PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE AT A MULTI-CAMPUS FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGE

H. W. Meyer*
Workwell Research Unit for Economic and Management Sciences
e-mail: Helen.Meyer@nwu.ac.za

G. J. C. Kirsten*
Faculty of Education Sciences
Educational Psychology
e-mail: Tiaan.Kirsten@nwu.ac.za
* North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Research indicates that those employed in the education sector are especially susceptible to psychological violence. This study aimed to determine the nature, more specifically the prevalence, severity and perpetrators of psychological violence at a multi-campus South African Further Education and Training (FET) College. A Psychological Violence Scale was developed and distributed to the study population of 262 staff members at six campuses and Corporate Centre of an FET College; 174 questionnaires were completed and returned. Findings indicated that staff members experienced psychological violence as prevalent, severe and mostly from superiors.
Keywords: psychological violence, prevalence, severity of psychological violence, perpetrators of psychological violence, lecturers, administration staff, Further Education and Training Colleges.

INTRODUCTION

The increase of violence in the world is an area of major concern. Unfortunately, violence has also spread to workplaces. In 2006, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that workplace violence, which included physical and psychological violence, was on the increase and had reached ‘epidemic levels’. Although physical violence attracts more media attention, the focus of the research reported in this article was on psychological violence. Research indicates that the psychological forms of aggression in the workplace are more rampant than physical violence (Keashley 2007).

While one would like to believe that the education sector with its mission of service to others would generally be safe from psychological violence, evidence suggests that the prevalence of psychological violence among educators is considerably high (Ellis 2007; Blase, Blase and Du 2008, 295). However, the assumption is that not all cases of psychological violence are reported, as educators and staff might either be ignorant of this phenomenon or be too afraid of the consequences of lodging complaints.

Psychological violence is more likely to occur in organisations where there is a threat of redundancy, organisational change and restructuring, reform or where job insecurity and excessive workloads resulting in high levels of stress are experienced (Ellis 2007; Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen 2009, 349). Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges in South Africa are currently in the process of transformation, reform and change, which may exacerbate the problem of staff being exposed to psychological violence at these colleges (Meyer 2011, 2; Meyer and Kirsten 2014, 2).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In South Africa, where a high staff turnover among teachers and lecturers is prevalent, psychological violence may have a devastating effect on the education sector. According to Meyers (2006), bullied employees may become less willing to work as hard or as efficiently as before the bullying commenced. The 2007 United States (US) Workplace Bullying Survey revealed that 77 per cent of people lost their jobs due to workplace bullying (WBI 2007, 17). According to Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen (2010), psychological violence is a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other work-related stress disorders put together and may be seen as a rather severe form of social stress at the workplace.
Research on psychological violence and workplace bullying in the international education sector includes those of Lewis (1999; 2004) at further and higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, Blase and Blase (2003) and Blase et al. (2008) who investigated the mistreatment of teachers at the hand of principals in the United States, and Fox and Stallworth (2010) who researched school teachers’ responses to violence and bullying in Canada. These studies revealed that psychological violence was rife among educators, thereby confirming previous findings of the ILO (1998) that educators are a high-risk group to experience psychological violence.

Although educators were identified internationally as a high-risk group experiencing psychological violence, research concerning psychological violence in the South African education sector is limited. For example, Pietersen (2007) studied bullying among academia and Steinman (2007) investigated workplace violence at a South African university. The research conducted on psychological violence and bullying in South African schools (Kirsten 2007; De Vos 2010; De Wet 2010) was also limited to phenomenological (qualitative) studies. Up to the point where this particular study was undertaken, no studies had been conducted on psychological violence at South African FET Colleges (Meyer 2011).

