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Impact of school violence on learner participation in South African secondary schools: a qualitative study

Abstract

School violence plays a significant role in shaping a school's culture and climate, which can have an impact on the participation and performance of learners in secondary education. In many instances, school violence can hinder the educational aspirations of learners. This paper investigates the impact of school violence on learners through the lenses of social justice theory and an interpretive paradigm. The sample of this qualitative research included three secondary schools in the Vhembe District in the Limpopo Province, South Africa, and are from advantaged and disadvantaged communities, representing a varied sample. Data collection included semi-structured interviews with 27 purposively selected teachers, including three principals, three heads of department, and 21 teachers. Data were analysed and interpreted using the constant comparative method of data analysis. The findings revealed corporal punishment, bullying, and sexual harassment as the major forms of violence perpetrated at the three schools. These are the direct result of the low socioeconomic status of parents, crime in the communities, and cultural and traditional beliefs of the community members. The study found that teachers spend most of their time solving challenges associated with various forms of school violence instead of focusing on teaching and learning. School violence also affects learners' concentration, thus increasing poor academic performance, classroom chaos, bunking of classes and depression. The study suggests that the victims of any form of school violence are encouraged to report the perpetrators to the school teachers and principals immediately. In addition, the school must conduct awareness seminars and workshops on various forms of school violence. If not monitored, these causes and effects may contribute to the widening gap of unequal educational outcomes of learners in the country.

Keywords: *academic performance, bullying, indiscipline, social justice, school violence*

1. Introduction

Violence in schools is an intensively researched subject because it involves the freedom and security of learners (United Nation Educational Scientific and Culcural Organisation [UNESCO], 2017). Over 240 million children worldwide suffer from a form of violence daily (UNESCO, 2017).

In sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria experiences very high school violence among children (Fenny & Falola, 2020) while Juan *et al.* (2019) report extreme crime and violence in South African schools. These outcomes suggest that many learners and teachers are living in fear and insecure states at their schools.

The violence in schools is perpetrated by learners on learners, learners on teachers, and teachers on learners (De Wet, 2024; Manda, 2018). Common violent behaviours include physical assaults such as knife fights, gun shootings, corporal punishment, sexual abuse, and psychological violence such as bullying (HSRC, 2017), leading to the injury or death of many learners and teachers. In South Africa, the violence includes both primary and secondary schools, resulting in the displacement of learners and teachers. The prevalence of violence in South African schools is viewed as mirroring the high crime rate in the country, since the country is rated as the third-highest crime spot in the world (World Population Review, 2022).

Despite the continuous research and awareness generated from the results, school violence is still on the increase (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; De Wet, 2024). The constant violence in schools is a significant threat to effective teaching and learning, and calls for further investigation to highlight the current state of school violence in the Limpopo Province. However, most research on school violence in the province has been gradual, while research does not always deal with the comprehensive nature, causes, and consequences of violence in schools.

Thus, this research seeks to collate the issues of school violence in one study to answer the question: What is the impact of school violence on learner participation in South African secondary schools?

2. Literature review

The literature identified the significant impact of school violence on both perpetrators and victims. The literature has identified that each causative factor of school violence affects the victim and the perpetrator negatively. The literature reviews the leading causes of violence and their impact on the school environment. Two major types of violence have been identified in schools, namely physical violence and psychological violence.

2.1 School violence from a social justice perspective

School violence is a multifaceted issue encompassing various forms of physical, psychological and verbal aggression within educational settings (Girmen & Kilic, 2018). Addressing school violence through the lens of social justice theory is essential to understanding the systemic factors contributing to violence and to develop equitable solutions. Social justice theory emphasises the promotion of equality, fairness and the eradication of social inequalities in society.

The core principle of the social justice theory is that all individuals should have equal access to resources, opportunities and basic human rights. It seeks to challenge and transform the power dynamics, social structures, and institutions that contribute to inequality (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Social justice theory acknowledges that systemic discrimination and oppression exist and seeks to rectify these injustices by advocating for policies, practices and actions that promote inclusivity, fairness and equity (Bell, 2016).

This study examines the manifestations of school violence, with a particular focus on how social justice theory offers insights into understanding the causes and addressing this pressing problem. In promoting a socially just school system in South Africa, this article systematically reviewed previous research on the prevalence of violence in schools and the causes and impact of such violence in schools in South Africa. The social justice theory is appropriate for this study, because violence does not promote social justice but promotes social injustice.

