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Learner’ school violence using incident logbook: a qualitative research approach

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Abstract. In this paper the notion of learner’s school is revisited using a silent tool, incident logbook. Research shows that incidents of learner violence has escalated in South Africa unabated. Different approaches to describe and recommend strategies to alleviate cases of violence in schools have been undertaken. This paper aims to describe through incident logbook learner’s behaviour regarded as serious misconducts that involve violent acts. These violent acts might lead to expulsion or suspension of a learner from the school according to the South African Schools Act, 1996 and various school policies. An interpretivist qualitative research was employed using a purposively sample of 5 incidents logbooks from five secondary schools. The researchers used a thematic data analysis using a Critical Peace Education (CPE) theory to discuss these incidents of school violence. The findings of the study show high incidents of recorded serious misconduct and violations of the school policies by learners by committing, violent acts such as physical, psychological, emotional abuses as well as thefts and vandalism of school and personal property. The research study recommends that CPE be used as tool to educate and foster peaceful co-existence in schools.

Keywords. Critical Peace Education, Learners, school violence, incident logbook

1. Introduction and background

This research presentation explores learners’ school violence through accidents reports in secondary schools in the selected schools in the Lejweleputswa district. Research findings attest that the levels of learners’ violence in schools is a great concern. As, such this paper chronicle the importance of recording school violence committed by learners either on fellow learners, teachers and vandalism on the school buildings. Incidents of violence in school vary from less serious to serious incidents and they are a global phenomenon (Burton & Leoschut, (2013). There is several reported school violence that appears in the literature (Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014, de Wet, 2020).

Bester, Du Plessis and Treurnich, (2017) and De Wet, (2007) perceive that many of the school violence directed on learner to learner in different forms. The reported forms of learner violence on one another takes the form of physical, emotional and psychological violence (Mayeza & Bhana, 2021, Bekithemba, 2019, Masilo, 2018). In many probabilities school, violence is directed at a defenceless learner or group of learners or a property of the school with the sole purpose of causing harm or inflicting pain through any of the following, rape, bullying and cyber-bullying, gangsterism, corporal punishment, defacing the property of the school

through graffiti Khumalo, 2019, Ngidi & Moletsane, 2018, Power, 2017). From this foregoing sentence, it will be appropriate to assume that school violence is an intentional and purposeful action of the learner or learners on the other learner/s or aimed at the property of the school. The foregoing three dimensions of school violence is related to different manifestations of school violence through which psychological, emotional, and physical harm to learners could be executed.

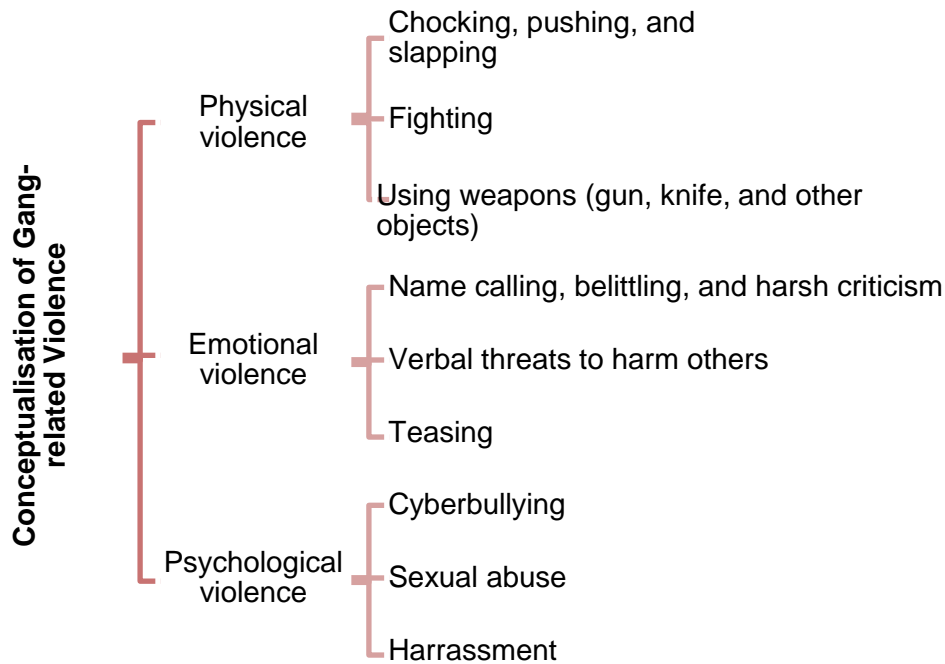


Figure 1.1 Violence reported in South African schools

Figure 1.1 depicts different forms of violence that learners and teachers could be faced with daily. Typologies of violence described in the figure suggest the potential of disrupting teaching and learning at school. Figure 1.1 highlights three main sources of violence as being typified by physical, emotional, and psychological violence (Widom & Wilson, 2015). Teachers are usually called up to the task when learners fight using dangerous weapons in class. They are the first line of defence to control the situation. These types of violence may also socially and psychologically affect the learners because they could be victims of violent incidents. In some circumstances, learners may be perpetrators who commit violent activities; in this way, the learners get hurt physically, emotionally, and psychologically (De Wet, 2007).