As FET College lecturers are vital to assist the South African youth in obtaining intermediate to high-level skills and knowledge necessary for access to work and higher education (SA 2006, 2), it was imperative to determine whether these staff members experienced psychological violence, and, if so, also to determine the experienced severity thereof, as well as determining the perpetrator/s of the psychological violence. The research reported below attempted to fill this research lacuna by reporting on a quantitative investigation conducted at a multi-campus FET College. In order to reach its aim of reporting on the research, the remainder of the article is structured as follows. Firstly, a conceptual-theoretical framework is outlined. This is followed by an exposition of the empirical research undertaken on the basis of that framework. Next the findings are presented, followed by a discussion set against the conceptual-theoretical background. The article concludes with some recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL-THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The nature of psychological violence was considered against the backdrop of systems theory as an encompassing theory.

Systems theory

The systems theory, developed by Van Bertalanffy, views organisations as open systems consisting of different but interdependent and interrelated sub-systems, namely technological, task, structural and psychological subsystems. Openness
implies that information flows between the subsystems of an organisation and between the organisation and its external environment. Consequently, a change in one subsystem will also affect other sub-systems. During organisational changes, change managers should thus anticipate and plan for the potential effects of changes of one subsystem on the other subsystems. Moreover, an intervention in any organisational subsystem will simultaneously affect the psychological and cultural subsystems, collectively known as the human social subsystem (Van Tonder and Roodt 2008, 44).

It was an assumption of this project that psychological violence is a systems problem caused by systemically dysfunctional structures that can be found in aspects such as hierarchy layers, transparency of decision-making, trust, role clarity and performance expectations (Namie and Namie 2009a; Wheeler, Halbesleben and Shanine 2010, 559).

**Psychological violence**

Psychological violence is a collective term for violent behaviour including bullying, mobbing, structural violence, workplace aggression, abuse, harassment, victimisation, intimidation and threats (Blase and Blase 2003, 8; Di Martino 2003, 2; Einarsen 2007; Work Trauma Foundation 2008; Namie and Namie 2009b, 136–138). While some forms of psychological violence such as abuse and harassment may consist of one act only (Di Martino 2003, 2), workplace bullying consists of a number, a minimum of two negative acts (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts 2007, 847; Nielsen, Skogstad, Matthiesen, Glaso, Aasland, Notelaers and Einarsen 2009, 83).

The distinctive features whereby psychological violence can be recognised include (mostly) repetitive, persistent, humiliating, harmful, negative behaviour or acts committed over the long term against victims who are unable to defend themselves or who are at the lower end of a power disparity (Lutgen-Sandvik et al. 2007, 838, 841; Namie and Namie 2009b, 296). It furthermore depends on the victim’s individual perception whether psychological violence is experienced as such (Keashley, 2007).

**The prevalence of psychological violence**

The prevalence of psychological violence refers to the extent to which the phenomenon occurs – or how widespread it is and the frequency of exposure to psychological violence. Psychological violence may consist of, but is not limited to, the following act/s or behaviour: verbal behaviour such as criticism, shouting and screaming (Blase and Blase 2003, 31; Steinman 2007, 21; WBI 2007, 12); non-verbal behaviour such as intimidating and aggressive posturing (Namie and Namie 2009b, 33); separating from others and isolating one (Blase et al. 2008, 279); the withholding of information, expected behaviour and resources needed by an employee in order to
get the job done (Blase and Blase 2003, 37; Blase et al. 2008, 279; Lutgen-Sandvik et al. 2007, 851; Pietersen 2007, 63; Namie and Namie 2009b, 1); or acts of omission, for example, by not providing due recognition or support (Pietersen 2007, 63; Blase et al. 2008, 279; De Wet 2010, 1453); excessive monitoring and micromanaging and unreasonable supervision (Teacher Support Network 2007; Blase et al. 2008, 279); unrealistic expectations, unreasonable demands and work overload (Pietersen 2007, 63; Teacher Support Network 2007; Blase et al. 2008, 279; Namie and Namie 2009b, 32); and singling someone out in terms of undoable duties, workload and deadlines (Blase and Blase 2003, 31).

