An Ecological System Approach to Violence in High Schools in KwaZulu-Natal

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Abstract

This study is based on the field of education which explores the nature and prevalence of school violence on learners and teachers in high school in KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore, the aim of the study was to undertaken to demonstrate that learners and teachers at secondary schools in the province of KwaZulu-Natal experience different forms of violence of which manifest from different systems. The Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory was discussed in order to understand the manifestation of violence on learning and teaching in high schools. In order to achieve the aim of this research study a qualitative research approaches research design was employed. In the quantitative research, was conducted between learners and teachers in the selected high schools in KwaZulu-Natal. In total, 56 participants were recruited: 32 teachers (including the four principals) and 24 learners participated. South Africa is a constitutional democratic state which aims to advance human rights through the Bill of Rights. Despite such a laudable constitution, South African continues to experiencing an increase in the violation of human rights, in particular those who are vulnerable. The research study used document analysis in the form of school incident logbooks, learners' school code of conduct on learner discipline triangulated against the South African Schools South African Constitution, Act 104, 1996 and the South African School Act (SASA), 84, 1998.

Keywords: School violence, Ecological Systems theory, Teachers and Learners**.**

1. Introduction

The ecological systems theory was propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977). Bronfenbrenner proposed the theory to point out that evolution cannot be discussed or clarified by a single principle, such as genetics, but rather by a more multidimensional and dynamic framework. The importance of this theory lies in the fact that it acknowledges that there is an interplay between different human, relational, group and societal influences (NSSF, 2016). The ecological systems theory is relevant in understanding school violence, because the underlying factors that prompt school violence may often originate from multiple factors that are personal and stem from the environment from which individuals emanate (Khani, 2016).
In the data analysis of the current study, violence was also interpreted from a bio-ecological perspective viewpoint as this integrative theory provided for the consideration of several influences and their effect over time on the development of violent behaviourIn this study, the focus was on learners and teachers. This theory is used to describe how and why school learners and educators were affected by violence that had been perpetrated by learners and the impact of their environment on the behaviours they displayed. It is important to note that this theory promotes the

concept that an individual and his or her environment are separate units that interact and affect each other dynamically (Stead & Watson, 2006).

Growing threat of school violence, teachers (Bosworth, Ford, & Hernandaz, 2011), school administrators (Katz, Heisterkamp, & Fleming, 2011), legislators (Elliott, 2015), and parents (Scherz & Scherz, 2014) are worried about the safety and security of children. Violence in communities and schools became increasingly alarming not only in South Africa but countries around the world. Researchers studying safety and security within the school parameters have presented the complexity of the phenomenon of violence and its impact on school environment (Ozer, 2005; Soliman, 2017).

2. Literature and Theoretical Framework

No single factor can sufficiently explain school-based violence as a number of different factors contribute to the culture of violence in schools. Crime-related causes are multi-factorial (Singh, 2011) and there is a multiplicity of reasons for the manifestation of violent behaviour exhibited by learners towards other learners and teachers. Burton (2017:12) argues that "a series of interrelated factors impact on young people in different ways, one of which will be [the threat of sexual] acts against other young people ..." It is important to objectively look at the larger context in which the school is placed in order to explain the causes of school-based violence. According to a study conducted by Singh (2006) on the effects of violence on educators, it was found that academic tension and a lack of drastic consequences the key causes of school violence were the effects of bad conduct and violence modelled by society. The notion also exists that learners who underperform academically are more likely to be associated with violent and aggressive behaviour than top achievers. Keller and Tapasak (2004) assert that there is a close correlation between academic underachievement and learner's anti-social conduct or violence. Absence of educational ambition also contributes to learners' participation in violent activities in schools and the community.

