




Review

# A Scoping Review of Contextual Factors Contributing to School Violence in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region

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**Abstract:** School violence is a prevalent phenomenon across Southern African Development Community (SADC), affecting children's psychosocial and mental well-being. As part of SADC's educational goals, access to quality education is a priority and is beneficial for the region's economic growth and development. This goal cannot be achieved without addressing school violence at its roots. Using Arksey and O'Malley's five-step framework, this scoping review explored evidence of contextual factors that contribute to school violence in the region. Twenty-four articles were included, and six themes were identified: home contextual factors, parental factors, community risk factors, school contextual factors, sociability factors, and demographic and individual characteristics. The findings suggest that factors contributing to school violence were from the learners' immediate environments, including exposure to violence at home and poor parental methods, interactions with teachers and lack of appropriate disciplinary methods and processes, disruptive ideas related to masculinity, lack of understanding and intolerance to demographic and individual differences, and exposure to violence, drugs, and alcohol at the community level. To address this phenomenon, a comprehensive approach is needed, which includes developing clear school policies, teacher training on managing disruptive behaviours and professionalism, mapping incidents of school violence, and interventions involving collaboration between schools, parents, and school social workers to curb school violence.

**Keywords:** school violence; contextual factors; Southern African Development Community; SADC; scoping review



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## 1. Introduction

School violence has grown to be a serious problem that affects young children and adolescents' educational prospects, the immediate safety and well-being of teachers, human rights, and public health (Milligan et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023). As a complex school issue, school violence encompasses a range of harmful behaviours and experiences within the school setting and has significant consequences for the learners' development (Cornell & Stohlman, 2021). Miller (2023) explains that school violence includes, but is not limited to, the victimisation of learners and teachers perpetrated by either learners or teachers, involving physical and psychological exploration, cyber threats and bullying, altercations, gangsterism, and the use of weapons within the school environment. The consequences of school violence are dire with the learners' and teachers' emotional, social, and economic development impacted in the long term (Moon et al., 2015; Longobardi et al., 2018). Specific

to learners, it results in learners showing aggression towards both peers and teachers (Mosito & Sitoyi, 2024). An example of school violence widely reported on in the literature is bullying, with worldwide statistics showing that one in three students has experienced school violence directed at them by their peers in the form of cyberbullying, sexual violence, or physical fighting (UNICEF, 2019). While bullying is extensively researched in the literature and is a significant concern, it is crucial to note that it represents one segment of school violence (Cornell & Stohlman, 2021). The global literature reports many contributing factors to the violence in schools, including easy access to school premises, overcrowding, ineffective disciplinary measures or indiscipline, societal norms and values, intolerance, and socio-economic problems (De Wet et al., 2018; Turanovic & Siennick, 2022; Alabi & Ngidi, 2021). Additionally, poverty, inequality, social norms, and inadequate school infrastructure exacerbate the problem of school violence (Turanovic & Siennick, 2022; Morales et al., 2022). Classroom overcrowding and ineffective discipline render a school environment un conducive to learning and teaching but primed for crime and violence. Time spent resolving violence-related problems takes up valuable teaching time (Alabi & Ngidi, 2021; Qwabe et al., 2022). Antisocial and pro-aggression attitudes and beliefs are factors as students learn to engage in antisocial behaviour and deem violence an appropriate method of resolving issues (HakiElimu, 2020).

Violence in school manifests itself in different ways. For instance, physical violence in schools consists of rock throwing, stabbings, hitting, kicking, pushing, bullying, and school shootings (Mosito & Sitoyi, 2024; Aras et al., 2016). Physical fights can be between two learners with equal strength, while bullying is typified by repeated acts of physical aggression against a less powerful victim, or between a learner and a school staff member (UNESCO, 2023). Corporal punishment is another form of physical violence perpetrated by teachers on learners, causing uncomfortable physical force such as striking children with their hands or objects, shaking, pinching, throwing, kicking, pulling, pushing, or scratching them (Veriava & Power, 2017). Psychological violence involves emotional and verbal abuse, social exclusion, suicidality, and relational or social bullying manifested through the routine and intentional use of various words and non-physical actions to manipulate, hurt, weaken, or frighten a person mentally and emotionally (UNESCO, 2023; Khumalo, 2024). On the other hand, sexual violence is described as non-consensual sex acts, including attempted acts, unwanted touching, sexual harassment, sexual comments and jokes, gender discrimination, and sexual bullying (Etienne et al., 2002).

The status of school violence in sub-Saharan Africa is such that 48% of students have experienced physical bullying (UNICEF, 2019). In southern African countries, school violence is also prevalent, encompassing physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as bullying and other forms of aggression (UNESCO, 2023). These forms of violence occur in or outside of the classroom, around schools, on the way to or from school, as well as on digital platforms. They may be perpetrated by learners, teachers, parents, and community members on learners or school staff (Lester et al., 2017). For instance, in Tanzania, statistics revealed that 67.4 to 75% of learners had encountered acts of school violence perpetrated by their teachers (HakiElimu, 2020). In South Africa, 68% of teachers and 49% of learners reported having experienced physical violence directly and indirectly by witnessing it in their schools (Lumadi, 2024). In Zimbabwe, bullying, fighting, gender-based violence, and other forms of violence are common in schools (Ziwanai et al., 2024). In Lesotho, school violence was found to be a manifestation of gender inequality and violence, and major violence risk factors included the use of drugs and weapon carrying (De Wat, 2007).

Learners in the SADC region, consisting of Low–Middle Income Countries (LMICs), are faced with multifaceted challenges linked to their socio-economic backgrounds and structural disparities within their communities and schools, and these are compounded by

