Ukuthwala "Bride abduction" and Education: Critical Challenges and Opportunities Faced by School Principals in Rural Kwazulu-Natal

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ABSTRACT The present research study explores how the school principals in rural KwaZulu – Natal, South Africa, experience bride abductions in their schools. It draws on systems theory. Data was collected using purposive sample and in-depth interviews with four school principals and two superintendents of Education Management. All interviews were conducted in isiZulu, tape – recorded, then transcribed and translated in English for wider readership. Content analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings suggested that bride abductions had negative impact on schooling and education at large such as the high rate of absenteeism, drop-outs and matric failure rate. The researcher argued that this is against the policy on compulsory school attendance. Further, the governance of every public school is in the hands of the school governing body, of which the principal is a member. As a way of looking forward, the researcher locates principals at the centre of bringing about change to negative cultural practices that impact negatively on education in their schools and argues that principals have power and influence on the communities which they serve and therefore must use it to end bride abductions in the communities which they serve.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been said about the practice of bride abduction in South Africa and beyond and the effects thereof in particular on a girl child. However, what came out clearly were the negative effects that the practice had in particular on the education of a girl child (Wadesango et al. 2011; Van der Watt and Ovens 2012; Kaschula et al. 2013; Kheswa and Hoho 2014; Ntabazalila 2014). Abuses of *ukuthwala* (bride abduction) have been perpetrated without the girl's consent and have negative effects on her education, health, physical and psychological well-being. United Nations Human Development Report of 1920 – 2011 states that:

Disadvantages facing women and girls are a major source of inequality. All too often, women and girls are discriminated against in health, education and the labor market – with negative repercussions for their freedoms (Moletsane 2011).

This assertion is the pillar for the human rights activists as well as for the women's rights advocates, who are of the opinion that despite the diverse cultural, social and political meanings assigned to the practice, *ukuthwala* (bride

abduction) perpetuates a form of gender-based violence in patriarchal communities and that it entrenches patriarchal power. However, Kaschula et al. (2013: 151) cautions that:

"Any observation of a culture and its norms from outside the culture will always be fraught, biased and emotionally charged, not least when the traditions or customs side in direct opposition to the norms of the observer. Ukuthwala and ala kachuu are no exception."

Ala kachuu is a bridal abduction custom in Kyrgyzstan, officially known as the Kyrgyz Republic, a Turkish state with a constitutional democracy that was put in place in 2010 (Kaschula et al. 2013).

In the quest for social justice in the context of a democratic South Africa, the South African Law Reform Commission (2014) has, in a discussion study, proposed a law to criminalise forced marriage. The Commission proposes that parents and community members who "aid and abet" a marriage or consent to bride abduction could face prosecution if the wife-to-be has not consented. In addition, South Africa has witnessed the criminalisation of forced bride abduction as Ntabazalila (2014) writes:

Mvumeleni Jezile was handed down the harshest sentence that the NPA has secured in

the country. He was convicted in the first ukuth-
wala (bride abduction) case in the Western Cape
and was sentenced to 22 years imprisonment.

Although the practice is said to have disap-
peared due to social transformation, however,
evidence suggests that it is prevalent at least in
deep rural areas of South Africa such as in Kwa-
Zulu –Natal and Eastern Cape provinces and
possibly in other areas. The below citation is
indicative of the fact that bride abductions are
still taking place in KwaZulu-Natal, South Afri-
ca as Bhengu (2005) writes:

Uproar as a result of abduction taking
place at school: A great disappointment wheth-
er Ms Pinky Khule aged 19, of Sigedleni at
KwaMaphumulo will write matric exams next
week following her abduction from school
(Translated from an isiZulu Newspaper,
Isolezwe 2005: 3).

In KwaZulu-Natal, there has been much
media coverage and debate about the practice
of *ukuthwala* (bride abduction). Evidentially,
Sikhakhane and Ncalane (2010: 2) report in
Isolezwe, an isiZulu daily newspaper in KZN,
about chief of Nhlangwini's practice of *ukuth-*
wala (bride abduction). In the same newspaper
Mjoli (2010: 4) also reports that the chief of Nh-
langwini, Melizwe Dlamini, sent messengers in
three black cars in daylight to *thwala* (carry
away) Ms Monica Msani, aged 24, of High Flats,
an area on the northern outskirts of KZN, how-
ever, Ms Msani ran away. The above media re-
ports indicated that *ukuthwala* is still happen-
ing in some parts of the country. It is also appar-
ent that people have different views about the
practice, and some people seek solace from the
law for protection against the practice. Howev-
er, it seems that the law is not the solution as
when the incidents of bride abductions were re-
ported to the police abductors got jailed but were
later released as they were not found guilty.

