Exploring adolescent learners' experiences of school violence in a township high school

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Rates of violence in South Africa are disturbingly high, constituting one of the most significant public mental health challenges in South Africa. Township (high) schools are especially prone to violence due to several factors, thereby influencing the learners' experience thereof. This article, based on a specific case study, focuses on exploring adolescent learners' unique experiences of school violence in a township high school, which may assist in understanding the phenomenon, and informing school prevention and/or intervention programmes/strategies for this and similar contexts. Conclusions drawn from the study are that school violence is a multifaceted phenomenon with unique contextual characteristics and, based on these findings, it is recommended that a holistic and an integrated approach be taken when dealing with violence in these and similar schools.

INTRODUCTION

Violence has become a part of everyday life in some schools in South Africa (Urbani, Zulu & Van der Merwe 2004:170). It has also gained momentum in the township schools of the Western Cape, invariably impinging on effective learning. Headlines highlighting this phenomenon are becoming common in various media sources (Xaba 2006:565) and are therefore a matter of public concern due to its current prevalence and history (cf. Lewis 1992:12) in South Africa.

In this context of violence, the education of many learners will be severely affected. The school plays a vital role in a learner's learning and socialization, and it is essential that schools offer a safe environment in which authentic learning and development can take place. Violence invariably taints the school environment and jeopardizes the educational process. It also infringes on the learner's right to education and to the freedom and security of the person (Neser 2002:33-34). Said differently, it impinges on learners' basic human rights. Adolescents are invariably exposed to and take part in this violence and the effect of engaging in violent behaviours is generally greater for adolescents than for other age groups due to the very nature of the teenage years (Gouws, Kruger & Burger 2000:75).

Acts of violence on learners and accompanying abuse are intolerable, and in order to develop effective strategies that will prevent school violence and improve learners' safety at school, it is important for policy makers and educators to understand what these victims of violence actually experience in order to understand this specific phenomenon better. As experience implies knowledge gained from participation in an event, such knowledge is indeed needed in order to understand it better (Neser 2002:33-34). Furthermore, the study of the phenomenon of violence in township schools is important for research as violence threatens the safe development and mental wellness of learners in township schools – the presence of violence, but more importantly the fear that violence evokes, affects the attendance of learners and their ability to focus effectively while they are at school (Schafii 2001:56).

According to Bach and Louw (2010) and Steyn and Roux (2009:24), school violence in South Africa has largely been researched from a quantitative methodology and often lacks a specific contextualization that is exploratory, descriptive and gives rise to "lived experiences". Experience and its position within the individual's life world are cardinal in understanding the very nature of a phenomenon, including township school violence. To De Wet (2003:253) "[t]he causes of violence (school) are multifaceted, complex and even conflicting." Given the complex nature of the phenomenon, a description of school violence can be expanded by understanding it in a specific context (a South African township high

school – N Ngqela and A Lewis) and life world (adolescent township school learners' experience thereof – N Ngqela and A Lewis).

In order to understand the causes and effects of violence in township schools on adolescent learners, this study is important and necessary: By understanding the risks to learners, and the effects that violence has on learners, educators, together with support staff, would be in a better position to develop interventions that would help those affected by violence in township schools, but also to understand what might cause this violence and what can possibly be done by the concerned parties and the authorities to address this specific phenomenon. Contextual approaches are important and are also needed.

In this article, the interpretive paradigm will be used, which considers an interactive process where the researcher is actively involved in gaining information of lived experiences of the external world from the population being studied (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:148). Furthermore, school violence does not exist in isolation, and learners in these contexts are not isolated, but are part of various interactive systems. In order to understand the experiences of violence of adolescent learners in a specific school context, it is necessary to understand the influencing systems (cf. Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana 2002:35).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The specific design selected for this study is a qualitative case study – the case being a high school in a township of the Western Cape with purposive sampling being used for individual and focus group interviews. The sample population was adolescent learners of a high school in the township of Nyanga in the Western Cape. From this population, thirteen adolescent learners from grades 10 and 11 were selected for individual and focus group interviews and identified by the safety officer at the school for a specific reason: all of these learners had experienced some form of violence while at school. Furthermore, they were adolescents exploring who they were and where they were going (Donald *et al.* 2002:78).