school violence and influence school violence (Khumalo & Pretorius, 2024; Wu et al., 2024). Some of these challenges within their communities include community crime and violence, high unemployment rates, the use of alcohol and drugs, poverty, and gangsterism, all of which influence learners' behaviours (De Wet et al., 2018; Khumalo & Pretorius, 2025). The consequences of school violence for the learners, teachers, and school climate are severe. The learners' fundamental rights to equality, dignity, and freedom from violence are all violated by different acts of school violence (Beninger, 2013). Moreover, such violence not only undermines learners' and teachers' safety and psychosocial well-being but greatly affects learners' academic performance and perpetuates a broader culture of violence in communities (Zeb et al., 2023). This review takes on the responsibility of mapping out the various contextual factors that contribute to school violence in the SADC region, particularly because, according to the authors' knowledge, there is no scoping review that provides a comprehensive report on the literature about the various forms of school violence and their social and environmental contributors as well as impacts. Although research studies exist within individual states in SADC, a comprehensive synthesis focused on the entirety of the region is lacking. Thus, conducting a review on school violence in the SADC region is essential for understanding its prevalence and impact, ensuring compliance with constitutional rights, enhancing educational outcomes, informing effective policies, and fostering safer communities. Moreover, this review will provide policy makers, education departments, teachers, and support personnel with research-based insight on these risk factors around school violence, therefore ensuring that schools adopt a proactive preventative approach to addressing violence.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The current review aimed to present evidence of contributing factors to school violence within the SADC region. To achieve this aim, a scoping review was used to map out the depth and breadth of related literature, identify research gaps in the proposed research focus, and determine the value of conducting a comprehensive systematic review. This scoping review's methodical approach was guided by Arksey and O'Malley's five-stage framework (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This framework includes the following steps: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) selecting relevant studies, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. Following the general recommendations for scoping reviews, this review was conducted by three researchers: GK and BL, who are subject experts, and NM, who has experience utilizing the scoping review methodology. This scoping review has been registered with the open science framework (Makhakhe & Khumalo, 2024; Khumalo et al., 2024). The problem, interest, context (PICO) framework (see Table 1) guided the development of the following broad question: what are the contributing factors to school violence in the SADC region?

**Table 1.** PICO Framework.

PICO Framework	
Problem	School violence
Interest	Contributing factors
Context	Southern African Development Community (SADC) region

### 2.1. Identifying Relevant Studies

The article search was conducted on 20 October 2024 from the following databases: ProQuest, PubMed, Web of Science, Academic Search Ultimate, PsycINFO, and MEDLINE Ultimate. These databases were selected because of their social science and public health

relevance. Furthermore, to reduce bias, a hand-search strategy from the selected articles was undertaken to identify other publications that did not emerge from the databases that meet the inclusion criterion of the review (see Table 2). Specifically, the hand search was conducted on the final selected full-text publications. Using the PICo framework, the search terms for the three constructs of interest were identified first, including “school violence” AND “contributing factors” AND “Southern African Development Community” OR “SADC” OR “Angola” OR “Botswana” OR “Comoros” OR “Democratic Republic of Congo” OR “DRC” OR “Eswatini” OR “Lesotho” OR “Madagascar” OR “Malawi” OR “Mauritius” OR “Mozambique” OR “Namibia” OR “Seychelles” OR “South Africa” OR “Tanzania” OR “Zambia” OR “Zimbabwe”. Only peer-reviewed articles published in the English language between 2014–2024 were considered for inclusion. Articles also had to be within the context of the SADC region.

**Table 2.** Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criteria Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Focus of publications	Articles reporting on school violence and contributing factors	Articles reporting on school violence without focus on factors contributing to it
Context of publications	Articles published within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region	Articles published outside this region
Publication year	Articles published in 2014–2024	Articles published outside this year period
Type of publications	Peer-reviewed articles with full-text publication available	Other types of publications (e.g., review articles, reports, commentaries)
Language	Articles published in the English language	Articles published in other languages

### 2.2. Selecting Relevant Studies

All citations were imported into Rayyan software (version 1.5.6), a web-based app that facilitates the initial screening of articles at abstract and title levels (Ouzzani et al., 2016). Additionally, the software facilitates the automatic removal of duplicates. The selection of relevant articles was completed using the inclusion criteria at two screening levels, namely (1) title and abstract screening and (2) full-text screening. Two authors (GK and NM) independently completed the blinded screening process at both levels. Thereafter, the two authors, with the assistance of the third author (BL), deliberated on the discrepancies from the selected articles. The discrepancies were then reviewed and resolved by the third author. A substantial level of agreement was found during the screening at abstract and title levels and full-text level, with an overall kappa at 0.80.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Charting

Once the independent screening was completed, the data extracted from the articles were charted on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in a standardised format to systematically capture key characteristics of each included full-text study. Specifically, the spreadsheet included the following details: author/s (date), aim/objective, country, methods, sample/participants, and summarised findings on contributing factors. Two reviewers (GK and NM) worked independently on the data extraction and met to discuss any discrepancies, which were eventually resolved with the assistance of the third author (BL).

### 2.4. Collating, Summarising, and Reporting the Results

Once data charting had been completed, all authors were engaged in the analysis and summary of key findings based on the extracted data. This was an iterative process

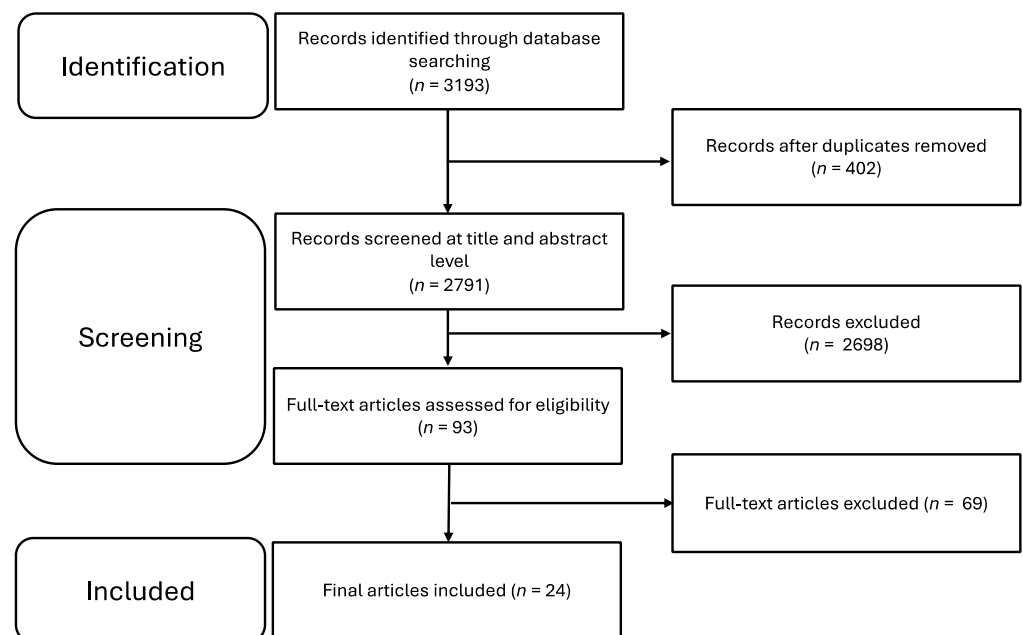
that involved the identification of descriptive themes related to the contextual factors that contribute to school violence. As such, data from the qualitative studies were analysed using Braun and Clarke's inductive thematic analysis, while statistical data from the quantitative studies were synthesised and recorded.

