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## A Systematic Scoping Review of Female Teachers Working in Risky Areas in South Africa

**Abstract:** South Africa is a highly ranked country with regard to violence against women. Similar to their male counterparts, female teachers in South Africa must navigate the complexities of teaching in environments characterised by social unrest, crime, and instability. This systematic review was conducted to determine how safe female teachers are in their workplaces, specifically by analysing the challenges experienced by female teachers in these volatile areas and their impacts on well-being and productivity. The systematic literature review method was adopted, and the PRISMA flow chart was used to conduct an extensive search on four databases, namely Google Scholar (n = 52), Scopus (n = 11), Teacher Reference Center (n = 55), and Taylor and Francis (n = 123), for data generation and analysis. A total of 241 articles were identified before applying exclusion and inclusion criteria. The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 18 was used for quality assessments. Subsequently, 17 studies were included, and the findings showed that female teachers working in risky areas in the South Africa face substantial challenges, including limited resources and constant exposure to violence, which impact their professional growth and job satisfaction. Despite this, teachers still show unwavering commitment to their students and profession. These findings highlight the need for government support and interventions that can ensure the safety of not only female teachers but also students and other members of the school community.

**Keywords:** female teachers; risky environment; South Africa; education; systematic review; workplace safety

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## Introduction

Education plays an essential and indispensable role in shaping the future of individuals and communities. Therefore, the safety of the givers and receivers of education must be guaranteed in all situations, regardless of race, gender, and language. South Africa, a country with a diverse education history, is a highly ranked country with regard to violence against women (Deane, 2002; Enaifoghe et al., 2021). Similar to their male counterparts, female teachers in South Africa must navigate the complexities of teaching in environments characterised by social unrest, crime, and instability. Female teachers occupy a significant position in the education sector and constitute the great proportion of teachers by gender (Sibisi et al., 2019).

Criminal activities are commonly reported in high-risk areas, which, as described by Netshitangani (2019), are known for poverty, violence, crime, and social instability. Thus, the inhabitants of these areas are vulnerable to incidents involving gang activities, drug abuse, and political unrest. These social risks place teachers and students in unwarranted conditions (Mgijima, 2014) in their personal and professional lives. Bullying, rape, harassment, and other sexual offences have been recorded in South Africa (Mncube & Netshitangani, 2017; Shaw & Skywalker, 2017).

The supposed end of apartheid, which is acknowledged as the critical turning point in the history of South Africa, has led to a persistent record of societal violence arising from protests against high tuition fees and inadequate municipal services and other forms of crime (Mothibi-mathopo-mofokeng, 2017). To end criminal incidents, the government of South Africa has declared that every citizen should live a violence-free life (Goldblatt, 2020). Further, the country's constitution includes a section on the protection of rights against cruel, inhumane, and unfair treatment (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108, 1996).

Female teachers may face additional vulnerabilities when working in high-risk areas, including personal safety risks due to the prevalence of crime and violence. Due to the high rate of crimes across South Africa, female teachers are susceptible to theft and physical assaults on their way to and from school and

within school premises. The lack of adequate security measures in many schools heightens this risk. More studies have focused on identifying societal violence in developed countries than in developing countries (Dunne et al., 2006). Therefore, this scoping review was conducted to identify key studies on this subject matter in the context of South Africa.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Globally, the outburst of violence against women is worrisome and has drawn the attention of various stakeholders, including researchers. Several studies have been conducted to understand the causes, volume, and extent of the negative impacts of violence on individuals and society. However, more attention has been paid to domestic violence than to external violence (Nadat & Jacobs, 2021; Ngunbane, 2020). There is a paucity of research evidence on the experiences and coping strategies of women working in risky areas as well as the support mechanisms available. This knowledge gap inhibits the development of targeted interventions and policies to address the specific needs of women working in dangerous environments. The aforementioned aspects require urgent attention, considering that women, especially those working in risky areas, are eligible members of society.

Therefore, this scoping systematic review was conducted to provide an understanding of the challenges faced by women in South Africa and the impacts of these challenges on their personal well-being and professional advancement. In South Africa, a large percentage of women work as teachers and encounter various cognitive, affective, and psychosocial challenges resulting from acts of violence (Grobler, 2018). Our study was based on the belief that a synthesis of relevant empirical studies and empirical articles can further the literature on the existing support mechanisms for addressing these challenges.