As a theoretical frame, the social ecological model illuminates our understanding of the multi-level causes of school-based violence. Historically, violence has placed learners from poor backgrounds at a disadvantage, which is one of the reasons that this study wishes to contribute towards the transformation of education and the improvement of the learning environment for learners in disadvantaged communities. Research has unearthed common background factors among learners with adverse learning outcomes, such as conduct problems, delinquency, and violent tendencies (Dawes & Donald, 2000). Research has also established a relationship between behaviour and its social settings. These risk factors include the characteristics of individuals and families, the social context, and the interaction between persons and their environment (Smith & Carlson, 1997). Against this background, The researcher adopted Dahlberg's (2007) bio-ecological systems model to delineate the personal factors that determine how young people may become perpetrators or victims of school-based violence. The model proposes that a home and school environment that is characterised by a lack of love predisposes an individual to becoming a perpetrator of violence. In this vein, the impact of family and the community on learners will be

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discussed in relation to the bio-ecological system model

As the basis of the eco-systemic theory sees the interdependence of interactions as occurring between various individual and their physical environment, these are essential aspects (Crawage, 2005). The bio-ecological framework model often positions people within a social context. With reference to this study, learners and educators were positioned in schools in a township setting. According to this model, the way in which learners living in a townships think, feel, behave, and develop is influenced by relationships with their peers, the community, and the family, and this system is underscored by the systems theory (Donald et al., 2002).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) differentiates between five levels of dynamic interacting environmental systems that impact the developing child:

1.   The *microsystem*: This is a pattern of activities and daily interactions within the child's immediate setting such as the home, school and neighbourhood.
2.   The *mesosystem*: This is the interaction between two or more microsystems.
3.   The *exosystem*: This is the interaction between two or more settings that do not contain the child.
4.   The *macrosystem*: This is broader societal cultural patterns.
5.   The *chronosystem*: This is the dimension of time that affects the developing child.

These systems, together with relevant examples of factors that are found within each, will be discussed in more detail below.
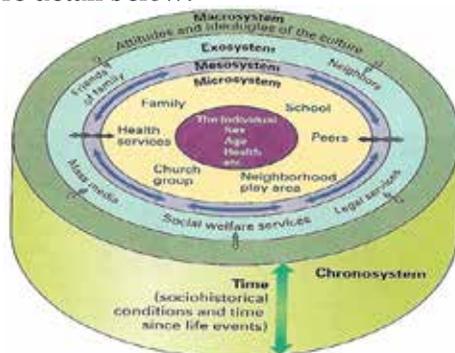

Figure: Summary of Bronfenbrenner's five interlocking contextual systems that influence the developing child
Source: Papalia, 2006:38

2.1 Microsystem
The microsystem is considered to be the closest layer to the child and has the most direct influence on its behaviour. It is composed of the immediate background of the person or group of individuals (e.g. home and school) with which young people communicate. This entails all the events, positions and interpersonal interactions that the participant encounters in his or her immediate community (Mothibi-Mathopo-Mofokeng, 2017). Dentemero and Kramz (1993) maintain that home learning is a powerful factor before and after school. According to Ward (2007:17), "violent

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behaviour in young people results from a complex interaction of risk and protective factors in different environments and over time, which influence how children learn behaviour". Children who are exposed to an environment (e.g., the home) with high levels of violence have a greater chance of engaging in aggressive and violent behaviour at some point in their early childhood or adolescent years that those who are not. Parent-level factors, such as negative adult influences, lack of parental involvement, and lack of parental support are associated with the perpetration of violence by young people (Espelage, Bosworth & Simon, 2001; Barboza, Schiamberg, Oehmke, Korzeniewski & Heraux, 2009; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003)

2.2 Mesosystem
Mesosystem level requires an understanding of the inter-relationships between two or more microsystems, each involving an entity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). A mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more of the microsystems – in other words, it is the interrelations between these systems such as the family, the school, and the neighbourhood (Thomas, 2005). The mesosystem provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem (Berk, 2000). It refers to the interactions that occur between microsystem contexts such as communication between the family and the school (Mofokeng et al., 2017). For instance, parents who are involved in the development of their children can assist with the type of peer friendship they choose. The structure of the mesosystem determines effects of the family influence on peer friendship selection or the interaction between family characteristics and individual attributes (Espelage, 2014).

2.3 Exosystem
In this system, the individual's development is influenced by events occurring in settings in which the individual is not present (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Beyond the immediate structure containing the person, including communities, the exosystem contains aspects of the community. For example, exposure to community violence and environmental influences in the area, all of which may or may not directly concern young people but may affect them, could negatively influence how they interact with their peers in school. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2006) assert that the exosystem involves other structures with which the child is not directly involved but which can impact individuals in the microsystem who have proximal relationships with the child, such as the parent's workplace. In addition, bullies tend to have parents who do not have sufficient supervision time or who are not actively involved in their children's lives (Espelage, Bosworth & Simon, 2000; Georgiou & Fanti, 2010; Low & Espelage, 2013). Parents who work too long hours or overtime and those who do not live with their children because of work do not get enough time with their children for proper parenting, which results in them either enforcing or withdrawing from discipline.

