

Exploring Factors Contributing to Crime and Violence in South African High Schools: The Case of 2008 Study on Nzululwazi High School in Alice Town, Eastern Cape, South Africa

S. M. Kang'ethe¹, Tatenda Manomano² and Moreblessing M. Ndonga³

¹*University of Fort Hare, Department of Social Work and Social Development,
Box XI314, Alice 5700 South Africa*

²*University of Free State, Department of Social Work, Nelson Mandela Road, Bloemfontein*

³*University of Fort Hare, Department of Development Studies*

E-mail: ¹<skangethe@ufh.ac.za>, ²<manomano T@ufs.ac.za.>, ³<200508994@ufh.ac.za>

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ABSTRACT This paper sought to explore the contributing factors of crime and violence in schools as a pathway to formulate alternative ways to bolster the perfidy currently experienced in schools in South Africa. A qualitative method was employed to explore the perceptions and experiences of the participants towards crime and violence in schools. The study was explorative in nature and the design took the form of a case study. An interview guide with semi-structured questions was utilized as a data collection tool to guide the administration of one-on-one in-depth interviews with the study participants. The findings indicated that: the location of schools contributes to violence; drug abuse by the students also contributes to violence and crime; lack of security services that search the students by the school premises and the crimes that go unreported also contribute to the perpetuation of crime and violence. These findings prompted these researchers to recommend for a comprehensive framework that addresses crime and violence in terms of ensuring security services are put in place and police forums and social workers should frequently be utilized in schools to ensure that all crimes and violence are prevented, and if they occur, they are reported urgently. To this end, it is hoped that the findings from this paper could form a platform to ring the bell to both the government and non-government officials to consider embarking on strategies and ways of protecting and safeguarding the children and the teachers in schools among other things.

INTRODUCTION

In a world where high levels of crime has immensely eroded families and communities, the phenomenon appears to have had a huge toll in the high schools in South Africa. However, the phenomenon of crime and violence is not just a challenge in South Africa, but affects many children in schools globally with pinching and horrendous effects not only on the results and throughputs, but also on the quality of citizenship that schools are supposed to mend (González 2012). Perhaps the western world schools have had a long history of the spate of violence in schools and some believe the state has been copied to African countries through the process of westernization, Eurocentrism, modernization and globalization (Kang'ethe 2014a). Perhaps the emphasis and pervasive understanding of human rights especially of the children by the children themselves could be exacerbating the prevalence of crime and violence in schools (UNRC 1989). In the United States of America, violence is a worm that has impinged on the progress of children in schools. Some of the contributing factors to crime and violence in schools include the prevalence of

drugs, poverty and other social problems affecting communities (Anderson 1998). Moreover, in South Africa, sexual abuse itself towards the girls has become a normal evil that can occur to any girl in the school environment, and the abuse of these girls by either the teachers or the students is on a rapid increase throughout the country (Human Rights Watch 2008). This has unashamedly seen halls and toilets among other places becoming breeding grounds for the sexual abuse of girls. Perhaps the laws of the country on sexuality indicating that it is not against the law for a girl as young as twelve to consent to sexual advances has exacerbated the situation (McQuoid-Mason 2011). The policy makers should know where such legislations are taking the country. It is a recipe for a state towards moral decadence that needs to be checked if other perfidious and horrendous effects such as the prevalence of HIV/AIDS are to be effectively tackled (Barnett and Whiteside 2006; Ndinga-Muvumba and Pharoah 2008; Kang'ethe 2014b; Human Rights Watch 2008). The most worrying fact concerning the impact of abuse on most of these abused children is that they are challenged psychologically and emotionally until their performance dwindles; lose morale

and interest to education; and have their concentration in education slide to the lowest ebb (Human Rights Watch 2008). Furthermore, bullying is also another form of violence that is rampant in schools in South Africa. Its existence is however a development from the apartheid regime where the whites were oppressing the blacks without any wrong done by them. This mindset was unfortunately and unconsciously carried on to the Post-Apartheid dispensation (Kang'ethe and Duma 2013). It is unfortunate that bullying can provoke deep feelings of fear, absenteeism and dropping out of school altogether (Ndonga et al. 2008). In South Africa, statistics indicate that 61 percent of high school learners are affected by bullying in Tshwane (Neser et al. 2003 as cited by Protogerou and Flisher n.d.) and nationally, statistics of bullying stood at 41 percent (Reddy et al. 2003 as cited by Protogerou and Flisher n.d.). It is against this backdrop that this article has been developed to explore empirically the contributing factors to crime and violence in the schools in South Africa with a 2008 case of Nzululwazi primary school in Alice Town, Eastern Cape.

Study Aims and Objectives

Whereas, the broad aim and objective of this study was to explore the kind of violence at Nzululwazi High School in Ntselamanzi, the aim and objective of this article is to explore the factors that contribute to the crime and violence in the schools in South Africa.