## **Methods**

The systematic scoping review method was adopted in this study (Ikhsan et al., 2021). According to Arksey and Malley (2005), a scoping review involves mapping the relevant literature in a particular field. This method follows the Preferred Report Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). A systematic scoping review enables the selection of a small number of research outcomes from numerous literature sources to develop a research agenda (Linnenluecke & Marrone, 2019). Findings from systematic scoping reviews are considered more valid than those obtained from other types of reviews because they usually provide the best proof for a research question (Amir-Behghadami & Janati, 2020). It allows researchers to identify and evaluate relevant studies and use the findings to achieve their research aims. The present study focused on examining the challenges that female teachers face when working in risky areas in South Africa and the effects thereof. Considering the level of

specificity of this study, a systematic scoping review was deemed the best approach to meet the research aim.

## **Search Strategy**

According to Winchester and Salji (2016), it is essential to specify the objectives and scope of a systematic review in order to minimise bias. We adopted a search strategy specification approach to reduce the volume of search outcomes. An extensive search was conducted on four academic databases: Google Scholar, Scopus, Teacher Reference Center, and Taylor and Francis. These databases were chosen because of their comprehensiveness and wide coverage of peer-reviewed studies in education. The selection of the databases and search strategy was also guided by established search recommendations (Sampson et al., 2009) no guidelines exist for their peer review. Poor searches may fail to identify existing evidence because of inadequate recall (sensitivity. The algorithm used to search the databases was (“women teacher” OR “female teacher”) AND (“violence”) AND (“risky areas” OR “volatile zones”) AND (“South Africa”), involving Boolean operators. The search resulted in the identification of 241 articles with duplicates. Two independent reviewers performed an initial systematic review using HubMeta to screen the obtained records and identify duplicates.

## **Data Extraction**

The database search yielded a total of 241 articles, distributed as follows: Google Scholar (n = 52), Scopus (n = 11), Teacher Reference Center (n = 55), and Taylor and Francis (n = 123). We excluded 128 duplicate articles. Based on the specified inclusion/exclusion criteria detailed below, the first author conducted an initial screening of the titles and abstracts, eliminating 84 articles and leaving 29 articles for full-text assessments. After the full-text assessments, 12 articles were excluded. Ultimately, 17 articles were included in the final review (see Figure 1).

## **Quality Assessment**

We used the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 18 (Hong et al., 2018) to appraise the methodological quality of the studies included in this scoping review. The MMAT allowed for the simultaneous assessment of the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed designs adopted in the included studies. The instrument was created to assess the methodological excellence of a range of empirical research designs, and it has been employed in other evaluations of studies involving diverse research designs (Miyawaki & Hooyman, 2023; Tamblyn et al., 2023). The use of MMAT begins with two preliminary screening questions, and any article that fails the preliminary screening is excluded from the study (Hong et al., 2018).

To address the subjective nature of the MMAT screening question, Hong et al. (2018) suggested that at least two people should review the articles independently (Miyawaki & Hooyman, 2023). We followed this advice in the present study and met later to compare the ratings and assessments and reconcile any differences.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The criteria for this systematic scoping review included relevant studies that centred female teachers in South Africa who were actively teaching or had previously taught in high-risk areas characterised by elevated crime, violence, poverty, or other significant risk factors. The studies had to specifically address female teachers' experiences, challenges, coping strategies and provide insights into the unique difficulties they face in high-risk environments. To ensure contextual relevance, the geographical location was restricted to South Africa, encompassing both urban and rural settings. Only peer-reviewed articles published in English were included, without any date restrictions.

Conversely, studies that focused on male teachers or did not substantially emphasise the experience of female teachers as well as articles that were not written in English were excluded. Studies conducted outside South Africa were also excluded to maintain the geographical relevance of this study. Further, articles from non-academic sources, such as newspapers, non-research blogs, and opinion pieces, as well as duplicate publications and articles without clear-cut methodologies were excluded.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study did not require any special ethical issues to address. It involved a systematic scoping review of the research findings reported in readily available research articles related to women working in risky areas in South Africa, obtained from different databases. However, we meticulously acknowledged authors of all the included studies and appropriately referenced them.

