

Can Violence Reduce Violence in Schools? The Case of Corporal Punishment

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ABSTRACT The paper is based on a qualitative study conducted in South African schools to obtain insights and understanding of the how and why of violence in schools based on the perceptions and experiences of teachers, learners, principals, support staff and School Governing Bodies (SGB). Semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and observations were conducted. The study also employed 'quantitative' research methodology so questionnaires were administered across six provinces in South Africa. The study reveals that many teachers are verbally, physically (use corporal punishment) and psychologically violent towards learners. Lack of professionalism, teacher absenteeism and non-punctuality contribute to violence. There is evidence in the report of some schools' failure to take into account the individual needs of young people by trying to control them in a generic manner resulting in violent rebelliousness. There is evidence in the report that many schools are not managed well. It emerged that because of authoritarianism, schools are failing to protect learners from violence. Thus policy makers and educationalists will have to change ways of reducing violence in schools from those that emphasise punishment, control and surveillance of learners to employing strategies that eliminate authoritarianism and increase effective school organisation and culture.

INTRODUCTION

Violence is prevalent in schools in South Africa. Statistics published by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR 2008), imply that South African Schools are the most dangerous in the world. The survey conducted by SAIRR states that only 23% of South African learners felt safe at school. De Wet (2003: 89) reported that as a result of the violence, learners and educators are often too scared to attend school. Further to the debilitating effects it has on learning and teaching violence also poses a problem for school management teams. School managers ought to implement measures that have been developed by government and by SGBs to eliminate violence. Are school managers coping in being able to bring this situation under control?

In South Africa the right to education speaks to the development imperatives of the Constitution requiring South Africans to 'free the potential of each person'. "Thus, given its centrality in the building of human capital, in advancing social cohesion and in creating the conditions to 'free the potential of each person' the success of the education system will determine the success of the still very fragile constitutional order we have embraced" (Kollapan 2006).

There has been considerable success in education over the past 18 years of democracy. How-

ever, effective learning and teaching is being undermined by a growing culture of violence in schools. Learning environments-schools have become territories for crime and violence. Learners and educators take firearms to school for protection. Although the South African Police (SAPS) and the Department of Education have many Safer Schools initiatives, including the piloting of Firearm Free Zones for Schools, in terms of the Firearms Control Act of 2000; there still exists a lot of violence in schools.

Further, violence and crime is directly affecting school principals, teachers and learners which affects quality education delivery. Reckson and Becker (2005) explored the narrative accounts of eight South African high-school teachers working in a gang-violent community in the Western Cape. They revealed that the primary source of stress for teachers is related to gang violence. This study showed that improved teaching efforts will make no difference to learners because of violence (Reckson and Becker 2005).

This paper is based on a study of violence in education in South Africa (Harber and Mncube 2012) and it is different from others as it used a range of stakeholders from the school community - learners, parents, teachers and school governing bodies in garnering information on violence across six provinces in South Africa. It is high on validity and reliability since it utilises a variety of data collection instruments namely

interviews, observations and questionnaires. It will also contribute to developing theories on school violence by looking beyond incidents and types of violence to understanding how and why schools play a part in both reproducing and perpetrating violence. What is it about schooling both generally, and in South Africa in particular, that makes violence more possible? It is the beliefs, practices and behaviours within schools that either sanctions violence directly or by omission that are of real significance? In this paper we asked: How effective are the safety measures used by different stakeholders and are the measures of reducing violence not violent themselves?

Understanding Violence in Schools

Zulu et al. (2004: 70) defines violence as any behaviour of learners, educators, administrators or non-school person, who attempt to inflict injury on another person or to damage school property. Internationally, violence both affects schools and is perpetuated and perpetrated by schools (for example, Harber 2004; Pinheiro 2006; PLAN 2008; Smith and Vaux 2003). School violence is a particularly serious problem in South Africa. Shootings, stabbings, physical and emotional violence have taken place in both public and private schools (Akiba et al. 2002; Zulu et al. 2004: 70).