Those employed in the health and education sectors are especially susceptible to psychological violence (ILO 1998; Ellis 2007; Steinman 2007, 30). International research confirms that educators form one of the largest occupational groups experiencing psychological violence (Einarsen 1999; Holmes and Page 2003). Some research also indicates that the incidence of psychological violence is more prevalent in the public sector (Steinman 2007, 42).

The severity of psychological violence

Some of the distinctive features of psychological violence, including repetition (persistence), duration, individual perception and power disparity may actually enhance the experienced severity of psychological violence.

Although psychological violence may consist of one serious incident (Di Martino 2003, 2), persistent and prolonged acts of psychological violence seem to enhance the severity (Lutgen-Sandvik et al. 2007, 855). Victims also seem to experience psychological violence that emanates from superiors, and thereafter from colleagues, as more severe, since it is perceived as more meaningful, difficult to control and accompanied with associated barriers that prevent them from dealing with psychological violence (Keashley 2007).

The perpetrators of psychological violence

The term *perpetrators of psychological violence* refers to those responsible for respondents’ experiences of psychological violence – people or institutions from where psychological violence emanates. Generally, evidence suggests that psychological violence is more likely to emanate from those appointed as superiors over their victims (Hauge et al. 2009, 349; Namie and Namie 2009b, 303). Research conducted in the education sector similarly revealed that psychological violence and workplace bullying emanate mostly from superiors, more specifically principals (Blase and Blase, 2003; Kirsten 2007; Blase et al. 2008; De Wet 2010, 1453).

Some studies also point towards colleagues of equal status as the main perpetrators of psychological violence (Nielsen et al. 2009, 95). Subordinates may also bully superiors, especially when they have the support of other superiors or the
informal power to do so (Steinman 2007, 111). Employees who are not appointed as superiors are the ones most likely to get bullied since workplace bullying is usually top-down (Namie and Namie 2009b, 36). Organisational pressure from the top is also ‘pressed’ down through to lower level employees. For example, Lewis (1999) indicated that the increasing pressure on public sector organisations creates more pressure on management, which, in turn, is passed onto subordinates and thus other subsystems. Psychological violence therefore tends to cascade down from higher levels to the lower levels due to interdependency between these sub-systems.

Some research also points to the organisation or the work environment and destructive leadership as causative factors of psychological violence (Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen 2007, 239; Wheeler et al. 2010, 554). The organisation as a system may promote psychological violence by encouraging hostile, cut-throat behaviour and consider it as part of managerial practice and leadership (Namie and Namie 2009b, 22). Consequently, perpetrators misuse other employees because the organisational culture allows and encourages them to do so by rewarding hostile behaviour and an abusive culture is established. Moreover, perpetrators appointed in managerial positions are usually defended by employers and Human Resources when exposed and face a low risk of being held accountable and thus view it as authorisation to continue the abusive behaviour (Namie 2008; D’Cruz and Noronha 2010, 529). The former is indicative of a systems problem on the organisational level; it encourages and sustains psychological violence on the managerial level and among employees.

The next section reports on the empirical investigation that was done based on the conceptual-theoretical framework outlined above.

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

The nature, more specifically the prevalence, severity and perpetrators of psychological violence was investigated at a multi-campus FET College.

A quantitative research design, contextualised by the post-positivist investigative approach, was used. The former implies the testing of objective theories by exploring the relationship between variables, which can be measured on instruments so that numbered data can be statistically analysed (Creswell 2009, 4). The development and use of a validated structured questionnaire such as in this research whereby reliability can be determined makes the analysis and verification of facts possible. Findings and conclusions were also based on analysed data obtained through the use of applicable statistical techniques.

A cross-sectional survey design was used (Creswell 2009, 146). Data was collected at one point in time, during a process which took about three weeks.
Study population and sampling

The study population consisted of all academic and administrative staff members employed at a multi-campus public FET College. The six campuses in the study population were previously independent Colleges that were merged into one FET College and are therefore situated in different geographical areas. The Corporate Centre included in the study population is not a campus, but the administrative headquarters of the six campuses.

