Chapter 3

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE

3.1   INTRODUCTION

During the Public Hearing, various factors contributing to school-based violence were identified. Of these factors, some focused on the effect of the immediate school environment upon learners, while others looked more broadly at the linkages between community issues and school-based violence. The list of factors included: the impact of poverty on the community; the presence of gangsterism; drug and alcohol abuse in the community; conditions in the home environment; the social de-sensitisation of youth to a culture of violence; discipline models in school and unclear management roles; unattractive school environments; and, the educators' misconceptions regarding the human rights of learners. The list was not exhaustive, neither were the named factors mutually exclusive.

3.2   APPROACHES

Several submissions indicated that the issue of school-based violence cannot be separated from the communities that schools serve, and cautioned against viewing schools as an 'island', as opposed to a wider social phenomenon largely impacted on by racial, gender, and economic inequalities. The Public Hearing considered the value of these two approaches to how schools relate to their communities. The first approach emphasised the 'school as an island' while the second approach emphasised the "school as the centre of community life.'

3.2.1   The school as an island

The 'school as an island' model gives little recognition to the broader community's impact on the school environment, focusing exclusively on the dynamics within the school itself. There was little support for this approach in the Public Hearing. An approach that schools are "not islands", but are part and parcel of the community, received support. Thus, the community environment impacts directly on schools.[92]

According to the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication (IHDC), the 'school as an island' approach is problematic as it situates the phenomenon of school-based violence within the school itself, rather than viewing it as symptomatic of a wider social dynamic. Ultimately, however, it is not the violence within schools that leads to overall social disintegration. Violence within schools is instead a symptom of the overall social dysfunction of the community within which the school is situated.[93]

3.2.2   The school as the centre of community life

A school is often a mirror image of the community and the families it services.[94]
Schools therefore cannot address violence in isolation. Rather they require community involvement. In a discussion on the role that communities and other structures play in dealing with the incidence of school-based violence, the National Professional Teachers' Organization of South Africa (NAPTOSA) identified the vital role that communities play in supporting local school efforts to maintain good behaviour and respect in the classroom. Furthermore, communities can assist in protecting learners from exposure to gangsterism and drug and alcohol usage.

In 2000, the Department of Education issued its Call to Action: Mobilising Citizens to build a South African Education and Training System for the 21st Century (also known as the (Tirisano Plan). This plan relied on the approach that schools must become centres of community life.[95] In keeping with this approach, Soul City IHDC proposed that schools should be at the centre of the government's service delivery obligations to the community. The needs of vulnerable children should be met through the government's community channels.

> **Box 3.A – Arguments in favour of the 'centre of community life' approach**[96]
> • Working within existing policy or legislative frameworks avoids the tendency to throw new policy or legislation at every issue, resulting in policy fatigue, implementor frustration, and the diffusion of capacity and resources.
> • A community-based approach assists in the creation of tangible forms of co-operative governance between various tiers – sectors and government departments with service delivery obligations to children (e.g. the Department of Social Development's delivery of child support grants, the Department of Health's delivery of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programmes, food parcels, and other services and the Department of Home Affairs' delivery of identity documents).
> • Such an approach draws upon and mobilises existing community structures as resources.

With the 'schools as the centre of community life' approach, school-based violence is understood as a multi-faceted social phenomenon in which community support and responsibility for schools become key to curbing violence. When schools are regarded as part of their communities, the responsibility for ensuring school safety and in turn, combating community violence more broadly, calls for the active participation of diverse stakeholders, not only the education sector. Examples were given during the Public Hearing of communities who took responsibility for their schools and were consequently able to curb vandalism of property – and burglaries.[97]

If schools are at the centre of community life, they have the potential to impact on the social climate of their communities by interacting with them and providing social services and skills training programmes to parents and families. The Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) has, however, warned about the danger of the 'school as centre of community' approach. The bank argued that this approach may lead to educators being overburdened if resources necessary to carry out the approach effectively were not provided.[98] However, the need for a multi-faceted response and intervention was echoed by government and non-governmental organisations throughout the Public Hearing. This approach is also repeated in the Safe Schools slogan—'We cannot do it alone'.

3.3 FACTORS IN THE COMMUNITY THAT CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE

During the Public Hearing, a number of factors that stem from within communities were identified as contributing towards increasing the risk of a child's exposure to violence. These factors include: socio-economic status, parental involvement and safety in the community.

3.3.1 Poverty

In the Commission's 2006 Public Hearing Report on the Right to Basic Education, poverty was identified as a key issue that impacts negatively on the realisation of the right to basic education.[99] Poverty has a disempowering effect on children and plays a significant role in

the cultivation of violent means to gain power.[100] Poverty inhibits the ability to escape a cycle of exclusion and destitution, and it can also be an obstacle to accessing essential social services if these are not readily available within communities. These social services include counselling services, treatment and rehabilitation for drug, alcohol or other substance abuse, and training and skills development courses. The ability to access social services is vital to overcoming the barriers created by poverty.