The researchers describe physical violence as the deliberate use of physical force with the potential for causing harm. This means that learners would want to harm other learners intentionally and teachers who would want to control the incident of violence as well. This type of violence includes learners who would scratch or bite one another; push or shove one another; stab one another with knives, pencils, and scissors; they would want to shoot one another using guns; and they would fight and injure each other. Emotional violence deals with incidents whereby learners would swear at their victims and try to make them feel small, doing things and not taking into consideration the feelings of other learners, threatening the victims and doing things so that they could always be scared, trying to control others, and shaming them in every way.

Mohlaloka, Jacobs and De Wet (2016) and Elcheroth and Reicher, (2017), (2017) posit that psychological violence impacts on learners psychologically, which could lead to mental abuse. The use of threats as a form of mental abuse is characterised by a person subjecting or

exposing another to behaviour that may result in psychological trauma, including anxiety, chronic depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Mgijima, 2014; Florence & Koch, 2011; Pillay & Ragpot, 2010) show that these types of violence illustrated in Figure 1.1 have a direct negative impact on the teaching and learning process as much as they have the potential to destruct the safety and security of learners at school.

There are a number prepositions or theories that account for the prevalence of learner school violence. Some of the theories espoused to illuminate on learner school violence are general systems and ecological systems, to name but a few. Systems theories explains views the social environment in which a child is raised as having an influence on the future behaviour of the child (Wallace, Roberson, & Globokar, 2019). For example, in an environment where violence is prevalent and seems to be allowed, children will be likely engaging in violent activities (Mayeza, Bhana & Mulqueeny, 2021). As such, parents should play a pivotal role in children's life because they are the guardians and the protectors of their children. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, nearly like systems theory advocates views individuals as nested within interactive systems. Individual characteristics influence risk and protective factors that may increase or decrease the risk of aggression and exposure to violence (Tissington, 2008). Despite these illumination from theories, learner school violence is spiralling unabated (Chitsamatanga & Rembe. (2020), Chauke, 2021, Kutuywayo, Frade, Mahuma, Naidoo & Mullick, 2021, Dube & Hlalele, 2018). According to the Children's Act 38 of 2005, subsection 18, parental responsibilities and rights that a person may have in respect of a child include the responsibility and the right to care for the child, to maintain contact with the child, to act as guardian of the child, to contribute to the maintenance of the child, and to administer and safeguard the child's property or property interests. Learner school violence in any form should not be allowed to develop in the first place. By taking early preventive measures, crimes associated with gangsterism can be reduced. The researchers adopted a Critical Peace Education Theory as a lens to further illuminate on the problem of learner school violence.

2. Theoretical lens- Critical Peace Education

Critical Peace Education (CPE) is a theory couched within the Marxist' Critical Emancipatory Research (CER). a theory that has its roots in the Frankfurt school (Max, Theodor, Zoltán, & Michael, (2017). Brandmeier, (2018, 2013) alludes that CPE as understood within the Frankfurt School has as its focus on recovery of human capacities to transform structural realities to reclaim subjectivities and autonomy of the lifeworld, such as a violent world space. Ogunnusi, (2019) mentions that violence as experienced by young people should be understood as being prolonged through structures of oppression. In a South African school context, many township schools bear the hall marks of an oppressive apartheid system, depressed ecologies of high unemployment, violence, crime ridden and hopelessness. Thus, CPE aims to raise critical consciousness from within the school communities to have communal agencies to deal with school violence affecting teaching and learning. According to Hlalele and Dube, (2018) and Mahlomaholo, Nkoane and Ambrosio, (2013), while referring to critical emancipatory theory (CR) in general, CPE should be understood as theory that looks at the historical, power relations and material conditions of people being researched. Nkoane, Mahlomaholo and Ambrosio, (2013) advances the cause for CR to say it is a theory justified through the intention to change and transform the status quo of those affected through empowerment and advocacy. In the context of this research study on learner school violence, CPE is the process of acquiring the values, the knowledge and developing the attitudes, skills, and behaviours to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment.

Again, Bajaj, (2008) concedes that CPE is about helping learners understand and transform conflict in their own lives, in the community and in the world at large. Bajaj and Brandmeier, (2011) allude that CPE is part of all learning areas and is reinforced by people treating each other in positive ways in classrooms, playgrounds and in their families and communities. Bajaj, (2015) emphasizing peace education in schools is an essential need in our educational institutions. It starts first with an honest willing to engage educators in the learning process, which is an essential and powerful way to transform their selves individually and collectively.