2.4 Macrosystem
The macrosystem refers to the outer layer of the child's environment and comprises "the dominant values, beliefs, customs, and economic and social systems of a

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culture or subculture that filter down in countless ways to individuals' daily lives" (Papalia, 2006:37). It is considered as "a cultural blueprint that may determine the social structures and activities that occur within the immediate systems level" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:30). Behaviours are established in the corporate culture and there is a great need to consider the organization rather than just the employee (Monks, Smith, Naylor, Barter, Ireland & Coyne, 2009). Aggressive conduct and violence differ across cultures and backgrounds (McConville & Cornell, 2003) and sociological researchers thus suggest that school norms can promote differences, isolation, aggression and inequality among learners in relation to their race/ethnicity, gender and socio-economic context (Leach, 2003).Structures that contribute to the creation of a climate of violence are for instance legislations, policies, norms, a patriarchal system, and social and economic inequities (Jameson, 2014). Children who are living in less than ideal conditions may view their environment as more threatening as they are frequently "...directly and indirectly exposed to negative events such as violence, crime, rape, and health problems..." (Muris, Du Plessis & Loxton, 2008:151). Differences in the quality of their education may also lead to differences in their interpretation and responses to violence (Papalia, 2006). A study by Burkhardt (2007), which compared children from different ethnic groups in South Africa, found that Black South African children reported a higher number and intensity of fears than those of other ethnic groups. Moreover, the apartheid regime created a dysfunctional society and family structures which have resulted in parents who now lack the necessary resources and skills to provide for the optimal development and adjustment of their children (SACE, 2011).

2.5 Chronosystem
The final stage of the ecological framework, the chronosystem, is related to persistence or transition (e.g., historical or life events). It influences the person and the community throughout the course of life (e.g., changes in family structure). For example, it argues that parent-child relationships may be more powerful during early childhood and pre-adolescent years, and that children may be negatively impacted by changes in the family system over the years. According to Hetherington and Elmore (2003) pre-adolescent children in divorced or remarried families exhibit higher levels of aggression, noncompliance, disobedience, inappropriate classroom conduct, and diminished levels of self-regulation. This may be a result of internal factors such as the developing child's physiological changes, or external factors such as the death of a parent (Jameson, 2014). Other chronosystem factors relevant to the South African context include changes that occur in the family structure, such as "a decline in the extended-family household in developing countries" (Papalia, 2006:38).

3. Methodology

One township school from each of four districts represented the study site. These districts were: UGu, UMgungundlovu, Pinetown and Zululand. The schools were selected based on the number of incidences of violence that had been recorded in that particular schoolThe study adopted a qualitative methodological approach to

interrogating school violence in the chosen study location, using semi structured interviews as well as focus groups a research instruments. Qualitative research, intended to generate knowledge grounded in human experience (Sandelowski, 2004), has established a distinctive place in research literature. As qualitative research becomes increasingly recognized and valued, it is imperative to conduct it in a rigorous and methodical manner to yield meaningful and useful results (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

3.1 Study Population and Sample

White (2005:113) defines a study population as "all possible elements that can be included in the research…the population can be people or a television programme, or curricula or anything that is investigated as a focus of the research project". For this study, the population consisted of all the learners and educators in violence-ridden township schools in KZN. The sample of participants was representative of the population. While there are several forms of sampling methods, they can be generally classified into two groups: probability and non-probability. The researcher chose probability over non-probability sampling because it offered more advantages in exploring the topic in question. To select the participants, the researcher used purposive sampling. Researchers rely on their expertise, creativity and prior study results to obtain purposely from the participants to ensure that the sample gathered may be regarded representative of the population (Huysamen, 2001). Participants were selected on the basis of their assumed knowledge and ability to share relevant data in relation to the research problem under investigation. For this study, the population consisted of all the learners and educators in violence-ridden township schools in KZN. In total, 56 participants were recruited: 32 teachers (including the four principals) and 24 learners. The research involved both teachers and learners from four selected high schools (one in each of four districts) in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Ethical clearance for the research study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 201. The teachers were recruited with the assistance of the principal and the selection of learners (after permission had been granted by the DBE, the principals and parents) was done with the assistance of teachers on the basis on who had experienced or had been witnesses of acts of violence in the schools.