Poverty can determine the learners' ability to concentrate in classrooms, whether they attend (or participate)school and whether they participate in the classroom. The stresses caused by the poor socio-economic backgrounds of learners become an external factor to the schooling environment that can have a direct effect on the learners' educational outcomes. An educator in the North West Province discovered that:

"…learners absent themselves from school on days when dustbins are collected in town, so that they will be able to scavenge the dumping site." [101]

Similarly, a child speaker from Molo Songolo shared the following experience:

"Here are some children that come in the morning… from far-off places to school without anything to eat in the morning and they have to travel by bus, by train, by whichever means, and to concentrate on an empty stomach… (it) is very difficult." [102]

Poverty has a disempowering effect on children and plays a significant role in the cultivation of violent means to gain power.[103]

The lack of social capital significantly perpetuates the inequalities that exist between rich and poor communities. The DBSA explained that social capital is largely responsible for the difference in learner outcomes between affluent and indigent schools. In its oral submission to the Public Hearing, the DBSA identified several factors that impact significantly on learners' performance. Such factors may result in children from poorer communities being sent to school with impaired social capital. These impairments ensure that poor communities are locked into cycles of marginalisation and exclusion.[104]

Box 3.B – The impact of social capital on performance in school[105]
The differing advantages of social capital are some of the strongest reasons for the disparate outcomes between children from poor and affluent backgrounds. The following impact heavily on children's behaviour and performance in the classroom:
- Living conditions in the home. This includes whether learners receive electricity, adequate space to study, and proper nutrition. This also includes whether learners are exposed to domestic violence in the home;
- School transport;
- The impact of HIV and AIDS. This includes consideration of orphans of HIV infected parents in child-headed households, and HIV infected learners themselves;
- Parental support. This includes consideration of the education level or literacy of parents, their ability to assist with schoolwork and the existence of learning materials in the home;
- Prevalence of gangs and organised crime syndicates in learners' communities.

3.3.2   Gangsterism, drug and alcohol abuse

Schools are not isolated from gang violence in the surrounding communities. In some instances, schools have become a fertile recruitment ground for gangs.[106] Learners in

these schools believe that being a member of a gang is 'cool.' This belief is further supported by the fact that even learners between the ages of 14 and 17 years are deemed powerful in their communities because of their affiliation to notorious gangs. Learners who do not have physical strength can rely on belonging to gangs to build a reputation for themselves in their communities and schools. Gang association can often be the difference between being the victim and being the perpetrator of violence. Social dysfunction that affirms the power and status of criminals in communities all add to South Africa's notorious culture of violence.

In 2003, the Cape Argus reported that gangs on the Western Cape's Cape Flats had a work-force of approximately 120 000 members. According to this report, gangs invest millions of rand in legitimate businesses. As a result, the criminal economy has had the effect of filling needs created by poverty. Criminal gang activities extend to hiring consultants and accountants to invest 'ill-gotten' cash. Added to this, gangs are known to have fostered a culture of corruption among police and government officials.[107]

Gangs often have a violent culture and are associated with the drug and alcohol trade.[108] Pervasive drug and gang activities are closely related to school-based violence.[109] The violence in schools is further compounded by the easy access and availability of drugs and dangerous weapons to the learners.[110]

Box 3.C – A high school principal's experience
"*This year, during the second term, we experienced an increase in gang violence, as gangs waged battles for gang turf with at least eight gangsters being killed in a short space of time. Our learners were highly traumatised and teachers hardly attended school for those two weeks subsequent to the incident. Tension was very high in the area, which created feelings of insecurity, fear and anxiety among our learners and many parents were reluctant to send their children to school, as they feared for their safety.*" [111]

3.3.3   Conditions in the home environment

Learners who grow up with violence in the home are more likely to display violent behaviour in school. Violence in schools reflects how commonplace violence has become in the broader society and the home.[112] Learners stated that many homes in townships and informal settlements were unsafe places. Furthermore, in some instances where sexual abuse occurred in their home, girls found it difficult to approach their mothers whom they felt did not always listen to them, or did not take further steps to prevent abuse, including sexual abuse.[113]

Box 3.D – Parental responses to sexual abuse
An interview by the Soul City IHDC of a Gauteng township girl between the ages of 11 and 12 elicited the following statement:

"*Questions: What about home? Who helps you?*

Answer: My mother. Some mothers are not helpful when you tell them that something bad has happened to you such as when your step father touches you, you will not feel alright, when you tell your mother she will tell you not to tell anybody because he is the breadwinner and what would we do if he left us? When your mother deserts you like that, you don't know whom to turn to." [114]

Another learner shared the following experience:

"*Okay, one day I had an incident with one of my teachers. I went to my mother. I spoke to her. She went to school to approach the teacher about it, but what they did, they turned the whole thing and they blamed me … they changed it and they make it that the child is wrong and then the parent can do nothing because all the teachers are just blaming the child because of the background where the child comes from. That is what happened in my case when I had a problem …*"[115]

The WCED indicated that 50% of their learners come from single parent families.[116] In addition to this, many parents work long hours and are not home in the morning when children leave for school, and have very little contact with their children when they return from work in the evening. Even where parents are unemployed, and are at home, families still appear to have very little contact time. One of the results can be that some children enter into serious relationships and become sexually active at much younger ages as they search for greater stability in their lives.[117] Also, children tend to socialise in smaller groups and this puts them at greater risk of forming gangs or cliques for a common identity.

Education Minister Naledi Pandor has recently called on parents to take greater responsibility for the behaviour of their children, especially in relation to how they behave towards others and on issues of discipline at home. Pandor urged parents to ensure that their children did not carry knives and guns when they leave home for school.[118]

Educators may have a socialising role on learners in their formative years in what constitutes acceptable behaviour, but once they leave the school premises, it would appear that other forces and influences come into play. This confuses the child, as acceptable behaviour at school appears to be in conflict with a set of behaviour at home and community.[119]

Finally, literacy among adults in the family setting was seen as an important factor contributing to the effective support parents and caregivers can give to their children's education, which in the end must serve as investment, contributing to the breaking of the cycle of poverty.[120]

3.3.4   De-sensitisation to violence and increased aggression

There are indications of increasing levels of intolerance amongst children and a worrying readiness to resolve conflicts through violence.[121] It was indicated that the slightest provocation could lead to one learner assaulting a fellow-learner. Other learners who witness these assaults often encourage this behaviour. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of learners bringing sharp objects to school in order to protect themselves.

There is generally an inability and a lack of skills among South African children to deal with conflict. This results in children resorting to violence. Furthermore, many children are de-sensitised by their surroundings in which television programmes, movies and video games, freely expose them to violence. Over-exposure to media, even non-violent media, can make children more aggressive due to the fact that children who watch television or play video games, spend less time interacting with other children, and thereby learn fewer social skills.[122]

The National Council of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) submitted that the society's treatment of animals is inseparable from its treatment of people, and that a strong correlation exists between childhood cruelty to animals, child abuse and domestic violence, as well as future anti-social and aggressive behaviour. It is essential to understand that to stop violence among adults, and break the cycle of domestic abuse, violence must be stopped at schools and replaced with respect for all life, human and animal, as well as a nurturing spirit for the environment.[123]

3.4   FACTORS WITHIN SCHOOLS THAT CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS SCHOOL BASED VIOLENCE

A few distinct factors within the school environment were highlighted during the Public Hearing as impacting on a learner's behaviour, psychological state, and the quality of a learner's interactions with educators and fellow learners in the classroom.

3.4.1   Discipline models in schools and unclear management roles

Classroom discipline is necessary in order to ensure that the state's obligation to provide basic education is discharged. In the past, South African schools were founded on autocratic-authoritarian discipline models. Still today, many schools are authoritarian in terms of their discipline models.[124] There is a need for the transformation of discipline models in schools in South Africa to models that reflect and promote constitutional values of equality, dignity and respect for others. This can be achieved by allowing learners to make choices, and by creating caring communities within their classrooms. Discipline and values need not be dealt with in isolation of each other as values are easier to impart if there are set boundaries.[125]

The Inter-university Centre for Education Law Education Leadership and Education Policy (CELP) defines discipline as positive behaviour management aimed at promoting appropriate behaviour and developing self-discipline and self-control among learners.[126]

The SASA provides that principals are responsible for the professional management of their schools.[127] The Act was criticised for not defining management in a manner that outlines the levels of accountability that would assist in creating a functional learning environment.[128] The Stigting vir Bemagtiging deur Afrikaans argued for changes to SASA's regulations, such as:
- Obliging principals to identify threats or weaknesses that threaten the smooth functioning of schools, and to develop strategies to overcome them.
- Clearly defining the role of the principal, specifically at an operational level.
- Requiring principals to implement risk management strategies at schools.

CELP asserted that it is one of the basic responsibilities of the Department of Education to provide a safe physical and emotionally supportive environment for learners. Educators should be able to respond to current social and educational challenges, especially those regarding violence, drug abuse, poverty, abuse of women and children and HIV and AIDS. For the most part, educators are not trained in dealing with the social realities facing their learners, and are not provided with adequate training or support to do so in conjunction with delivering on the core curriculum.

