

Experiencing Violence in Schools: Voices of Learners in the Lesotho Context

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ABSTRACT This study explored learner experiences of school violence at a secondary school in Lesotho. Fifteen (15) learners participated in the study. Data were collected through individual and focus group interviews and document analysis. The study found that learners were exposed to complex patterns of violence and these were experienced in multiple forms, for example, sexual violence, corporal punishment, sexual harassment, bullying, physical violence. In certain ways schooling itself can be viewed as violence in that the school had an ethos of authoritarianism and control. Violence was often experienced as a gendered phenomenon. The study highlights the need for proactive programmes that are directed at attaining the goal of building school communities that are safe havens. A key component of such programmes should be critical self-reflection and self-scrutiny by members of the school community.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of school violence has become one of the most pressing educational issues in schools internationally (Brickmore 2008; Bisikaa et al. 2009; Johnson 2009; Limbos and Casteel 2009; Antonowicz 2010; Bester and du Plessis 2010). It has been argued that many schools are far from being safe places (Netshitahane and Vollenhoven 2002; Herr and Anderson 2003; Harber 2004; Smith and Smith 2006; Meyer-Adams and Conner 2008). Studies have shown that school violence comes in different forms and impacts on teachers, learners, parents and the school (Morrell 2002; Bhana 2005; Johnson 2009; Linares et al. 2009; Bester and du Plessis 2010). Violence can take the form of physical injury as in assault (Antonowicz 2010). It can be abuse of power as in the case of bullying. (Piotrowski and Hoot 2008). Violence can also be in the form of sexual harassment (Jones et al. 2008). Bhana (2005) explains that levels of sexual violence in schools are exacerbated by social constructions of masculinity and femininity. Schools do not exist in a social vacuum; they reflect and reproduce the power relations within society (White 2007). Morrell (2002) explains that

male dominance is a global phenomenon and violent masculinity exists within homes and in schools across the world. Scholars have argued that schools are not divorced from cultural norms that maintain a power gap between male and female (Mirembe and Davies 2001; Bisikaa et al. 2009). In their study in Uganda, Mirembe and Davies (2001) found that there are strands of gender inequality in schools rooted in patriarchal beliefs. Similarly, Mwahombela (2004) reports that in Tanzanian society male dominance at home is common and the victims are women and girls. This patriarchal social order is extended to schools.

Unequal gender relations in schools may be reinforced through discipline (Bisikaa et al. 2009). Corporal punishment is used differently with boys and girls in certain contexts (Antonowicz 2010). According to Morrell (2001) the justification for using corporal punishment with boys was that it taught boys to be tough and uncomplaining. On the other hand, it taught girls that they had to be submissive and unquestioning. Corporal punishment persists in schools in many contexts even though it may be banned (Morrell 2001; Humphreys 2008). Studies by Tafa (2002) and Humphreys (2008) reveal that corporal punishment is legal in Botswana. Scholars and researchers have argued that corporal punishment teaches students that violence is the solution when one disapproves of other people's action (de Wet 2007; White 2007; Humphreys 2008). The danger is that a violent social context breeds violence.

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De Wet (2007) points out that in Lesotho the use of corporal punishment is permissible. There is no explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in schools in Lesotho, except under section 4(5) of the Education Bill of 2006 which states; “no child shall be subjected to inhuman and degrading punishment including corporal punishment” (Ministry of Education and Training 2006). However, the Bill does not prohibit corporal punishment by law in schools but regulates the use of corporal punishment. A more recent development has been that the Minister of Education and Training presented the new Education Bill of 2009 in the national assembly which among others seeks to abolish corporal punishment in schools (Ministry of Education and Training 2009).

Bhana (2005) argues that social and economic disadvantage can increase children’s vulnerability to violence. School violence can be linked to family and home circumstances (Elliot et al. 1998; Leoschut 2006; White 2007). Most of the exposure to violence occurs while children are still young - a time when these experiences are most likely to impact negatively on their development.

Sexual violence in schools is well documented in the literature. Mirembe and Davies (2001) reported that sexual harassment is still ignored in most of the schools in Africa. A research report by the Human Rights Watch (2001) found that that many girls experience violence in South African schools. According to the report, girls experienced sexual harassment by teachers, as well as psychological coercion to engage in dating relationships with teachers (Human Rights Watch 2001). They are also raped, sexually abused, sexually harassed and assaulted at school by learners and teachers. The study found that although girls in South Africa have better access to school than their counterparts in other sub-Saharan states, they are confronted with levels of sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools that impede their access to education on equal terms with male students.