Problem Statement

The state of crime and violence in schools has reached unfathomable proportions threatening to tear the fabric of educational fraternity in South Africa. The worrying fact is that whereas schools are premised to be areas of training and development of various aspects of citizen empowerment such as maintaining peace and tranquility, they have become locations and central points of violence and crime. There is therefore immense concern about schools being the platforms of various forms of social vices such as drug abuse, students molesting one another and increasingly horrifying episodes of sexual harassment and sexual encounters. These are vices that cannot allow learning to flourish and need to be annihilated altogether, or the environment is changed to divert the tide of these vices. These debilitating circumstances impose

negative consequences on the social functioning and state of mind of the children. They challenge the spirit of studentship and also the spirit of one achieving qualitative citizenship. It is based on these complaints and indicators that this article has been prepared to document the contributing factors towards crime and violence as a means of alerting policymaking, NGOs as well as the government to promulgate possible solutions to fight this enigmatic challenge.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study utilized a qualitative research method in soliciting a *wide range of views* from the study participants. It was particularly useful because of its inductiveness and its ability to assist in exploring a phenomenon within a specific locale and context (Strauss and Corbin 1998 as cited by Fothler et al. 2008). The design took the form of a case study and this was essentially important since the study was explorative in nature. Designs differ in terms of detail and finality.

Method of Data Collection

The study purposively enlisted 12 grade nine learners from Nzululwazi by subjecting them to a one-on-one in-depth interview with the researchers. These learners were chosen randomly by their teachers. The pupils were found ideal because the other pupils were doing examinations.

Instrument of Data Collection

This study adopted the use of an interview guide with semi structured questions as a data collection tool to guide the administrations of the one-on-one in-depth interviews with the study participants.

Sampling Methodology

This study employed the probability sampling methodology and more specifically the random sampling method in selecting the participants for this study. This type of sampling method was ideally chosen because it increased the chances of selection and thereby increasing the generalizability and representativeness (Babbie 2007; Neuman 2006) of the results against the study population.

Data Analysis

The researchers were conversant with IsiXhosa language and according to the qualitative rule of qualitative data collection criteria formed the primary data collection instruments (Babbie 2007; Neuman 2006). All the data from the interviews was analyzed using the content thematic analysis, whereby the data was organized into a family of codes, categorized and rearranged into themes and subthemes according to the emergent views from the study participants.

Research Domain

The data was collected in October 2008 and analyzed in October and November 2008. The data was collected from Nzululwazi High School located in Ntselamanzi, Alice Town, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This location was ideally chosen for this study because of the widespread complaints associated with crime and violence from the neighborhood as well. Its proximity to the University where these researchers reside made it an ideal location to carry out the study.

FINDINGS

Age

The findings indicated that 7 of the study participants were aged 13 years while 4 of the learners were aged 14 years and one was aged 15 years old (Table 1). On gender, 4 of the learners were males whereas 8 of the learners were

Table 1: Age, gender and grade of the study participants

Participant (students)	Pseudo names	Age (years)	Grades	Sex
1	Yandiswa	13	9	Female
2	Sino	13	9	Male
3	Amanda	13	9	Female
4	Dineo	14	9	Female
5	Thembaletu	13	9	Male
6	Bukosi	15	9	Male
7	Zimkita	14	9	Female
8	Hope	14	9	Female
9	Siyanda	13	9	Female
10	Siphokazi	13	9	Female
11	Stanley	13	9	Male
12	Yolanda	14	9	Female

females. These findings indicated that there was a state of gender discrepancy in that females outnumbered the males, which is a common feature recorded in South African statistics that females generally outnumber the males (Statistics South Africa (SSA) 2010).

The Location of Nzululwazi is a Den of Drug Abuse

The findings indicated that most of the participants revealed that the location of Nzululwazi high school is affected by crime and violence because it is closer to Ntselamanzi township where there is a lot of drug abuse. These findings were supported by the following sentiments from the beneficiaries who were subjected to a one-on-one interview:

"The young boys buy drugs from Ntselamanzi because the use of drugs is very high and even those that sell are easy to locate within this community. The phenomenon makes these boys to be violent and to want to commit crime"

"It is very unsafe at school because most of the learners are under the influence of drugs and one can't be certain whether he/she will leave school without being raped or even bullied."

These findings indicate that a lot of crime and violence takes place at Nzululwazi High School due to the critical location of the school in Ntselamanzi location where there is a lot of drug peddling. This state of affairs could prompt violent behavior that affects other innocent children. It is quite unfortunate that drugs have terrible effects on the learners as they effectively disturb their normal functioning and prompt them to engage in unlawful behavior which can pose a threat to their lives as well as other school colleagues. If unattended to, these people can cause much harm that could have been avoided if the location was cleaned up by police and restored to sanity.

