Editorial

This study reports on a project that investigated the dynamics of violence in South African schools and was led by Professor Vusi Mncube (University of South Africa) and Professor Clive Harber (Emeritus Professor: University of Birmingham, UK and Honorary Professor: University of South Africa).

Using Bourdieu and Coleman’s social capital theories Vivian Manyike argues that violence in schools can partly be attributed to the social contexts of these schools, for example, the unique context of South African townships. She argues that violence could be reduced through optimising social capital. This paper explains how the social capital theory could be used to change the social contexts of such schools and how this would reduce violence, improve school safety and enhance learners’ academic performance.

Vusi Mncube and Nomanesi Madikizela-Madiya report on gangsterism in South African schools and contend that the scourge of violence in South African schools is a cause for concern. The findings suggest that gangsterism is one of the major causes of violence in schools and is an external factor that exacerbates violence in schools. The study recommends that there is need to support current efforts aimed at increasing basic levels of good management, school effectiveness and teacher professionalism in South African schools.

Mncedisi Maphalala and Pinkie Mabunda note that media reports indicate an increase in the incidents of assaults, drug abuse, sexual harassment, robberies, vandalism and gangsterism in South African schools. They argue that despite the existence of relevant policies, physical violence, sexual abuse and gang activities are still the order of the day in South African schools. The findings from this study indicate that fights over turf or territories, socio-economic background and easy access to schools are some of the factors that contribute to gangsterism in the Western Cape schools.

Mncedisi Maphalala focuses on the consequences of school violence for female learners and contends that globally violence against girls is widespread. This paper looks at factors associated with gender-based violence in schools as well as the effects on female learners. The findings of the study reveal that female learners continue to face barriers to their learning because they are often the victims of violence perpetrated by male learners and teachers. Schools are not safe places for many girl learners and are primary sites for violence; this has a negative impact on their education and emotional welfare. The study proposes a synergistic approach in the form of the collaborative efforts of communities, administrators, teachers, parents and learners to create an integrated strategy to make our schools safe.

Mmankoko Ramorola and Matshidiso Joyce Taole question whether the links between school violence and drug usage in schools are external or internal factors. The findings to this study identified five themes relating to drug abuse at school, namely: types of drugs used by learners at school; corrective measures schools put in place; evidence of drugs and the relationship to violence; sources of drugs; and reasons for students’ intake of drugs. The study recommends the cooperation of stakeholders such as education leaders, the government, law enforcement agencies and community leaders to overcome drug abuse in schools.

A paper by Ramodungoane Tabane and Awelani Mudau reports on the sexual harassment of female learners by male learners as a dynamic of school violence in South African secondary schools. The study indicates that while female learners suffer sexual harassment from male learners, they are too fearful to report it and that sexual harassment is excused as ‘boys being boys;’ female learners must simply endure the humiliation.

A paper by G. D. Singh and Trudie Steyn reports on part of a study that sought to identify forms of learner aggression, contributory factors to aggression, the consequences and psychological effects of learner aggression and the identification of strategies to help manage learner aggression in rural secondary schools in the Empangeni district of KwaZulu-Natal. The findings identify a number of psychological responses from victims who have suffered learner aggression, the consequences of learner aggression in schools, and the negative impact of this on the quality of teaching and learning in these schools. The research concluded that the consequences of learner aggression are devastating, have a serious effect on the victims’ mental health and lead to high levels of stress, anxiety, depression and even suicide.
A paper by Vusi Mncube and Tshilidzi Netshitangani responds to the question of whether corporal punishment is a relevant tool to reduce violence in schools. It revealed that many teachers are verbally, physically (through the use of corporal punishment) and psychologically violent towards learners. They argue that a lack of teacher professionalism, teacher absenteeism and non-punctuality contribute to violence in schools. They recommend that policy makers and educationalists change their current ways of reducing violence in schools from those that emphasise the punishment, control and surveillance of learners to strategies that eliminate authoritarianism and increase effective school organisation and culture.

Matshidiso Joyce Taole and Mmankoko Ramorola report on teacher attitudes, professionalism and unprofessionalism in relation to school violence. These authors argue that rethinking how teachers act at school will influence both teachers and learners as transformation agents. Teachers are viewed as beacons of hope by the learners in their care. However, the professional ethical disposition of teachers is constantly being questioned because of the levels of violence in our schools. This study found that teachers are perpetuating such violence through their use of derogatory comments, bullying, and verbal violence, all of which is targeted at learners. In addition, the study revealed that teachers are sometimes the victims of school violence. They recommend emphasising professional ethics during pre- and in-service teacher training. They also recommend that in-service training and on-going support be given to both teachers and learners to enable them to deal with violence.

Bawinile Mthanti and Vusi Mncube report on the social and economic impact of corporal punishment in South African schools. This study found that the widespread use of corporal punishment still exists despite the fact that it was abolished almost 20 years ago. The study makes use of a questionnaire and concludes that violence in the form of corporal punishment has both a social and economically negative impact on learners, eventually becoming a barrier to learning. They conclude that the effective management and organisation of schools can help to reduce violence in schools.

Elizabeth Chikwiri and Eleanor Lemmer report on gender-based violence in primary schools in the Harare and Marondera districts of Zimbabwe. Informed by womanist theory, this paper reports on a qualitative study of gender-based violence in Zimbabwean primary schools. Findings provide a comprehensive picture of gender-based violence in primary schools manifested in acts of physical violence, and particularly the unsanctioned use of corporal punishment, psychological violence and sexual abuse. An insidious form of gender-based violence is embedded in child labour practices both in the schools and the community. In addition, they contend that gender-based violence damages girls’ health, social and psychological development and impedes their learning. Further, gender-based violence is perpetuated by a culture of silence informally maintained by victims, teachers, peers, parents and by the school’s weak compliance with protective policies.

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Guest Editors