

“It’s a Warzone” - The Nature of School-based Violence in South Africa

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Abstract

The violence that continues to raise its ugly head in the South African communities has unfortunately found its way into the schools. Various media reports paint a shocking and disheartening picture of the ever-escalating incidents and levels of violence in South African schools. This violence has dire consequences for both learners and educators who often feel like schools have become warzones. It is pivotal to comprehend the nature of school-based violence in order to devise strategies of mitigating it. Based on a mixed methods study conducted at nine high schools, data was collected from both learners and educators using focus group discussions and questionnaires and analysed using thematic analysis and statistical analysis. Measures were put in place to ensure the quality of data. The findings indicate that learner-on-learner, learner-on-educator, and educator-on-learner violence is prevalent in schools. The different typologies of school-based violence were found to be around several spheres, namely: emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, gang, property, and cyber violence. The paper concludes that violence has filtered into schools, perpetrated by learners and educators. It is recommended that a holistic approach be designed to identify bio-psycho, social-political and technological strategies for responding to different forms of violence in schools.

Keywords: High-school learners, School-based violence, Bio-psycho-social approach, Intervention research, South Africa

Introduction

There have been widespread reports in the media on violence in South African schools involving young people. The general state of ill-discipline and violence in schools and its continuing deleterious effects on the personal safety of both learners and educators, and on teaching and learning, is of a great concern. South Africa has been described as a country with the highest rates of violence in the world (Proudlock, Mathews & Jamieson, 2014). With such high rates of violence in society, it is no surprise that violence in schools is also high because schools are a representation and a microcosm of society.

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The seriousness and extent of the problem of violence occurring in South African schools was presented in findings of a study by Burton (2012), according to which only 22.2% of learners felt safe at school. When compared to other countries like the US and Brazil, the levels of violence were found to be significantly higher. This observation is supported by other researchers such as Huisman (2014) and Diale (2014), who state that violence against children and youth has reached endemic proportions in South Africa as 15.5 million children in this country suffer from some form of violence. Continued exposure to violence in schools exerts a negative impact on learners' and educators' functioning and well-being. According to UNICEF (2012), the effects not only result in short-term consequences, but also culminate in a range of physical, health and social problems which persist across a person's lifespan, ultimately leading to significant economic costs to society.

The aim of the study was to explore the nature and types of violence in South African schools to better understand the phenomenon and make recommendations for addressing the violence. It was envisaged that the study would contribute to the knowledge base of violence prevention, particularly in schools and generally in society, and as a result, foster safer schools and communities where people's rights to protection and education would be upheld. Furthermore, the significance of this study lies in its potential to influence social policy towards school-based prevention programmes and implementation by professionals such as social workers that would facilitate the growth and development of children and the youth.

The research question was: What is the nature and types of violence in South African schools?

The objectives of the study were as follows.

- To determine and contextualise the prevalence of violence at South African schools.
- To identify, explore and describe the nature and types of school-based violence in South Africa.
- To determine where violent incidents by learners against other learners occur.
- To establish where violent incidents by learners against educators occur.
- Based on the research findings, to draw conclusions and make recommendations for addressing school-based violence in South Africa.

This paper explores the nature and types of school-based violence in South Africa, which was part of a wider study on developing a school-based violence presentation programme for South Africa. The paper begins with providing a background of the study, followed by an exploration of literature on the impact and consequences of school-based violence. Thereafter, a discussion of the research methodology and the subsequent presentation and discussion of the research findings is undertaken. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are made.

Background

The occurrence of school-based violence is a disturbing phenomenon in South African schools. A report released by the South African Council of Educators (2011) revealed a grim picture about school safety and shocking results that showed in 2011 that 1.8 million learners had experienced violence at school. The situation has not changed since then, incidences of school-based violence is still a great cause for concern, incidences of sexual violence, corporal punishment,

bullying, gang-related activities, and occasional murder continue to plague some South African schools. Some acts of ill-discipline perpetrated against educators and fellow learners are known to have occurred in the past and continue to overshadow the media landscape. The following media excerpts are indicative of the alarming nature of these violent attacks perpetrated by learners against their peers and educators in many schools across the country:

- “Bullying, theft, gangsterism, corporal punishment, drug abuse and the possession of weapons continue to plague Gauteng schools” (Louw, 2015a).
- “Jail term of teen, 17, who raped girl, 5, halved” (Venter, 2015).
- “School of hard knocks: ‘Blind eye’ teacher in bully video previously suspended for assaulting pupils” (Louw, 2015b).
- “Classroom bully outrage: Pupils’ assault in front of teacher angers officials” (Molosankwe, 2015).
- “Lesbian fears school after attack” (Masombuka, 2014).
- “Pupils face rapist teachers every day” (Narsee, 2014).

