

# Violence in sub-saharan african schools: A scoping review protocol

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## Protocol

**Keywords:** Violence, sub-Saharan Africa, Schools, School violence, Violence in schools

**Posted Date:** April 24th, 2020

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-24101/v1>

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**Title Page**

**VIOLENCE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN SCHOOLS:  
A SCOPING REVIEW PROTOCOL**

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# **VIOLENCE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN SCHOOLS: A SCOPING REVIEW PROTOCOL**

## **Abstract**

**Background:** Violence in schools is an intersectional, multifaceted and complex global phenomenon that impedes gender equality and transformation, disrupts learner progress, familial and school environments and constitutes a public health, educational, social and human rights challenge. According to the United Nations (UN) study on Violence against Children, violence in schools refers to sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), bullying, gang-related violence (GRV), school and community-related violence, verbal, physical and psychological violence that includes fighting and weapons. Literature searches rendered no scoping or systematic results for a complex topic such as violence in SSA schools with catastrophic consequences. Hence, the objective of this scoping review is to map evidence of violence in SSA schools from existing literature over the past decade to summarise findings, identify research gaps, guide future research or determine the feasibility of a systematic review being conducted.

**Methods:** Due to violence in schools being a broad topic our literature searches will include grey literature, unpublished and published studies, empirical studies, all study designs, conference presentations and website content using various keywords to search multiple databases to locate relevant literature. Search engines and electronic databases that will be searched are Google Scholar, PsycINFO (EBSCO), CINAHL, SCOPUS, EBSCOhost, PsycARTICLES (EBSCO), EMBASE, university libraries, education departments and MEDLINE (EBSCO). Title and abstract screening will be independently conducted by two screeners to minimise bias. A data charting form, compiled by three screeners using a Google form, will be used to extract relevant information from each article. Two screeners will populate the charting form electronically whilst all four screeners will ensure the charting form is continuously updated.

**Discussion:** We anticipate mapping literature on violence in sub-Saharan African schools. Once summarized, the data will be useful to identify literature gaps, guide future research on school violence or determine the feasibility of a systematic review being conducted.

**Keywords:** Violence, sub-Saharan Africa, Schools, School violence, Violence in schools

## Background

Violence in schools is an intersectional, multifaceted and complex global phenomenon that impedes gender equality and transformation, disrupts learner progress, familial and school environments and constitutes a public health, educational, social and human rights challenge [1-4]. According to the United Nations' (UN) study on Violence against Children, violence in schools refers to sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), bullying, gang-related violence (GRV), school and community-related violence, verbal, physical and psychological violence that includes fighting and weapons. Such acts could be intentionally and unintentionally performed by learners, teachers, other school employees and community members within and outside the school environment [5-7].

Mapping evidence of violence within SSA schools is relevant as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates that one billion children attend school globally with all children deserving a safe, nurturing and stimulating school environment to learn in [4]. Additionally, a 2017 study conducted by the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO), revealed that 246 million school-going children and adolescents experience violence in school annually [8]. Within the SSA context, the January 2019 *Behind The Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying* report disclosed that 48.2% (47.7% boys and 50.5% girls) are bullied at school (9). Furthermore, the report also revealed that 36.9% (44.6% boys and 31.9% girls) of learners have engaged in physical fights at school [9]. In addition, 36.6% boys and 35.8% girls had been attacked inside the school premises. At a personal level, children who have been bullied, fear attending school and find the experience stressful [9]. Twenty-five out of the 71 countries worldwide in which corporal punishment at schools is lawful, are found in SSA with the use of violence as a school disciplining approach being documented [9-11]. Reports by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment against Children indicated a high prevalence of school violence in Botswana (92%), Gambia (70%) and Uganda (79%) [12]. Additionally, a cross-country analysis of schoolgirls, showed that school violence by teachers was reported by 86% of the girls in Kenya, 82% in Ghana and 66% in Mozambique [13,14]. Moreover, the scourge of school violence interferes with children's human rights, affects their academic and social performance, compromises their physical, social, educational and personal development, and may affect their mental and physical health and wellbeing as they get older. School violence also permeates the societies within which the school is based and vice versa [15]. Additionally,

learners, teachers and school employees who have observed or experienced school violence may prematurely leave school, become traumatised and have their chances of attending and/or working in an institution of higher learning or participating in a work environment reduced. In the SSA context, which is estimated as one of the most impoverished regions globally, school violence could impede learners' ability to escape poverty through education [16].