## Results and Discussion

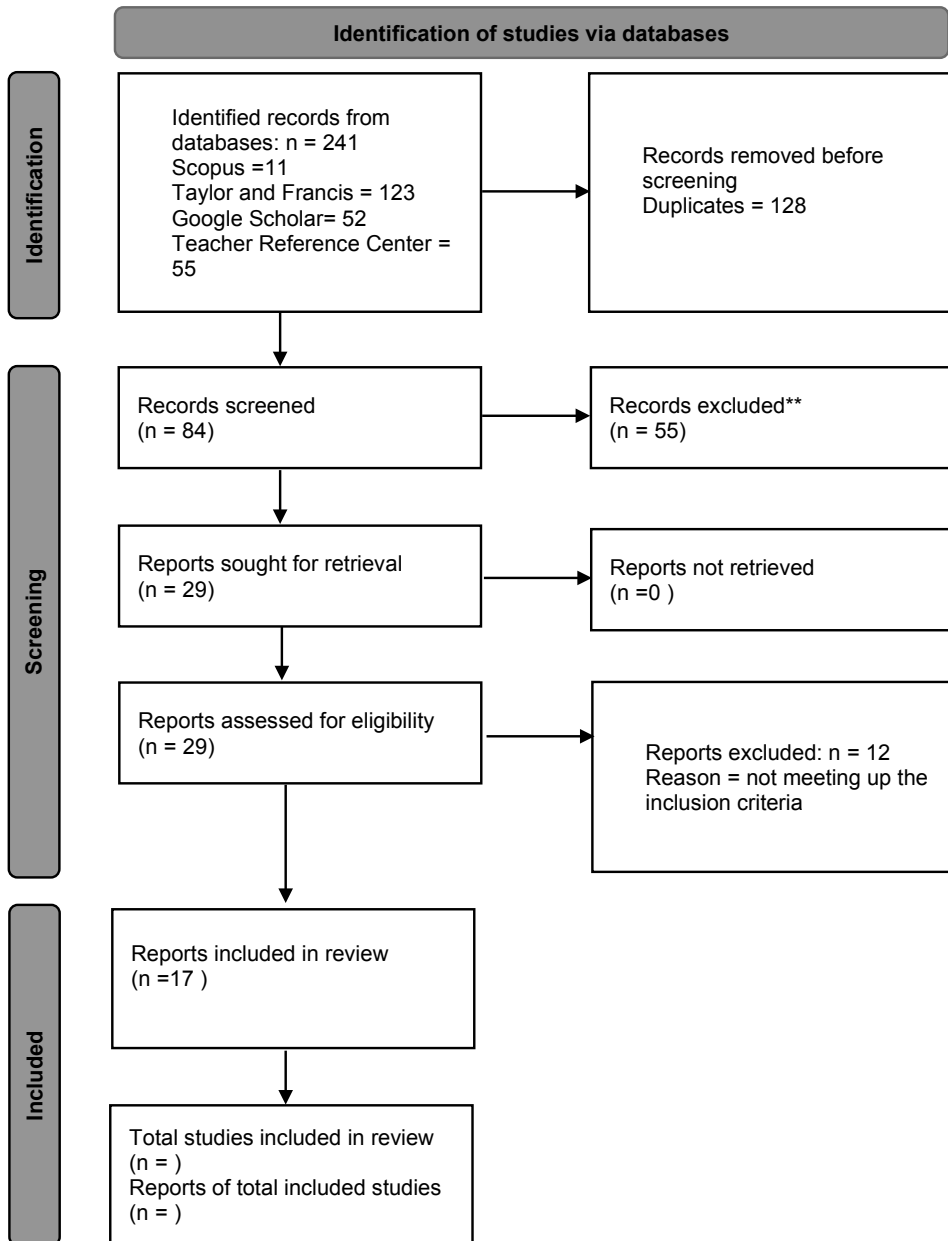


Figure 1: PRISMA flow chart of the identified studies

S/N	Author and Year	Title	Method	Sample
1	Lange et al., (2012)	Voices of women teachers about gender inequalities and gender-based violence in rural South Africa	Qualitative	6 female teachers
2	Ngidi and Kaye (2022)	Reducing school violence: A peace education project in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa	Mixed study	111 participants
3	De Wet (2007)	Educators as perpetrators and victims of school violence	Quantitative	801
4	Deane (2002)	Violence against women and children in South Africa	Narrative literature review	
5	(Mogale et al. 2012)	Violence against women in South Africa: Policy position and recommendations	Systematic review	18 studies
6	Nako and Muthukrishna (2018)	Teacher-instigated in-school interpersonal violence: Types and prevalence in South African public schools	Quantitative	1185 cases
7	Mangena and Matlala (2023)	Teachers' lived experiences of workplace violence and harassment committed by learners from selected high schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa	Qualitative	11 female teachers
8	Schmidt and Mestry (2015)	The experiences of female principals in the Gauteng Province	Qualitative	3 female principals
9	Hochfeld et al., (2022)	Learners' perspectives on school safety in Johannesburg	Mixed method	8 urban schools
10	Hlungwani, (2023)	An examination of school safety interventions in Gauteng	Qualitative	15 schools