2.2 Prevalence of school violence

The literature reveals that physical violence is one of the most visible and alarming forms of school violence in South African secondary schools. Physical violence involves the action of using bodily strength that may cause bodily harm and injury, which sometimes results in the death of the victim (Reddy *et al.,* 2010). The physical violence common in schools includes theft, physical assault, gang violence, corporal punishment, and sexual violence (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; HSRC, 2017). Perpetrators often resort to physical violence to establish dominance, settle conflicts, or exert control within the school setting. According to the South African Council for Educators (2020), 68% of teachers and 49% of learners reported experiencing or witnessing physical violence at their schools. This study reveals that teachers have experienced more forms of physical violence than learners did.

Verbal and psychological violence has also been recorded in secondary schools in South Africa. Verbal and psychological violence encompasses various forms of non-physical aggression that aim to harm, intimidate or demean others (Mathews *et al.*, 2018). Verbal violence includes verbal threats, insults, or derogatory language, while psychological violence involves manipulation, social exclusion or spreading rumours.

Sexual violence in South African secondary schools is a distressing and pervasive issue. It involves any form of unwanted sexual behaviour, including sexual harassment, assault, or rape. Research indicates that a considerable number of students experience sexual violence, leading to severe psychological and emotional trauma (Burton *et al.*, 2015). Burton *et al.* (2015) further explain that females are more susceptible to contact sexual behaviour such as rape and sexual assault. The males or boys experience non-contact sexual violence by viewing sexual acts and pornographic materials (Burton *et al.*, 2015). The vulnerability of learners to sexual violence is influenced by factors such as gender inequality, social norms, and inadequate institutional support. These sexual behaviours are responsible for teenage pregnancies currently in the country. The Department of Basic Education's analysis of the General Household Survey of 2019 on schooling found that the average pregnancy rate of girls aged ≥14 ranged between 3% and 4% during the period 2010–2019 (DBE, 2021).

Bullying is a prevalent form of school violence that involves repeated acts of aggression, power imbalance, and intentional harm inflicted by one or more individuals on another student (UNESCO, 2017). Bullying can occur physically, verbally or electronically (cyberbullying). Burton and Leoschut (2013) blame the escalation of bullying on increased access to social media. The consequences of bullying are profound, including increased risk of mental health issues, academic decline, and social isolation (Stevens, Fortune & Nzimande, 2017).

Hendricks (2018) explain that school gang-related violence is of great concern to school authorities. Gang-related violence poses a unique challenge within South African secondary schools. It involves acts of violence committed by individuals associated with gangs, often driven by territorial disputes, rivalry, or criminal activities.

2.3 Causes of school violence

The causes of physical violence in South African secondary schools are multifaceted, stemming from a complex interplay of individual, social and systemic factors. Some key factors identified in the literature include:

• *Socioeconomic challenges*

Research suggests a correlation between socioeconomic disadvantage and increased levels of violence in schools (Wilcox, Gray & Sheikh, 2017). Poverty, unemployment and inequality exacerbate the risk of violence by contributing to social tensions and limited access to resources. Learners from disadvantaged communities and homes (such as single or no-parent homes and homes run by learners) are likely to be exposed to violence (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Meyer and Chetty (2017) contend that learners exposed to or who have experienced violence developed aggressive behaviours, which they are likely to exhibit in schools.

• *Drugs and weapons*

Further studies revealed that learners with access to drugs and weapons are likely to exhibit violent behaviour (Chetty, 2021). he influence of gangs and the presence of weapons significantly contribute to school violence, posing serious threats to the safety and well-being of students and staff (HSRC, 2017; Klein, Maxson & Ennis, 2019). Gang violence within and in the vicinity of schools has been identified as a significant risk factor for physical violence (Hendricks, 2018). Gangs often engage in territorial disputes, recruitment and extortion, leading to an environment conducive to violence. The fear of violence can impede learning, leading to lower attendance rates and increased dropout rates, further perpetuating cycles of violence and poverty (Child, 2017).

• *Traditional beliefs*

Traditional notions of masculinity prioritising aggression and dominance promote physical violence among male students (Gasa, Seekings & Taylor, 2016; Stevens, Fortune & Nzimande, 2017; Mohamed, 2015; Naidu, 2015). Certain cultural practices may enforce traditional beliefs about sexuality and sexual expression (Stephens *et al*., 2017). In some cultures, rituals and practices that reinforce harassment or inappropriate behaviour may exist. For example, certain initiation ceremonies may involve hazing or degrading actions towards new students, perpetuating a culture of bullying and harassment (Gasa *et al*., 2016).