Violence in schools can come from different sources and take many forms. For example, bullying may be learnt outside the school but perpetuated inside because the school ignores it or doesn't deal with it satisfactorily. It involves different actors at different times inside the school learners bully each other, teachers bully learners, learners bully teachers, parents bully teachers and principals bully teachers or the opposite. Bullying is a major form of violence in schools (Roland and Munthe 1989; Oshako 1997; Ruiz 1998). Bullying can be looked through the lens of the social learning perspective of modelling and reinforcement by Bandura (1973) where children are more likely to imitate a model when the model is a powerful figure, rewarded rather than punished for the behaviour, and when model shares similar characteristics with the child. Reducing or eliminating bullying is more difficult because many teachers and parents view bullying as an inevitable part of school life (WHO 2002: 29-30).

While bullying is often seen to originate from the character of children, a review by Smith (2005) revealed that, despite many years of expensive research and intervention, bullying had not been reduced much at all. Indeed, bullying might be happening because the school organisation and culture itself could be conducive to bullying given its often oppressive and authoritarian ethos (Harber 2004). Indeed, historically, authority and order in schools have consistently been associated with violent imposition in the form of physical punishment (Rousmaniere et al. 1997). Bullying of learners by teachers is a clear form of direct, internally generated violent imposition. Studies in Poland, sub-Saharan Africa and America confirm that learners are attacked, threatened, abused both physically and verbally by educators (de Wet 2007; Piekarska 2000; PLAN 2008).

Corporal Punishment

The most common bullying of learners by teachers is corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is an internal form of violence perpetrated by schools with regard to learners. This is a form of violence institutionally sanctioned in many schools around the world. Children may well be beaten up at home but not necessarily in the systematic way that corporal punishment can and is carried out in schools. Moreover, many children go to school from homes where no physical punishment (or sexual harassment) exists and are then exposed to it for the first time in school. So, corporal punishment is a form of violence internal to schools both in the sense that it exists at school and that the people who experience it there don't necessarily experience it outside.

In 90 out of 197 countries monitored by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, corporal punishment remains legal despite consistent and overwhelming evidence of its harmful effects and the fact that it is not in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In respect of the developed or industrialised world, it is still legal in France, Korea and a number of Australian and American states (PLAN 2008: 12).

In other countries where it has been officially banned, such as South Africa and China (PLAN 2008: 12), it is still widely used, suggesting that

corporal punishment in school still exists in at least one third and perhaps as much as half of the countries of the world.

In relation to South Africa, Hunt (2007), using observation and interviews, found that corporal punishment was still used in three out of four of her case study schools in the Western Cape area and that learners were subjected to incidents of verbal insult and humiliation. Corporal punishment also remains widespread in rural areas (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005: 17). In a recent study of schools in three provinces of South Africa that:

Corporal punishment is banned in South Africa, yet such incidents were observed on numerous occasions. For instance, during recess at one school in Pietermaritzburg an act of bullying by a male learner towards a female learner resulted in...six strokes of a stiff plastic tube across the palm of the hand (Hammett and Staeheli 2011: 275). So while there is no evidence that corporal punishment improves behaviour or academic achievement – quite the opposite (PLAN 2008) – there is considerable evidence of its harmful effects, including physical harm and even death. The World Health Organisation, which explicitly includes corporal punishment in school as part of child abuse, states that:

Importantly there is now evidence that major adult forms of illness – including ischaemic heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, irritable bowel syndrome and fibromyalgia – are related to experiences of abuse during childhood.Some children have a few symptoms that do not reach clinical levels of concern, or else are at clinical levels but not as high as in children generally seen in clinical settings. Other survivors have serious psychiatric symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, aggression, shame or cognitive impairments.....(WHO 2002: 69/70).

In addition, corporal punishment also rarely makes learners feel enthusiastic about schooling or learning. In Nepal corporal punishment is an important reason for school drop-out (Teeka-Bhattarai 2006) while in Botswana:

“The more obvious effects of corporal punishment included increased learner anxiety, fear or resentment in class. Girls, in particular, remained silent, and were mistakenly dubbed as “lazy” or “shy” by some teachers, and so did some boys. Other boys absconded or refused to

cooperate in female teachers’ classes...Other studies have also found that excessive physical punishment, generally of boys, can prompt truancy (Humphreys 2006).