Unreported Cases of Crime Contributes to More Crime

The findings from this study revealed that most of these study participants indicated that they do not report these crimes due to the fear of being further harassed by the culprits, or due to sheer cowardice. Some pupils may also not be sure of their rights to fight molestation by the bigger boys or crime perpetrators. These find-

ings were supported by the following qualitative perceptions from the beneficiaries who were subjected to a one-on-one in-depth interview by the researchers:

“My food was taken during break time by a grade 11 pupil, I feared antagonizing him for he can make me a target all the time.”

“A grade 10 student touched my breast but I could not report because I was afraid of being beaten after school and this can continue till I leave this school.”

These findings revealed that some of the crimes were not reported by the victims, prompting the criminals to continue unabatedly. Failure by the victims to report the culprits only helped them to realize an open slate to commit crime without fear or minding the law enforcers. It is very clear that a criminal is likely to continue doing the same thing if actions or measures to reprimand him or her are not put in place. It is unfortunate that most children are forced to grow under such unsafe and merciless circumstances where they cannot contest for their rights. It is therefore important for the government to consider educating the children on their rights and how they can exploit them, as well as ensure that the children are safe in schools.

Drugs Such as Dagga are Smoked at School

The findings from this study revealed that most of the study participants indicated that crime and violence was prompted by the fact that some boys smoked dagga at the school premises. These findings were supported by the following qualitative perceptions from the beneficiaries who were subjected to a one-on-one in-depth interview with the researchers:

“Most boys smoke dagga at break time and after that they come and harass others in front of the whole class.”

“Apparently there is virtually nothing done to stop those drugged with dagga to harass other pupils especially the smaller ones. We are perpetually in fear of these boys because we know something bad will happen at school.”

The findings from this study revealed that most of the boys take dagga during *break time* and this is unfortunately giving them the pressure to commit any form of crime and violence at school. If they were not smoking dagga during school time, perhaps this could reduce chances of them becoming violent and harass their col-

leagues. In such a state of affairs it could be very important if a monitoring exercise is utilized to regulate and ensure that there is no smoking taking place at the schools and if a learner is caught, then there is need to surrender him/her to either rehabilitation centers or even to have him/her arrested or removed from the school altogether. This could also stabilize the schools and improve the performance of the learners at the end of the day. This also points to the weakness of the administrators in maintaining discipline in the school.

Lack of Security Services Encourages Students to Bring Dangerous Weapons in School

The findings from this study revealed that lack of security services manning the school gate prompted learners to bring weapons that help them to commit crime and violence. These sentiments were supported by the following qualitative perceptions from the beneficiaries who were subjected to a one-on-one in-depth interview with the researchers:

“There are no security guards at our school to search for weapons and this unfortunately makes some unruly students to bring weapons and other illegal material that promotes crime and violence. The situation warrants urgent intervention.”

These findings revealed that the lack of security guards positioned at the gates and other key entrance points has unfortunately made it easier for students who desire to bring weapons and other substances, to bring them to school. It is quite unfortunate that this condition has created a palatable environment for crime and violence. These weapons are used to inculcate fear, harass and make the victims oblige to the demands of the culprits. It indicates that no one at the school is safe because there is no one who is able to detect those weapons before they kill, injure or damage someone or the school property.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study revealed that there were more female learners than males. This is a state that is mirrored by national statistics that indicate that females outnumber the males in South Africa (SSA 2010). The findings also indicated that the school is situated in areas where drugs are peddled and the abusers likely

to engage in crime. With more girls being the target of crime in school, they are likely to abscond, drop off and therefore become the victims of the process of feminization of both poverty and HIV/AIDS (Musekiwa 2013; Kang'ethe 2013). This is unfortunate considering the fact that HIV/AIDS prevalence in South Africa has affected institutions of learning more than other segments of the population (Kang'ethe and Mutopa 2014). Ensuring of especially the girl children should be a primary concern and priority from both the traditional and local government. This is to avoid their marginalization and exploitation in the form of violence and crime against them. This can be done by utilizing educational campaigns against sexual abuse and harassment as well as through the media and other forums.

The findings revealed that all the learners that were interviewed were from grade 9 and their ages ranged from 13 to 15 which is an age cohort that has also been identified through statistics to be more affected by crime and violence in schools either through bullying or sexual abuse. Other research findings from Western Cape confirm that bullying affected many learners in high school and at least thirty-six percent of the learners were found to be involved in bullying between grade 8 and 11 (Liang et al. 2007 as cited by Blake and Louw 2010). This problem of bullying was also causing a grave concern as it was also found to be affecting learners in the schools in Free State Province (De Wet 2005). Furthermore, about 24.3 percent of grade 9 students were badly affected by bullying in Port Elizabeth (Flisher et al. 2006 as cited by Protogerou and Flisher n.d.).