Permission to gain access to the school was granted by the Western Cape Education Department and ethical clearance was obtained from Stellenbosch University. Informed consent was given by the learners and parents.

CONTEXT

South African cities and towns have been shaped to a large degree by discriminatory practices that were a result of past racially discriminatory policies; Nyanga Township in the Western Cape, the focus of this research, being no exception. Statutes such as the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 (Motseke 2010:118) and the Group Areas Act of 1950 divided cities and towns, residential and business areas according to race (Khosa & Zwane 1995:11). The central business core was surrounded by residential areas traditionally reserved for the white population and were usually characterised by well-maintained infrastructure and facilities. On the periphery of the city, townships were created for the black population. Most of these areas were under-developed and lacked adequate infrastructure and recreational facilities. Often the "Coloured" and Indian communities were situated between the white and black areas to act as a buffer. According to Khosa and Zwane (1995), these townships were created to segregate Black, Indian and "Coloured" South Africans into contained communities without a self-sustaining infrastructure so that they would be economically dependent on white communities, while remaining socially segregated. These townships, as remnants of the apartheid system, are still prevalent today and reflect the context of this study.

Nyanga Township is one of the oldest black townships in Cape Town, and was established as a result of apartheid's racist migrant labour system policies. In the early 1950s, black migrant workers were forced to settle in Nyanga as Langa (another black township close by) became too small. This township is one of the poorest and most dangerous parts of Cape Town, and its unemployment rate is estimated at around 70% (Nyanga, Cape Town 2007).

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

(Township) school violence is a multifaceted (De Wet 2002; De Wet 2003; De Wet 2007) and multi-theoretical (Leone, Mayer, Malmgren & Meisel 2000:1) phenomenon. Several theories inform and assist in understanding the phenomenon: psycho-analysts' instinct and drive theories, Anderson's General Affective Aggression Model (GAAM), Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Baron & Byrne 2002:327-329, 338, 444), Hirschi's Theory of Social Control, and Agnew's General Strain Theory (Burton 2008:1-2). These theories take an

individual and/or systemic view to the phenomenon and assist in understanding it better. Violence, it appears, has varied explanations and causes, and in order to understand the phenomenon within the context of this study, its complex nature is acknowledged. According to several of these theories, it has become clear that learners cannot be studied outside of the dynamic contexts and systems in which they develop.

Adolescence is the transitional period of development between childhood and adulthood, and represents the stage during which a person experiences a variety of changes: physical, emotional, intellectual, emotional and social. This period is related to prominent changes in mood and they generally view their friends and peer group as more important than their parents. They may also participate in actions viewed as being socially unacceptable, generally due to peer pressure (Adolescence 2008), hence the possibility of being at risk of being harmed by and themselves being violent. Adolescents furthermore need to search for their own identity. Donald *et al.* (2002:79) argue that identity is both an individual and a communal issue, so the adolescent has to balance a sense of 'who I am' with a sense of 'how do others see me' and 'how do I connect with the larger picture' of community values and cultural norms. Inevitably then, this search will waver between experiences of certainty and confusion, even leading to tension and frustration and the possibility of violence.

According to MacNeil and Steward (2000:232), school violence is any intentional verbal or physical act producing pain in the recipient of that act while the recipient is under the supervision of the school. Hagan and Foster (2000:5) uphold the above definition, but go further in describing school violence as the exercise of power over others in school-related settings by some individuals or social process. Such processes deny those subjected to it their humanity to make a difference, either by reducing them from what they are, or by limiting them from becoming what they could be. This behaviour disrupts the safe learning environment of a school.