3.2 Data Collection Techniques

In qualitative research, the researcher may use a variety of methods to collect data such as field notes, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, narratives of personal stories, observation, document analysis, and audio/video recordings (Maxwell, 2005). In the field of social sciences, the two main methods of collecting qualitative data are individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), which the researcher used. However, the researcher also utilised key informant interviews (KIIs), and participant and general observations. During the semi-structured interviews with the teachers and principals (face-to-face interviews) and the focus group discussion with the learners, the researcher aimed to make subjective meanings of the participants' perceptions of reality through social interaction. The researcher used semi-structured

interviews because these questions allowed the interviewer to probe for more indepth answers which thus "expand[ed] the interviewees" responses" (Rubin & Rubin 2005: 88).

3.3 Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, thematic data analysis was adopted. Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that thematic analysis should be a foundational method for qualitative analysis, as it provides core skills for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. The data analysis process was commenced shortly after completing the research interviews. Thematic data analysis was used by referring back to the field notes, transcripts, and voice recordings Thematic analysis provides a highly flexible approach that can be modified for the needs of many studies, providing a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004).

Findings

Drug abuse, gambling, alcoholism, and smoking

It has been reported by numerous studies that learners are exposed to various illegal substances and are known to take them during school hours (Dlungwane, 2017; Ngidi, 2017). When learners are under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, it makes successful teaching and learning impossible. Various drugs have different effects on learners and some become highly aggressive and violent when under the influence. Most of the educators who were interviewed identified the use of dagga and smoking as common among learners. Something simple like a fizzy drink could be mixed with cough mixture to turn it into a powerful drug that makes the youth feel excited and in control. One of the FGD participants mentioned that this drug completely changed people's personality and they became 'someone else' when under its influence. The participants offered the following comments:

"Mostly its learners who sell [drugs] to other learners, but at times there are outsiders who supply them too. Some girls were affected by Xanax here at school and it seemed like they were losing their minds. They had to be hospitalised and one of the teachers confiscated the tablets but they still managed to smuggle them onto the premises. Some even fight over them." Participants 3

"I sent one of the learners to rehab because I saw potential in him. Looking at his background I understood what the root cause of the problem was. The learner's father is a drug addict due to unforeseen circumstances in life and his mother is an alcoholic as well. So looking at the state he was in at home, I understood what might have led him being the way he was." Participants 2

The general consensus was that teachers were aware that learners took drugs at school. They confiscated these substances when possible but they did not have any control over the drug situation in their respective schools. However, I was informed that some schools had been able to identify addicted learners and had referred some to rehabilitation centres.

Lack of parental involvement

According to the findings, the educators felt that parents should play a major role

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in disciplining their children. According to the South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996, the term 'parent' refers to primary caregivers, biological parents, or someone who is legally in the care of a learner and includes anyone who is in charge of learners' schooling (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). One may argue that parents' involvement in their children's lives is essential for their upbringing. Myeko (2000:12) defines parental involvement as "...the participation of parents in their children's school activities, such as school functions, which [will] promote their children's academic outcomes". According to van Wyk (2001) and Ramsey (1994), many parents are reluctant to cooperate with educators and refuse the discipline their children, believing that they can do no wrong. The educators felt that some parents would not discipline their children because they also engaged in unacceptable behaviour. Families can contribute to adolescents' violent, aggressive behaviour by accepting that the adolescent's use of such behaviour is a problem-solving strategy (Crawage, 2005). The following responses from the interviews illustrate this point:

 "We sometimes have a problem with parents, especially when we ask for a teacher-parent meeting so that they can see that their kids aren't performing well but they never show up. This affects the behaviour of learners because they know that, whatever they do, their parents don't care. Secondly, you find that most of them are drug abusers Participants 1

"Because we have cases of parents who don't pay attention to their kids, we have cases of kids who finish school at the age of 21 to 22 years sometimes. And most of them are very brilliant but due to their parents' negligence, they end up spending more years than they should at school. This leads to kids being exposed to drugs that are a number one challenge in school here in our areas. They are supplied everywhere they go. The type of drug they use is very dangerous as well because it makes them act in ways we have never seen." Participants 2

