

Management of violence in high schools by teachers, parents and students: the case of urban and semi-urban high schools in the Manzini region, Swaziland

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Research Paper

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ABSTRACT

An exploratory, descriptive and contextual qualitative study to explore and describe the nature of violence, contributing factors and strategies that can be utilized to curb the violence was conducted among teachers and students in high schools in the Manzini Region of Swaziland. Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used to select 8 to 10 teachers from each high school among the five schools to form a focus group for discussions. About 8-10 students were also selected from all the five schools to form a focus group for discussions. The study observed high occurrence of violence among high school students in both urban and semi-urban areas. Most of the cases of violence were related to alcohol and drug abuse, which resulted in the

disruption of teaching and learning, and created sour relationships between teachers and students. Types of violence described involved teachers beating up students, verbal show between teachers and students, fights between students against teachers as well as students fighting among themselves during school hours or sport days. Although not very common, some violence between students and parents often result to the death of the parent involved. The absence of counselling services for students among many schools is cited as a major contributor to decay in morals and behaviour among students finally leading to alcohol and drug abuse.

Key words: High school students, alcohol and drug abuse, violence.

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INTRODUCTION

The escalating rate of violence involving high school students against teachers and their parents is a major concern in Swaziland. As a result, the relationship between teachers and their students has deteriorated to levels where the purpose of instruction is negatively affected. Killings of their colleagues by some students have been reported in several schools. In some schools students, behaviour has become very unpredictable. Sometimes they fight among themselves or mob up against teachers for issue that could be resolved amicably without fighting. Violence has been reported to occur commonly during school outings such as during sports days or school excursions when students are presented with a chance to involve themselves in alcohol and drug abuse with large amounts of time outside class and without close monitoring by their teachers. In some

schools, students sometimes live in perpetual fear of certain students who could attack them or become violent towards the teachers. Violence has sometimes contributed to some students dropping out of school. The decaying moral among students often spill over and affects parents to the extent that end up being killed by their violent children.

Alcohol and drug abuse among high school students is a disturbing pathology in Swaziland. This is very common during the marula season in which the fruits are brewed and enjoyed by many including children without restrictions. There are even days set aside by national authorities during which women regiments are expected to brew the fruit and then bring the alcohol for national celebration ceremonies. It is believed that the tree or fruit, as usually referred to, is healthy and capable of

cleaning the bodily systems. Hence, many Swazis are motivated to drink it, including the children, and to that effect the abuse of this type of alcohol among Swazis is alarming. On the other hand, Swaziland is faced with a serious problem of large production of marijuana through cultivation. As a result the drug is easily accessed by many people who desire it including the youth. It is also believed by many that the abuse of marijuana enhances the performance in sport, more especially in football, and as such, smoking of marijuana is high among sports personalities which happen to be the youth. Therefore, youth or schools become good forums or market for selling marijuana.

In view of the above, the researchers seek to explore and describe violence in schools for the purpose of first and foremost identify the contributing factors and then develop strategies to assist teachers, parents, students and support staff to manage the violence.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- a) to explore and describe alcohol and drug abuse and its association with violence in high schools in Swaziland and;
- b) to develop strategies to help teachers, parents, and students manage students' behaviour and prevent occurrence of violence.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilised an exploratory descriptive qualitative design. Convenient and purposive sampling techniques were used to select five schools in the Manzini region. From each school, two groups consisting of eight (8) members per group were conveniently and purposively selected. One group was from students and another from teachers. Focus group discussions that were sparked and guided by a set of open questions were conducted with each group. In depth interviews were also conducted with parents that had been involved in reports of violence with their children. Data was analysed by the use of the Tesch (in Creswell, 2010) method of analysis.

Measures to ensure trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln's model of trustworthiness (2006:215) formed the basis for ensuring trustworthiness in this study. Hence, the four criteria of truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality were precisely followed by the researchers when conducting the study. For the criterion of truth value, the strategies of credibility were adhered to in the study. To further strengthen the integrity of the findings triangulation utilised through the convergence of multiple perspectives and processes. Tesch's, (2010)

methods of data analysis combined with the methods of strategies development by (Walker and Avant, 2006) and (Chinn and Kramer, 2005) were utilised. For proper classification and illustration of concepts, methods of Copi and Cohen (2011), Chinn and Kramer (2005) and (DeeDee 2006) were utilized.

