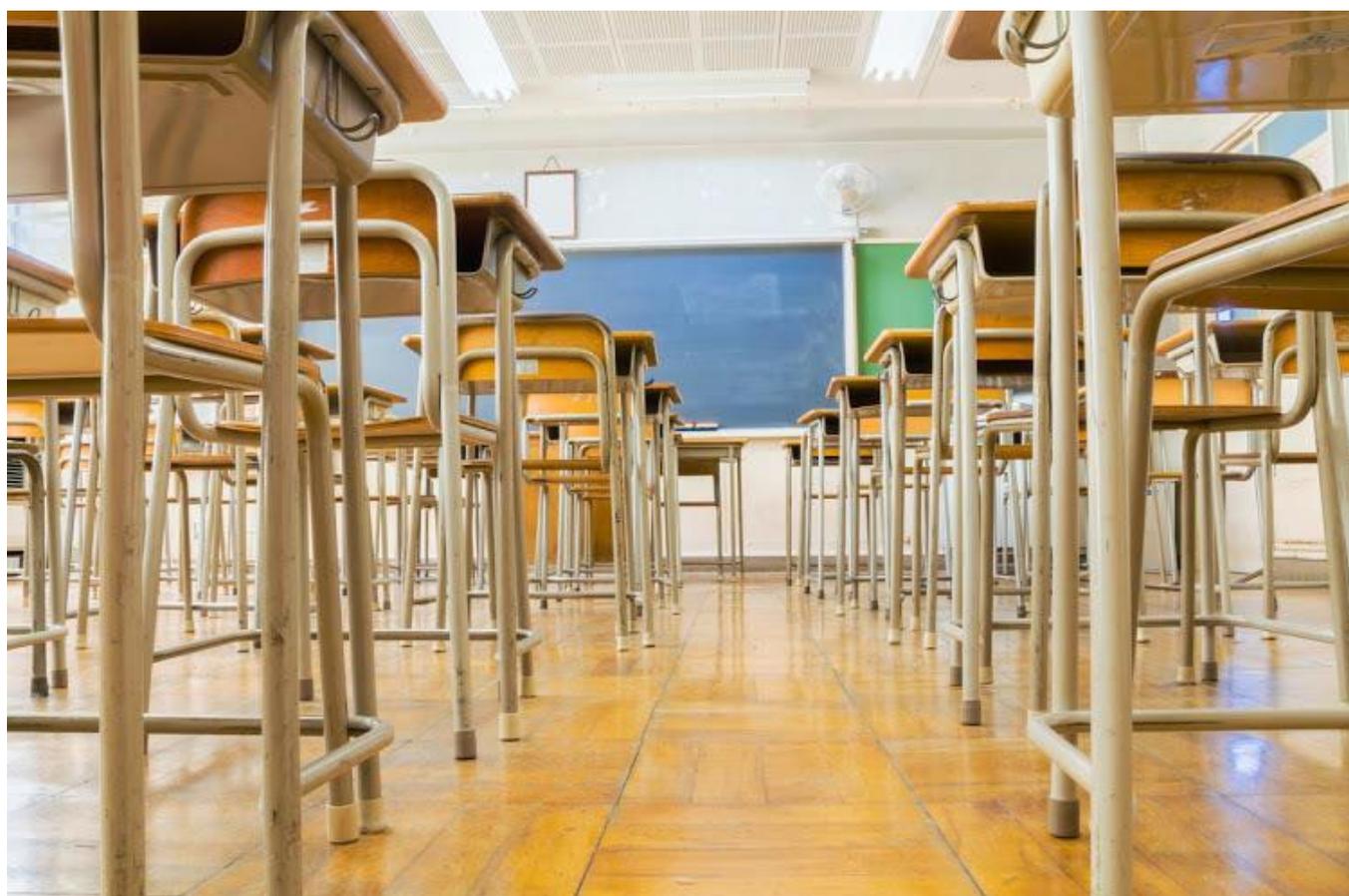


VIOLENCE AGAINST TEACHERS AT SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA



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BACKGROUND

Twenty percent of South Africa's teachers believe that schools are violent places and suspect their students and colleagues are armed. This is according to a survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council with the Department of Education among more than 20000 teachers at 1380 schools across the country. About 17% of teachers reported fights involving weapons at school and almost 13% of teachers believe gangs operate in their school. Most reported violence was between pupils or between a pupil and a teacher.