Violence in South African schools, particularly in the townships, escalated some 30 years ago when thousands of learners protested to Afrikaans being the medium of instruction (Lewis 1992:56). During these years, the black youth began a full-scale campaign to reject the

school system that they saw as a primary agent of their enslavement (Khosa & Zwane 1995:17). Khosa and Zwane (1995:18) further argue that the education system for black people under the apartheid government was a vital instrument of oppression and contributed to subsequent school violence. "The reasons behind political violence are usually related to imbalances and distortions in the power and access to resources of different groups in society, and to basic differences in political viewpoints and goals" (Donald *et al.* 2002:236). Education was one such imbalance and was a reflection of the prevalent unequal political system. The education system for black people formed a critical cornerstone of the apartheid government's strategy of separate development with townships and the schools situated within them being part of it. This strategy ensured that the conditions in black South African township schools were not conducive to effective learning. Township schools had extremely overcrowded classrooms, inadequate or non-existent teaching and learning resources and infrastructure, and poorly trained educators. The resistance against the apartheid education system by black township learners generally through fighting subjected these school children and their communities to violence that left students with a legacy of self-destructive coping strategies, which they now use to respond to the difficult challenges of creating a new society (Khosa & Zwane 1995:21).

There can be serious long-standing physical, emotional and psychological implications of violence for educators and adolescent learners as well as those in the community (Govender & Killian 2001:1). These include fear (MacDonald & Kirkpatrick 1983:258); stress (Smith and Carlson in Boqwana 2009:20); post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bach & Louw 2010: 25); diminished self-esteem, depression and suicide, reduced school attendance and dropout, impaired concentration and a diminished ability to be taught (WHO 1996), to name but a few.

As has been previously highlighted, effective teaching and learning can only take place in a safe and secure school environment (Xaba 2006:565). Township schools, due to their history and specific nature, are especially vulnerable to unsafe conditions and threats of violence due to, among other things, poor resources and infrastructure, their poor location, especially in and around informal settlements (Curriculum Review 1999) – aspects not

conducive to sound and authentic education.

Schools, like families, are some of the primary arenas in which children are socialised and masculinities and femininities shaped (Redpath, Morrell, Jewkes & Peacock 2008: 35). Khosa & Zwane (1995:4) claim that sexual violence against school girls in the township schools occurs within the framework and discourse of a male-dominated society. In the African society, men have very often been taught to define their power in terms of their capacity to affect their will over women with or without the consent of those women involved (Simpson 1993:6).

Several forms and expressions of school violence occur of which the following are a few as illustration of how they feature within various systems. Donald *et al.* (2002:236) note: "There are different kinds of violence. It is important to be clear about these differences, as violence is often taken to be a single, general problem in society." In dealing with causes of school violence and recognising the complex nature of the phenomenon within and across systems, it is recognised that these systems are dynamic and influence each other reciprocally.

INDIVIDUAL SYSTEMS

In the South African environment, there are a range of individual, systemic and contextual drivers to violent and antisocial behaviour in young people (Van der Merwe & Dawes 2007:95). Within the person, individual temperaments and acquired biological deficits may contribute to an adolescent's violent disposition and tendencies. Antisocial personality types, attention deficit disorders, impulsivity, hyperactivity, low resting heart rate and neurotoxin exposures, as well as serious head injuries are among the factors that may push a child in the direction of violent behaviour (De Wet 2007:255). According to Stancato (in De Wet 2007:255), a negative self-image and low self-esteem may equate to a state of confusion in the adolescent's search for meaning in the form of self-acceptance, a healthy self-esteem and an acceptable identity. Indicators include social isolation, loneliness, poor impulse control, and defiance of authority, mood swings and an obsession with weapons, resulting in violence and even death in instances.

FAMILY AND HOME

The primary socialization of a child is generally provided by the family and home, while secondary socialization is provided by the school, peers and the media (cf. Bowlby 1980:56). In adolescence, peer relations become fore fronted, yet the importance of family and home are not negated (Gouws *et al.* 2000:67). South African children living in black townships generally live in poor conditions, where some do not even live with their parents, but with caregivers who do not have sufficient parenting skills or resources to meet the basic needs of these children, thereby creating an environment susceptible to destructive behaviour. Many children in township schools also come from single-parent homes caused by migratory working conditions and parents dying due to HIV/AIDS (Western Cape Education Department 2005:8). These children, and others living in similar conditions, may feel worthless and helpless and display a perpetual craving for reassurance and gratification that never seems to be satisfied, leading to new frustrations that may be reacted to with anger and violence (cf. Van den Aardweg 1987:176).

