



**EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL-RELATED
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE: A CASE STUDY OF
EMPUCUKWENI HIGH SCHOOL IN EMALAHLENI,
SOUTH AFRICA**

May 2023



PROJECT BACKGROUND

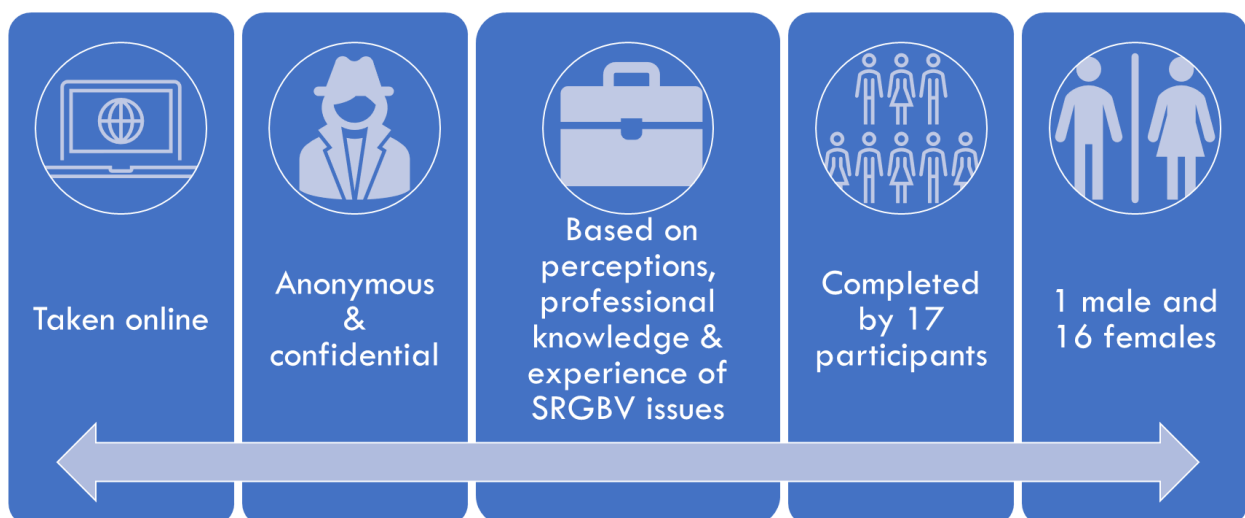
The Masiphephe Network, hereinafter referred to as “the Network”, has been working with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on the development of local, community-based strategies to address school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) violence in 12 schools in Gauteng (GP), Mpumalanga (MP) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN). The Network is funded by the United States Agency for International Agency (USAID) and its implementation is led by the Centre for Communication Impact (CCI). CCI works in partnership with the University of Cape Town’s (UCT) Gender, Health, and Justice Research Unit (GHRJU) as well as six community partner organisations, namely: Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT), Sonke Gender Justice (Sonke), Ethembeni Crisis Care Centre (ECCC), Gugu Dlamini Foundation (GDF) and Project Association Southern Africa (PSASA).

The Gender, Health and Justice Unit (GHJRU) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) conducted a baseline study through a survey in 12 schools, on behalf of the Network. Empucukweni High School, in Emalahleni, was one of the schools that participated in the study. A baseline study is the collection of data to analyse an existing situation to identify the starting point for an intervention or a support response. The purpose of the survey was to gain some understanding of the nature of SRGBV in the specific school.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed methods approach. The initial stage of this research involved conducting a survey to gather data from a sample of 17 educators. An educator in the context of this study includes administrative staff, learner support agent (LSA), school-based support team (SBST), teacher, teacher’s assistant (TA) and member of the school management team (SMT).

Figure 1: Summary of Research Methodology (Survey)



The professional capacities represented were as follows: TA (n=2), teacher (n=5), LSA (n=1), administrative staff (n=2), SMT (n=4) and SBST (n=3). The survey did not ask the educators to discuss any specific stories or incidents. Also, learners did not participate in this survey. In certain cases, the

total number of responses in this report may not equate to 17 due to the respondents having the option to select multiple choices. Consequently, the total number of responses could exceed 17. Additionally, for non-mandatory questions, the number of responses may be lower than 17.