EMPIRICAL STUDY

School violence is defined by Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg (1988), cited in Zulu et al. (2004:70), as any behaviour of learners, educators, administrators or non-school persons, attempting to inflict injury on another person or to damage school property. Internationally, violence both affects schools and is perpetuated and perpetrated by schools (e.g. Harber 2004; Pinheiro 2006; PLAN 2008; Smith & Vaux 2003).

Violence in schools can come from different sources, take on many forms and involve different actors. For example, bullying may be learned outside the school but perpetuated inside the school because the school ignores it or doesn't deal with it satisfactorily. It may also involve different actors at different times inside the school – for example, learners may bully each other, teachers may bully learners, learners may bully teachers, parents may bully teachers, and principals may bully teachers or be bullied by them.

In England, for example, about 14 children aged 5 and below are suspended from school every day for violence – i.e. pushing and shoving a teacher or other learners (Williams 2009). Girls in Nepal reported being sexually harassed by male learners and subjected to inappropriate touching by male teachers, which include touching their buttocks, breasts and even undoing their bras. Unfortunately, most of these incidents of sexual harassment went unreported (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006).

Female learners in Papua New Guinea also described their fear of sexual assault and violence in both schools and in society in general (Dunne et al. 2006). In Brazil about three quarters of the 4 150 schools included in a national survey reported acts of violence. The investigation revealed:

(a) that the most frequent type of violence among learners was physical aggression (66%); and (b) adult aggression towards children and adolescents (28%) and derogatory comments (20%) (UNICEF 2009). De Mattos (2009), reviewing the production of school failure in Brazil from 1996 to 2006, has

shown that violence promotes failure but, at the same time, school failure has been generating violent practices among teachers and learners, resulting in young people being excluded from educational opportunities (De Mattos 2009). Prinsloo (2005:5) defines a safe school as a school that is free of danger and where there is an absence of possible harm, a place where non-educators, educators and learners may work, teach and learn without fear of ridicule, intimidation, harassment, humiliation, or violence. School should be a safe environment that encourages effective teaching and learning. Squelch (2000/1) identifies the following features of a safe school:

- Presence of physical features such as secure walls, fencing and gates
- Buildings that are in good state of repair
- Well maintained school grounds
- Good discipline and a culture conducive to teaching and learning
- Professional educator conduct
- Good governance and management practices
- Absence of (or low level) of crime and violence

Teachers Union (SADTU) is suggesting that teachers should be paid a danger allowance because some learners go to school carrying weapons. The union argues that teachers work in dangerous situations like the police (SAPA 2011). Violence in South African schools, therefore, is a matter of concern. The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP 2009) in its study reported feelings of fear in South African schools, with 11,6% of female learners and 8% of male learners feeling safe in schools. Learners and teachers are equally exposed to violence. Teachers and learners in schools alike are exposed to school violence in one way or another.

The study conducted by Rossouw (2008) revealed that teachers have been subjected to physical and psychological violence in South African schools. In one incident a pregnant teacher was kicked and injured by learners, and in one of the schools in the Western Cape, the school principal was allegedly beaten up by a parent (Rossouw 2008).

In spite of attempts to protect the interests of teachers through the *Employment of Educators Act* 76 of 1998, teachers don't feel safe in schools. Many teachers are planning to quit and others are demanding armed guards at schools (Rossouw 2008).

A survey of recent media reports shows numerous incidents of violence against teachers (SABC 2011). In an alarming example of such violence, a female teacher was stabbed in the stomach in class at one of the public schools in Soweto, Gauteng (SABC 2011).

