

The Intervention of Safe, Caring and Child-friendly School Policies on Social Construction of Violence in South African Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT This paper investigated the intervention of Safe, Caring and Child-friendly School (SCCFS) policies on social construction of violence in South African secondary schools. It also investigates the model that can be developed to make schools safe, caring and child-friendly. A self-develop questionnaire was used to collect data from school principals, HODs, educators, educators unions, SGBs and learners in secondary schools. Multistage sampling technique was used to select the participants in this study. Two research questions were posed in this paper, and the responses from the participants were analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentage. The findings of the study show that the UNICEF designated safe, caring and child-friendly schools in South Africa have made substantial efforts to realize the SCCFS objectives but most basic facilities in the schools were inadequate with respect to their child-friendly status.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned by the escalation of incidents of learners' misbehavior in South African secondary schools, which raises safety and security concerns. There are alarming rates of violence in South African schools, which has become a great concern to many including the researchers of this paper. Violence occurs between learners to learners, educators and learners, and school to school. South African schools are now polarized with different types of violence, and the most common is bullying at different stages (Prinsloo 2008; Van Jaarsveld 2008). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (2014) argues that violence in schools is a major concern for educators, parents and learners. Maphosa and Shumba (2010) claimed that with the abolition of corporal punishment in South Africa, violence has risen at an increasing rate and this has led to the outcry of educators because discipline is no longer effective in schools, and learners are now claiming rights and misbehave always. Educators are handicapped to discipline the learners, and even parents do not help matters, as they always react to little discipline that educators give to their wards.

Prinsloo (2008) put forth that the serious incidents of violence in schools that have received wide media coverage is that in South Africa there is general concern about the increase of violence in schools. Due to the high incidents of

school violence, schools are no longer viewed as safe and secure environments where learners can learn, enjoy themselves, and feel protected (Van Jaarsveld 2008). The democratization of the South African school system in line with the new democratic constitution enacted upon attainment of independence in 1994 has brought with it an emphasis on respect and preservation of learners' rights.

Burton and Leoschut (2012) argued that violence in schools has garnered considerable media attention in South Africa in recent years. The local media coverage of brazenly violent acts, which have proven fatal, has continuously fueled public opinion that school violence in South Africa is escalating at an alarming rate and that something needs to be done about it (Burton and Leoschut 2012).

School violence in its countless forms is a constant threat to role-players in current South African schools (Kgobe and Mbokazi 2008). Violence occurs at multiple levels due to a confluence of risk factors and social processes at the individual, peer, family, school, and national levels (Osher et al. 2006; Mayer and Leone 2007). Despite the fact that school violence is a serious problem for educators, learners and administrators worldwide, it is rarely studied cross-nationally (Denmark et al. 2005). Pillay (2000) proposes that if crime is not brought under control in South African schools, this will have far-reaching consequences on the young people of

South Africa who will end up as drug addicts, violent criminals and anti-social individuals, rather than being assets to the nation's economy.

Research on the implementation of SCCFS globally has not come up with clear results that show its impact, especially as there appears to be widespread conceptual interpretations of the intervention (Chabbock 2004). If that is true, it is not clear what mechanisms in the SCCFS framework mediate the social construction of violence to create friendly schools. Over several decades, a great deal of work has been undertaken on policies and practices meant to develop safe, friendly and child-caring schools (Holt and Espelage 2006; Mora-Merchán and Ortega-Ruiz 2007).

It is apparent that school violence has not been addressed adequately within the education system of South Africa. Of late, learners have also voiced their concerns about school violence as reported by Kane (2006d: 22) in the United Nations Study against Children Regional Consultation for the Europe and Central Asian regions. Their concern was not only with physical violence but also with the psychological violence that educators and others inflict when they use humiliation or ridicule towards a learner. Kane (2006) further observed that school violence among peers was also a problem in schools and was often again a reflection of attitudes and behaviors that existed within the wider community. In terms of school-based violence, national governments are increasingly showing concern for outlining policies and guidelines to citizens in relation to what constitutes appropriate behavior between adults in positions of power including educators and learners. The Centre for Justice and Crime prevention (CJCP 2007) published a report based on an audit, which it conducted for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the South African National to show the needs for these rights. In support of the initiative, Burton and Leoschut (2013) noted that three years after the DoE committed itself to SCCFS, violence continued to be reported in South African schools.

Research Objectives

This paper has two objectives namely:

1. To investigate SCCFS policies that mediate social construction of school violence.

2. To investigate the model that can be developed to make schools safe, caring and child-friendly.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are SCCFS policies mediating the social construction of school violence?
2. What SCCFS model can be developed to make schools safe, caring and child-friendly?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study employed a quantitative research approach. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002: 42) consider quantitative research to be fast, economical and of significant relevance when policy decisions need to be made, but also warn that it might be rigid and artificial due to the structured nature of questionnaires.

Research Design

From a methodological point of view Babbie and Mouton (2002), describe research design as a plan on how the researcher intends to conduct the study. This study employs concurrent triangulation design, which captured both quantitative and qualitative approaches simultaneously.