### 2.5. Ethics and Dissemination

Ethical approval for this review was not necessary, as this review is based solely on secondary data from articles that have been published open access.

## 3. Results

The initial search identified 3193 articles (Figure 1). After the removal of duplicates, 2791 articles remained for the title and abstract screening. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were thoroughly applied to this screening phase, resulting in 2698 articles being excluded and 93 articles being screened at the full-text level. Sixty-nine articles were excluded at full-text level. These articles were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria due to various reasons such as reporting on the impact of school violence on academic achievement (e.g., Pillay, 2021; Okeke et al., 2024), experiences of school violence with no reflection on contributing factors (e.g., Motswi & Mashegoane, 2017; Modiba, 2020), or being conducted outside SADC (e.g., Wright, 2016; Álvarez-Guerrero et al., 2023). Twenty-four articles were finally included for synthesis. All articles reflected on school violence in SADC schools and reported on various contributing factors. The results are presented in Table 3 and discussed in detail thereafter.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA-ScR flow chart.

**Table 3.** Contributing factors to school violence.

Author/s (Date)	Aim/Objective	Country	Methods	Sample/ Participants	Summarised Findings on Contributing Factors
Singh and David (2024)	To examines the ways in which primary school boys who otherwise denounce violence explain their participation in it.	South Africa	Qualitative approach	13 learners	Boys used violence to demonstrate strength and gain respect. This perpetuates toxic masculinity that relies on acts of violence to validate itself. Boys used violence to get more respect from peers and joined gangs as a way to solidify their strength. This violence extended into the school, where schoolteachers were impacted through verbal attacks.
Mabasa and Muluvhu (2019)	To explore and describe accountability of parents on their learners' violence in schools in the Malamulele Central Circuit.	South Africa	Qualitative approach	Parents, sample size not stated	Parents perpetuating violence in schools by blaming teachers for the violent actions of their children instead of instilling discipline. Learners in schools are involved in school violence to please other school learners in company as well as engage in alcohol intake which perpetuates violence. Lack of parental supervision for their children's work. Learners from poor families are highly likely to be engaged in school violence where their economic situations are unknown to the school.
Dube and Setlaltoa (2024)	To discuss the experiences of learners who face xenophobia in South Africa.	South Africa	Participatory action research	10 migrant learners and 3 teachers	This study found that migrant children often experience body shaming. This includes comments about their skin colour or physical features, such as being too dark or having a big head. The effects of xenophobia contribute to a cycle of school violence.
Metsing and Tlale (2024)	To explore challenges faced by learners who are survivors of school violence and the implications for support structures.	South Africa	Qualitative study, phenomenology	5 principals and 30 teachers	Support structure was ineffective, and learners would pick that up. The ineffectiveness then suggested that learners might not be confident enough to go to their teachers for support since there was a lack of trust in effectiveness. This would then mean that learners who were aggrieved might not trust school authorities to protect them and thus resort to taking the law into their own hands.
Chauke (2021)	To explore the prevalent nature of youth violent behaviour and suggest a collaborative model in response to learner violence in a selected high school.	South Africa	Qualitative study, case study design	5 learners, 4 teachers, 1 school principal, and 5 parents.	Learners went to the community and drank home-brewed beer, returned to school while they were under the influence of home-brewed beer which affected the process of teaching and learning. Learners who use drugs (marijuana) abuse fellow learners emotionally and disrupt the process of teaching and learning. Learners during leisure time outside school fight amongst each other and unsolved fights continued again at school. Some learners become involved in a school fight because they want to belong to a certain group that can protect them. Prejudicial bullying is prevalent in the selected high school, and learners who come from other African countries such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe are subjected to it, perpetrated by learners who are originally from South Africa.

Table 3. Cont.

Author/s (Date)	Aim/Objective	Country	Methods	Sample/Participants	Summarised Findings on Contributing Factors
Mahaye (2023)	To investigate educator's perceptions of how learners' rights to safety affect disciplinary procedures in secondary schools in the Umbumbulu Circuit of KwaZulu-Natal.	South Africa	Qualitative approach	10 teachers	The educators who try to discipline learners themselves become targets of crime—some learners cause harm to the educators in the form of revenge or reprisal attacks. Some of the issues recounted by educators involved learners who served as conduits for the selling and distribution of illicit and banned substances. Children who refused to connive get harassed and hounded within their communities. Bad parenting and the unwillingness of some parents to support secondary schools' disciplinary procedure efforts was also faulted for an increase in disciplinary issues.
Makhasane and Mthembu (2019)	To explore school violence misconceptions and professional development of teachers.	South Africa	Qualitative approach	1 principal of the school, 3 teachers and learners (3 focus groups with 4 learners)	Some boys used inappropriate language when speaking to the girls, which contained sexual connotations, such behaviour understood to be an expression of boys asserting their masculinity, and therefore they were simply required to apologise to the aggrieved girl. Other boys sexually harassed girls, but they got away with it because the aggrieved girls were instructed by school managers to forgive such boys. The teachers' interpretation of sexual harassment leaves much to be considered about their conceptualisation of sexual harassment. It points to a misconception of the seriousness and impact of sexual harassment on the victimised girls. The principal depicts teasing as a non-violent behaviour and therefore unproblematic, illustrating the misunderstanding of homophobia as a form of violence since verbal utterances may cause emotional or psychological harm. It also appeared that the beliefs held by some teachers regarding lesbians and gays accounted for their misconceptions of homophobia, such as depicting homosexuality as emanating from evil spirits. Violence perpetrated against gays and lesbians was interpreted from Christian and African perspectives where it was seen as a misfit of the dominant beliefs. Thus, those who instigated violence were condoned with the understanding that they were trying to "correct" abnormal behaviour.
Kiiza and Newlin (2022)	To explore the causes of selected conduct disorders among adolescents in school.	Uganda and South Africa	Qualitative approach, explorative and phenomenological	10 teachers	Findings from South African teachers reflected that the prevalence of conduct disorders among school-going adolescents is largely due to factors such as the socio-economic status of the families and the environment they grow up in. Some learners come from abusive families, which can lead to a negative school environment. Socio-economic status at home also contributes to the behaviour of children, as it can lead to conflict and aggression. Poverty is another contributing factor, as many students from impoverished homes lack basic needs and develop an inferiority complex. This can lead to violations of rules, such as theft of belongings. Some secondary school pupils are destructive due to factors such as violent parents, divorced parents, or strict parents. The level of communication between parents and their children is poor, and teachers face confusion and fear of punishment. In South Africa, rules are too relaxed, leading to abuse and gangs in schools. Teachers struggle to control these influences and bring about change in the school environment.

