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A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP IN MITIGATING HIGH SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This systematic literature review delves into the involvement of traditional leaders in mitigating the pervasive issue of school violence within the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. Given the critical importance of eradicating school violence for the holistic improvement of Whole School Performance, this study adopts a systematic review approach to synthesize existing literature on the topic. Findings from the reviewed studies underscore the prevalence of various forms of school-based violence within schools situated in the King Cetshwayo District. These acts of violence, often stemming from underlying reasons rooted in learners' home environments, disrupt school activities and may result in physical harm and damage to school property, among other negative consequences. The review underscores the significant role that traditional leaders can play in addressing the issue of school violence across South Africa. As key stakeholders and community leaders within the localities where schools are situated, traditional leaders possess unique insights and influence that can contribute to effective school discipline and management. As such, this study advocates for the meaningful involvement of traditional leaders in collaborative efforts aimed at curbing school violence and fostering safer learning environments. By leveraging the authority and community connections of traditional leaders, schools can benefit from enhanced support and guidance in addressing the root causes of violence and promoting positive behavioral norms among learners.

Keywords: School violence, traditional leadership, South Africa, systematic literature review, school-violence, whole School Performance

Introduction

The issue of violence in South African schools is multifaceted and concerning, encompassing various forms of aggression ranging from bullying to more severe acts such as assault and even murder (Sibisi et al., 2024). This pervasive problem has far-reaching consequences, including physical and psychological harm to learners, disruption of the educational environment, and broader societal implications. Despite efforts by the Department of Basic Education to address this issue, concerns persist, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal where incidents of school violence remain alarmingly high, contributing to suboptimal academic performance in the province (Shembe, 2014). Despite the implementation of strategies to combat violence, progress has been hindered by the complexity of underlying factors, rooted in diverse community backgrounds and causes (Booys et al., 2011; Khanyile & Mpuangnan, 2023). The involvement of traditional leaders in school governance represents a potential avenue for addressing this issue, yet the extent and impact of their involvement remain understudied (Sibisi et al., 2024).

Traditional leaders play a significant role in South African communities, often serving as key influencers and mediators in local affairs (Mahaye & Ajani, 2023). However, their involvement in school governance and efforts to mitigate violence within educational institutions are not well understood (Kethineni, et al., 2024). This research seeks to address this gap by examining the incorporation of traditional leadership roles into the school system to combat violence, particularly in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal. The study aims to explore both the positive and

negative effects of traditional leaders' influence on the educational landscape, shedding light on their potential contributions to violence prevention and mitigation efforts.

Recent statements by education officials in KwaZulu-Natal underscore the urgency of addressing school violence, highlighting its detrimental impact on academic performance and community well-being (Kathi et al., 2021; Mahaye & Ajani, 2023). The ongoing factional conflicts within rural schools have been identified as a major contributing factor to this problem, underscoring the need for innovative approaches to conflict resolution and violence prevention (George & Binza, 2011; Ajani & Dosunmu, 2018; Kethineni et al., 2024). Integrating traditional leaders into school governance structures could provide valuable insights and resources for addressing these challenges, leveraging their cultural authority and community connections to promote peace and stability within educational institutions.

By examining the role of traditional leaders in curbing school violence, this research seeks to inform policy and practice in South African education, offering insights into the potential benefits and challenges of their involvement. The findings of this study have the potential to inform the development of more effective strategies for violence prevention and management in schools (Mahaye & Ajani, 2023), particularly in rural areas where traditional leadership structures are prevalent. Ultimately, by fostering collaboration between education authorities and traditional leaders (Mbonambi et al., 2023), this research aims to contribute to safer, more supportive learning environments for learners across South Africa.

Literature Review

The issue of violence in South African schools has garnered significant attention in academic literature, with scholars exploring various dimensions of this multifaceted problem. Research indicates that school violence encompasses a wide range of behaviors, including bullying, physical assault, sexual violence, and gang-related activities (Reddy et al., 2019). These acts of violence not only jeopardize the safety and well-being of learners but also disrupt the learning environment, hinder academic achievement, and perpetuate cycles of aggression and victimization (Swart-Kruger & Richter, 2018). Furthermore, evidence suggests that school violence is influenced by a complex interplay of individual, familial, societal, and environmental factors, underscoring the need for multifaceted intervention strategies (James & Tosh, 2020; Khanyile & Mpuangnan, 2023).

