

“I don’t want to come back now”: Teacher directed violence

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Teacher directed violence (TDV) is characterised as damaging physical or verbal aggression directed towards teachers by students, parents, or colleagues. In this article the researchers explore the experiences of three secondary teachers in Western Australia who have experienced TDV. Given the limited sample size, this qualitative study employs an interpretative phenomenological approach that draws on attribution theory to explore employment decisions made by teachers following TDV. Semi-structured interviews focusing on the lived experiences of the participants were subjected to interpretative phenomenological analysis. The findings from the study suggest that blame; relationships; and responses and reactions felt after the incident of TDV are key factors in employment decisions. Implications are discussed in relation to teacher welfare, turnover, and attrition.

Introduction

Teacher directed violence (TDV) can be physical or verbal violence directed at teachers by students, parents, or work colleagues (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Espelage et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2014; Reddy et al., 2013). Other names for TDV may include but are not limited to: ‘teacher victimisation’ (Curran et al., 2019; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Moon et al., 2020; Reddy et al., 2018) and ‘violence against teachers’ (De Cordova et al., 2019; Moon et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2011). TDV can include harassment such as: verbal threats, obscene gestures or remarks, Internet victimisation, bullying and intimidation; physical violence such as: hitting, punching, biting, kicking, and pushing, throwing of objects; and property offences such as: theft or damage to property (McMahon et al., 2020).

TDV is increasing globally (Tronc, 2010) and has dominated news headlines worldwide with headings such as: “Chaos in classrooms as violent students turn on teachers” (Bita, 2023); “US to combat threats of violence against teachers” (BBC, 2021); and “Scots teachers live in fear of being attacked and spat on at work after 22,000 incidents reported” (Rodger, 2022). Research in the USA suggests that 80% of teachers have experienced some type of TDV during their teaching career (Anderman et al., 2018; Espelage et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2014; Reddy et al., 2018). Findings in other countries have varied, with 80% of teachers experiencing TDV in a Canadian sample (Wilson et al., 2011); 25% in Finland with 3.7% stating that this was a daily occurrence (Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012); and 25% in South Korea (Moon et al., 2015).

Although Australian research is scarce, findings indicate that TDV is commonplace. In a study surveying 800 teachers in the public and private primary and secondary school sectors, 99.6% of teachers had experienced bullying during their teaching career with the perpetrator usually being another member of staff in a position of power (Riley et al., 2011). Bullying was found to be a strong indicator of teacher attrition (Fetherston &

Lummis, 2012). Another Australian study found 55.6% of teachers had experienced harassment and bullying from both students and parents: parents were the main perpetrator in primary schools (62.9%); and students were the main perpetrator in secondary schools (77.6%) (Billet et al., 2019). Specifically in Western Australia (WA), 64.3% of teachers in the primary and secondary sectors who were surveyed had suffered from at least one experience of TDV in the last two years (Lowe et al., 2020).

This paper reports the findings of a study conducted in Western Australia which investigated teacher experiences of TDV and how these incidents impact future employment decisions.

Literature review

There are concerns about teacher attrition, although despite estimates of high attrition rates in the media of 30 to 40%, there are no national figures available in Australia (Weldon, 2018). Other countries have reported high attrition rates for teachers with over 30% leaving the profession after five years in the United Kingdom (UK) (Gov.UK, 2022), and 44% after five years in the USA (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Current research has indicated that some of the reasons for turnover and attrition in Australia are due to the continual changes in policy, lack of autonomy, excessive workload, being undervalued by school leadership, disrespected by parents, and how teachers are perceived and blamed in the media (Heffernan et al., 2022; Roberts & Downes, 2020). However, there is very little research on how TDV affects turnover and attrition.