Leach and Humphreys (2007) report that studies conducted in eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa depict consistent patterns of sexual abuse and harassment of female students by both teachers and male students. A study by Mitchell and Mothobi-Tapela (2004) conducted in Zimbabwean schools found that learners were sexually abused by their teachers.

Bullying is another form of violence prevalent in schools (Roberts 2006; De Wet 2007; Piotrowski and Hoot 2008). Bullying is a combination of verbal

and physical aggression, and is an aggravation directed from an agent towards the victim. Bullying has an influence on the victim’s physical, emotional, social and educational wellbeing. Harber (2004) mentions that though there are variations in the type of bullying, bullying in schools is carried out by both males and females, and both males and females are the victims.

There is a significant body of research that has explored the notion of ‘schooling as violence’ (Abello 1997; Harber 2002; Herr and Anderson 2003). Herr and Anderson (2003) argue that social norms of dominant groups, for example, the middle class are imposed through social institutions such as the school. This represents a form of symbolic violence. Other examples of symbolic violence can be seen in the differential treatment of children from different backgrounds, different constructions of parents, the authoritarian organization of schooling, a culture of control and regulation, and authoritarian teaching methods that instil fear of failure. Harber (2002) explains that the origins of mass schooling as a form of social control means that the predominant form of schooling internationally has always been authoritarian with learners having little control or power over the school curriculum or organization, and are seen as the recipients of knowledge and instruction. Abello (1997) found that the various kinds of verbal and physical violence directed at pupils in schools are characterized by authoritarian forms of school organization in Columbia. Corporal punishment or caning is the most ritualized form of physical violence against pupils (Harber 2002; Tafa 2002). Human Rights Watch (2001) reports that in Kenya violence is a regular part of the school experience. Teachers use caning, slapping and whipping to maintain classroom discipline and to punish pupils for poor academic performance.

Kapari (2010) draws attention to the link between the internal characteristics of the school and school violence. These internal characteristics, according to Kapari (2010), include clarity of rules, fairness of rules, perceptions of school safety, nature of the school’s response to violence, respect for students and student influence on decision making. In many schools internationally, students are controlled by rules and regulations. Harber (2002) points out that this kind of school regime requires that there must be rules and processes of punishment. In many schools, children do not have the freedom to develop on their own. These cultures in schools reflect

unequal power relations (Harber 2002). Authoritarian teaching methods in schools are another example of symbolic violence in schools as argued by Harber (2001). Watkins (1999) cited in Harber (2002) reports that authoritarian teaching methods and the consequent fear of punishment and humiliation are the main causes of non-attendance at schools in Cambodia, Pakistan and Mozambique. The teaching methods require children to be passive recipients of knowledge which involve frontal teaching and hours of inactivity and sitting silent. A further dimension is advanced by Fullan (1991) who found that schools in Canada reflect patterns of alienation and isolation. Fullan's study revealed that students were critical of a lack of communication, dialogue, participation and engagement in the process of learning. Students had little sense of identity or belonging in the schooling contexts. Rooth (2002) argues for children to engage in learning which allows participation and empowerment.

Violence in secondary schools in Lesotho is not a new phenomenon, but there is limited literature on the issue. Research undertaken has drawn attention to various forms of violence in schools such as gender violence, child abuse, corporal punishment (see Monyooe 1996; Monyane 1999; Mturi and Hennink 2005; Thurman et al. 2006). More recently, de Wet (2007) undertook a study on teacher and learner experiences and perceptions of violence in urban schools in Lesotho. The research reported in this article contributes to this body of research. The goal was to explore the experiences of school violence by secondary school learners in Lesotho. The research questions were: (a) How do learners experience violence in their school?; and (b) Are the learners experiences of violence gendered?

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted at a residential secondary school in the southern part of Lesotho at Qacha's Nek district. The school is a co-educational church school in a rural area. The school had 569 learners and 22 teachers.