However, the question we need to ask our-
selves is why the practice of bride abduction
does not come to an end, if it has negative ef-
fects on a girl child and on the communities where
the practice exists. The majority of South Afri-
can communities such as rural KwaZulu – Natal
and Eastern Cape observed bride abductions in
silence and claimed it is the part of their culture.
School girls are waylaid on their way to and from
school and consequently find themselves in
"nuptial beds" with complete strangers (Nkosi
2009). Schools are affected by bride abductions

but nothing has been done to investigate how
schools respond to the effects of bride abduc-
tions on education of their learners. The present
research, therefore, seeks to fill in that gap by
looking into the critical challenges and opportu-
nities faced by school leaders in rural KwaZulu
–Natal with regards to the effects of bride ab-
ductions in their schools and in education at
large.

The majority of South African schoolgirls
as young as 12 years are abducted and made
wives against their will in most cases by total
strangers. Abductions take place at school, and
between school and home. In most cases the
men (abductors) are between 55 and 70 years
old, widowed and HIV positive (Prince 2009).
This happens in the name of the cultural prac-
tice of bride abduction. Bride abduction as a
cultural practice is supposed to open up mar-
riage negotiations. The man who carries away a
woman is not supposed to engage in sexual in-
tercourse with a woman on the very same day of
the occurrence to protect a girl's virginity, for
such an act would be equal to rape. Once, the
marriage is consummated then the married cou-
ple may start engaging in sexual intercourse.
Such an observation on the nature of the cus-
tom of bride abduction was also made by Koya-
na and Becker (2007). He contends that it was
against customary law for the young man who
carried away the girl to have intercourse with
her (emphasis added). The young woman who
has been carried away was immediately placed
in the midst and care of the sisters of the abduc-
tor and in most cases under the strict supervi-
sion of the older women of the house and was
treated with the utmost kindness and respect.
This was done to entice her to wish to go ahead
with the marriage and be part of the caring fam-
ily that carried her away. Marriage negotiations
are not yet opened, until the messenger from the
carried away woman's family comes to find out
from her if she wishes to carry on with her ab-
ductor, if she agrees, it is then that marriage ne-
gotiation resumes with the girl's consent.

The abductor first has to send off marriage
negotiators as soon as possible (the following
day) to open up marriage negotiations with the
girl's family. The girl's family would then have to
send a messenger, usually a girl's immediate fam-
ily member, to get her consent to marry. Upon
her agreement, the marriage negotiation process
would proceed, but if she does not agree, then

marriage negotiations would stop there. As such an act is tantamount to committing an offence, a man who carried away a young woman with intent to marry is liable to pay a penalty called *Inkomo yokuthwala* (a penalty cow) whether marriage negotiations continue or cease. Therefore, by contrast to forced bride abduction which is criminality and illegal, *ukuthwala* is not illegal, but is a preliminary to marriage negotiation not yet marriage per se but an event or rather a per formative act leading to the process of marriage.

Various reasons prevail that account for the custom of *ukuthwala* (to carry away) (Nkosi and Buthelezi 2013). The main reason for the custom of *ukuthwala* is to open up marriage negotiation process where it is difficult to do so in a normal way. Difficulty could be caused by the parents of the girl who are not keen to give consent may be because they do not like their daughter's future husband. It could happen that the girl is acting against their parents' will who wish to marry her off to the person that the girl does not like. In this case the girl may connive with the person whom she loves and arrange to be carried away with her consent but would pretend as if she does not like where she is going by pretending to be forcibly abducted. In some cases, the abductor really loves the girl and the girl is already engaged, then he resorts to the abuse of *ukuthwala* (bride abduction). It could happen that the abductor is faced with high competition of his age-mates who also want the girl, and consequently resort to bridal abduction against / with her consent. *Ukuthwala* is arranged and in most cases with the girl's consent. The question we need to ask ourselves is where do the abductors find a girl? In most cases the woman avails herself as she is found somewhere and not in the house. The woman does this to protect her dignity so she cannot lose face and thus risking to be labelled as a lose woman who will consequently face social stigma.

However, cultural practices are evolving with time, and so is the cultural practice of bride abduction. Nowadays, some people abuse the custom of bride abduction to suit their needs. As an instance, on 31 May 2009, the Sunday Times Newspaper reported that, "in the Eastern Cape, more than 20 school girls are forced to drop out of school every month because of bride abductions". Girls, as young as 12 years are forced to marry men who are old enough to be their fathers. Their parents play a role in their

abduction. The two main contributing factors to the changes in the custom are poverty and parental greed. Kheswa and Hoho (2014) argued that:

Patriarchal attitude of parents and poverty stricken backgrounds are among factors contributing towards "ukuthwala" "(bride abduction)". Drawing from gender-strain and social-exchange theories, vulnerable girls are being sold by parents for poverty relief, without considering that owing to lack of negotiation of safe sex between the girls and abductors, HIV/AIDS transmission is likely.

