# Learner- on- learner violence: A Case of Tshwane West District (D15), Mabopane, Gauteng Province

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## Abstract

In recent years, violence among learners has escalated in many schools in South Africa. This has raised concerns in society on whether the measures put in place to address the problem works. For this reason, we set to investigate the causes and measures to curb school violence in two schools in a disadvantaged community of Mabopane, Gauteng Province. We selected a township setting as the context of our research. This choice is informed by frequent occurrence of violence in high schools. We used a qualitative research approach to collect data through semi-structured interviews with twelve learners (n = 6) from two high schools in the township of Mabopane. The findings suggest that the lack of control of learners, as demonstrated by learners loitering around during classes, gambling, and drug abuse are the primary causes contributing to violence.

**Keywords:** *Discipline; Educators; Learners; School Management; Violence; Intervention*

## Introduction

Prinsloo and Neser (2007) define school violence as any purposeful physical or non-physical (verbal) act that causes physical or non-physical suffering to the recipient while under the supervision of the school. These physical and non-physical acts often result in fights and attacks on the victims within the school environment (Ncontsha & Shumba, 2013), and has left some learners deceased and others injured. Research shows that the scourge of learner-on-learner violence is high in South African schools and has escalated in recent years (Burton, 2008; Le Roux & Mokhele, 2011; Mncube, 2014; Ncontsha & Shumba, 2013). South Africa has a culture of violence which spills over into schools. The World Population Review (2022) rank South Africa as the country with the third-highest crime rate in the world, with the crime index of 76.86, after Venezuela and Papua New Guinea with crime indexes of 83.76 and 80.79, respectively. The report notably indicates a high level of violent crimes in the country. The high levels of violence in the schools mirror the violence that exists in society, because schools are a microcosm of a broader society.

Studies on school violence indicate that factors driving leaner violence are associated with broader socio-economic factors and exposure to violence (Burton, 2008; Le Roux & Mokhele, 2011; Mncube, 2014; Ncontsha & Shumba, 2013). Despite having studies conducted on school violence, the education authority's anti-violence strategy appears to yield negative results, as literature shows that the level of school violence has increased in recent years. Although societal factors are important in understanding the phenomenon of school violence, we investigated the variables within the school environment that perpetuate learner-on-learner violence. We believe that such an approach is likely to suggest measures that might prove to be effective in curbing violence at school level.

## 2. Literature Review

The National School Violence Study (Burton, 2008) undertaken by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) found that in total 15.3% of learners in primary and secondary schools have been victims of some form of violence while at school. Another study by CJCP in 2012 (DBE, 2015) shows that one in five secondary school learners – a total of 20.2% - have been victims of school violence. The two surveys indeed indicate a high prevalence of learner violence in South African schools. Classrooms are identified as the most common sites for violence in the national studies conducted in both 2008 and 2012 (DBE, 2015).

No new national survey has been conducted in relation to school violence since 2012 (Burton, 2019), but data collected by CJCP in 2016 suggests that the level of violence in schools is relatively stable but unfortunately high, and this constitute the violation of the learners' right to be free from all forms of violence (Constitution of RSA, 1996). Mncube (2014) argues that the basis for violence is social rather than genetic or biological and therefore, there are ways and means of reducing human violence.

The Department of Basic Education is concerned about high levels of violence (DBE). However, educational officials' efforts to reduce school violence appear to be ineffective. The DBE has a protocol agreement with the South African Police Service (SAPS) to conduct unannounced search and seizure operations, and to educate the youth about the dangers of violence and substance abuse in schools. Burton (2019) points out that searches and using metal detectors have not yielded positive results in the United States in addressing violence in schools.

In Gauteng Province, the provincial department of education, in partnership with SAPS, provides schools with volunteers who serve as security personnel. Although schools welcome any effort or attempt that would safe-guard their property and assets and create a safe and healthy working environment, the volunteer system provides security officers who are ill-equipped to offer the appropriate security services required by the schools (Mashaba, 2015).