Nevertheless, historically, authority and order in schools have been consistently associated with violent imposition,

Formal schools in Western capitalist societies have been designed to discipline bodies as well as to regulate minds. A key purpose of modern state schooling has been the formation and conduct of beliefs, as well as the acquisition of prescribed knowledge. School discipline has frequently been overt and physically violent, with learners most often the target of teacher-administered punishment (Rousmaniere et al. 1997: 3).

Sexual harassment is also rife in schools in some countries, including South Africa (needs some supporting references here). The main problem is that instead of challenging traditional gender stereotypes and unequal power relationships of the wider society the schools can reproduce it. Rather than educate about masculinity, and particularly non-violent forms of masculinity, in order to curb more violent interpretations of violence, schools actually encourage such interpretations (Salisbury and Jackson 1996). Moreover, there is an authoritarian, closed nature of schooling meshed with patriarchal values and behaviours that provide a context in which sexual harassment can happen. The assertion that unless teachers themselves have been educated about gender and power issues, they are likely to model behaviour that reflects their own experiences and those of the wider community becomes crucial made by PLAN report (2008: 26). Schools must have a larger continuum of values activities to support a more diverse learner body and not just accept dominant and violent forms of masculinity (Klein 2006).

Another form of direct, internal violence perpetrated on learners is corporal punishment; this is a form of violence institutionally sanctioned as indicated in studies conducted worldwide (PLAN 2008). Corporal punishment also remains widespread in rural areas of South Africa (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005: 17). In a recent study of schools in three provinces of South Africa, numerous incidents of corporal punishment were observed (Hammett and Staeheli 2011).

According to the Plan report (2008) there is no evidence that corporal punishment improves behaviour or academic performance however there is considerable evidence of physical harm and even death. In Nepal corporal punishment is an important reason for school dropout (Teeka-Bhattarai 2006). Children who drop out come back to schools to harass learners. Excessive physical punishment, generally of boys, can prompt truancy (Humphreys 2006).

Why violence does occur in and by the school that is supposed to nurture learning in a safe and caring environment? According to Harber (2004) and Harber and Mncube (2012), in terms of schooling, with certain exceptions the dominant or hegemonic model globally remains authoritarian rather than democratic. In this authoritarian situation of relative powerlessness and neglect of their human rights learners can be mistreated violently or be influenced by potentially violent beliefs because the dominant norms and behaviours of the wider society are shared, not challenged, by many adults in the formal education system.

Authoritarian organisation provides an environment where learners' rights, needs and feelings can too readily be ignored or suppressed and where it is difficult for teachers or learners to act independently and to critique and challenge dominant social and political orthodoxies, including those that lead to violent behaviour and conflict. Instead of just reproducing and perpetrating only the socio-economic and political inequalities of the surrounding society authoritarian schools also reproduce and perpetrate the violent relationships.

Role modelling is one of the social/psychological explanations of the causes of violent behaviour in relation to socialisation which are relevant to the authoritarian role of schooling in reproducing and perpetrating violence. Thus, if those adults who young people are expected by society to admire, respect and imitate are consistently authoritarian to them they will come to accept this as the normal way of relating to others, giving orders or taking orders. Similarly, if those in authority are physically violent and abusive towards them, then this becomes normal and they will reproduce this violence. They become socialised through imitation into authoritarianism, repression and violent means to achieve ends (Miller 1987).

An alternative approach is to use more democratic approaches to reduce violence in schools.

This would be congruent with South African post-apartheid education policy that had an overwhelming emphasis on the role of education in helping to create a more democratic and peaceful society (Department of Education 1995: 22). However, using democratic relationships in schools as a means of reducing violence does not mean a lack of discipline or order or a *laissez-faire* regime but a change to more democratic forms of discipline and order where rules and (non-violent) punishments are agreed and implemented collectively (Harber and Mncube 2012). Further, they contend that schools organised along more democratic lines would have a culture of mutual respect, civility and politeness as well as the freedom to make constructive criticism and engage in free and open debate (Harber and Mncube 2012).