Instrumentation

This study has used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through questionnaires from school principals, Heads of Departments, educators, educators' unions, SGBs and learners. This multi-paradigmatic focus is ideally suited to the multi-paradigmatic nature of coaching. Secondary data was collected from the literature such as government policies, journal articles, books, newspapers and school circulars.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire was developed for the purpose of assessing the implementation of the SCCFS policy and practices. A questionnaire was used to collect data from participants re-

garding how they viewed the perceptions of school principals, School Governing Bodies (SGBs), educators' unions, Learner Representative Councils (LRCs), Head of Departments (HODs) and educators to manage violence in schools.

RESULTS

During the observations in this study, a number of different aspects related to safety of the school environment have been observed. According to Bell and Dymont (2006), observation helps a researcher experience school grounds or play areas with diverse natural settings with being more physically active and more creative. The researcher collected descriptive information on the school environment where learning takes place. Through this tool, the study aimed at collecting massive information on physical appearance of the entire schoolyard, classrooms and latrines. Even though the observation schedules are costly, time-consuming and usually not anonymous, they were used in the current study to gather information, which was needed.

Sample

Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the sample from 24 secondary schools in Vhembe. The sample in this paper was school principals, Head of Departments (school based), educators, School Governing Bodies members, educators' union and learners within Vhembe District, so that they could provide information on how safe, caring and child-friendly schools could be produced.

Data Analysis

As indicated above that quantitative approach was employed in this paper, therefore the analysis also adhered to these aspects. The descriptive statistics of percentage was used to analyze the responses gathered through the questionnaire.

Validity and Reliability

The instrument was validated using face and content validity method by giving the instrument to experts in the field of education leadership and policy for scrutiny. The reliability of

the instrument was measured using Cronbach alpha to measure the internal consistency after the instrument has been pilot-tested.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to establish the way in which learners' socially contributed in the implementation of SCCFS program in South African secondary schools. The researcher found that school principals, SGB members, educators, educators unions and learners' participation in the implementation of SCCFS did not improve their commitment to safe, caring and child-friendly schools. Results indicate that seventy percent of participants in this study had frequently experienced school violence and that school violence is considered a stressful life event. Past research has attributed experiences of school violence with frequency of Internet use (Maphalala 2014). These results make a number of contributions to future evaluation and monitoring efforts of the SCCFS initiative and the field of comparative policy and practice more generally. Finally, as has been suggested in other research regarding school violence samples (Kowalski et al. 2012; Kowalski and Limber 2013), the use of longitudinal research would be beneficial in establishing predictors and outcomes associated with school violence.

This study adds to the field of school violence by providing data on the frequency and impact in a sample of South Africa learners in schools. The conclusion from this study is that educators and learners tend to understand and adapt new innovations when they are part of them. However, such a conclusion ought to be arrived at with caution, since this study did not set up appropriate analysis schools, but used individual educators who were part of the sampled study. Further research into such analyses could provide further insight. More research is needed to effectively design a successful, targeted prevention program suitable for all South African schools.

Demographic

In this paper, the presentation of data analysis reveals that there were more male than female participants who took part in the study. 52 (71%) of the participants were males and 21 (29%) of them were females. Majority (42%) of

the participants were in the age group of 40-49 years, 19 (26%) of them were aged 50-55 years, 9 (12%) of the participants who took part in the study were 20-29 years old, 6 (8%) of the participants were in the age group of 30-39 years and the rest 9 (12%) were those in the age group of above 56 years. The findings of the analysis show that there were many middle age participants compared to the experienced educators in the study. Nearly half (49%) of the participants were holding university degrees, 13 (18%) of the participants were holding of diploma certificates, 12 (16%) were grade 12 certificates holders, 11 (15%) were holding master’s degrees and the rest (3%) had ordinary certificates of education. None of the participants who participated in the study had other academic qualifications.

Table 1: Analysis of participants from demographic data

<i>Biographical variables</i>	<i>Description of variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Female	21	29
	Male	52	71
<i>Age</i>	20–29 years	9	12
	30–39 years	6	8
	40–49 years	31	42
	50–55 years	19	26
	56 years and over	9	12
<i>Academic Qualifications</i>	Grade 12	12	16
	Education	13	18
	Certificate/Diploma		
	Undergraduate	36	49
	Degree		
	Master’s	11	15
	Other	2	3

Source: Field work (2016)

Research Question 1: To what extent are SCCFS policies mediating the social construction of school violence?

Table 2: Participants’ responses regarding to SCCFS policies mediating the social construction of school violence

<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Agree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
A mission of this school to improve learners experiences and life chances, reducing the impact of school violence	42	44	36	37
School usually encourages the learners to care for each other	75	87	85	11
The expectation for this school is that female learners should recognised with male learners has consequences regarding their attitudes towards success in school.	38	47	39	49
Learners are encouraged to participate in the development of meaningful consequences for violations of the established code of conduct.	42	52	33	41

In this paper, the relevant data about the response frequencies of participants from selected secondary schools to the different questionnaires was reported. The objective of Table 1 consisting of four statements used the key terms agree and disagree responses as developed by the researcher, in order to get perceptions with regard to how do SCCFS policies mediate the social construction and reconstruction in schools.