Parental pro-violence attitudes and family conflict are risk factors for violent behaviour, as modelling is a central learning process. Presenting violence as an acceptable means of problem-solving normalizes the occurrence and use of violence, harsh and/or inconsistent disciplinary practices in homes and by family members. Severe physical punishment and abuse in homes and families are significant determinants of violent behaviour (Van der Merwe & Dawes 2007:98). Poor monitoring and supervision of child activities, and inadequate limit-setting (permissive or lax parenting) are also associated with violent behaviours in children and adolescents (Patterson, DeBaryshe & Ramsay 1997:270). Other home factors that may lead to violent behaviour include too large families, little family bonding and poor family management practices (Patterson *et al.* 1997:265). These violent patterns and problem-solving skills are very often transferred from the family to the school system (De Wet 2007:255) thereby reflecting the interaction and transference of violence from one system to another.

SCHOOL

Frank (2006:38) observes that the school setting is in fact a double-edged sword: it has the potential to offer interventions to violent behaviour, but is also the system where children are vulnerable to violence through offending

and victimization. Kandakai (in De Wet 2007:256) argues that learner conflict takes place more easily in unkempt, graffiti-covered and unhygienic schools than in neat schools where a positive school climate prevails. Furlong and Morrison (2000:78) mention that there are several characteristics that make schools more conducive to violent behaviour: schools being too big; bad school ethos, discipline challenges and the school's failure to confront issues of sexual harassment.

Schools in South Africa also play a part in reproducing violence through their continuing failure to confront issues of sexual harassment (Vally & Dalamba 1999:37). However, sexual harassment, abuse and violence at school also occur in prestigious, affluent schools and are not only limited to township schools. Privilege does not protect the learner from sexual violence, but the poverty that is prevailing in township schools has been found to often render a learner more vulnerable. This needs to be contextualized within the framework of poverty-stricken areas where learners need to travel long distances in order to arrive at school, often making use of public transport, which in itself is inherently unsafe and dangerous (Naylor 2002:1). Furthermore, corporal punishment in schools has been banned in South Africa, yet despite this, it still prevails in township schools (Motseke 2010; Morrel 2001). In addition to the violence they are subjected to outside of school in their communities, these children are also regularly abused in their schools by their teachers.

THE COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

School violence aetiology may stem from larger community and societal factors over which the school has little or no control (De Wet 2007:253).

Political violence in South Africa from 1948 onwards led to high levels of intolerance and subsequently to much violence especially within the black education system (Lewis 1992:57; De Wet 2007:253). Morrell (2008:40) argues that schools in South Africa were the "trenches of the liberation struggle" especially during the 1970s and 1980s. He further argues that it seems as if the situation has not changed since the African National Congress came to power in 1994, because instead of producing a new generation of peace-loving and industrious pupils, the new freedom was followed by an increase in crime and violence in South African schools.

The pervasive condition of poverty, especially in black communities (who generally live in townships) allows for unemployment, resulting in many people in these areas being economically inactive for large periods of time, or sometimes indefinitely (Bennett-Johnson 2004:2). This has resulted in people seeking social and economic survival through selling alcohol and drugs. These conditions exacerbate the social conditioning of those children and adolescents who pattern themselves on these perceived role models. The "modelling" continues to other violent behaviours such as using weapons and joining gangs, with this kind of behaviour spilling over into schools (Bennett-Johnson 2004:200). However, given this, Donald et al. (2002:237) refer to research evidence from South Africa and other countries where adolescents, especially males, have shown resilience to violence. This resilience is attributed to, amongst others, a more developed cognitive situational understanding and peer camaraderie.

