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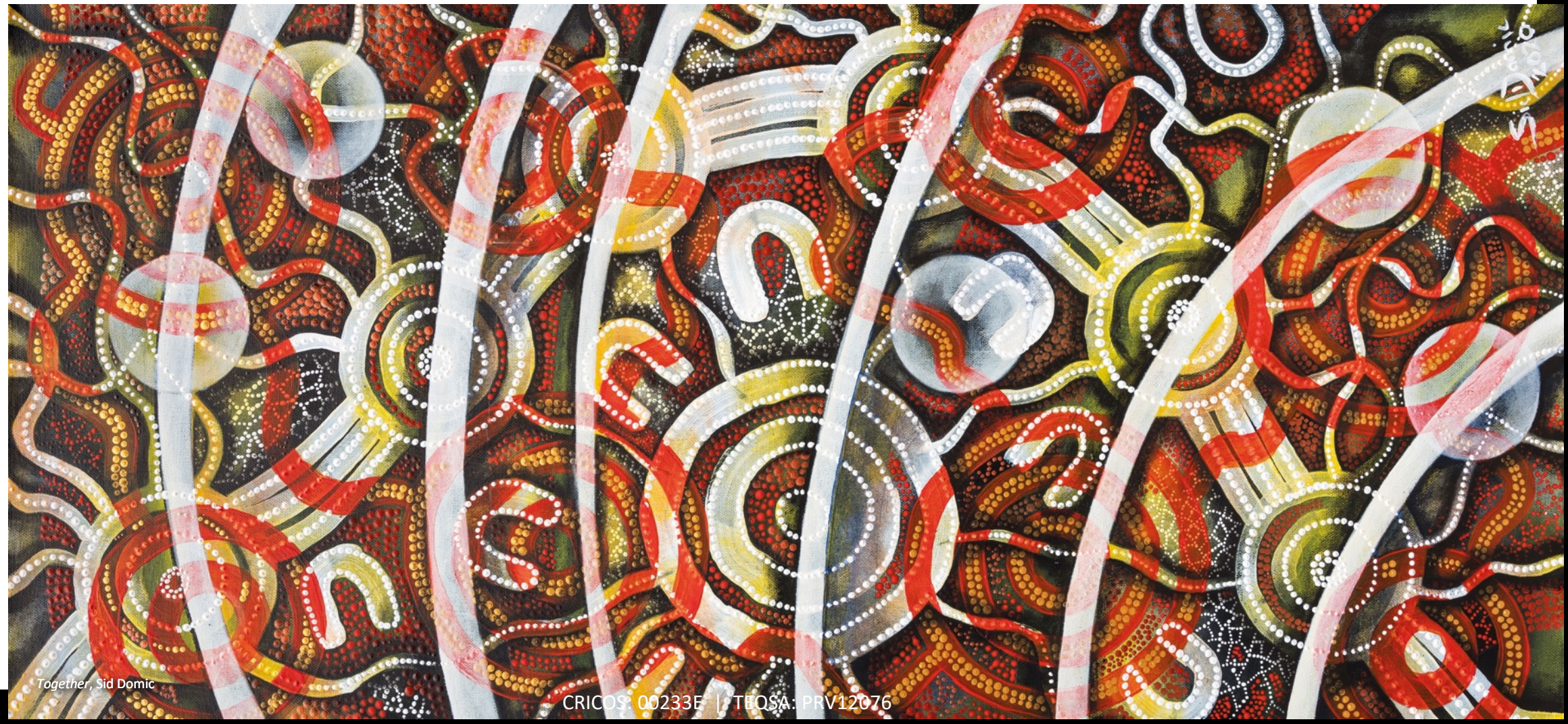
Beyond self-care: What we can learn about Occupational Violence and Aggression from the education industry



Prof. Donna Pendergast (GIER)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Griffith University acknowledges the people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay respect to the Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Together, Sid Domic

A Multidisciplinary Approach: The Experts

Griffith Institute for Educational Research (GIER)

Registered Teachers



Professor Donna Pendergast AM
Director of Engagement Arts, Education, Law
PROJECT TEAM LEADER



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Inclusion Research Specialist



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School of Education and Professional Studies

Griffith Work, Organisation, and Well-being (WOW)



Professor Paula Brough
Research Centre Director, WOW
DEPUTY PROJECT TEAM LEADER

Organisational Psychology

Prevention of Occupational Violence and Aggression Arising from Student Behaviour

Griffith Reducing the Impact of Stress on Employees (RISE) Research Unit

Psychology; Rehabilitation



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Griffith Professional Learning Hub (PL Hub)

Professional Development



David Noonan
Manager, PL Hub
Resource Management, Project Leader



Shaun Charles
Coordinator, PL Hub
Resource Management & Development

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Occupational violence and aggression (OVA) is...

"Any incident where a person is abused, threatened, or assaulted at work or while they are carrying out work. This includes abuse, threats or assaults by workers, clients, patients, visitors, or others.

Examples: Biting, spitting, kicking, throwing objects, using or threatening to use a weapon, verbal abuse and threats, aggressive behaviour such as yelling, or physical intimidation."

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland. (2022). Managing the Risk of Psychosocial Hazards at Work, p. 17.

OVA Across Industries

Transport Roles



- Bus operators
- Senior network officers
- Network/customer service operators
- Customer liason officers
- Busway safety officers

Government Roles



- Education (e.g. Teachers)
- Planners
- Customer service branch
- Transport inspectors
- Driving examiners

Other Roles



Retail (e.g. frontline staff)

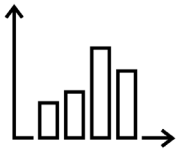


Fast food (e.g. serving)



Healthcare (e.g. nurses)

Frequency



- Incivility: multiple times daily
- Abuse: daily/weekly (role dependent)
- Aggression: weekly to monthly
- Consistent across organisations
- Consistent across industries

Reporting



- **Underreported**
- High **severity focus**
- Accumulative nature often **overlooked**

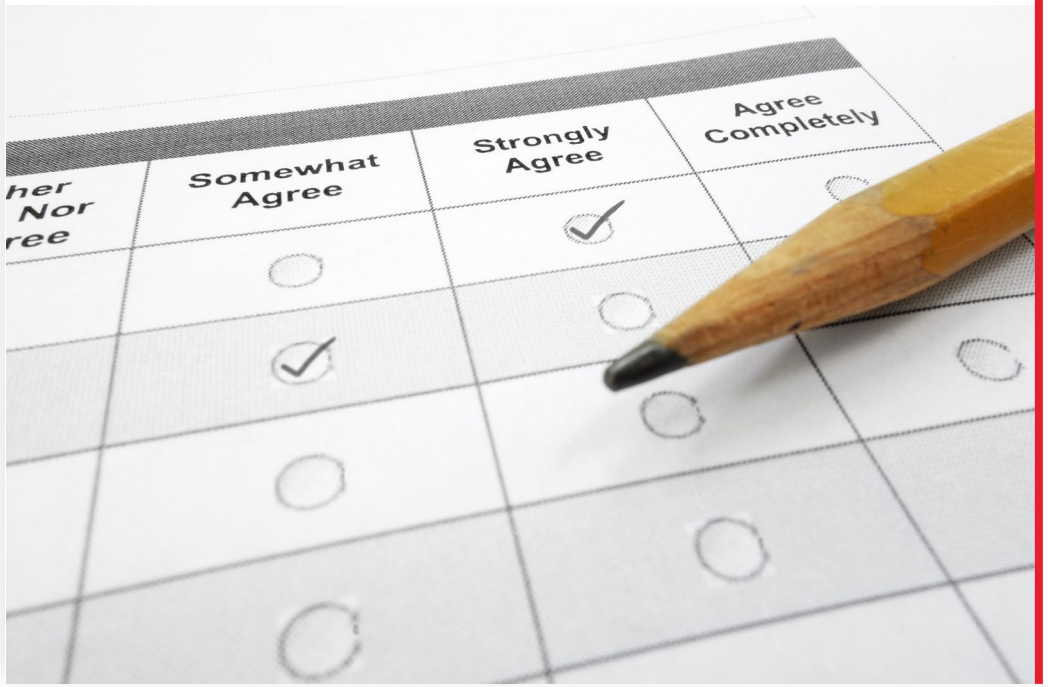
Teacher Well-being and Career Intentions