2.4 Impact of school violence

The consequences of physical violence in South African secondary schools are far-reaching and multifaceted. They have an impact on the physical, psychological and academic well-being of both the victim and perpetrator. Research has identified the following consequences:

• Physical and emotional harm

Victims of physical violence often suffer physical injuries, including cuts, bruises and broken bones. Additionally, they may experience long-lasting psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Gasa *et al*., 2016; Stevens *et al*., 2017). These physical and emotional symptoms affect learners' academic performance and prevent them from freely engaging and interacting with their peers (UNESCO, 2017).

Physical violence disrupts the learning environment, leading to lower academic performance and increased dropout rates (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013; Meyer & Chetty, 2017). Students who fear for their safety or experience trauma are unable to concentrate on their studies, thus, not progressing educationally satisfactorily. Burton and Leoschut (2013) contend that depression suffered by victims of school violence causes them to lose concentration, increasing the possibility of dropping out of school in the long run because of a lack of motivation.

School sexual violence may also result in emotional, social and health-related issues for the victims. Victims and perpetrators of school violence are sometimes not immune to violence. When teachers believe they are unfairly accused of being perpetrators of violence against learners and issues of victimisation are poorly addressed, it may result in withdrawal educator syndrome (CJCP, 2017). According to Ncontsa and Shumba (2013), violence and crime can result in strained relationships between learners and learners, teachers and learners, and teachers and school management teams, having a negative impact on teaching and learning.

3. Methodological approach

The interpretive approach to research endorses open research involving closeness between the researcher and the participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasise the fundamental approach of getting participants to think and feel in order to volunteer information through contact interviews. In an attempt to find the causes of and solutions to school violence, the interpretive paradigm adopted in this research provides a platform to engage and explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers and school management teams regarding the type, causes and impacts of violence in schools since they are critical stakeholders.

The author used a multiple case study design to obtain the results, as he focused his study on three schools. Every school could provide different responses and help him to understand the phenomenon under investigation better.

3.1 Sampling

This paper investigates the impact of school violence on learners through the lens of social justice theory and an interpretive paradigm. The sample of this qualitative research consisted of three secondary schools in the Vhembe District in the Limpopo Province, South Africa, and are from advantaged and disadvantaged communities, representing a varied sample. The sample comprised 27 teachers selected through purposive sampling, including three principals, three heads of departments, and 21 teachers. Seven participants were evenly selected from each school and represented each race and sex. Learners were not used as respondents because the researcher is of the view that perpetrators or victims may be unable to give accurate accounts of events. In addition, perpetrators think of punishment while the victims seek justice and may distort facts from the issues.

3.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 participants. The 21 teachers were selected purposively because they met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria included males and females, participants who had been victims of violence at school, had been approached by a victim about an alleged violence incident, and had personally witnessed or had been involved otherwise in any form of violence taking place in the schools. The principals and heads of the departments were selected by virtue of being the administrators of the schools. The interviews were conducted on the school premises.

The semi-structured interview schedule was designed to cover the scope and focus of the study. It consisted of open-ended questions to answer the main research question: What is the impact of school violence on South African schools? The broad themes of causes, types, and effects of school violence, as experienced by various schools, were covered. With the consent of the participants, interviews were recorded electronically, and notes were taken during the interview process to take care of words pronounced with ascents and that may not be transcribed accurately.

3.3 Data analysis

Data consisted of transcriptions from the interviews of the selected participants. The data were analysed using ATLAS.ti software The transcribed interview data were uploaded to ATLAS.ti software. After identifying and eliminating redundancies and duplications, data were coded, developed into units, and categorised into themes that are considered relevant to the study. The data were thematically analysed by merging the codes into sub-themes. These sub-themes were merged into overarching and consolidating themes. These themes are explored in the findings section, supported by verbatim excerpts from the data.

3.4 Ethical consideration and trustworthiness

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from both the University of South Africa research and ethics office and the Limpopo Department of Education. The participants were duly informed about the research processes involved. Participants were further informed about the voluntary nature of participation and the option to withdraw from the research at any stage without any consequences. Participants were reminded that their identities would not be mentioned or revealed in the final article, should an article follow the research. The content of their responses would also be kept confidential.