A purposeful sampling technique was used to select the school. The particular school was chosen because of its reputation for violence. The first author is a teacher in Lesotho and was aware of incidents of violence at this particular school. The participants in the study were adolescents

between ages 13-17 years in Form C, D and E (Grade 10, 11 and 12). From the pool of learners in this age range, 15 learners (8 boys and 7 girls) participated in the study. They were selected randomly but stratified by gender.

Semi-structured interviews were used to generate information from students. In addition, two focus group interviews were conducted. Key issues that emerged in the individual interviews were raised with learners for discussion in the focus groups. Learners were allocated to groups by gender. This was done to ensure open and free discussion, in particular about experiences of violence by girls against boys and vice versa. The interviews were conducted in Sesotho. They were audio-taped, later transcribed and translated into English.

Documents were another data generation technique used in the study. School records of critical incidents of violence, minutes of parent meetings, school policy documents and school regulations were accessed for analysis.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study revealed the complex and multiple ways in which learners experienced violence at the school. Three key themes emerged in the study namely, webs of violence; schooling as violence; and violence as gendered phenomenon. Each of the themes will be discussed in sections below.

1. Webs of Violence

The study highlighted that violence is complex because it happens in multiple forms and affects learners in different ways. Morrison (2001) asserts that violence casts a web of harm that captures the victims, offenders and their communities. All the participants in the study experienced violence either as witnesses or targets or both. Analysis of school documents on critical incidents of violence showed that learners used violence for various reasons including for the exercise of power and to solve conflicts.

There were accounts of learners resorting to violence to solve conflicts. The response of a male learner interviewed about causes of violence suggests that violence stems from poor problem solving in situations of conflict,

Difference in opinion causes violence; for instance, if we are in the television room one

person wants to watch soccer and the other wants to watch the movie, and if none of us is willing to make a sacrifice - that is where the problem starts. They would quarrel and that results into a physical fight.

Linares et al. (2009) drawing on their study conducted in Spain, Hungary and the Czech Republic argue that a lack of clear norms of coexistence is a problem associated with school violence. The findings in the present study also seem to point to this issue. Limbos and Casteel (2008:542) in exploring ways to address violence in schools use the concept 'communal school organization' to describe a school structure that reinforces informal social relations, common norms and values, collaboration and participation. In such a context, there are informal social controls to regulate the behaviour.

Male learners at the school also used collective violence - actions of violence that are group related. In one incident recounted, boys from the school fought with boys from another school because they could not accept that they had been defeated in sports tournament. A female learner who was a witness related the incident in this way,

While we went to the sports tournament, boys from our school fought with the boys from another school. The reason was that our soccer team was defeated. Boys from our school threw stones at boys from the other school. They responded by throwing stones everywhere. Girls and teachers tried to run away but there was no place to hide. Many people including teachers and girls were injured. The police came and stopped the fight.

According to Wrangham and Wilson (2004), collective violence is more destructive than personal violence as individual members participating in a group feel less responsible for their activities. The belief is that they are acting in the name of a higher cause such as loyalty to certain group. Wrangham and Wilson (2004) explain that the use of physical violence to resolve individual status competitions is an important predictor of collective violence at the gang level.

Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2007) in a study undertaken in South Africa reported that learners use defence mechanisms in the context of violence such as repression of inner feelings, rationalism about other individuals' aggression and denying responsibility for own behaviour. In a similar pattern, the data in the present study suggests that learners in this school blame other people for

acts of violence they perpetrate. In the female focus group interviews, a learner justified the violent actions of learners during the strike,

Violence is the proper way of responding to violence because for a long time learners told the principal that we are given little food and we also asked him to improve the quality of menu. In order to force the principal to respond, boys had to go on strike.

Violence is complex as victims and perpetrators experience and interpret violent acts in multiple ways. The learner in the above excerpt alludes to a breakdown in communication between learners and the school principal. Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) argue that if students' perception of the psychosocial environment is negative, there is a higher likelihood that they will react in an aggressive manner. On the other hand, blaming the other can be viewed as a defence mechanism. Gouws et al. (2000:79) assert that "these defence mechanisms enable learners to safeguard themselves against anything that poses a threat to them including experienced aggression."