Australian Teacher Workforce Survey

Year: 2023 (published 2025)

41,493 Teacher Responses

20% of responses from Queensland



The most prevalent job demands that teachers reported experiencing:

- My work is emotionally demanding (86%)
- I get emotionally involved in my work (82%)
- Managing students' behaviour takes a lot of time and effort (80%)
- I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do (71%)
- I have more diverse needs in my class than I, as one teacher, can single-handedly support (67%).

Job demands were more likely to co-occur with stress, burnout, negative feelings and reduced health-related quality of life.

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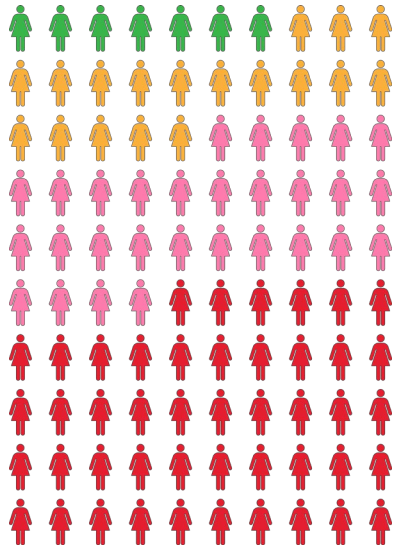
Work-related sources of stress teachers reported experiencing most:

- Workload (58%)
- Dealing with students / parents / community (42%)
- Time pressure (40%)
- Administrative duties (40%)
- Emotional load (32%)

Levels of stress:



None (7%)

Low (18%)

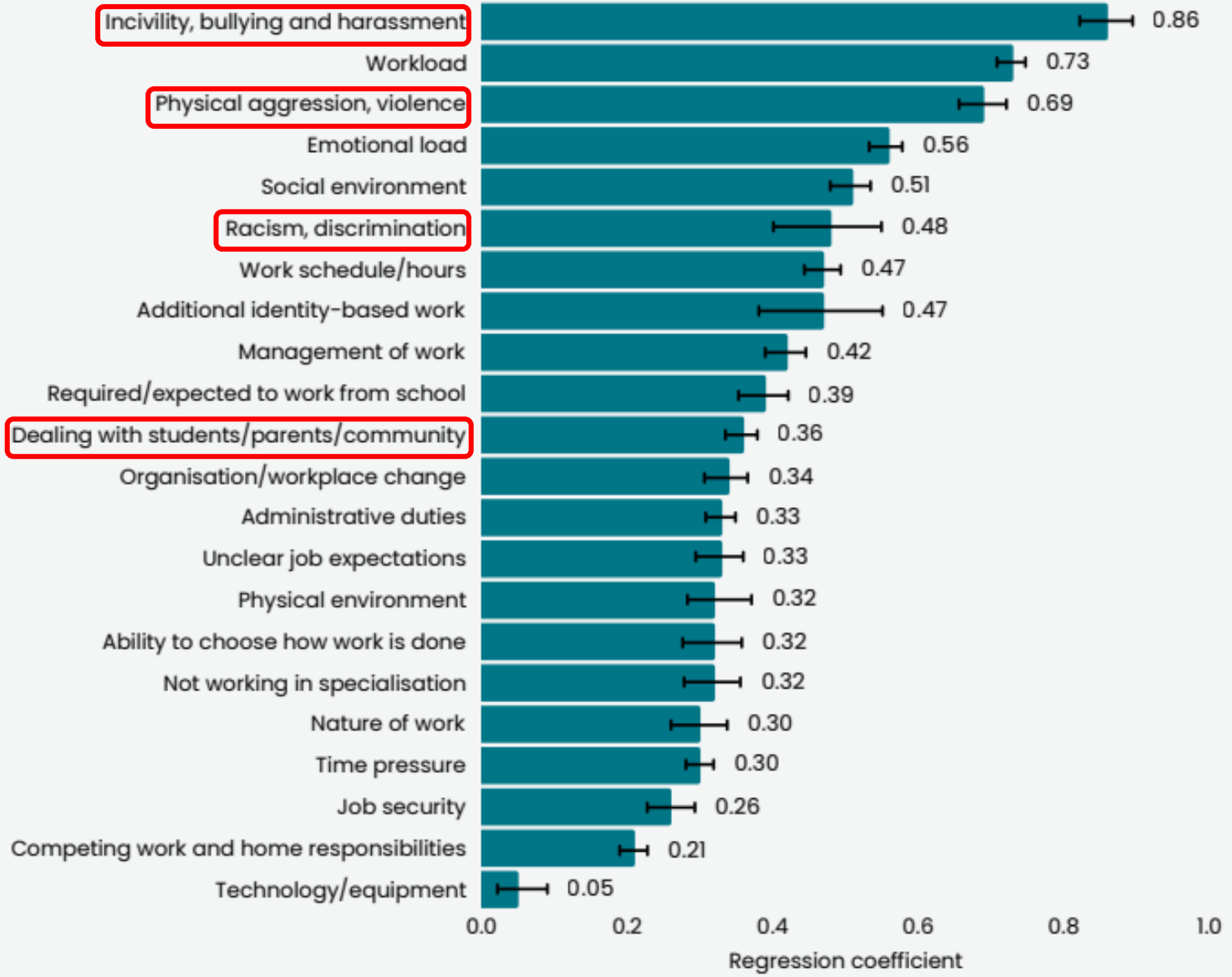
Moderate (29%)

High (23%)

Very high (16%)

Severe (7%)

Figure 1. Strength of relationships between stressors and stress level



Phase 1 Project Components

1 Investigative Research Study



Key Tasks:

- Investigation: occupational violence and aggression arising from student behaviour.
- Contemporary International and Australian evidence-based best practice.
- Outcomes to inform professional development programs.

Outcomes:

1. Reports:
   - Professional
   - Parent/general public
2. Presentation of findings

Duration: 6 weeks

2 Needs Analysis



Key Tasks:

- Consultation:
  - Schools and staff
  - Regional & and central offices
  - Key stakeholders
  - Unions
  - Associations

Outcomes:

1. Data collection from online survey and focus group consultation.
2. Consultation insights report including areas requiring further exploration.

Duration: 10 weeks

3 Resource Development



Key Tasks:

- Develop diverse resources to suit a range of schools/ staff based on findings.
- Published on DoE platform.