Further, some of these girls are virgins and the men they are forced to marry are HIV positive (Prince 2009). This is not the way traditional bride abduction is done. Traditional bride abduction was intended for people of the same age group who, in the normal course of events, would have been expected to marry each other. Old men were never engaged in traditional bride abduction. Further, the custom of bride abduction was meant for young women at a marriageable age, identified by their dress code which signifies the stage at which a young maiden is at. The custom was not meant for the minors. Nowadays, the abuse of the custom of bride abduction resulted in the violation of women's rights. In the present study, the researcher has prioritised education as the basic human right.

The evolving nature of the custom of bride abduction and the fact that it is unwritten, but handed over from generation to generation by word of mouth, makes it difficult to ascertain the true custom as practised in the community. Further, the custom of bride abduction not only differs between nations, but between ethnic groups within those nations, and between tribes within those ethnic groups (Mwambene and Sloth-Nielsen 2011; Nkosi 2014). For this, complications are evident in understanding the practice of bride abduction leaving each tribe, and each person, with a distinct view of what constitutes the real custom of *ukuthwala* (the custom of bride abduction) which is said to be traditional and acceptable. This is what Thornberry (2013) referred to as the living customary law. Statutes, textbooks and case law, as a result, may no longer reflect the living law. Arguably, abuses of customary law are at times construed as a true reflection of customary law, and these abuses tend to distort the true customary law and undermine its value (Thornberry 2013). The difficulty is one

of identifying the living customary law and separating it from its distorted version. *Ukuthwala,* is an old custom that is now distorted like many other traditional practises, is an example of this confusion. The way *ukuthwala* (the custom of bride abduction) is practised now makes it a form of violence against women and specifically, against girl children. In some parts of rural Kwa-Zulu-Natal and in other areas in South Africa and in some other places, with social transformation and education, the traditional custom vanished as it had become old fashioned and outdated, however, it is highly evident that among the traditionalists who did not convert to Christianity and who are not educated in Western standards, there has always been continuity in terms of customary law and traditional lifestyle. Arguably, these are the people predominantly found in deep rural areas who uphold cultural practices like *ukuthwala* (the custom of bride abduction) with high esteem.

Abduction has a negative impact on the learner, her family, the larger community, the school, and the education system at large, as girls drop out from school at an early age and contribute to the largely illiterate group of people and low education standards that have an adverse influence on the economy of the country. The majority of girls who are abducted have registered for matriculation examination and drop out before the examination process starts (see, for example, Bhengu 2005).

Section (3) (1) of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 stipulates that school attendance is mandatory for every child from the age of seven to the age of fifteen (Department of Education 1997). However, most of the girls are denied compulsory education as they are abducted as early as the age of 12 and their abductors do not allow them to return to school. Some girls get abducted, absent themselves from school for a very long period of time, sometimes manage to escape from their marriages through abduction, and come back to school in the same year. School principals face this challenge daily and are afraid of interfering with this custom that is observed in silence within the communities in which they serve. Besides, principals have a duty and obligation to change negative cultural practices that have a detrimental impact on education in their schools. This can be done through the involvement of the school governing body (SGB), the community, teachers, learn-

ers and Department of Education officials such as the superintendent of education management (SEM), and the psychological services.

The aim of the research reported in the study sought to explore the role of the rural KZN school principals in understanding and managing the impact of bridal abductions in their schools with the aim of identifying opportunities that they might have in dealing with challenges at hand. The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 provided the context for this research, which was qualitative in design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among principals of schools in selected schools in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The interviews were conducted in isiZulu and were tape–recorded. The data was transcribed and translated into English for report writing and for access to a wide readership. Data was categorised and analysed according to emerging themes and a conclusion was drawn.

Context of the Study

Section (3) (1) of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 stipulates that compulsory school attendance by every learner from the age of seven to the age of fifteen is mandatory (Department of Education 1997). Section (5) of the SASA stipulates that if a learner who is subject to compulsory attendance in terms of subsection (1) is not enrolled at or fails to attend a school, the Head of Department may (a) investigate the circumstances of the learner's absence from school; (b) take appropriate measures to remedy the situation; and (c) failing such a remedy, issue a written notice to the parent of the learner requiring compliance with subsection (1). Section (6) (b) of the SASA stipulates that subject to this Act and any other applicable law, any other person who, without just cause, prevents a learner who is subject to compulsory attendance from attending a school, is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months (Department of Education 1997).