The study population consisted of more (190) academic than (72) administrative staff members. The academic staff members included Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Heads of Departments, Campus Managers, Deans and other Senior Managers (office based educators). The study population included educators from post level one to post level five, thus all levels of management and non-management employees. A non-probability sample (convenience sampling) was used as the Psychological Violence Scale was distributed to the whole study population of 262 staff members. The sample size consisted of 174 respondents who completed and returned the questionnaires, thus a sample size ratio of 66 per cent. Concerning the position of the respondents, the majority in the sample, 81 (55%), were academic staff members, 50 (34%) were administrative staff members and 16 (11%) were management staff members (27 did not respond to this specific item). Thus, most of the respondents, 131 (89%), were non-management employees (academic and administrative staff) and only 16 (11%) of the respondents were management employees.

Measuring instrument

The Revised Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R), originally developed in 2001 by Einarsen and Hoel, is the most frequently used instrument to measure the prevalence of workplace bullying in workplaces (Einarsen and Hoel 2006; Namie and Namie 2009a). However, The NAQ-R is limited as it does not provide an option of possible perpetrators next to each act for respondents to indicate from where or by whom psychological violence acts emanates. A Psychological Violence Scale was therefore developed to measure the prevalence and severity of psychological violence and the possible perpetrator/s (people and/or institution) responsible for the psychological violence acts.

Responses on the Psychological Violence Scale were divided into three main sections for the prevalence, severity and possible perpetrators responsible for psychological violence. The first two sections for prevalence and severity had an interval scale (Likert scale) attached. The number of responses on the Likert scale to assess prevalence ranged from 0 to 3 (4 responses), the number of responses to assess severity ranged from 0 to 4 (5 responses). Eight possible perpetrators that might have been responsible for psychological violence were provided in the third section next to the psychological violence acts. Respondents could therefore choose
one or more perpetrators responsible for each act. The possible perpetrators included superiors and those appointed in authoritative positions over staff members, namely, the Department of Education, Management Committee (Manco) consisting of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and two deputy CEOs, superiors at the Corporate Centre (Deans, senior management – Human Resources Manager, Programme managers) and superiors at campuses (Campus Managers, Heads of Divisions (HODs), Senior Lecturers and administration managers). Colleagues of equal status, students, parents and the community were also included as possible perpetrators. These perpetrators were derived from the literature and identified within the context of the education sector, specifically FET Colleges.

Data collection

Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data. The researcher, assisted by trustworthy persons, distributed the questionnaires at the campuses and Corporate Centre. Closed and sealed boxes were provided for the completed questionnaires. These boxes were left in a pre-arranged safe place until the date it was to be collected by the researcher.

Data analysis

The data on the completed questionnaires were analysed with the assistance of a statistician. Recording and computing were conducted with the following statistical computer programmes, namely SPSS (2007) (SPSS 16.0 Windows, Release 16.0.0), STATISTICA version 8.0 (StatSoft, Inc, 2007) and SAS (2003) (SAS system for Windows Release 9.1 TS Level 1M3).

Descriptive statistics, namely, the frequencies, means ranking, standard deviations and variance of responses to each item on the Psychological Violence Scale were applied. An exploratory principal component factor analysis with Oblimin rotation was conducted to determine how the items grouped together on factors. Based on the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.870, enough data was obtained for factor analysis. Fourteen factors were extracted, which explained 72.0 per cent of the variance while the commonalities for all variables was more than 0.50. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was calculated for the extracted factors. The reliability coefficients of two of the fourteen factors were considered too low and therefore the items contained in these two factors were analysed as individual items. T-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were also performed and p-values, F-values and effect sizes (Cohen’s d-values) were calculated (Maree 2007, 210–230). Only the descriptive statistics will be reported in this article, due to the extent of the findings.
Psychological violence

Trustworthiness of the research

Reliability
Internal consistency was established by calculating Cronbach’s alpha on constructs identified in the factor analysis. The Cronbach alpha coefficients of 12 factors were all higher than 0.5. The reliability coefficient for these factors ranged from 0.51 up to 0.91 and the inter item correlations from 0.38 to 0.61, indicating that these factors were reliable. Field notes of the whole survey process were kept so that the research could be replicated.

