Gang-related Violence in South African Schools

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ABSTRACT This paper reports on a primarily qualitative study which also employed some quantitative research methods in collecting data in six provinces in South Africa. In order to get at the lived reality of gang-related violence in schools, qualitative research was used and to get an overall picture of gang-related violence in South African schools, quantitative research was also used. Data was collected from a range of members of the school governing bodies namely learners, parents, teachers and non-teaching staff. The results confirm the enormity of gang-related violence in schools. Findings showed that the fear of gang-related violence at school can be as harmful as primary victimisation and personal experiences of violence, causing learners to drop out or avoid school, or to lose concentration in the classroom and in learners developing healthy pro-social relationships as actual victimisation. It was also found gang violence is a destructive phenomenon and has a negative effect on the delivery of quality of education. The study is concluded with recommendations extracted from relevant literature as well as comments expressed by the participants of this study. Through collective ownership, responsibility and self-reliance, communities can succeed in reducing the incidence and prevalence of violence within their community. A standardised code of conduct and school safety policy are vital tools in the prevention and management of school-based violence, but should be adjusted to meet the school's specific needs regarding violence and discipline. Schools should have access to effective psychological support to counter the effects of violence and to foster and reinforce effective coping strategies.Whilst this study intends to improve our understanding of school-related violence and fill some of the gaps identified by previous studies, it is clear that further research is needed.