Mainstream teachers' lived experiences of adolescents with behavioural difficulties: An exploratory study
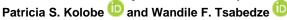
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Globally, mainstream teachers have been experiencing intense challenges of behavioural difficulties by learners in schools. For decades, scholars have intensified the relational impact of behaviour with regard to academic progression. However, there is limited knowledge on the experiences and coping strategies of teachers regarding these challenges. Using an exploratory research approach in the study reported on here, we focused on the lived experiences (psychological well-being and coping strategies) of teachers of adolescents with behavioural difficulties. A phenomenological research design and qualitative approach to enquiry were used to conduct the study. Purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used to select 8 participants (3 female and 5 male teachers) for the study. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, and 2 major themes emerged: poor psychological well-being and inadequate coping strategies of teachers. Depressive symptoms reported by participants included the following: anhedonia, burnout, reduced job performance, and demotivation. These challenges primarily lead to negative mood regulation and maladaptive coping, such as displacement – a defence mechanism. Behavioural difficulties experienced by adolescents have a profound impact of intense stress and negative emotions, leading to poor psychological well-being of teachers. Thus, there is a need for the Department of Education to create structures, guidelines and support systems for schools on behavioural difficulties for the well-being of teachers.

Keywords: adolescents; behavioural difficulties; coping strategies; mainstream teacher; psychological well-being

Introduction

Behavioural difficulties in schools, especially high schools, have become a serious concern nationally and internationally (Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou & Catalano, 2014). Findling, Townsend, Brown, Arnold, Gadow, Kolko, McNamara, Gary, Kaplin, Farmer, Kipp, Williams, Butter, Bukstein, Rice, Buchan-Page, Molina and Aman (2017) state that teachers are faced with increasing rates of behavioural difficulties in schools. An increase of about 90% in behavioural problems has been reported in the United Kingdom (Findling et al., 2017), while in New Zealand, White (2013) reports that 61.9% of high school learners are suspended annually. Behavioural difficulties by adolescents continue to be the most challenging problem in South African schools (Bechuke, 2015; Burkey, Hosein, Morton, Purgato, Adi, Kurzrok, Kohrt & Tol, 2018). This implies that adolescents' behavioural difficulties have led to South Africa's teachers not being optimally productive, which has affected the delivery of the education system.

Behavioural difficulties in classrooms constitute the common concern and challenge faced by teachers in many schools (Brown, Westbrook & Challagalla, 2005; Goldstein, 2015; Simeon, Herbst & Nienaber, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Verbal and emotional abuse are common in schools in South Africa and experienced by most teachers, leaving them weary and scarred for life (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). According to the National School Violence Study, about 90% of adolescents with behavioural difficulties are identified as perpetrators of hostility and aggressive behaviour towards teachers (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Research has revealed that 12.2% of teachers have experienced violence such as physical fights and aggressiveness from learners with behavioural difficulties (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Therefore, it is important to highlight that teachers are facing such challenges which affect how schools (especially in rural areas) are at high risk of such behaviour. The reason being that teachers in rural areas faced with such behaviour are not able to refer adolescents for professional counselling due to a lack of psychological support services in these areas. A study by Robarts (2014) revealed that behavioural difficulties affected teachers and the learning process in the Umfolozi district of the KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. Adolescent learners with behavioural difficulties often consume lesson time, as teachers spend most of the time battling to maintain and manage discipline in classrooms. The Department of Education in South Africa needs to bridge the gap between teachers and learners when it comes to such behaviour of adolescents since it affects the learning environment in schools.

Common adolescent behavioural difficulties in classrooms in South Africa include the following: verbal abuse (Burkey et al., 2018); interruption of lessons (Alcantara, González-Carrasco, Montserrat, Viñas, Casas & Abreu, 2017); disrespect, such as teasing and neglect of academic work (Burkey et al., 2018); disobedience, non-cooperation and disregard of classroom rules (Allen, Chinsky, Larcen, Lochman & Selinger, 2017). There is a high rate of gang violence in schools in the Western Cape province in which teachers and other well-

behaved learners become victims of physical abuse by aggressive adolescents (Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014). This aggressive behaviour leads to a disengagement between teachers and learners in class, and teachers (and learners) fearing for their safety in schools.