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) *School-based violence prevention: a practical handbook* reflects the importance of preventing violence in schools and the societies in which schools are based [17]. Hence, UNICEF, UNESCO, United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), United Nations Development Plan (UNDP) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) are committed to the reduction and ultimate elimination of violence in schools and have put programmes in place to address school violence [18]. These organisations endorse and elevate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3: *Good Health and Well-being*; 4: *Quality Education* and SDG 16: *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions* that aim to assist communities in upholding the law, protecting human rights of all citizens, advocating for the eradication of fear and violence in schools and ensuring that learners receive quality education [19]. By having peaceful, cohesive and inclusive societies, as envisioned by the SDGs, less communal tribulations would be present, and the school environment would not be adversely affected [19]. Finally, an interventional campaign, the *Safe to Learn Call to Action*, aimed at encouraging governments, communities and teachers to assist in reducing violence in schools, and the communities that these schools are based in, has only been endorsed by five SSA countries (Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan and Uganda) by July 2019 [20]. Thus, more advocacy is required to get unanimous buy-in for the programme.

Although various studies have focused on violence in SSA schools to the best of our knowledge, a scoping review on violence in SSA schools within the last decade has not been conducted [13-15]. Hence, the objective of this scoping review is to map evidence of a broad field such as violence in SSA schools from existing literature over the past decade. Thereby broadening and extending an understanding of the violence in schools through a research lens that can identify literature gaps, guide future research agendas or determine the feasibility of a systematic review being conducted. Additionally, it could aid in the formulation and co-ordination of robust interventional programmes that reduce and/or eliminate school violence and prioritise the protection requirements of the school and its communities at multiple levels.

It could further assist with an effective teacher, learner and community engagement on violence and the negotiation of physical, emotional and sexual boundaries, irrespective of learners, teachers and community members' age, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion and race.

## **Methods**

To comprehensively map, determine and present the range of a complex body of evidence by mapping the relevant data that addresses broad research questions on violence in SSA schools, a systematic scoping review was chosen over a systematic review [21]. This review will utilise Arksey and O'Malley's framework that was later enhanced by Levac and associates as well as the Joanna Briggs Institute's guidelines to map evidence on school violence in SSA schools [22-24]. The five steps of the framework are as follows: i) Identifying the research question; ii) Identifying relevant studies; iii) Study selection; iv) Charting the data and v) Collating, summarising and reporting the results. The PRISMA-P (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic review and Meta-Analysis Protocols) 2015 Checklist guided the protocol development (Additional file 1) [25, 26].

### **i) Identifying the research question**

The primary research question guiding this review and framing the search strategy is:

What evidence exists regarding violence in SSA schools?

The sub-questions are:

- What types of violence occur in SSA schools?
- What factors contribute to violence in SSA schools?
- What preventative processes and policies exist regarding violence in SSA schools?

### **Eligibility criteria**

The PCC (Population, Concept, Context) framework (Table 1) will guide the eligibility criteria used in the study selection process of this scoping review [24].

**Table 1:** PCC Framework that guides the eligibility process

<b>PCC</b>	<b>Description</b>
P = Population	School: According to the UN study on Violence against Children, the term "school" refers to all educational settings for children [27].

