SAFETY AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract
Background:
The challenge of safety and security in schools across the globe is very important to both teachers and learners as it creates an environment which promotes the physical, emotional, and social well-being of the stakeholders and has a bearing on the teaching and learning process. Schools in South Africa have been influenced by the macro-environmental variables, undesirable events, and behaviours such as drug addiction, violence, gangsterism, child abuse, bullying and the like. Public secondary schools in South Africa are witnessing high cases of incidents that disturb and threaten the safety and security in schools which is negatively impacting effective teaching and learning. To ensure safety and security in schools, it is very important to determine the security problems and challenges and find the solutions for tackling them. Therefore, this study investigated the safety and security challenges faced by selected public secondary schools within the Pinetown District in South Africa.
Objectives:
The study assessed the safety and security of the selected public secondary schools in Pinetown District. In addition, the study also examined the challenges that influence the security and safety of the selected public secondary schools.
Method:
Through qualitative research, this study investigated the safety and security challenges faced by public secondary schools in the Hammarsdale Circuit in Pinetown District, KwaZulu Natal Province. Purposive sampling was used to select the 5 teachers, 5 principals, 10 students, and 5 members of governing bodies. The primary data was collected using interviews and focus groups.
Results:
Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative primary data to identify emerging themes on the safety and security challenges faced by selected public secondary schools within the Pinetown District. The findings revealed that gangsterism, weapons, bullying, as well as alcohol and drug abuse, are the major challenges that affected the safety and security of the selected public

secondary schools. In addition, the findings also revealed that the selected schools had mechanisms in place to mitigate the identified challenges. However, the measures fall short of ensuring the safety and security of teachers and learners.

Conclusion:

The study concluded that the selected public secondary schools in Pinetown District were facing numerous safety and security challenges. This implies that the stakeholders in the education sector need to have a comprehensive approach to tackling the safety and security challenges in public schools.

Keywords: Safety, security, schools

Introduction

Every community desire to have a safe and secure environment in which people are free to do their daily activities and children go to schools with a conducive environment where effective teaching and learning can take place (Hellström and Lundberg, 2020). Schools must have a safe and secure physical and physio-socially safe environment which encompasses the entire learning environment from learners, teachers, premises, parents, and community (Akiba, 2019). Ali and Fatima (2016) acknowledge that the single desire for parents is a safe and secure school where their children can be safe from all types of risks and hazards. The issues of safety and security in schools have a direct impact on the community and the nation at large as schools play a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and building strong communities (Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya, 2018).

According to Mhlongo (2017), safety and security in public schools is a serious concern and a problem in South African public schools due to violence and crime which has increased over the past years. Schools in South Africa might have been exposed to pandemic diseases, fires, drugs, gangsters, and many natural disasters such as heatwaves, floods, and so on. Jaarsveld and Minaar (2012) posit that there are several reasons for concern as a result of violence in schools nationwide creating a climate of fear. Currently, school safety and security are one of the most basic problems facing South African schools (Akiba, 2019; Mhlongo, 2017; and Jaarsceld and Minaar, 2012). Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2018) opine that there has been an increasing victimization, security concerns and an insecure school environment, which is adversely affecting the teaching and learning process in South African schools. Hence, school management together with the school community, must be prepared for all these kinds of threat and must develop strategies to deal adequately with them. Therefore, the study aimed at investigating the safety and security challenges faced by selected public secondary schools within the Pinetown District, South Africa.

Statement of the problem

Safety and security in educational institutions in South Africa have been an issue of concern with cases of drug and alcohol abuse, rape, violence, bullying, sexual harassment, anti-social behaviour and victimisation being issues of concern raised in public schools in Durban (White, Gina and

Coetzee, 2015). This has resulted in an unsafe and insecure learning environment leading to student withdrawal, reduced teacher morale and overall school safety. Therefore, this study seeks to assess the safety and security challenges faced by selected public secondary schools within the Pinetown District.

Research objectives
The following are the main objectives of the study:
● To assess the safety and security at public secondary schools in Hammarsdale Circuit, Pinetown District.
● To identify safety and security challenges faced by the public secondary schools in Hammarsdale Circuit, Pinetown District.
● To provide recommendations on mechanisms and strategies to improve safety and security in public secondary schools in Hammarsdale Circuit, Pinetown District.