Research questions

- What school incidents reports tell us of learners' school violence?
- How incidents of school violence committed by learners indexed by the school authorities?

3. Research design and method

A qualitative research design was employed using an interpretivist leaning (Sefotho, 2018). The aim of an interpretivist research is to understand the world subjectively, in its interpretation and relativism (Kumar, 2018). In this context school violence incidents reports were used as the focus of the study and they are not generalized to other schools that were not part of the study. A purposive sample as non-probable sample from five secondary schools in the purposively schools was used (Creswell and Clark, 2017). On that account, purposive sampling is a subjective selection of the researcher of the participants in the study based on known or reported incidents of school violence in those schools. This research study used learners' incident logbooks as document analysis. Bowen, 2009, states that document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, either printed or electronic material. The interpretation of document analysis is to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. Dalglish, Khalid and McMahan, (2020) mention that the documents to be analysed may include advertisements; agendas, attendance registers, and minutes of meetings; manuals; background papers; books and brochures; diaries and journals; event programs (i.e., printed outlines); letters and memoranda; maps and charts; newspapers.

Data was thematically organized as it appears in the incident logbooks and thematically analysed. For ethical considerations, Richards and Schwartz (2002)'s advice on ethics as prescribed standards or rules within a particular professional organisation, regulating the conduct of its practitioners was used. Permission to conduct research was requested from the relevant provincial Department of Education, and the researchers abided by their stipulated rules and regulations. After permission was granted the lead researcher contacted the sampled schools where she worked with copied incidents logbook at the schools whereafter she left the incidents logbooks at the schools. The incident report had all the information of the school, incident, number of cases reported, and action taken by the safety committee and the School Governing Body. The incident logbooks were straight to the point, however, did detail the incidents occurred, and the action taken was also not fully explained.

4. Findings and discussion

The format of the school incident report logbooks was in table form – very short and straight to the point. Nonetheless, there was no explanation of how the incidents occurred and how they were solved. The incident reports had the following information: the surname of the learner and their name, the number of the learner, date of the incident, grade of the learner, description of the incident (a mark awarded against someone for misconduct or offence) and

| School | Type of incident | Number of cases in a year | Action taken by the School Disciplinary Committee (SDC) |
|---------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| A, B, C, D, E | Physical abuse | Stabbing on the school grounds | Suspensions, counselling |
| | | Stabbing outside the school premises | |
| | | Assault on the school premises | |
| | | Assault outside the school premises | |
| | | Carrying dangerous weapons | Suspensions, counselling Parental intervention |
| A, B, C, D, E | Emotional Abuse | Sexual harassment | Suspensions, counselling |
| | | Bullying [verbal] | |
| | | Intimidation | |
| A, B, C, D, E | In possession of drugs | Alcohol | Parental intervention and counselling |
| | | Drugs | |
| A, B, C, D, E | Thefts | Personal theft | No action or suspects could not be found |
| | | School vandalism and theft of property | |
| | | | |

the name of the person who reported the incident. The following are the reports from the A, B, C, D and E Schools (*pseudo names*):

Table 1.1 The school incident report logbook

The aforementioned learners incident report were from different grades, which are grades 8, 9, and 10. The incident logbooks showed that cases of learner misconduct reported were mainly committed by learners in grades 8, 8, and 10. This means that grade 8 learners are mostly influenced by negative behaviours at school and outside the school, and they do not have enough concentration to focus on their work; they even lack motivation. The researchers assume that since learners in lower grades are not old enough or rather mature enough, they tend to be

victims and perpetrators of violence. When they progress through grades, they tend to be more serious and focused, and their education increases, and they try to avoid school violence.

4.1 **Physical Abuse**

Based on table 1.1 in the above, serious bodily harm, incidents such as stabbing on the school grounds and fatal stabbing on school grounds have occurred severally at the schools mentioned, twice. Stabbing outside school grounds has occurred five times, assault on school has occurred fifteen times and assault and assault outside school grounds has occurred twenty times as well. Based on the logbook report, it appears that the actions taken were not recorded. Table 1.1 named incidents of physical abuse, but there was no sexual harassment at the school, and no kidnapping and abduction at the schools. With regard to bullying, it takes place often, and there were 21 incidents of bullying inside the school premises and in the classrooms. This is because sometimes the teachers would not be around the premises of the school (during break time or free periods) and leave the learners alone inside the classes without checking if everything is okay. There higher cases of assault inside the school grounds (35) and there were (21) cases outside the school premises. stabbing outside school grounds (two times in a month), and assaulting outside school grounds (two times in a month). Furthermore there were other 33 cases of being found carrying dangerous weapons in the school premises. Either suspension or counselling was taken, but there was no further elaboration on what transpired thereafter.