C = Concept	<p>Violence: Refers to “physical, sexual, and psychological abuse from intimate partners or non-partners” [28].</p> <p>School Violence: According to the UN study on Violence against Children, violence in schools includes sexual and gender-based violence, bullying, gang-related violence, school and community-related violence and verbal, physical and psychological violence that includes fighting and weapons. Such acts could be intentionally and unintentionally performed by learners, community members and school employees within and could extend outside the school environment [5-7].</p>
C = Context	<p>sub-Saharan Africa: Refers to countries that are geographically located south of the Saharan desert [29]</p>

## ii) Identifying relevant studies

Due to school violence being a broad topic, our literature searches will include grey literature, unpublished and published studies, empirical studies, all study designs, conference presentations and relevant website content. Search engines and electronic databases that will be searched include Google Scholar, PsycINFO (EBSCO), CINAHL, SCOPUS, EBSCOhost, PsycARTICLES (EBSCO), EMBASE, university libraries, education departments and MEDLINE (EBSCO). Grey literature will be sourced from humanitarian websites such as UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO as well as governmental departments by the primary investigator (PI) (DMM). The references list of all relevant articles will be perused to attain additional literature and experts in school violence will be contacted by a research assistant to obtain further literature on the topic. Every endeavour will be made to source abstracts and full text articles from authors when they are unavailable online. The following keywords will be used in each database search: “Violence in Sub-Saharan African schools”, “violence in schools”, “violence in school”, “school violence” AND “sub-Saharan Africa”. This study’s literature searches will be limited to the previous ten years (2009-2019) to obtain contemporary literature on violence in SSA schools.

## iii) Study selection

To ensure the feasibility of conducting a scoping review on violence in SSA schools, the appropriateness of keywords and databases, a university librarian schooled in database searches and search strategies was consulted. Thereafter a pilot search was conducted on one selected database to ensure the appropriateness and relevance of the keywords and database. The results thereof are found in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Pilot search results of one database search

Keywords	Search Engine	Date of Search	Results
(((((("violence"[MeSH Terms] OR "violence"[All Fields]) AND ("schools"[MeSH Terms] OR "schools"[All Fields])) OR ("schools"[MeSH Terms] OR "schools"[All Fields] OR "school"[All Fields])) AND ("violence"[MeSH Terms] OR "violence"[All Fields])) OR ("violence"[MeSH Terms] OR "violence"[All Fields])) AND learners[All Fields]	PUBMED	14/02/2020	56
(((((("violence"[MeSH Terms] OR "violence"[All Fields]) AND ("schools"[MeSH Terms] OR "schools"[All Fields])) OR ("schools"[MeSH Terms] OR "schools"[All Fields] OR "school"[All Fields])) AND ("violence"[MeSH Terms] OR "violence"[All Fields])) OR ("violence"[MeSH Terms] OR "violence"[All Fields])) AND learners[All Fields]) AND ("africa south of the sahara"[MeSH Terms] OR ("africa"[All Fields] AND "south"[All Fields] AND "sahara"[All Fields]) OR "africa south of the sahara"[All Fields] OR ("sub"[All Fields] AND "saharan"[All Fields] AND "africa"[All Fields]) OR "sub saharan africa"[All Fields])	PUBMED	14/02/2020	13

The PI, together with a research assistant will remove all duplicate literature. Thereafter the selected studies, will be exported by the research assistant to an Endnote X9.2 electronic library prior to title and abstract screening commencing. Moreover, to assess the eligibility of studies, title and abstract screening will be independently conducted by the PI and SMN to minimise bias. The full article screening will also be independently conducted by two (SMN, SAN) screeners. A third screener (DMM) will resolve any conflicts, disagreements and discrepancies that might arise during all screening phases based on the eligibility criteria.

### Inclusion Criteria

The following criteria will ensure the inclusion of literature that relates to the research question of this scoping review:

- Literature relating to and providing evidence on violence in SSA schools.
- Grey literature including government reports, policy statements, conference proceedings, theses and dissertations that report on violence in SSA schools.



- Sub-Saharan African literature published between 2009 and 2019 to ensure the inclusion of current, relevant information relating to school violence over the past decade.
- Empirical studies, meta-synthesis and meta-analysis on violence in SSA schools.
- Studies conducted in SSA schools.
- Studies in all languages.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

The following will be excluded:

- Literature that does not include violence within a SSA school setting.
- Literature published before 2009.