11	Netshitangani (2019)	Voices of teachers on school violence and gender in South African urban public schools	Qualitative	4 schools
12	Ngqela and Lewis (2012)	Exploring adolescent learners' experiences of school violence in a township high school	Qualitative	13 adolescents
13	Mkhonto (2018)	Women and promotability in rural South African schools listening to the voices of female teachers in Ehlanzeni District	Qualitative	10 female teachers
14	Mathebula and Potokri (2022)	Female teachers' promotion barriers and mitigation strategies: Multiple case study findings from South Africa	Qualitative	5 female teachers
15	Makhasane (2022)	Teachers' views about the intricacies of learner-on-teacher violence and the implications for school leadership	Qualitative	10 teachers 2 principals
16	Vanderschuren et al. (2019)	Perceptions of gender, mobility, and personal safety: South Africa moving forward	Qualitative	285 rail female passengers
17	Motsoeneng (2022)	The negative consequences of teacher-directed violence to students learning	Qualitative	10 teachers

Table 1: Summary of the Included Studies

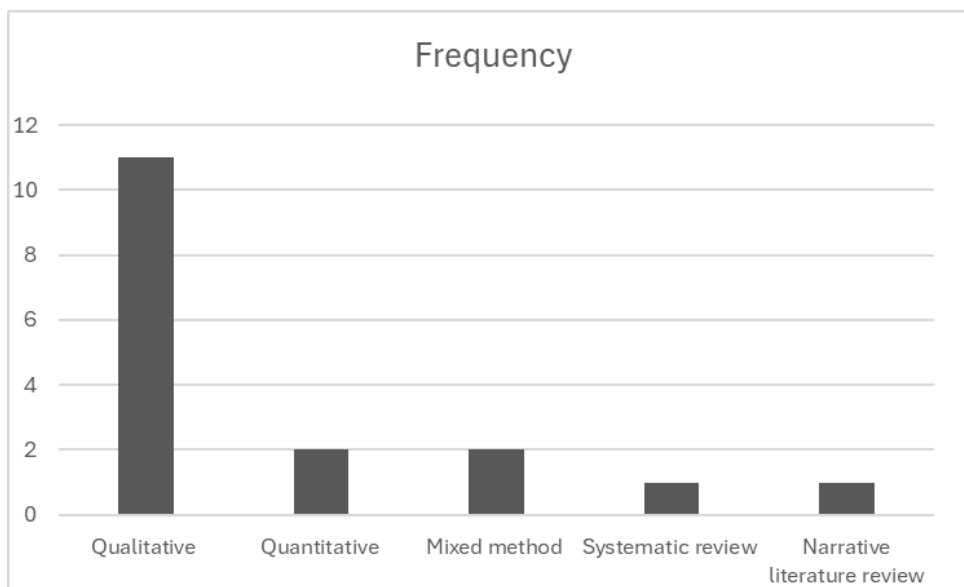


Figure 2: Publication distribution based on the research method used

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the included publications based on the research design used. Of the 17 studies included, a qualitative research design was used in 11 studies, while quantitative and mixed methods approaches were used in two studies each. Only one systematic review and one narrative literature review were included.