There is a small amount of research exploring the impact of TDV on turnover and attrition in the USA (Curran et al., 2017; Moon et al., 2020; Peist et al., 2020; Zuraweicki, 2013) and in China (Yang et al., 2022). Disempowerment was a major factor in teachers' decisions to leave their school or profession after experiencing TDV (Peist et al., 2020). One study found 9% of teachers moved to another school due to aggression and 6% of teachers left the profession completely (Moon et al., 2020). Threats of violence and actual violence directed towards teachers were strong predictors of teachers moving to another school or leaving the profession completely, but this could be mitigated to a degree by teacher resilience and school support (Curran et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2022). Similarly, one study discovered statistical significance between verbal threats and teachers moving to another school but not leaving the profession entirely (Zuraweicki, 2013). These teachers did not state TDV as the reason for the move, mostly the move to another school was attributed to a "geographical relocation" (Zuraweicki, 2013. p. 28). The TDV incidents occurred in schools in low socio-economic areas.

Turnover and attrition affect factors such as financial cost and negative publicity (Espelage et al., 2013), the culture of the school (Bass et al., 2016) and diminished engagement of student learning (Räsänen et al., 2020). There is a paucity of qualitative research exploring employment decisions following a TDV incident. This qualitative study used an interpretative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of teachers who have experienced TDV, and employment choices made thereafter. The findings in this article have emanated from a larger study.

Theoretical framework

This study explored how participants attribute cause following a TDV incident through the lens of attribution theory. Attribution theory was initially conceptualised by Heider (1958) who cogitated two main attributions of behaviour: dispositional factors (internal) and situational factors (external) (Dainton & Z Kelley, 2010). The current study used Weiner's (2014) attribution theory which proposes three causal properties of attribution: causal locus; causal stability; and causal control. Causal locus is established when the individual attributes the cause to be either internal, due to individual characteristics, or external, due to something or somebody out of the individual's control. Causal stability refers to how consistent and permanent the cause is. A stable cause would result in there never being a change and an unstable cause could produce a change. Finally, causal control denotes how much control an individual considers themselves to have in a situation (Weiner, 2014).

Two previous studies have used attribution theory to consider how individuals perceive the cause of TDV. Kauppi and Pörhölä (2012) characterised three types of attribution for TDV: "student related", "institution related" and "teacher related" (p. 1059). Results suggested that the cause of TDV was student related. However, it could be argued that the cause cannot be singularly the students, otherwise all teachers would experience TDV. Anderson et al. (2018) considered internal causal locus as an attribution of cause focusing on whether self-blame was due to the teacher's character – characterological self-blame (CBS) and therefore not able to change, or whether the self-blame was due to the teacher's behaviour – behavioural self-blame (BSB) which would enable the individual to change. Results found that if the cause was perceived to be BSB, the individual believed that they were less likely to experience TDV again.

Attributing cause internally or externally may influence whether another incident of TDV may occur (Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012). How stable the participants view the situation and how much control they have over the situation could determine their view of safety in their current place of employment and the likelihood of an incident happening again. Therefore, using the three causal properties of attribution: locus; stability; and control, this study explored how teachers attribute cause and what impact this has on their employment decisions.

The current study: Research methodology

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) aims to explore the lived experiences of individuals through a thorough process of analysis. Guided by phenomenology, IPA considers the ideas of four phenomenologists: Husserl; Heidegger; Merleau-Ponty; and Sartre (Smith et al., 2009). Husserl reflected on preconceptions confusing experiences, with the aim of finding the essence of the phenomena through eidetic reduction (Husserl, 1983). Heidegger believed in the notion of individuals being a product of contextual factors (Heidegger, 1927/ 1962). Merleau-Ponty believed in embodiment and the

uniqueness of the individual's understanding of their experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1958). Finally, Sartre considered the influence of others and how this affects how an individual views the world (Sartre, 1948). Eatough and Smith (2017) has provided those unfamiliar with this research approach with detailed information.

Based on the hermeneutic philosophy of interpretation, researchers embed themselves in a double hermeneutic cycle. Firstly, understanding how the individual has made sense of their experiences but also how the researcher has interpreted this understanding (Spiers & Smith, 2019)). Each case study is focused on one at a time using an idiographic approach which focuses on the individual's personal experience before drawing comparisons between cases later. This method is inductive, assumptions are constructed as meaning emerges rather than through deduction which is driven by a pre-existing theory (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

The purpose of this study was to explore the employment decisions of participants who have experienced TDV and consider where, or to whom the attribution of blame was placed.