The researcher informed the participants that they were the only people who could help him answer the questions contained in the research. He thanked them for their voluntary participation without any compensation and provided a guarantee of privacy to all participants by assigning identifying codes to them, assuring them that the data collected during interviews would be kept confidential and solely used for the study. To ensure the accuracy of the interviews, the data and initial interpretations were shared with the participants during the study for verification through Interviewee Transcript Reviews (ITR) or member checking (Rowlands, 2021).

All participants confirmed that their responses were accurately represented in the study. As a result of this validation process, the researcher was confident that the study had high internal validity.

4. Results

4.1 Prevalence of school violence

The first theme of the study sought to understand the prevalence of school violence among the participants. The teachers gave vivid accounts of school violence to the best of their ability. The first research question sought to elicit information on the conceptualisation of school violence. Although their ideas of school violence were similar, some of the more prominent ones included the following:

AT2 understood school violence to occur only among learners. The teacher explained,

I think that school violence has to do with assaults on learners, yeah, any physical attack on each other.

However, at School C, the explanation was more detailed, suggesting a deep understanding of school violence and indicating that school violence occurs between learner-learner, learner-teacher, and teacher-learner. CT3 stated that school violence implied,

The presence of disorder and behaviours that can cause fear and injury among learners and teachers and may not be good for teaching and learning.

The second research question was on the type of violence experienced in their schools. The participants responded with accurate dates. The principals provided the most valuable information, since they documented the events in their school diaries, including the most recent ones.

Table 1: Types of school violence experienced by schools

Type of school violence	School A	School B	School C	Total
Bullying	12	17	17	36
Corporal punishment	21	12	4	37
Sexual harassment	9	5	2	16
Gangsterism	3	3	4	10
Alcohol and drugs	1	5	1	7
Shooting	0	0	0	0
Vandalism	2	2	0	4
Stabbing	1	0	0	1

Corporal punishment and bullying have been recorded as significant forms of school violence. The three schools in the study experienced excessive forms of corporal punishment and bullying; Schools B and C experienced the most bullying incidents, and School A recorded the highest corporal punishment incidence but less bullying than the other schools.

The common forms of bullying recorded in the schools were learners taking money from their peers, taking their food, and harassment. CT1 explained,

Most times, some of the boys come to school without food and money, and because they are hungry, they take food away from the young ones and sometimes beat them up or threaten them.

AT6 believed,

Harassment of young kids forms part of the daily activities of the older boys.

Corporal punishment was recorded in Schools A, B, and C. According to the participants, corporal punishment becomes the last resort after several failed attempts to correct the learners' deviant behaviours. Teachers are aware of the ban on corporal punishment in schools but reiterated that alternative punishments are indirect punishments for teachers. AT1 stated,

We are aware of the ban on corporal punishment but have to use it sometimes to reduce indiscipline in the school.

CT7 revealed,

> *The learners use the alternative form of punishment to get to us because we stay behind for long hours supervising them, and sometimes they deliberately misbehave, knowing beating them is not allowed.*

This reveals that teachers use corporal punishment on the learners, despite it being against the laws of the state.

The third-highest school violence reported in the schools was sexual harassment. The harassment occurs mostly between boys and girls. The older boys mainly cause this harassment after their initiation. However, sometimes the younger kids are involved. School A experienced the highest occurrence of sexual harassment, with School C with the least incidents. BT5 explained,

> *Learners experience this form of violence, especially when the boys returned from initiation school … I must add that sexual harassment is always between the learners and does not involve teachers.*

The study identifies gangsterism as another form of violence prevalent in participating schools, although it is not as high as other violence.

The participants reported other forms of school violence but on a smaller scale. School B experienced drug-related offences. The study found that physical forms of violence were minimal in all schools. Physical violence, such as shootings, was not recorded in the three schools, while School A recorded stabbings. In addition, Schools A and B recorded vandalism.