S/N	Author	Nature of the Risk	Intervention
1	Lange et al. (2012)	Gender-based violence in school	Not mentioned
2	Ngidi and Kaye (2022)	Sexual abuse	Use of a cure violence model involving all educational stakeholders
3	De Wet (2007)	Learner-to-teacher violence Teacher-to-teacher violence	Intervention that would improve attitudes, knowledge, and skills
4	Deane (2002)	Sexual violence	National action plan on sexual violence and harassment to be established in schools
5	Mogale et al. (2012)	Nil	Two acts passed by the government to prevent violence against women in South Africa



6	Nako and Muthukrishna (2018)	Interpersonal violence Physical abuse Sexual victimisation Harassment Verbal abuse	Development of protocols for sexual and physical abuse Training of staff on sex-related violence
7	Mangena and Matlala (2023)	Workplace violence Learner to teacher Teacher to teacher	Implementation of a national school safety framework to address insecurity
8	Schmidt and Mestry (2015)	Patriarchal oppression	Widening awareness of women's experiences Investing in the security of women in various South African communities
9	Hochfeld et al. (2022)	Women's vulnerability to violence Students' confirmation that their schools were unsafe Health-related risks Unsafe learner behaviours	Development of a whole-school response to school safety Increased surveillance and securitisation of schools
10	Hlungwani (2023)		Boosting the knowledge of key safety intervention implementers
11	Netshitangani (2019)	Fear of being unsafe in the hands of gangs	Holistic, nongendered security
12	Ngqela and Lewis (2012)	Lack of safety and classroom management Community-induced violence	Not mentioned
13	Mkhonto (2018)	Culture of male migration Poor infrastructure	Initiate an empowering policy
14	Mathebula and Potokri (2022)	Discrimination demotivates female teachers	The community and school governing board should support women
15	Makhasane (2022)	Physical and threat of violence	Teachers should be given a role in addressing the violence emanating from the students
16	Vanderschuren et al. (2019)	Sexual harassment in public transport Lack of adequate implementation of women's safety policy Fear of moving around	Women should be used as the yardstick for security concern Introduction of BRT as an alternative transport system Policing and security in public transport Awareness and advocacy of women's personal safety
17	Motsoeneng (2022)	Absenteeism due to fear Teacher attrition Fear for their safety Harassment Intimidation	Not mentioned

Table 2: Summary of the Included Studies and Findings

## Challenges Faced by Female Teachers in Risky Areas in South Africa

The following is a summary of the challenges faced by female teachers working in risky areas in South Africa:

- **Unsafe learner behaviour:** This review revealed that some students are gang members who consume hard substances. Substance use is attributed to unsafe behaviour in South African schools, and innocent teachers and learners are affected when gangs disrupt schools. Hochfeld et al. (2022) reported that female teachers and learners face danger due to unsafe learner behaviours in South African schools. Female teachers, especially young ones, feel unsafe to the extent that they depend on male colleagues for security when moving around (Netshitangani, 2019). This is because women are seen as caregivers, whereas men are known to be disciplinarians (Nikiwe Zuma, 2016).
- **Lack of safety and classroom management:** The sense of insecurity that prevails in schools is a result of learners' perception that the security measures in place, particularly fencing, are inadequate, in disrepair, and outdated (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012). This feeling is exacerbated by observable deficiencies, such as breaches in the fencing, security gates left ajar, and malfunctioning security lights, which collectively contribute to students' concerns about their own safety and the overall security of the school premises.
- **Community-induced violence:** Community-induced violence refers to acts of school violence that originate from or are sustained by a specific community under scrutiny. The widespread presence of weapons and drugs in township schools indicates that these items are easily obtainable beyond school premises (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012). This suggests that the communities surrounding the schools may serve as sources for such materials, giving rise to significant concerns for the safety and well-being of students.
- **Discrimination:** Studies have revealed that patriarchy and discrimination against women in South African schools continue to put female teachers at risk (Schmidt & Mestry, 2015). The erroneous societal belief that women are second-class citizens and that men should dominate every sphere induces psychological fear among female teachers. Such patriarchal norms continue to reinforce violence against women in South African society (Mshweshwe, 2020). Studies have also revealed that female teachers and learners are about nine times more prone to be victims of all forms of violence than their male counterparts (Hochfeld et al., 2022).
- **Learner-teacher work violence and harassment:** Teachers frequently encounter nonverbal expressions of disrespect from students (De Wet, 2007), such as the display of a middle finger. In one instance, a teacher reported feeling intimidated by a student who conveyed hostility through an intimidating gaze or stare (Mangena & Matlala, 2023). These nonverbal forms of disrespect can create an uncomfortable and challenging environment for educators, negatively impacting the classroom atmosphere. A study conducted by Makhasane (2022) in KwaZulu Natal revealed that parents and their