Learner interviews and document analysis revealed that bullying was a common form of violence experienced at the school. Both the focus groups and individual interviews reflected that bullying was a means of 'socialization' of new learners to the school. The study showed that this kind of 'socialization' is perpetrated by both boys and girls. Senior learners forced junior learners to perform personal chores, amongst others they had to wash senior learners' shirts and socks. If they refused they were beaten up. A female learner recounted her experience of bullying,

I was once a perpetrator of violence because at the beginning of this year I forced the Form A students to wash my clothes. In the case of those who refused, I beat up them but in most cases they did what I wanted them to do because I am a senior to them and a friend to the matron.

As indicated in the above excerpt, bullies know how to oppress a vulnerable individual, and continue to do it in order to achieve personal satisfaction. According to Nadasan (2004), bullies are aware of what they are doing and the act of violence is a planned one. In the study, the analysis of school records indicated that acts of bullying were a challenge for teachers. In the minutes of a staff meeting held in February 2009 teachers reported that Form A students were victims of bullying. The kind of bullying recorded

at this school was direct bullying. It included physical aggression and the use of offensive words, as in the study by de Wet (2007).

The issue of power is a central concept in bullying. Bullies often report feeling powerful and justified in their actions (Baumeister 2001; Bullock 2002). The pattern of bullying in the school in the study reflects that the main intention is to dominate others who are weaker or less powerful.

The study suggests that the critical problem associated with bullying was a culture of ridicule, disrespect, dehumanisation and marginalisation. Mitchell et al. (2008) suggests that the key problem underlying bullying is negative peer climates, and that often members of the school community accept hurtful behaviours. Zero tolerance policies such as expulsion of perpetrators from school do not target the root of the problem.

2. Schooling as Violence: Interrogating the Impact

A key theme that emerged in the study is the issue of schooling as violence. The argument is that violence is systemically generated within and by schools. Dunne et al. (2004) explain that often schools as institutions normalize violence through control mechanisms embedded in regulations and policies. In the study, corporal punishment was used to enforce discipline and to maintain a culture of learning and teaching. Teachers used caning to maintain classroom discipline, and to punish learners for underachievement. A female learner reported,

I have experienced physical violence at the school. One of the teachers beat me in the classroom because I did not answer the question, but I did not know the answer to that question she was asking. She used a big stick which she usually carries to class to beat us.

Tafa (2002) argued that the use of the cane in a school is the most tangible symbol of an authoritarian school regime. Noguera (1997) asserted that in schools the exercise of discipline in the form of caning is seen as a primary means through which cultures of power and authority are reinforced. The findings in the present study suggest that corporal punishment used in the teaching and learning context was viewed by learners as unfair and unjust. For example, learners explained that school policy laid down that learners could not use 'Sesotho', their mother tongue, as a medium of communication in the

school. Punishment meted out for contravention of this school language policy was often of a violent nature, according to learners. A critical concern is that teachers and school leaders do not seem to understand that corporal punishment is a violation of a learner's human rights. Seeking alternate ways of disciplining learners does not seem to be on the school's agenda.

The strategy of expulsion and suspension as the way of dealing with violence was documented in the minutes of the school's disciplinary committee meetings and in the minutes of staff meetings. A learner voiced his concern that children from poor families who were expelled often dropped out of school because they could not continue schooling if they had no access to the boarding facilities. Expulsion and suspension of learners as part of dealing with violence in the school can be viewed as a form of symbolic violence (Stoudt 2006). This kind of response to violence is contrary to The Lesotho Education Amendment Bill of 1995 which made primary education free and compulsory, and legislated to protect children from arbitrary suspension, expulsion and institutionalised violence (Ministry of Education 1995). The school is obviously not exploring more sound strategies to deal with violence. Harber (2004) warns that learning environments often promote education for control rather than education for critical consciousness. Harber (2004) draws attention to the fact that that authoritarianism in schools results in a failure to teach learners how to assess values and make responsible choices in situations of conflict. Watkins et al. (2007:73) argue that a 'personal-communal model' of school organization is more effective than a 'rational-bureaucratic model'.

Drawing in a further dimension, Kapari (2010) foregrounds how the school climate may influence school violence and victimization in schools. Kapari (2010) points out that key school climate factors associated with high levels of violence and victimization include: punitive or authoritarian attitudes; unclear, unfair or inconsistently enforced rules; ambiguous responses to student misconduct, inadequate teacher support of students, lack of participation by students in decision making, students' low sense of fairness; low sense of belonging and inconsistent discipline strategies.