Outcomes:

1. Min. five short videos (3-5 minutes)
2. Min. three short podcasts (5-10 minutes)
3. Min. two infographics
4. Min. two information sheets
5. Interactive elements (e.g. mix/match, flip cards)

Duration: 6 weeks

4 Training Proposal



Key Tasks:

- Proposal of critical training resources for development which are tailored to suit a range of schools/staff.

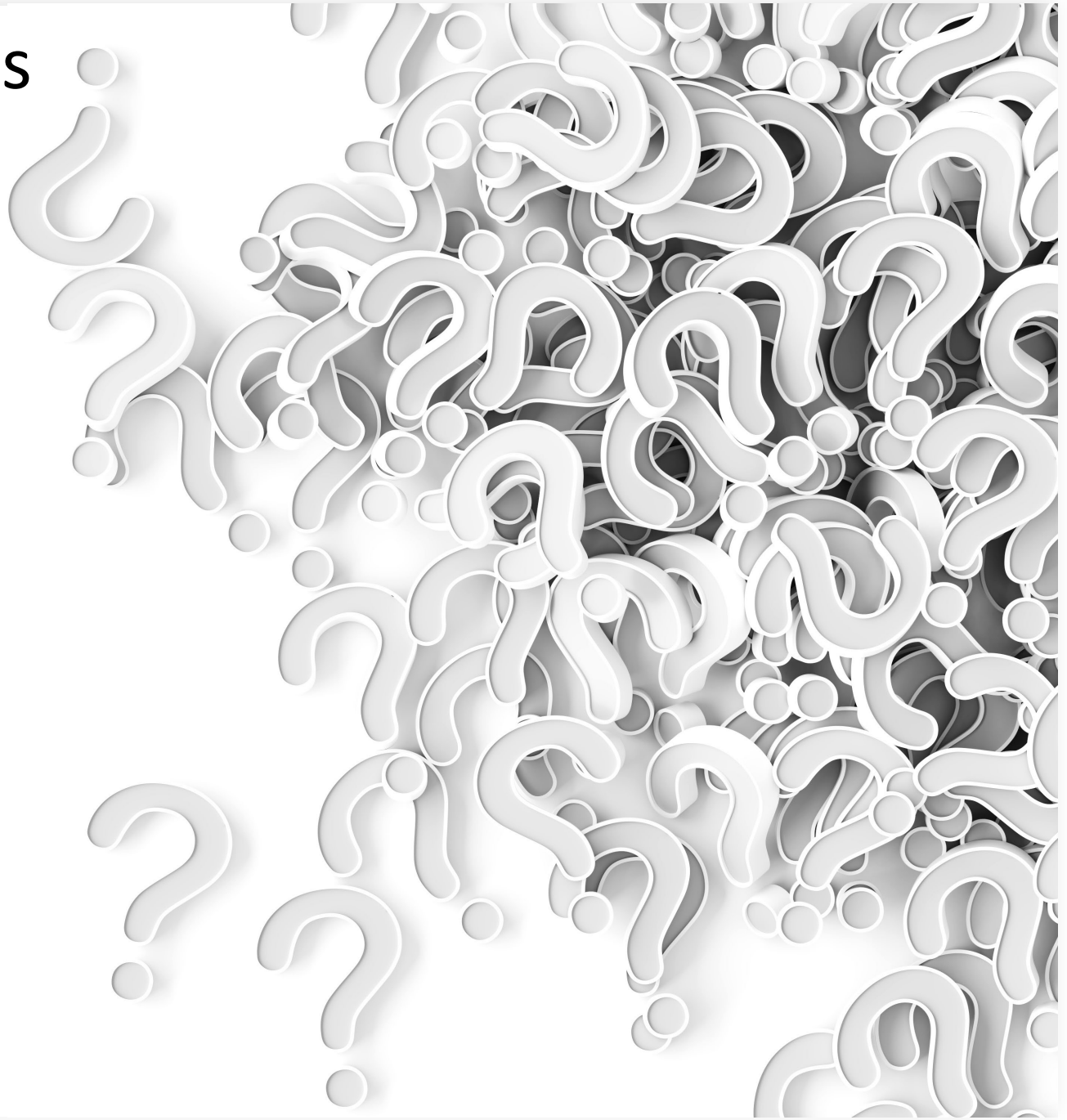
Outcomes:

1. Three options to proceed with statewide training implementation.
2. Options for testing training to assess alignment with education environment needs.
3. Training proposal revision based on feedback.

Duration: 4 weeks

The Six Research Questions

1. How are ‘occupational violence’ and ‘student aggression’ defined in literature?
2. How are ‘occupational violence’ and ‘student aggression’ measured in literature?
3. What ‘student behaviours’ are categorised as occupational violence and student aggression?
4. How does occupational violence and student aggression in schools impact school staff?
5. What factors contribute to occupational violence and student aggression?
6. What interventions are evident in literature for managing occupational violence and student aggression arising from student behaviour?



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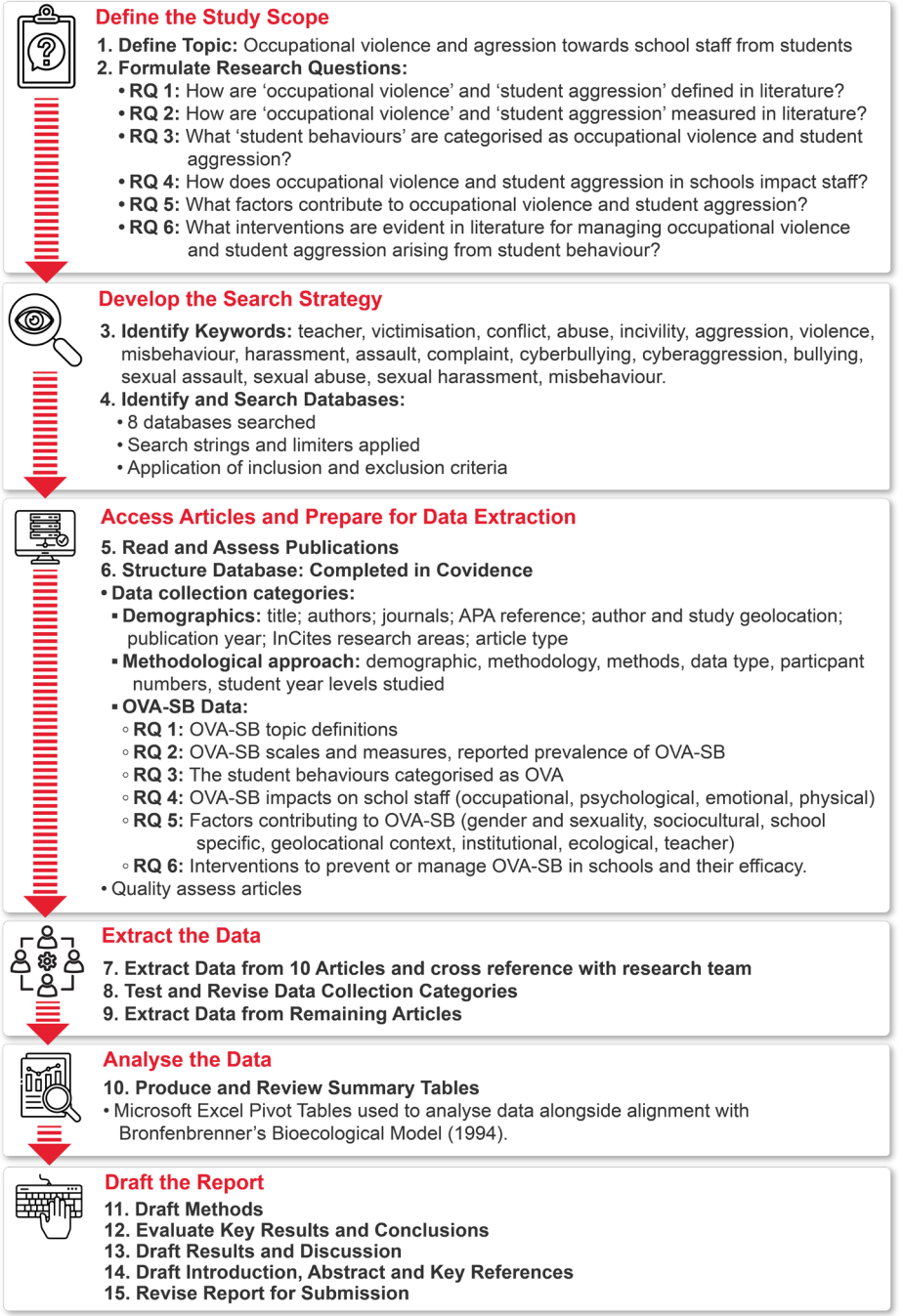
The IRS Methodology