Bleazby (2013) pointed out that the word “social construction” is rooted from symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. They went further to argue that it is a viewpoint that up-roots social processes simultaneously playful and serious, by which reality is revealed and concealed, created and destroyed by the activities. It provides a substitute to the intellectual tradition where the researcher earnestly seeks certainty in a representation of reality by means of propositions. Hence, Bleazby (2013) pointed out that social reconstruction is the philosophy that promotes peaceful coexistence and unity within a population using nonviolent ways to settle disputes. It aims to address past abuses through reconciliation and strengthen the appreciation of differences among people in a community.

The findings reveal that 42 (44%) of participants indicated that their schools have a mission to improve learners’ experiences and life chances, reducing the impact of school violence. Hence, 36 (37%) participants disagreed with the statement, from the second statement, the question arises concerning encourages the learners to care for each other in schools. The results indicated that 75 (87%) of the participants supported an idea that the school has usually encourages the learners to care for each other. Hence, eleven percent participants indicated that

Table 3: Participants' responses regarding to the model developed to create safe, caring and child-friendly schools

	<i>Agree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Learners at this school know and understand their rights.	49	34.0	29	20.2
The school has educators who have been specially trained to work with learners with disabilities.	18	12.5	60	41.7
The school has partnerships with local businesses to support school programmes.	25	17.3	44	30.6

there is no such policy in schools. It is most important for this paper that nearly half (47%) of the participants indicated that female learners should be recognized compared with male learners regarding their attitudes towards success in school, whereas forty-nine percent of the participants disagreed. When considering learners' encouragement to participate in the development of meaningful consequences for violations of the established code of conduct, the overall perception was better at 42 (52%), indicating that the half of secondary schools have policy that encourages learners to participate in the development of meaningful consequences for violations of the established code of conduct. Here, 33 (41%) participants disagreed that there was no such policy in their schools.

Research Question 2: What model can be developed to make schools safe, caring and child-friendly?

Under Table 3, the relevant data about the response frequencies of participants from selected secondary schools to the different questionnaires was reported. The objective of Table 2 consisting of three statements used the key terms agrees and disagree responses as developed by the researchers. The findings show that 49 (34%) participants indicated that learners at school know and understand their rights. Hence, 29 (20.2%) participants disagreed with the statement, from the second statement, the question arises concerning with educators who have been specially trained to work with learners with disabilities. The results indicated that 18 (12.5%) of the participants supported an idea that the school has educators who have been specially trained to work with learners with disabilities. Hence, 60 (41.7%) participants indicated that there is no such policy in schools. From statement three it has been realised that 44 (30%) participants indicated that the schools did not have partnerships with local businesses to sup-

port school programs, whereas only 25 (17.3%) participants agreed to the statement. When considering this statement one can conclude that schools need more attention to engage to build cooperation among school, parents and business people.

Implications of the Study

Despite the limitations of research, the researcher believes that the findings have several implications for this study. It is clear from the two questions in the findings that policy is inherent in SCCFS in schools. The findings have at least two implications. Firstly, policies mediate the social construction in schools. Secondly, the model developed to make schools safe, caring and child-friendly. It is important that, there is a need to push for understanding policies that addresses the widespread and prevalence incidence of violence against learners and educators. School fulfills an important role, but cannot provide the complexity of interaction that can be provided by communities. Schools and communities should work together to support the SCCFS and as well as create an environment that welcomes and nurtures families. It is in the best interest of all South African schools to support the SCCFS policy, as the importance of parents' roles in their children's education. The most particularly interesting to mediated constructions to normalize within the context of the everyday practices of incidents in South African schools is the social reconstructions.

CONCLUSION

The UNICEF designated safe, caring and child-friendly schools in South Africa have made substantial efforts to realize the SCCFS objectives, but there is need for improvement since a SCCFS model is an ideal. There is however, no

indication of schools involvement in these efforts to make the school safe, caring and child-friendly. The conclusion was made on the basis of the empirical findings of this study. The results indicate that school violence was associated with psychological distress amongst the learners in sample. Based on the findings, the study concluded that educators' attitude on provision of safe, caring and child-friendly school environment was low and that educators liked the idea of safe, caring and child-friendly school approach. It was also concluded that educators were not motivated enough to implement safe, caring and child-friendly school approach in their schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in view of the findings and implications of the study. In all schools a mission should be displayed to improve learners' experiences and life chances, reducing the impact of school violence, it should be emphasized that learners at schools must know and understand their rights, schools should encourage learners to care for each other, in all schools there are needs to be increased training for educators specially trained to work with learners with disabilities, and it was recommended that schools should have partnerships with local businesses to support school programs.

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