Validity
The Psychological Violence Scale was circulated among knowledgeable colleagues for their comments, compared with another newly developed questionnaire and sent to those researchers (Lewis and Sheehan 2008) for their input to establish face validity. The literature and pilot studies were undertaken to ensure content validity. Construct validity was determined by means of factor analysis. The extracted factors were interpreted to ensure that they were theoretically sound.

Generalisation
As a convenience sample was drawn, the findings are only applicable to those respondents who participated in the research; generalisation to the population should be done with caution.

Ethical considerations
Permission was requested and granted from the CEO of the FET College and the Campus Managers prior to the research. Respondents were informed about the research, that participation would be voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time and had to provide informed consent. The respondents remained anonymous and the research results were treated confidentially. The Ethical Committee of the university under whose auspices the research was conducted approved the research.

FINDINGS
The items of the five most prevalent and five most severe psychological violence experiences were ranked (from highest to lowest) based on their means and the perpetrators responsible for the five most prevalent and severe experiences were determined. The findings are presented in the tables below.
Table 1: The five most prevalent psychological violence experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Excessive pressure to produce work</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Given unreasonable deadlines</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exposed to unmanageable workload</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>More tasks assigned to you than to other staff at similar post level</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Complaints fall on deaf ears</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>52</td>
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</table>

The means show that respondents experienced the five most prevalent psychological violence experiences seldom (1.43) to often (2.18), where 0 is never, 1 is seldom, 2 is often and 3 is very often. However, on closer inspection, it is clear that the majority of staff members, who experienced the five most prevalent psychological violence experiences, experienced them often. Furthermore, those who experienced excessive pressure to produce more work experienced it very often while the minimum respondents never had this experience. An exceedingly high majority of respondents also experienced the five most prevalent psychological violent experiences in varying degrees in comparison to those who had never experienced it.

The means show that respondents experienced the five most severe psychological violence experiences as slightly severe (from 2.27 to 1.87), where 0 is not experienced, 1 is not severe, 2 is slightly severe, 3 is severe and 4 is extremely severe. However, the majority of the respondents experienced excessive pressure to produce more work and being given unreasonable deadlines as severe, on varying levels, while the respondents who responded to these two items experienced it mostly as severe. Most of the respondents also experienced being exposed to an unmanageable workload as severe, on varying levels, compared with those who did not experience this specific
item. The majority of the respondents, who experienced that their complaints fell on deaf ears and that more tasks were assigned to them as opposed to other staff at similar post levels, also experienced it as severe.

**Table 2:** The five most severe psychological violence experience

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<td>Given unreasonable deadlines</td>
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<tr>
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Table 3: The perpetrators of psychological violence

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<tr>
<th>Perpetrators</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Students/Learners</th>
<th>Subordinates</th>
<th>Colleagues: Equal status</th>
<th>Superiors at my campus</th>
<th>Manco/Supersiors at Corporate Centre</th>
<th>Dept. of Education</th>
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<td>Excessive pressure to produce work</td>
<td>45 25.9 103</td>
<td>21.3 98</td>
<td>37 20.7 92</td>
<td>36 37.4</td>
<td>45 39.2</td>
<td>45 20.7 92</td>
<td>37 21.3 98</td>
<td>19 10.9 74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Given unreasonable deadlines</td>
<td>36 17.7 69</td>
<td>19.3 80</td>
<td>37 18.2 82</td>
<td>36 39.2</td>
<td>36 39.2</td>
<td>36 36.5 72</td>
<td>37 21.3 98</td>
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The ranking order of the perpetrators responsible for the respondents’ most prevalent and most severe psychological violence experiences was (from the highest to lowest rank): Manco and superiors at the Corporate Centre; superiors at campuses; the Department of Education; colleagues of equal status; students, subordinates, parents and the community. Manco and superiors at the Corporate Centre, superiors at the respondents’ campus, the Department of Education and colleagues of equal status also ranked the highest as perpetrators for most items and mostly in the aforementioned order.