Source: The Dynamics of Violence in South African schools: Report

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UNION VIEWS

Basil Manuel, the executive director of the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of SA, said that a principal in Lavender Hill in the Western Cape was recently stabbed by a parent who then returned to the school afterwards "to finish him [the principal] off". "The principal has left and no one wants to replace him. You must be slightly soft in the head to take the job," he said. SA Democratic Teachers' Union spokesman Mugwena Maluleke said: "Teachers feel unsafe in our schools. The young ones in particular - violence is why they resign - not only the low salary."

DBE VIEW

Education spokesman Elijah Mhlanga said the department was "extremely concerned" about violence in schools. "We are extremely concerned about the violence that takes place in school. "It's even more worrying when the violence is against teachers whose job is to impart information to learners. "It becomes difficult when they have to teach while thinking about defending themselves. Some of the learners use weapons and as a Department we can't tolerate it," he said.

INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AT SCHOOLS

A video showing a pupil throwing what appears to be an exercise book at a teacher in the classroom went viral this week. In the video the teacher walks out of the classroom and appears to make a phone call. Some teachers go for counselling after violent incidents but others "don't want to be recognised as having been manhandled or defeated [by pupils]. Even the process of counselling they see as an embarrassment. In the Sedibeng school video, the other pupils are laughing as they watch the teacher being hit and walking out of the classroom. "... they are laughing because they expected the teacher to react because society says you must fight back. The teacher did the right thing by not fighting back but walking out.

WHAT IS THE DBE's SOLUTION?

Department of Basic Education says it has measures in place to ensure pupils are held accountable for their actions. The step-by-step process to be followed by the department in disciplining pupils who attack teachers at schools is:

The pupil is suspended from school for five days.

After five days of suspension, a disciplinary hearing is held.

When the hearing is concluded, the pupil is sanctioned.

INCIDENTS IN PROVINCES

In April, the Sunday Times reported that hundreds of pupils have faced disciplinary action in the past year for offences ranging from assault, intimidation, drug dealing and sexual violence. According to the report, Limpopo education officials alone have handled 942 cases of serious pupil misconduct in the past 12 months. The province's statistics revealed 358 pupils were involved in physical abuse, including assaulting other pupils. Since January last year, Gauteng schools have expelled 151 children, 31 of them for assaulting teachers and other school staff.

The Free State Department of Education says it is concerned by the assault on teachers by learners in the province's schools. Three teachers were assaulted by learners at two schools in Botshabelo and in Bloemfontein. One of them a female teacher had her clothes torn by a group of learners during the assault. Provincial Education Department Deputy Director General, Motseki Monnane says statistics show that on average, a school finds dangerous weapons three times a year. "The use of dangerous weapons like testimony related by one of our teachers from Leratong Secondary School in Botshabelo where a learner shot another in a school yard in Qwa Qwa, so it is very clear that the use of dangerous weapons in our schools is now becoming a serious issue."

WHAT ARE TEACHERS SAYING

They don't want to be known as the person who was unable to discipline a child...so many are quiet about it

But for most teachers, they feel that even when the methods are applied, it is the consequences that are not adequate and very often teachers complain about the children who have been found guilty of all sorts of mayhem are then placed back into the same class with the very same teachers that they may have

assaulted. These pupils come back as heroes and it just further breaks down the entire system of discipline.

EXAMPLES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST TEACHERS

Pupils slap, stab, threaten and throw chairs at teachers. Teacher's fight schoolboys over schoolgirls, while female teachers are sexually harassed by boys they teach, the same boys who have had sex with other women teachers. These were some of the tales of violence in schools' teachers told City Press. "These boys sometimes don't understand why a female teacher refuses when approached. Teachers resist and fight back. Things are getting out of hand. It's the survival of the fittest. It's the law of the jungle out here," said one.

COMMENTS FROM NGO's and OTHER AGENCIES – STORIES OF VIOLENCE

Manene Tabane, Gauteng chairperson for the Congress of Traditional Leaders of SA, said he had heard horrifying stories from teachers in Gauteng schools. "Teachers feel like they are just cheque collectors. Their morale is low. They can no longer discipline pupils. They feel they are not protected. Boys are proposing to their female teachers because there are no serious repercussions for their actions," he said.