For example, a study of three schools operating in a more democratic manner in South Africa at the end of the 1990's (Harber and Muthukrishna 2000) suggested that, in addition to exhibiting an orderly, purposeful and calm atmosphere with clean premises and business-like behaviour, all three schools, went beyond these possible minimum level indicators of functional effectiveness in their willingness to embrace change and in their commitment to implementing a new educational ideology aimed at fostering a non-violent, non-racist democratic society.

South African Legislation on Violence Reduction

In line with the democratic provisions of the Constitution, the South African Schools Act (SASA) 1996 prohibits corporal punishment (Republic of South Africa 1996b). With regard to discipline, SASA empowers SGBs to adopt a learners' code of conduct after consulting teachers, learners, and parents (Republic of South Africa 1996). In terms of the provision of the SASA a code of conduct is intended to establish a disciplined and purposeful school environment (Republic of South Africa 1996). Teachers should be guided by the "Code of Professional Ethics" of the South African Council for Educators. Some of the provisions of the code of conductor, for example, that an educator (teacher) should: respect the dignity, beliefs and constitutional rights of learners and, which includes the right to privacy and confidentiality; acknowledge the uniqueness, individuality, and

specific needs of each learner; guiding and encouraging each to realise his or her potential; exercise authority with compassion; avoid any form of humiliation, and refrain from any form of abuse, physical or psychological; refrain from improper physical contact with learners; promote gender equality; refrain from any form of sexual harassment (physical or otherwise) of learners; refrain from any form of sexual relationship with learners at any school; use appropriate language and behaviour in his or her interaction with learners and act in a way to elicit respect from learners; take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the learner; not be negligent or indolent in the performance of his or her professional duties.

To demonstrate their seriousness about the safety of learners in schools, the South African government passed Education Laws Amendment Act 31 of 2007, provides guidance pertaining to drug testing, random search and seizure at schools. Section 8A of this section prohibits any person to bring to school any dangerous objects and illegal drugs.

In view of the above discussion, the paper will try to answer the following questions:

1. How does the school present a model to learners where violence is seen as a solution to problems and conflicts?
2. What measures and initiatives are taken by schools to promote a violence-free environment?
3. Are the measures effective given the violent nature of educators?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The manner in which educators conduct themselves in and outside the school premises can encourage violence or dilute the positive effects of the violence reduction measures employed. In this study the following themes emerged in terms of those in authority providing a negative role model in regard to violence: verbal abuse, physical violence which includes bullying and corporal punishment and sexual harassment. Issues regarding how to deal with school-based violence also emerged.

Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse by teachers appears to be a common form of violence in schools. Educators call

learners by undesirable names, use vulgar words or swear, talk badly about the learners' parents and are rude to learners. In this research, learner responses in the focus group interviews provided instances of such behaviour,

Most of the emotional violence is from educators who swear at learners, in an inappropriate way like calling names and shouting ... (Learner NWP).

... some educators who call us these nasty words like bitch because we are wearing short skirts (Learner NWP).

The above utterances clearly show that learners are not happy with the educators. They felt emotionally abused. Emotionally stressed individuals are more likely to be violent. To underscore this finding, a study of stress among learners in Poland by Piekarska (2000) found that an important factor was educators' verbal abuse of children. When educators use discouraging, demotivating words to learners which affect them emotionally but can also result in them failing the grade or dropping out of school (Teeka-Bhattarai 2006).

... last year this educator discouraged me and said oh, you have no future on this stream and I ended up failing because of that because always when I think of reading I think of her (Learner Limpopo)

Educators must protect and shape the learners in positive directions. Moreover, South African educators have a legal obligation towards safety and the protection of learners in terms of loco parentis status, but the results of the study indicated that educators are often doing the opposite. Such behaviour by educators does not demonstrate mutual respect and it contradicts the professional code of conduct for educators and is a form of un-professionalism that contributes to an atmosphere where violence is acceptable. Learners then imitate such behaviour (Miller 1987; Bandura 1977). Violence can take place in schools via role modelling when educators are violent towards learners (Miller 1987).