The education authorities have another partnership with the Department of Sport and Recreation as part of an intervention to keep learners preoccupied and away from destructive activities. The challenge here is that the school funding model by the Gauteng Provincial Education Department does not make provision for funds to be allocated to extramural activities, including sports. Maile (2013) points out that many schools (disadvantaged) have cut down on extra-curricular activities due to inadequate funding. Fundraising by schools might be a plausible solution to finance cultural and sporting activities. All public-school governing bodies are required by Section 36 of the South African School Act (SASA, 1996) to raise additional resources. However, literature indicates a lack of fundraising knowledge and skills in disadvantaged schools (Mashaba, 2015; Mpolokeng, 2017).

The DBE adopted and implemented the National Safety Framework at schools, crafted by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (DBE, 2015). Burton (2019) states that schools often do not have the capacity to use the available tools to deal with violence. This suggests that schools have been given the framework but not the resources or capacity to implement it. Indeed, education authorities confirmed

that the school safety and security strategy to address youth violence has met with limited success due to inadequate resourcing (Gauteng Five-Year Strategic Plan, 2010 -2014).

Life Orientation as a learning area is also viewed as a measure to curb violence, because learners are taught values such as self-discipline, responsibility, respect for self and others, and other important social values. Despite Life Orientation being taught at schools, high levels of violence have continued to persist in schools.

Violence undermines the environment for effective teaching and learning, and impact negatively on learner performance. Schools are not completely vulnerable to external violence in a violent society. It is imperative for schools to have measures in place, including the code of conduct, to resist and protect learners against violence. This article will attempt to provide a more comprehensive and integrated perspective on the causes of learner-on-learner violence, and to propose functional intervention strategies.

High levels of violence put the schools at the risk of underperforming. Students' ability to learn is negatively impacted, and in extreme cases, violence may lead to learner drop-out. Teaching time is also lost as educators focus on solving problems of learner aggression and unruly behaviour (Ncontsha & Shumba, 2013).

Learner-on-learner violence takes place in different ways and forms such as bullying, sexual violence, physical assault, gang violence, psychological abuse, and threats of violence (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). A number of factors can be regarded as the main causes of violence in schools, including crime and violence in the community, indiscipline of learners, unemployment and poverty in communities, overcrowding, easy access to school grounds, and a lack of recreational facilities (Masitsa, 2011; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). In brief, it can be said that the causes of school-based violence include personality traits and behaviour of learners; family dynamics; school dynamics; and social dynamics (Mathe, 2008; Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Smit, 2010). All these causes can be grouped broadly as ecological factors.

In South Africa, two of the primary risk factors for school violence are easy access to weapons and drugs (Burton, Leoschut & Bonora, 2009; Ngqela & Lewis, 2012). A learner who has brought drugs or weapons to school may want to use it, thus placing other learners at high risk of violence (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). A study by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), together with the DBE, revealed a disturbing reality of the possibility of teachers and learners carrying all sorts of weapons on school premises (HSRC, 2017).

Many of our learners, particularly those from informal and disadvantaged communities, are faced with or exposed to violence in those communities almost daily (Cluver, Bowes & Gardner, 2010; Mathe, 2008; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). The use of corporal punishment by teachers is another form of exposing learners to an environment of violence and aggression (Mncube, 2014). Learners who are exposed to violence are at risk of being victims themselves at school, or subjecting others to their learnt violent behavioural factors (Brown, Simelane & Malan, 2016). Furthermore, learners who are subjected to violence within the privacy of their homes may also be driven to cause learner-on-learner violence at schools. Violent attitudes and behaviours transfer to the learners and instil a behaviour that is not acceptable in the school environment (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Learners who have been victimised at home and in their communities in general are at increased risk of violence and victimisation at school. These learners have picked up aggressive and anti-social behaviours, which they subsequently display at school towards other learners (Meyer & Chetty, 2017).

Membership to or association with gangs by learners, even from outside the school environment, is often behind learner-on-learner gang violence at schools (Mathe, 2008; Mncube & Harber, 2013). This violence often manifests itself on school grounds as spills over in disputes between gangs with members

who are learners (Brown, Simelane & Malan, 2016; Equal Education, 2016). In some cases, violence is caused by gang members threatening, bullying, and robbing other learners of their possessions.

Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) noted that indiscipline is a source of violence in schools that leads to an unconducive and disorderly school environment. The school environment gets easily disrupted when learners lack the discipline required for teaching and learning, and when rules and good relations are disregarded (Mathe, 2008). The manifestation of indiscipline itself is influenced by many factors. These factors are, for example, *student-specific factors* - such as being from the lower class of the community, and *class-specific factors* – such as class composition and class climate factors (Mareš, 2018). Class composition includes overcrowding. Crowded classrooms make it easy for learners to misbehave and exhibit behaviours that are not needed in schools. The safe learning environment is thus disrupted (WHO, 2019). Class climate may include the general behaviour of the class. According to Mareš (2018:564), "students in classroom behaving aggressively tend to be rated by their peers more favourably when enrolled in classrooms where aggressive behaviour is the norm." Thus, peer rating reinforces aggressive behaviour and the readiness to resort to violence in the classroom, which is detrimental to the environment nurturing effective teaching and learning.

Uncontrolled and easy access to school premises makes it possible for violent activities from outside the schools to be brought into the school premises. It is therefore important to carefully consider and be mindful of the school location and perimeter infrastructure when implementing efforts to prevent school-based violence (WHO, 2019). For instance, communal toilets or unisex toilets can increase the risk of violence against girl learners (WHO, 2019). Secure schools mean a low risk of violence (Mathe, 2008), but this cannot be achieved when there is easy and uncontrolled access. In the context of learner-on-learner violence, control includes making sure that learners do not bring weapons and illegal drugs to school.

Measures to prevent violence in schools are divided into three categories namely measures related to the management and leadership of the school focusing on discipline and collaborative relations with law enforcement and social agencies; those related to modification of the educational environment, installing metal detectors, security guards and other safety and security measures; and curriculum-based measures (Burton & Lezanne, 2013; Kelly, 2017; Volokh & Snell, 1998).

The focus of curriculum-based initiatives is to equip students with the knowledge and tools they need to recognize situations that cause conflict and might result in violent activities. Learners should be taught how to deal with anger, to mediate conflicting situations, to be tolerant, and how to report violence (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013; Ngidi, 2018; UNESCO, 2019; Volokh & Snell, 1998). In essence, the entire school community should be provided with training on how to identify and respond to violence.

Management and leadership in schools play an important role in ensuring accountability and teacher professionalism. Educators should employ strategies of managing classrooms in a positive manner, and model care and concern for victims and perpetrators of violence (Ngidi, 2018; UNESCO, 2019; Volokh & Snell, 1998). Teachers are thus change agents and should create a positive and supportive environment that promotes healing, and address learners' needs in a fair and just manner. The existence and practice of these variables minimises the prevalence of violence in schools (Mncube, 2014; Ngidi 2014).

A learner code of conduct, based on policy and legislative framework with an emphasis on safety and security, to enhance positive learning and a healthy classroom environment, assists in prescribing school rules that reduce violence when implemented properly. Dube and Hlalele (2018) argue that practices that preserve human dignity and do not undermine the rights of learners, creates an environment in which learners are treated with respect, and the incidences of violence are mitigated.

Collaborating and establishing partnerships with other stakeholders that provide services from agencies such as law enforcement, social welfare, civil society, and other professional organisations are helpful in mitigating the occurrence of violence (UNESCO 2019). Healthy relations with stakeholders and among members of the school community enhance effective communication that leads to reduced levels of violence.

Davids and Wahid (2016) suggest that to remedy undesirable disruptive behaviour, teachers, parents, and learners must realise that violence should be countered with the language of care, discourse, and mutual engagement.

## *Theoretical Framework*

The study is underpinned by the theory of social learning and Sameroff's Transactional Ecological Development model. Social learning theory purports that children's acquisition of behaviour ensues from their exposure to competent role models that display appropriate behaviour in solving problems and coping with their world. As much as positive behaviours can be acquired through positive role models, conversely, negative behaviours and in particular violence, can also be acquired through the modelling of negative behaviours (Sommer, 1990). Sameroff's Transactional Ecological Development model asserts that learners cannot be studied outside of the contexts in which they develop and are located (Burton, 2008). Violence is an anti-social behaviour that children learn within their societal context, hence the social learning theory and Sameroff's Transactional Ecological Development model provides a useful lens to investigate the phenomenon of learner-on-learner violence within the school context.