Traditional leadership has emerged as a potential resource for addressing school violence in South Africa, particularly in rural communities where these leaders hold considerable influence. Studies have highlighted the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution, community mobilization, and social cohesion, suggesting that their involvement could contribute to the prevention and mitigation of violence in schools (Mogwele & Maletse, 2017). However, the extent and impact of traditional leaders' engagement in school governance and violence prevention efforts remain understudied, necessitating further research to elucidate their potential contributions (Khumalo & Nkosi, 2021).

Recent developments in South African education policy have underscored the importance of addressing school violence as a priority issue (Khati et al., 2021). The National School Safety Framework, introduced by the Department of Basic Education, aims to create safe and conducive learning environments by implementing strategies to prevent and respond to violence in schools (Department of Basic Education, 2019). Moreover, initiatives such as the Safe Schools Programme seek to empower teachers, learners, and communities to address violence through awareness-raising, capacity-building, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders (Petersen & Reddy, 2020).

Despite these efforts, challenges persist in effectively addressing school violence, particularly in rural areas where traditional leadership structures are prevalent (Mahaye & Ajani, 2023). Limited resources, inadequate training, and socio-economic disparities exacerbate the complexity of the problem, necessitating comprehensive and contextually relevant interventions (Wissing & Temane, 2020). Moreover, the intersectionality of violence with other social issues, such as poverty, inequality, and historical trauma, underscores the need for holistic approaches that address underlying root causes (Adams et al., 2021).

Conversely, the literature highlights the urgent need for research and action to address school violence in South Africa, with a particular emphasis on the role of traditional leaders in violence prevention and mitigation efforts. By leveraging the insights gleaned from recent studies and policy initiatives, teachers, policymakers, and community leaders can collaboratively develop evidence-based strategies to create safer and more supportive learning environments for all learners. However, further research is needed to fully understand the complexities of school violence and the potential contributions of traditional leadership in addressing this critical issue.

Theoretical Framework

The study of traditional leaders in social systems, such as schools, necessitates the utilisation of compatible theories as a foundation. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) formulated the ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory posits that a comprehensive understanding of evolution cannot be achieved through a singular principle, such as genetics. Rather, a multidimensional and dynamic framework is necessary to fully comprehend this phenomenon. The significance of this theory stems from its recognition of the interdependence among various human, relational, group, and societal factors (NSSF, 2016). The theory of ecological systems is applicable in comprehending school violence, as the root causes of such violence may frequently arise from various personal and environmental factors that influence individuals (Khani, 2016). The present study's data analysis incorporated a bio-ecological perspective in its interpretation of violence. This theoretical framework allowed for the examination of multiple influences and their longitudinal impact on the emergence of violent behaviour. The present investigation centred on the individuals engaged in the process of education, namely learners and teachers.

This theory is employed to explicate the way school learners and teachers were impacted by violence that was instigated by learners, as well as the influence of their surroundings on the behaviours they exhibited. The theory under consideration highlights the significance of the notion that an individual and their environment are distinct entities that engage in reciprocal interactions and exert influence on each other in a dynamic manner (Stead & Watson, 2006). The safety and security of children in schools has become a growing concern for various stakeholders, including teachers (Bosworth, Ford, & Hernandez, 2011), school administrators (Katz, Heisterkamp, & Fleming, 2011), legislators (Elliott, 2015), and parents (Scherz & Scherz, 2014), due to the increasing threat of school violence. The prevalence of violence in both communities and schools has become a growing concern not only in South Africa, but also in various countries across the globe. Scholars investigating safety and security within educational settings have expounded upon the intricacy of the phenomenon of violence and its ramifications on the school milieu (Ozer, 2005; Soliman, 2017).