From the above, it is evident that rates of violence in schools are not declining. The frequency of violent incidences is also illustrative of the extent to which South African schools could be facing a national crisis. Inevitably, the aggressive use of weapons during episodes of school violence results in unnecessary and unfortunate fatalities. There is therefore an urgent need to address school-based violence in the context of a culture of those very rights which all South Africans are guaranteed in the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights Act No. 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). The right to safety strengthens the need to create safe and healthy teaching and learning environments for all - environments that are free from intimidation and any form of violence.

There is limited information on the extent of school violence in the African Continent. In Burkina Faso, in a violence study conducted in 2009, Devers et al. (2012) report that 12% of secondary school pupils indicated incidences of attempted rape of their fellow pupils; 44.9% reported that teachers approach girls and text them while 26% reported that teachers seduce girls. In addition, 73.3% of primary school pupils reported incidences of physical violence; 84.3% reported verbal violence; and 65.4% reported psychological violence observed at school (Devers et al., 2012). In another study conducted in 2008, 13% of girls reported experiencing sexual violence whilst 40% reported being aware of sexual harassment cases at their schools. A total of 81.7% of the participants reported incidences of sexual violence against girl learners identifying teachers as the perpetrators; 41.7% identified male pupils as perpetrators; and 30.5% identified administrative staff at the school as the perpetrators (Devers et al., 2012).

Leoschut and Jantjies (2011) conducted research in Maputo, Mozambique with 499 youths aged 12-19 and discovered that 4 out of 5 learners perceive school violence to be a big problem and that 11.2% experience fear when travelling to and from school. The study’s findings show that 36.4% learners experienced the threat of harm and violence; 33.1% experienced verbal violence; 19.6% experienced physical violence; 13.8% endured corporal punishment; and 4.2% suffered sexual violence; whilst 7.1% of the learners were bullied and coerced into doing wrong things they did not want to do.

In Cote d’Ivoire, findings reveal that sexual violence is widespread, with 11% of girls having been victims of sexual violence out of a total of 1,242,000 children whose aged ranging between 10-17 years (UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children, 2011). A National survey on Crisis and Gender-based Violence carried out in 2008 revealed that 21% of girls between ages 2-14 years, had

experienced severe physical punishment and another 21% of girls had been victims of sexual violence (UNICEF Cote d'Ivoire, 2009-2013).

From an international perspective, Germany had few incidences of school violence with only 6.2% of students reporting that they experienced sexual violence (UNICEF, 2012). Similarly, in Belgium only 1.1% of students experienced sexual violence, whilst in Pakistan more than 2,500 cases of sexual abuse were recorded by clerics in religious schools (UNICEF, 2012).

Brazil is also regarded as a country with high rates of school violence. According to a bullying study involving 5,168 students in five regions by Plan Brazil, findings show that 70% of the total sample reported having witnessed scenes of violence between school mates and 30% declared having been victims of at least one form of bullying in the 2009 school year (UNICEF, 2012).

The impact of school-based violence

Learners who experience school violence are likely to experience and suffer wide-ranging physical, health, emotional, behavioural, and educational consequences (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). There are immeasurable costs that violence against children must bear on present and future generations, and it undermines human development. The effects of school-based violence often persist into adulthood, ultimately contributing to an intergenerational culture of aggression and violence. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheet (2013), the impact differs according to the nature and severity of the violence.

Health consequences of school-based violence

Violence has a profound impact on adolescents' health and behaviour resulting in short-and long-term physical health related problems. Some injuries are not visible but may culminate into negative behaviour outcomes such as alcohol or drug abuse and suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheet, 2013). Such injuries often persist into adulthood, with some leading into permanent disabilities or even death. Other physical health hazards posed by school violence as identified by Beninger (2013), include the spread of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS and unwanted or early pregnancies. Similar findings were reported on a study in Ethiopia involving 1,278 children (Antonowicz, 2010) indicating that 10.6% of the victims of sexual violence fell pregnant and 23.5% had contracted sexually transmitted infections (STI's). Furthermore, the author found that those who contracted STI's never sought treatment out of fear of stigma. This can be detrimental to both maternal and child health or can lead to unsafe abortions or infanticide (Antonowicz, 2010).

Other health-related consequences stem from corporal punishment and serious physical injuries inflicted on learners. Becker (2008) report that in a study about corporal punishment in the USA, findings indicate that learners sustained severe muscle injury, extensive bruising, and scarring. Similarly in South Africa, the SAHRC (2008) report that school violence can result in physical injuries that include wounds and scars. In summary, violence has serious negative health-related implications. The physical injuries and concomitant scars may lead to psychological and emotional trauma.

Psychological consequences of school-based violence

The psychological impact is perhaps the most reported of the consequences of school-based violence. Badri (2014) states that children and youth experience emotional trauma and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, low self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness and disempowerment because of being subjected to violence. Gevers and Flisher (2012) confirm that victims of school violence become suicidal because of the traumatic experience. Compared to their male counterparts, Devers et al. (2012) concludes that female victims of gender-based violence are more inclined to develop eating disorders. A survey by Plan Brazil on bullying shows that 27% of victims of bullying lost interest and enthusiasm in education; 14% were afraid to go to school; and 3% respectively lost trust in teachers, lost friends and stopped learning (Pereznieto et al., 2010). In a Nigerian study, Antonowicz (2010) found that girls live in fear of sexual harassment from boys and teachers and as a result are unable to trust their classmates.