4.2 **Emotional abuse**

Table 1.1 focuses on emotional abuse. There were 5 cases of sexual harassment at the schools. Sexual harassment does not occur that often at the school, but bullying happens most of the time, and intimidation takes place more than often. According to the report, there were no actions taken which were recorded by the school. According to the report, it seems as if the learners who commit these incidents of violence have also commit other similar rules of the school policy. are used to various cases. These include intimidating other learners (51), bullying other learners verbally (41).

4.3 **In possession of drugs or alcohol**

Table 1.1. further reveals that there were two cases with regard to both drugs and alcohol at the school, and no action/s were recorded by the safety committee and the school disciplinary committee. Drugs and alcohol are very serious in the sense that they affect the concentration of the user, and the users end up committing violent activities inside the classroom and school premises. This affects the victims negatively and affects their academic performance as well. Additionally, there are cases of carrying drugs (23), using drugs (9). According to the reports, it seems as if the learners are used to various cases. It also seems that incidents of use of alcohol and drugs are linked to cases of intimidation and theft of personal property or school property.

4.4 **Theft**

Based on table 1.1 there was loss of property at the school, but there was no case of robbery. There was one case of theft of school property, nine (9) cases of school property vandalism, nine-teen (19) theft of school property and twenty-six (26) cases of theft of personal property. No action taken was recorded with respect to all the cases. Based on Table 2 (Incident report), under column (Action taken by the safety committee of the school), it seems that no action taken was recorded, and there was no elaboration on how the incidents occurred as well. Because of this matter, the researchers believes that the teachers and the learners are not made aware of the importance of the incident report. Most learners may be committing such acts

because they know that they are not recorded anywhere and that the right protocol is not always followed by the teachers. Awareness is essential so that the learners do not repeat the misconduct at the school and for them to know that there is a follow-up made by teachers after every misconduct. Teachers must also be made aware that they must record all the misconducts at the schools as evidence and as a strategy of following the protocol.

5. Discussion

The prolonged learner's school violent incidents demonstrate and affirm the CPE Theory and related literature review. For example, the incident logbooks reports show the deep embedded nature of structural violent society or environment created by apartheid or separate development of South Africans based on race and unequal access to education of quality and opportunities for employment. Post this apartheid and a democratic government, the new South Africa based on equal human rights has yet to change pattern and nature of different manifestations of violence perpetuated by learners against one another and to teachers. Stabbing one another on school grounds or vicinity of the schools imply access to dangerous fatal weapons which has characterized the nature of the society in which learners live and learn. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems as espoused by Tissington, (2008) advises that learners will avoid or will not know violence if their environment is nonviolent. Learners who are perpetrators of violent acts as described in the incident's logbooks in table 1,1 show that many learners (in this category younger than 16 of age) lack self-confidence and affirm it to others through violence. This research study affirms what Florence and Koch, (2011) state that there is a high correlation of incidents of violent behaviour and easy access to drugs and alcohol among low-economic societies. Learners who are reported as having committed or found in possession of alcohol or drugs are mostly from less affluent township schools in South Africa. Dube and Hlalele, (2018) further argue that school violence is an indication that there is breakdown of relations between teachers, parents and learners which contributes to an escalation of violence in schools. Segalo and Rambuda, (2018) also, indicate that this breakdown in fundamental teaching and learning relationship among teachers and learners have led to teachers avoiding taking responsibility of enforcing discipline in learners.

Bekithemba, (2019) in another study in lieu of the reported incidents of school violence advocates for a pedagogy of disarmament which sought to foster and promote peace and nonviolence, common humanity, encourage coexistence and negation of use of weapons in resolving school difference. Furthermore, Bekithemba, (2019) warns that the current nature school violence is not fit for post militant societies and for educational discourses, but it is time that South Africa acknowledges that the extent to which schools have become armed environments pose a serious problem to sustainable learning environments. Murithi, (2009) provides an ubuntu philosophy as an alternative to ending violence in school. Murithi, (2009)'s ubuntu approach is common to Bajaj, (2009)'s notion of ending and creating sustainable schooling environments void of violence through is the process of acquiring the values, the knowledge and developing the attitudes, skills, and behaviours to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment.

6. Conclusion

In this study school violence was explored by using learner's incident logbook and the researchers found it useful to highlight the escalating violent incidents committed by learners in schools. Violence focused on the person, that is physical, psychological and emotional violence seem to be similar with what societal environment can offer to young growing people.

CPE as an alternative is advocated to instil discipline through acquiring principled coexistence and respect for life and human dignity.

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