The data from two case studies in the present study suggested that neither school had anti-bullying policies'. Moreover, it was reported by learners that educators do not take action when bullying is reported which sends a message to learners that bullying is allowed. QUOTE (S) from study to support this?

Corporal Punishment

As pointed out in the literature review section, another form of direct, internal violence perpetrated on learners is corporal punishment. This is a form of violence institutionally sanctioned around the world although not legal. While there has been a drop in the number of countries using corporal punishment since the 1960's, the practice remains common globally despite widespread debate, all that is known about its harmful effects and the existence of many positive alternatives. South Africa is one of those countries still practicing corporal punishment illegally as expressed by the learners and educators in interviews and in questionnaires. Thus, learner respondents to the questionnaire reported corporal punishment. In one school, the educator used a stick after break to force learners back into her classroom. A learner said,

.... and they (learners) are busy making a noise, she (educator) asked one of the boys for a belt and she hit her like seriously in front of all of us in the class, that was traumatizing! (Learner, Limpopo)

These actions result in physical harm as learners drop out of school and corporal punishment can cause truancy and truant learners are more likely to come back to school to harass others (Humphreys 2006).

Learners indicated that they do not complain or inform their parents because this might actually encourage educators to use it, despite the educators knowing that they are breaking the law. According to one learner, "we were suspended for a week and when we came back my parents decided to tell them to punish me and then they beat me up with a *shambok*". What these learners are actually saying shows that parents and educators view physical punishment and bullying as inevitable part of schooling (WHO 2002: 29-30). Learners in Limpopo and KZN said that they do not feel comfortable with their educators because they are not sympathetic to their most basic right of dignity as they cannot go to the sanitation block during breaks because educators administer corporal punishment when they are late, even though they (educators) know the state of the toilets.

"... in breaks... and our toilets are far from our classes, so when we go to that side of the toilet we use almost 15 minutes, ...which means

the break is already over then we find the educators at the gate with a shambok and they beat us. (Learner Limpopo)

Some educators acknowledged the use of corporal punishment by their colleagues and gave excuses for not putting a stop to it. One life orientation educator acknowledged that, "there are those that use it and they have a reason of using it.... I do not talk to them". It is this silence that helps to perpetuate violence in schools. This confirms that schools reinforce and reproduce violence and can provide a violent role model for learners.

From the above statements by learners and educators, it is evident that both bullying by teachers and corporal punishment remain prevalent in schools. Although interviewees and respondents from urban provinces also expressed their knowledge of practices of corporal punishment, this research confirmed that corporal punishment remains widespread in rural areas as per the report by Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005: 17). In this study the data from Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and North West Provinces confirmed this.

Measures and Initiatives Taken by Schools in Preventing Violence

One way of dealing with imported violence identified by the study, such as the importation of weapons and drugs from the surrounding community, was seen to be the use of control and surveillance measures:

Sometimes sporadically we just invite the SAPS to come and do the search without informing them prior to the officers coming because we enjoy a very healthy relationship with police ... when we invite people from outside like the CPF and they [students] know these guys and they know how aggressive they can be ... Now they toe the line. They change completely. (Principal KZN)

As part of the intervention strategies to curb violence in schools in the Western Cape, schools have resorted to search and seizure methods and drug testing within their premises. One school has a standing agreement with the local police station that from time to time during the course of the day police would patrol around the school area and also conduct search and seizure in the school:

We always conduct search and seizures anytime, we have a community forum they call it

cluster committee, in this committee there is a police officer who is the commander of the cluster committee so about 2 times in the month I call him and to request his visibility and they will bring all the forces that they have like the sniffer dogs and everything.....(School B Principal, Western Cape)

The search and seizure described above is not in line with legislation of how the search and seizure of dangerous weapons and illegal drugs should be conducted. While there are contradictions and contestations, the Education Laws Amendment Act 31, 2007 states clearly how the search and seizure should be conducted.