According to the ecological systems theory, the most direct influences on learners' behaviour occur within the microsystem, which is composed of individuals or groups of individuals within their immediate settings (e.g., the home or school) and with whom children have interactions. When it comes to school violence, risk factors for violent behaviour (bullying, fights, aggression, and verbal abuse) compromise parent-children relationships, inter-parental cooperation, positive peer relationships, school connectedness, and a conducive school environment. Parent-level factors, such as negative adult influences, lack of parental involvement, and lack of parental support, are associated with violent tendencies in learners (Holt & Espelage, 2007).

Community-based violence

The level of crime and violence in the communities in which schools are situated will have an irrevocable effect on learners' behaviour at school. The availablity of drugs and the dealers who peddle them are known in the community. High levels of drugs and a high percentage of adults involved in crime further increase the exposure of youths to these vices and encourage them to engage in violent activities (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). It becomes difficult for schools to deal with these problems if they are societal issues that cannot be stemmed. This research revealed that, in many instances, learners arrived at school already under the influence of drugs because they bought these drugs on their way to school. Dlungwane (2017) argues that the escalation of informal alcohol outlets and drug sellers on the streets contributes to the social conditioning of learners and adolescents who deem it acceptable and even

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admirable to partner with these delinquent role models. Learners frequently witness incidences of crime and violence on their way to school and they become accustomed to these vices. One of the educators bemoaned the prevalence of crime and violence in the area and admitted that it was not a place to raise children. This view is supported by the following narratives:

"Yes, I've seen some violence among learners, especially when they fought during weekends because of alcohol. They usually ended up finishing the fight at school. As we speak, there is a learner who is now mentally unstable because he was attacked by learners and outsiders after school." Participants 5

"But according to my own research, that I had to do for my dissertation, I discovered that the problem lies in the community. This community has mostly single parents and some of these kids live on their own and that has a high impact on their behaviour. This community is not educationally driven, so these learners are not motivated and they don't know what the importance of educations is. They don't know much about respect and discipline. So when they enter the school premises it's hard to change their mind set from what they're usually accustomed to." Participants 6

According to Codrington (2000:32-35), "society plays a central role in the development of moral and other values, and it is from society that children absorb most of their values and attitudes". Flannery (1997:24) also alludes to a "significant relationship that exists between the amount of violence in a neighbourhood and the level of violence that children report at school". Amos (2013:1) studied African communities and states that each home has its own rules and customs regarding the upbringing of the children who live in it. Therefore, learners' home life and background play a significant role in their lives. The behaviour of children at school is often a reflection of the teachings of their parents and other role models at home and in the community. Violent behaviour is learnt and emanates from the home environment or community and filters through to the school.

Socio-economic issues

Youths in South Africa live in communities where they learn that violent behaviour is rewarded and that violence is likely to solve their problems and make them feel powerful and worthy (Ward, 2007). Unfortunately, the neighbourhoods in which the study was conducted had an undeniable impact on the violence and delinquency that characterised the schools. Drug abuse, regardless of the expense, is a nationwide problem that affects most communities in South Africa, but more especially disadvantaged communities. It becomes rather difficult then to try and solve a drug problem in schools because a school is part of the broader community. One may argue that there are a number of socio-economic issues that contribute to children taking drugs. This notion is supported by the following response:

"As for drugs, I think the country as a whole has an issue of drug abuse that needs to be dealt with. Maybe if the whole country can come together to try and fix the problem there would be a change. What we should also look at is that this issue is also linked up with poverty. Most of these learners here at school sell drugs because they are trying to survive. The socio-economic factors are what force them to sell what they are selling while they are with other learners. I think they have bad role models or they look up to the wrong people. I say these things because some of the people around them, and even within their families, see a business opportunity in

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schools. Learners are easily persuaded and they are a good market, so they may be asked to sell such drugs in school as the income will support their families. This all goes down to the high unemployment rate and shows how poverty pushes people to the dark side." Participants 4