## *Research Strategy*

This research employed a qualitative method. A case study approach was employed to investigate the phenomenon of learner-on-learner violence within the school setting in Mabopane Township, Gauteng Province, South Africa. A non-probability method was used to select the sample size. Mabopane was selected because it is a township with predominantly disadvantaged communities, which depends on the public schooling system. It was the authors' intention to investigate and understand the phenomenon of school violence and its effect within a school setting in a disadvantaged community.

Based on information obtained from the district office, which indicates the number of violent cases reported to the district by the schools, we selected two schools with the highest number of cases reported. The data collection instrument was semi-structured interviews with focus groups. Twelve learners – six in each school – in the executive committee of the Leaner Representative Council (LRC) were purposively selected to participate in the focus group interviews, because learners in the LRC are representative members in the school governing body, and conversant with school governance, rules, regulations, and problems encountered by the schools in relation to violence. In each school, six leaners from the LRC participated in the study.

## *Findings*

### 1. Definition and Level of School Violence

School violence can be physical or non-physical, and often result in fights that have left some learners injured and even deceased (Ncontsha & Shumba, 2013; Prinsloo & Neser, 2007). The interview analysis found that learners understand the meaning and concept of the school violence. Students mentioned the following:

Participant: *"School violence is the violence that is taking place within the school premises, with some learners abusing other learners physically and it can also be emotional."*

Another participant: *"It starts with verbal abuse and end up being a physical fight."*

Third participant: *"Boys were fighting for two rands and one boy's ear was beaten off by another boy. The boy has no upper part of his ear."*

The study found the prevalence of high levels of violence in the participating schools.

Participant: *"Violence is a problem in our school. It is a very big problem."*

## 2. Causes of Learner on Learner Violence

We found that easy access to drugs by leaners is fuelling learner-on-learner violence in schools. Members of the LRC mentioned the following:

Participant: *"Learners who take drugs inside the school can't control themselves and always clashes and fight with other learners."*

Second participant: *"Learners come to school being high on drugs and they also take drugs in the toilets. They smoke dagga, ntash, and there is this one called cat which they also smoke."*

Third participant: *"There are students who sell drugs in the school."*

Fourth participant: *"There is a hole in the fence, and during break some learners go out of the yard to buy drugs and then come back to school."*

Another participant: *"The liquid that is used to clean the smartboard, some learners sniff that liquid and it get them high."*

The study found that learners bring weapons to schools.

Participant: *"Learners come to school with dangerous weapons including guns."*

Data analysis revealed that learners pick up aggressive and anti-social behaviour from their community, which they display in school and towards other leaners.

Participant: *"Some learners are bullied in the community by other people, and when they come to school they start bullying other learners in the school."*

The analysis found that single parent homes and abusive families are drivers of learner-on-learner violence. Learners mentioned the following:

Participant: *"There are family members that are constantly fighting, and fathers beating mothers in front of the kids. When the kids come to school they take out their frustration and anger on the other children."*

Another participant: *"Home manners, we have mothers who are constantly changing boyfriends at home, and this creates anger in the kids which they bring to school. And boyfriends are abusive to the kids because they are not biological parents."*

Third participant: *"There are biological parents who are abusive to the kids at home."*

Dysfunctional families contribute to violent attitudes and behaviours that rub off the learners, instil in them a behaviour that is not acceptable in the schooling environment, and put learners at an increased risk of violent behaviour.

Teachers were found to be exposing learners to an environment of violence through lack of respect and verbal abuse. Learners mentioned the following:

Participant: *"Majority of teachers do not respect learners, and often abuse learners verbally in class. When the teacher leaves the class, the abused learners tend to take out their anger on other kids who were laughing when the teacher was being abusive."*

Non-attendance of classes by teachers and teacher absenteeism was found to create an environment for learner gambling in the classrooms, which leads to learner violence.