3. Violence as a Gendered Phenomenon

According to Dunne et al. (2006), gender relations and boundaries within the school as an

institution are part of the hidden curriculum through which feminine and masculine identities are constructed and reinforced. The present study found that school based gender violence is often associated with everyday institutional structures and practices and sexualized encounters within the school context. In the discussion that follows we present a nuanced understanding of these encounters at the school.

3.1 The 'Boys Will Be Boys' Discourse: The discourse of 'boys will be boys' is rooted in the ways in which boys are socialized to express and defend their masculinities. Often parents, community members, teachers and peers perpetuate the widely accepted belief that boys should dominate and control. Klein (2006) argues that sexual violence by boys emanates from the 'boys discourse' in which they are taught to express and defend their masculinity through domi-nation. Leach and Humphreys (2007) contend that the social practices of schools operate within and serve to sustain a gender regime which promotes aggressive masculinities and compliant femininities while discouraging other ways of being.

In the study, the data provided evidence of boys being violent towards girls. Learners explained that this occurred in situations where girls refused to have relationships with boys, and the rejection by a female learner of sexual advances made by a boy. A learner explained,

Boys insult girls when they refuse to have relationships with them. After evening study they would pour water on them. Boys would also force us to kiss them and sometimes they would touch us on the buttocks especially after evening studies when we return to the residence.

It may be that boys perceive the experience of rejection by girls as the unbearable reversal of traditional roles. Klein (2006) argues that when boys are rejected by girls whom they are expected to dominate, they may resort to violence.

3.2 The Complexity of Sexual Harassment in Schools

Sexual harassment may include unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct. Prinsloo(2006) explains that sexual violence is experienced in different ways in schools but generally it is initiated by hegemonic masculinities (Prinsloo 2006). The complex ways in which sexual violence is experienced, constructed and

interpreted is evident in the reporting of a case of sexual violence by two learners below:

A friend of mine left the school because she was raped by a group of boys; she told me that there were four boys. She told me that after the night function, a 'dance' at school, as she was going to the dormitory, she was among the last to leave the hall, she met four boys. They actually stood on the way. She had earlier refused a love proposal from one of them. She told me that other students saw the rape but no one came to her rescue (female learner).

It happened that one girl was gang raped by a group of boys. She was a girl who was popular, she would sing and dance in the hall, she was not shy, and she wore fashionable clothes. Boys in our school think that kind of a girl is sexually active and has many boyfriends. But she did not have those characteristics. They trapped her after the night dance at the school and raped her. I do not really know what was done by the teachers but she is not at school now (male learner).

The critical incident reported above suggests perpetrators, and most likely the onlookers, who chose not to act were of the view that the victim was acting against the standard norms of the society whereby girls are expected to be quiet, submissive and not outgoing. Burton (2008) states that the link between participation, empowerment of women, and male violence are complex, and there is evidence that violence against women increases in intensity where gender relations are being transformed and male privilege is challenged.

A complex dimension of the above incident is the fact that certain learners chose not to act or intervene. Van der Zande (2009) explains that most gangrapes happen because the perpetrators have lost their capacity to be compassionate and become caught up in a group mentality that makes violence seem acceptable. She argues that the bystander effect operates at many levels: learners may be afraid, they may be in disbelief, or they do not know what to do. Mirembe and Davies (2001) in their study conducted in Uganda found that neither female students nor female teachers reported sexual harassment, and in some ways sexual harassment was seen as 'normal' and difficult to challenge. Thus they chose not to act. This could also mean that females have internalised violence and accept it as normal. Learners in the present study, including female learners, witnessed the attack and did not intervene. It may be

that similar dynamics are being played out at the school.

Haffejee (2006) pointed out that schools are often responsible for perpetuating damaging gendered practices and cycles of gendered violence. Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) assert that there are many generally accepted social beliefs which develop a cultural tolerance of rape and other sorts of violence against women and girls. This could suggest that boys in this study engaged in acts of rape or harassment activities because of prevailing cultural beliefs. Rape like all forms of male violence against women, is connected to the broad socio-cultural milieu which reinforces and entrenches beliefs of male dominance, supremacy and aggression (Vogelman and Lewis 1993).

In analysing the above critical incident, it seems that boys could not accept rejection by the girl, and that a girl who is outgoing, confident and popular is constructed as promiscuous. Bhana (2005) suggests that this type of violence may be viewed as the violent expression of masculinity. De Wet (2007) also found that school violence in Lesotho is a manifestation of gender inequality and violence in society.