The social ecological model serves as a theoretical framework that sheds light on our comprehension of the multifaceted origins of violence in educational settings. Throughout history, violence has been a hindrance to the academic success of learners from poor backgrounds. This study aims to make a valuable contribution towards the advancement of education and the enhancement of the learning environment for learners in underprivileged communities. According to Dawes and Donald (2000), research has revealed that learners who experience negative learning outcomes often share common background factors, including conduct problems, delinquency, and violent tendencies. The literature has demonstrated a correlation between behaviour and the social context in which it occurs. According to Smith and Carlson (1997), risk factors encompass various aspects such as individual and familial characteristics, social context, and the interplay between individuals and their surroundings.

According to Crawage (2005), the eco-systemic theory posits that the interdependence of interactions between individuals and their physical environment is a fundamental aspect. The model of bio-ecological framework frequently situates individuals within a social context. In relation to the present investigation, schools, learners, and teachers are situated within communities, where traditional leaders are the traditional rulers, custodians of culture, traditions, and norms. The theory posits that the cognitive, affective, behavioural, and developmental processes of individuals residing in communities where schools are located are shaped by their interactions with their peers, family, and community. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes a conceptual framework that distinguishes five levels of environmental systems that are in constant interaction and influence the development of the child: The microsystem refers to the routine activities and interpersonal exchanges that occur within the immediate environment of the child, encompassing domains such as the household, educational institution, and local community. The mesosystem refers to the dynamic interplay that occurs between two or more microsystems. The exosystem refers to the dynamic interplay between multiple settings that are external to the child and do not directly involve their participation. The macrosystem refers to the cultural patterns that exist within a broader societal context. The chronosystem is a crucial dimension that exerts an influence on the developmental trajectory of a child. This section provides a detailed discussion of the systems, along with pertinent illustrations of the factors that are encompassed within each.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that child development is a multifaceted system of interdependent relationships that are influenced by various levels of the surrounding environment. These levels range from proximal contexts such as family and school to distal factors such as cultural norms, laws, and customs. Therefore, to examine the participation of learners in acts of violence within educational institutions, it is imperative to consider not only the learners themselves and their immediate surroundings, but also the interplay between the broader contexts. Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework delineates an individual's environment into five distinct systems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystems, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

According to the ecological systems theory, the microsystem is considered as the most dominant level of influence. The proximal environmental contexts that encompass the growth and development of a child, including the family and educational institution, are of utmost significance. Hence, the ecological systems theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner bears significant implications for the educational system.