Participant: *"Teachers don't attend their classes regularly and sometimes they are absent from school. When there is no teacher in class, learners start gambling in class and soon fights start as a result of gambling."*

The bunking of classes by learners by hiding in the school toilets is a contributory factor to leaner-on-learner violence.

Participant: *"Learners bunk classes in the toilets. Gambling and fighting are also taking place in the school toilets."*

Gangsterism contributes to learner violence in the participating schools.

Participant: *"One student accused another learner of stealing his cell phone. The owner of the phone called his gang from outside the school, and the learner accused of stealing ran to the staffroom and hide behind teachers. This put teachers at risk."*

The above findings indicate the existence of uncontrolled and easy access to the premises of the participating schools, which makes it possible for violent activities from outside the schools to be brought onto the school premises. Learners mentioned the following:

Participant: *"No access control to the school premises."*

Another participant: *"During break there are outsiders around the school fence who are giving things to students who are inside the school yard, and no one is checking on this activity. We don't know if they are giving them food or drugs."*

Lack of tight security in the schools also contributes to vandalism of the school property. A participant said the following:

*"There is no tight security in the school. Last year they had stolen the hard drives of all smartboards in the school."*

The interview analysis found that schools disregard the school rules. Lack of rules contributes to learner indiscipline and a disorderly school environment, which impacts negatively on good relations and perpetuates violence.

Participant: *"Students don't know school rules and the consequences of not following the rules. That's why learners misbehave in class."*

Second participant: *"I'm now in grade 12, they only tell us about the examination rules, no other rules except exam rules."*

Data analysis in the participating schools found that there are students who are not performing well academically, and these learners are too old for the classes that they are attending. These older students are domineering and abusive towards other leaners. Learners mentioned the following:

Participant: *"There are older students for their grades, and they call themselves ancestors of the school. Other learners can't tell them anything because they claim they have been in the school for a very long-term and they are abusive to other learners."*

Sexual relationships between learners contribute to an environment of learner-on-learner violence. Students mentioned the following:

Participant: *"You will find a girl dating two or more boys, and then there is a fighting over the girl."*

Another participant: *"Not only boys, even girls fight for boys."*

## 3. Forms of Violence

Learner-on-learner violence takes place in different ways and forms. The study found that the most common forms of violence in participating schools are physical assault and emotional abuse.

Participant: *"Common form of violence is physical violence and emotional abuse."*

Second participant: *"Mostly it is fighting which involve boys."*

Third participant: *"Girls are mostly involved in verbal abuse with each other."*

Bullying was found to be perpetrated at the lower grades of the participating schools. Learners mentioned the following:

Participant: *"bullying is very common in grade 8 because the learners are newcomers to the school."*

Another participant: *"I was with the teacher and we saw a grade 8 boy bleeding from his nose and crying. When we ask what happened, the boy didn't reply until we got his classmates who explained that the boy was beaten by some boys who are bullying him every day and he was afraid to report it."*

The study found that boys are most often the perpetrators of sexual abuse.

Participant: *"When we are crowded, boys like slapping girls on their buttocks and when you turn around you can't see who did it. You can't identify the culprit."*

Threats between learners also characterise the pattern of learner-on-learner violence in the schools.

Participant: *"One girl has changed the school because she was threatened by another girl who wanted to cut off her dreadlocks."*

Another participant: *"Teachers tell us to call them when it is their period, but as a class rep when you want to go out of class to call the teacher to come to class, other learners start threatening you."*

## 4. Sites for Violence in the Schools

The most common sites identified where leaner-on-learner violence takes place in the participating schools are classrooms and toilets.

Participant: *"Violence is taking place in our classrooms and toilets."*

Data analysis found that school violence is also taking place outside the school premises of the participating schools, but clashes that lead to such fights start in the classrooms and toilets. A participant mentioned the following:

Participant: *"Some fights are outside the school gate, but clashes had started in the classroom and toilets."*

## 5. Measures to Curb School Violence

The study found that the code of conduct is disregarded as a measure to curb violence in the participating schools:

Participant: *"Ever since I was in this school, we never red or discussed the school code of conduct with our class teachers."*

Second participant: *"At school they don't give us a code of conduct."*

The interview analysis revealed a lack of enforcement of the disciplinary measures on learners.