During the Public Hearing, it was asserted that learners are generally unsupervised on the playground, while educators are in the tea-room during break times. Even when there are educators on duty, there are insufficient numbers to monitor the learners on school grounds.[129] There was a general sense that leaving learners unsupervised and vulnerable was not conducive towards promoting a disciplined environment.

3.4.2 Unattractive school environment

Unattractive physical surroundings can be linked to learners' self-image and overall confidence. As such, the school environment itself was cited as a key contributing factor to school-based violence.

Research conducted on youth risk behaviour has indicated that small environmental changes can make a difference in how young learners play and interact with others. Some classrooms do not provide sufficient space to accommodate children who are forced to share desks or literally climb over one another to manoeuvre through a classroom. Such overcrowding – often involving 50 to 60 learners sharing the same space – can contribute to school-based violence by increasing hostile and negative feelings between learners and undermining discipline. The resulting atmosphere is not conducive to learning and also increases health and safety risks.[130]

3.4.3 Misconceptions regarding human rights of learners

The perception that children are bearers and recipients of rights without a responsibility to respect the rights of others was a common theme of the Public Hearing. It has sometimes led to educators and school management being reluctant to take legitimate disciplinary action due to the fear of infringing the learners' rights. Such hesitation further results in perceptions that rules and procedures are not consistently applied, and that there is a general reluctance in the education system to act decisively against learners who are perpetrators of violence.

> **Box 3.E – Understanding respect for others' rights**
> "When people are asked about the founding principles of the Constitution they usually come up with freedom and equality. When they are asked what freedom means to them, 50% say "I am free to do what I like". When more are asked about equality, they just say that everyone is equal and they never really go beyond that. When other rights are discussed, people often say, 'I cannot expect the children to clean the classroom because they have a right not to, you know, be treated as slaves', and 'They have freedom of movement so they can walk around in the school and classroom as they wish.'"[131]

CELP stated that educators and learners find it difficult to deal with discipline because they also are not aware of the content of rights.[132] Educators find it difficult to understand the balancing of rights and responsibilities.[133] It was suggested that there was a need to hold workshops to address these perceptions, and deepen the understanding of learners' and educators' rights and responsibilities.[134]

Chapter 4

CURRENT INITIATIVES TO COMBAT SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE

4.1   INTRODUCTION

There are many initiatives, including programmes and projects, run by the government and the NGOs that are aimed at curbing school-based violence. The WCED has been particularly proactive in implementing internal measures in partnering with civil society so as to take a broad-based approach to combat this complex phenomenon.[135] This chapter will showcase some of these as examples of how to address the complex issue of violence in schools. The examples do not intend to exclude other noteworthy and equally valuable projects.

It is difficult to asses the outcomes of crime prevention and attitudinal or behaviour modification initiatives that take place through among others: learner seminars; the use of corrective, assertive and positive discipline techniques; conflict resolution and mediation training; and the establishment of peer mediators on school premises.[136] One significant problem identified in terms of evaluating the success of the project, is the difficulty in gathering information and statistics from the schools.

4.2   INITIATIVES BY THE GOVERNMENT

4.2.1   Western Cape Department of Education (WCED)

In 2006, the WCED introduced the new National Curriculum Statement, which is intended to be more relevant to the needs of South Africans, particularly the youth. At the Public Hearing, it was submitted that the National Curriculum Statement has potential to help youngsters deal with issues such as drugs, peer pressure, racism, gender-bias, bullying and other forms of violence. The educational outcomes, in Life Orientation, provide life skills to learners. These educational outcomes provide a tool-kit for change. However, it has been questioned whether educators are equipped to implement this tool-kit. It was submitted that a sustained and ongoing educator development programme would be implemented. This will assist educators to achieve outcomes to provide educators with practical skills to manage learners more effectively in the classroom. Linked to this, is the ongoing support to school-based management teams and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to ensure adherence to the code of conduct at school level.[137]

The Safe Schools Project

In 1997, the WCED launched the Safe Schools Project (Safe Schools). The objective of Safe Schools is to provide a comprehensive approach to promoting health and safety among learners through the prevention, reduction and control of violence and injury at schools.[138]

The Safe Schools Project instituted a three-prong strategy for creating a school environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. It consists of:
1. Changing the physical landscape of each school to create a safe environment;
2. Instituting behavioural and attitudinal training programmes for learners, educators and parents; and
3. Developing a community-based system approach to solving school issues.[139]