SAHRC (2008) found that unwanted sexual behaviour contributes to a lowered self-esteem and diminished psychological well-being. The devastating effects of violence on an individual's mental health and well-being are evident from the above-mentioned findings. Other negative psychological effects of school violence include depression and anxiety disorders (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheet, 2013). There is a positive association between adolescents' experiencing of verbal, physical or sexual violence and emotional and psychological trauma.

In a study to investigate the effects of verbal violence and corporal punishment by parents, Evans, Simons and Simons (2012) report that verbal violence contributes to delinquency among both males and females, whilst corporal punishment had a minimal effect. The study further reveals that corporal punishment fosters low self-control and hostility and contributes to antisocial behaviours in males particularly (Evans et al., 2012). However, the findings show that verbal violence has a negative effect on both genders. This is attributed to young people finding the harsh parenting practices unjustified and believing that they are capable of reasoning with their parents if they are given a chance to do so, rather than being shouted or screamed at (Evans et al., 2012).

Sexual violence is another type of violent behaviour which has serious psychological implications and repercussions for the child's own sexual behaviour. Beninger (2013) emphasises that child victims of sexual violence suffer severe emotional setbacks. Furthermore, they are at great risk of engaging in sexual experimentation at an early age, or with multiple partners (Kenya Violence against Children Study, 2011) whilst others may engage in commercial sex for good grades, lodging or food (Antonowicz, 2010). School violence has a long-standing psychological impact. Left with the indelible psychological scars after traumatic violent experiences, children are likely to encounter educational difficulties.

Educational consequences of school-based violence

School-based violence impedes the achievement of regional and international agreements to which South Africa is a signatory. School violence hinders the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 16.2 which relate to the achievement of universal access to education for all and the elimination of all forms of violence against children, and to UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) goals to meet all the educational needs of children, youth, and adults. As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, a call is made to all member states to promote safe and peaceful societies and strong institutions to facilitate access to education in safe and

secure learning environments (United Nations Secretary-General, 2014). Therefore, political leaders and leaders of educational institutions are called upon to end school violence and to mitigate against these negative outcomes.

Gender discrimination is one critical challenge in curbing school-based violence and is a barrier to achieving gender equality (Beninger, 2013). Robinson et al. (2012) confirm that gender-based violence in developing countries impedes students' enrolments, retention, and academic achievement. Violence, and particularly gender-based violence, runs counter to the country's commitment to work towards non-violence and gender equality. The long-term effects of violence may not only lead to failure to educate girls, it also limits social development since studies show a correlation between women's lowered educational attainment and risks for child health survival (Pereznieto et al., 2010).

Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014) add that school-based violence instil fear and affect educational process to the extent that it impacts the culture of teaching and learning. Devers et al. (2012) argue that violence not only discourages children from attending school, but also discourages parents from sending their children to school. Some parents change schools to protect their children against violence. According to a national representative study in Ethiopia involving 1,268 learners in all nine regional states, over 40% parents said that school-based violence can discourage them from sending their children to school (Save the Children Denmark, 2008). In this study, 60% girls and 42% boy learners said that violence had contributed to girls' absenteeism from school (Save the Children Denmark, 2008).

Similarly in Brazil, a nationally representative survey on bullying indicated that 5,396 learners (0.6%) had missed classes at some point during the school year as a direct result of bullying and harassment (Pereznieto et al., 2010). School violence has dire consequences for both learners and their parents. More importantly, it deprives learners of the opportunity to access education in safe learning environments, free from violence and intimidation (Pereznieto et al., 2010).

According to Devers et al. (2012), many victims of violence who continue to attend school lose interest, lack concentration, and as a result they perform poorly academically. Many victims of school violence cease to see education as a priority due to their inability to concentrate and their lowered self-esteem. Badri (2014) observed that victims of violence may become hyper vigilant or extremely lethargic, often leading to the deterioration of their academic performance and contributing to absenteeism, failure and even dropout from school before graduation which affects their ability to reach their academic aspirations. Failure to achieve educational success leads to undesirable economic outcomes as will be discussed in the following section.

Economic consequences of school-based violence

The denial of children's right to education because of school-based violence impacts children's current and future ability to participate in economic activities in society (Pereznieto et al., 2010). The negative consequences of violence not only affect the individual child victim, but also their families, the wider society and threaten the rate of economic growth (Antonowicz, 2010).

The economic implications because of lower educational attainment are more severe for girls. The economic cost of 65 low and middle income and developing countries who fail to educate girls to the same standard as boys has been estimated at \$92 billion per year and for higher income countries, the economic cost is estimated at \$7.9 billion per year (Pereznieto et al., 2010). School dropout affects students' lifelong outcomes. Violence curtails opportunities to education and economic freedom and jeopardises the opportunities of most individuals to get themselves out of poverty and

improve their standards of living. Ellery, Kassam and Bazan (2010) state, “School violence has far-reaching consequences for children, their families, their communities and countries, and on global economic development.”