Verbal abuse, harassment, and disturbance by learners during lessons (Shek, Keung Ma & Sun, 2011; Sun, 2015) often shift teachers' attention away from teaching to managing disturbing learners, resulting in a loss of teaching time (Shek et al., 2011; Sun, 2015). Behavioural difficulties provoke stress among teachers and disciplined learners. Teachers fall behind in terms of continuing with planned lessons, the teaching progress is hindered, and lessons become ineffective, thus contributing to teachers feeling frustrated and stressed (Friedman-Krauss, Raver, Morris & Jones, 2014). Often teachers are under pressure to execute lessons while maintaining discipline in the classroom. Reports indicate that once such challenges unfold, teachers begin to experience emotional exhaustion and burnout, which contributes to disruption of the teaching process (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014). According to Malik, Björkqvist and Österman (2017), burnout is a response to chronic stress associated with factors in the educational system and teaching environment. Teachers suffering from burnout would be less responsive towards learners, reduce job performance and display low levels of motivation; burnout also increases behavioural difficulties and affects the quality of teaching and learning (Gupta & Rani, 2017).

Mental health among teachers could also affect teacher-leaner interaction. Teachers living with mental illnesses often endure negative life experiences due to the symptoms of their condition, impairments in functioning and quality of life (Pyne, 2017). Internal disorders such as mood and anxiety disorders, which includes substance abuse, have been identified in teachers (Marmorstein & White, 2018). Teachers diagnosed with depression often have low tolerance towards adolescents with behavioural difficulties (Pyne, 2017). Managing adolescents with behavioural difficulties exposes teachers to anxiety and less time is spent on teaching. This results in teachers experiencing intense anxiety symptoms that affect occupational and social functioning. Teachers can adopt unhealthy coping skills like the use of substances which increases the prevalence of substance abuse (Pyne, 2017).

Provisions have been made to reduce chances of behavioural difficulties in high schools in South Africa (Robarts, 2014). Measures to address these behavioural problems, such as suspension of learners, have been reported (Findling et al., 2017). A serious crisis exists in the North West province as disobedience in classrooms has increased by

10% and suspension from school by 90% (Lekganyanye, 2011). It has been found that during such periods of suspension adolescents become involved in more risky behaviour which result in them being expelled from school, which increases the drop-out rate from South African schools (Carney, Browne, Myers, Kline, Howard & Wechsberg, 2019).

A potential crisis in schools regarding complains and dissatisfaction by teachers about behavioural problems is increasing yearly and the failing efforts by government to address teachers' concerns has resulted in 52.8% of teachers experiencing signs of burnout, such as emotional exhaustion and demotivation towards the profession (Masekoameng, 2010). Masekoameng (2010) found that behavioural difficulties of learners was one of the major factors influencing low teacher morale resulting from long-term exposure to adolescents with behavioural difficulties. Furthermore, 74.2% of teachers maintain that if different employment opportunities arise they will leave the teaching profession immediately (Bechuke, 2015; Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013).

Teachers are not satisfied with new interventions to manage adolescents with behavioural difficulties in classrooms (Robarts, 2014). The South African Department of Education expects of teachers to fulfil various roles in the classroom, such as social work, career guidance, counselling, parenting and mentoring (Benraghda, Ali & Radzuan, 2015; Huang & Hu, 2016; Ovando & Combs, 2018). However, learners have the responsibility to participate actively in a classroom. The learner's role in the classroom is to gain knowledge and skills provided by teachers (Coetzer, 2010). Learners are also expected to be disciplined, respectful and obedient towards authority figures such as teachers (Coetzer, 2010). Teacher and learner interaction is one of the crucial elements towards establishing effective and productive teaching and learning in the classroom (Cooper, 2017). Teachers and adolescent learners with behavioural difficulties often struggle to maintain the required interaction for effective learning (Cooper, 2017).