- The Systematic Quantitative Literature Review (Pickering & Byrne, 2014).
- Inclusion criteria:
  - English language
  - Peer-reviewed articles
  - Published in the past 15 years
  - Focused on OVA-SB
  - Pass quality tests
- 2440 articles retrieved.
- 113 articles closely examined to develop the findings.
- Detailed methodology available (Pendergast et al., 2024).



RQs. Bibliometric analysis

RQ1: What are the demographics of the articles meeting the inclusion criteria?

RQ2: What is the intellectual structure of articles meeting the inclusion criteria?

RQ3: What future OVA-SB research lenses can be derived from the 113 article demographics and intellectual structure?

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RQ1 Demographic analysis

Article Types and Publication Timeframes

a) Article Types

Articles Included
N = 113

96%
Original Research
n = 109

3%
Review Articles
n = 3

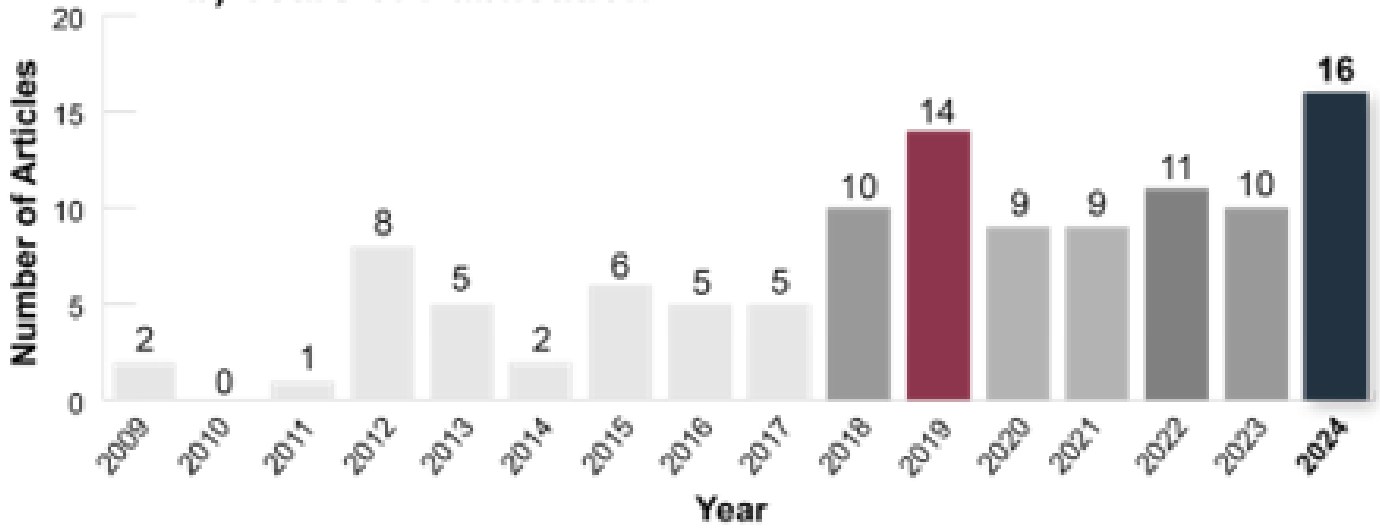
1%
Conference Papers
n = 1

b) Years of Publication

Article Timespan:
2009-2024

70% Published between 2018-2024

33% Published in the past three years.



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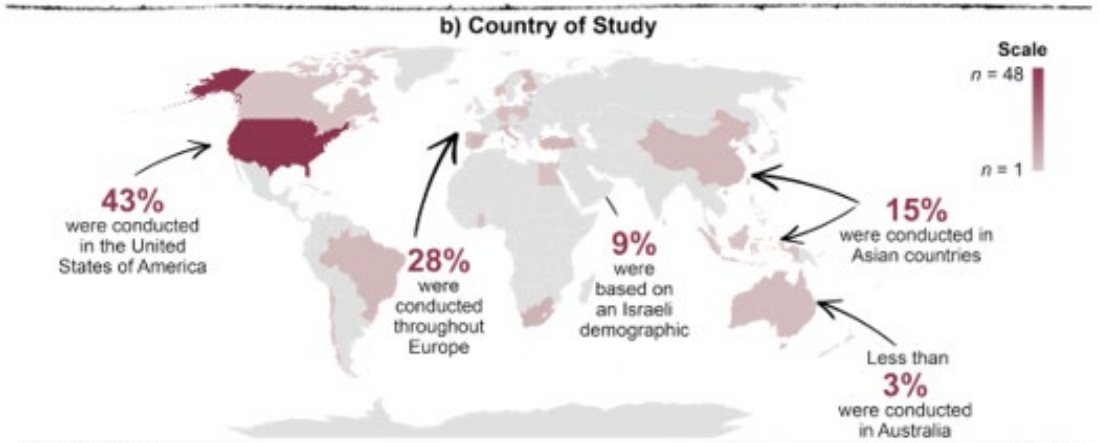
a) Country of Authors