4.2 Causes of school violence

Teachers identified the socioeconomic status of learners as a reason for learners' misbehaviour in the three schools. Most parents, particularly from black communities, are unemployed and fail to provide for their children. The principal from School A added,

> *Some learners from poor backgrounds come to school without food and snatch food from their victims.*

Other participants explained that the violent nature of the learners is learnt behaviours from their homes. At School C, where gang attacks are experienced, the participants attributed the violence to the community. CT7 explained,

> *Some of our communities are full of crime and violence, and our learners copy from the community and their parents who are at times involved in violent behaviours.*

Sometimes, the gangsters encourage their victims to commit violence in the school. AT6 added,

> *The use of drugs in schools is sometimes copied from their peers.*

The study reveals that cultural practices such as male initiation provide aggression and dominance for initiates. These aggressive behaviours perpetuate a violent culture where the older boys begin to harass the females. BT2 explained,

> *When the initiates return from the bush, they have the notion that they are men and begin to show masculinity through advances on the females.*

Participants from the three schools commented that a lack of discipline significantly contributes to school violence. The lack of discipline in schools is largely blamed on the teachers and school leadership, where learners are left unattended, creating an atmosphere of violence. AT4 opined that violence is caused by teachers not attending their lessons.

> When teachers do not attend their lessons regularly, they leave the learners no choice but to become chaotic and become violent.

BT4 agreed,

> As teachers, we sometimes provoke our learners, and when they retaliate violently, we play the victim. I noticed that most of the bullies are older learners who have repeated almost every class and are waiting to pass through the school; such learners should be removed.

4.3 Impact of school violence

Overall, teachers from the three schools described the impact of school violence as physical harm and emotional effects of violence on learners in relation to learning. The victims of school violence may suffer physical injuries and emotional trauma. It also creates a toxic and unpleasant atmosphere in the schools where learners feel unsafe and uncomfortable. The following are responses from two principals:

> Sometimes the effect becomes so unbearable to the victims that they no longer come to school, leading to poor school attendance and eventually dropping out [AP].

CP1 added,

> Since they attend the same class as the perpetrator of the violence, learners fail to concentrate, leading to poor performance and a high failure rate and learners who are victims bunk classes and end up dropping out.

All these effects of school violence negatively impact the learners' performance.

School violence affects not only learning but also teaching. A toxic and uncontrollable environment is also not conducive to teaching. AT1 explained,

> As a result of the violent activities, the textbooks are sometimes stolen, or the pages are torn off, leading to a textbook shortage, which means I must spend lots of time writing on the chalkboard. This makes teaching very difficult and time-consuming.

BT4 added,

> … learners vandalised the classroom windows, making it difficult to teach during winter because the rooms are cold and not conducive for teaching.

Furniture is also destroyed, creating a shortage in the school, and half the lesson is spent on learners looking for chairs. AT7 expressed his view of the issue,

> As teachers, we get demoralised and demotivated to teach because of the violent actions of learners.

Thus, it can be said that school violence has a negative impact on teaching.

5. Findings and discussion

Corporal punishment emerged as the most common school violence in the three sampled schools. In terms of section 10(1) of the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996), corporal punishment has been banned from South African schools. Corporal punishment is, however, still common practice, with teachers hitting learners with dusters and sticks (Nkosi, 2021) on their hands, the back of their bodies and their buttocks. Sometimes, they pinch learners' cheeks (Venter, 2022). It is rather unfortunate that teachers still use corporal punishment in our schools, contrary to the laws of the country. Teachers find it more convenient to hit learners than using other forms of disciplinary measures. It is convenient for them because they find alternative disciplinary measures to be "self-punishment". For example, learner detention means the teacher must spend time with the learner at the school when everyone is gone. This indicates that teachers lack knowledge of other positive disciplinary measures (Quali & Ward, 2022).

Apart from inflicting physical pain on the victims, corporal punishment could cause learners to withdraw in class and sometimes kill learners' initiatives. The finding reveals that corporal punishment will likely cause learners to drop out of school when it persists. In Taiwan and some parts of Tanzania, teachers believe that corporal punishment is essential for successful teaching and learning (Chen & Wei, 2011; Masath *et al.,* 2021). However, it is evident that in schools where corporal punishment was administered, other forms of indiscipline were reduced, especially bullying, indicating that the physical pain helps to curb disciplinary problems among learners.

Sexual abuse or violence is conduct involving the unlawful and intentional use of physical force or threat that results in the violation of the bodily or sexual integrity of another person. The findings reveal that sexual abuse is prevalent in the research areas. It seems the most common sexual abuse constitutes learner on learner abuse, with fewer learner-on-teacher or teacher-on-learner incidents.