Beninger (2013) states that few cases of school-based violence have immediate health-related consequences that are severe enough to require hospital treatment and which therefore would result in economic costs. Perezniето et al. (2010) argue that the economic impact of school-based violence on health care and treatment is largely dependent on the form and severity of violence. Some of the acute cases where treatment is required include rape cases of severe injury that result from stabbings or extreme cases of corporal punishment and sexual abuse that result in pregnancy (Devers et al., 2012). Some of these injuries are serious to an extent that they can lead to permanent disabilities or even death (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Although studies have found that severe incidents do occur, these have not been registered systematically. As a result, it is difficult to determine aggregate financial costs of school violence (Perezniето et al., 2010). However, the costs for ongoing medical and mental health care services are huge (Kingshott, 2012). Thus, it can be concluded that school violence generates an important economic cost for victims, their families and health care service providers.

Social consequences of school-based violence

Enormous social costs are incurred because of school-based violence. Antonowicz (2010) perceives school violence as a threat to everything that a modern society aspires to such as peace, individualism, emotional well-being, stability, and equality, and has the potential to affect social cohesion. School-based violence affects learners’ ability to trust and form pro-social relationships. Taken to extremes, Leoschut et al. (2011) conclude that school-based violence obstructs learners’ ability to engage in normal childhood and school-related activities. School-based violence affects learners’ ability to develop social skills and the internalisation of moral values. The failure to develop adequate pro-social behaviour and positive social capital because of exposure to violence undermines the development of caring and healthy communities. Children who are affected by violence are unlikely to engage in altruistic activities and will not be able to show empathy to other children. There is a probability that learners who are exposed to violence are likely to engage in disorderly and aggressive behaviour and may grow into adults who use violence and engage in criminal behaviour (Gevers & Flisher, 2012).

Gevers and Flisher (2012) highlight that victims of school violence become pessimistic and often get a cynical view about the future, resulting in poor choices that jeopardise their future. When people feel unsafe, it makes it harder for them to develop their capabilities, pursue their personal goals and participate in socio-economic activities. The social consequences of school violence on children not only affect them in person, but violence has implications for the development of their social capital and social cohesion.

The impact of school-based violence on the educator

School-based violence does not only affect learners’ emotional, academic, social, economic, and behavioural development, but also educators’ attitudes and teaching performance. Educators who are exposed to violence experience post-traumatic stress disorders which ultimately influence their teaching capabilities negatively (SAHRC, 2008). Some educators feel scared and disempowered, and they could act aggressively toward their learners (SAHRC, 2008). This could in turn lead to

alienation, dissatisfaction with work and ultimately, personal problems such as alcohol dependency (SAHRC, 2008).

School-based violence has health, psychological, educational, social, and economic consequences for learners, educators, and society in general. The Institute of Security Studies (ISS) and the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) confirm that violence in general is a huge problem in South Africa and has a detrimental impact on individuals, families, and schools (van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2009).

Given the devastating impact of school violence, it is important to prevent it as opposed to dealing with the consequences. This requires serious efforts in giving children a voice and access to resources and opportunities as a concerned Ghana Village Chief aptly states:

From what these children have said and done concerning the various types of abuse against them, we (adults) should bow our heads in shame. But there will be more chances for us to raise our heads with pride, only if we support our children to have access to health, education, and to participate in communal decision-making. (Ghana Village Chief – Plan International, 2008). Giving children a voice, applies to prevention of school-based violence. There are however, no quick-fix answers (Robinson et al., 2012), neither can there be a blanket approach to addressing school violence as this is a complex problem that is caused by multiple contextual factors. Due to its complexity, school-based violence demands different strategies.

Methodology

The goal of the study was to explore the nature and types of violence in South African schools to better understand the phenomenon in order to make recommendations for addressing the violence.

The research questions were as follows.

- What is the prevalence of violence among high school learners?
- What is the nature and types of violence at your school?
- Where do violent incidents by learners against other learners occur?
- Where do violent incidents by learners against educators occur?

The study adopted a mixed methods research approach, which according to Rubin and Babbie (2013) is, “A type of research design in which not only does the researcher collect both qualitative and quantitative data, but also integrates both sources of data at one or more stages of the research process so as to improve understanding of the phenomenon being studied”. The study used a mixed concurrent design, specifically the equal status type, whereby the quantitative and qualitative approaches were implemented approximately at the same time. Because the study wanted to first understand the nature and types of school-based violence before offering practical solutions to the problem of school-based violence, an exploratory convergent design was utilised whereby the exploratory and descriptive designs were followed.