The second phase of the research involved conducting a validation workshop with a group of educators, comprising both survey participants and non-participants. A total of 15 educators actively participated in the workshop. The purpose of the validation workshop was for the members of staff/research respondents to authenticate the research findings as a true reflection of the situation at the school.

The next phase of the research involved a review of the code of conduct. The question we aimed at answering through the scoping review of the code of conduct for learners is: “Does the school code of conduct for learners meet the minimum requirements prescribed by the DBE?” To answer this question, the schools were requested to submit their current copy of the code of conduct for learners. The documents were evaluated to determine whether they meet the criteria of what a code of conduct for learners should entail as highlighted in the NSSF and the school governing body (SGB) Records Manual. The code of conduct for learners was reviewed and the recommendations derived from the review are integrated into the latter part this report.

Lastly, a DBE district district/provincial validation workshop was held on 3 May 2023 where twenty-six (26) individuals attended the workshop. The delegates represented the DBE (district); the schools (i.e., Empucukweni and Phillip Ndimande), South African Council for Educators (SACE) and the Masiphephe Network. Important to note is that even though a total of four schools in the Mpumalanga province participated in the project the DBE validation workshops were divided into two due to the distance between Mbombela and Emalahleni.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The numbers and percentages, throughout this report, refer to the number of times a specific option was selected by the respondents who took the survey. This report should be read in conjunction with the provincial report which provides a detailed discussion of the findings.

1. MOST COMMON TYPES OF SRGBV

Learner-on-learner violence	Learner-on-educator violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical abuse (n=16) • Verbal abuse (n=14) • Bullying (n=14) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal abuse (n=16) • Bullying (n=11)
Educator-on-learner violence	Educator-on-educator violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal abuse (n=12) • Physical abuse (n=7). • Bullying (n=7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal abuse (n=13)

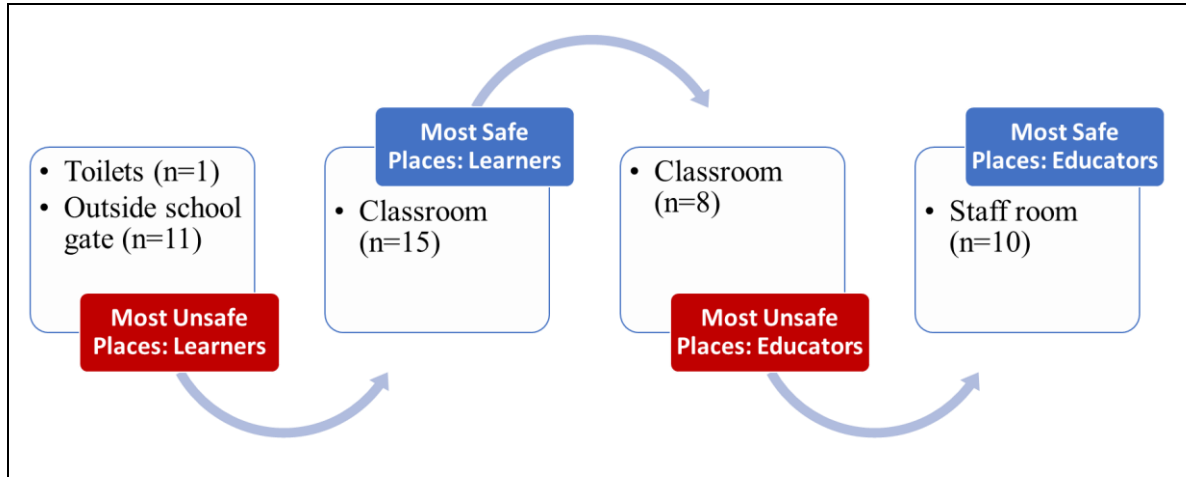
It was mentioned during the validation workshop at the school that learner-on-learner sexual harassment is common at Empucukweni.

“Yes. *Kuyenzeka*. It means *uku-bribana, ukubamba bambana*.”