According to Chaaban and Du (2017), cognitive strategies may include the ability to identify existing classroom challenges and planning effective problem-solving skills to address challenges such as behavioural difficulties, while behavioural strategies include implementing problem-solving skills in a practical manner, self-care and teachers avoiding learners with behavioural difficulties, while focusing on disciplined learners. However, these strategies are categorised as adaptive and/or maladaptive coping strategies (Chaaban & Du, 2017). Alcantara et al., (2017) further add that the type of coping strategies

used by teachers to reduce classroom challenges determine the level of success.

Teachers in most mainstream schools in South Africa face different challenges, such as overcrowding (Matshipi, Mulaudzi & Mashau, 2017). Overcrowding in schools could contribute to difficulties experienced by teachers in attempting to maintain discipline and order (Matshipi et al., 2017; Mwapwele & Roodt, 2018; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Voss, Wagner, Klusmann, Trautwein and Kunter (2017) posit that the implementation of classroom management methods by teachers determine learners' behaviour in classrooms. Strategies such as punishment, after class talks, relationship building and rule-setting, are often said to be applied (Coetzer, 2010). However, such strategies require teachers to maintain healthy coping skills. Teachers using maladaptive coping strategies towards learners with behavioural problems reportedly have compromised teachers' well-being (Lindqvist, Weurlander, Wernerson & Thornberg, 2017). Negatively affected emotional and psychological well-being is said to further attribute to teachers implementing ineffective classroom management strategies (Lindqvist et al., 2017).

Previous studies focused on highlighting the causes of behavioural difficulties displayed by learners, such as parenting styles, teacher-learner interactions, and parent-teacher solutions to behavioural problems acted out at home and at school (Anake & Adigeb, 2015; Huver, Otten, De Vries & Engels, 2010). However, these studies did not focus on the lived experiences and coping strategies of teachers in the classroom environment. The direct role played by teachers with regard to coping strategies to handle stressful challenges in classrooms can provide a basis for intervention strategies. Indirect roles played by teachers can also affect how such coping strategies are employed. Understanding the experiences and coping strategies of teachers can contribute to the management of behavioural challenges and further contribute to possible holistic intervention programmes geared towards dealing with adolescent behavioural problems.

Theoretical Framework

In this study we used the Job Stress and Health Model (JSHM) which was introduced by Hurrell and McLaney in 1988. JSHM provides an understanding of how adverse health outcomes can relate to work-related factors. Hurrell and McLaney (1988) discovered multiple sources of stress in the work environment (physical environment, role conflict, job control, role ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, work load, responsibility for people, underutilisation of abilities, cognitive demands and shift work). These factors are mostly experienced by teachers teaching learners with behavioural difficulties.

Individual factors such as personality, coping strategies that a person chooses to use, non-working factors (such as domestic/family demands) and buffer factors (such as social support) can determine whether an individual has an acute or chronic reaction towards job stress (Hurrell & McLaney, 1988). Adolescents with behavioural difficulties are stress-provoking factors for teachers and how teachers handle the distress can influence the degree of impact that the stress could have on the teachers' health and well-being.

Literature

The literature review highlights concerns in global and South African literature with regard to teacher's experiences with adolescents with behavioural difficulties.

Adolescents' behavioural difficulties

According to Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider and Shernoff (2014), teachers spend more time with learners than parents. Teachers need a holistic understanding of the development phase of adolescents and play an influential role in learners' transition during adolescence. Adolescence differ from child to child and can be contingent on biological, socio-cultural and individual dissimilarity elements (Louw & Louw, 2014). The authors further argue that when the age of adolescence begins and ends, focus should rather be on biological development (which is known as the beginning). Many theorists have contributed to the understanding of how adolescents function during adolescence such as Erik Erikson (1959), Piaget (1952).

However, Hodes, Cluver, Toska and Vale (2020) posit that adolescence is a period of many physical, psychological and social changes. Physical, cognitive, social and emotional development may provide an understanding of teachers' experiences as these professionals interact with adolescents with behavioural difficulties on a daily basis. The physical, cognitive, social and emotional development impacts the behaviour of learners (Bundy, De Silva, Horton, Patton, Schultz & Jamison, 2018). An understanding of the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development is important in this study and is discussed in more detail.