For the qualitative phase, the collective case study design was used as it provided an in-depth view about the phenomenon of school-based violence. With the case study as a bounded system, the researchers systematically conducted the enquiry with the aim of describing and explaining the nature of school violence being experienced in South African schools to develop ideas on how to address the problem. During the quantitative phase, the descriptive survey research design was employed,

focusing on the “how” and “who” questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013), to identify and describe the nature of school-based violence.

The population in the study comprised of all learners and educators of Tshwane South District High Schools in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. Obtaining information from all learners and educators was impractical, the option was to draw a sample. A sampling frame consisting of a list of all registered schools in Tshwane South District was obtained from the Gauteng Provincial Department of Education. The list consisted of 51 schools; nine schools were sampled to participate in the study. Creswell (2014) urges researchers to select the same individuals to participate in both qualitative and quantitative phases of the study to make data integration simple and comparable. Therefore, the researchers selected grades 9 and 10 learners and educators to participate in both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study.

Given the fact that the study utilised the concurrent triangulated research design, a mixed methods sampling method was employed, whereby the samples for each strand of the study were drawn separately and did not inform one another. In the study, both probability and non-probability sampling strategies were implemented to select cases of schools, grades, educators, and learners. The quantitative sample was larger, comprising a total of 679 learners as compared to the smaller qualitative sample of 47 learners and 30 educators. Non-probability samples were used to provide “information rich” data and obtain diverse perspectives from various learners and educators in the qualitative study (Braun & Clark, 2013). Probability samples were used to achieve representativeness and to allow for the generalisation of findings.

The researchers used the concurrent mixed methods data collection approach; whereby they collected both qualitative and quantitative data in parallel, at almost the same time, with respect to almost similar research questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Qualitative data collection methods tapped into the deeper meanings to generate deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study, whilst quantitative data collection methods sought to provide precise and generalisable findings.

The main data collection tool for the qualitative phase of the study was focus group interviewing. The researchers developed and used a semi-structured focus group interview schedule to ask open-ended questions that were intended to elicit views and opinions about the types of school-based violence (Creswell, 2014). Data got saturated after five focus group sessions with 47 learners and four focus group sessions with 30 educators, culminating into nine focus group interview sessions. For the quantitative phase of the study, a questionnaire was self-administered to a total of 679 learners from nine different high schools and they all completed and returned the questionnaires. However, 2 questionnaires could not be used due to errors. As the study was identified as descriptive in nature, questionnaires allowed for the statistical analysis of the data set. As such, the researchers developed a non-standardised, self-administered questionnaire based on information derived from an extensive literature review.

As the study used a mixed methods paradigm, data analysis was also mixed. The two strands of data were analysed separately and only combined and integrated in the interpretation stage. The two independent sets of results were then compared and contrasted to lead to key findings. During the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was used, whilst during the quantitative phase, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data.

The researchers employed several strategies to enhance the quality, trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility of qualitative data. The strategies included reflexivity; the use of audit trail; member checking; peer debriefing; ensuring thicker descriptions and using an inter-coder

agreement. The researchers also put in place strategies to ensure the reliability, validity, and credibility of quantitative data.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers were alert to the ethical implications of the decisions they made during the study. To ensure that the research participants did not suffer any harm, the following core ethical requirements were adhered to.

The researchers were aware of their responsibility to protect participants from physical and emotional harm and to minimise risk, as such, they informed the participants of their right to withdraw from the study (Braun & Clark, 2013). The researchers identified social workers and arranged with them to be on stand-by if the need for counselling arose. Research participants were informed about this service, however, none of the participants needed any counselling.

All participants were aware of the purpose of the study, and they agreed to participate explicitly on a voluntary basis. The researchers did not deceive the participants and did not make any promises to pay them for participating in the study. The researchers reminded the participants about their absolute right not to participate or to discontinue participating at any time during the process of the study.

Research participants were required to sign an informed consent letter which stated exactly what the study was all about, what was expected from them and what potential harm existed (Strydom, 2011). In asking for consent, the researchers did not use deceit, pressure, or threats.

The researchers were aware of the possibility of invading participants' privacy and violating participants' right to confidentiality. Consequently, confidentiality was provided by number coding transcripts and replacing all names of schools with codes without destroying the integrity and usefulness of the data. The researchers used numbers instead of actual names and stored the data, safely packed in boxes, in a secure room at home where access was restricted.

Presentation of Findings

This section presents the findings of the study. It starts off with a presentation of demographic details, which are then followed by the integrated presentation of qualitative and quantitative findings.

Demographical Information on Participants

The demographic profile of learners involved in the survey. Learners involved in focus group discussions and educators in the focus group discussions is presented below.

Biographical information of learners: Survey research

The demographic profile of respondents is presented below in table 1, with reference to age, sex, race, language, and grade. For the quantitative strand of this study, a total of 679 respondents sampled from the nine participating schools completed self-administered questionnaires. However, two questionnaires could not be used due to errors.