Further, in this paper the researcher is engaging the question whether the school principal can really change the historically embedded cultural practice by arguing that indeed the principal has a duty and obligation to change negative cultural practices that impact negatively on education in his school through education and

awareness campaigns and through the involvement of school governing body (SGB), community, teachers, and learners and by the involvement of the department of education's officials such as the superintendent of education management (SEM), the department of education's psychological services such as social workers, life orientation and the life skills subject advisors to the life of the school. This argument is premised from an understanding that the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 mandated every public school to establish a school governing body (SGB) consisting of parents of children at the school, educator and non – educator staff at the school, learners (in the case of secondary schools), co-opted members of the community, and the principal as an ex –officio member (Department of Education 1997). SASA places the governance of every public school in the hands of the school governing body (SGB), a structure chaired by an elected parent [Section 16 (1)]. Section 20 (1) of the SASA endows the SGB with the decision making authority to determine the policies and rules by which schools are organized and controlled. This arrangement is based on the notion that the community knows the needs of the school and is in the best position to solve its own problems as well as that citizens must be accorded the opportunity to decide on matters that affect them (Vandeyar 2000 cited in Calitz et al. 2002).

While school governance and management are not synonymous (Khuzwayo 2007), the SGB (led by the chairperson) and the school management team (SMT) (led by the principal) have arguably become "two centers of power within a school" (Khuzwayo and Chikoko 2009). They argue that this is especially so given that the principal serves in both structures. With such powers and authority vested in the hands of the principal, the researcher, therefore, argued that it is possible to influence other stakeholders (as mentioned above) that form part in the life of his school by explaining the negative impact that bride abduction has on the life of the school. Such an engagement would lead to the involvement of the entire community and together possible solutions may come up.

The present research study, therefore, explores the role of the rural KZN school principals in understanding and managing the impact of bridal abduction custom and the abuse of such a custom (bride abductions) in their schools with an aim of identifying opportunities that they might have in dealing with challenges at hand. To understand the phenomenon at hand and the role played by school principals in managing its impact the researcher uses the systems theory as a framework which the researcher discusses in the following section.

Theoretical Framework: Systems Theory

The theoretical framework of a research study relates to the philosophical basis on which the research is based, and forms the link between the theoretical aspects and practical component of the paper conducted (Sinclair 2007). Thus, the point of departure to any research, it is imperative to consider the relevant theory underpinning the knowledge base of the phenomenon to be investigated. A theoretical framework is also inclusive of reference to the research question, line of inquiry and methodology determining the research (Ocholla and Le Roux 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore how the school principals of KZN manage the impact of bride abduction in their schools and to unravel the opportunities that might prevail to deal with challenges at their disposal using the Systems Theory in providing an analysis. In addition, the systems theory was used to investigate the experiences of school principals in managing the impact of bride abductions on education in their schools. Systems theory sees different levels and groups of people as interactive systems where the functioning of the whole is dependent on the interaction between all parts (Swart and Pettipher 2001). A school, for instance, is a system with different parts, such as its staff, its students, its curriculum, and its administration, and its stakeholders. To understand the whole system, we must examine the relationships between its different parts. As in the example of school and community, the interdependence between its parts forms the system as a whole. The school exists because of learners who come from the community. This means the school principal has a relationship with the community and the community has the relationship with the school principal. If the community blocks the way of learners from coming to school, then there is no school. Further, if something goes wrong in the community from where learners come from, the entire school is destabilized. Evidentially, the practice of bride abduction tak-

ing place in communities allows men to abduct school going children and make them their wives. Women, including school girls are brutally assaulted if they resist abductions. Onlookers observe in silence. Girls are abducted on their way to and from school. In most cases, abducted women do not go back to school and others do if they could manage to escape from their abductors, but they come back traumatized as abducted women and others are witnesses of abductions. Other girls do not want to go to school in fear of being abducted on their way to or from school. The trauma serves as a barrier to their learning (Kheswa and Hoho 2014)

In an inclusive classroom environment, the teacher has to respond to all learners' individual needs. Swart and Pettipher (2001: 19) viewed that "inclusion is about all learners and not just a few. It is not just about disability, but means responding to all learners' individual needs". This, therefore, serves as a challenge to some teachers, especially those who have been in the education system prior to the introduction and implementation of the Education Labor Relations Council (ELRC) document that are not trained as counselors. The ELRC document stipulates seven norms and standards of which a teacher as a counselor is one of them.

Swart and Pettipher (2001) noted that the inclusion cannot be separated from school reform as well as from educational change. They argued this does not happen automatically as it demands that principals, teachers and the school community possess knowledge and skills in educational change and school reform. For change to take place, the principal should be a transformational leader (Bush 2003). In addition, Ainscow (1999) called for shared or transformational leadership which acknowledges that every school community member, including educators and parents, can be a leader and that leadership role needs to be acknowledged and developed. The school principal must recognize his responsibility to set the tone of the school and help the school as a whole to become and maintain a supportive, caring community (Swart and Pettipher 2001: 19). Systems theory advocates system and subsystem interaction. This means whole systems can interact with other systems around them. Further, subsystems can also overlap with other subsystems. All parts of the system affect the system as a whole, that is, whatever happens in one part affects all other parts

(Swart and Pettipher 2001). This theory is helpful to understand how the school principals manage the challenges in their schools as the results of the problems coming from the communities which they serve with special reference to bride abductions. Whilst there is vast literature on school and community partnerships and challenges faced by school principals but there is none on the challenges faced by school principals as the result of bride abductions. Having these reasons, a literature review is necessary, which is the focus, the researcher pivots into the following sections.