It is between the ages of 11 to 20 years that problem behaviour could be noticed in this age group (Steyn, Van Wyk & Kitching, 2014). Behavioural difficulties are disturbing and problematic behaviour, which are acted out by learners in the classroom setting. Problem behaviour reflects aggressiveness, disruptiveness, bullying, verbal and physical fighting and vandalism (Steyn et al., 2014). Disobedient

adolescents not complying with the requests of teachers or parents can be identified as learners with difficult behaviour. However, such behaviour can further evolve into more extreme behaviour, such as delinquent acts.

Behavioural difficulties can cause clinical significant impairments in academic and other areas of functioning (Kledzik & Dunn, 2012). As this behaviour affects different areas of functioning, pathological disorders may need to be examined. Thus, such behaviour is often noticed among leaners in psychopathological disorders such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder (CD) (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013).

Furthermore, neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD, ODD and CD often share disruptive characteristics and are labelled as disruptive, impulsive behavioural disorders in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, *Fifth Edition* ([DSM-5] APA, 2013). Learners with behavioural difficulties may, to a certain degree, present with certain symptoms found in these pathological disorders (ADHD, ODD and CD), but the learners might not meet the full diagnostic criteria. Teachers witness the symptoms of disorders acted out by adolescents with behavioural difficulties in classrooms. Severe consequences such as school dropouts could be seen, which could lead to serious social problems when effective interventions are not implemented during the early stages thereof (Chau, Kabuth, Causin-Brice, Delacour, Richoux-Picard, Verdin, Armand & Chau, 2016; Ghosh & Sinha, 2012).

According to Cuellar (2015), many developed and implemented treatments have been focusing more on finding results for the present and not really having a long-term, sustainable effect in the future regarding the disorders. The unsustainable treatment intervention plans have created frustration and a sense of hopelessness regarding behavioural difficulties in classrooms by teachers, and decreased the level of tolerance towards adolescents with behavioural difficulties (Zuze & Juan, 2020).

Teacher training on managing learners with behavioural difficulties
The main purpose of teacher training is to provide teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour to successfully carry out their duties (Sibiya, Gamede & Uleanya, 2019). Policymakers in the Department of Education have developed training programmes to implement classroom management courses to reduce the levels of behavioural problems in classrooms and schools in general (Christofferson & Sullivan, 2015). However, the constant complaints and low morale of teachers contribute to their inabilities to effectively deal with learners with behavioural problems in classrooms (Voss et al., 2017).

The common concerns and challenges faced by teachers in many schools are disruptive behaviour of learners in classrooms/schools (Simeon et al., 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Several behaviour management strategies have been designed for teachers to practise. Strategies such as positive behavioural interventions and support to create positive behavioural outcomes for learners have been reported (Pas, Cash, O'Brennan, Debnam & Bradshaw, 2015). However, Boujut, Dean, Grousell and Cappe (2016); Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) found that teachers who are inadequately equipped may result in teachers experiencing stress and burnout, which later negatively affect their well-being.

Teachers experience emotional breakdown as a result of learners' behavioural difficulties (Fovet, 2021). There is a high level of demotivation in schools due to learners with behavioural difficulties. Teachers are tempted to change to careers or profession that are perceived to be less stressful than teaching (Shillingford & Karlin, 2014). It is more likely that teachers teaching learners with behavioural difficulties will experience symptoms of depression (Shelemy, Harvey & Waite, 2019). This is because teachers feel the burden to support the learners psychologically in order for them to pass or achieve good results.