Participant: *"At school they suspend learners but they don't make sure that they enforce the suspension. There was a big fight in my class. The students were suspended, but the day after the suspension they came to school and nothing happened."*

Unattended classes by teachers are prone to learner indiscipline and violence. The study found that the school management is incapable of enforcing policies that ensures regular class attendance by teachers.

Participant: *"The deputy principal gave class reps registers in which teachers must sign when they attend their periods in classes. As the register was introduced last year, teacher attendance improved, but as time went on, they no longer attend to their classes properly."*

The bunking of classes by learners hiding the school toilets, which fuels violence, indicate the failure of teachers in participating schools to manage their classes properly to ensure regular learner attendance.

The problem of drug abuse in the participating schools is compounded by learners who are selling drugs in the schools. However, data analysis found a lack of collaboration between the schools and law enforcement agencies. Participants mentioned the following:

Participant: *"We must have random searches by the police on a weekly basis."*

Another participant: *"Ah! The police only come once a year."*

The study found that education authorities provide security personnel to the schools, but the security services provided to the schools are inadequate to create a secure school environment. Participants mentioned the following:

Participant: *"The school has no tight security. We only have two security guards, male and female. We as learners, we are many and I don't think they can cope with searching us when we come to school."*

Another participant: *"They must expel the drug dealers in the school. But, security guards don't search the learners, and as a result teachers don't know these boys who are selling drugs in the schools."*

Life Orientation as a learning area teaches learners values such as self-discipline, responsibility, respect for self and others, and other important social values that mitigate violence. However, the study found that Life Orientation is not adequately taught.

Participant: *"Teachers don't attend Life Orientation classes. Life Orientation periods are free periods to us."*

Interview analysis revealed that teachers in participating schools do not model care and concern for their learners, resulting in a lack of a supportive environment that can mitigate violence.

Participant: *"If you tell a teacher your problems, the teacher tells other teachers, and then your problems get known by other people in the school."*

Another participant: *"We are scared to go to teachers and tell them our problems."*

The lack of a supportive environment indicates that teachers are not assisting students to deal with their problems, frustrations, and anger that contribute to school violence.

Data analysis also found a breakdown of a healthy relation and trust between teachers and learners in the schools. Participants mentioned the following:

Participants: *"We don't have teachers whom we can trust and discuss our problems with them, so that they can help us."*

Another participant: *"We want therapists at school, and our files must not be shown to teachers because we won't have confidentiality."*

The study found lack of collaboration in the schools with other stakeholders that can assist in curbing learner violence.

Participant: *"We don't get help from outside the school. We need real therapists, social workers, and psychologists to help learners with their problems."*

Another participant: *"I was born HIV positive. In my class I'm a class rep and many students in the class have problems, and some of them tell me their problems and frustrations, and I'm not sure how I can assist them. Because of what has occurred at home, some students do not want to return home after school. We need therapists, social workers, and nurses here at school. This problems and frustrations create anger and fights among learners."*

Sporting activities keep learners occupied and away from destructive activities. Adequate facilities give learners who do not excel in class the opportunity to excel on the sports field and earn respect from their classmates (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). The interview analysis found inadequate extracurricular activities in the schools. The analysis also revealed that students with poor academic performance are using violence to dominate and earn the respect of other learners. Learners mentioned the following:

Participant: *"Older learners who are not doing well in class fight with other learners for dominance, they want to be known that they are in charge."*

Second participant: *"Sporting activities are not active."*

Third participant: *"School teams do not have proper attire. We don't have sponsors here at school."*

### Discussion of the Findings

We found that learners understand the meaning and concept of learner-on-learner violence, which is inflicted bodily or non-physical pain by learners on other learners. The analysis also found that learners perceive violence in their schools as a serious problem, thus confirming the prevalence of a high level of learner-on-learner violence in the participating schools.

We found that learner-on-learner violence in participating schools is caused by drug abuse, aggressive and anti-social behaviour that learners pick up from their dysfunctional families and community, teachers exposing learners to an environment of violence, non-attendance of classes by teachers and teacher absenteeism, bunking of classes by learners hiding in the toilets, learner gambling, gangsterism, uncontrolled and easy access to the school premises, learner indiscipline, poor academic performance by students, and leaner sexual relationships.