**DISCUSSION**

Some general interpretations can be deduced from the findings, the first being that psychological violence was prevalent among these staff members and experienced as severe in varying levels. Two of the most prevalent and severe psychological violence experiences, namely excessive pressure to produce more work and an unmanageable workload, may be the result of the additional administration requirements related to the new curriculum, which is also known as the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programme introduced in January 2007 (FET Colleges 2010). Excessive pressure to produce work and an unmanageable workload are also related to staff members’ work design and indicative of a systems problem on the organisational level that may have also been caused by the introduction of the new curriculum on a national level. International research conducted in the education sector similarly revealed that teachers experienced increased workload pressure, unreasonable work demands, unreasonable time limits and impossible deadlines (Blase and Blase 2003; Teacher Support Network 2007; Blase et al. 2008, 279), while Pietersen (2007, 63) also recorded impossible deadlines among South African academia. Two new findings emerged from this research that may be specifically related to the education sector, namely, more tasks assigned to a person than to staff at a similar post level and complaints that fell on deaf ears. Although these two items were derived from the literature, it was originally worded as ‘singling out one in terms of undoable duties, workload’ (Blase and Blase 2003, 31) and ‘acts of omission’ (WBI 2003). The latter was reworded to its current format based on the inputs from knowledgeable experts in the education sector during the design of the Psychological Violence Scale. Further research in this regard is necessary to determine if these two items are also prevalent and experienced as severely in other contexts.

An unexpected observation was that the most prevalent experiences of psychological violence concurred with the most severe experiences and in the same ranking order. Thus, it appears as if the most prevalent experiences of the staff members who participated in this research were associated with the most severe psychological violence experiences. This suggests that the severity of psychological violence increases simultaneously with the prevalence of psychological violence.
acts. This finding confirms the notion that the more often psychological violence is experienced, the more severe it is experienced (Lutgen-Sandvik et al. 2007, 847). Since staff members experienced the most prevalent psychological violence experiences very often and simultaneously perceived these experiences as severe, this might also suggest that they are at risk to suffer in terms of health damage.

Psychological violence emanated mostly from those appointed in authoritative positions and/or as superiors over staff members, including Manco and superiors at the Corporate Centre and superiors at the respondents’ campus, followed by the Department of Education and thereafter colleagues of equal status. The former also points to a problem on the managerial and to a lesser extent the group levels. This finding also concurs with literature that those appointed as superiors are more likely to be the perpetrators of psychological violence and that psychological violence is usually top-down (Blase and Blase 2003; Blase et al. 2008; WBI 2007, 10). However, this finding should not be interpreted that superiors at the FET College themselves did not experience psychological violence as 11 per cent of the quantitative sample consisted of management staff members who also have superiors from whom psychological violence may emanate. The sample also consisted of more non-management employees (89%) in relation to management employees that could have influenced the statistics. Superiors (management) and staff members at FET Colleges may therefore also experience psychological violence that emanate from their superiors, including superiors at the Department of Education who ranked third as perpetrators of psychological violence. This furthermore suggests that psychological violence in the FET College cascades down through the different hierarchy levels, affecting staff members on all levels, including management staff members.