Table 1 Biographical information of learners: Survey research (n=677)

Variable	Response options	Frequency	Percentage
Age	13-14	67	10
	15-16	356	53.1
	17-18	224	33.4
	19 & older	24	3.6
Sex	Female	344	51.7
	Male	322	48.3
Race	Black	517	78.7
	Coloured	35	5.3
	Indian	96	14.6
	White	9	1.4
Language	Afrikaans	24	3.6
	English	160	24
	Isindebele	19	2.8
	Sepedi	130	19.5
	Setswana	115	17.2
	Siswati	12	1.8
	Tshivenda	5	0.7
	Xitsonga	96	14.4
	Zulu	67	10.0
Grade	9	298	46
	10	354	54

Biographical information of learners: Focus group Interviews

The demographic profile of the participants is presented below in 2 with reference to age, sex, ethnicity, language, and grade.

Table 2 Biographical information: learners (n=47)

Age	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
14 – 15	20	42.5
16 – 17	24	51.1
18+	3	6.4
Total	47	100
Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	24	51.1
Female	23	48.9
Total	47	100
Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White	0	0
Black	33	70
Indian	9	19.9
Coloured	5	10.
Total	47	100

Age	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
English	13	27.7
Afrikaans	1	2.1
IsiZulu	8	17
Sepedi	11	23.4
Setswana	10	21.3
Tshivenda	0	0
Xitsonga	1	2.1
Isiswati	0	0
Isindebele	0	0
Other	3	6.4
Total	47	100
Grade	Number	Percentage
9	18	38.3
10	29	61.7
Total	47	100

Biographical information of educators: Focus group interviews

The biographical information of the educators relates to their age, sex, ethnicity, language, qualification, and number of years of teaching experience is presented in table 3 below.

Table 3 Biographical information: Educators (n=30)

Age	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
21-30	11	37
31-40	4	13
41-50	7	23
51+	8	27
Total	30	100
Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	9	30
Female	21	70
Total	30	100
Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White	8	27
Black	11	37
Indian	7	23
Coloured	4	13
Total	30	100
Language	Number	Percentage
English	8	27
Afrikaans	11	37
IsiZulu	3	10
Sepedi	6	20

Age	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Setswana	1	3
Tshivenda	1	3
Xitsonga	0	0
Isiswati	0	0
Isindebele	0	0
Other	0	0
Total	30	100
Qualification	Number	Percentage
Diploma	5	17
Degree	16	53
Post-graduate	9	30
Total	30	100
Teaching Experience	Number	Percentage
1-5	7	23
6-10	7	23
11+	16	54
Total	30	100

Integrated Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

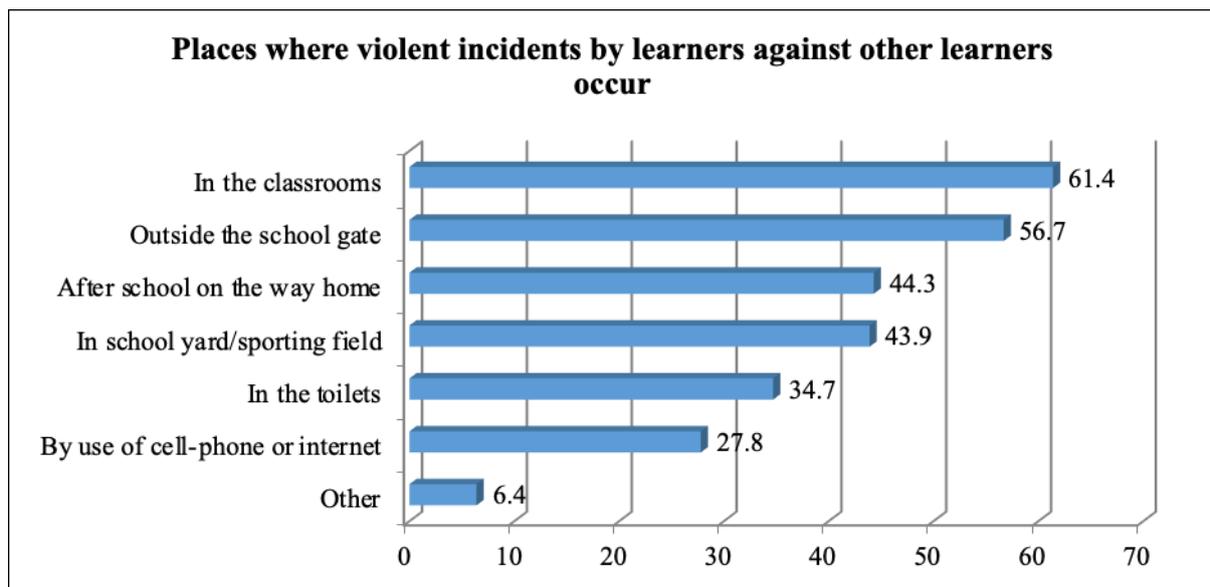
Findings indicate that learner-on-learner, learner-on-educator, and educator-on-learner violence is prevalent in all the participating schools. Included in this discussion are different typologies of school-based violence, namely: emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, gang, property, and cyber violence. These are presented and discussed below as themes.