Students have easy access to drugs in the community in which they live and come to school high on drugs. Drug abuse appears to be a main contributory factor to learner-on-learner violence. The problem of substance abuse and its impact on learner violence is compounded by learners who sell drugs in the schools and the ability of learners to leave the school during school hours to get drugs from the surrounding community.

Non-attendance of classes by teachers and teacher absenteeism was also found to contribute to learner indiscipline and violence in the schools. Lack of regular class attendance creates a situation where learners gamble in class, with the ensuing violence caused by gambling. Inadequate teacher attendance, coupled with a lack of proper classroom management and supervision by educators, creates a climate for learners to bunk classes by hiding in the school toilets. The study found that gambling and fighting takes place in the school toilets. Gambling was found to be another main contributory factor impacting on violence in the schools. Although literature shows that the two primary risk factors to school violence in the country are easy access to weapons and drugs (Burton, Leoschut & Bonara, 2009; Ngqela & Lewis, 2012), this study found the two primary factors to be drugs and gambling in the participating schools.

Students who are bullied in their community become the bullies towards other learners in the school. Single parent homes, where the mothers are constantly changing boyfriends/partners, were found to create anger and frustrations in the children, which drives learner-on-learner violence in the schools. Another family dimension is abuse, in which violence is perpetrated against children and other members of the family. Learners who have been victimised at home and in their community are at an increased risk of subjecting others to their learned violent behaviour. Meyer and Chetty (2017) argue that learners have picked up aggressive and anti-social behaviour, which they subsequently display at school towards other learners.

Literature states that the use of corporal punishment by teachers exposes learners to an environment of violence and aggression, which perpetuates learner violence in schools (Mncube, 2014). However, the study found that teachers are exposing learners to an environment of victimisation by not treating learners with respect, and subjecting them to verbal abuse. The abused learners then take out their anger on other students through violent behaviour.

Mathe (2008) argues that a lack of learner discipline occurs when rules and good relations are disregarded. The study found that school rules are disregarded in the participating schools, and this contributes to learner indiscipline. Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) posit that indiscipline is the source of violence in schools and leads to a disorderly school environment.

Secure schools mean a low risk of violence (Mathe, 2008). Participating schools are characterised by a high risk of violence. We found uncontrolled and easy access to the school premises makes it possible for violent activities from outside the schools to be brought onto the school premises. The analysis found that gang activities are spilling-over into the schools. Lack of access control made it possible for learners to bring drugs and dangerous weapons, including guns, to schools. Learners who bring weapons to school are placing other students at high risk of violence because he/she may want to use the weapons (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Lack of tight security also contributes to vandalism of the school property, as happened to School B, where all the hard drives of the smartboards were stolen.

Learners who are not performing well academically in their classes were found to display abusive behaviour towards other learners. Sexual relationships among learners also contribute to the level of violence in the participating schools, as learners were found to be dating more than one partner, resulting in fights among learners over boyfriends and girlfriends.

The most common forms of violence in the schools are physical violence and emotional abuse. Boys are mostly involved in physical fights and girls mostly in verbal abuse. Bullying is taking place at the lower grades of the schools towards newcomers. Sexual abuse is perpetrated by boys on the girls.

Classrooms and learner toilets were identified by the study as the most common sites where learner-on-learner violence takes place. There is also some learner violence taking place outside the school premises, but the causes of such violence were found to emanate from inside the schools.

We found that participating schools are disregarding the code of conduct. Schools must have a code of conduct in place. The learner code of conduct should impede the use of drugs or any intoxicating substance, the carrying of weapons or any sharp objects, the use of violence or vulgar language, and discourage threats against persons or their property (Mncube, 2014). Parents should be made conscious of the content of the school code of conduct, and class teachers should discuss the code of conduct with their learners. A code of conduct, coupled with the clear implementation of the school rules and the enforcement of disciplinary measures, provides for an ordered, safe, and peaceful environment where both internal and external crime and violence is reduced to a minimum (Mncube, 2014).