Transferability for applicability

For transferability criterion, the strategy of applicability was used. Applicability refers to the degree to which research results can be transferred to other groups, contexts and settings. However, generalization in qualitative research is not as important as the ability of the researcher to explore and provide an in-depth description of the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher influenced transferability by purposive selection of research respondents from the relevant context of the study. This was followed by the use of appropriate research methods and dense description of literature to facilitate exploration and adequate description of circumstances contributing to the increase of violence in schools.

Dependability for consistency

The research science was precisely followed when exploring circumstances contributing to violence in school in Swaziland. Criterion of consistency was ensured through adherence to the research method described and depending on the responses of the research respondents regarding the phenomenon under investigation, (increase of violence in schools).

Confirmability for neutrality

For the purpose of ensuring neutrality in this study, the researcher ensured that issues of bias were not part of the study when interviewing the respondents. Hence, the results of the focus group discussions were not based on the researcher's perceptions and feelings but through responses obtained while adhering to methodological guidelines and processes selected for this purpose.

Ethical considerations

The methods used in the study were cleared by the Ethics and Scientific Committee and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Education and Training. Informed consent was also obtained from teachers, parents and students that were involved as participants. Anonymity of all participating individuals and schools was also strictly maintained

throughout the study and in this publication of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reports a very close relationship between violence and the abuse of alcohol and drugs by students in high school in the Manzini Region in Swaziland. The violence may be partly responsible for disruption of the teaching and learning process, development of poor relationships between teachers and students and among the students. Violence in schools was reported to occur in the form of teachers slapping students, verbal showdown between teachers and students, and consequently students attempting and/or fighting against teachers. The violence was also through fighting among students themselves at school or during school sport days or excursions. Teachers' responses regarding violence in schools are stated below.

One teacher commenting on students control and the results of the school had this to say:

"Students are difficult to control at this school. This even affected the academic performance of the students. The form V results were very good in ten years ago but of late the results are not good and the school is a laughing stroke".

Another teacher regarding teaching students and students' behaviour had this to say:

"As teachers we are having problems regarding teaching the students. These guys are just bad news. They sometimes behave like animals. A day does not pass without disciplining a student".

Another teacher concerning students' demands on their rights had this to say:

"The concept of children's rights has created some negative attitudes among students. Some students believe that they have rights that should be observed. That is among other things, the students often demand that they have the right to enjoy love making or sex and that teachers should not deprive them of their rights. Theirs (teachers) is to teach which is what they are paid for".

Another teacher regarding parents attitudes on students discipline had this to say:

"Some parents are against teachers to discipline students. But they do not even attempt to discipline their children, whilst on the other hand, when students misbehave; the same parents label the school as a bad one that is failing to groom students accordingly".

When the interviewer asked teachers what was to be done to correct the situation, teachers responded as stated below:

One teacher stated:

"Students are just very indisciplined. There is very little that teachers can do. The culture of indisciplined comes with the students from their families".

Another teacher stated:

"The major problem here is that most of the students come from the township. Township life is bad and dirty, and there is almost nothing teachers can do about it because it is the township culture".

Another teacher had this to say:

"May be it is better to declare this a crisis that need to be dealt with through combined efforts from parents, teachers, Ministry of Education, Police officers, Business forum and None Governmental Organizations".

Another teacher had this to say:

"I agree that in dealing with the issue we need combined efforts. But in what-ever group or formation formed, students must be represented, if not then, I am afraid we might be wasting time and energy".

Another teacher had this to say:

"Why don't we conduct research so to find out what makes students abuse alcohol and drugs so much around this city and suburb areas because other schools are also complaining about this problem".

Another teacher regarding conducting research had this to say:

"Yes, research can be conducted at a later stage, I think for me our schools, more especially this one where I am teaching, need to immediately implement interventions that would assist in removing such problems. We cannot just fold our arms, whilst the children who are the future of the nation rot due to drugs and the alcohol".

The American Academy of Paediatrics, (2013) states that adopting policies that will develop a robust workforce of child and adolescent mental health specialists, facilitate the ability of primary care paediatricians to provide early identification and treatment for children with mental health disorders, and improve school-based mental health services and supports.