Research questions

1. How do teachers attribute causes to TDV?
2. To what extent do teachers' attributions of the causes of TDV affect their decision to remain in their current role, move to a different role, move to a different educational setting, or leave the profession entirely?

Method

Participants

The three participants were former secondary school teachers. IPA is a useful methodology for this study as IPA tends to be used with small sample sizes using purposive sampling with participants having similar experiences in common (Smith & Nizza, 2022; Spiers & Smith, 2019). IPA is a time-consuming process and therefore three participants is an optimal number of participants to gather detailed data about the phenomenon (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Approval was obtained from Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethical Committee. Participants were given information about the research and signed consent forms agreeing to be interviewed.

All participants were female and had teaching experience ranging between three years and thirty years in the secondary sector. The schools where the participants had taught and experienced TDV were government schools in urban areas.

Procedure

Semi structured interviews were used starting with broad interview questions to put the participants at ease, e.g. "Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your teaching

history?" before moving on to questions that may bring back painful emotions, e.g. "Can you describe what you were feeling during the incident?" Rich data results in the interviewer asking probing questions that enable the participant to think deeply about their experiences and reflect profoundly (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Smith & Nizza, 2022). Naturally prompting to elicit more information from the participants' responses is typical in semi-structured interviews (Kallio et al., 2016; Smith & Nizza, 2022). A list of mental health organisations was emailed to the participants prior to the interview taking place and participants were asked for the name and mobile number of a contact person should the participant become distressed during the interview.

Interviews were approximately 60 minutes in duration and were conducted using Microsoft Teams which involved audio and video recording. The transcription function on Microsoft Teams provided the first transcription. The video and audio recordings were watched and listened to several times to transcribe verbatim, correcting words that were incorrectly transcribed, to remove any identifiable information, and to note any distressing signs from participants. There were no visible signs of distress recorded with any of the participants. The day following the interview, the interviewer contacted the participant to check for any distress that may have been caused during the interview. In each case, the participant stated that there was no distress or discomfort caused. The interviewer emailed a short summary of the main points from the interview for member checking.

Data analysis

In alignment with IPA guidelines, the researchers read through each transcript several times, firstly with the audio which enabled the researchers to be immersed in the interview. The right-hand margin of the transcript was annotated with any ideas or thoughts that arose, looking at the language used, repetition of phrases, differences in meaning and interesting comments (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Spiers & Smith, 2019). These exploratory notes were interpretive, based on personal and professional experience and considered varying meanings (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

On the left-hand margin of the transcript, each comment made in the right-hand margin was carefully considered to create experiential statements previously known as emergent themes (Smith & Nizza, 2022; Spiers & Smith, 2019). Close reference was made back to the original notes on the right-hand margin. The experiential statements are a summary of the participant's response considering the psychological understanding of meaning and context (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

The researchers noted between 63 and 72 experiential statements for each participant. Examples of these were: gang violence rife at school; swearing and refusal to comply; concern for the safety of others; tried to stay calm; and didn't blame the student. The researchers took each participant's experiential statements and grouped these in clusters of experiential statements that link together. These clusters are called personal experiential themes (Smith & Nizza, 2022). There were between 17 and 20 clusters of personal experiential themes for each participant. These clusters were then defined into headings such as: Lack of respect from students to teachers; Lack of engagement; Ineffective

school organisation; and Relationships. During the process, the researchers referred to the transcript to make sure that the statements were true to the participant's experience.

A cross case analysis followed which involved the identification of similarities and differences of each case, looking closely at each personal experiential theme (Smith & Nizza, 2022). These interpretations were formulated into ten group experiential themes. Three of these themes: attribution of blame; relationships; and reactions felt after a TDV incident, provide the framework for the presentation of the findings. These themes are most relevant to answering the research questions.