### **iv) Charting of data**

A data charting form (Table 3) has already been compiled by three screeners (DMM, SMN, SAN) using a Google form containing variables from the articles that are relevant to answer the research question. Two screeners (DMM, SAN) will pilot the form and will independently populate the form electronically with the relevant information from each article. To ensure an iterative process all three reviewers will ensure the charting form is continuously updated. All discrepancies and disagreements between screeners will be resolved through dialogue and SMN will mediate to ensure consensus is reached.

**Table 3: Data charting table**

Author and date	Study Title	Study Aim	Study Design	Study Setting	Study Population	Incidents of school violence	Intervention	Outcome	Key findings	Significant findings	Conclusion

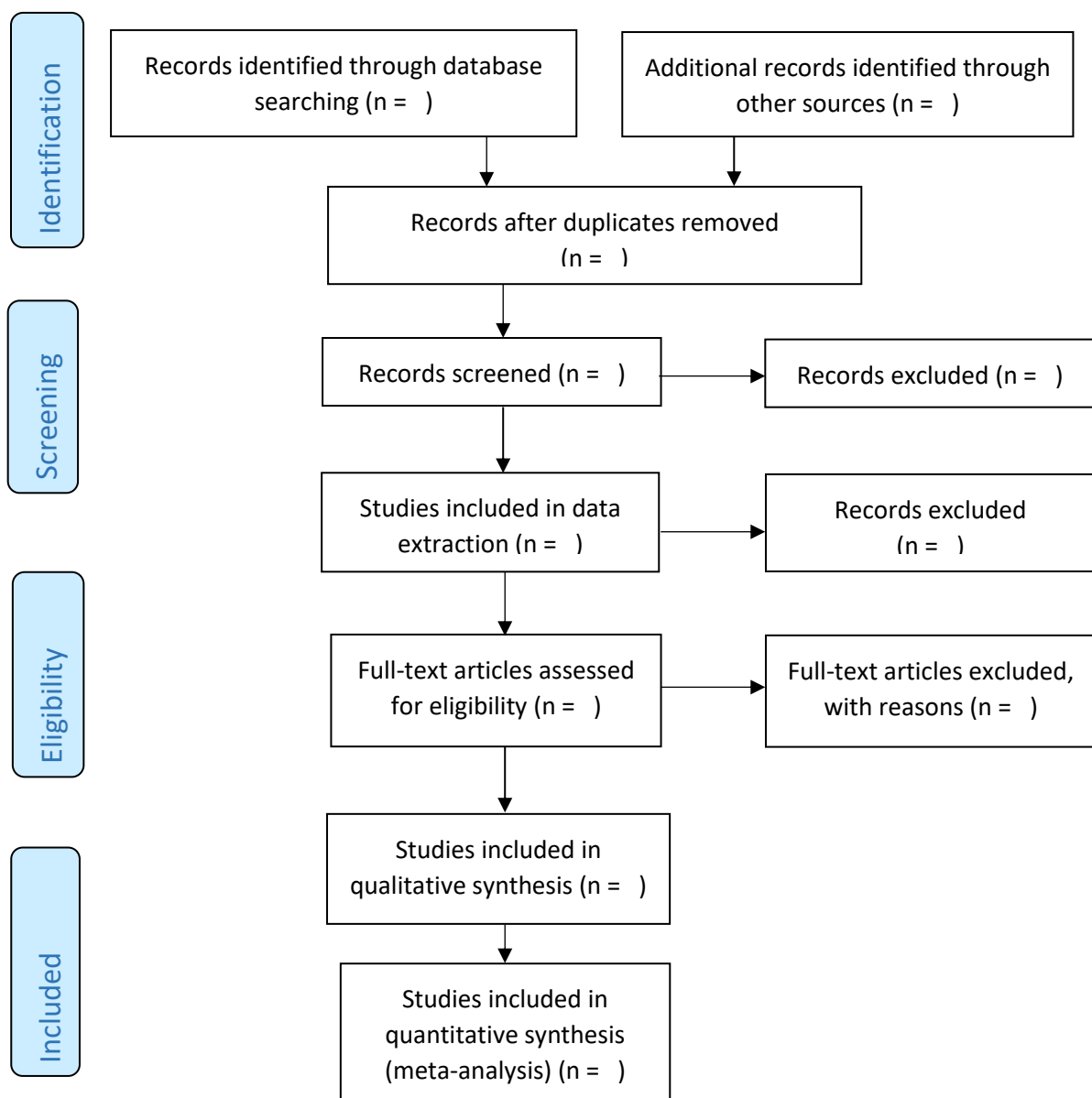
### **v) Collating, summarizing and reporting the results**

