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Editorial

School violence is a problem which occurs internationally and confronts all authorities with seemingly invincible obstacles that impede their education. There are also constant reports on shocking violence in American schools where people are killed by shooting, while the German authorities have already commissioned two large research projects to investigate the problem and propose solutions. French authorities have also taken steps to protect their educators.

Why has what is so grotesquely abnormal become normal for us in this country? This question, posed by Graça Machel (2021), South Africa's former first lady and anti-gender-based violence (GBV) advocate, is what comes up when one studies the official statistics and the incessant news reports on violence in education in South Africa.

How does this 'grotesquely abnormal' situation exist in a society based on Ubuntu? If *I am, because you are*, and we both become the product of each other's actions and decisions, how does it square with the brutality of daily life and the threat to the futures of children, teachers, students and ultimately the broader community? This suggests that there is a lack of knowledge on the nature and effects of school violence on various role players.

Our invitation to scholars to reflect on the scourge of violence in educational settings, created an opportunity to contemplate the causes and consequences, but also ways to ameliorate the situation. All the scholars also touched on what the meaning of school violence might be and they made use of extant international and national literature.

Meg Milligan, **Bhekuyise Zungu** and **Kanessa Miller Doss** explore the trends as well as the underlying psychology, the lifelong psychological impact and the ways culture and other environmental factors can temper it. They attempt to understand how this problem developed into the current constantly worsening national crisis in South African schools. They examine aggression and violence from its origins through the process of evolution, biological and psychological coevolution. They also look at the problem from a historical perspective, describe many of its relevant forms and note its disproportionate occurrence across populations. Lastly, they identify challenges and provide recommendations.

Sifiso Sibanda gives an overview of the extent to which violence has ravaged schools, colleges, and universities by way of a qualitative content analysis of online newspaper articles and social media news.

Two other authors look at specific consequences of school violence. **Rudzani Israel Lumadi** applies the lenses of social justice theory and the interpretive paradigm to investigate the impact of school violence on learners' aspirations, participation and performance in secondary schools. **Mochina Mphuthi's** systematic literature review and document analysis assess the possible role of the Life Orientation curriculum in curbing the learner behaviour that perpetrates school violence. Life skills such as communication, managing emotions, and conflict resolution are suggested as means of developing healthy relationships.

One particular type of school violence, namely bullying, has become pervasive among learners and between teachers and learners. Usually, when analysing an act of bullying, we distinguish among the victim, the bully and the bystander. However, yet another role exists – a bully-victim. **Kebogile Mokwena** explores and explains reasons why some learners assume the dual roles of victim and perpetrator. From this article, one can deduce that there are many manifestations of violence in education.

Inevitably, gender also comes up when talking about bullying and other forms of school violence. **Shakila Singh** and **Sherri Lee Gopaldass David**'s article draws on a qualitative study on the experiences of school violence among boys at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal. They argue that it is necessary to focus on boys' own perspectives, the demands they have to face and an understanding of the complex social and cultural contexts within which they navigate the everyday world of school.

The study by two other authors, **Angel Dlungwane** and **Viljay Hanlall**, focuses on Black girls and the implicit nature of gender-based violence (SRGBV) that affects them in township high schools. The aim is to look beyond the connection between masculinity and gender-based violence to the specific acts, as well as multiple and qualitatively different pathways to the enactment of GBV. It is important to understand these dynamics if school violence prevention interventions are to be effective. The discussion of the concept of implicit violence underlines the complex nature of the school violence phenomenon.

Corene de Wet undertakes a qualitative media study within an interpretative research paradigm to expand our knowledge of sexual violence perpetrated against learners in South African public and private schools. She employs media reports from South African English newspapers to explore the link between violence and personal, structural and cultural sexual violence in schools as well as to consider possible rectifications of the abnormal situations.

Cina Mosito and **Zandisile Sitoyi** are the first of several authors who take a closer look at the effect of school violence on teachers' well-being. They apply an interpretative phenomenological research design to examine three teachers' experiences of school violence. In the same vein, the article by **Charity Okeke** and **Windvoël Simphiwe** apply the routine activity theory to investigate factors that specifically influence learners to target teachers. It also highlights teachers' coping strategies to improve their teaching experiences.

The case study presented by **Roy Venketsam** introduces another aspect of school violence, namely the role of leadership. He discusses the case of teachers who had been victims of violence, either directly or indirectly, yet received no support from school leaders. **Nicholus Tumelo Mollo** turns the spotlight on what legislation says about teachers' right to safety

from violence, as well as the functionaries' explicit duty to act to protect them. Highlighting a different view, **Pierre du Plessis**' article explores the perceptions and experiences of school principals and school governing bodies in rural areas regarding school violence. It highlights the improvement of management, school effectiveness and professional conduct of teachers as ways of curtailing violence.

On a more positive note, **Roelf Reyneke** reports on a quantitative study conducted on safe parks. Results show that safe-park activities enhance learner safety, improve community well-being, reduce gangsterism, and decrease discipline problems.

The last article deals specifically with violence in higher education. **Mlamuli Hlatshwayo** explores a broader philosophical conception of violence in the education system. He explores the deeply embedded and well-entrenched epistemic violence in higher education because of the dominance of Eurocentric thought in curriculum design. He also touches on the lasting effects of decolonisation.

In 2017, Sayed, Badroodien, Hanaya and Rodríguez wrote a chapter titled, "Social cohesion, violence, and education in South Africa", in a book edited by Seedat *et al*. (2017). The submissions by authors tended to take a superficial view of violence and produced explanations of the concept that they gleaned from the extant literature (particularly in South Africa) and from public discussion in newspapers on social media and in meetings organised by education authorities. The recommendations made to improve the situation and curtail the different types of violence and in the end to reduce their presence in education institutions to an insignificant level also suffer from the lack of sound information on the issues.

Like the article by Milligan *et al*. in this volume of *Perspectives in Education*, this chapter by Sayed *et al.* (2017) suggests that a simplistic and superficial view of the nature of the problem and possible solutions is not going to improve the situation. They analyse the concepts 'social cohesion' and 'violence' in education and they argue convincingly that education must be located in an environment where there is social cohesion (cohesion is not threatened by violence). Social cohesion can diminish the frequency and intensity of educational violence and contribute to a better future for all.

It would seem that the phenomenon of violence in education can only be addressed by intensive studies, looking at it through various lenses and developing strategies to counter it by using possible approaches from various fields of study. It is clear that the problem can only be addressed successfully if studied intensively as a complex phenomenon requiring innovative solutions. For now, it remains a daunting challenge for all academics and role players in education.

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