Table 3. Cont.

Author/s (Date)	Aim/Objective	Country	Methods	Sample/ Participants	Summarised Findings on Contributing Factors
Nyokangi and Phasha (2016)	To exposed sexual violence in schools for learners with mild intellectual disabilities in South Africa.	South Africa	Qualitative approach, multiple-case study	16 learners with mild intellectual disabilities	Factors contributing to sexual violence at schools for learners with mild intellectual disabilities included (i) peer pressure, (ii) concealment of reported incidents of sexual violence, (iii) unsupervised areas linked to schools, and (iv) arranged relationships.
Lumadi (2024)	To investigate the impact of school violence on learners through the lenses of social justice theory and an interpretive paradigm.	South Africa	Qualitative approach	3 principals, 3 heads of department, and 21 teachers	The study found that the socio-economic status of learners and experiences of domestic violence contributed to learners' misbehaviour in the three schools. Some boys come to school without food and money, and because they are hungry, they take food away from the young ones and sometimes beat them up or threaten them. In the community, gangsters encourage their learner victims to commit violence in the school, and cultural practices such as male initiation are sources of aggression and dominance for initiates. The lack of discipline in schools is largely blamed on the teachers and school leadership, where learners are left unattended, creating an atmosphere of violence.
Dlungwane and Hamlall (2024)	To explore teachers' and learners' views and experiences of the manifestation of implicit GBV at the researched schools.	South Africa	Qualitative approach, interpretative	24 learners and 20 educators	Boys in high schools used jokes to subvert girls' authority and gain sway when they felt threatened by losing influence; used humour to silence girls who were gaining momentum in class and downplayed their academic achievements; dismissed girls' successes by accusing them of dishonesty or using their sexuality for academic success; and used rumours to denigrate girls, spreading resentment towards those who refused romantic relationships. Fun teasing targeted physical characteristics and made girls feel unaccepted and disdained. The boys' retaliation was influenced by stigmas of male superiority and sex-identified stereotypes, making them feel isolated and oppressed.
Chauke et al. (2021)	To investigate intersectional factors contributing to learner violence in school with a view to suggest possible solutions.	South Africa	Qualitative approach, case study	1 principal, 4 teachers, 5 learners, and 5 parents.	Learner violence was influenced by intersectional factors within the Limpopo province, including school size, family and household background, a shortage of teachers leading to chaos in classrooms, and learners being invited to taverns to drink alcohol, leading to school attendance with hangovers. Boys were found to not respect female teachers due to experiences of abusive families, and domestic violence led to learners carrying weapons to school with the intention of hurting others. Girls were less influenced by domestic violence, while those from families with parental care were likely to be violent at school. Poverty led to girls engaging in extramarital affairs for financial benefits.

Table 3. Cont.

Author/s (Date)	Aim/Objective	Country	Methods	Sample/ Participants	Summarised Findings on Contributing Factors
Morojele et al. (2017)	To depict the profiles of bullies and bullying victims within a cultural context of one co-educational secondary school in Hammarsdale in South Africa.	South Africa	Qualitative approach, narrative	6 learners	Bullying in schools is often based on the perceived beauty of a student's body, particularly those who are thin or fat. This stigma is particularly targeted against girls, who are often ridiculed for their appearance. Boys' attractiveness is also considered a factor in bullying, as being told that a girl's appearance is ugly can lead to serious fights. Overly competitive behaviour, such as comparing one's wealth to others' homes and school uniforms, also contributes to bullying. The competition of cell phones among students can trigger jealousy and lead to fights. The availability of portable possessions, particularly the latest electronic gadgets, also triggers jealousy and leads to bullying.
Mahabeer (2020)	The intention of this study was to gain insight into the beliefs, fears, and experiences of novice teachers in the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa.	South Africa	Qualitative approach, interpretivist	4 teachers	The study found that bullying behaviours are influenced by social problems and biographical and contextual factors. Home circumstances, such as violent communities, poverty, dysfunctional families, drugs, child abuse, neglect, and corporal punishment, are the root causes. Biographical factors, such as personal attitudes, emotions, upbringing, and age, also contribute to bullying. Social factors, such as neglect, jealousy, and upbringing, can also contribute to bullying. Bullying can be a result of being cheeky, jealous, or from a violent environment. Additionally, drug abuse is a concern.
Sibisi et al. (2024)	To provide a precis of the comprehensive nature of school violence and preventative strategies meant to curb this phenomenon.	Eswatini	Qualitative approach	10 learners, 10 parents, 10 educators	The location of a school in Mbabane contributes to the prevalence of school-based violence, particularly among boys. The school is situated in a township which is often characterised by unruly behaviour, which children from the surrounding areas learn at home and bring to school. The school's location also contributes to domesticated squabbles from home and the community, which often result in children settling their scores at school. These violent boys often grow up in communities where they witnessed man-to-man fights and physical assaults. The overall atmosphere of the community may also contribute to the prevalence of school violence.
Ngidi and Kaye (2022)	To explore the nature of school violence and existing strategies used to combat it and then design an effective intervention strategy to reduce violence.	South Africa	Participatory action research	32 educators, 32 learners, 40 parents, and 7 community members	Participants blamed the community for improper behaviour affecting school learners, including drug and alcohol sales. Learners blamed parents who did not educate them on right and wrong, allowing them to imitate violence at school. They also complained about friends treating children like gods, ridicule for not having a romantic partner, and cultural differences.

Table 3. Cont.