Key areas for intervention

To ensure a safe learning and teaching environment Safe Schools understands that a three-prong strategy is insufficient. Thus, the Safe Schools Project focuses on implementing changes that will provide sustainable solutions. The Safe Schools Project has identified seven key areas for intervention to address school-based violence. These are:

1. Job creation;
2. The stabilisation of crime through law enforcement and the criminal justice system;
3. The provision of basic necessities such as adequate food and shelter;
4. The promotion of well-being through the provision of health services, social services, faith-based services and NGO services;
5. The provision of extra-curricular after-school activities such as sport and recreation;
6. The creation of cultural organisations and the provision of libraries; and
7. The provision of education programmes including safety education in schools, adult education and training and early childhood development.[140]

One of the first interventions made by the Safe Schools Project in schools was the installation of alarm systems linked to armed response services. Schools that installed the alarms were provided with a subsidy to cover the costs. Safe Schools Project has also advised each school to schedule additional patrols of the armed response service units to ensure greater visibility and vigilance.[141]

Other intervention initiatives include performing risk analysis of schools; promoting after-school and holiday programmes; arranging trauma debriefing and counselling for victims and their families; training on issues such as self-defence, sexual abuse, conflict resolution, and behaviour improvement; establishing parent watch programmes to monitor toilets; establish a call centre (discussed further below); and encouraging the implementation of community-based partnerships aimed at developing community-oriented solutions.

Overall, the Safe Schools Project strives to be proactive in the fight against school-based violence by determining effective and best practice strategies, and encouraging their implementation across the Western Cape.[142] The National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) submitted that the Safe Schools Project is a successful initiative, but raised concerns about its sustainability.[143]

Safe Schools Call Centre

The Safe Schools Call Centre (Call Centre) was established as part of the Safe Schools intervention strategy. Educators, learners and parents can call the toll-free number to report crime including: violence; physical and sexual abuse; alcohol and drug abuse; vandalism; and incidents of corruption in schools. Moreover, schools are obliged to report all burglaries and incidents of vandalism to the Call Centre.[144]

In 2003, the Call Centre recorded 1,561 crime incidents ranging from abuse, burglary, vandalism, and gang violence. In the year 2004 it had risen slightly to 1,958. In 2005, 2,778 incidents were recorded, and for 2006, up until 31 March that year, 1,038 incidents were recorded. Approximately two-thirds of all incidents recorded were from metropolitan schools.[145]

Through the Victim Empowerment programme, the Call Centre also provides support and management services to learners and educators. The Call Centre's staff members are able to provide initial counselling for callers who need help. If further assistance is required, callers are referred to experts. Other services provided by the Call Centre include: trauma counselling; arranging random SAPS and City Police patrols around the schools and their surrounding areas; as well as, requesting the patrol services of armed response companies.[146] The Call Centre also provides information on issues affecting the lives of learners such as: HIV/AIDS; alcohol and drug abuse; and abortion.

Hands Off Our Children Campaign

In March 2002, the Hands Off Our Children (HOOC) campaign was launched to address the problem of child abuse in the Western Cape. The HOOC acknowledges that child abuse is a complex matter, and therefore works with various groups within the community to raise awareness about child abuse, develop prevention strategies and provide assistance to child abuse victims. Prevention and education programmes are held at schools, faith-based organisations and other community forums.[147]

The HOOC's strategy to raise awareness, support victims and prevent child abuse, consists of:
1. Implementing an intensive, educational crime prevention campaign;
2. Organising a parental guidance programme;
3. Establishing a victim support programme; and
4. Developing a cross-disciplinary training programme for those who manage child abuse cases.[148]

Drug abuse management policy

In 2002, the Department of Education released its National Policy on the Management of Drug Abuse by Learners in Public and Independent Schools and Further Education and Training Institution.[149] The central focus of the policy is the prevention, intervention and management of drug abuse incidents. The policy is to assist schools in the development and operation of their own policy on drug use and abuse by learners through the employment of a multi-disciplinary process. The policy is an important mechanism for combating school violence. Drug abuse can be a contributing factor to incidents of school violence.

Choose 2 Live Project: Drugs & Gangs Reduction Project

The Choose 2 Live project strives to reduce drug abuse and curb gangsterism among young people using a 4-step process. The 4 steps are:
1. To promote awareness on the risks and dangers of drug abuse and gangsterism;
2. To provide alternative programmes to gangsterism in communities where youth are at risk, and encourages youth to participate in the programmes;
3. To strengthen communities by providing community-based drug treatment initiatives that prepare communities to fight against drug abuse; and
4. To create partnerships with law enforcement organisations, such as the South African Police Service (SAPS), in order to counteract the demand for drugs and participation in gangs.[150]