Findings

This section presents three group experiential themes that emerged from the data: attribution of blame; relationships; and reactions felt after a TDV incident. These themes are presented with quotations from the interview data to validate the data interpretation. The three participants have been given pseudonyms to avoid identifiable information.

Themes

Attribution of blame

When discussing the experiences, the participants tried to find reasons for why the incident had happened. Table 1 considers who participants blamed for the incident of TDV occurring. The participants frequently mentioned others as the cause of TDV. The attribution of blame was a means for the participant to process the incident and to protect themselves in the future.

Table 1: Group experiential theme and subthemes for the attribution of blame

Blame others	Other members of staff should have provided context Management did not support staff The bus driver antagonised the situation
Blaming oneself	No blame attributed to self Potential blame of self

Layla recalled that she had been asked to cover a class but claimed the information provided by the classroom teacher was inadequate and lacking. She described the atmosphere as "eerie" and noted that there was a boy at the back of the class who was "boiling and gripping the desk." She remembered walking over to him and asking him, "Are you OK?" She recollected, "he flipped his desk up... and he threw a chair at me." She claimed that although she was "visibly pregnant", she stated, "I do not think that was going through his mind at the time." She recounted that she had no idea what had triggered the violence.

I didn't have context. I didn't know if his anger was at someone else that I wasn't aware of, um... who might have got sent out or didn't get sent out because I didn't even know who was meant to be in the classroom.

She considered the lack of information given to her prior to the unexpected request to cover the class was insufficient and contributed to her feeling ill-prepared and the reason she was physically attacked. She recalled, "There must have been something that went on beforehand." Layla reported that after the incident of TDV she was informed that there had been an issue or an incident that had contributed to the perpetrator getting angry, but she was not updated on what this issue was, "I was told that there was an incident that happened that had got him riled up but um, I'm not sure what that was."

Layla also considered her own role in the situation she experienced. She reflected on whether she contributed to the TDV when she asked the boy if he was OK, "Did I just trigger that by saying that? Should I have left him alone?" Although Layla questioned whether she was to blame for the incident, she reported that the absence of an explanation of earlier events leading to the TDV left her feeling uncertain about future situations, "I would have liked some context, so like understanding of what happened... even a debrief." This indicates that Layla attributed most of the blame externally, as did Vera.

Vera blamed her TDV incident on the lack of thought and consideration from the leadership team for what might occur to teachers when following management directives. She expressed that she felt obliged to follow the leadership directive to ask students to pick up litter at recess.

... you're getting a direction from the, the, teaching, you know, the, the upper levels that there's a seagull problem. And what do you, you know, you when you're out on duty you need, if you see kids drop rubbish, you need to get them to pick it up.

She recalled asking a student to pick up the rubbish that he had dropped, and he argued with her, "No, I'm not picking it up." She stated that when she told the boy that she would report him, he "reluctantly did pick it up." As Vera walked away, she reported "a golf ball size piece of chewing gum was hurled at the back of my head, and it stuck at the crown at the back of my head. Very, very hard." She walked to the office, "in absolute tears" and described how a colleague tried to help her, saying, "Don't worry" as he "cut it all out" of her hair. Although she was distressed, she was not offered time out or support after the incident, "I was really upset... I had to go back to class. There was no, 'Don't go to class.'"

Vera took the matter to the police to investigate but she stated the school allegedly refused, "they weren't going to release that to the police... so the police couldn't take it any further." There was no follow up support or care provided and she was told to "come back and work and not let the kid get the better of me... I got no counselling. Nothing." She stated that safety measures were not put in place by the leadership team to support teachers, "We should have been doing duty as a couple, as a pair, you know, with two people there so that you had support, we had no mobile phone." She contemplated that she could have questioned the directive in a staff meeting, "I needed to say, well what are you going to do if these kids don't pick up the rubbish?" Vera explained that she miscarried her baby during this time and attributed this directly to the incident and the

aftermath, “So, three weeks later I had a miscarriage. So, you know, that’s where I know, I put it down to the high stress situation that I was in.”