With regards to educator-on-learner physical abuse, the educators who attended the school validation workshop refuted the finding that this type of SRGBV takes place in the school. They explained that corporal punishment has been abolished, therefore, they do not physically abuse the learners.

“Asibashayi. Abasashayw’ abantwana!”

2. VIEWS OF SAFETY



3. MOST COMMON SRGBV ROOT CAUSES

- Alcohol or substance abuse by learners (n=13)
- Substance abuse by parents or caregivers (n=13)
- Violence in the home (n=13)
- Peer pressure (n=12)
- Child poverty (n=11)
- Inappropriate discipline by parents or caregivers (n=11)

3.1 WEAPONS

- Weapons are brought to school by learners (n=15).
- The most common types of weapons brought to school by learners are knives (n=5).
- In-school weapons used by learners during acts of violence are pens, pencils and rulers (n=12), broom sticks (n=7) and school desks and chairs (n=6).
- Learners bring weapons for protection (n=9), due to peer pressure (n=9) and for revenge (n=8).
- Weapons are mostly confiscated during raids by the police (n=9), during searches at the gate (n=5) and during fights between learners (n=9).

3.2 THE USE OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER SUBSTANCES BY LEARNERS

- Learners are more likely than educators to attend school intoxicated or use substances on school premises (n=10).
- Types of substances used by learners are alcohol (n=17), marijuana (n=11) and tobacco products (n=9).

4. MOST COMMON IMPACT OF SRGBV ON VICTIMS

4.1 Impact on Learners

Emotional/Psychological Impact	Physical Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling angry (n=13) Feeling embarrassed (n=12) Having low self-esteem (n=11) Feeling sad and hurt (n=9) Feeling anxious and afraid (n=9) Having suicidal thoughts (n=7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical fighting at school (n=10) Death by suicide (n=7) Minor to mild wounds (n=6)
Sexual Impact	School-related Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unwanted pregnancy (n=13) Engaging in risky sexual behaviour (n=11) Contraction of HIV and other STIs (n=5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing school (i.e., truancy) (n=14) Experiencing difficulties concentrating in class (n=12) Dropping out of school (n=11) Failing or doing poorly at school (n=9) Being mean towards others (n=8)

4.2 Impact on Educators

Emotional/Psychological Impact	Work-related Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having low self-esteem (n=8) Feeling helpless and demoralised (n=7) Being embarrassed (n=6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ineffective teaching (n=11) Absenteeism (n=10) Resigning from work (n=5),

5. DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS

- Disciplinary hearing (n=9), reporting to parents (n=8), reporting to the police (n=8), temporary suspension from class or school pending disciplinary hearing (n=8), written warning (n=7) and verbal warning (n=7) are the common types of actions taken in the school against learner perpetrators of SRGBV.
- Verbal (n=8) and written (n=8) warnings are the predominant types of disciplinary actions taken against educator perpetrators.

6. REPORTING PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

- Twelve (12) respondents reported that the school does have a formal SRGBV reporting process in place.
- Learners report mostly to educators (n=8) whereas educators report mostly to the principal (n=10).

7. SUPPORT

7.1 AVAILABILITY OF SOCIAL WORKER

- Twelve (12) respondents reported that there is no social worker available to the school, four (4) reported that there is a social worker that assists when requested by the school while one (1) believed that there is a part-time social worker on duty at the school.
- It was confirmed during the validation workshop that the school has no social worker.

7.2 STAKEHOLDERS OFFERING SUPPORT TO VICTIMS

- The SAPS (n=11) and the district circuit manager (n=10) are the main stakeholders that offer services to victims of SRGBV in the school.
- Victims are referred for services through the SMT (n=7), the SGB (n=6), the school counsellor/social worker or directly to organisations via telephone, email or referral form (n=4).

8. CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING

8.1 EDUCATORS AND SGB TRAINED TO DEAL WITH SRGBV

- Ten (10) respondents said educators and SGB have been trained on how to deal with SRGBV issues.
- Of concern, educators have not been trained on the mandatory reporting of child abuse and maltreatment. For details on mandatory reporting, please refer to the recommendations section in this report. For a more comprehensive discussion, consult the provincial report.