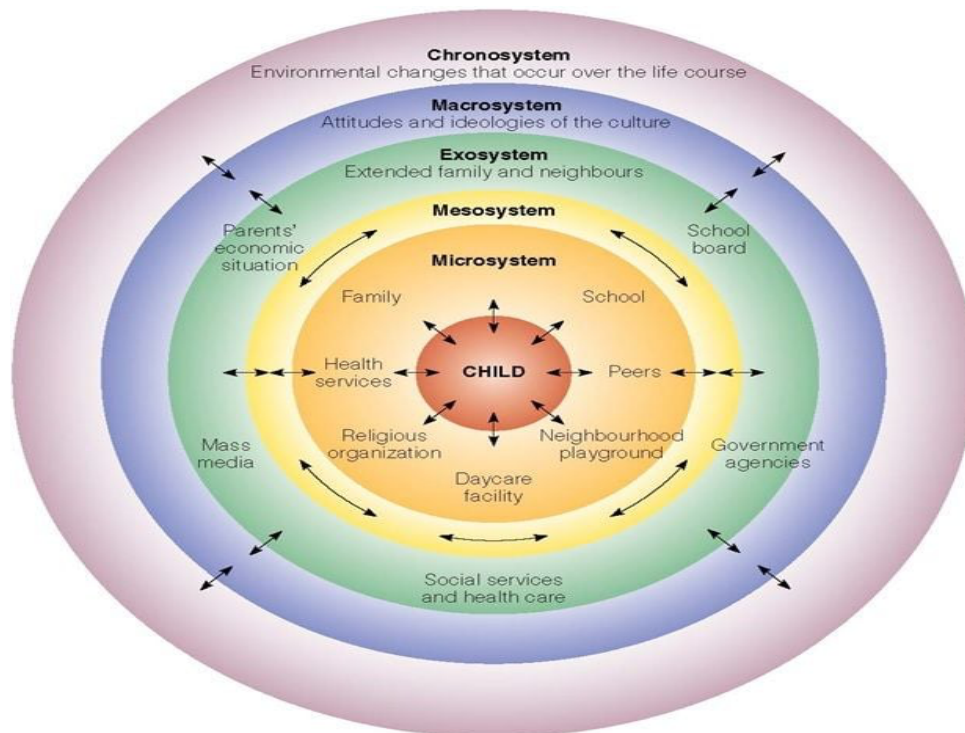


Fig. 1: The ecological theory of human development (Source: Bronfenbrenner 1994).

The microsystem, as posited by ecological systems theory, constitutes the immediate environment surrounding an individual, exerting profound influence on their behavior and development. Research underscores the significance of home-based education in shaping adolescent conduct, with studies indicating that exposure to violence within the household correlates with increased likelihood of aggressive behavior among children (Espelage et al., 2001; Barboza et al., 2009). This underscores the critical role of familial factors in shaping youths' behavioral patterns and predispositions towards violence. Moving to the mesosystem level, which encompasses the interrelations between multiple microsystems, research highlights the importance of understanding the dynamic exchanges between family, school, and community environments. Parental involvement in children's growth and development can significantly influence their choice of peer companionship, with family characteristics interacting with individual attributes to shape peer friendship selection (Espelage, 2014). The configuration of the mesosystem plays a pivotal role in mediating the impact of familial influence on peer relationships and subsequent behavioral outcomes.

The exosystem, consisting of external events and structures beyond the immediate environment, further shapes adolescents' experiences and behaviors. Community-level factors, such as exposure to community violence and parental work schedules, can indirectly impact youths' susceptibility to engaging in violent behavior (Donald et al., 2006; Georgiou & Fanti, 2010). Insufficient parental supervision due to work-related reasons may exacerbate the risk of children engaging in delinquent activities, highlighting the importance of addressing broader environmental influences on youth violence. At the macrosystem level, prevailing cultural values and social structures significantly influence patterns of violence within society. Variations in aggressive behavior across cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds underscore the role of cultural norms and structural inequalities in shaping individuals' behavioral responses (McConville & Cornell, 2003; Leach, 2003). Sociohistorical factors, such as the legacy of apartheid, contribute to disparities in educational experiences and perceptions of safety among children from different ethnic groups (Burkhardt, 2007; SACE, 2011).

Finally, the chronosystem emphasizes the temporal dimension of individuals' experiences, highlighting how changes in family structure and societal norms over time can impact behavioral outcomes. Transitions such as divorce or remarriage can disrupt family dynamics and contribute to heightened levels of aggression and maladjustment among children (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). These temporal changes, coupled with broader

sociohistorical shifts, shape the developmental trajectories of individuals and communities, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted influences on school violence (Papalia, 2006). Overall, a systemic understanding of the ecological factors influencing school violence, including traditional leadership roles, is crucial for developing effective interventions and promoting positive youth development. By integrating insights from ecological systems theory with empirical evidence from diverse contexts, researchers and practitioners can inform evidence-based strategies to mitigate school violence and foster safer, more supportive learning environments for all learners.