Author/s (Date)	Aim/Objective	Country	Methods	Sample/Participants	Summarised Findings on Contributing Factors
Rubbi Nunan (2022)	To obtain the teacher's perspectives of what causes students to exhibit challenging behaviour in schools as a bedrock to understanding students first, before addressing their behaviour.	South Africa	Qualitative approach	15 teachers	The negative family dynamics surrounding students, including unemployment, drugs, violence, neglect, abuse, displaced aggression, and alcohol and drugs, are a leading cause for their challenging behaviour at school. Students carry weapons to school and bring weed and cigarettes to school. Non-cooperation and violence from parents towards teachers also contribute to students exhibiting challenging behaviour at school. Parents often become defensive, argue, and shift blame onto teachers, while also covering up their children's behaviour due to their upbringing and incorrect parenting.
Njelesani et al. (2022)	The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of school violence among students with disabilities in the Lusaka and southern provinces of Zambia.	Zambia	Qualitative approach	6 boys and 8 girls	The school did not effectively respond to issues such as teachers sexually violating young girls, leading to pregnancy. They blamed the affected learners and who were victimised during school assembly. Teachers blamed learners with disabilities for disturbances and told them that they were a problem. In some instances, teachers resorted to taking learners who were perceived as problematic to police authorities. When the students with disabilities and girls were blamed for sexual violence, they often experienced greater violence.
Netshitangani (2018)	The purpose of this paper is to examine the reduction of school violence from the management point of view.	South Africa	Qualitative approach, case study	2 teachers (the school principal and the Life Orientation teacher) and 2 SGBs	The study found that school principals often treat teachers and pupils differently in managing incidents of violence, leading to a bias towards teachers and a lack of attention to pupils' complaints. This attitude discourages victims from reporting incidents. The negative and unprofessional behaviour of teachers can encourage school violence, and the inability of principals to strengthen professionalism is a concern. Verbal abuse, bullying, and corporal punishment are other forms of unprofessional behaviour that are institutionally sanctioned. Teachers' inappropriate language can also encourage students to emulate such behaviour. In a poorly managed situation, pupils can be violently mistreated or influenced by potentially violent beliefs, as dominant norms and behaviours are shared by many adults in the formal education system. The absence of teachers in classes creates an opportunity for students to engage in violent acts.
Brown and Buthelezi (2020)	This article explores the gender and sexual diversity perceptions of teachers.	South Africa	Qualitative approach, case study	10 SBST members	The study found concerning attitudes among some teachers towards learners with same-sex sexual orientations. The attitudes were related to beliefs that homosexuality is a choice, lack of understanding around its origins, and the perception that homosexual learners are "acting" or going through a phase. Teachers used homophobic language and lacked knowledge of how to address sexual diversity, and their religious views played a role in the discrimination and prejudice.

Table 3. Cont.

Author/s (Date)	Aim/Objective	Country	Methods	Sample/ Participants	Summarised Findings on Contributing Factors
Mahlangu et al. (2021)	To determine the prevalence and factors associated with learners' experiences, and to examine pathways to the learners' experiences of CP at school.	South Africa	Cluster randomised controlled trial	3743 learners	Risk factors associated with learner experience of corporal punishment (CP) at school includes the learners' behaviour, home environment, school climate, and other factors including their families' SES and mental health. Experiencing CP at school was associated with all individual measures of learner behaviour (substance use, sexual behaviour, and misbehaviour), with all individual measures of home environment (caregiver communication score, caregiver kindness score, corporal punishment score, and learners' neglect score), and with less communication between caregivers and learners and caregiver unkindness. Similarly, learners who experienced physical punishment at home and were neglected at home, with a negative caregiver attitude to school work, were associated with an increased risk of experiencing corporal punishment at school.
Ameli et al. (2017)	To describe the prevalence of exposure to violence among adolescents in Malawi.	Malawi	Not stated	561 learners	Bullying perpetration is linked to physical abuse, victimisation in school, and emotional abuse at home. Boys are more likely to witness domestic violence, while girls experience emotional abuse. After adjusting for sociodemographic characteristics, no similarity was found. Boys were more likely to experience physical abuse and bullying victimisation, while girls experienced emotional abuse.
André and Moriña (2020)	To examine the origins of conflicts, as perceived by the larger school community, in a public school in the context of Angolan community.	Angola	Qualitative approach	167 (teachers, students, and family members)	Contributing factors were found to be related to ethical and deontological origins, poor student behaviour/poor parental guidance and discipline at home, and a lack of parental participation at school and involvement with their children. The study revealed that the most relevant conflicts in the school context were related to a lack of compliance by the teachers to professional standards and the code of conduct required by the educational institution for teachers and the teachers' lack of respect for the institutions' ethical deontological standards. The research also showed that the undisciplined behaviour of the students, the poor quality of family life, and a lack of parental supervision and guidance (involvement) play a huge part in the ongoing conflicts in the larger context of the school community.
Naidoo et al. (2017)	To report baseline prevalence and factors associated with forced sex.	South Africa	Quantitative approach	434 adolescents	The prevalence of forced sex among school learners in South Africa is 14.2%, with girls at 15.0% and boys at 13.6%. Urban location, low socio-economic status, and discordant maternal/paternal vital status remain significant risk factors. Girls are more likely to experience forced sex, with a 24.80% prevalence among low socio-economic status students compared to medium-high SES students.

### 3.1. Study Characteristics

This scoping review aimed to document the contributing factors to school violence in the SADC region. A total of 24 studies were included in the final analysis. Of the 24 articles, 79% were from South Africa ( $n = 19$ ), 4.2% were from Eswatini ( $n = 1$ ), 4.2% were from Angola ( $n = 1$ ), 4.2% were from Zambia ( $n = 1$ ), 4.2% were from Malawi ( $n = 1$ ), and 4.2% were from Uganda and South Africa (i.e., only evidence from South Africa was considered) ( $n = 1$ ). In terms of the research methodology, qualitative approaches were employed in 79% ( $n = 19$ ) of the studies. Participatory action research was used in 8.3% ( $n = 2$ ), while action research approaches were used in 4.2% ( $n = 1$ ) of the studies. Lastly, cluster randomised controlled trials were used in 4.2% ( $n = 1$ ) of the studies, and quantitative approaches were used in 4.2% ( $n = 1$ ). The studies included a diverse range of participants, including learners, teachers, school administrators and principals, parents, and vulnerable populations such as learners with disabilities and migrant learners.

### 3.2. Results of the Analysed Studies

The findings based on thematic analysis revealed six themes, namely, (i) home contextual factors, (ii) parental factors, (iii) community factors, (iv) school contextual factors, (v) sociability factors, and (vi) demographic and individual characteristics.