Socio-economic factors within the community and society also impact on school violence. The ready availability of drugs in these communities, as well as the high numbers of adults involved in crime further increases the probability of youth involvement in violence (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana 2010:222-225).

Township violence in South Africa is largely influenced by racist policies of the past and its results. Urbanization and the migration of black people from rural areas, as remnants of these policies, cause overcrowding, and an increased strain on the poor resources available in these townships. Unemployment rates in townships were (and are) still high. Poverty and tension from overcrowding resulted in internally violent communities (cf. Kaldine 2007:245-247) and it was and is a very common experience for township children to witness assaults, stabbings, and shootings (cf. De Wet 2007:253-255).

Apartheid was a system through which the state exercised control over the majority of its population through segregation and oppression. It was during this era that violence became entrenched within the oppressed communities, as a means to react to this oppression. The response of the people in these oppressed communities to the strained living conditions they were subjected to was to resist, whereby violent oppression was also met by violent resistance (Marais 1998:185). A wave of

political violence gripped the country from the late 70s, mid-80s until 1994, and it was during this period that liberation movements escalated their violent attacks against the apartheid government in response to the apartheid government repression: the government responded violently by killing many people. Much of this violence took place in townships and also within the schools there. South African township youth became involved in this cycle of violence that continued throughout the liberation struggle. Some have even referred to this generation as the "lost generation", as they had lost their right to be educated (Meier 2005:170). The township of Nyanga (the context of this study) in the Western Cape is one such township that experienced these racial policies and the resultant violence.

The former system of apartheid education ensured that conditions in black schools generally did not ensure effective learning (Lewis 1992; Mdhluli & Zwane cited in Crawage 2005:4). These conditions included unqualified educators and a lack of equitable education for all learners, as well as a lack of resources to provide quality education. Township schools were overcrowded, had little resources, and in some schools learners did not even have desks. Dissatisfaction with these conditions led township learners to engage in riots and resort to violence (Lewis 1992; Van Zyl Slabbert, cited in Crawage 2005:24; Meier 2005:170) in order to ensure an equitable education. These and other community and societal factors encouraged the formation of subcultures as alternatives to the dominant culture from which they experience themselves as marginalized and excluded. These subcultural formations manifested themselves by way of, amongst others, gang formation and ensuing violence.

In the following sections, adolescents' experience of township school violence is presented in the data analysis and discussion in order to gain a clearer understanding of this phenomenon.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Three general themes emerged from the responses to the questions posed to all participants (individual learners and focus groups):

Theme 1: Lack of safety and classroom management

It became evident from the individual interviews that all of the participants (N=13)

stated that they do not feel safe within their school setting due to the nature of violence that is evident both within and outside their school premises. Linked to this experience was a feeling of the lack of effective classroom and school management that led to their environment being perceived and experienced as unsafe and violent. Several learners spoke of this lack of safety as well as the lack of effective classroom management, which reflected in, amongst others, absent teachers within the classroom and ineffectual monitoring of facilities. The following verbatim answers serve as an example:

> Oh yes teacher, only last week 2 learners were fighting in the toilets, in fact one was stabbed. I think there is no system in place like for instance learners are always left on their own in their classrooms, teachers that are suppose to come to class do not come and in that way it's free time and this is what causes lots of problems in classes [L2 individual transcript].
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> Let there be no free periods at school because that's where the problem starts, some learners take chances when there is no teacher in the classroom … [Learner 3 individual transcript].

This lack of effective management is linked to the lack of safety experienced within the school, as learners at the school feel that the security fencing is ineffective, damaged and even obsolete - holes in fences, security gates are left open, and security lights are not working. For example:

> I can say the Department of Education must erect electric fence and remote controlled gates. There must be guards or caretakers always at the gates. Let no learner get out of the gates during lunch time [Learner 6 individual transcript].