Rank	Country	Count
1	United States of America	61
2	Israel	12
3	South Africa, Spain	6
4	Australia, England, Italy, South Korea	5
5	Chile, China, Finland, Türkiye	4
6	Brazil, Hong Kong, Poland	3
7	Croatia, Germany	2
8	Cameroon, Canada, Egypt, Estonia, Ghana, Indonesia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Taiwan, Norway, Switzerland	1


b) Country of Study

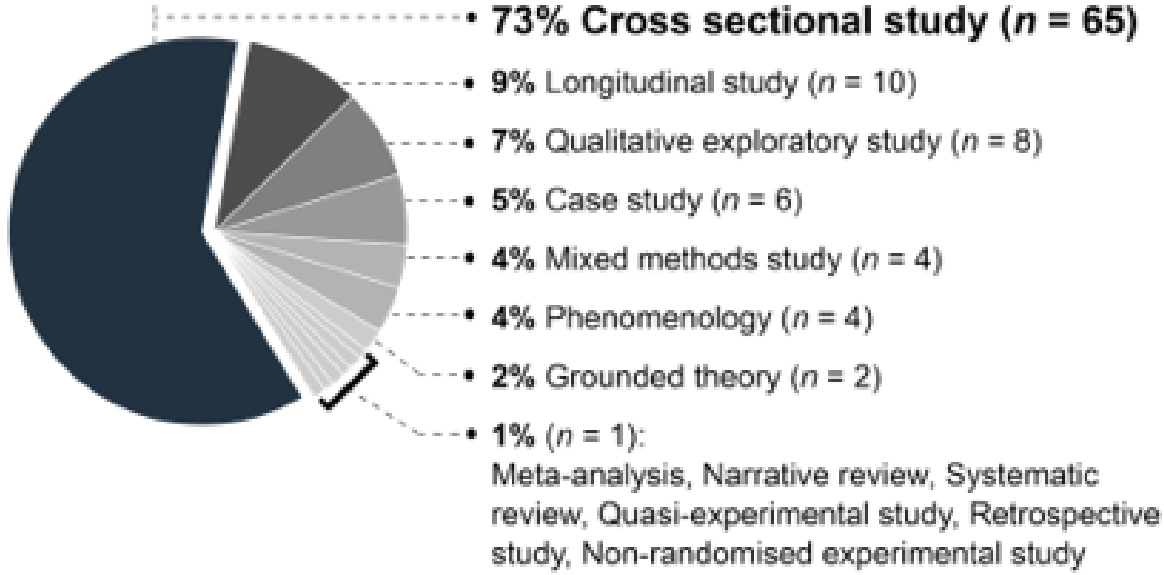
Rank	Country	Count
1	United States of America	48
2	Israel	10
3	South Korea	7
4	South Africa	6
5	Finland, Türkiye	5
6	Brazil, China, Spain, Taiwan	4
7	Australia, Italy	3
8	Chile, Croatia, England, Estonia, Germany, Poland	2
9	Cameroon, Canada, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia	1

Research Methodology Analysis

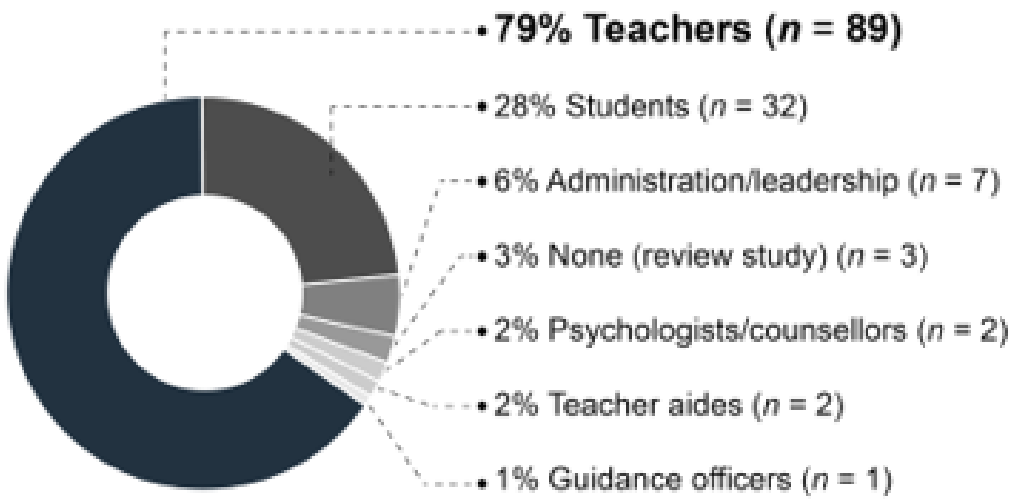
a) Data Type Collected



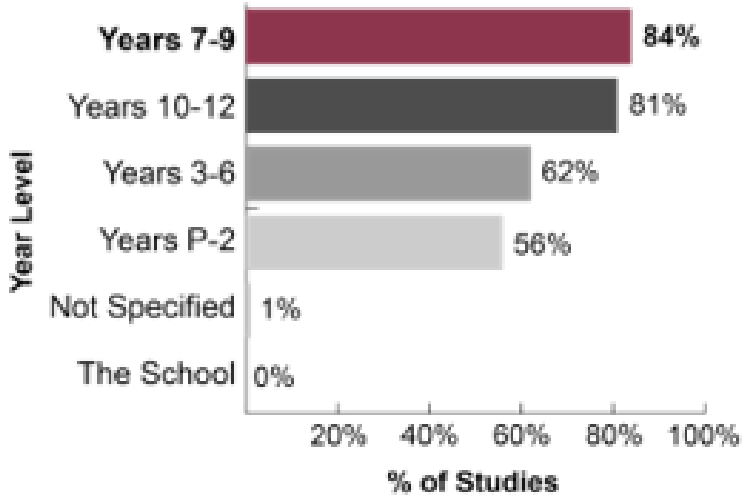
b) Study Methodology



c) School Staff Demographic Studied



d) School Year Level Studied



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e) Study Methods

Data Collection Methods

- 91% **Survey**
- 18% Semi-structured interviews
- 4% Observations
- 1% Case Report, Field notes, Incident reports

Data Analysis Methods

Top 6 Quantitative Methods

1. Descriptive statistics (*n*=90)
2. Correlational analysis (*n*=32)
3. Cronbach's alpha (*n*=29)
4. Logistic regression (*n*=20)
5. Chi-Square (*n*=15)
6. Hierarchical Regression (*n*=14)