#### 3.2.1. Home Contextual Factors

The reviewed studies collectively highlight the significant influence of unfavourable home situations on learners' behaviour in school settings, with a strong emphasis on the role of learned behaviours and displaced aggression resulting from experiences of domestic and familial violence and families' low socio-economic status (SES). Regarding domestic violence, studies show that disrespect towards teachers carrying weapons to school and physical fights were associated with witnessing domestic violence in SADC families (Chauke et al., 2021; Mahlangu et al., 2021; Kiiza & Newlin, 2022; Morojele et al., 2017; Mahabeer, 2020; Ngidi & Kaye, 2022; Rubbi Nunan, 2022; Ameli et al., 2017). The domestic violence experienced by learners was often between their parents, where the learners observed their fathers beating up their mothers (Chauke et al., 2021; Ngidi & Kaye, 2022), and in some instances, the abuse was directed at the learners themselves, where the parents beat them up as a way of disciplining them (Rubbi Nunan, 2022). Due to these experiences, learners exhibited aggression and imitated violent behaviours observed at home and directed their frustrations toward peers and school staff (Mabasa & Muluvhu, 2019; Chauke et al., 2021; Ngidi & Kaye, 2022; Rubbi Nunan, 2022; Ameli et al., 2017). Additionally, the learners' household SES was highlighted to have profound influences on school violence perpetuated by learners, therefore emphasizing the intersection of poverty, inequality, and maladaptive coping mechanisms. Kiiza and Newlin (2022) observed that SES disparities manifested in classroom dynamics, where children from less privileged backgrounds felt intimidated by their wealthier peers, therefore behaving "harshly" towards them. Kiiza and Newlin (2022) further found that this sense of inferiority, stemming from unmet basic needs, led to learners violating school rules and the theft of other learners' belongings. Material possessions and their associated SESs also play a significant role in fuelling conflicts, as highlighted by Morojele et al. (2017), who found that competition over items such as cell phones and other electronic gadgets often triggered jealousy and physical altercations among learners. Similarly, household lack of food leading to learners coming to school hungry contributed to violence, as affected learners would bully (i.e., threaten and beat) fellow peers for their food (Lumadi, 2024). Another study reported a significantly higher prevalence of forced sex ( $p = 0.036$ ) amongst students in the low SES category (24.80%; 95% CI 11.60–45.40) compared to the combined medium–high SES categories (12.90%; 95% CI

8.80–18.50) (Naidoo et al., 2017). Poverty led to some schoolgirls engaging in transactional relationships with teachers to meet their financial needs, perpetuating cycles of exploitation and violence within the school environment (Chauke et al., 2021). Sometimes, parents from low SESs encouraged such relationships with adults in exchange for financial support and free groceries (Ngidi & Kaye, 2022).

### 3.2.2. Parental Factors

Parental support plays a significant role in learners' development and behaviours, with studies suggesting that poor parenting methods and absent parental involvement have a detrimental effect on learner behaviours in the school setting. Studies attributed school violence to parents' lack of support and the parents' inability to talk to and counsel their children (Chauke et al., 2021; Ngidi & Kaye, 2022; Mahlangu et al., 2021; André & Moriña, 2020). These children are prone to be vulnerable to peer pressure, get involved in fights within the school premises, and experience corporal punishment. The issue of school violence is further compounded by parents who often defend their children's misconduct and their resistance to collaborating with schools on disciplinary matters (André & Moriña, 2020; Mabasa & Muluvhu, 2019; Mahaye, 2023). In defending their children, some parents would fight and blame teachers even when their children were guilty of misconduct (Mabasa & Muluvhu, 2019; Rubbi Nunan, 2022). This led to continued imbalances in learners' moral characters and challenging behaviours because they know that they have their parents' backing, regardless of whether they are wrong or right in a case they are involved in (Mahaye, 2023; Rubbi Nunan, 2022). A study by Nyokangi and Phasha (2016) presented a case where parents of children with intellectual disabilities and teachers arranged sexual relationships for these children to protect them from possible exploitation from community members because of their disability. This reflects poor parental decisions driven by a lack of awareness or misguided attempts to shield their children from harm. While this practice was considered beneficial by the parents and teachers, it had unintended consequences of female sexual abuse experiences for the paired children as sexual boundaries were not explained to the children. For instance, one study participant noted that "to me forcing my girlfriend to have sex is not rape. I am not raping her because she is my girlfriend and she says that she loves me, so I am not raping anyone" (Nyokangi & Phasha, 2016, p. 237).

### 3.2.3. Community Factors

The location and characteristics of the community surrounding the school significantly contributed to the prevalence of school violence. A study by Sibisi et al. (2024) concluded that schools situated in townships or peri-urban areas have higher incidents of violence, specifically among boys. Mahabeer (2020) echoed similar conclusions. Community violence by boys such as unresolved fights or squabbles continued to the school premises (Chauke, 2021; Sibisi et al., 2024). Moreover, drugs and alcohol are pervasive issues in many communities, directly impacting learner behaviour. Studies indicate that the communities where learners come from expose them to alcohol and drugs and community members facilitate the sale and consumption of drugs and alcohol by learners (Chauke, 2021; Mahaye, 2023; Chauke et al., 2021; Ngidi & Kaye, 2022), which undermines discipline in schools. Chauke et al. (2021) further noted that communities with accessible taverns and a culture of alcohol consumption create conditions where learners frequent these establishments, often returning to school intoxicated, which disrupts teaching and learning. Similarly, Chauke (2021) observed that home-brewed alcohol and drug use among learners led to truancy and diminished academic achievement. Rubbi Nunan (2022) provided compelling examples of learners engaging in substance abuse, such as consuming cannabis-infused

muffins, sniffing benzene, and smoking cigarettes and dagga from their community. These substances contributed to school violence encounters.

#### 3.2.4. School Contextual Factors

Challenges in the school context, specifically poor support structures and disciplinary measures, were highlighted as contributing factors. A study found that learners perceived their school support structures as insufficient to deal with school violence, leading aggrieved learners to take matters into their own hands (Metsing & Tlale, 2024). Additionally, school support teams tasked with managing school violence were frequently changed in some schools, therefore interrupting the processes to manage learners' disruptive behaviours. While some studies reported on the lack of discipline and appropriate responses to violent acts (Lumadi, 2024; André & Moriña, 2020; Netshitangani, 2018), Makhasane and Mthembu (2019) noted that some incidents of sexual harassment and violence were not effectively addressed as school authorities often instructed victims to forgive perpetrators rather than implement corrective measures. Additionally, inappropriate language by teachers towards learners, such as vulgar language, rudeness and swearing, and gossiping about and threatening learners, led to learners mimicking such behaviours in their interactions (Netshitangani, 2018). Chauke et al. (2021) posit that due to low teacher numbers and overcrowded classrooms, teachers struggled to maintain order and prevent destructive learner behaviours, therefore contributing to school violence. Unsupervised classroom and scholarly transport led to inappropriate and hurtful behaviours of pinching, inappropriate touching, and pulling down girls' clothing by boys (Nyokangi & Phasha, 2016; Lumadi, 2024; Netshitangani, 2018).