Furthermore, a positive teacher-learner relationship is described as one where teachers provide learners with a secure and safe learning environment. Teachers are often open, warm and supportive towards learners (Pakarinen, Silinskas, Hamre, Metsäpelto, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus & Nurmi, 2018). A negative teacher-learner relationship is one where the teacher is less attentive, neglectful, and unsupportive towards learners (De Laet, Colpin, Van Leeuwen, Van den Noortgate, Claes, Janssens, Goossens & Verschueren, 2016; Pakarinen et al., 2017). This could be related to the parent-learner relationship as explained earlier. Negative teacher-learner relationship towards learners with behavioural difficulties could also contribute to further difficulties in maintaining behaviour in the classroom.

Multifactorial causes of adolescent behavioural difficulties and teacher-learner challenges have been noted. Behavioural disorders such as ADHD, ODD and CD could also contribute to the difficulties; however, such learners do not always meet the full diagnostic criteria of such disorders (Besag, Gobbi, Caplan, Sillanpää, Aldenkamp & Dunn, 2016).

Study Context
The study was conducted in a secondary school in a semi-urban area in the North West province of

South Africa. According to literature, schools in semi-urban areas in South Africa have an increasing rate of adolescents with behavioural difficulties compared to rural areas (Hampton, Harty, Fuller & Kaiser, 2019). Semi-urban areas are more likely to report incidences of behavioural difficulties in class while this is not the case in rural areas (Uleanya, Gamede & Kutame, 2020).

Methodology

A phenomenological research design and a qualitative approach to enquiry were used to explore teacher's experiences of adolescents with behavioural difficulties in a subjective manner (Denscombe, 2010). We used an exploratory approach (Wang & Lee, 2019) to investigate experiences of teachers who taught children with learning difficulties. As this is an existing problem in schools, conclusions cannot be drawn, however, it is worth investigating and making recommendations based on the results of the study. Purposive and stratified sampling incorporates a hybrid strategy to bridge homogeneity and heterogeneity (Aurini, Heath & Howells, 2016; Levitt, Bamberg, Creswell, Frost, Josselson & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Silverman, 2010). The sample was achieved by dividing the sampling frame into strata, after which a purposeful sample was selected from the identified strata (Levitt et al., 2018; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Participants selected for the study had more than 2 years' teaching experience teaching Grades 6 to 12 learners and were from the Sotho, Tswana, Zulu, Indian, Afrikaans and English-speaking population of the area. Three female and five male teachers fluent in English participated in the study thus the service of an interpreter was not necessary. A focus group was then constituted.

The Ethics Committee of the North-West University approved the study (Ref: NWU-00337-17-A9). Permission to conduct the study in schools was requested and obtained from the North West Department of Education. Furthermore, the deputy principal of the relevant school consented to acting as gatekeeper for the study. The research assistant explained the purpose and aim of study and issues of confidentiality and anonymity to the participants during the initial contact. Participants were provided with both a biographical information sheet and consent forms to complete before the interviews. An appointment was later set for a group interview with participants. A focus-group interview was conducted with eight participants on school premises after school hours. The following questions were asked in the interviews: "What are the experiences of teachers regarding learners with behavioural difficulties and what are the coping strategies teachers use?" Data saturation was met, as there was no need for a second focus group as similar themes were noted.

In this study, data were collected from one focus group. A phenomenological focus-group interview (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Flick, 2014; Van Dipten, Van Berkel, De Grauw, Scherpbier-De Haan, Brongers, Van Spaendonck, Wetzels, Assendelft & Dees, 2018) was used to obtain insights through exploring the depth and richness of experiences of teachers who taught adolescents with behavioural difficulties. An open-ended question was used to kick-start the interview. The question was as follows: "As a mainstream teacher of adolescents with behavioural difficulties in your school, what experiences can you share regarding daily interaction with these specific learners?" Follow-up questions were asked to ensure rigour, vigour and intensity of the data. Member checking was used for verification, conformity, and ensuring the reality of the information provided by the participants. Field notes were also used to gather information in order to add additional details that could not be recorded. The observational field notes were intended to add meaning and help us understand the teachers' experiences. The participants gave consent that these processes could be used to record information. To ensure that the data were transcribed correctly, we created a text-based version of the original audio recordings. Data were arranged systematically for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data collected were transcribed, organised and analysed to obtain sensible results (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2011). Thematic analysis was used to recognise, examine, search and communicate themes that emerged from the data (Mabuza, Govender, Ogunbanjo & Mash, 2014). The goal was to explore the experiences of teachers of adolescents with behavioural difficulties using in-depth interviews applying an in-depth, structured interview guide. Themes were generated from the transcripts and arranged in subthemes.