While teachers hail random search and seizure methods as a deterrent for school violence, learners view it in different light. According to the learners the random search and seizures rob them of valuable time for learning and sometimes in the process their rights are violated, as shown in the excerpt below:

Now on the point where the police is searching the learners.... is also stealing time off our education whether the search is for our safety but I personally think if they have search for 3 to 4 hours how many hours is left on the clock for our learning..... (School A learner, Western Cape)

In addition, some schools even go to the extent of paying private security companies to help them with violence. However, it was evident that the provision of some simple security measures was seen to be helpful 'No ... Because we don't like bullying at this school. Because we have got guards that always watch us do things'. (Student Focus Group Gauteng)

Most of the responses regarding what schools can do about violence, then, deal with punishment or control and surveillance to apprehend offenders. However, in the United States of America, where problems with school violence are also encountered, such 'tough' measures have had little success while less coercive strategies have been more successful (Noguera 1995). Moreover, there is a danger that following this path will lead to the semi-'militarisation' of schools in South Africa - a situation in schools where traditional forms of school authoritarianism have broken down. Instead of being replaced with more constructive forms of democratic discipline and order, it has given way to a culture of violence. Educational personnel have abdicated their responsibility for

safety and security to an ineffective array of armed security guards who patrol the school and a technology of metal detectors, walkie-talkies, and emergency security telephone systems in classrooms. Teachers focus purely on academic skills as defined by state-dictated curricular requirements and are not concerned with the whole learner – behaviour, social skills and values. There is little insistence on personal responsibility and learners conclude that teachers just do not care.

The positive aspect of these responses to issues of violence is that schools do not just wait for the government to do something. For example, both these principals mention the existence of safety and security committees in their schools. These committees include mainly parents, with few teachers and students. One principal explains as follows:

We were told [by the Department of Education] that we should not venture into making this safety and security committee to be ... teacher orientated and be driven by teachers because it might lose the buy in from the parents. We want parents to be the driving force. (Principal KZN)

Such schools go beyond just utilising parent support in dealing with violence. They open channels of communication among the school-based stakeholders. For example, one principal said:

... we've got a representative council of learners ... So we have a very open line of communication ... if a learner is bullied, is victimised in whatever way, he has got an option of reporting that to class representatives or go direct, if he does have confidence ... go direct to the class teacher. Of course we'll help with that and also will take it at least to Deputy Principal ... or even the Headmaster... (Principal KZN)

CONCLUSION

From this study it is clear that a proportion of teachers are verbally, physically and psychologically violent towards learners, including using corporal punishment which is illegal. Such direct forms of violent behaviour by teachers demonstrate a serious problem with regard to a lack of professionalism, compounded by evidence in this report of teacher behaviour that also indirectly contributes to violence – teacher

absenteeism and lateness. There is also some evidence in the report of the schools' failure to take into account the individual needs of young people in an attempt to control them in a "one size fits all" manner, which in itself can result in violent rebelliousness.

Learners need a safe, consistent, well-organised environment where they are encouraged to learn in a meaningful way, where they are treated with respect, and where their voices are heard. Learners do not need schools where teachers beat them up, abuse them verbally and humiliate them. They do not need schools where teachers do not turn up or are regularly late, ignore their needs or treat them in violent and disrespectful ways. The more schools provide well-organised learning environments as mentioned above, the less violence will occur and the less will be the demand for police and other forms of control and punishment

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rather than increased technical control and surveillance via searches and punishment, schools need to examine more closely what it is about their own practices that actually create a situation that allows for violence to take place and even escalate. The study also suggests that the role of the police in helping with violence in schools can be positive but is also haphazard and inconsistent – and in some cases non-existent.

Current efforts aimed at increasing basic levels of good management, school effectiveness and teacher professionalism in South African schools need to be supported and enhanced as this will also have a beneficial effect on reducing school violence. A well-ordered school is also a less violent school. Many teachers still need training on why corporal punishment is ineffective educationally and has negative consequences, as well as what are constructive alternatives to corporal punishment. In addition, bullying must be recognised as a problem and acted upon in schools by staff and each school should have clear anti-bullying policy. Finally initial teacher education needs to be more rigorous in producing professional teachers.

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