Bambanani Safer Schools Programme

In September 2005, the WCED in partnership with the Department of Community Safety launched the Bambanani Safer School Programme (BSSP). As a starting point, the WCED and the Department of Community Safety identified high-risk schools that needed additional human resources to combat crime. The BSSP then deployed 180 Bambanani Volunteers to 45 priority schools to assist with security monitoring. Bambanani Volunteers are trained in first aid and conflict resolution.[151]

The School Safety Committees (Safety Committee) are tasked with the responsibilities of: conducting safety audits; advising with regard to selection and implementation strategies; and conducting audits of safety and security service providers.[152] When the Safety Committee first evaluated the BSSP, they found it to have a positive impact. Based on the effectiveness of BSSP, the programme was expanded in 2006 to include 500 Bambanani Volunteers at 100 priority schools, supplying these schools with five volunteers each.[153] However in the evaluation, some challenges for BSSP were identified. Some of the identified challenges included: provocation of the Bambanani Volunteers by learners; low morale among Bambanani Volunteers; and incidents of Bambanani Volunteers shouting at learners.[154]

Upgrading of security

In 2006, the Minister of Education identified high risk schools in each province for a project that would upgrade current security measures. The security measures included improved walls and fencing and Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras. It was also indicated that legislation that allows for random body searches and drug testing would be considered.

The Safe Schools Project provided high risk schools with security infrastructure, ranging from remote control gates with CCTV cameras, intercom systems for evacuation and safety drills, safety gates, burglar bars, maintenance on broken fences and barbed wire. The provision of the infrastructure was based on the needs identified by the school's Safety Committee and verified through a risk analysis by the Safe Schools Coordinators. While the schools awaited the repair of their security infrastructures, temporary emergency security was provided to ensure learner safety.[155]

Learner Support Officers

The Learner Support Officers inititative was created with the assistance of the WCED and the Department of Community Safety. The goal of the initiative to introduce Learner Support Officers in the school environment is to promote the development of a safer environment by reducing truancy, dropout and absenteeism rates, while promoting crime prevention in rural and urban schools.[156] Through the intervention of Learner Support Officers, it is hoped that schools will become supportive environments that will allow learners to reach their full potential, becoming productive citizens and catalysts for positive change.[157]

The Learner Support Officers strive to implement strategies that equip learners to resist the pressure to join gangs. They also teach learners how to resolve conflicts peacefully. The Learner Leadership programmes were identified as a potential method to create role models who could become examples to other learners. A Provincial Representative Council for Learners has launched training peer counsellors in 140 high schools as part of an extended HIV and AIDS programme.[158]

In June 2001, the WCED in collaboration with the SAPS launched a workbook manual entitled "Signposts for Safe Schools". It is intended to assist educators in preventing and managing negative conduct in schools. The manual, among others, encourages the creation of school safety committees, which work closely with the police service. Schools are also encouraged to adopt-a-cop and invite police personnel to assist schools in creating safe environments.[159]

4.2.2. South African Police Service

The SAPS has programmes geared towards preventing crimes against children and increasing school safety. Some of the programmes employed by SAPS include Captain Crime Stop, Adopt-a-Cop, the Youth Against Crime Club, and Child Protection Week.[160] Other programmes include open day visits to police stations, sports days for schools organised by the SAPS and awareness presentations by police experts. Additionally, the SAPS makes an effort to maintain a presence at the schools by providing monitors for break time and by speaking out against bullying and violence during school assemblies.[161]

The Captain Crime Stop programme is an educational and awareness programme focusing on créches, pre-primary and primary schools. The cartoon-type hero visits the school; demonstrates acts of heroism and teaches the children a lesson in safety and security. However, it was noted during the hearing that this programme is not working as effectively as anticipated.[162]

The Adopt-a-Cop programme focuses on learners aged 13 years and above. A local police official, trained specifically for the position, is allocated to each school. This police official is required to visit the school regularly and assist school leadership in identifying and solving issues related to crime and school violence.[163] The Adopt-a-Cop programme also strives to increase awareness of crime in the school and the surrounding community. The overall goal of the programme is to establish and build relationships of trust between learners and the SAPS, thereby increasing and strengthening communication between the learners and the SAPS.[164]

The WCED indicated that there are regular patrols conducted by the SAPS on pre-identified schools. There are also regular searches, including the use of police dogs, when searching for illegal substances. It was further indicated that a revised Adopt-a-Cop Programme is being considered.[165]

Specialised Education Support Services

The Directorate of Specialised Education Support Services launched the Specialised Education Support Services project to assist the Education Management and Development Centres (EMDC) of the WCED to combat the expulsion of learners from WCED schools. Through the implementation of developmental and diversion programmes, the project strives to provide remedial intervention and support to learners at risk of suspension and expulsion.[166]