Different steps were followed in the analysis (Howitt & Cramer, 2017; Kadish, 2015). Firstly, familiarisation with data by reading and re-reading the transcribed data to search for ideas and significance. We also made notes during the reading and re-reading of the data. The next step was the generation of initial codes from the data. The purpose of coding was to capture core sections of the data. We coded the data by making notes in the texts that were analysed to indicate potential patterns and identify segments of the data. Thirdly, we searched for themes based on the initial coding. The next step was a review of the themes to refine the potential themes. Thereafter the themes were defined and labelled to ensure objective definition and labelling of themes. Lastly, the report was written to illustrate the analysis using extracts from

the data and intense reflection of the analysis was achieved.

Results
Two major themes emerged from the data: teachers' well-being; and teachers' coping

strategies (cf. Table 1).

Table 1 Themes on the experiences of teachers working with adolescents displaying behavioural difficulties

Themes	Sub-themes
Teachers' well-being	Misconduct
	• Learners fighting in the streets, alcohol abuse and poor family relations
	• Poor interpersonal relationships
	• Family disruptions
	Emotional abuse
	Lack of interest in school work
	Emotional distress and depression
	• Acting as parents to neglected learners
	• Burnout
	• Emotional exhaustion
	• Motivation to leave teaching (attrition)
	• Teaching experiences:
	- Death sentence; monster; pain; torture; suicide; and frustration
Coping experiences	• Age of the teacher
	• Years of experience
	• Negative mood regulations
	• Maladjusted coping
	• Self-motivation
	• Peer support
	• We laugh out the bad experiences (sharing experiences and laughing about it ... (laughing it out)

Experiences with Adolescents displaying Behavioural Difficulties
We further present teachers' recounted other unacceptable behaviours displayed by the adolescents with behavioural difficulties. These results support the above themes on the experiences of teachers working with adolescents displaying behavioural difficulties as captured in the excerpts below.

Dishonesty
One participant stated as follows: "*These children do not have any truth, they are very dishonest and if you do not realise it, you can end up being swept away by their lies and go along with them*" (P2). Another added
> *They do not do their homework, they are never on time in everything* (P6).
> *... they think dishonesty is their key to survival and they think they can play with one's mind ...* (P7).

Another participant added as follows: "*Adolescents with behavioural difficulties are fond of off-task behaviour while in class like fidgeting, daydreaming, inattentiveness while teaching is on*" (P4).

Rudeness
P2 pointed out that
> *some of these learners will throw papers around and at times, bully other learners ... At one point,*

> *one boy used rude words towards another learner and as I tried to show him that that was rude, he stormed out of the class murmuring impolite words ... these learners can be very discourteous and uncouth.*

Loss of respect and intimidation
> *In most cases, we come across some learners who join in all these bad behaviour due to peer pressure and fear of intimidation ... they would also be disrespectful, harassing other learners, in most cases, boys will be harassing and intimidating girls....* (P1)
> *... you will find that these learners are mostly involved in this disrespectful behaviour because of fear of rejection and some because they are being bullied around by adolescents with behavioural difficulties and want to belong to this so-called mighty group.* (P7)

Discussion
The main aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of mainstream teachers of adolescents with behavioural difficulties. Two themes emerged in the study as follows: psychological well-being and coping strategies of teachers teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties.

Teachers indicated that teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties evoked unpleasant reactions and negatively influenced their psychological well-being and support systems, for

example, members of their families and close relations. Teachers also reported that they experienced strained relationships with their support systems (members of their families) due to high levels of work stress; this implies less productivity by teachers if work-related issues affect their psychological well-being. Frustrations from the place of work are transferred to homes, especially to members of their families. This implies that most teachers become unproductive at work due to the psychological and unhealthy conditions at their place of work. The findings are in line with those of a previous study, which reveal that the transfer of frustration and irritation of teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties to members of the families could be referred to as displacement defence mechanism (Diehl, Chui, Hay, Lumley, Grühn & Labouvie-Vief, 2014).