Qualitative Methods

1. Thematic analysis (*n*=14)
2. Content analysis (*n*=13)

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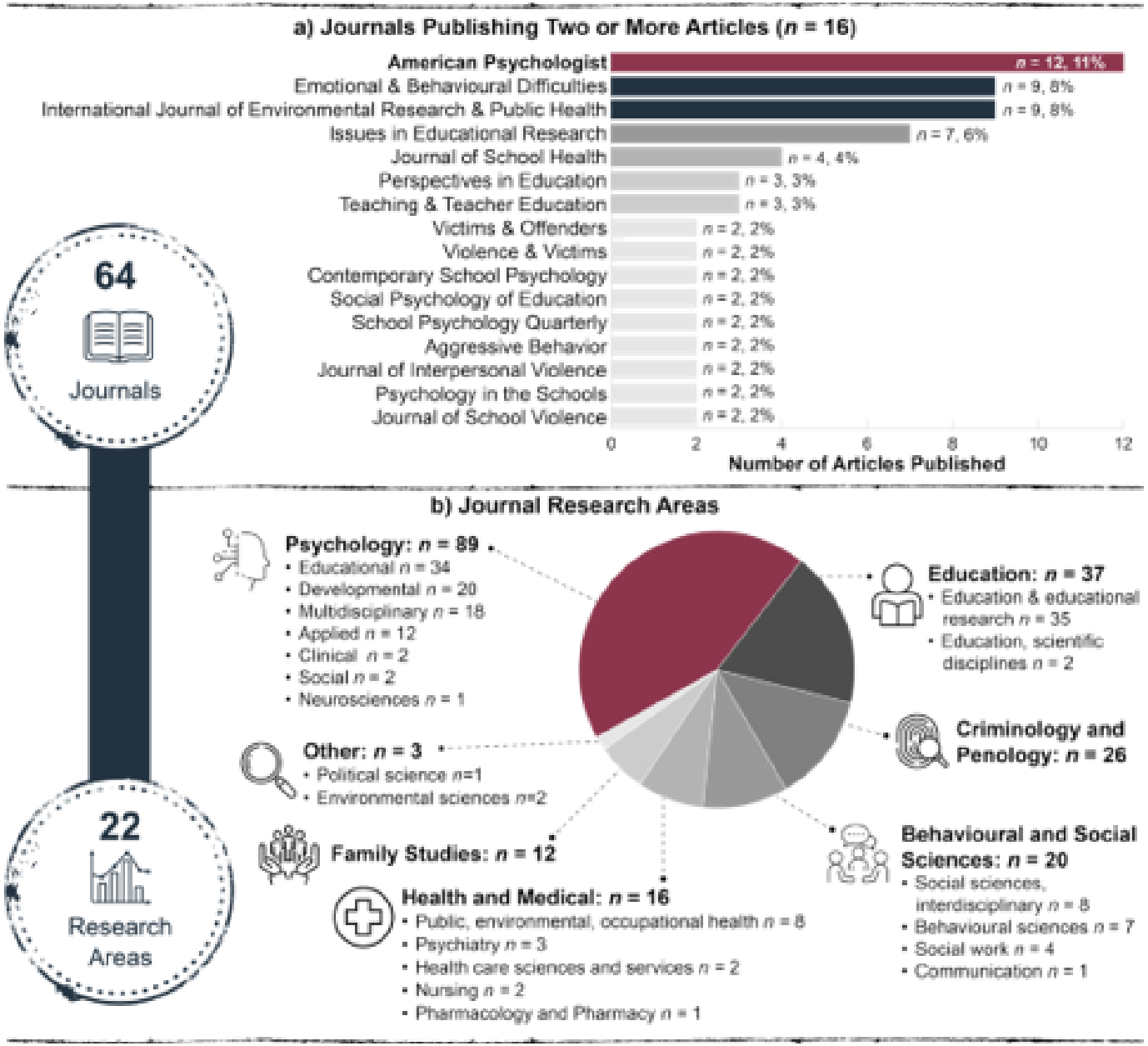

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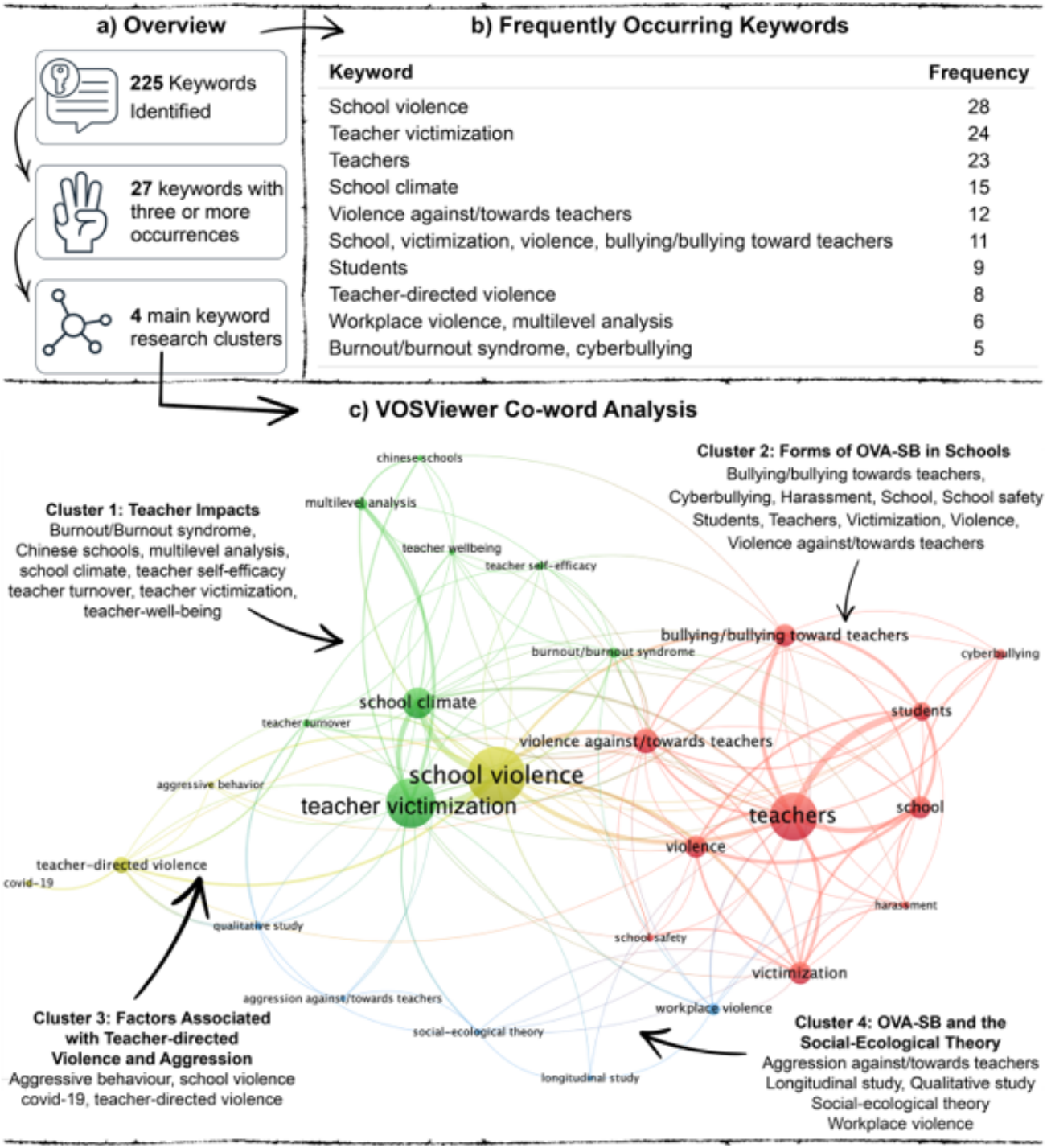

RQ2 Intellectual structure (keywords)

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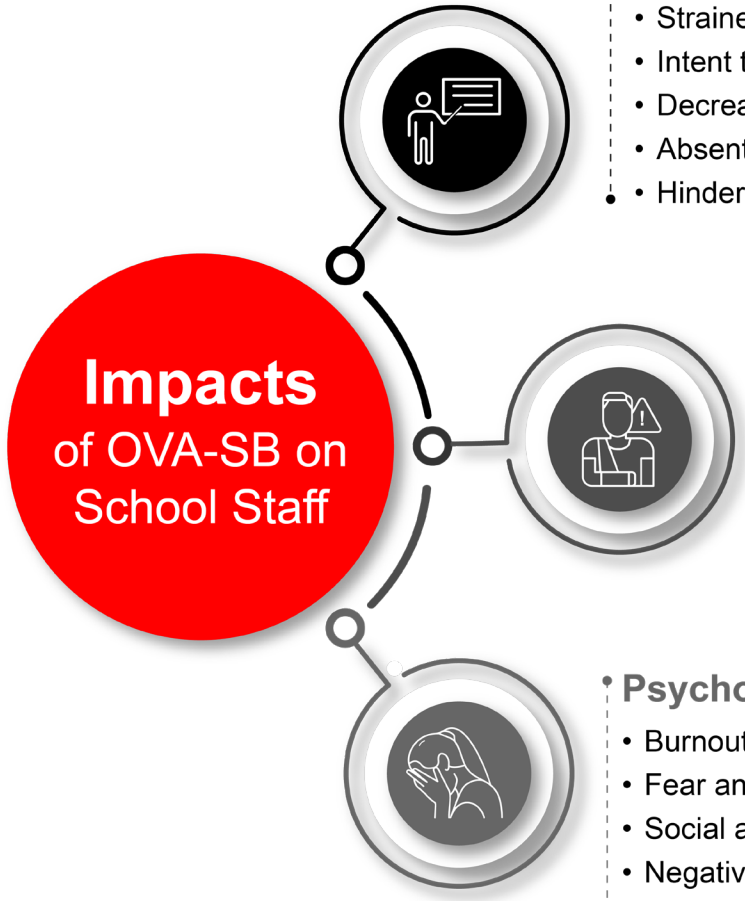
Cluster 1 - The Impacts of OVA-SB on School Staff