8.2 LEARNERS EDUCATED ON ISSUES OF SRGBV

8.2.1 Issues of SRGBV Included in the School Curriculum

- Fifteen (15) respondents reported that SRGBV issues are included in the school curriculum through Life Orientation (LO).
- However, it was revealed during the validation workshop with the school that LO does not cover issues of SRGBV sufficiently.

8.2.2 Existence of Peer Educator Programmes: Girls/Boys Empowerment Movement (GBEM)

- GBEM clubs do not exist in the school.
- “The aim of GBEM is to encourage girls and boys to work together as equals and to foster respect for the human dignity and rights of both sexes. This is to foster gender equality values and promote positive gender norms through peer education and life skills” (DBE, 2021, n.p.). Peer education is one of effective ways of learning in that through teaching each other learners are able to solidify their knowledge and spread it within their community (Western Governors University, 2022).

9. LAWS AND POLICIES THAT ADDRESS SRGBV

- In general knowledge of primary policies and frameworks that deal with issues of violence and GBV was very low among the respondents.
- The school has a separate educators’ policy in addition to the SACE Code of Professional Ethics. However, not all educators were trained on the educators’ policy.
- The school has no separate policies on bullying and harassment (general and sexual). Issues of bullying and harassment are imbedded in the code of conduct for learners.
- Most of the educators who participated in this study were not aware of the National Schools Safety Framework (NSSF). It, therefore, could not be established if the NSSF is implemented fully in the school.
- Not all educators who participated in this study had knowledge of the Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment. Therefore, the protocol may not be fully implemented in the school. This means that not all staff may be aware of the

process to be followed when reporting offences that are sexual in nature as outlined in the protocol.

9.1 EXISTING SCHOOL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LEARNERS

- The school has a code of conduct.
- Seven (7) respondents reported that their school conduct was reviewed about a year ago while four (4) reported that it was last reviewed two years ago.
- Thirteen (13) educators reported that parents do sign the school code of conduct.
- Thirteen (13) educators reported that learners do sign the school code of conduct.
- When asked if issues of SRGBV are included in the school code of conduct only nine (9) respondents said yes.

9.1.1 Review of the Code of Conduct

A tick (✓) means that the specific section of the code of conduct is included in the copy submitted for review, while a cross means (✗) that the section in question is missing from the reviewed code of conduct.

a) *Common elements of a school's code of conduct.*

1. Introduction ✓
2. Aim of the code of conduct ✓ (not as a standalone section, but contained in the introduction)
3. Rights of learners (educators) ✗
4. Responsibilities of learners ✓ (sections 2.3; 2.6; 2.7; 2.8; 2.9; 2.10; 2.11; 2.13; 2.15; 2.17; 2.22)
5. Responsibility of educators with regard to learners ✗
6. Responsibility of parents with regard to learners ✗ but mention of parents having to pay for damages caused by their children (section 2.3), and to take responsibility for their sick children (section 2.5)
7. School rules, regulations and procedures ✓
8. Scope of the code of conduct and its legal implications ✗
9. Disciplinary procedures ✓

b) *School rules, regulations and procedures: element 7 for codes of conduct.*

1. School hours: contained in section 2.1. which clearly sets out the time at which students are meant to be on the premises but does not state the exact times at which school starts and ends. This information should be added.
2. Absence and leaving the premises: absenteeism is in section 2.4; reference to leaving the school premises can be seen in section 3.1. ('Practical application of disciplinary code') where category B refers to 'banking' [sic] classes. This could refer to being done both on and off school property. Beyond this, there is no direct reference to leaving the premises.
3. Dress code and appearance: see sections 2.2 (school uniform), 2.12 (make-up), 2.14 (hair), 2.16 (jewellery), 2.20 (nails), 2.24 (hats and caps), points 6 & 7 of category A of disciplinary code (clothing not according to school uniform, hair/nails not according to school uniform, respectively). All these sections to be placed together under its own heading.