For one participant, Angela, the blame shifted beyond the school gate and was specifically attributed to the bus driver - although he was not the perpetrator of the assault. She stated that there had been previous issues between a year 10 boy and the bus driver and as a result the bus driver said, “I’m not taking that kid.” She recounted how when she asked the boy to “get off the bus,” the boy “just pushed me off the steps...he kept swearing in my face... ‘you dirty fucking white cow’ ... and then he spat in my face.” She remembered “asking people to go and get someone from the school”. However, while the boy was still verbally abusing her, “The bus driver closed the door and just drove off and left me.”

Angela felt that the bus driver had antagonised the situation because of his attitude and his language directed to the students generally, stating that, “he escalated the situation... he was swearing at the kids... 'You’re a naughty shit,' type of thing.” Angela argued that the bus driver was accountable for the incident and was the reason the boy became violent. She said:

I knew the background with the kids and although what he (the boy) did was wrong, he was wound up by the bus driver and you know in, in my opinion, the bus driver was the ultimate fault cause, he started the dispute... and did not behave like an adult.

Upon reflection, Angela attributed no blame to herself and understood that had anyone else been present, they would have experienced TDV, “I took it that I could have been any person. If it was me or any other person standing there, the same thing would have happened.” She felt she had no personal control of the situation and like Layla and Vera, she believed there would be no assurance that a situation like this would not happen again.

Relationships

Table 2 lists how the participants viewed their relationships with students, parents, and staff. The relationships that the participants had with students, parents and staff contributed to how safe they felt and their perception of the threat of violence.

Table 2: Group experiential theme for relationships

Relationships with students	Close relationships with students Physical and verbal abuse from students
Relationships with parents	Verbal abuse from parents Parents did not respect teachers
Relationships with staff	Good relationships with other members of staff No relationships with other members of staff

We used to take the kids on a year 8 or 9 camp, after that they got to know, and they would respect you... I used to find after the camps the kids couldn’t do enough for you.

Vera stated she valued the relationships that she had developed with students over the years. She commented that over her thirty-year teaching career, schools had stopped doing as many extra-curricular activities such as camps and this is where she believed the teacher/student relationship was strongly built.

However, Vera believed these relationships changed when she was in a school where there was no continuity of teaching students from year seven through to year twelve. Vera noted that she had not developed relationships with the students and their siblings over the years, "You just stayed with one group and your reputation wasn't known by the other students in the school or older brothers or sisters." In this school, she suspected that there was no respect from the students, and the students would challenge teachers, "They would purposely drop something down and watch you to see if you would say anything. And stare you out sort of thing."

Likewise, Angela expressed the importance of strong relationships, "I miss the relationships with the students... those years are the most important years of their lives, and you try to build a relationship with them." Similarly, Layla enjoyed working with a group of male students who needed extra support, "... they were boys who'd been in trouble... but I got to do some really amazing things... and I loved that." All participants noted the importance of a respectful student/teacher relationship.

Conversely, participants expressed disappointment regarding their relationships with parents. Two of the participants indicated parents did not support them and teachers were often subjected to verbal abuse. Layla considered the parents to be unhelpful and difficult to deal with.

We managed the parents as much as we managed the students... when you are dealing with the students, the parent of that student that you're dealing with tends to speak to you in exactly the same way... there was no support from the homefront.

Layla stated parents were unhelpful and unwilling to collaborate with her. She described having to "manage" the parents rather than working cooperatively with them.

Equally, Vera remarked that dealing with parents was challenging and confrontational.

The parents were the ones who would come in and say, 'What the fuck are you doing with my child? Blah, blah, blah' or they would go 'What the fuck's my child doing? Why can't you fucking control them?'

The lack of responsibility from the parent to discipline their child or to mutually find a solution to the issue was commonplace and Vera perceived parents to be uncooperative and disrespectful to her position as a teacher. One parent said, "Well, I wouldn't even put my boots on for your salary."

Relationships with staff differed across participants. Layla stated that she had good relationships with other members of staff but after the incident of TDV her feelings towards her colleagues changed.

I had a really, really good relationship in my learning area... I was embedded enough to feel like I had more value than that, and certainly I had relationships with staff.