Literature Review

School and community partnerships have been observed as crucial by several scholars (see for example, Heystek and Louw 1999; Mncube 2009, 2010; Myende 2011, 2013; Myende and Chikoko 2014). Further, research revealed the importance of communication at various levels and among stakeholders for effective leadership and effective management within schools (see for example, Bhengu and Mthembu 2014; Bush 2008). Networking, influencing, and negotiating with the community are the responsibilities of the principal if effective leadership and effective management has to be achieved at school (Achua and Lussier 2010: 157-164). Thus, the sound role relationships of the principal and the community which she serves become crucial if both parties are to pull in one direction towards the advancement of the school vision and mission.

To get ahead in an organization you will have to influence people to gain power, play organizational politics, network and negotiate to get what you want (Achua and Lussier 2010). The ability to make use of these related concepts is what (Bhengu and Mthembu 2014; Achua and Lussier 2010) call effective leadership. They argued that leadership is the "influencing" process of leaders and followers to achieve organizational objectives through change. "Influencing is so important that it is called the essence of leadership. Influence has a direct effect on organizational performance and your career success" (Coburn 2011, cited in Achua and Lussier 2010: 140). The principal of the school is perceived as having influence on the community which he / she serves.

Networking is part of politics, and through networking you can develop your power and

influence (Clark 2009). Position power is derived from top management. Thus, a school principal has more potential power to influence than an employee who is not a manager (Achua and Lussier 2010: 141). Networking is one of the leadership skills required as a school manager. Research has shown the importance of networking in career success (Ng et al. 2009; Clark 2009). "It's who you know, not what, that's responsible for the big things in your professional life" (Hooiberg and Lane 2008: 46). More people find what they want through networking. Networking produces a number of other positive outcomes including friendships, information benefits, heightened control, and power (Ng et al. 2009).

Negotiation is an attempt to get what we want. When we and another person both want something from each other, we are in conflict and can negotiate to get what we want (Kaiser and Kaplan 2006). Thus, "negotiating is a process in which two or more parties are in conflict and attempt to come to an agreement" (Achua and Lussier 2010: 164) and hence negotiation skills are important in this regard. As a result, school and community partnerships depend on the principal's ability to network, influence, and negotiate if effective leadership and effective management have to be achieved at school. In an effort to understand the role played by school principals to manage the impact of bride abductions in their schools a qualitative research method was undertaken.

METHODOLOGY

The present research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena that inform understanding about the world in which we inhabit and why things exist the way they are (Bertram and Christiansen 2014). Further, qualitative research investigates events and the meanings people attach to them in their natural setting (Cohen et al. 2011). The qualitative researchers are concerned with the interpretive understanding of human experiences of phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Research in this field involves the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals producing subjective data, relative to the ideology of the interpretive paradigm. Scholars who use interpretive paradigm are interested in meaning, that is, how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences and how they structure their social world (Cohen et al. 2011; Bertram and Christiansen 2014). The researcher of this study was interested in making meaning of how the school principals in rural KwaZulu-Natal experienced *ukuthwala* (bride abduction) and how they mitigated the challenges to their instructional leadership in their schools.

This method was useful in capturing the richness and complexity of the respondents' understanding of their role in relation to the communities which they serve. The investigation was carried out at the three research sites in KwaZulu-Natal. Two senior primary and secondary schools respectively, were selected resulting to four schools investigated. Six respondents, comprising the four principals and two Superintendents of Education Management participated in the investigation and were selected from a pool of data collected in three research sites. The permission to conduct research was granted by the University of KwaZulu – Natal ethics committee, the Department of Education, the local Chiefs as well as by the school authorities, that is, the SGBs and principals. Informed consent to participate in the study was obtained from each research participant.

Data was generated from the purposive sample through a methodological triangulation (Cohen et al. 2000) of semi – structured interviews, observations and in-depth interview techniques with four school principals and two Superintendents of Education Management who are heading the education wards under which these principals were serving. Four interviews were conducted with each research participant to discuss bride abductions. Their experiences, perceptions and interpretations of bride abductions will not be reported in the study. The researcher is reporting on the case of Cebi as corroborated by the school principal. All interviews and narratives used in the paper were tape – recorded and then transcribed. Data was analysed at two stages, that is, during and after data collection. Data from each source was initially categorised according to emerging themes. Themes were then reduced in relation to the study's research questions. Data was then triangulated and meanings drawn from there. Content analysis was used to analyse the data. The researcher used pseudonyms for ethical reasons. All interviews were