#### 3.2.5. Sociability Factors

The studies included in this review highlighted the importance of sociability factors as significant contributors to school violence. As such, the studies reported that various forms of peer-to-peer bullying were due to feelings of jealousy (Dlungwane & Hamlall, 2024; Mahabeer, 2020), especially in gendered interactions. Boys ridiculed, teased, and used jokes to downplay the academic achievements of girls. In some instances, the learners resorted to violent behaviour to prove their masculinity and to be popular (Mabasa & Muluvhu, 2019; Nyokangi & Phasha, 2016). Ridicule directed to boys about their lack of romantic partners triggered them to become aggressive in defence of their manliness (Ngidi & Kaye, 2022). Due to this and peer pressure, one boy confirmed "going to the extent of beating girls who refused his advances. . . and resorted to behaviour that involved taking pictures of girls' underwear in class or through the toilet window" (Nyokangi & Phasha, 2016, p. 235). Boys often used aggression to gain the respect of others and demonstrate their strength through fighting to defend themselves, which boosted their self-worth and made them feel powerful (Singh & David, 2024). This behaviour perpetuates violence and toxic masculinity (Makhasane & Mthembu, 2019; Lumadi, 2024; Dlungwane & Hamlall, 2024; Ngidi & Kaye, 2022). In their social interactions with girls, boys wanted to assert their masculinity and used inappropriate language containing sexual connotations when speaking to the girls (Makhasane & Mthembu, 2019; Dlungwane & Hamlall, 2024). They used alienation and shameful rumours to maintain dominance over girls, causing them to feel isolated and oppressed (Dlungwane & Hamlall, 2024). Lastly, Lumadi (2024) linked the cultural practice of male initiation to aggression and dominance over girls. Furthermore, the experience of gang participation led to school violence (Chauke, 2021; Kiiza & Newlin, 2022; Singh & David, 2024; Lumadi, 2024). School gangs were formed to combine their protective powers and were helpful when some of the members who got into fights could not fight (Singh & David, 2024). As such, affiliations to a gang offered a sense of protection during group

fight, ensuring that individual learners were not isolated targets. (Chauke, 2021; Kiiza & Newlin, 2022). Additionally, Lumadi (2024) explained that gang-related violence stems from the broader community where gangsters encourage learners to perpetuate violence on school premises.

### 3.2.6. Demographic and Individual Characteristics

Another significant factor contributing to school violence was learners' and teachers' lack of understanding and intolerance to demographic and individual diversity, which different studies reported were related to foreign nationality, gender and sexual orientation, physical appearance, and culture and religion. Migrant children often experience body shaming and derogatory comments about their skin colour or physical features, such as being "too dark" with physical features compared to animals by fellow peers (Dube & Setlalentoa, 2024). These acts were linked to xenophobia. Similarly, Chauke (2021) found that learners from countries like Mozambique and Zimbabwe were subjected to prejudicial bullying perpetuated by learners who are originally from South Africa and often experienced name-calling and bullying acts. Homophobic statements and treatment were passed to some learners because of their gender and sexual identity, further perpetuating acts of violence against those specific learners (Makhasane & Mthembu, 2019; Morojele et al., 2017; Netshitangani, 2018). Specific to teachers' behaviours, Brown and Buthelezi (2020) found that they are perpetrators of discrimination and prejudice by using homophobic language and regarding homosexuality as "unacceptable". Moreover, learners whose physical appearance was considered undesirable experienced bullying. Specifically, dark-skinned and slender learners are often targeted, facing ridicule and exclusion, with teasing disguised as humour (Chauke, 2021; Dlungwane & Hamlall, 2024; Morojele et al., 2017).

## 4. Discussion

By examining and synthesizing evidence, this review demonstrates the various contextual factors that cause and contribute to school violence within the SADC region. While 24 studies were included in this review, there is a dearth of empirical research as the majority of the studies were conducted in South Africa. Other SADC countries included Eswatini, Zambia, Malawi, and Angola.

Regarding contextual factors contributing to school violence, findings on domestic violence and families' low SESs support previous research that acknowledges the relationship between these aspects and school violence. For instance, Wu et al. (2024) found an association between family SES and school violence, reporting that learners with low SESs exhibited more aggressive behaviours compared to those with high SESs, while Lloyd (2018) recognised that learners exposed to domestic violence are at risk of developing behavioural problems, including aggression, misconduct, and unpredictable behaviours. Like some scholars (Romero et al., 2018), we argue that the families' low SESs and experiences of domestic violence are mutual reinforcing factors. Children of low SESs are prone to experience, directly and indirectly, domestic violence due to associated risk factors and chronic poverty, which was found in this review to lead to some learners engaging in transactional sexual activities for food and material gain. These factors contribute to the victimisation and perpetuation of school violence and underscore the critical need for comprehensive interventions that not only address school violence but also its broader social and economic roots.

Poor parenting methods, including the lack of supervision, involvement, and support, significantly increase learners' vulnerability to peer pressure and involvement in school violence. The findings evidenced that parents failed to provide counselling and guidance to their children regarding violent acts and tended to defend their children's misconduct by

fighting and blaming teachers, further undermining efforts to address school violence. According to [Huffman et al. \(2020\)](#), ineffective parenting approaches, particularly the absence of parental supervision and support, were positively connected to learners' misconduct and delinquency. As such, nurturing quality parent–child relationships and parental monitoring can reduce learners' problematic behaviours on school premises. One study included in this review concluded that parents exposed their girl children with mild intellectual disabilities to sexual abuse by pairing them in relationships without discussing sexual boundaries with them. While not much research has been conducted in this specific area, we believe that while the act by the parents was noble, it had unintended consequences due to parents' lack of “advice” and “counselling” to their children about what it means to be in romantic relationships and have sexual experiences. [Starke et al. \(2024\)](#) acknowledged that forced relationships exacerbate abuse among those with intellectual disabilities and advocated for sexual health education to differentiate between safe, legal sexual activities and abusive, criminal sexual behaviours. Sexual education could encompass sexuality as an integral aspect of life, together with understanding the negotiation of sexual circumstances, and can be taught concurrently with the right to consent and the application of contraception. Overall, a quality parent–child relationship would include parents frequently engaging their children in dialogue and providing advice and counselling on appropriate behaviours. This may also include engagements about reported misconduct highlighted by the schools and teachers, which links to the identified factor of parents blaming and fighting teachers and defending their children. We further put forth that fostering a collaborative environment between parents and educators is crucial to effectively address these learners' experiences of violence and promote positive outcomes for learners.