Layla considered the response and behaviour from members of staff to be inadequate after the incident of TDV. She believed that her position as relief teacher devalued her in terms of how the incident was dealt with.

In comparison, Angela declared that she had no idea who the principal or deputy were because they were not visible around the school, "I couldn't even tell you who the deputy or who the principal was at that school cause I never saw them." When Angela returned to school after the incident, she found no-one there to help her. She stated there were no supportive relationships in place for staff.

Reactions felt after TDV

All participants felt unsupported by the leadership team and the processes that followed the TDV incident. Table 3 illustrates the emotional and physical distress caused by the incident and how it was dealt with exacerbated the anguish for the participants.

Table 3: Group experiential theme: Responses and reactions felt after TDV

Disappointment in how the school supported the victim	No communication from Admin about any consequences No debrief Unresolved
No ongoing emotional support given	No-one followed up or checked in with the participant No care shown
Hopelessness	Felt disempowered Felt disregarded
Physical distress	Crying Shaking
Apprehension	Scared to go back to school Scared to be alone with perpetrator
Emotional	Traumatised Embarrassed

Participants felt disempowered and disregarded through a lack of communication about the consequences for the student. Layla was confused about whether there were any punishments for the perpetrator.

I don't even know if that (the apology) was the punishment. Like what are the consequences for that behaviour? I've got no idea if that was it.

The absence of a debrief and an understanding of what would happen moving forward was disconcerting, "We didn't really have a full debrief... I thought it was poorly handled. I didn't think it was enough." Layla felt disregarded by the school and deemed their

response to be insulting, "The blow off I got was really disrespectful." Layla considered the incident to be unresolved and as a result she did not want to come back to school. She finished her contract and never returned but did not explain to the school her reasons for her decision, "I don't want to come back now... I didn't mention anything at the time as to why, but it really was how it was handled."

Similarly, Vera described a lack of detail about the imposed consequences coupled with an absence of assistance from the leadership team left her feeling unsupported, "I felt like the system, the school wasn't supporting me." Vera viewed this behaviour as uncooperative and indifferent. She was told to continue teaching, to not let students "get the better of you." She said she was expected to teach immediately after the incident, and she considered that to be insensitive. She noted there was no follow up to check in on her, "I got no counselling, no nothing." Vera experienced feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, "I felt disempowered... I didn't feel like I had any rights... I was traumatised." Feelings such as embarrassment, tearfulness, and apprehension which Vera reported were not addressed by the school, thus prompting her to look for alternative employment. She remembered that she 'gripped the steering wheel' when driving to work because she was so afraid of what might occur during the day. Financial constraints meant that Vera could not leave straightaway as she "needed the money" but when her husband needed to relocate with work, she handed in her notice and described it as "the happiest day."

The response from the school to the situation for Angela was equally as disappointing. She was not informed about any consequences given to the perpetrator. She felt the incident was dismissed:

It wasn't talked about, it was, it was like, don't talk about it, just move on... There was so much other stuff going on at that school that it was just one of those things.

During the TDV incident, Angela remembered the physical effects of feeling "hot and sweaty" and hoping that "someone a little bit bigger than me would turn up and help." This was not the case and returning to school, Angela stated she could not find anyone who would help her. In addition, Angela said she was disappointed in how the leadership team and other members of staff handled the situation afterwards. Angela believed that someone "should have followed that up." Feelings of apprehension about being alone with the student again were worrying, and she said, "I didn't want to be with him by myself again." As a result of the situation not being dealt with effectively, Angela reported being unsure about her future teaching career and she was reluctant about going back into the classroom. She confided in her mum, claiming, "I don't know if I'll ever teach again."

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of teachers who have experienced incidents of TDV and how these experiences impact employment decisions afterwards. For teachers who have experienced TDV, factors in turnover and attrition were influenced by where the blame was placed, how the situation was dealt with by the

leadership team and how probable the chances of another TDV incident occurring again were. The results indicated that the blame was placed externally, the leadership team did not support the participants adequately, and participants believed that another incident could occur again in the future.