Theme 1: Learner-on-learner violence

During all the focus group discussions with both educators and learners respectively, most participants reported that violence between learners is prevalent in their respective schools. Several educators revealed that often learners physically fight among themselves because of numerous issues. Learners also confirmed the infighting between themselves due to varied reasons. Furthermore, educators revealed that often learners physically fight among themselves using different instruments and objects.

Places where learner-on-learner violence occurs.

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate where these violent incidents by learners against other learners occur. The figure below depicts their responses:

Figure 1 Places where violent incidents by learners against other learners occur (n=677)

According to Figure 1 Places where violent incidents by learners against other learners occur (n=677), 61.4% (n=416) of the respondents indicated that the violent incidents occur in the classrooms; 56.7% (n=384) outside the school gate; 44.3% (n=300) after school on the way home; 34.7% (n=235) in the toilets and 43.9% (n=297) indicated that it occurs in the school yard or sports field. The least place where violent incidents by learners against other learners occur was at other unidentified places. The latest instrument used by learners against other learners was a cell phone or the internet, which accounted for 27.8% (n=188). To confirm that classrooms are the most common places where violence takes place, an educator said:

“There was this big fight earlier in my class and I couldn’t just deal with it anymore, you know you get to a point when you are tired. So, I stood far away on a corner next to my table and I watched the fight like everybody else.”

The results are consistent with studies by Burton and Leoschut (2013), which reveal that classrooms, open grounds and playing fields are common sites where violence takes place. Molosankwe (2015) states that most of these violent incidents happen in the presence of educators or when the learners are left alone unsupervised.

Theme 2: Educator-on-learner violence

Both qualitative findings and survey results indicate that learners are victimised not only by their peers, but also by educators. The results show that 19.3% (n=128) of the respondents indicated that they were physically abused by educators and another 40.3% (n=268) saw other learners being physically abused by educators. The respondents indicated that educators use foul language and objects to discipline learners. A Chi-square test for independence was used to investigate the relationship between sex and nature of violence and the question whether: “A learner ever experienced emotional abuse incident (s) that occurred at their school in the past 6-12 months, the results showing: $\chi^2 (1, n=593) = 7.324, (p=0.025)$, Cramer’s V (0.107). Respondents from townships were more likely to witness physical abuse of a learner by educators ($p=0.015$). The strength of the association is however weak.

The above findings confirm that violence perpetrated by educators against learners is prevalent and common in the participating schools despite the findings showing that less learners experience violence perpetrated by educators.

Theme 3: Learner-on-educator violence

Learner-on-educator violence was identified by educators at all the schools. Educators revealed that learners are disrespectful; they answer back or speak in South African indigenous languages which immigrant educators do not understand, to humiliate the educators. Further, it was revealed that learners threaten and insult the educators. Educators also reported that it is common for the big boys to verbally threaten junior educators, especially female educators, and threaten them with physical violence. This phenomenon was confirmed by the participating learners. Thus, there is convergence between the qualitative findings and the survey research regarding the prevalence of violence perpetrated against educators by learners. Survey research results reveal that 22.4% (n=149) of the respondents were aware that an educator was threatened with violence or physically assaulted by a learner.

Places where learner-on-educator violence occurs.

Respondents were also asked to indicate places where the violent incidents perpetrated against educators by learners occur. Figure 2 below indicates the places where the reported incidences of violence against educators are observed.

Figure 2 Places where these violent incidents against educators occur (n=677)