The programmes include four areas of training: response ability pathways; mapping the future; drug information; and drug counselling. After the training, co-coordinators were nominated and the implementation of preventive programmes began. The programme indirectly aims at reducing school-based violence by trying to combat the major causes of expulsion, namely assault/violence with and without a weapon; drugs-dealing and distribution or drug possession and use; and theft/fraud.[167]

Protecting our Property (POP)

The POP programme was created to combat vandalism of school property which has become a significant problem at some schools. It is important to prevent vandalism as it can result in learners experiencing feelings of hurt and/or fear. Further, the money spent on curbing vandalism could be spent more constructively to improve school facilities, purchase school supplies, or to implement other programmes and projects.[168]

POP incorporates a variety of strategies to help protect the schools from vandalism. The project has created neighbourhood watch programmes using human resources including police, parents, and learners and has created a vandalism hotline. In addition, POP works to create projects for graffiti artists to use their talents in non-destructive ways and to raise awareness about the criminal consequences of vandalism in an effort to curb vandalism.[169]

4.3.1 Support services

a   )   Child-line

Child-line is a NGO that works to protect children from all forms of violence and to create a culture of children's rights in South Africa. As part of its programmes, Child-line has established a national toll free number.[170] The national toll free line receives on average between 60 000 and 90 000 calls a month. Many of the calls received relate to violence experienced at schools.

Child-line provides programmes to a number of schools to address rights and responsibilities, crime prevention and education on child abuse.[171] Further, Child-line is in the process of developing a Behavioural Manual.

b   )   Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programme (TVEP)

The Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programme (TVEP) is an NGO that provides a service to victims of sexual assault and gender-based violence. Through its two 24-hour trauma centres, located in hospitals based in Tshilidzini and Vhufuli, it provides one-stop holistic services to victims of sexual assault. Every sexual assault victim in the Thohoyandou Policing District receives this service from one of the TVEP trauma centres.[172]

In 2002, TVEP began a rights-based "Break the Silence" campaign targeted towards learners. As part of the campaign to break the silence around sexual violence, TVEP focuses on educating learners on topics such as domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. TVEP stated that it had been unable to gain the support of the WCED for their programmes and is therefore unable to access learners during school hours. Thus, its campaigns are held after school in big groups. This prevents TVEP from structuring its campaign to smaller groups based on age and grade which would be a more effective means of reaching learners.[173]

4.3.2   Advocacy

a)   Gun Free South Africa

The Gun Free South Africa (GFSA) is an NGO committed to reducing the proliferation of guns in South Africa. The GFSA is a strong advocate for declaring all schools "Gun Free Zones" using the firearm free zone (FFZ) model set out in the Firearms Control Act.[174] The Gun Free Zones Project aims to increase peace and to create a safe environment. This will contribute towards learners attending school without fear of violence, and the creation of an environment conducive to learning.[175]

The GFSA proposes the following five step plan to achieve its goal of firearm free schools:
1. Holding discussions aimed at reaching a consensus;
2. Meeting with stakeholders to develop policy and elect safety teams;
3. Adopting the policy developed by the stakeholders and having the Minister declare the school a FFZ;
4. Implementing of the policy; and
5. Maintaining the policy and a buy-in from stakeholders.[176]

b)   LGBT Wellness (OUT)

The OUT Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Trans-Gendered (LGBT) Wellness (OUT), is an NGO that advocates for the promotion of the LGBT peoples' sexual and mental health and their related rights. In relation to school violence, OUT is involved in policy development and training programmes to curb and prevent violence against the LGBT learners. OUT researches and reports on the experience of the LGBT learners, including the prevalence of hate crimes against the LGBT learners, incidents of corrective rape, high levels of homophobia and the disconnection between the constitutional and legislative framework that guarantees rights and the reality on the ground. OUT noted that discrimination against the LGBT learners has resulted in high drop-out rates. OUT also noted that discrimination negatively impacts individual learners' well-being, and this often leads to reports of suicide and substance abuse.[177]

OUT collaborate with the Education Department and other organisations to respond to the needs of individuals. It serves as a watch-dog to ensure that the LGBT learners enjoy their rights which are enshrined in the Bill of Rights and other relevant legislation.[178]

c)   Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication

The Soul City IHDC is an NGO that advocates for social change and health promotion. Soul City focuses on issues such as: HIV and AIDS; poverty and violence; endemic socio-political violence; and child vulnerability.[179] Soul City works from the position that good health is not merely related to the absence of illness. Rather, good health is a product of a range of actions which include the building of an enabling environment, advocacy for health public policy, community action, developing personal skills and reorienting health services towards the health promotion approach.[180] Soul City IHDC views schools as the centres of communities, and not as an island, thus it advocates for community involvement in the fight against school violence. Soul City IHDC uses the power of the mass media to promote its message. For example, Soul City incorporates child abuse messages in its television and radio materials.[181]

4.3.3   Education and Awareness

a)   **South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)**

The South African national broadcaster, the SABC, runs several entertainment based educational programmes aimed at children such as Soul Buddyz and Takalane Sesame. Soul Buddyz is a multi-media project, which includes a television series broadcasted on SABC1. The target audience of this programme is children between the ages of 8 and 12. The show covers the lives of a group of children from all walks of life who meet after school in a park. During each episode, critical issues faced by children are dealt with in this programme, empowering them to deal with such issues in a positive manner.[182] Takalane Sesame is a programme targeted towards younger children.