Who is to blame?

The first research question asked, “How do teachers attribute causes to TDV?” For each of the participants, the causal locus tended to be external. Although the perpetrator was the student in each incident, which supports previous research (Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012), the participants placed the blame elsewhere. For two of the participants the blame was attributed to the leadership team or staff. In one case, the leadership team gave out directives without considering the safety and wellbeing of staff. In another case, the blame was attributed to staff not warning the participant of previous issues with the perpetrator which the participant believed put her in danger. The third participant, Angela, attributed the cause of the TDV incident to the antagonistic behaviour of the bus driver prior to the incident. Previous research suggests that if an individual perceived the cause to be behavioural self-blame (BSB) the possibility of TDV occurring again could be reduced (Anderson et al., 2018); however, participants did not assign blame to themselves.

Possibility of change

The second research question asked, “To what extent do teachers’ attributions of the causes of TDV affect their decision to remain in their current role, move to a different role, move to a different educational setting, or leave the profession entirely?” As Weiner (2014) indicated, causal stability is associated with hopelessness, helplessness, and apprehension. Causal stability was a significant factor in employment decisions made after the incident of TDV. For one participant the ability to build respectful relationships with students was not possible. The organisation of classes meant there was no scope to develop relationships with students over the years. All participants felt relationships with parents were poor and lacking in respect and support. The causal stability of these relationships was fixed, and participants considered this situation was not going to change. This supports previous research suggesting that teachers felt disempowered through the lack of respect from parents (Peist et al., 2020). Participants also indicated that their relationships with the leadership team and other members of staff were unsupportive and uncaring. Participants viewed the causal stability as unchangeable which influenced their decisions to leave their current role which again supports previous research (McMahon et al., 2020; Moon et al., 2020; Peist et al., 2020) and corroborates the findings that school support could have mitigated this to some extent (Curran et al., 2019).

Control over the situation

Causal control interrelates with locus (internal or external) and stability (stable or unstable). How much control someone has on the outcome can affect future decisions. Participants felt they had no control over the situation. Participants considered the consequences, or lack of, given to the perpetrators by the leadership team put teachers in

a vulnerable position with no control over the situation or future safety. One participant felt powerless as a relief member of staff and all participants believed that the leadership team devalued staff and did not support the welfare of teachers. This affirms previous research which implies turnover and attrition following an incident of TDV can be moderated to a degree with the support of the school and leadership team (Curran et al., 2019; Peist et al., 2020). By understanding the impact TDV has on teachers, the leadership team could offer support such as de-briefing opportunities and clear communication regarding consequences for the perpetrator, to ensure teachers feel safe in their place of work.

Limitations

Like all research, this study may have limitations. Three participants may be considered a small number of participants, although in IPA research this number is typical (Smith & Nizza, 2022). All three participants were female. Male teachers may respond differently to incidents of TDV and decisions to find alternative employment may differ depending on family circumstances. All three incidents of TDV occurred in state schools in urban areas in Western Australia, limiting the transferability of the research. Risk of a TDV incident and the degree of support from rural or remote schools could differ. Future research could interview male and female participants in remote and rural schools, in the primary sector, and alternative educational settings.

Conclusion

TDV is a global issue, it affects teachers, students, and the community. This study found that teachers who had experienced TDV wanted to leave their current school and did consider leaving the profession. However, in some instances financial needs delayed such actions. In some cases, these goals were later achieved by moving to another school or to another area of education such as university. By understanding the impact TDV has on teachers, support can be offered to ensure teachers feel safe in their place of work. How TDV is dealt with should involve all stakeholders including staff, parents, and the community. Although this paper has focused on violence against teachers, violence is a pervasive issue within society, warranting comprehensive investigation to comprehend and bring attention to the fundamental roots of cultures that breed violence and foster tolerance towards it. These research priorities transcend the realm of educational studies and encompass a multitude of other disciplines. However, the implications of this research suggest that schools and departments of education who set policies about violence need to take action to protect the physical and mental wellbeing of their staff which may reduce turnover and attrition.

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