However, students' responses on violence in schools were also received and are stated below.

One student had this to say:

"There is a big problem at the school. Some students abuse drugs and then become violent to other students and teachers, more especially after school".

Another student ventilating anger had this to say:

"Teachers are too much beating us here as if we are donkeys. They are bad to us. We hate them".

Another student had this to say:

"We may be wrong sometimes, but the teachers do not value us as humans the way they treat us, the beating that is going on in this school is too much and unbearable".

Another student had this to say:

"Even if we have come here to learn and get education, that does not mean we should be punished to death, because sometimes we are made to dig several pits and later required to feel them up with the soil. What is that? Why one is made to dig the pit if not needed? This is as good as killing the student".

When the students were asked what they thought was to be done to correct the situation, students responded as stated below:

One student stated:

"Students should be respected because they are also human beings".

Another student had this to say:

"Parents and teachers should come together to solve this problem. But I think as students we should be consulted so that we can contribute some of the things that can be done which are also somehow acceptable to us".

Another student had this to say:

"A counselling office with qualified counsellors should be established in schools, more especially in our school so that students can go to counsellors for help. I think teachers can also benefit because they can also go for counselling because some teachers are drinking alcohol at the school".

Another student also stated:

"Yes, I support the establishing of a counselling office that can also help students who abuse drugs and alcohol".

Regarding mental health of children, Kids Mental Health (2009) states that Children need to have a good mental health status if they are going to live up to their full potential and truly live a life that is filled with positive experiences and the willingness to do what is best for themselves and the people around them.

In addition, Kids Mental Health (2009) states that "there are a myriad of factors that can impact a child's mental health status, both positively and negatively. Providing children with an environment that demonstrates love, compassion, trust, and understanding will greatly impact a child so that they can build on these stepping stones to have a productive lifestyle".

Kids Mental Health (2009) further states that many children do not receive that type of lifestyle though. Some children have to deal with a childhood that is filled with

resentment, hatred, distrust, and constant negativity and they have a difficult time coping with their emotions. On the other hand, parents' responses regarding violence in schools are stated below.

One parent had this to say:

"The violence in school is a problem to all of us. But most of the schools that present with violence are those in areas of urban and semi-urban. You can also see that most of the students involved in violence are those abusing drugs".

Another parent had this to say:

"Some of these kids are spoiled by us parents. Children come with these habits from where they live. They then influence other children in schools. Most of the schools are surrounded by the townships and township life style is fast, bad and dangerous for children".

Another comment from a parent regarding their relationship with teachers was:

"Teachers and parents should work together. For example, teachers should feel free to discuss students' behaviour and performance at school with parents at the earliest time possible".

Another parents on the same observation stated:

"I agree with this observation. Sometimes parents go to an extent of protecting their children when teachers discipline them. This sometimes occurs even among parents who are aware that their children are misbehaving".

Albari et al., (2013) regarding the development of children state that "developing creativity for children is the responsibility of school and family. The school should be a creative ideal example for the children by offering creative activities to develop the children's, creative tendencies, in addition to the necessity for cooperation between the school and family to make creativity".

Observations by the interviewers

The interviewers also observed that violence cultivated poor relationships between teachers and students. Hence, teachers were talking badly about students. Students were also disgusted about their teachers. They spoke in heated tones with angry gestures when relating their ordeal against teachers. As a result teachers were not keen to work with some students. Teachers stated that students were reporting them to the Ministry of Education and Training through the open telephone line created for students to report abuse by teachers. Teachers felt that students were abusing the line because they were reporting occurrences that did not exist. Other responses captured from teachers regarding violence in schools are stated