This finding is supported by the bio-ecological systems theory as it posits that a person and the environment are independent units that dynamically interact and influence one another (Stead & Watson, 2006). The study revealed that some learners were members of gangs and that these gangs were part of bigger groupings outside the school. As adolescents in dysfunctional neighbourhoods identify with role models, they are highly likely to identify with adults who model violent or deviant behaviour as their heroes (Anderson, 1999). Drugs affect schools but drug use is a community problem, and learners get these drugs from the community. According to Volkmann et al. (2013), drug trafficking is a form of external violence. It originates outside the school and then gang members within the school facilitate drug peddling, targeting willing learners The participants mentioned that, in order to tackle the drug issue in schools, it should first be addressed at community level. This is illustrated by the following response:

"The police station itself supplies them with drugs. There are people who are part of the community who supply them with drugs and, what troubles us, is that they use learners inside our school to sell them. When a learner is caught with drugs and we call the police, they come and confiscate the drugs, but nothing happens to the learner as they all work together. We have people who supply them with Xanax and they mix it with cool drink to make it more intoxicating. They even take this drug at school. So we work with a lot of excited learners and this leads them to steal from one another. There was an incident where a learner was able to steal from his aunt's bank account and started using her money without her knowledge. When I caught him, I had to let her know of this behaviour because he was a drug addict and a thief." Participants 2

Gangsterism

The participants revealed that learners formed gangs at the schools under study. Some learners who joined these gangs missed school on a regular basis because they would leave home and never arrive at school. Instead, they would spend the day with their fellow gang members doing what gangsters do: rob, intimidate, threaten, hurt, and injure. It was reported that older gang members gave the youngsters drugs to sell at school while others allowed their outside gang members to gain easy access to their schools, which rendered educators and other learners vulnerable to threats, intimidation, and violence. Various studies have confirmed that gangs operate with impunity in some school environments, making these schools places where drugs, thugs and weapons can move as freely through the gates as learners (Mncube, & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014). Some schools are so destabilised by gangs that the curriculum is not delivered according to any regular schedule (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Many gang-related incidences start in the community and spill over into schools, resulting in injuries to teachers and learners. Whenever gang-related fights occur, they instil fear among learners and teachers who then become reluctant to attend school. Kelly (2008) and Kemp (2007) acknowledge that gangs have an effect on society, which inevitably leads to fear among and the vulnerability of law-abiding citizens. The following excerpts from the interviews illustrate this point:

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"We have had gang related fights. We have bullying as well and they are gang initiations. As we speak, there is child who has been so beaten up that the he became mentally unstable. He got hurt during a gang initiation process. So they also happen outside the school but end up affecting the kids at school." Participants 2

"We see worse in our communities; sometimes we witness mob justices and gang wars as well. There are guns and everything and we have witnessed it all." Participants 7

Both boys and girls are part of gangs. If you are on duty monitoring late comers at the gate, around 8 o'clock you won't see them, but if you give it 30 minutes to an hour, you will see them coming in large numbers as a crew and they behave the same way. Their dress code is the same; they usually don't have their school ties and their shirts are unbuttoned. Their behaviour is so different and controversial compared to the behaviour we usually see from other learners at school." Participants 8

This research finding is supported by the bio-ecologic systems theory which posits that a person and the environment are independent units but that they dynamically interact and influence each other (Stead & Watson, 2006). The study revealed that some of the learners in the schools under study were gang members. There had been incidences in which gang fights spilled over into these schools. The macrosystem is a combination of the micro-, meso- and exosystems, and a common characteristic is that they are highly influenced by the culture in which an individual lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). When school violence is viewed from societal level, it appears that broad societal factors help create the climate in which violence is encouraged.

Cultural beliefs and practices – fighting using 'muthi'

Based on the findings, it was clear that some boy learners at these schools used ethnic weapons such as 'izinduku' (walking sticks or 'kieries') which were normally used in a traditional context when men were going to war or engaged in fighting. Many boys at these schools used vernacular expressions of 'stick fighting' to reinforce their dominance over other boys. They were fond of referring to metaphors of manhood that bolstered their position among their peers. These weapons are known as very dangerous and are often associated with traditional medicine. Ngidi (2013:66) argues that "the implication is that when there is any fight or altercation with such learners, they will not hesitate to use their weapons to inflict pain and injury". In one of the focus group discussions, a participant mentioned how lethal weapons were used in these fights and that one would definitely die if hit with such a weapon. Dlungwane (2017:89) argues that, in some cases, "...adults (elder brothers) arbitrated these confrontations, which indicates that this cultural practice to resolve a dispute was not only accepted by the boys' elders, but encouraged by the presence of older boys". At one particular school, the boys had adopted a repertoire of Zulu cultural practices and structures to handle conflict, which often involved physical violence and confrontation in which the boys used sticks to assault their opponents.