Safety and security in schools
Safety and Security are two words that are interchangeably used, although the concepts are related. Safety is a concept that includes all procedures and practices taken to preserve the life, health, and bodily integrity of individuals (Safeopedia, 2021). In the context of schools, safety involves protecting students and staff from potential hazards and dangers such as violence, accidents, and illness and creating a neutral supportive environment for students to convey their feelings as well as concerns (Mubita, 2021). On the other hand, Security is defined by Degaut (2019) as the measures taken to protect students, teachers and staff from any potential danger and harm in the school environment. In the same context, Wysokinska-Senkus (2020) states that security is means or devices designed to guard persons and property against a broad range of hazards including crime, fire, accidents, espionage, sabotage, subversion, and attack. Mubita (2021) explains that security in schools encompasses physical security measures such as fences, security guards, and metal detectors as well as policies and procedures that promote security such as zero tolerance for weapons and clear reporting procedures of unsafe incidents. Security is very crucial in schools at creates a sense of security and safety for all members in schools which in turn promotes a conducive environment for learning (Svanstrom, 2017). In addition, Maarman and Lamont-Mbawuli (2017) posit that school security provides secure conditions to educational leaders, teachers, learners and members of staff, as well as patrons who visit the school on occasion. Security in schools cannot be overstated as an unsafe and insecure environment presents challenges for students to learn and achieve their full potential (Ali and Fatima, 2016 Ipingbemi and Aiworo, 2012).

Features of a safe and secure schools
A safe and secure school encompasses all measures taken to combat threats to learners, teachers, support staff and property in education environments (Mubita, 2021). The Constitution, statutory law, common law, and case laws in particular the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act No.84

of 1996) provide clear guidelines on safety and security issues in schools. The schools must have secured facilities (security fence, surveillance systems and security team), provision of clean basic facilities (Toilets and water), an environment that is free from harassment, and focus on improving good character and academic achievement (Mhlongo, 2017).

Factors that influence safety and security in schools
Prevalence of violence in schools
The issue of safety and security of schools in South Africa is compromised by many variables including violence, students having access to dangerous weapons, bullying, drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism and gangsterism (Mhlongo, 2017; Akiba, 2019; Mubita, 2021). Violence is a huge variable that negatively affects safety and security in secondary schools in South Africa. school violence refers to behaviours and actions that include the use of physical force intended to hurt, cause pain, or kill (Xaba, 2017). Violence in schools is mainly committed by students against other students which takes place in many forms including physical, and verbal abuse and bullying. Violence in schools can lead to physical injuries and psychological distress leading to student withdrawal and affecting student learning and achievement (Sommer, Reynolds and Kehn, 2018). In addition, violence can lead to the creation of fear and mistrust among students and staff making it very challenging for students to learn effectively and staff to perform their jobs. In the same context, Mhlongo (2017) states that violence in schools damage the reputation of the school leading to a loss of trust from the community and potential decrease in enrolment. The prevalence of violence in schools is evidenced by media reports which confirms violence in schools (Ncontsa and Shumba, 2017; and Tanwar, 2016). Violence in South African schools is a result of multifaceted variables such as educators' lack of understanding of the human rights of learners, drug and alcohol abuse, scarcity of resources in schools, racial discrimination, and learners being exposed to violence and violence media (SACE, 2021). Moyo et al. (2018) further assert that school violence come in different forms and includes behaviours such as racial harassment, homophobic harassment, learner-to-learner verbal and physical abuse, physical abuse of teachers by parents, sex-based harassment, vandalism, and theft of teachers' property.

Possession of dangerous weapons by students
Botha, Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2019) acknowledge that the possession of dangerous weapons by students are a major safety and security concern in secondary schools. The possession of dangerous weapons by learners in schools presents challenges in maintaining security in schools as weapons can be used to harm, intimidate, and injure other students and staff (Degaut, 2019). The presence of dangerous weapons in the school environment can cause injuries and even death such as in the case of shootings in schools that have been happening in American states schools (Maurice, 2018). The presence of weapons is associated with disciplinary problems and criminal charges which can negatively impact students` educational and career opportunities (Botha, et al., 2019). In a study conducted by Degaut (2019:11) on school violence revealed that most students in schools can easily access various types of weapons and bring them to the school premises.