children often threaten female teachers with attacks if their orders are not obliged.

- **Teacher-teacher work violence and harassment:** Verbal aggression and abusive conduct are prevalent issues in the educational landscape of South African schools (De Wet, 2007). Such behaviours are frequently observed among teachers and can harm the educational environment, undermining the respect and cooperation necessary for effective learning and teaching. Acts of verbal aggression can manifest in various forms, from insults and shouting to derogatory language, and they pose significant challenges to fostering a positive and conducive educational environment.
- **Limited resources:** High-risk areas often suffer from resource shortages, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of teaching materials, and insufficient support systems. This can burden teachers, requiring them to be resourceful and creative in delivering quality education.
- **Professional development opportunities:** Teachers in high-risk areas have limited access to professional development opportunities, such as workshops, training programmes, and mentoring. This hinders their growth as educators and affects their ability to effectively address their students' unique needs.
- **Health-related risks:** Hochfeld et al. (2022) conducted a study in Johannesburg, South Africa, and found that females lack access to safe toilets in schools and communities. This implies that female teachers and learners are exposed to health risks due to poor infrastructure and unhygienic or poorly maintained facilities.

### Coping Strategies

- **Awareness and advocacy:** The findings of this review revealed that creating awareness about red zones and how individuals protect themselves from crime in those areas is a commonly used approach to managing crime in South Africa. Goldblatt (2020) reported that there has been relatively successful lobbying and agitation for legislation to criminalise both violence against women and rape for the past two decades. Different awareness programmes on matters affecting women in South Africa are required (Mathebula & Potokri, 2022), through which relevant information can be shared to increase the level of safety consciousness. Furthermore, individuals involved in executing the School Safety Programme should have a good understanding of the school setting, teachers, students, support personnel, and the actions necessary for tackling the issue of school violence (Leukes et al., 2011). To this end, stakeholders who can implement school safety and security interventions should be trained in school safety art and science (Leukes et al., 2011).
- **Investment in security:** It has been identified that investing further in the security of women in various communities will go a long way in curbing vio-

lence in South Africa. Schmidt and Mestry (2015) reported that the attention given to women is meagre compared to the government's large allocation of 49% of budget to education. The school environment must be a safe place for all, including teachers and learners (Leukes et al., 2011).

- **Provision of legal frameworks on safety and security:** As a matter of urgency, the government developed two laws to prevent violence against women in South Africa and established the Ministry for Women, Children, and Individuals with Disabilities (Mogale et al., 2012). Its mandate is to lead on socio-economic transformation and implementation of the empowerment of women, youth and persons with disabilities through mainstreaming, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation.

### Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this scoping review have certain implications for policy and practice that can inform approaches to significant sociopolitical development. One such implication is the urgent need to address the issue of teachers' well-being. Policymakers and education authorities should take bold steps to protect and support all female workers in South Africa, especially teachers working in dangerous areas. This will prevent the exodus of female teachers from the teaching profession. Furthermore, working in risky areas gives rise to various mental challenges, leading to an urgent need for mental health support. This support can come from free and accessible counselling services and stress management programmes for female teachers. A mentally healthy teacher can deliver quality teaching and remain committed to the profession.

A connection between students' academic outcomes and teachers' well-being was identified in the present study. This highlights the need to improve working conditions so that female teachers can contribute positively to attaining educational goals. Moreover, school stakeholders, including the government, policymakers, principals, and community leaders, should improve safety measures within and outside schools. Exclusive transportation services can be provided to female teachers to minimise the risks they face.