As this scoping review maps literature relating to violence in SSA schools, relevant information from each article will be extracted, assigned codes, that will be categorised and summarised. The team members (DMM, SMN, SAN) will collectively perform a descriptive numerical summary and a thematic analysis of extracted data. The qualitative data will be thematically summarised whilst the quantitative data will be presented in a table format. Variables of interest will be presented in the form of graphs. The choice of graph type will be determined

by the variable type. This process will be critically interrogated and analysed by all the reviewers to ensure it meets the objectives and the study criteria.

## Quality assurance

To ensure a rigorously methodological review, included literature will be evaluated utilising the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) 2018 version [30] guidelines with low quality articles having a rating of 25%; average articles 50%; above average 75% and a high average being 100%. The quality assurance will also assist with the risk of bias. Additionally, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review Analysis Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA ScR) will ensure all screening results are reported on (Figure 1) [31].



**Figure 1:** PRISMA ScR Flowchart demonstrates the literature searches and study selection process.

## Discussion

The clarion call to end violence in schools is very important to one of the world's poorest regions, SSA, where education and development are intrinsically linked [9]. The UN's *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* guarantees the right to education for all children, the need for appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse and the establishment of social programmes to support children who face violence and abuse [32]. Moreover, violence-free schools should be catalysts for the promotion of non-violence, co-existence, overcoming tensions and peaceful conflict resolution among teachers, learners, other school employees, visitors and beyond the wider community as schools are microcosms of society [8]. There is a realisation that children are 'poly-victimised' meaning that they are exposed to multiple forms of violence in more than one setting, thus, positioning the school at the epicentre of ending this scourge is significant [33]. Additionally, schools should be inclusive structures and places where positive social norms and human values such as respect, solidarity and tolerance are promoted and encouraged [8].

Mapping evidence of violence in SSA schools is relevant due to literature suggesting that violence perpetrated against children is 'invisible' as it is mostly hidden, under-reported, unreported due to fear and secondary victimisation, stigma associated with being a victim of violence, the 'normalization' of violence and the lack of supportive structures to report perpetrators of violence [34]. Hence, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (*Quality Education, Gender Inequality, Reduced inequalities, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, Good Health and Wellbeing*) call for all stakeholders to assist communities uphold the law to protect human rights and dignity of all and to advocate for the eradication of fear and violence in schools is apt [19].

The findings of this study may be of interest to governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), policy makers and organizations such as UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO, UNHRC, UNFPA, UNDP and HRW and other stakeholders involved in the provision of policies, guidelines and programmes to comprehensively deal with violence in schools. Moreover, the results of the scoping review could assist in identifying research gaps, guide future research and systematic reviews and recommend interventional strategies to reduce or eliminate violence in SSA schools. The results could aid in the development of programmes that facilitate a warm, nurturing, transformational educational

environment. Furthermore, the review could address the role of governments, CBOs, NGOs, policies, awareness campaigns and GBV dialogues in addressing violence in SSA schools.

## **Dissemination**

The results of this scoping review will be disseminated through national and international conferences and submitted to peer-reviewed journals that focus on violence in schools, in order to reach the intended stakeholders.