The findings of this study are also similar to those of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Pyne (2017) that mainstream teachers of adolescents with behavioural difficulties develop poor interpersonal relationships with their support systems due to the displacement defence mechanism acted out in the home setting. The defence mechanism results in numerous family disruptions, such as constant conflict which could lead to an increase in the number of dysfunctional families and cases of divorce.

Literature reveals that teachers fulfil several roles such as mentoring, social work and parenting (Benraghda et al., 2015; Huang & Hu, 2016; Ovando & Combs, 2018). The findings of this study concur with the literature. Teachers also indicated that they became parents to neglected learners, increasing emotional attachment to adolescents with behavioural difficulties and providing care to some learners. This implies that teachers develop the need to support adolescents as parents and such care can lead to teachers becoming worried and concerned, which could then affect their psychological well-being. The findings reveal that teachers experienced negative emotions (such as sadness and disappointment) when above-average learners performed poorly in studies due to behavioural difficulties (ADHD, ODD and CD) expressed in the classroom during lessons. A teacher mentioned that learners with ADHD, ODD and CD normally showed symptoms after they have enrolled at school. She further explained that learners normally did not meet the full diagnostic criteria, but the behaviour show that the child has learning difficulties. Such behaviour can lead to reduced quality of teaching, learning, and poor teacher-learner relationship. It is, therefore, necessary for the education system to introduce mental health awareness campaigns, which will address such behavioural issues not only by teachers but also by the community from which

these adolescents hail because all issues begin at home and end up with teachers at school.

This awareness must guide teachers and the community on how to raise children and adolescents to refrain from bad behaviour, to experience good mental health, perform better at school, and to become future leaders who will boost the economy of the country.

Teachers expressed experiences such as "end of joy, peace and happiness", "suicide", and "death sentence", which can be a reflection of depressive symptoms and/or burnout. Teachers further maintained that they were exhausted and felt emotionally drained most of the time. One teacher qualified her experience of teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties as being in need of a *Monster*, an energy drink, as she reported to often feel physically, mentally, and emotionally drained. The teacher indicated that it was difficult to manage adolescents with behavioural difficulties and complete the planned lessons since such learners were disruptive in class. This finding correlates with those of Friedman-Krauss et al. (2014) and Sun and Shek (2012), who found that behavioural difficulties were disruptive behaviours that affected lessons and resulted in extreme stress for teachers. Reports indicate that teachers who display depressive and burnout symptoms can become demotivated. This suggests that most teachers in schools who teach adolescents with behavioural difficulties are more likely to produce poor results as most of the time is spent trying to correct those misbehaving learners in class rather than teaching. As South Africa is a developing country it means that the government must assist in paying the school fees of learners who are repeating grades and this affects the economy of the country.

Some of the participants reported changing careers and leaving the teaching profession. They also reported that there was thought of leaving the teaching profession due to the level of stress and unhappiness. This implies that the teaching environment is not healthy (psychosocial) for an individual to teach and enjoy work to be productive. These results are supported by Voss et al. (2017) who state that most teachers' ability to teach is affected by the unsafe environment which leads to less productivity in schools. This correlates with the model of job stress and health theory (Hurrell & McLaney, 1988) in which it is proposed that challenges faced by teachers when teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties contribute to severe emotional problems and impact on the proper functioning of teachers. Reduced responsiveness of teachers towards learners reduces job performance and satisfaction and leads to low levels of motivation (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014; Sun & Shek, 2012). In those aspects, teachers

leaving the teaching profession imply that the Department of Education has a role to play in motivating teachers to execute their jobs and not leave the teaching profession due to stress caused by adolescent behaviour.