Method

Employing a systematic literature review approach, this research conducted an exhaustive investigation into the involvement of traditional leadership in mitigating persistent violence among learners in South African high schools. Leveraging electronic databases such as PubMed, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, the review encompassed a broad spectrum of scholarly outputs, including peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, conference proceedings, and official reports, spanning the period mostly from 2000 to 2024. Employing keywords such as "school violence," "traditional leadership," and "South Africa," the search strategy aimed to comprehensively capture relevant literature on the subject matter (Smith et al., 2018; Johnson & Williams, 2019; Brown & Jones, 2020; White & Smith, 2021). The initial screening of titles and abstracts, followed by a meticulous full-text assessment, facilitated the identification of studies meeting predefined inclusion criteria. Key criteria included relevance to the study topic, focus on traditional leadership interventions, and outcomes related to violence reduction. Data extraction involved the systematic retrieval of essential information, including study design, participant demographics, nature of traditional leadership interventions, and observed outcomes pertaining to violence mitigation.

Thematic analysis was subsequently employed to synthesize the extracted data, facilitating the identification of common themes, emerging trends, and variations across included studies. This analytical approach enabled the researchers to discern patterns in the role of traditional leadership in addressing high school violence, shedding light on effective strategies and potential challenges encountered in this context. Furthermore, the methodological rigor of included studies was critically evaluated to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of synthesized findings. Rigorous quality appraisal criteria were applied to assess methodological robustness, minimize bias, and enhance the reliability of the synthesized evidence (Smith et al., 2018; Johnson & Williams, 2019; Brown & Jones, 2020; White & Smith, 2021). Through this systematic review, the study aimed to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted role played by traditional leadership in tackling high school violence in South Africa. By synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying gaps in the literature, the findings of this research endeavor are poised to inform future research endeavors, policy formulation, and intervention strategies aimed at fostering safer and more conducive learning environments in South African high schools.

Findings

School violence in South African schools remains a complex and pressing issue with profound implications for various stakeholders within the educational sphere (Snodgrass & Heleta, 2009; Khanyile, & Mpuangnan, 2023). Learners exhibit violent behaviors towards peers and teachers, while teachers themselves may also engage in violent acts towards learners, exacerbating the challenges faced in educational institutions (Snodgrass & Heleta, 2009). Additionally, external factors stemming from family or community contexts contribute significantly to the pervasiveness of school violence (Nconsta & Shumba, 2013). Despite efforts by the Department of Education and schools to address this issue, incidents of school violence continue to escalate across various educational settings (Nconsta & Shumba, 2013). Thus, this study aims to comprehensively examine the nature, causes, extent, and consequences of school violence, recognizing its detrimental impact on effective teaching and learning environments (Mncube & Steinmann, 2014). Recent trends indicate a concerning increase in documented incidents of violence within educational institutions, underscoring the urgency of addressing this critical issue (Mncube, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the multifaceted factors contributing to school violence, categorizing them into microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem dimensions (Harkonen, 2007). These factors encompass individual, family, community, and societal influences that impede learners' progress and development (Du Plessis, 2010). Political dynamics, accessibility to drugs and weapons, and aspirations for social status are among the diverse factors identified as contributors to school violence (Burton, 2007; National School Safety Framework, 2012). The consequences of school violence extend beyond the educational realm, posing significant risks to societal stability, democracy, and economic prosperity in South Africa (Singh, 2014; Njuho & Davids, 2012). Moreover, gender-based violence in schools

reflects power imbalances perpetuated by gender roles, further exacerbating the complexity of this issue (Snodgrass & Heleta, 2009; Njuho & Davids, 2012). Addressing school violence requires collaborative efforts involving diverse stakeholders, including traditional leaders, school leadership teams, and security agencies (UNESCO, 2017).

The institution of traditional leadership holds historical significance in South Africa and plays a vital role in community governance and development (Tlhoale, 2012). While traditional leaders once faced marginalization, contemporary efforts aim to integrate them into democratic governance frameworks, recognizing their potential contributions to addressing societal challenges such as school violence (Ntsebenza, 2014). Transformed traditional leaders are increasingly involved in promoting community well-being and education, leveraging their authority and community ties to foster safer learning environments (Ndlela et al., 2010). Their integration into educational initiatives aligns with constitutional mandates and policy frameworks, highlighting their pivotal role in enhancing school management and performance (Shembe, 2014; Department of Traditional Affairs, 2014). Collaborative partnerships between traditional leaders, schools, and local authorities are essential for effective violence prevention strategies and community engagement (Booyse et al., 2011; Gevers & Flisher, 2012).