held at the respective schools during agreed times except for the two SEM where the researcher conducted the interviews in the District office. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. These interviews afforded the researcher an opportunity to have in – depth interview with participants regarding their perceptions on the opportunities that the school principal might have in working with the local community to deal with bride abductions in the area. The focus of the findings of the study will be on the interviews conducted with the school principals and Superintendents of Education Management in the selected communities which were all recorded with the permission of the participants. The participants spoke in isiZulu. Therefore, the data were translated to English. The next section details the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the research study are based on sentiments expressed by school principals, superintendents of Education Management, school learners (above the age of 18) and members of the communities under investigation. The findings revealed that the age old custom of bridal abduction among the Zulus of KwaZulu – Natal is still vigorously practiced in deep rural areas and in some urban areas despite the assumption that it faded away due to social change. Further, findings revealed that the abuses of the custom of *ukuthwala* (bride abductions) are also predominant in these areas. As a result, bride abductions have negative impact on schooling and on education at large. School principals have a challenge to manage the negative effects of abductions in their schools. These negative effects are discussed below; including the researcher gave the biographical profiles of the school principals and superintendents of Education Management.

Biographical profiles of the principals and superintendents of Education Management (SEM's) indicate that all of the four principals had ten or more years of experience as principals. All are expected to be abreast with school governance and management responsibilities. All of them are acquaintances of the communities they serve. They can be termed well experienced school principals. The biographical profiles of the school principals raise concerns in terms of being transformational leaders in re-

spect of the communities they serve. They are sitting with one and the same problem year after year. However, the principals work collaboratively with the superintendents of Education Management and report matters that are beyond their control. Further, the biographical details of the SEM's in the communities under investigation displayed that the two respondents had more than ten years of experience as superintendent of Education Management in the same communities.

The results are presented under two main themes that emerged from data analysis namely, bride abduction as a barrier to instructional leadership and leaner deprivation of educational opportunities. The discussion of the results is presented in the subheadings below.

Bride Abduction as a Barrier to Instructional Leadership

Bride abduction as a barrier to instructional leadership seemed to be a recurring theme that emerged from the data. In the present research study, "barriers to instructional leadership refer to factors that negatively impact on the school principals' role in leading teaching and learning" (Bhengu et al. 2014: 203). It must be noted that in the study leadership and management are intertwined owing to the discourse that they are related concepts (Bhengu et al. 2014).

Absenteeism

For instance, principals mentioned that girls were afraid to go to school for fear of getting abducted. This resulted in a high level of absenteeism which impacts negatively to the teaching and learning process, and resulting to high failure rate in their schools. Worst of all when the principal of the school 2, tried to fight the problem, he received death threats from men who were determined to kidnap and marry the school girls. Principal 2 had to run away for fear of his life, and for some months he could not perform his duties as a school principal.

Dellasega and Nixon (2003) noted that victims of violent behaviour suffer feelings of anxiety, insecurity and fear. Further, skipping classes or staying home out of fear of being bullied at school leads to academic underachievement where learners fall behind in their assignments, homework, tests and assessments (Bemak and

Key 2000). Data from interviews corroborates literature and Systems theory which sees different levels and groups of people as interactive systems where the functioning of the whole is dependent on the interaction between all parts (Swart and Pettipher 2001). A school, for instance, is a system with different parts, such as its staff, its students, its curriculum, and its administration, and its stakeholders. To understand the whole system, we must examine the relationships between its different parts. As in the example of school and community, the interdependence between its parts forms the system as a whole. The school exists because of learners who come from the community. This means the school principal has a relationship with the community and the community has the relationship with the school principal. If the community blocks the way of learners from coming to school, then there is no school. Further, if something goes wrong in the community from where learners come from, the entire school is destabilized. As evidence, the practice of bride abduction taking place in communities allows men to abduct school going children and make them their wives and this has a direct impact on the school principals as instructional leaders.

Matriculation Examination High Failure Rate

As a result, the matric results dropped from an average of 90 per cent to 36 per cent (Department of Education 2002). Principal 2 says that in 2000 and 2001 girls were abducted before they could write their matric exams, but after intervention by the Department of Education, girls are abducted immediately they finish writing matric. Data from interviews confirms literature review as Thulo (2003) visited the area and reported on bride abductions taking place in the area and their impact on education. Thulo (2003) writes:

The abuse of ancient traditions has resulted in young women being kidnapped and raped in the Bergville district"…Hlongwane says meetings were held with all the stakeholders in education i.e. teachers, SGBs and pupils and a campaign was conducted to make men aware that they were disrupting education. This however, only provided a partial solution to the problem. Now some men wait until the girls write their final matric paper before abducting them (p. 3).