Studies by Degaut (2019) and Botha et al, (2019) found that the most common weapons found in South African secondary schools are knives, firearms, and other dangerous objects. Wincentak et al., (2017) acknowledges that the rampant violence, death and injuries that are happening in schools can be attributed to the possession of dangerous weapons such as knives and guns by students.

Bullying in schools

Another factor that has a profound influence on safety and security in secondary schools is bullying. According to Degaut, (2019) bullying is an unwelcomed aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves real or perceived power balance. According to Englander (2017), bullying can be physical, psychological, or emotional. The physical aspect of bullying involves hurting someone`s body or possessions, verbal include saying or writing mean or threatening things, and emotional bullying involves tarnishing the reputation or social relationships (Englander, 2017). All forms of bullying have serious consequences on students` emotional and mental health leading to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem resulting in absenteeism, dropout, and a feeling of unsafe at school. In addition, Lumstein (2019) explains that victims can end up with suicidal thoughts, loneliness, anxiety, and low self-esteem, and the bullies sometimes also suffer repercussions, which might cause long-term problems. Resultingly, bullying creates an environment which is unsafe and unsupportive for students and teachers. Moyo et al., (2018) confirm that bullying is one of the most rampant security and safety issue in South African schools.

Drug and alcohol abuse

According to Hopkins & Gilchrist (2018), drug abuse refers to the use of drugs for non-medical purposes and involves abusing any psychotropic substances which influences the bodily functions thereby affecting the person using them socially and physically. There are various drugs that are abused by students in South African schools such as marijuana, heroin, cocaine, ecstasy, cannabis; mixed with mandrax (white pipe), inhalants, and prescription drugs as well as abuse of HIV drugs (Umpierrez et al., 2016). Zyl (2018) states that South Africa has a high rate of drug and alcohol abuse among its youth and those in schools are at the epicentre of this crisis. In a study conducted by Wysokinska-Senkus (2020), 45% of high-school learners had, at one point and time tried using drugs, and 32% were still using them. Drug and alcohol abuse impact the safety and security of schools in various ways. Drugs and alcohol lead to violence and risky behaviours by students which creates unsafe as well as unstable environment in the school premisses (Zyl, 2018). In the same vein, drugs, and alcohol usage in schools lead to a surge in criminal activities by students which poses a safety risk to the entire school community. Drug and alcohol abuse have negative effects on student`s health and increases the chances of violent behaviour which in turn affects the safety and security of other learners. In the same context, a study by Macha and Kadakia (2017) concurs that 43% of the students who abuse drugs and alcohol are ten times more likely to be involved in fights and display violent behaviour within the school environment than those who do not take drugs. Alcohol and drug abusers are highly involved into all forms of violence, they steal,

rape, and assault others more than those who are not abusing drugs and alcohol which compromises the security and safety of children in schools (Hopkins & Gilchrist, 2018; and Zyl, 2018).

Gangsterism

In addition, gangsterism, which involves the formation of a group to commit violence and crimes, and protecting its members, has taken a toll on the safety and security of secondary schools in South Africa (Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya, 2018). Gangsterism is more prevalent in mostly in townships near big cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban (Maphalala & Mabunda, 2018). According to Bowers duToit (2019), cases of gangsterism in schools have been witnessed in Western Cape students who have been linked and identified with street gangs, which furthermore, fulfils the transformation to adolescent from childhood. Gangs in South Africa and other nations are well known for their role in perpetuating crimes, fighting, and shooting (De Wet, 2018). Gangsterism in schools create a tense atmosphere which is full of fear and insecurity as well as intimidating other students and teachers. In addition, gangsterism are involved in all sorts of illegal activities such as drug dealing which can further contribute to an unsafe environment (Khumalo, 2019).