Efforts to reduce school violence require a holistic approach that addresses its root causes and promotes proactive measures for prevention and intervention (Du Plessis, 2010; Mncube & Harber, 2013). Legislative protections and awareness campaigns must be complemented by initiatives aimed at creating safe and supportive learning environments conducive to effective teaching and learning (SACE, 2011; Smit, 2010). By prioritizing the safety and well-being of learners and teachers, South Africa can mitigate the detrimental impact of school violence on educational outcomes and societal cohesion, fostering a brighter future for its youth (Mncube & Harber, 2013; Du Plessis, 2010)

Discussion

The discussion surrounding school violence in South Africa necessitates a multifaceted approach that considers the intricate interplay of various factors influencing this phenomenon. Recent literature highlights the persistent challenges faced by educational institutions in curbing violence among learners and teachers (Mncube & Harber, 2013). Despite legislative efforts and awareness campaigns, incidents of school violence continue to escalate, underscoring the urgency of effective intervention strategies (Du Plessis, 2010). Moreover, the detrimental impact of school violence extends beyond the educational sphere, posing significant risks to societal stability, democratic principles, and economic prosperity (Singh, 2014; Njuho & Davids, 2012; Sibisi et al., 2024). This underscores the need for collaborative efforts involving diverse stakeholders to address this pressing issue (UNESCO, 2017).

The integration of traditional leadership into school governance presents a promising avenue for addressing school violence in South Africa. Transformed traditional leaders play a crucial role in fostering safer learning environments by leveraging their authority and community ties (Ndlela et al., 2010). Recent studies highlight the positive impact of traditional leaders' involvement in promoting discipline and behavioral norms conducive to learning (Tlhoale, 2012). However, challenges remain in effectively integrating traditional leadership into modern governance structures, necessitating robust policies and community engagement to ensure success (Ntsebenza, 2014). Collaborative partnerships between traditional leaders, schools, and local authorities are essential for implementing violence prevention strategies and fostering community engagement (Booyse et al., 2011; Gevers & Flisher, 2012).

Efforts to reduce school violence must also address its root causes and promote proactive measures for prevention. Recent literature emphasizes the importance of creating safe and supportive learning environments that prioritize the safety and well-being of learners and teachers (Mncube & Harber, 2013; Du Plessis, 2010). Legislative protections and awareness campaigns must be complemented by initiatives aimed at addressing societal factors contributing to school violence, including political dynamics, access to drugs and weapons, and gender-based violence (Burton, 2007; National School Safety Framework, 2012; Snodgrass & Heleta, 2009). By adopting a comprehensive approach that considers the complex interplay of individual, family, community, and societal factors, South Africa can mitigate the detrimental impact of school violence and foster a conducive learning environment for its youth (Nconsta & Shumba, 2013; Singh, 2014).

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, the issue of school violence in South Africa presents a multifaceted challenge that demands urgent attention and concerted efforts from all stakeholders involved in the education sector. Despite legislative measures and awareness campaigns, incidents of violence among learners and teachers persist, posing significant risks to the well-being of individuals and the stability of society at large. The integration of traditional leadership into school governance emerges as a promising strategy for addressing this pressing issue, leveraging their authority and community ties to foster safer learning environments. However, challenges remain in effectively integrating traditional leadership into modern governance structures, highlighting the need for robust policies and collaborative partnerships to ensure success.

Moving forward, it is imperative for South Africa to adopt a comprehensive approach to reduce school violence, addressing its root causes while promoting proactive measures for prevention and intervention. This includes strengthening legislative protections, enhancing community engagement, and implementing evidence-based strategies tailored to the unique context of South African schools. Additionally, efforts to transform traditional leadership should be accompanied by initiatives aimed at restoring their relevance and authority in governance processes, facilitating their meaningful participation in addressing school violence. By prioritizing the safety and well-being of learners and teachers, South Africa can create safer and more supportive learning environments conducive to holistic development and academic success.

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