It further appears that the perimeter fencing needed to be monitored daily and that school authorities, together with school governing bodies, must assume responsibility for monitoring and maintaining the safety infrastructure, as unsavoury elements from the community did not respect the sanctity of the school's boundaries. In support of the above several learners revealed:

> How can I feel safe here? Can you see there's a taxi rank just next to the fence and the fence has got holes because of them, in fact not only taxi drivers and learners, but from people who want to cross (using school grounds – N Ngqela & A Lewis) to the other side and the shortcut is crossing through the school. Also, you never know when these taxi drivers or gangs are going to fight, so how can I feel safe? [L3 individual transcript].

The majority of learners from the focus group also felt that educators should attend to their own classes, as most fights happen in classrooms during their absence. Both individual

interviews and focus group interviews identified classrooms, open grounds or playing fields and toilets as the sites of most of the violence at their school. The focus group interviews gave a clear picture of the situation in this instance where a learner was stabbed in the toilet:

> Learner in the focus group: A Learner was stabbed in the toilet.
> Learner in the focus group: We wish there could always be teachers in the classrooms because if they are not there, learners start to make noise and some start fighting.

Individual learners further felt that the visibility of police could make a difference regarding their safety at school. This further reflects their experience of not feeling safe at school, but also that the South African Police Service is regarded as necessary within this context of maintaining a violence-free environment, together with teachers who are considered an important and necessary part of the educative process. As one learner noted:

> Police must be around the school premises quite often and search learners for weapons and drugs [L2 individual transcript].

According to Prinsloo (2005:5), South African educators have an important duty towards the safety and the protection of learners, not only in terms of the Constitution and other relevant legislation, but also in terms of their *in loco parentis* role. This includes learners' safety and security as well as ensuring that the school manages this aspect. In this context, adolescent learners experienced their environment in such a way that they felt that the police were necessary in also maintaining a violence-free environment.

Literature (Burton 2008:78) further reveals that in terms of school management, educators in township schools exhibit a lack of adequate classroom management skills, a perception that to some is exacerbated by the banning of corporal punishment as a disciplinary option. Previously, discipline was generally maintained through fear of physical punishment. Alternative (effective) discipline measures appear to be lacking in this specific context. Furthermore, the Schools Act acknowledges the role that the governing body should play in ensuring a safe school environment (Prinsloo 2005:7).

There is a feeling amongst learners in this school that these steps should also go some way towards preventing learners from other schools and gang members from surrounding communities from entering schools and causing violence. All this speaks to effective school (micro-) management (cf. Burton 2008:78), thereby

improving and ensuring the effectiveness of learning. Gouws *et al.* (2000:75) note that if the educators assume "the role of adolescent escort and companion" as opposed to being absent and authoritarian in their discipline, significant relationships can be forged, thereby ensuring safety and effective learning and education.

Theme 2: Community induced violence
Learners in this specific study experience the community system as influencing the prevalence of violence within their school context. In this study, community-induced violence refers to school violence activities that stem from, or are perpetuated from the community under investigation. Schools do not operate within a vacuum, and the synergy between the two was apparent when interviewing the learners, especially within this context.

The prevalence of and easy access to weapons and drugs within township schools suggest that these are readily available outside the school, an aspect verified by the data. Often both alcohol and drugs are used to generate the courage needed to commit a violent act. This is revealed by several of the learner interviews:

> It's because learners are growing up in violent areas and they think it is ok to be violent. Sometimes it is the drugs that they buy in the community that they use that makes them violent [L2 individual transcript].
> Some of them are because where they come from there are always street fights, especially if they stay near the shebeens, but sometimes at their homes, their parents fight, so they think there's nothing wrong in doing that [L3 individual transcript].
> Sometimes it is because they [the community members] sell guns in the neighbourhood, so they will buy them to use the guns to rob during weekends and bring these guns to schools sometimes. Also drugs like marijuana or tik are easily available in the neighbourhood so they buy these drugs and smoke them inside the school toilets so that they can be brave to do anything wrong they have been thinking of while they were sober [L5 individual transcript].