The study revealed that traditional medicine called 'muthi' was used to enhance boys' success during fights. According to Damba (2011), educators, family, and the community are becoming increasingly concerned about tendencies among children to purchase 'muthi' for use during a fight. This traditional medicine reportedly gives them power over an opponent. However, it has been observed that taking

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these traditional herbs make the boys become uncontrollable and they seek blood. A participant revealed that a learner who had been a victim of 'muthi'-induced violence never fully recovered after he had been assaulted by boys who stood accused of using this traditional medicine. The participant stated:

"They had all sorts of weapons, from golf clubs to spear-shaped sticks. And now they even have handcuffs so that when they catch you, they handcuff you and then they beat you up. They even drink 'uMuthi for strength and other purposes. If they land one punch you don't wake up. They take it in front of us. Even a slap does extreme damage to you if they slap you. Every day after a fight they go to their 'sangoma' [traditional healer] and get more. And you will spot them because they are always looking for a fight." Participants 9

Although constructions of masculinity or the impact of adolescent male risk behaviour on society were beyond the scope of this study, generally speaking, boys are expected to be daring, virile, and to constantly showcase boldness and strength. This also prevails in incidences of violence that occur in schools. Traditionally, boys are placed under pressure to be masculine and to never back down from fights, and this has resulted in them going to extreme lengths when it comes to fighting. Dlungwane (2017) argues that traditional stereotyping puts enormous pressure on young men and it may pressure them to take part in various risk-taking activities to prove their manhood. In this context, Connell (1995:14) states:

"The adoption of traditional, patriarchal versions of manhood and the variations in boys' discourses and ways of being often lead to violent confrontations among boys at school, as boys configure their masculinity on the basis of general social, cultural, and institutional patterns of power and meaning. In fact, a lot of the violence by males against males is a form of boundary policing which serves to determine individual positioning within a hierarchical arrangement of masculinity."

This form of 'boundary policing' referred above seemed to be normalised in the schools under study by boys with the desire to 'fix them' [their opponents] through the use of violence.

Discussion

The study established numerous factors contributing to violence in schools. These included drug abuse, gambling, alcoholism and smoking, socio-economic issues, community-based violence, gangsterism, and cultural beliefs and practices such as using 'muthi' to strengthen the fighting spirit and physique. The schools were not functioning separately from the communities in which they were situated as the causes of violence in the schools had spilled over from community-based acts of violence. Drugs and alcohol posed a huge menace to the communities as they reportedly accounted for a high number of incidences of violence. The study revealed that the problem of drugs at a particular school also manifested in the community in which the school was situated. Drug problems seemingly overwhelmed the selected schools, calling for a number of stakeholders to collaborate in tackling the problem. Some learners sold drugs in the schools on behalf of well-known drug lords residing in the communities. This posed a huge danger to learners and teachers alike. Socio-economic issues such as poverty compelled some of the learners to adopt criminal behaviours in order to survive. For some learners, it was crime that enabled their families to put food on the table as selling drugs in particular was a source of income

for them. Community-based violence clearly spilled over into the schools where property was often vandalised and stolen. The study also revealed that some violent incidences, particularly gang-related conflicts, often started in the community and spilled over into the schools

Conclusion

The study provided sufficient evidence to corroborate earlier findings that crime and violence in on the rise in South African schools. Although statistical data were not provided to support this statement, the rich, authentic views of teachers and learners from violence-ridden schools in township areas in four different district in KZN attested to the fact that learners' behaviours had often escalated to intolerable levels of violence and criminality in these schools. The study further corroborates that there is a relationship between community violence and school-based violence in high schools. Schools are a vital sub-sector of the larger community and external forces thus impact the functioning of schools to a large degree. Socio-economic issues that impact communities such as the abuse of alcohol, drugs, and other substances are also key factors that instigate and exacerbate school-based violence in high schools. Based on the findings, it is imperative that various stakeholders and agencies work together to curb school-based violence. School leadership teams need to be equipped with the relevant skills to manage and reduce school violence.

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