## **Abbreviations**

CBO	Community Based Organization
GRV	Gang-related Violence
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HRW	Human Rights Watch
MMAT	Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
PCC	Population, Concept, Context
PI	Primary Investigator
PRISMA-P	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic review and Meta-Analysis
	Protocols) 2015 Checklist: Recommended items in a systematic
	review protocol*
PRISMA ScR	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review Analysis extension
	for Scoping Reviews
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Plan
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNICEF	The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

## **Declarations**

## **Acknowledgement**

The authors express their gratitude to the College of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the South African Research Chairs Initiative of the Department of Science and Technology and National Research Foundation of South Africa for their support of this study. Additionally, Mr Mukesh Kemrajh, Senior Librarian, Edminson Library, Edgewood Campus, UKZN is acknowledged for his assistance with keywords and database searches.

## **Funding**

Not applicable.

## **Availability of data and materials**

All data generated or analyzed during this study will be included in the published scoping review article and will be available upon request.

## **Authors contributions**

The protocol was conceptualized and developed by DMM and SMN. SAN edited the first draft and all authors read and approved the final protocol. The subsequent study, review of abstracts, full article studies and extraction process will comprise of three screeners and a research assistant.

## **Competing interests**

The authors have no competing interests.

## **Consent for publication**

Not applicable.

## **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Not applicable.

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#### **Additional File:**

1. PRISMA-P (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic review and Meta-Analysis Protocols) 2015 Checklist: Recommended items in a systematic review protocol\*



# Figures

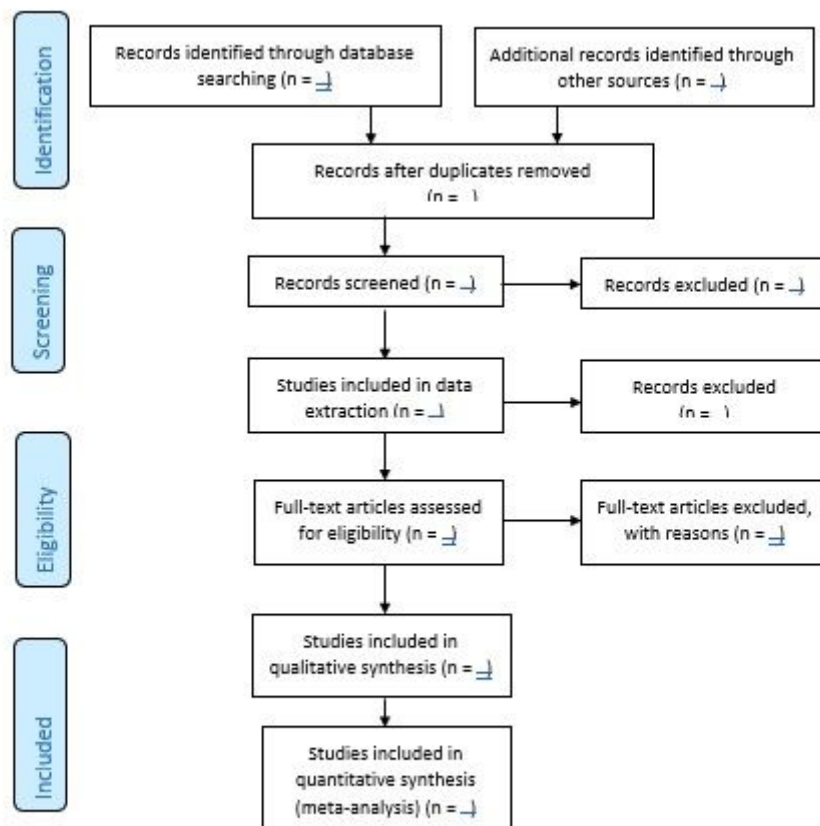


Figure 1

PRISMA ScR Flowchart demonstrates the literature searches and study selection process.

## Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [290220PRISMAPchecklistScopingReviewProtocol.docx](#)
- [290220TrackedViolenceinSSAschSRP.docx](#)