4. Rules promoting safety: section 2.9 (behaviour on school grounds) provides that ‘learners must respect one another, and no foul play will be tolerated’. Section 2.26 (weapons) bans the carrying of weapons, and states that unannounced searches will be conducted. Rules referring to, and promoting safe conduct are also inferred from the categories of misconduct in the disciplinary system (section 3.1). Category B point 1 makes it an offence to bully another learner; and category C contains offences such as assault, theft, sexual harassment, smoking/drinking or possession of alcohol/cigarettes/drugs on school premises, repeatedly bullying other learners, and possessing dangerous weapons or objects. Place all together under same section and make clearer what promotes safety at the school. This means stating clearly that the offences are ways in which safety is being compromised at the school. This should be described under the separate element and not be interpreted through the disciplinary procedure.
5. Rules promoting healthy relationships: can be read from section 2.9 where learners are advised to respect one another, and section 2.11 behaviour of learners towards other learners.
6. Rules that promote responsibility towards school property: section 2.7 (physical assets), 2.8 (behaviour in the classroom), 2.17 (toilets). To be placed under its own section.
7. Medical treatment and emergencies: section 2.5 (injury and illness during school hours).
8. Communication and meetings **X** This needs to be included.
9. Textbooks and stationery (caring for): 2.13 (textbooks) stationery to be added and both placed together under their own section.
10. Reports/assessments on academic progress **X** This must be added.

c) *Guidelines for misconduct and disciplinary procedures– element 9 for codes of conduct*

Empucukweni disciplinary system:

1. No statement regarding corporal punishment being outlawed.
2. Regarding the *who, what and when* of disciplinary proceedings, the misconduct is placed according to categories, A-C. Each category states the different types of misconduct and is assigned a specific action that will be taken according to different categories. The categories do not state who will deal with the misconduct but does state specific people who will inform parents of the misconduct.
3. The range of actions to be taken are listed according to card levels (yellow, orange, red) for each category, and categories A and B result in detention, whereas category C can result in suspension or expulsion.

Recommendations Based on the Reviewed Code of Conduct

- Include sections for elements 3, 5, 6 and 8. The aim of the code of conduct (element 2) should be standalone and clear, i.e. not to be implied from the introduction.
- *School rules, regulations and procedures*: include all missing information discussed above. Place information separately under each element for codes of conduct. This will make it clearer a) that all elements have been included, and b) it sets out where to find this type of information per element.
- To make clearer who will/can deal with the different categories of misconduct when they occur or are brought to the attention of the educator.
- Must contain a statement about the outlawing of corporal punishment.

- Need to explain the ‘tick’ system and when action will be taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) General Code of Conduct Recommendations

- Workshop the entire school community – learners, educators, administrators, parents, and other community stakeholders. The school needs to, through advocacy, ensure that everyone knows and understand the content of the code of conduct.
- Review the code of conduct annually and ensure that learners are part of the process.
- Ensure that the code of conduct meets the criteria stipulated by the DBE as per above recommendations.
- Includes sections that deal specifically with SRGBV.
- Align the code of conduct to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act Amendment Act 13 of 2021.

Moreover, even though it was revealed that issues of bullying and harassment (general and sexual harassment) are included in the code of conduct, the school needs to develop standalone policies dealing with these issues.

(ii) Safety and Security

We noticed during the validation workshop that the school does not have formal security and therefore recommend that the SMT and the SGB prioritise safety and security by including the hiring of official security officers in the schools’ annual budget. The SGB should also be trained and capacitated on fund raising so that they can raise funds for security if the school budget is limited.

(iii) Need for an In-House Social Worker

The school does not have its own social worker and we recommend for one to be hired. It is important that one is hired as soon as possible to assist the educators with learners depicting problematic behaviour and or need psychosocial services. As submitted by the National Association of School Workers (NASW), school social workers are vital because they “are an integral link between school, home, and community in helping students achieve academic success. They work directly with school administrations as well as students and families, providing leadership in forming school discipline policies, mental health intervention, crisis management, and support services” (n.d.: np).

(iv) Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)

The findings show that unwanted pregnancy is very high in the school. Therefore, it is recommended that the school make sexual and reproductive health and rights training and awareness for learners a priority. Furthermore, support should be provided to encourage girls who fall pregnant to stay in school.