Understanding the experiences of female teachers in risky areas can contribute to discussions around gender equality and inclusivity in the education sector and highlight the importance of providing equal opportunities, support, and protection for female teachers, promoting gender diversity in teaching, and addressing gender-based discrimination. The findings of this review underscore the need to provide safety training for female teachers so that they may gain the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate high-risk environments effectively. In addition, there is a need to actively engage community leaders in sanitising their communities and in warning their subjects against unethical practices towards teachers. Finally, this review revealed certain gaps in the existing research as necessary attention is not provided to identify and adequately address the challenges in re-

spect to female teachers in South Africa. Therefore, researchers need to conduct studies on specific issues affecting female teachers at work.

### **Limitations of the Review**

There are some limitations to this review. First, the review was restricted to studies conducted in South Africa. These studies might not include all the challenges women face in their workplaces. Second, some studies might not have been identified. Third, the findings of this review cannot be generalised to other countries around the world, as they may have some peculiar challenges that differ from what women experience in South Africa. Fourth, only certain databases were searched to identify relevant studies. Several other databases that may have relevant literature were not searched. Based on these limitations, we recommend that future researchers expand the scope of their studies, search for articles on more databases, and compare South African experiences with those of people from other countries in the world.

### **Conclusion**

This systematic scoping review of female teachers working in risky areas in South Africa has provided an essential glimpse into the challenges and opportunities that female education workers face. The review uncovered the pivotal roles that female teachers play in the South African education system, especially in rural areas where living conditions are unbearable due to a lack of basic amenities. It is evident from the findings that female teachers face multifaceted challenges, including emotional stress and limited access to resources. These obstacles impact their well-being and job satisfaction. Despite these adversities, female teachers exhibit an unwavering commitment to their students and profession. Their stories are a testament to the enduring power of education as a force for positive change in the lives of young people, even in the most challenging environments. The strategies used by female teachers and those recommended by past researchers to manage these challenges were highlighted as significant components of this review.

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### **SISTEMATIČNI PREGLED POLOŽAJA UČITELJIC, KI DELAJO NA TVEGANIH OBMOČJIH V JUŽNI AFRIKI**

**Povzetek:** Južnoafriška republika je država z veliko stopnjo nasilja nad ženskami. Učiteljice v Južni Afriki se morajo podobno kot njihovi moški kolegi spopadati z zahtevnostjo poučevanja v okoljih, za katera so značilni socialni nemiri, kriminal in nestabilnost. Namen sistematičnega pregleda je bil ugotoviti, kako varne so učiteljice na svojih delovnih mestih, zlasti z analizo izzivov, s katerimi se srečujejo na teh nestabilnih območjih, ter njihovih vplivov na dobrobit in produktivnost. Za pripravo in analizo podatkov je bila uporabljena metoda sistematičnega pregleda literature, za obsežno iskanje v štirih podatkovnih zbirkah – Google Scholar (n = 52), Scopus (n = 11), Teacher Reference Center (n = 55) in Taylor and Francis (n = 123) – pa diagram poteka PRISMA. Pred uporabo izključitvenih in vključitvenih meril je bilo identificiranih 241 člankov. Za kvalitativno vrednotenje je bilo uporabljeno orodje MMAT (Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool), različica 18. V raziskavo je bilo nato vključenih 17 študij, ugotovitve pa so pokazale, da se učiteljice, ki delajo na tveganih območjih v Južni Afriki, soočajo s precejšnjimi izzivi, med drugim z omejenimi viri in s stalno izpostavljenostjo nasilju, kar vpliva na njihovo poklicno rast in zadovoljstvo pri delu. Kljub temu pa te učiteljice ostajajo neomajno predane svojim učencem, učenkam in poklicu. Ugotovitve opozarjajo tudi na potrebo po vladni podpori in posegih, ki lahko zagotovijo varnost ne le učiteljic, temveč tudi učenk, učencev in drugih članov šolske skupnosti.

**Ključne besede:** učiteljice, tvegano okolje, Južna Afrika, vzgoja in izobraževanje, sistematični pregled, varnost na delovnem mestu

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