In terms of coping strategies, the findings reveal the following subthemes: self-motivation; peer support; negative mood regulations; years of teaching experience; age of the teacher; and maladjusted coping strategies. Teachers become intolerable towards learners with behavioural difficulties, resulting in feelings of frustration and irritation. One teacher maintained that she experienced an unpleasant incident with a misbehaving learner who disobeyed her instructions in class. The teacher felt hopeless as the learner continued with the inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. The teacher decided to aggressively discipline the learner after school in a different context and setting and the learner ended up respecting her during and after school. The teacher indicated that since the Department of Education scrapped corporal punishment in schools, teachers are unable to manage discipline in classrooms which leads to aggressive encounters between teachers and learners.

Teachers in the study applied a problem-focused coping strategy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lethale & Pillay, 2013) to deal with the difficult class situations. Teachers' judgement and reasoning relating to using corporal punishment after school hours is consistent with Bechuke's (2015) study that since the government scrapped corporal punishment in schools, teachers are failing to effectively manage adolescents with behavioural difficulties and the level of behavioural difficulties has increased significantly.

Some teachers turned to the use of alcohol to manage frustrations and irritations relating to the distress of teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties. A teacher mentioned that when stressed the only way to escape the thoughts and frustrations was to ensure that there was enough alcohol in the house. The teacher mentioned that having a few cold bears after work helped to escape from the negative thoughts brought on by stress-related issues for a short while.

Teachers' age was an indicator of how teachers coped with teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties. Younger teachers struggled in coping with challenges of teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties while older teachers empathised and agreed with younger teachers that they had also struggled to cope when they were less experienced. However, older teachers maintain that with experience younger teachers will better cope with stressors associated with teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) state that teachers often have different ways of reacting to

adolescents with behavioural difficulties. This finding highlights the importance of teaching experience in managing adolescents with behavioural problems.

Regulation of negative moods was also highlighted as a coping strategy. Maladaptive coping methods, such as displacement defence mechanisms, substance abuse and aggressive behaviour were highlighted in our study. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) moot that although individuals use different strategies to cope, adoption of displacement defence mechanisms can lead to avoidance-focused coping. Teachers indicated that self-motivation, such as being optimistic about the situation, and peer support assist in managing adolescent learners with behavioural difficulties. This highlights the importance of team support that can be a protective factor for teachers.

Recommendations

It is recommended that teachers need support from the ministry of education, such as support for psychosocial well-being which will encourage and motivate them to work to increase their productivity. The Department of Education should work in collaboration with the Department of Health to implement effective awareness campaigns and interventions for teachers to cope with stressors related to behavioural difficulties in schools. The Department of Education should also request professional health care assistance from the Department of Health. For example, clinical psychologists could provide debriefing and group therapy sessions for teachers with regard to stress management and psycho-education on stressors relating to teaching adolescents with behavioural difficulties and provide sensitisation and awareness sessions for the prevention of burnout.

We recommend sufficient awareness for teachers in handling learners with behavioural difficulties through campaigns as well as increased awareness with regard to addressing parents' involvement with schools. Adequate working parent-teacher relationships in disciplining and modifying the behaviour of adolescents should be created. Working parent-teacher relationships are essential in preventing and reducing high levels of stress experienced by teachers of adolescents with behavioural problems.

Conclusion

Our study revealed that teachers of adolescents with behavioural difficulties experienced severe stress and negative emotions. Child Abuse Research in South Africa identified dishonesty, disrespect, disobedience, and rudeness as common behavioural difficulties. Generally, teachers feel that the education system has failed to protect them as employees. Thus, there is a decline in the well-being of teachers in schools due to challenges with

adolescents displaying behavioural difficulties. Additionally, teachers present deficiencies in areas such as occupational and social functioning. Teachers use unhealthy methods of coping, such as alcohol abuse and displacement defence mechanisms. However, positive coping strategies such as self-motivation and peer support need to be encouraged among teachers.

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Authors' Contributions
PA and GR conceptualised the study, wrote the manuscript and conducted interviews; PS and WF conducted all statistical analyses. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Notes

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