Demotivation Among Teachers

Principals indicated that teachers expressed concern about bride abductions taking place and their effect on their morale. In this regard, a school principal 1 said that bride abduction:

has affected the staff in such a way that their morale is low. Teachers stated that it is difficult to put all their efforts teaching learners who are not going to write final exams due to abductions. This is because we all know that bride abductions are very high during exam times that is middle of the year and when it is at the end of the year especially for the girls doing Matric.

Another principal confirmed teacher demotivation as a result of bride abductions in the schools and further highlighted the impact that this has on learner and teacher performances in the classroom. She said:

Teachers are de-motivated including me. I am also fed up… am really, really fed up… this has led to low performance by learners and by teachers in the classroom.

This confirms with the view espoused by Singh and Steyn (2014) who maintains that aggression and violence perpetrated by learners at school contributed to the low staff morale. Further, Bester and Du Plessis (2010) confirm that learner violence leads to a lack of teacher motivation to support students in the classroom. In this case it is violent acts by men on school going children which impact negatively on teachers' morality and consequently fail to do justice in the classroom to support learners.

Lack of Support from Various Stakeholders

Research participants indicated that after the education campaign in the area, the men resorted to abducting the girls just after the girls finished writing their last matric paper. The education campaign proved to be the partial solution and this study is interested in the long term solution. The above account questions the understandings of the value of education for the girl child in long term bases by the rural communities of KwaZulu-Natal. Thulo (2003) stated that the principal did not want to discuss the matter with the Sunday Times for fear of "opening old wounds". Principal 2 supported Hlongwanes's allegations. This is what he said:

There is nothing that can be done, except may-be that girls escape after being abducted, but escaping is also a problem, because children return too traumatised to be able to concentrate on school work after being kidnapped

Findings revealed a gap in school and community partnership. Lack of full support from the communities by schools result in difficulties which impact negatively on learner performance (Myende 2011). On the other hand, the superintendent of Education Management 2 of the above community had this to say:

In 2001, school X's matric pass rate became 36 per cent. However, in 2002 results had improved to 100 per cent. Then the abductions emerged in January of the following year.

The above situation is very unjust. It equals the waste of money and energy to invest in educating a girl child in this community. Research participants indicated that escaping is not a solution as a girl might find that she has been impregnated by her abductor.

School Dropouts

Principal 1 of another community indicated that girls are abducted at an age of 12 years. They leave school and at a later stage come back (if the abductor agrees) but with numerous problems such as fear and anxiety. Dellasega and Nixon (2003) observed that the victims of violent behaviour suffer feelings of anxiety, insecurity and fear. Principal 3 indicated that:

Some learners rather drop out from school in fear of being abducted. Those who manage coming back to school after abductions show signs of withdrawal and do not want to mix with other learners, and are fearful even if you talk to them as a teacher; they seem not to trust anyone… as the number of learners drop, so is the number of educators needed, thus results to staff redeployment (PPN).

Another principal added to the dilemma and indicated that:

The man kidnaps a girl, gives her numerous children, whom he cannot support because of unemployment, then he dies perhaps of HIV / AIDS, the girl child is then left alone to look after the children, she may/ may not get support from family members, the majority do not have identity documents as they are under age and thus could not get social grants, usually

children are supported by their grandparents through pension fund, which also supports the girl child on her return to school, if she decides so.

This is a picture that is not different from an account on abductions as narrated by Principal 3 and 4 who claim that parents sell girls as child brides in exchange of *ilobolo* (bride wealth). Principal 3 had this to say:

Most of the children in this community come from very poor families. Parents sell girls as child brides in exchange of ilobolo. They do this in connivance with abductors. In most cases girls had been kidnapped with the help of their parents, beaten severely if caught trying to escape the home of the abductor, and if they managed to get away, girls are disowned for defying tradition and for being rude and lacking respect.

The above account indicated that in contemporary society the custom of *ukuthwala* has been commercialised. During the olden times *ukuthwala* (literally, to be carried away with an intention to marry) allowed parents to arrange the marriage of their children, but was never intended to violate the rights of children.

Low Self-esteem and Underachievement

Principal 4 corroborated the story of one of his learners who got abducted but managed to escape and finally got back to school. This is what he said:

One of the girls from the community told how when she was just 14 she had been sent by her mother to collect money from her aunt who live in the neighbourhood, only to find she had been set up to be abducted to marry an old man who was a total stranger to her. The girl said she screamed and told her abductors to let her go, but they told her to shut up as her husband was waiting for her. The girl was put into a house with an old man and was told how this man was now going to make her his wife whilst was watched closely by the four men. The girl said she experienced excruciating pains but the girl managed to escape three days later and thereafter she went back to her home. On her arrival at home, the girl said she was shocked by her mother's indifference to her disappearance at home. The girl said her mother did not do a thing and said this with tears run-

ning down her face. She said her "husband" had already paid ilobolo to her family. The girl said she feels like she was sold and that her mother does not care about her.