The commonest forms of sexual harassment include boys making advances on girls, and unwanted sexual behaviour such as touching girls inappropriately. This behaviour is limited to boys and girls; none of the female teachers reported to have experienced this form of violence. The fact that none of the teachers reported sexual abuse to learners does not mean it never existed because teacher-on-learner sexual abuse is common in South Africa (De Wet, 2024), or perhaps it is consensual (Manda, 2018). Sexual violence among learners is more prevalent in rural and township schools than in urban schools. This is the case because of the cultural element, where male initiates see themselves as mature and ready to engage with girls. No pregnancy was reported as a result of the sexual violence in schools, as is the case in other parts of South Africa (De Wet, 2024).

The findings also revealed that the sexual harassment of girls sometimes results from cultural influences. Gasa *et al*. (2016), Stephens *et al.* (2017), Mohamed (2015), and Naidu (2015) argue that traditional notions of masculinity, which prioritise aggression and dominance, promote physical violence among male students. The findings confirm that sexual harassment is higher among the initiate males. The initiates become more violent because they want to show their masculinity.

This study presents another global phenomenon that points to bullying in school. Bullying is where learners threaten and intimidate others. Bullying can occur in different forms, such as unpleasant remarks, moral labelling, beating, pushing, taking what does not belong to them, and sometimes kicking their victim. Bullying was identified as the molesting of young kids by older and aggressive boys and sometimes inflicting harm on them (UNESCO, 2017). The older boys have been involved in acts such as forcefully taking money from their peers and the younger ones and unnecessarily harassing the younger kids. The bullies threaten and sometimes beat up their victims when they dare to complain. Bullying occurs more in township and affluent suburban schools. Some learners resort to taking others' property because they come from poverty-stricken homes and cannot afford some common items (Wilcox *et al.*, 2017). In addition, some learners come to school without pens and pencils; thus, they are compelled to take others' possessions, illustrating this phenomenon.

The study identified vandalism as school violence. Vandalism is an aggressive and violent behaviour of learners that can cause significant damage to school property (Singh & Steyn, 2014). Common aggressive behaviour of learners in schools includes breaking classroom windows, making it difficult to teach during the winter, because the rooms are cold and not conducive to teaching. Furniture is also destroyed, creating a shortage in the school, and half the lesson is spent on learners looking for chairs. This finding supports the assertion that such violent conduct interferes with teaching, causes a loss of teaching time, and causes teacher fatigue (Osher *et al.*, 2010). Such violent behaviour also affects the school environment negatively, making teaching and learning difficult, and resulting in poor learner performance. Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) found that violence leads to loss of learning and tuition because the disruptions require attention.

The study also highlights the emergence of drug abuse and gangsterism at the three schools. Drug abuse is an indirect form of violence. Learners who engage in the abuse of substances such as alcohol and hard drugs are capable of perpetuating other violence. These crimes directly reflect the society and communities learners come from (Meyer & Chetty, 2017). In their study, Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) found that school violence is a direct reflection of crime in the communities. Communities with high crime rates are likely to record violence in their schools. This study confirmed previous studies that suggest that crime in schools is a direct reflection of the crime rate in the community. The perpetrators of this violence are the older boys, while the younger boys and girls are the victims. Although the young ones also perpetrate violence, they do so because they belong to a gang of older boys who instruct them to do so. Younger boys and girls are vulnerable and need protection.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Violence in schools is reported annually in South African schools. School violence is on the increase and increasingly affect both teachers and learners' well-being (Chetty, 2021). Learners are increasingly becoming violent against one another and sometimes against teachers and management (Venketsamy, 2023) School violence is detrimental to the school environment, teachers and learners. It creates an unequal school environment for learners and teachers where fear and intimidation thrive. Several factors emerged as causes of school violence among learners. These violent behaviours perpetuated by the learners leave profound physical, social, emotional and psychological marks on the victims. Some learners who cannot bear the scars of the violence leave school. Others who remain at school cannot cope with academic work and perform poorly. A high-violence school environment will promote

poor performance. Such an environment does not allow learners to perform to the best of their ability. The study has shown that school violence has a negative impact on both learners and teachers.

The findings highlight the failure of the Department of Basic Education to implement policies and guidelines such as the School Safety Framework, which was developed to protect and prevent violence in schools. A holistic approach to personal transformation recognises that young people ought to be at the centre of the strategy to eradicate violence from schools. Personal transformation strategies should include processes where young people are enabled to delve into their inner worlds as a catalyst for their personal transformation. Young people must be supported to explore who they are; they should be allowed to express their emotions and engage in self-coaching processes through setting goals and positive self-talk.

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