Vandalism

De Wet (2018) highlight that school vandalism which is an aggressive act committed on school property might not cause physical harm to the students and teachers but can damage the property that ensures the safety and security of learners at schools. School vandalism is an aggressive act, mainly committed on the school property, even though it may not necessarily cause physical harm to the learners and teachers (Vilalta & Fondevila, 2017). Vandalism in schools disrupt learning due to damaged equipment, classrooms and supplies making it challenging for students to learn. In addition, Khumalo (2019) vandalism create of sense of disorder and lawlessness which can make students and staff feel insecure and unsafe.

Peer pressure

Peer pressure is a set of group dynamics that can override one's personal habits and behaviour and is usually common during adolescence (Dhull & Beniwal, 2019). The safety and security of schools is threatened by learners who give in to peer pressure. Pickard (2018) is of the view that peer pressure affects and influences the attitudes and behaviour of students in a significant way. Students spends most of their time at schools and the company they keep influences how they behave and perceive the world around them. Therefore, some students spend time away from home with delinquent and anti-social-peers, who are often involved in drug-related, sexual, or criminal activities (Ji-Kang & Ron, 2019). Some students will be influenced by to take drugs, alcohol, bully others and engage in any form of mischievous acts to fit with the peers. In the same context, Dhull & Beniwal (2019) concur that when students feel pressure from their peers to engage in risky or illegal behaviour, they feel compelled to participate to fit in. In addition, peer pressure makes it very challenging for students to speak up against unsafe acts or something dangerous being done

their peers as the fear being ostracised hence making their schools unsafe (Pickard, 2018).

Enforcement of school safety and security

The way the enforcement of schools' safety and security is carried out influence the state of security and safety in secondary schools (Pickard, 2018). Khumalo (2019) explain that the effectiveness in enforcement of school safety and security policies can have a significant impact on the safety and security of students and staff in schools. Schools with clear and consistently enforced safety and security policies send a message with a serious impact on creating a safe learning environment. Such schools are capable of being on top of security issues decreasing violence, bullying and other risky situations in their schools. On the other hand, when safety and security policies are enforced in an inconsistent or ineffective manner, risky and unsafe behaviors are likely to increase in schools (Gudyanga, 2017).

Location of the school

The neighborhood in which the school is located can have a significant impact on the safety and security of the school (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2017). The location of the school can affect numerous factors that impact school safety and security which includes the level of crime in the area, the socio-economic status of the residents and availability of resources. Baldry (2018) postulates that community characteristics also have an impact on the behaviours of the students. Therefore, if the neighbourhood contends with high unemployment rates, crime and violence, students living in such an area are likely to display violent behaviour (White et al., 2015). Members of the community in which the schools are located are part of the people that the students interact with – hence some problems that learners experience at home or within the community spill over to the schools (Mthiyane, 2013). Wincentak et al., (2017) concur that the schools that are in neighborhoods that have high crime rate are at the risk of violence eruption in premises, vandalism, drug abuse and criminal gangsters recruiting the students. In addition, schools in neighborhoods that have less resources might find it challenging to have modern safety and security features as well as equipment. Hence, it is crucial for the schools to consider the neighborhood they are to develop effective security and safety policies for the schools (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2017).

Family factors

Several family factors play a significant role in safety and security of the schools. The family dynamics, values and behaviour are high likely to be exhibited by students in the school settings. Therefore, Rigby (2017) state that family factors include inadequate parental engagement skills, unreasonable and inconsistent discipline, bullying, limited supervision, and the lack thereof, distant or absent parents, crime and traumatic events like losing a job, divorce and imprisonment (Ji-Kang & Ron, 2019). Furthermore, by tolerating their children's violent behaviour in solving problem, families perpetuate violence (Rigby, 2017). It can also be argued that parents who lack self-control and display aggressive behaviour do not serve as good role models to their children (Ji-Kang & Ron, 2019).

Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the systematic and structured approach used by researchers to design, conduct, and analyse a research study. Research methodology provides a framework for gathering, interpreting, and evaluating data in a way that ensures the research is credible, valid, and reliable. Research methodology encompasses the following key components:

Population of the study

This study was conducted in Hammarsdale Circuit in Pinetown District, KwaZulu Natal Province. Therefore, the principals, learners, members of school governing bodies and teachers constituted the population of this study.

