

Title: Experiences of child-on-child abuse at schools in Gauteng, South Africa

Principal Author: Sheri Errington
Director of Social Perspectives
MA Research Psychology
sheri@socialperspectives.co.za
083 280 9613

Co Author: Dr Shaheda Omar
Director of The Teddy Bear Foundation
PhD Social Work
Shahedao@ttbc.org.za
083 557 3720

Abstract:

Safe schools are not only essential in ensuring the right of learners and educators to “freedom from all forms of violence” and the right of learners to a basic education, but safe, well-functioning schools have a positive impact on the communities in which they are situated and can play an integral role in building a safer South Africa for all (NDP 2030, 2012). However, rather than a haven for learning and community, many schools are experienced by learners as places of bullying, sexual harassment, corporal punishment, verbal abuse and other forms of violence (Kutywayo et. al, 2022). Violence in schools has a profoundly negative impact on children’s physical and mental health, often leading to reduced school attendance, lower academic outcomes and increased drop out rates (Sui et. al, 2021). This results in devastating long-term consequences for children, their families and communities at large (Rasool, 2022). Both research and the increase in news articles about violence in schools shows that child-on-child abuse is increasing (Kutywayo et. al, 2022). Yet, there are very limited studies using data directly obtained from samples of children in schools. This study investigated the prevalence of child-on-child abuse in schools, based on the self-reported experiences of 948 learners from 12 primary and high schools in Gauteng, South Africa. A basic qualitative research approach informed the methodology, which included the design of a simple anonymous survey questionnaire for data collection, as well as basic descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis for data analysis. The most common themes that arose from the learners’ responses highlighted that bullying, emotional abuse and physical abuse by learners against other learners are prevalent forms of child-on-child abuse in schools. The findings give weight to the critical need for diversion and crime prevention programmes in South African schools. The presentation aims to share a descriptive account of the evidence and provide a detailed discussion of the implications for learners, schools and psychosocial support services to schools.

Key words: Child-on-child abuse, safe schools