The Department of Education as perpetrator of psychological violence is a new finding and contrasts with the previous research in South African schools where principals were indicated as sole perpetrators (Kirsten 2007; De Wet 2010, 1453). The Department of Education is the employer of most of these staff members but also governs all education in South Africa. Officials from the Department of Education are therefore appointed in authoritative positions over FET College staff members. FET Colleges also went through several changes during the time of the research, for example, the employer changed from the Department of Education to the College Council, the NCV curriculum was introduced, merging, the restructuring of posts and the implementation of Employment Equity and affirmative action (Bisshoff and Nkoe 2005, 205; Meyer 2011, 2; Meyer and Kirsten 2014, 2). This also suggests that pressure from the Department of Education is exerted on superiors at the FET College who have to implement these changes and, in turn, also become the perpetrators of psychological violence. Although the changes were initiated on a national level, they simultaneously affected the organisational system of the FET College, including the management and academic staff members, causing disruptions in these subsystems. If the aforementioned changes were handled disrespectfully
and coincided with the unrealistic redistribution of workload, manipulation and intimidation by the Department of Education and the FET College as organisational systems, staff members may have rather experienced structural violence, which is a form of psychological violence. Structural violence is described as ‘the intentional use of power and/or organisational systems and structures or laws against an individual or entity to carry out covert or unethical agenda, enforce change or indulge in unfair practices to the disadvantage of the affected individual or entity’ (Work Trauma Foundation 2008). The findings also revealed that staff members indeed experienced an unmanageable workload and excessive pressure as the most prevalent psychologically violent acts. Psychological violence by the Department of Education is furthermore indicative of power disparity or dysfunctional power differential relationships, characteristic to psychological violence.

Literature also indicates that victims may perceive psychological violence that emanates from superiors and colleagues as more stressful compared with other perpetrators (Keashley 2007; Meyer and Kirsten 2014, 2). Since staff members in this research identified superiors and then colleagues of equal status as the perpetrators of their negative experiences, it might suggest that respondents in this study were likely to experience a great deal of stress as a result. The former is also typical of psychological violence as it usually starts with one perpetrator, but soon escalates to involve the whole workgroup. Research also indicates that colleagues who witness bullying would rather side with the perpetrator and become perpetrators themselves, especially when the perpetrator is a superior (Namie and Namie 2009b, 6, 86). Superiors and colleagues of equal status indicated as perpetrators in this research may also point to a hostile organisational culture at the FET College. Colleagues of equal status were also reported as perpetrators in other contexts (Keashley 2007; WBI 2007, 10) and by teachers in the UK (UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line 2010, 28). Learners ranked after colleagues of equal status as perpetrators of excessive pressure to produce work, given unreasonable deadlines and exposed to an unmanageable workload. The latter may also be related to the demands of the new NCV curriculum that includes the completion of assessments and portfolios of evidence that lecturers have to control. In line with literature, subordinates did not rank high as perpetrators (WBI 2007, 10; UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line 2010, 2), while parents and the community were least indicated as perpetrators of psychological violence. In contrast to studies conducted in South African Schools (Kirsten 2007; De Wet 2010, 1453), psychological violence in this research came from various perpetrators, though mostly from superiors and the Department of Education, colleagues of equal status and even from learners more than from subordinates, while parents and the community were indicated the least as perpetrators of psychological violence.

The findings indicate that psychological violence at the FET College exists on the national, organisational, managerial, group and interpersonal levels. In line with
the systems approach, a change in one subsystem, for example, on a national level, simultaneously affected the other subsystems in the FET College.

CONCLUSION

The findings confirmed that psychological violence is prevalent at the multi-campus FET College as it is experienced often and simultaneously as severe by staff members. The five most prevalent and most severe psychological violence experiences of staff members included excessive pressure to produce work, being given unreasonable deadlines, being exposed to unmanageable workloads, more tasks being assigned to one than to other staff members at a similar post level and complaints that fall on deaf ears. The most prevalent experiences concurred with the most severe experiences. This may suggest that the more psychological violence is experienced, the more severe it is also experienced by these staff members.

Psychological violence emanated from various perpetrators, though mostly from superiors, the Department of Education and colleagues of equal status, and in that particular order. As staff members in this research experienced psychological violence, often (repetitive) and mostly from those appointed in authoritative positions (power disparity) and from their colleagues, they are more likely to experience psychological violence as severe and thus have an increased risk to suffer in terms of health damage.