Sample of the study

Purposive sampling was used to select five public secondary schools in the Hammarsdale Circuit and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from five (5) principals (one from each school), five (5) teachers (one from each school) and five (5) members of the School Governing Bodies (one from each school). Focus group discussion was used to collect the data from ten (10) learners (two from each school) between Grades 10 and 11.

Research instrument

This study used interviews and focus group discussions as measuring instruments. This study employed semi-structured interviews which enabled the researcher to capture detailed information from participants on safety and security in public secondary schools. Additionally, the use of focus groups in this study allowed learners to share their experiences about safety and security issues in their schools and stimulated a discussion on the measures the schools and the government at large must put in place to ensure adequate security and safety of learners in schools.

Data collection

The researcher personally conducted the interviews and focus groups with the participants. The interview sessions were recorded using a tape recorder and notes were taken during the process for later use during the data analysis.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative primary data to identify emerging themes on the safety and security challenges faced by selected public secondary schools within the Pinetown District.

Results and discussion

Perceptions of the participants on drug and alcohol abuse in schools

Of the participants who were interviewed, 90% of the principals, 70% of the teachers, 80% of the learners, and 50% of the SGB members noted that there was a high use of drugs and alcohol in schools among learners and that this compromises the safety and security of teachers and learners. In addition, the participants further maintained that drug and alcohol use among learners compromises effective teaching and learning, as learners who are under the influence of alcohol struggle with concentration. The participants state that the most abused drugs with students are dagga and cigarettes, and when they are high with those drugs, they display rowdy behaviour

which is difficult to control. Participants highlighted that when the students are high with drugs and alcohol, they are violent, threatens other students and teachers, and instill fear and an insecure learning environment. These findings concur with the findings of Wysokinska-Senkus (2020) and Macha and Kadakia (2017) who found that 45% of high-school students had, at one point, tried using drugs; and that 32% of the students were still using them at it causes violence among learners in the school environment. Blumstein (2019) acknowledges that drug and alcohol use does not only harm the students` health, but also increases the incidence of violence in school and compromises the safety and security of learners and teachers. Another study, conducted by Macha and Kadakia (2017:3) revealed that 43% of the learners who took drugs are ten times likely to be involved in fights and engage in violent behaviour – even within the school environment than those who do not take drugs.

Gangsterism a threat to school safety and security

The data collected from the interviews and focus groups shows that drug lords and gangsterism were a major security challenge encountered by the selected public secondary schools within the Pinetown District; and that this has completely influenced teaching and learning in those schools. The participants highlighted that drug dealers offer students with drugs, and they always find ways to sell their products to the students. In addition, the students will end up being affiliated with the drug loads and gangsters Khumalo (2019) acknowledges that gangs in schools are formed to safeguard and support the interests as well as the behaviours of the students, violate school rules and engage in violent behaviours. As a result, Gikonyo and Kageni (2017) acknowledge that school gangs must be regarded as society problems in South Africa because schools are part of the community. Thus, what happens in schools reflects the community's problems.

Bullying compromises safety and security in schools

In addition, the study participants' views on bullying, and how this compromises safety and security in selected public secondary schools in Hammarsdale Circuit, Pinetown District shows that most off the participants interviewed revealed that bullying is one of the factors that influence effective learning and teaching in public schools. Participants further noted that bullying in schools is attributed to different social backgrounds, where learners are always stressed and take out their stress on fellow learners. In addition, the participants highlighted that despite having have the code of conduct on guard against bullying of learners at our school the schools experience such cases and when we fail to deal with them locally, we usually report them to the police or the social worker, for the learner who is bullying others to be rehabilitated. In addition, the participants revealed that the victims of bullying end up commitment suicides, withdraw from schools and struggle to cope up with learning. Participants indicated that all forms of bullying compromise the safety and security in schools. Hellstrom and Lundberg (2020) posit that bullying can lead to lower grades, decreased motivation, and even dropping out of school. In addition, bullying can cause feelings of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts in the victims as well as affect the learning environment. In the same vein, Englander et al (2017) concur that most victims of bullying, therefore, end up suffering trauma and being disempowered. This consequently impact effective learning in a negative way, and in extreme cases, victims exhibit suicidal thoughts, loneliness,

anxiety, and low self-esteem, due to repeated victimised.