Gouws *et al.* (2000:115) observe that adolescent's moral development can also be influenced by the community they live in. During interviews with individual learners and focus groups it became clear that school violence is a spill-over from the community. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecosystemic model (cf. Lewis 2009:15) is useful in explaining the multifaceted and systemic effects of community violence on individuals, especially within this context. This is further explained by the previously mentioned GAAM theory on violent behaviour that recognises systemic influences of violence. Within the construct of these models, com-

munity violence has both a direct and an indirect effect on the individual. The direct effect is explained as the individual's personal experience with violence in his/her community, and his/her participation in or witnessing of a violent incident. The indirect effect of community violence relates to the effect that the presence of violence has on the individual and the other systems within the ecosystem.

School violence is often a symptom of the overall social dysfunction of the community within which the school is situated (Steyn & Naicker 2007:146). This implies that schools are often mirror images of the communities and families they serve. The Nyanga Township, and the surrounding community where most of these learners come from, is an area where learners experience tension due to, amongst other facets, challenging socio-economic conditions: the selling of alcohol and drugs, as is reflected in media reports of this specific community (*Cape Argus* 2009).

Theme 3: Gender-related violence

The study provided evidence that violence at this specific school reflected a specific gender-based physical, emotional and verbal type of violence. Males were often identified as the perpetrators of this school violence with girls often bearing the impact. In support of the above explanation, several (girl) learners revealed:

> Boys just kick us without any reason. In this area, there are many groups of boys that threaten or intimidate us by forcefully robbing our cell phones [L1 individual transcript].
> Yes, these boys will forcefully propose love from us and if you reject his proposal, they just kick you or slap you [L2 individual transcript].
> Boys and male educators are also sexually abusers [Learner 4 individual transcript]

As far as gender-based violence is concerned, Mills (2001:3) acknowledges that for many boys, being tough is their understanding of what it is to be male. In a patriarchal society, aggressive play by boys towards girls is often described as 'typical' or 'boys will be boys' behaviours, and such behaviour is even encouraged and normalised, often with counter-productive outcomes. It is this use of aggression by boys to gain power and to dominate that is intimidating and threatening to girls and undermines their whole positive experience of school (Bester & Du Plessis 2010:224). Within this school, characterised as being predominantly black and African, this discourse is indeed characteristic and prevalent and reflects

negative identity confusion, a negative form of adolescent identity formation as identified by Eric Erikson (cf. Gouws *et al*. 2000:66). This type of violence may be seen as a violent expression of masculinity (cf. Bhana 2005:100). According to Connell (1999:8), there is a widespread belief in some communities and societies that it is natural for men to be violent. Some boys see violent actions as being synonymous with manliness (De Wet 2002:92). The subordination of females to the authority of males may therefore, as illustrated in this study, result in physical, sexual or psychological harm to female learners with gender hierarchies thus having an influence on school violence within this specific context.

CONCLUSION

School violence, and in this instance township school violence, has multiple reasons for its origin and cannot be attributed to one single theory or causal factor. From the evidence provided by the literature study, individual interviews, and focus group interviews, schools, and in this instance within a township, are very often sites of violence, impacting on the well-being of adolescent learners. Institutional, systemic and gender-based violence have been implicated in instances of school violence within this context.

From the participants' responses it can be concluded that there is a great need to intensify security measures within school premises to promote an effective environment of learning and teaching and therefore ensuring the right to education. This can be ensured by the school and the community. With regard to school management, it was evident that educators show a lack of adequate classroom management skills and that there is a definite need for this to be enhanced within this specific community.

Throughout the interviews, it has been evident that a school reflects what is happening in its community. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the community has an influence on what is happening at school, and that the school is a mirror image of the community within which it is situated. These learners reflect these experiences of the community as such, and focusing on positive intra- and interpersonal relationships is one such step in addressing security, positive gender and parental roles and community involvement.

Finally, this study highlights the need for further specific research on the phenomenon of

the escalating school violence, especially within a similar and different specific context. These further studies could possibly include comparative case studies of learners' experiences (of violence) in other school environments (not necessarily the township).

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