The high incidence of classroom violence and learner violence in the school toilets is due to non-attendance of classes by teachers, and lack of supervision and classroom management by educators. The management of participating schools must enforce policies that ensure regular class attendance and proper classroom management by teachers. Mncube (2014) and UNESCO (2019) confirm that a well-run school, with accountable and positive classroom management by teachers, create an inclusive classroom environment that helps to foster a climate of commitment and responsibility that deters deviant learner behaviour.

Participating schools are characterised by drug abuse and learners selling drugs in the schools. We found that the security services provided to schools by the education authorities are inadequate, resulting in uncontrolled and easy access to the school premises. The provision of adequate security guards at schools and other security measures, such as well secured school fences, has the capacity to deter drugs and weapons from coming into the school. Education authorities should provide adequate security services that would modify the school environment by creating a safe and healthy climate in which students can learn, free from violence.

The DBE has a protocol agreement with the SAPS for unannounced search and seizure operations, and to educate the youth about the dangers of violence and substance abuse in schools. However, the participating schools are not taking advantage of the existing relationship with SAPS to curb drug abuse and violence in their schools. Schools must take advantage of the existing relationship with SAPS and strengthen their collaboration with the law enforcement agency.

Life Orientation as a school subject teaches learners societal values that can mitigate violence and sexual harassment, but the analysis found that the subject is not adequately taught to learners. This finding suggests that because Life Orientation is not an examination subject, teachers do not take the subject seriously. Hence, learners are inadequately taught societal values and skills that can impact negatively on learner-on-learner violence in the participating schools. School management must ensure that teachers attend their Life Orientation classes regularly, and effective teaching and learning takes place. Volokh and Snell (1998), Ngidi (2018), and UNESCO (2019) argue that activities that teach students the skills and tools to recognise situations that cause conflict and violent activities, and how to mediate conflicting situations, could curb learner violence.

We found a lack of a learner supportive environment - care and concern for learners - that can mitigate school violence, caused by the breakdown of trust between learners and teachers. A breakdown in social relations and trust escalates school violence. Dube and Hlalele (2018) argue that practices that preserve human dignity with learners treated with respect, engaged in a dialogue, and given a voice, could create a violent-free environment. Participating schools must inculcate positive relations in the school community, with teachers modelling care and concern for the learners. Healthy relations within the school community create an environment for assisting learners to deal with their problems and frustrations, which are likely to fuel learner violence, by enhancing communication and trust between teachers and learners. A school with a sense of purpose and connectedness, where teachers and learners experience belonging and togetherness, can do much to reduce learner violence (Mncube, 2014).

Data analysis found a lack of collaboration between the schools and stakeholders in the community. Stakeholders such as social welfare, civil society, and other professional organisations are helpful in assisting schools to prevent and minimise learner violence (UNESCO, 2019), and services provided by the stakeholders should not only be provided for the victims but also for perpetrators of violence. Schools should have a plan that contains the available services from stakeholders that can mitigate the occurrence of violence (UNESCO, 2019), and strengthen the collaboration with such stakeholders, including the district office - education authorities.

Bullying was found to take place at the lower grades of the participating schools. Learners should be taught how to deal with anger, how to mediate conflicting situations, and how to report violence. Learners should also be taught the value of healthy relationships to curb fights over boyfriends and girlfriends.

The analysis also found a lack of extracurricular activities in the participating schools and learners who are performing academically poor, display abusive behaviour towards other learners. Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) purport that adequate sporting facilities mitigate school violence by giving learners who do not excel in class the opportunity to excel in sports field and earn respect from their classmates. Education authorities should ensure that extra-curricular activities are taking place in schools, and the required funding for such activities should be provided to schools by education authorities.

## Conclusion

The scourge of violence prevalent in many South African schools can no longer be ignored. The occurrence of violent activities go against the country's democracy that cherishes the right to human dignity, equality, and a safe, healthy, learning environment. Measures to prevent and minimise violence in schools require that the management and leadership in schools ensure the school is well run and effectively managed, focuses on discipline and collaboration with the law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders in the broader community. Successful interventions will minimise the level of violence and improve the quality of education.

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