Apart from educational programmes such as Soul Buddyz and Takalane Sesame, a new programme called "Each One, Teach One" has been introduced. This programme aims to discuss pressing issues related to education. On each episode, experts are invited to share their knowledge, and parents and learners are given the opportunity to call in and share their experiences and views.[183]

4.3.4   Research, analysis and training

a)   **Inter-University Centre for Education Law, Educational Leadership and Education Policy (CELP)**

CELP was established in 1997 with a mission of conducting research and providing non-formal training in an effort to empower educators with valuable information about new legislation and policies. CELP was developed in response to an increased awareness that many educators were unaware of new legislation and policies that affected them.[184] CELP adopted the slogan "Making a meaningful contribution to transformation in education", based on its mission of promoting knowledge of education in law and striving to make a meaningful contribution to transformation in education. To achieve its objectives, the Centre conducts scientific research, makes recommendations and provides information and training on education management and education law and policy.[185]

With regards to school violence, CELP advocates for the empowerment of school managers. CELP's research indicates that the emphasis on equality and freedom in our new dispensation has resulted in learners and educators finding it challenging to deal with issues of obedience and authority. There are a number of misconceptions regarding freedom. Learners have the perception that they cannot be told where they can and cannot go due to our culture of rights which also places an emphasis on the freedom of movement. Where such perceptions exist, educators and managers attempting to exercise authority over students are paralysed. CELP proposes training educators on how to interpret the Constitution and other relevant legislation. CELP believes such training will empower educators with knowledge and confidence to exercise authority over their classrooms and schools, and demand obedience from learners while creating an environment suitable for learning.[186]

b) The University of South Africa Centre

The University of South Africa's (UNISA) Institute for Social and Health Services and the MRC-UNISA Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme, have completed significant research on school violence in South Africa. The university has created guidelines for developing safe school plans.[187]

The guidelines outline ten key steps, summarised as follows:
1. Conduct an overall school safety assessment;
2. Create a code of conduct for learners and educators;
3. Develop training tailored to meet the needs of learners and educators;
4. Actively involve learners in school safety planning;
5. Create opportunities for and solicit parental involvement;
6. Create safety zones by providing a variety of after-school activities for learners;
7. Create safety promotion and crisis management teams comprised of learners, educators, parents, and community emergency health workers;
8. Develop community partnerships and obtain broader community involvement;
9. Re-design schools to eliminate dangerous areas and to minimise trouble spots; and
10. Multi-disciplinary collaboration to formulate, adopt, and implement policy.[188]

UNISA's philosophy is that through collective ownership, responsibility and self-reliance, communities can succeed in reducing the incidence and prevalence of violence and unintentional injury within their community.[189] UNISA supports the Safe Schools project as a first step towards creating safe communities and pockets of safety for the youth within communities..[190]

c) Substance Misuse: Advocacy, Research and Training

Substance Misuse: Advocacy, Research & Training is an NGO that advocates the view that current drug awareness programmes do not work and messages such as "Just Say No" are too simplistic and have little impact. The following shortcomings have been identified with the current anti-drug campaigns:[191]

• When learners realise that they have a drug abuse problem, they often fall into a vacuum because they are unable to access adequate medical treatment;
• Anti-drug campaigns aimed at learners can open them up to domestic abuse when their parents are substance abusers themselves and attempt to educate them about the effects of drugs;
• Learners may also suffer secondary trauma in instances where they are knowledgeable about the negative effects of substance abuse and its consequences if there are substance abusers in their homes; and
• The campaigns fail to address the issue of abuse of 'over the counter' medications.[192]

SMART advocates for the use of only specialised counsellors in drug prevention programmes, to prevent causing learners and educators additional harm. SMART believes drug abuse should be considered a health issue instead of a moral one. Thus the emphasis should not be on searching learners or educators for drugs and punishing them, but on making sure they are protected. To effectively protect the rights of substance abusers, SMART advocates that provisions should be made to ensure that there is an effective, affordable and accessible treatment available with standards set by a qualified agency.[193]