3.3 Male Teachers as the Perpetrators of Sexual Violence

Internationally, it has been found that male teachers may be the perpetrators of sexual violence in schools (Timmerman 2003; Leach and Humphreys 2007; Jones et al. 2008). The Human Rights Watch (2001) and Leach and Humphreys (2007) revealed that within schools, male teachers are the perpetrators, either directly or indirectly by promising better grades or marks, money or dating relationships. In a 2001 study by Human Rights Watch in South Africa, 37 rape survivors (7%) indicated that a school teacher or principal had raped them (Human Rights Watch 2001).

Learners in the present study alluded to sexual violence by teachers at the school. Learners have observed male teachers' differential treatment of girls with whom they have had sexual relations and those who have rejected male teachers. Learner comments were as follows,

If they refused to have relations with a teacher, teachers beat them up and reduce marks - which makes them to agree to being abused by teachers.

Students revealed harassment and humiliation meted out to girls who reject sexual advances from

teachers. The report of the Human Rights Watch (2001) shows that in some cases female learners agree to satisfy teachers' sexual demand because of fear that they will be physically punished by the teachers if they reject teacher advances. The critical concern is that female learners experience sexual violence from people who are supposed to be their role models and protectors.

The findings in the study reveal that the deep rooted influence in learner experiences of gender violence is gender inequality. The study found limited evidence that the school was trying to challenge and shift inequitable gender norms that result in girls having less worth. Although it has to be conceded that gender inequality is a multi faceted issue and cannot be addressed solely within schooling contexts, Aikman and Unterhalter (2007) stress that school cultures can help to promote gender equality rather than reinforce and entrench inequalities. Gender equality should permeate the school culture, curriculum, formal and informal teaching practices, and should target both boys and girls. The focus should be on making schools youth and girl-friendly which would mean challenging amongst others, dominant images of masculinity and femininity, cultures of control and authority, and gendered hierarchies of power that work to marginalize girls (Aikman and Unterhalter 2007; Moletsane et al. 2010).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study was motivated by the prevalence of violence in schools in the Qacha's Nek district in Lesotho. It sought to explore how secondary learners' experience violence as it occurs in their schools, and whether violence is a gendered phenomenon.

The study revealed that the most obvious manifestation of violence at the school is unequal power relations, and this is linked to domination, oppression and marginalization of vulnerable learners in a school. The study also highlights the authoritarian nature of the school with an ethos of control and punishment, suggesting that schooling itself can be a form of violence. Bell (2007) explains that oppression operates through everyday practices that do not question the assumptions underlying institutional practices. Harber (2002) stresses that authoritarianism in schools and classrooms and the use of violent punishment is not only a violation of the human rights of children, but has a negative impact in

that pain and fear get to be associated with learning. In-service professional development programmes are needed to equip teachers and school management with alternative ways of resolving conflict and disciplining learners. Brickmore (2007/2008) states that sources of violence need to be addressed early and consistently if the goal is to build sustainable and safe school communities. Programmes have to be pro-active.

A key issue in this study is that findings point to the need to focus on the internal characteristics of the school when interpreting and finding solutions to school violence. Kapari (2010) and Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) argue for a move away from interventions that focus solely on the bully-victim relationship and on changing individuals. Rather, the lens should shift to examining the school climate and working towards systemic change within the school culture and its community. For example, the study showed that schools tend to mirror society, and they do not create spaces for reframing of traditional gender beliefs and practices. Stromquist (2007) stresses that the power of education lies in its capacity to raise critical consciousness in the whole school community through knowledge. Schools need to take a more proactive role to achieve change in social interactions, social attitudes and ideologies.

Further research is needed in African contexts to examine the association between school climate and school violence, in particular to explore the protective influences that may be available within school settings that can be harnessed to address violence and victimisation, for example, the power of the peer group as highlighted by Kapari (2010). A further area for research may be to focus on public schools that are safe on the African continent, and unpack what contextual factors support safe schools. Johnson (2009) found that in schools in the USA with less violence, learners are aware of school rules and view them as fair, have good relationships with their teachers, believe that they have ownership of their school, feel that their classroom school and cultures are positive, organized, orderly and focused on learning,

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