Consistent with the systems theory, psychological violence at the FET College cascaded down through the hierarchy levels from the national level through the organisational, managerial, group levels and interpersonal levels, affecting all staff members at the FET College and the system as a whole. If psychological violence is not addressed, it may also adversely affect the whole teaching learning process in FET Colleges and its aim to respond to the economic and development needs in South Africa.

Based on the findings, a multi-level approach (Saam 2010) is recommended to address psychological violence at the FET College. This would ensure that psychological violence is addressed on the levels where it exists, thereby providing applicable systemic solutions. From a system’s perspective, the implementation of strategies on different levels would be more effective than strategies implemented on a single level. Strategies implemented on different levels are anticipated to simultaneously affect all other levels within the FET College, resulting in a positive cumulative effect.

The following multi-level strategies are recommended to address psychological violence at the FET College:

- Macro-level policies should be implemented on a national level to prohibit psychological violence including structural violence. Evidence suggests that psychological violence is more likely to thrive in the absence of strong policies.
More specifically, a psychological violence policy that prevents all forms of psychological violence could be introduced on the national (Department of Education) and organisational levels of the FET College. In the case of this particular FET College, psychological violence incidences are handled by means of grievance procedures. Grievance procedures, though, are not recommended to deal with psychological violence as superiors (who in this case are also the perpetrators) usually have to handle the grievances and may thus thwart it.

- Organisational development, changed work designs and a 360-degree feedback performance appraisal system (360-DFS) (Meyer 2011, 374) are recommended on the organisation level of the FET College. The work design of staff members should be changed to incorporate the added tasks related to the NCV curriculum and to address their experiences of excessive pressure and unmanageable workloads. This should also provide for a more realistic distribution of workloads and realistic task descriptions. The Department of Education as employer should, however, initiate changed work designs on a national level to be implemented on the organisational level at FET Colleges. The feedback resulting from a 360-DFS, as recommended, is anticipated to increase the self-awareness of perpetrators that would enable them to adopt a self-critical approach to discourage them from resorting to psychological violence (Mamatoglu 2008, 431). Organisational development is also expected to address an organisational culture at the FET College that sustains abusive leadership and psychological violence by colleagues of equal status.

- Perpetrating superiors from the Department of Education and at the FET College should be addressed and held accountable (managerial level). Perpetrators who suffer no consequences for their negative behaviour view it as indirect approval to engage in more similar behaviour (Wheeler et al. 2010, 557). Superiors at the Department of Education should also manage changes more effectively and superiors at the FET College should distribute work fairly. Managerial training and development are suggested in this regard. Superiors should preferably cultivate emotional intelligence and adopt the positive behaviours related to transformational leadership (Kelloway and Barling 2010, 264).

- Staff members experienced psychological violence from their colleagues (group level) and therefore it is suggested that colleagues rather support one another (Meyer and Kirsten 2014, 10). Staff members should challenge psychological violence and witnesses should report it to break its cycle, thereby also addressing a hostile organisational culture.

- Staff members should become assertive and guard their personal boundaries to discourage perpetrators from bullying them (interpersonal level). Assertiveness training may be useful. Good use could also be made of newer legislation such
as the Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011 to act upon perpetrators of psychological violence. This can be done by obtaining a protection order against such transgressors where it can be shown that harm has emanated from harassment.

- All staff members should receive training on the NCV curriculum and improved assessment strategies such as integrated, self and peer assessments to save time and to enable them to handle the additional demands of the curriculum.

The Psychological Violence Scale could be used to include more FET Colleges in South Africa. The former would make random sampling possible, which will enable generalisation of the findings to the general population. If similar findings to this research emerged when more FET Colleges were involved, it will not only confirm the results of this research, but will provide a stronger ‘voice’ to staff members that psychological violence needs to be addressed by the authorities. The Department of Education and superiors at FET Colleges should also be made aware of the findings of this research (Meyer and Kirsten 2014, 10) so that psychological violence can be addressed and staff members supported.

REFERENCES


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ILO see International Labour Organization.


Council of Nurses, Public Services International (Joint programme on workplace violence in the health sector).