One teacher said detentions and suspensions have proved ineffective in some schools, as parents either protest or pupils simply repeat offences, leaving teachers feeling powerless. Nosisa Thinta*, a head of department at a school in Tembisa, found herself on the receiving end of the violence two years ago, when a Grade 11 pupil slapped her when she asked him why he was not in class. "He was hanging out on the balcony and I asked him why he was not in class. He turned, without saying a word, and slapped me. He slapped me so hard I lost my balance," she said.

The boy ran away. He was expelled following a disciplinary hearing. Thinta still lives with the effects of that slap. She can now only partially see with her left eye. "I don't know who to sue: the child, his parents or the department," she said. She laid assault charges against the boy, but withdrew them because she didn't want him to have a criminal record that could affect him for the rest of his life.

Shortly after her assault, another schoolboy threw a chair at her colleague while walking down the school stairs, after the teacher reprimanded him for not doing

his homework. Even talking to pupils and punishing them by making them clean toilets and classrooms was no longer working, Thinta said

City Press reports

From Eastern Cape women teaching staff being beaten for rejecting schoolboys' sexual advances. Meanwhile, boys have stabbed or used guns to threaten male teachers who propositioned their girlfriends at school. In Limpopo, City Press was told of male teachers being sexually harassed by schoolgirls. Chris Mdingi, Eastern Cape secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (Sadtu), said detaining and suspending these children sometimes did not work. "I don't know if it's the pigment of our skins. Parents in our schools sometimes get arrogant when teachers write to them informing them about their behaviour or about their not submitting tasks. That is not happening at former model C schools," he said.

PRESS INFORMATION

Sadtu general secretary Mugwena Maluleke said the situation at schools around the country was bad. "Pupils violate the rights of other pupils and teachers, and teachers violate the rights of pupils and of other teachers." Maluleke said social ills and violent service-delivery protests had compounded the problem. The only solution was for parents to discipline their children and teach them the value of education. Tough school leadership was required and teachers needed to set an example by behaving professionally, being punctual, arriving to lessons prepared and for government to provide support. "Schools should not be boring places. There must be recreational facilities, so children can enjoy being at school. These children have their own culture and they know their rights," Maluleke said.

WHAT IS SACE SAYING?

Themba Ndhlovu, spokesperson of teachers' regulatory body, the South African Council for Educators, said they had no figures of how many teachers had been assaulted by pupils. "However, we hear about this through the grapevine. We've been saying to teachers that they must report these incidents, even though we do not have jurisdiction over pupils." Ndhlovu said detentions and suspensions worked in some schools, but that others had reverted to illegally meeting out corporal punishment since April. A total of 141 complaints regarding the latter had been lodged. "All these are under investigation, with some already at the disciplinary hearing stage,

Examples: Violence and abuse against teachers

Learner assaults teacher at Glenvista High School - Gauteng



SASOLBURG PUPIL SHOTS TEACHER



The latest developments on this matter

Following the killing of a teacher by a learner in North West, education officials will be calling a symposium to discuss violence.

Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga said this week she would call a symposium that would include the SAPS, the Department of Social Development and school governing bodies to deal with violence in schools.

This follows the murder of a teacher, Gadimang Daniel Mokolobate, in Zeerust, North West, by a learner.

“It is unfortunate that, as a sector responsible for education, we have to deal with these types of incidents, often distracting us from our core business of learning and teaching,” Motshekga said.

She added that communities and parents should also take responsibility for what happens in schools.

“Schools operate within communities and are often a reflection of the community and the social ills that are found in these communities. We need support from all around us. It brings to mind the adage, 'it takes a village to raise a child'. This really speaks to our situation in education as we cannot deal with these issues on our own.”

The National Professional Teachers’ Organisation (Naptosa) says more has to be done to protect its members in schools.

“Our union has been inundated with disturbing testimonials concerning the levels of violence against teachers in schools. The country has also been witnessing a series of shocking videos showing violence by learners towards teachers.