below. There was drug abuse in school by teachers and students such that students were not cooperative to teachers more especially after lunch or sometimes even after short breaks before lunch. Due to the alcohol and drug abuse, students' performance was declining while violence and disrespect towards teachers increased. Students were openly making bad and insulting comments to or about teachers. However, responses from students suggested that some teachers were also involved in alcohol and drugs. For example, students at some schools reported cases of teachers that were abusing alcohol and drugs even during school hours. The issue regarding teachers abusing alcohol and then losing their jobs was also observed by the researcher. Hence, some teachers were already the victims of alcohol and drugs. On the other hand, others were already mentally disordered and admitted at the National Psychiatric Centre. Some of the teachers were in and out of the Psychiatric Hospital and somehow had difficulty maintaining regular school attendance because they were also a source of violence themselves in such schools. However, there were recommendations made by teachers, students and parents in various schools. The three groups recommended that violence in school had to be minimized. The minimization was to be effected through the establishment of a counselling office with the deployment of professional counsellors. The proper establishment of the counselling services would be evident through proper counselling of students with psychosocial problems. Promoting students' and teachers' understanding of the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse and counselling of those already involved was emphasized. The three groups also recommended that good relationships between teachers and students had to be cultivated at all-cost. This would be achieved through good communication between teachers and students. Teachers would be approachable by students and that students would be motivated to approach teachers when having problems. Teachers should maintain interest in helping and counselling the students as well.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES TO ERADICATE VIOLENCE ASSOCIATED WITH ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Promotional and motivational strategies were developed in assisting teachers, parents and students to minimizing violence between teachers and students as well as among the students through the eradicating of alcohol and drug abuse in high schools. The motivational strategies consisted of loving, teaching, caring and encouraging. Whilst promotional strategies consisted of increase of support system, developing effective coping mechanism, build self confidence in students and improve recreational activities/centres. Motivational

strategies, Robinson, (2005) are discussed below.

Loving: Refers to a situation in which teachers, parents and students come close to students to understand them and also have the zeal to minimize impact of mental health problems that consequently cause students to abuse alcohol and drugs in schools. It is also expected that loving teachers, parents and students should allow students to have a voice in expressing their feelings on matters affecting them.

Teaching: Refers to the process of providing students with relevant knowledge on the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse and also provide information on strategies students should utilize to promote their own mental health and that of their families and communities. It is expected that at the end of the teaching process students should understand the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse in their everyday lives. That is, they should become aware of their inappropriate behaviours which resulted to gross disruption in teaching and learning processes.

Caring: Helping students to realize who they are and how they should properly conduct themselves, as well as promoting their own mental health and that of the families and the community.

Encouraging: means instilling some motivation among students to self-initiate and actively participate in activities performed, which are promoting their own mental health. According to Martin (2003) "motivation can be conceptualised as students' energy and drive to learn, work effectively, and achieve to their potential at school and the behaviours that follow from this energy and drive. Motivation plays a large part in students' interest in and enjoyment of school and study".

The promotional strategies are discussed below:

Increase support system: refers to the commitment and efforts that should be demonstrated by teachers, parents and students in striving to establish some structures where adolescents could visit for both preventive and curative services including counselling. In addition, increasing support system refers to the establishment of a conducive atmosphere in which teachers, parents, and students are almost always ready and available to assist adolescents to actively participate in the promotion of their own mental health, more especially when these students/adolescents are faced with mental health problems and specifically alcohol and drug abuse.

Develop effective coping mechanism: refers to the ability or strength that should be demonstrated by students/adolescents that stand firmly against challenges and atrocities caused by mental health problem influx in schools, families and the society at large which may cause students/adolescents to abuse alcohol and drugs, subsequently presenting with violent behaviour. **Build self confidence:** refers to a situation in which students/adolescents reflect observable strong self worth and determination to engage in self initiated activities in their endeavour to promote their own mental health.

Improve recreational centres/activities: entails the establishment of centres where adolescents could access for recreational games and counselling services, so that the adolescents do not idle thus causing the adolescents to indulge into drug abuse, theft and general criminal tendencies.

It is expected that the adequate implementation of both motivational and promotional strategies should result to positive consequences regarding the promotion of mental health of students/adolescents. Some of the consequences may include the reinstate of the adolescents into a peaceful and progressive school environment in-term of teaching and learning. Development of strong self worth and the feeling of being-well among adolescents are also the positive consequences that shall be expected. The perceived positive consequences, but not limited to, are discussed bellow. According to Cordts (2006) "the curricular student activities programme in a school teaches students many useful skills that can be considered leadership skills, and even skills for life. These include goal setting, teamwork, organization, communication, problem solving, and decision making. Many business leaders indicate that these are the traits they look for when hiring, and they will certainly aid any student in his or her post-secondary educational pursuits".

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