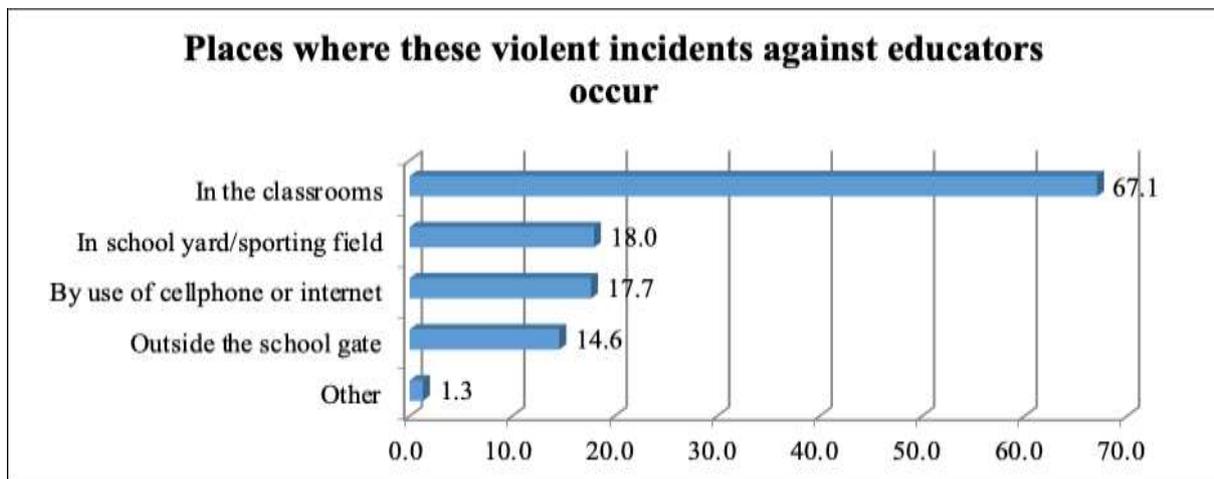


Figure depicts that violence perpetrated against educators occurs in the classrooms was indicated by most of the respondents (67.1%; n=454). The rest of the respondents indicated that violent incidents occur in the school yard/sports field (18%; n=122); by use of cell phone or internet (17.7%; n=120). Violent incidents perpetrated by learners against educators occur outside the school gate is slight. This accounted for (14.6%; n=99) of the reported cases.

Overall, there is convergence between the data regarding the prevalence of learner-on-educator violence in all the participating schools. The incidents occur in different places within the vicinity of the school and via the use of cellphones. The findings are compatible with several studies (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; De Wet, 2007) which confirm the extent of emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, gang, property, and cyber violence.

Discussing of Findings

The findings of the study are aligned to what is stated in the literature and to the findings of other studies. Literature indicates that violence is multi-dimensional comprising varied forms with each type differing according to frequency and the individuals' characteristics such as age and gender (Benbenishty & Astor, 2008). The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) (2008) reports that the nature of violence often depends on the social context in which it takes place such as whether it is between learner-on-learner, teacher-on-learner, and learner-on-teacher or by external people against both learners and teachers. Another view by Mncube and Harber (2013) indicates that violence emanates from different sources and involves different actors, often taking place in wide-ranging contexts. Du Plessis (2008) asserts that it is important to distinguish between the different kinds of violence, as it can easily be perceived as a single or general problem in society.

School violence takes many forms, varying from minor to severe acts of violence and aggression and includes corporal punishment, bullying, gang-related activities, sexual abuse, physical assault, verbal abuse, theft, robbery, and threats (Gevers & Flisher, 2012). The National School Violence Study focus is on verbal threats, physical assaults, robbery, and sexual assault; whilst other researchers (Burton, 2012) focus more on serious types of offences such as attacks with a weapon, rape, attempted murder, and murder. On the other hand, Du Plessis (2008) makes a distinction between political, gang, criminal, and relational violence whilst the SAHRC (2008) differentiates between learner against learner; learner against educator; educator towards learner and external persons against learners and educators.

Evidently, other forms of violence emanate from different sources and involve different actors and take place in wide-ranging contexts such as inside or outside the school premises (Mncube & Harber, 2013). In this study, it was found that verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, cyber, property, gang and systematic violence are all types of violence are often interrelated and affect many South African schools.

Implications and significance of the study

The establishment of a safe school environment for learners and educators is critical for ensuring effective teaching and learning. Safety and security are human rights issues, enshrined in the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (RSA, Act 108 of 1996).

It was envisaged that the study would contribute to the knowledge base of violence prevention, particularly in schools and generally in society, and as a result, foster safer schools and communities where people's rights to protection and education would be upheld. Furthermore, the significance of this study lies in its potential to influence social policy towards school-based prevention programmes and implementation by professionals such as social workers that would facilitate the growth and development of children and the youth.

Social workers are encouraged to incorporate critical thinking and uphold social values such as social justice and equality. In dealing with the issue of societal dysfunction, particularly school violence, it is crucial to explore the influence of socio-economic, political factors and cultural systems. It is also crucial to interrogate such issues as violation of human rights, inequality, prejudice, and stereotypes that perpetuate violence in society. Social workers are therefore expected to play a critical role in ensuring that such issues are addressed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, learner-on-learner, learner-on-educator, and educator-on-learner violence is prevalent in South African schools. The different typologies of school-based violence are around several spheres, namely: emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, gang, property, and cyber violence. The violence in schools can only be solved by multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder engagements.

A holistic approach is required to broadly assess and identify personal, social, economic, cultural, political, historical, technological, structural factors that contribute to different types and forms of violence in schools.

A comprehensive school-based violence prevention programme guided by the bio-ecological systems theory and practice frameworks such as developmental social work approach, social and emotional learning theory, character education and social cognitive and social competence approaches should be designed to target different types of violence.

In sum, violence is multi-dimensional and manifests in varied forms in schools and is exacerbated by varied contextual factors. Learners and educators are at risk of violence within the school context.

Recommendations

The nature of school-based violence is composite. As such, the following recommendations are made.

Future studies should further explore the causes of school-based violence in the context of the unique cultural and social factors and investigate similarities and differences between school violence in South Africa and other nations.

A holistic approach be designed to identify bio-psycho, social-political and technological strategies for responding to different forms of violence in schools.

The department of education, as the custodian of health and welfare of both learners and educators should establish violence prevention forums and task forces.

Academic and research institutions should conduct studies aimed at developing school violence intervention strategies and interventions.

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