(v) Training and Capacity Building on SRGBV Issues and Important Policies

The findings reveal that educators and the SGB have not been trained on SRGBV issues or related policies. The educators further revealed that the SMT members are trained but they do not cascade the information down to them. It is, therefore, recommended for the SMT to train or arrange with the DBE district department responsible for training to train educators and the SGB on important policies such as the NSSF, and the Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in

Schools, and Alternatives to Corporal Punishment: A Practical Guide for Educators, to name a few. The SMT should ensure that the safety and disciplinary committees as well as the SBST are also well trained and capacitated. The educators who attended the validation workshop highlighted the impracticality of the policies, which makes their implementation challenging. Therefore, it is crucial that educators receive comprehensive training that includes guidance on adapting the policies to their specific school context. This will enable them to effectively localise and implement the policies.

The SGB plays a very pivotal role in the school, therefore it is important that all members of the SGB, are immediately trained on their roles and responsibilities and on how to deal with issues of SRGBV after being elected to office.

Learners could learn issues of SRGBV through peer learning activities such as GBEM. It is therefore important for the school to encourage learners to form these clubs. The LSA plays a crucial role in this context particularly in facilitating peer learning activities.

(vi) Mandatory Reporting Training

Educators also need to be trained on mandatory reporting. Educators have an obligation, to report to a relevant authority, any offences against a child (i.e., learner) such as a sexual offence or any form of child abuse or maltreatment if they have knowledge, reasonable belief, or suspicion of it. There are different laws which cover this, as well as who to report to. We provide below examples of the laws which address these issues. The *Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools* (2019) sets out the reporting process for sexual offences.

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act Amendment Act 13 of 2021 sets out the mandatory reporting of sexual offences, stating that any person:

- ... who has knowledge that a sexual offence has been committed against a *child* must report such knowledge immediately to a police official.
- ... who has knowledge, reasonable belief or suspicion that a sexual offence has been committed against a person who is *mentally disabled* must report such knowledge, reasonable belief or suspicion immediately to a police official.
- A person who in good faith reports such reasonable belief or suspicion shall not be liable to any civil or criminal proceedings by reason of making such report.

The *Children's Act* (No. 38 of 2005) also covers reporting of sexual offences against children:

The Children's Act states that if there is a reasonable suspicion (on the part of particular professionals dealing with a child) that the child is being abused in a way that causes physical injury, sexual abuse or neglect, this must be reported. Persons in this category include a range of professions including legal practitioners, medical practitioners, traditional and religious leaders, psychologists and social workers, teachers and persons working in care facilities, amongst others.

If any person suspects that a child is being abused or in need of care and protection, they must report to a social worker, a designated child protection unit or organisation or to the police.

There are also a number of other mechanisms for child protection:

The *Domestic Violence Act* (1998) and the *Domestic Violence Amendment Act* (2022) allow a child who is experiencing any form of abuse – whether it is physical, sexual, psychological or emotional (amongst other acts of harm including harassment, intimidation or stalking) – to apply for a protection order. This order can be applied for by the child, a parent or legal guardian, or any other person with a ‘material interest’ in the protection of the child. A person with ‘material interest’ can include: a counsellor, a health service provider, a member of the South African Police Service, a social worker or a teacher, who has a material interest in the well-being of a complainant.

(vii) Collaboration with Stakeholders

It is recommended for the school to collaborate with other statutory (i.e., Department of Social Development, Department of Health, Thuthuzela Care Centre, etc.) and non-statutory stakeholders (i.e., community-based organisation and non-governmental organisations). GBV issues are complex and cannot be handled by the school alone, it is thus important for the school to build relationships with stakeholders offering GBV services for support.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Department of Basic Education. (2021). Presentation to the portfolio committee on Basic Education, 17 August. Retrieved from: [Enter Title here \(pmg.org.za\)](#).
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (n.d.). School social work. Retrieved from: [School Social Work \(socialworkers.org\)](#).
- Western Governors University. (2022). Peer learning: Overview, benefits, and models. Retrieved from: [Peer Learning: Overview, Benefits, and Models \(wgu.edu\)](#).