Study findings also revealed that the location of Nzululwazi High School was prone to drug peddling because the school is located in Ntselamanzi location where poverty and unemployment are more pronounced and there is also a lot of drug abuse. Since, some of the learners come from that area, it is not shocking that the school is suffering from violent behaviour. Other anecdotal evidence indicates that violence is also linked to the socio-economic status of the location as areas of less economic development are believed to have inherited a lack of respect and dignity towards one another, a state bequeathed by Apartheid era. This is because people from these areas were oppressed and neglected and therefore tend to view bullying, vio-

lence and crime as a normal part of life (Department of Social Development (DOSD) 2012). Statistics actually indicate that learners who take drugs are three times more likely to be involved in violent crime (Fedhealth 2013). A study conducted by the Drug Alliance of South Africa indicated that sixty-nine percent of the participants revealed that they were aware that drugs were readily available in their schools while thirty-four percent of the participants revealed that they had taken drugs in the previously (Stott 2013).

The study findings also revealed that one of the contributing factors to crime was the lack of security service at the Nzululwazi high school. This state of affairs unfortunately creates an enabling atmosphere for bad children to bring weapons or even drugs to school. Other researchers reveal circumstances in which school violence and crime have been fatal. For example, according to Mncube et al. (2013), there were two learners who died at one of the school premises; while a 16 year old boy was killed and three others were wounded at Beauvallon Secondary School in Valhalla, Western Cape (The *Eye Witness News* 01 March 2012 as cited by Mncube et al. 2013: 01). Moreover, an 18 year old boy was stabbed in the neck at Verentoe High School in Auckland Park, Johannesburg outside the school gates due to a misunderstanding about a ball (The *Citizen* 02 March 2012 as cited by Mncube et al. 2013). This state of affairs indicates the lack of a comprehensive security system that protects and ensures that children are safe from harm whilst they are at school. The government needs to work out modalities to ensure the safety of children at school and also to have the administration ensure that weapons do not get into the school premises.

The findings from this study indicated that drugs such as dagga are being smoked during school time at school. In such circumstances, the drug users are more at risk of committing crime and violence because they will be under the influence of those drugs. Other perceptions actually document that the use of drugs and alcohol are critical factors that contribute to violent crime in schools (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) 2008). To this end, scientific explanations indicate that the use of drugs have a psychological effect on the user that can also disturb their mind and psychological make-up and strain them until they

are incapable of doing the right thing (Atkinson et al. 2009; Kang'ethe and Rhakudu 2010). Furthermore, a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicated that school violence can reduce the academic performance and instill feelings of fear and isolation as well as affect the physical and mental health of the victims (UN 2012 as cited by Burton and Leoschut 2013).

The findings from this study revealed that most of the crimes go unreported and this contributes to more crime because the perpetrators do not face the full wrath of the law or even the stages of prosecution. This agrees with sentiments that indicate the vulnerability of women to report crimes (Wilson 2001). In the same vein, international bodies such as the WHO indicate that there are reasons that make people not to report crimes which range from inadequate support systems, fear of retaliation and fear or risk of being blamed (World Health Organization (WHO) 2012). Moreover, in Gauteng, forty-four percent of learners who were bullied reported that no action was taken towards the perpetrators and in such circumstances violent crime could continue unabated (UNISA 2012).

CONCLUSION

Although South Africa has gone a long way in championing commendable rights and needs of children especially on acquisition of their education, it is however worrying that the state of violence and crime in the high schools remains a horrendous and pinching quagmire that needs urgent address. The high rates of this scourge appear to be hindering and impeding many of the children from benefiting from this resource. It is never too late for the country to establish mechanisms and strategies to bolster the challenge of crime and violence in schools. It is hoped that this paper will be a platform upon which the policy makers, NGOs, private sector and private individuals work towards addressing the quagmire of crime and violence in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is based on the findings from this study that the following recommendations have been documented:

- ♦ The placement of security services is very pivotal and crucial to ensure that no use of

drugs takes place at school the premises. This will also curb any incident of weapons finding their way to school.

- ♦ The role of the social workers in assessing the impact of crime in schools cannot be overemphasized to strengthen those that have been affected and victimised to improve their performance and independence among other things.
- ♦ Combating violence and crime in schools should attract national priority. Schools should be havens of peace and tranquillity if learning will be effectuated.
- ♦ Educational campaigns and affirmative action programmes that target especially the needy and vulnerable communities with higher rates of crime and violence are critical.
- ♦ The law enforcement structures should be effective to handle crime cases happening in schools. There is also a need to educate the children on their rights and instilling confidence in them to report any violation of their rights physically or even emotionally.
- ♦ It is imperative for communities that have drug abuse cases to be cleaned up as this state of affairs negatively impacts on the schools of those communities.

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