The principal 4 stated that the learner in question suffered from low self-esteem and was underachieving in her academic work due to the lack of full concentration in class. The above narrative is indicative of the fact that some school principals in KwaZulu – Natal are seriously faced with challenges of managing the schools which are impacted negatively by bride abductions taking place in the communities which they serve. The principal indicated that she spends most of her time counselling learners and teachers in her school with regards to problems brought about by abductions and claimed that this is a waste of time on her part which could be used productively on other things that could move the school forward. Various factors contribute significantly to underachievement of both learners and teachers at school, the consequences of which are prolonged absenteeism, frequent resignations and even death caused by stress, anxiety and depression (Makwabe 2007).

Fear of Intervening in a Historically Embedded Cultural Practice

The superintendents of Education Managements in these wards indicated that although they are aware of the negative impacts of bride abductions in their schools but have nothing to do as bride abductions are complex and are cultural practices that take place in the communities. Similarly, the majority of research participants are the outsiders in the communities which they serve. Principals mentioned that they feared to intervene on the issue which is a custom that is observed in silence, despite the fact that they are the acquaintances of these communities by virtue of the number of years that they have already served. Even the principal who is the son of the soil and the one who comes from the neighbouring township mentioned that it is difficult to manage the school because of the challenges faced as a result of bride abductions in the area but has minimal work that she could do.

Deprivation of Educational Opportunities

All of the above point to notions of learner deprivation of educational opportunities. Forced bride abduction grossly violates a young girl's right to education which is her future and a future of her country. Consequently, it perpetuates the feminization of poverty. Indeed, and it does so "by denying a girl opportunities and compromising their development in areas such as education, livelihood and personal growth" (Thomas 2009). As findings show apparently girls dropout from school and stay in their abductors's homes to do farm work and become responsible for taking care of their abductors (Iyanuolo 2008). In extreme cases, when the elder sister in marriage cannot conceive because of advanced age or is barren, the girl may be abducted and forced to discontinue schooling (Hanzi 2006). In other words, the deprivation of education could have a negative impact on the psychological well-being as well as on their physical well-being since they are not ready to be mothers. Juru (2005) contends that in Mpumalanga, one of the harmful consequences of *ukuthwala* is decreased opportunities for education.

The researcher's initial proposition was that there seems to be challenges faced by school principals in KZN in managing the impact of bride abduction on education in their schools but there seems to be opportunities as well to deal with such challenges. The present research has presented findings suggesting that bride abductions have negative impact on schools and education at large. School principals are faced with a challenge of managing the impact that bride abduction has on their schools. Further, findings reveal that there are no turnaround strategies in place to meet such challenges which include teachers teaching traumatized learners (those who witnessed incidents of abductions and those who were abducted and escaped and returned to school); the principal cannot plan in advance (for the upcoming year for example, duty loads for educators; the principal does not know how many children will turn up to school the following year; situational management becomes the principal's norm; as a person, the principal is faced by a predicament of being an outsider in the community which she/he serves. Therefore, the principal have no say for the fear of invading the space and interfering on the community's custom which people have agreed. As a result, the principal is faced with internal conflict because he is also accountable to the Department of Education in terms of school man-

agement and in particular regarding the output / results. The principal has to counsel educators and other learners on matters pertaining to abductions in the area. The South African policy on Inclusive education and support services highlights two major approaches to addressing barriers to learning. These include prevention and support. Prevention also focuses on elements of social transformation that can help to prevent the occurrence of barriers to learning of which in the context of this study is bride abduction. The supportive approach focuses on providing education support services to schools, staff, parents and caregivers, and students.

CONCLUSION

The present research study, therefore, concludes that as much as there are challenges but opportunities prevail because the principal has a duty and obligation to contribute towards bringing about change in cultural practices that have a negative impact on their schools through the powers and authority vested in his / her hands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The principal must develop strong networking skills to use in various stakeholders within the community. These would include local Chief, headmen, headwomen, local municipal councillor, CBO's, NGO's, and make the negative impacts of bride abduction on schooling be laminated and has to reinforce immediate attention to them. The principal should have an influence and educate these stakeholders about the value of education of a girl child for the entire community and beyond. The principal must also liase with Life Orientation teachers in her school to teach about bride abduction as a theme in collaboration with teachers of other subjects in order to break the cycle of abductions in the area. This will raise awareness to the boys and girls in the school who will in turn take the matter and discuss it further with their brothers and parents at home whereby evils of abductions on education will be prioritized and why is education important for a girl child. The principal should by all means and cost endeavor to work collaboratively with the SGB in identifying the needs of the school and should be in the best

position to solve their own problems of which in this case it is bride abduction. Bride abduction grossly violates women's rights and has tremendous effects on education at large; thus, men's attention needs to be drawn to this effect.

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