Findings from the review support previous findings that the community from which the learners come plays a significant role in their experiences of school violence ([Lester et al., 2017](#)). As such, the findings emphasised that unfavourable community situations such as townships with broader societal issues of unresolved conflicts, substance abuse, and gang activities contributed to school violence. Specifically, unresolved fights and squabbles continued to the school premises, and drugs and alcohol were sold to learners by community members, which in some instances learners carried to school or consumed before attending school. These unsolved fights may be linked to gang associations or general community fights that have detrimental effects on learning experiences when brought into school premises. Learners who engage in antisocial behaviours such as fights outside school are likely to also engage in them at school. Moreover, previous studies acknowledge that community members are often ones who expose learners to drugs and alcohol and recognise that this influences learners' risky behaviours ([Lester et al., 2017](#)). As a result of these findings, we argue that exposure to community violence, unrestricted and accessible tavern establishments, and the selling of alcohol and drugs to children all increase the likelihood of experiencing or witnessing school violence.

The lack of effective support structures and disciplinary measures for school violence emerged as another contributor. In this review, school authorities often failed to address violence appropriately and implement disciplinary measures for cases such as sexual harassment of girls by boys. Offenders were instructed to apologise to the victims without any additional corrective measures. We are of the view that when teachers enable this behaviour, which may sometimes be masked as “just playing around”, they perpetuate inappropriate behaviours and violate girls' rights. Moreover, this normalisation of violence undermines a sense of safety and security for all learners, particularly girls, and can have long-lasting negative consequences for their academic achievement, social–emotional well-being, and overall development. Ineffective disciplinary measures were also due to low teacher numbers and overcrowded classrooms and scholarly transport, rendering teachers

unable to manage disruptive behaviours. With the administration issues in mind, it is not a surprise that managing learners' disruptive behaviours may be challenging. The findings are consistent with the previous literature that acknowledges overcrowded schools and insufficient teacher numbers in the SADC region (Chinyoka, 2014). While these issues may be due to contextual factors such as SADC's economic challenges and education budget constraints, we advocate for structures to be put in place to ensure that teachers are supported in their roles. These may include support personnel such as school social workers, school security staff, teacher training on managing disruptive behaviours, and the establishment and implementation of disciplinary committees and safe school committees (Veriava & Power, 2017; Bakari et al., 2023).

The review identified several other contributing factors of school violence, including masculinity insecurities and societal expectations of what it means to be masculine, peer pressure, and gang participation driven by wanting security and protection from victimisation. While the focus was not necessarily on which gender perpetuated school violence, the factors highlighted here were found to be perpetuated by male learners, therefore supporting Gruber and Fineran's (2008, p. 2) statement that "most bullies are male, that girls experience more harm than boys from sexual harassment, and that homophobic comments are used routinely (mostly by boys) to humiliate and control others (primarily other boys)". As such, findings identify that the boys harassed girls for their academic achievements, peer pressure amongst boys led to some of them physically assaulting girls and sexually harassing them, and fights ensued amongst boys to prove their masculinity, defend themselves, and boost their self-worth and participate in gangs.

Moreover, prejudice due to demographic characteristics such as nationality status and personal characteristics such as sexual orientation and being overweight or underweight were other factors directly linked to learners' experiences of school violence. Prejudice towards learners with different national statuses was predominantly reported in South African studies. We are of the view that South African peers' rejection of learners from different countries may reflect community xenophobic attitudes and stigma toward foreign nations such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Crush and Ramachandran (2014) recognised this treatment towards people from these countries and posited that such treatment is often directed at Zimbabweans and Mozambicans as compared to nationals from other SADC countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland. Homophobic attitudes and prejudice towards lesbian and gay learners by teachers and learners were also identified as contributing to school violence. This prejudice has been widely discussed in the literature (HakiElimu, 2020; Langa, 2015), confirming that learners may be bullied and victimised due to their gender orientation and identity.

This study is not without limitations. While the databases were chosen for their comprehensive coverage of the literature related to school violence, we acknowledge the potential omission of other relevant sources, and we also did not delve into the rigour of the included articles in terms of their methodology. Additionally, we limited our searches to the English language. Limitations to the included evidence exist, as we only reported on contributing factors of school violence as reported in the articles, and the evidence is specific to the SADC context. Although these limitations are noted, a scoping review was appropriate in achieving the aim of this current study.

Research focusing on school violence is limited in the SADC region, as we found that most of the studies were conducted in South Africa. Therefore, this review highlighted this gap and the need for more studies that reflect factors contributing to the phenomenon and contextually relevant methods of addressing it. Future research should specifically explore learners' perceptions about school violence management strategies, communities' and support personnel's (e.g., school social workers') roles in addressing school violence, and

learner-developed initiatives to curb the prevalence of school violence. In terms of practice, a comprehensive approach to addressing school violence is needed in schools within the SADC region. We suggest that such an approach needs to include these key areas: (i) the implementation of clear school policies, (ii) training for teachers and school administrators on national policies and school policies on how to address school violence encounters and professionalism, (iii) schools establishing task teams to map out incidents of school violence and strategies on ways to create safe environments, and (iv) future interventions that involve collaboration between schools, parents, and psychosocial support personnel such as school social workers to curb violence in schools.

## 5. Conclusions

This scoping review examined the existing evidence regarding factors contributing to school violence in the SADC region. The six themes that emerged are an extensive summary of the reported factors within the learners' immediate environments, including home, school, and the community. To our knowledge, this scoping review is the first of its kind in the SADC context. Hence, we regard it as unique and contributing to the current literature that attempts to bring to light school violence as a prevalent issue. This review showed that school violence, as perpetuated by learners, parents, and teachers, was due to various multifaceted factors. Therefore, in order to address the phenomenon, different intervention programs and services need to be channelled to comprehensively address the root causes of violence, such as those stemming from the home and community contexts, learners' and teachers' attitudes towards diversity, and ways to manage conflict.

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