Occupational Impacts

- Intention to quit or leave the profession
- Desire to transfer schools
- Strained workplace relationships
- Intent to retire
- Decreased productivity
- Absenteeism
- Hindered student-teacher-parent relationships
- Negative job perceptions
- Decreased job satisfaction
- Reduced job commitment
- Undermined classroom safety
- Reduced educational quality
- Loss of passion for teaching

Physical Impacts

- Broken bones, noses, and teeth
- Workers compensation claims
- Increased absenteeism/sick leave
- Anaphylactic reaction to allergen
- General wounds
- Stab wounds
- Hospitalisation
- Death
- Physical injury and assault: bruising, black eyes, swollen faces
- Acute physiological responses: shaking, nausea, heart palpitations
- Ongoing physiological responses: rapid heartbeat, trembling

Psychosocial, Psychological, and Emotional Impacts

- Burnout, stress, emotional distress
- Fear and not feeling safe at work
- Social alienation
- Negative emotions: anger, frustration, humiliation, shame, embarrassment, disgust, feeling insulted, guilt, despair, lack of control
- Helplessness, hopelessness, powerlessness
- Self-doubt and self-blame
- Feeling unheard
- Impacted self-efficacy
- Depression, anxiety, insomnia
- Symptoms of PTSD
- Impacted personal life and family
- Intrusive thoughts or memories
- Difficulty concentrating

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Cluster 2 - Forms of OVA-SB



Verbal

- Incivility (rude, disrespectful)
- Inappropriate language
- Relational aggression
- Threatening

- Verbal abuse
- Bullying
- Racism
- Manipulation

Physical

- Physical assault and abuse
- Weapon pulled or used
- Ordinary object weapons

- Physical gestures
- Throwing items
- Physical intimidation

Property Damage and Theft

- Personal belongings
- School items

Cyber

- Cyberbullying
- Cyberstalking

- Cyberharassment

Sexual

- Verbal sexual harassment
- Physical sexual harassment

- Cyber sexual harassment
- Sexual assault

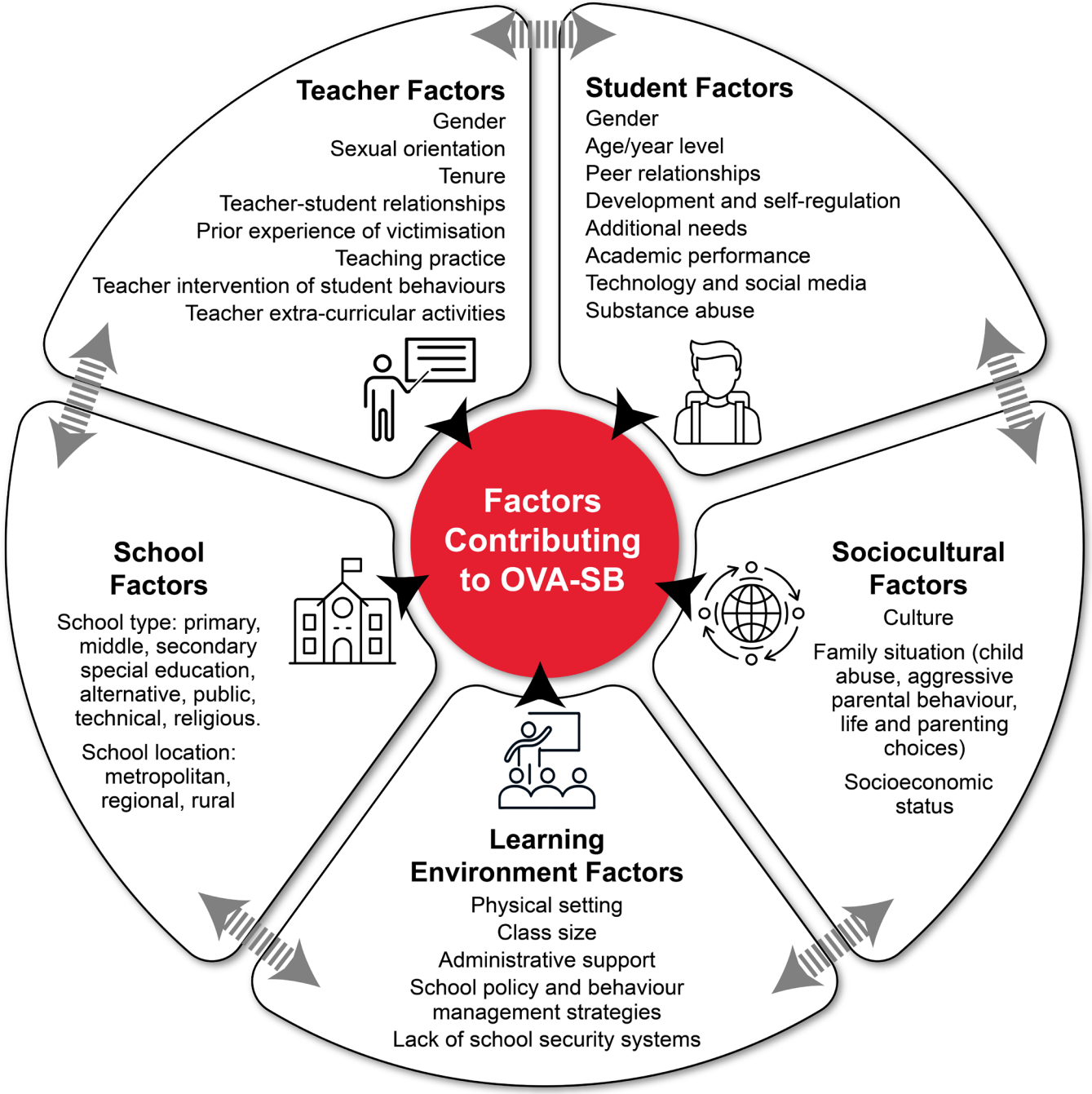
Cluster 3 - Factors Influencing OVA-SB

Multifaceted.

Intersecting.

Complex.

All are important.