“Violence in schools has resulted in some teachers leaving the profession. People in positions of authority in communities should intervene in order to safeguard the integrity of the teaching profession,” said the union’s president Nkosiphendule Ntantala.

“While Naptosa acknowledges that violence in schools requires a multifaceted approach to curb it, we are of the view that the department can do much more to protect its employees. The department has to accept that current measures employed to deal with disruptive learners who physically and psychologically assault teachers are not effective at all.”

"For example, relocation of abusive learners to other schools merely shifts the problem from one school to the next and only perpetuates the cycle of violence against teachers and, furthermore, puts other learners at risk.”

Ntantala said instead of relocating learners, they should be provided with professional help to rehabilitate.

SA Democratic Teachers’ Union (Sadtu) spokesperson Nomusa Cembi said they had, for years, been calling on the department to ensure schools are safe.

“We expect our schools to be free of drugs and of weapons that can endanger the lives of both the teachers and learners.

“We reiterate our call for the Department of Education to address safety concerns,” Cembali said.

Examples of provincial education departments taking action.

The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) is building a values-driven organisation and we will NOT tolerate or condone any form of violence or aggression against any teacher, principal or staff member.

Our teachers are our most important asset, not just for the WCED, but for the country as a whole. They are valued professionals and should be given the respect that they deserve.

As a former teacher, and as Head of Department, I have great empathy for the many teachers that deal with learners that have behavioural issues.

We are very aware that there are disciplinary challenges at our schools. It is also well known that there are learners that are expelled from schools in the Western Cape. This is because we take a zero -tolerance stance against learners who transgress various disciplinary code, especially if they show aggression against or assault fellow learners or teachers.

Through the schools’ codes of conduct, schools should state clearly what kinds of behaviour they consider unacceptable. Should a learner transgress, then the school has the right to discipline the learner.

The WCED will support schools that ensure that the relevant disciplinary procedures are followed when it comes to violence and substance abuse in our schools. The WCED’s Policy on Learner Discipline and School Management assists schools on how to conduct this process. The WCED district offices are also equipped to provide advice on how to manage the disciplinary procedures.

Our learners need to be taught from a young age what the values are that they should demonstrate towards their educators, as well as their peers.

That is why the WCED has identified “The Year of Values-Driven learning” as a theme for 2018. This theme focuses on six values: caring, competence, accountability, integrity, innovation and responsiveness. Schools have been asked to identify 12 values that symbolise and characterise the values that they want to espouse and then showcase these values in various ways.

The WCED has also adopted a Mindset Change programme which aims to help individuals make the shift from adopting negative attitudes to positive approaches instead.

While we have many socio-economic challenges in our province, we cannot become a society that accepts or condones violent behaviour towards our teachers. The WCED will NOT TOLERATE any form of aggression or threats against teachers.

We also require the assistance of parents and community members. They too have a role to play. Parents need to take primary responsibility for their children's discipline and values and also need to set the right example of how one should behave.

Parents must also be made aware that if their children do choose to behave inappropriately towards a teacher, their children's actions will have severe negative consequences. We do not want to see learners' futures jeopardized through such unnecessary and unacceptable actions and trust that this will serve as a caution.

** Brian Schreuder, Head of Department: Western Cape Education Department.*

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

SAPA believes that the DBE needs to convene an urgent leadership summit with all relevant stakeholders regarding this matter of teacher violence. Principals and teachers need to be given an assurance of protection against physical harm from learners and parents. All schools should have security guards as a mandatory in their post establishment and the norms and standards amended accordingly. Parents need to be held accountable for their children's actions. More severe punishment should be in place for perpetrators of violence against teachers. The 2014 Summit outcomes and decisions have not been actioned and there are still many issues still pending and challenges not resolved.

This article was presented to the department of basic education by SAPA at our August meeting and believe that this summit convened by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) on behalf of the Minister was prompted by our concern and those of other stakeholders in education regarding the increase in violence against teachers at schools.

This research is based on academic articles, journals, newspaper articles and sources of interviews conducted between 2014 and 2018.