Weapons as a threat to student and staff safety and security

Another theme sought to capture participants' views or perceptions on weapons; and whether carrying weapons to schools compromises the safety and security of learners and teachers in the selected secondary schools in the Hammarsdale Circuit in Pinetown District. The participants interviewed, concurred that carrying weapons to schools by mainly boys compromises the safety and security of learners and teachers in schools. In addition, the participants acknowledge that the schools search the students for dangerous weapons although the security personnel are not adequate in this regard. In addition, most of the teachers, learners and SGB members acknowledges that guns, electrical shockers, and okapis (knives) are brought to schools hidden in bags, undergarments, and shoes. The motive for bringing those dangerous weapons is to protect themselves from bullies, seek revenge and some are supplied the weapons by their gang members and druglords. These results support Applebury (2021) who claims that the community and streets provide a market for weapons, which end in schools. Learners carry weapons for many reasons such as protection, security, power, and status, or selling them (Botha et al., 2019). Other studies conducted previously have also shown that learners bring weapons to schools (Degaut, 2019; Botha et al., 2019).

Inadequate enforcement of security and safety policies in schools

The effectiveness in implementing the school safety and security policies is very important in ensuring a welcoming environment which is suitable for learning. However, of the participants interviewed, 60% of the SGBs, 80% of principals, 70% of the teachers, and 80% of the learners noted that the current mechanisms – such as the Code of Conduct and the availability of security guards at the schools were not effective enough to ensure the safety and security of students and teachers in public schools. In addition, the participants further noted that there are few security guards in some schools. This makes the job of searching and monitor what happens in the school premises challenging. Therefore, students smuggle knives, firearms, drugs, and alcohol in the school premises. Participants also noted that although schools have structures or mechanisms – such as the Code of Conduct; and the school disciplinary committee, comprising the principal, teachers, and SGB members to ensure the safety and security of learners and teachers, these mechanisms fail to achieve the purpose – mainly because of the lack of parental cooperation or involvement in the affairs of their children. The Code of Conduct sets out rules or parameters on how learners must behave. However, some parents of children in selected secondary schools do not want to be involved in their children's activities at the schools.

Recommendations

Based on the study results, the following recommendations were made to ensure the safety and security of learners and teachers in the selected public secondary schools in the Pinetown District:

● The Department of Education must allocate sufficient budgets to schools to have adequate security features and personnel. The allocated budget will enable schools to have security equipment such as surveillance cameras and more guards to ensure a safe and secure learning environment.

● Educational workshops and campaigns against drugs, alcohol, and the joining of gangs should be planned and conducted periodically in schools. The main motive will be to educate the students about the impact of drug and alcohol abuse on them, school, and their community at large.

● Safety and security incidents are unique, therefore there must be a comprehensive plan to handle the issues the department of education and a school must have a plan. In addition, the principals, educators, and staff at all schools must be trained on how to ensure that a safe and secure learning environment is maintained at the schools.

● The Department of Education must allocate sufficient budgets to schools for security upgrades, and these upgrades must include the installation of surveillance cameras in every corner of the buildings and classrooms to monitor acts of bullying, violence, vandalism, and the general behaviour of the learners. The recruitment of more security guards that tally with the enrolment rate of every school must be factored into the budget, as some schools have few guards and yet many students.

● The department of education should devise a comprehensive and uniform strategy for all the schools in the country to deal with the safety and security issues.

Conclusion

Safety and security are an important issue which has been a concern in various secondary schools in South Africa. Therefore, this qualitative study investigated the safety and security challenges in the selected schools in the Hammarsdale Circuit in the Pinetown District, KwaZulu Natal Province. The findings revealed that violence, drug, and alcohol abuse, bullying, gangsterism and access to dangerous weapons by the students are the main challenges in maintaining a safe and secure environment in the selected secondary schools in Pinetown District.

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