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Cluster 4 -

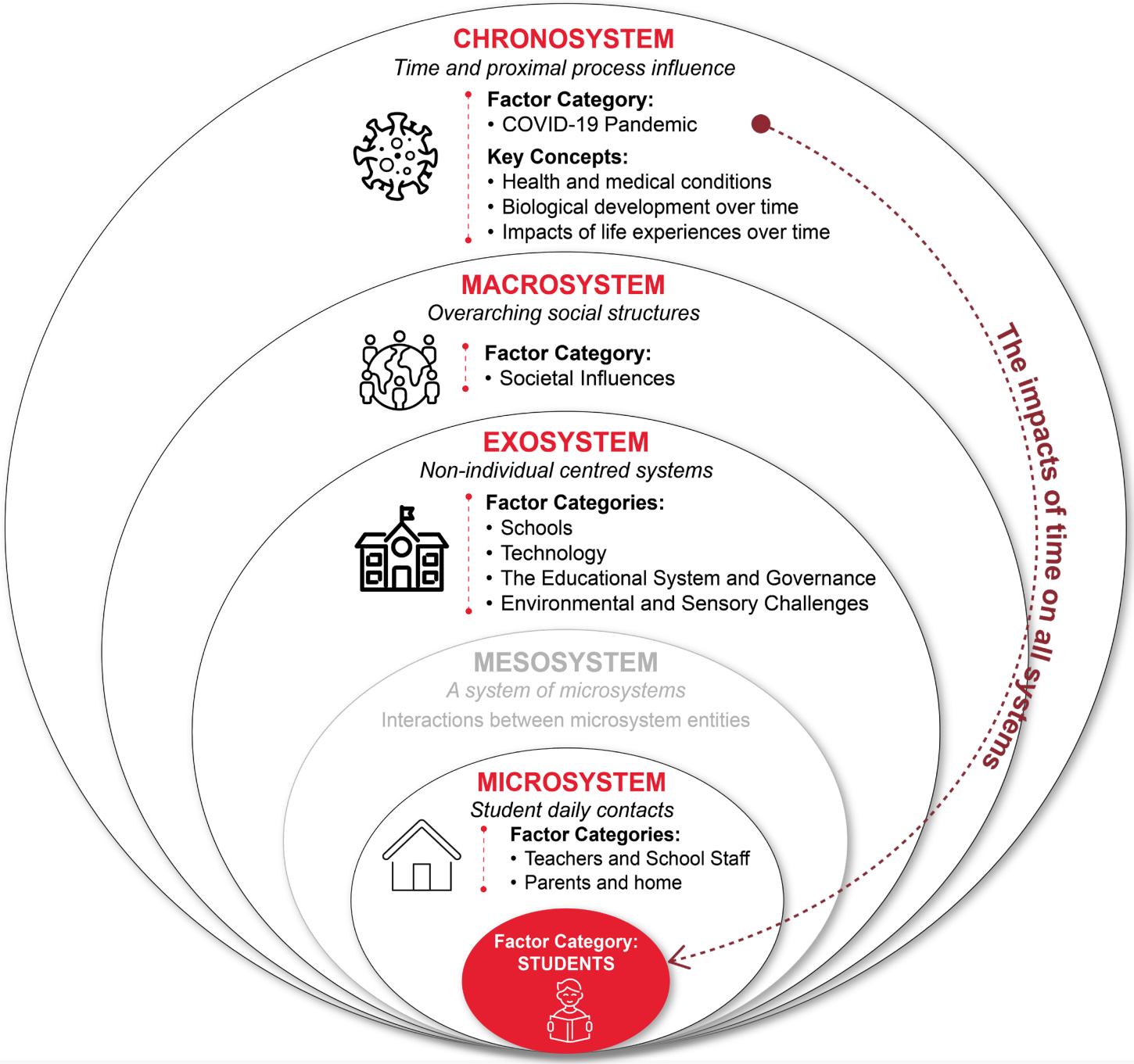
Factors & Bronfenbrenner lens

Multifaceted

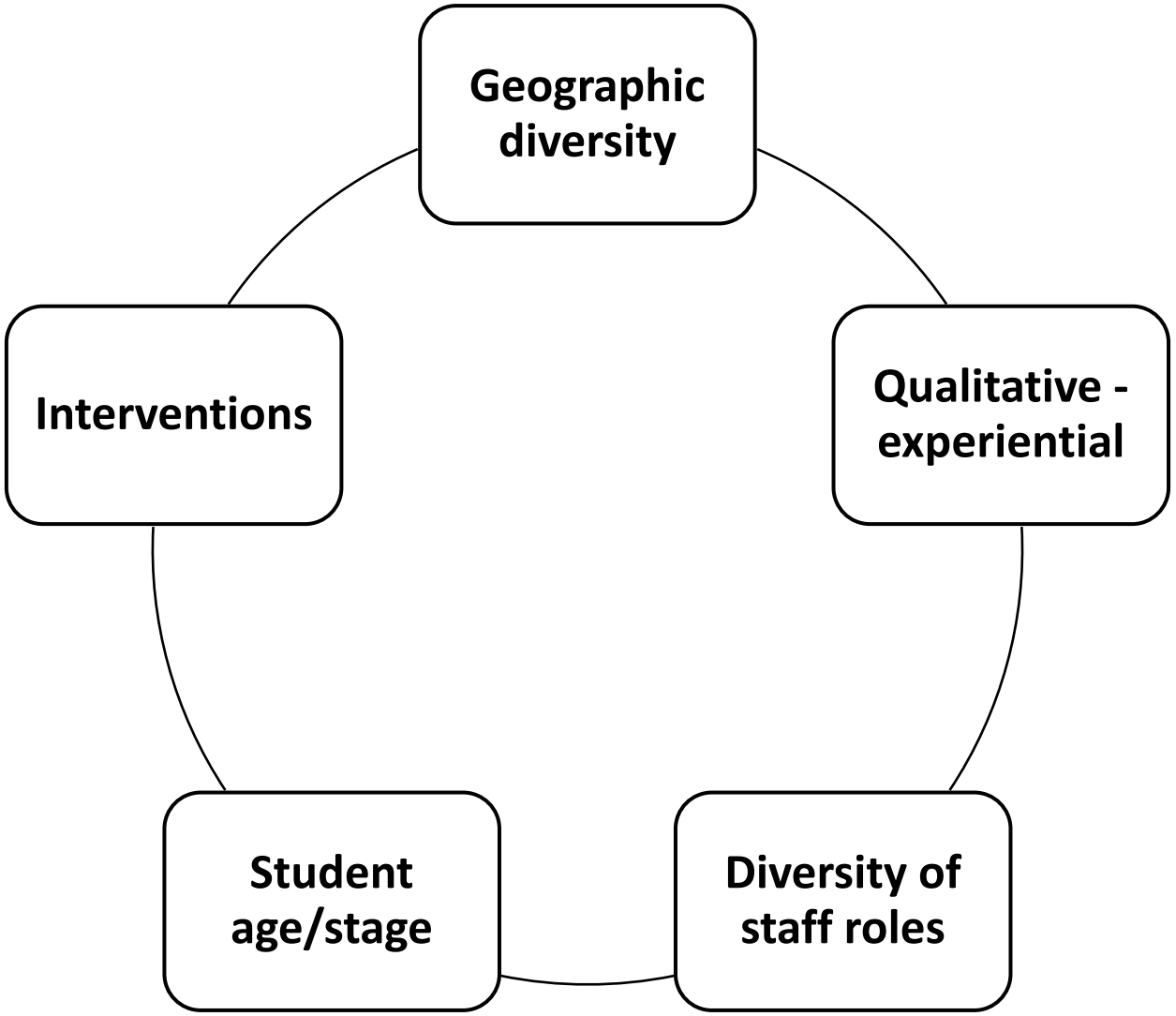
Complex

Intersecting

Challenging



RQ3 Future research lens – OVA-SB



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