New early-career educators are found to use their personal finances to purchase learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs) needed to complete the annual teaching plan (ATP), negatively affecting their monthly budgets. [Nachinguru and Mwila \(2023\)](#) believe that the misuse of school funds by management contributes to the lack of LTSMs. In contrast, [Sebidi \(2023\)](#) argues that financial violence in the workplace occurs when financial resources are withheld to exert power over workers.

This study also revealed that early-career educators in Soshanguve, South Africa, are victims of sexual violence, with both learners and SMT members perpetrating such acts. Educators have reported being asked for inappropriate sexual favours in exchange for permanent posts, and others have been touched inappropriately by learners. However, [Muzokura et al. \(2020\)](#) assert that sexual violence usually occurs in private, not on school premises. [Zatalini \(2024\)](#) suggests that victims of sexual violence may fear individuals of the same gender as the perpetrator. In line with these findings, this study demonstrated that educators who had been sexually violated by learners feared being in close contact with them, and those violated by SMT members feared being alone with colleagues of the same

gender. The findings of this study suggest that parents should be more actively involved in monitoring their children's schoolwork and withdrawing privileges when necessary. This can encourage students to focus on their academic responsibilities. Wildmon et al. (2024) support this view, asserting that parents have the power to teach self-control by reinforcing desired behaviour and penalising undesirable behaviour. Liu et al. (2020) also believe that parents can better discipline their children by speaking to them in a private and less formal setting. Furthermore, the study suggests that communities can reduce violence by addressing the substance use behaviours of learners, such as drug and alcohol abuse. Motshusi et al. (2024) agree with this suggestion, emphasising that parents and society should help teach children appropriate social norms. Due to the increasing incidents of violence reported in schools, this study aimed to investigate violence experienced by early-career educators in township schools of the Soshanguve Tshwane North district. The findings of this study are based on a limited sample of 20 early-career educators from four schools within the Tshwane North district. Future studies can explore the issue of violence in other districts of Tshwane for a broader understanding.

## 6. Conclusions

This study revealed the exact form of violence experienced by early-career educators in township schools. Level one educators are subjected to sexual abuse not only from the school management team but also from learners who make sexual statements towards them, which is inappropriate within the school environment. To address some of the forms of violence experienced by early-career educators, this study recommended that parents make a habit of checking their children's schoolwork. This will hold learners accountable for their work. Parents should avoid having altercations in spaces where their children can see them. Parents can create a safe space to talk to their children. The community can stop selling substances to underaged children and also interrogate and take away any substances if they find them in possession of substances. Township schools should organise workshops primarily targeting parents, equipping them with the knowledge needed to collaborate effectively with teachers and the school management team (SMT) to reduce school violence. These workshops will provide parents with the necessary skills to discipline their children at home and encourage greater parental involvement in their children's education. This study further recommends that Open Distance Learning institutions in South Africa design a short learning programme focused on maintaining discipline in schools and managing early-career educators. School management teams should enrol in this course to gain the necessary knowledge and skills for effectively managing early-career educators and maintaining discipline in schools.

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