A critical analysis of gender violence and inequality in and around schools in South Africa in the age of Aids: Progress or retreat?

Relebohile Moletsane, Claudia Mitchell and Thandi Lewin

“The South African education system is uniquely situated to play an important part in combating gender inequality. It is not only the curriculum that teaches children respect for human rights; the context in which learning takes place also informs the lesson. If the South African education system is ever to achieve non-discriminatory education for all children, it must prioritize and place full political and financial support behind efforts to end gender violence in its schools. If the South African government is serious about its pledge to educational equality, the national and provincial education departments must coordinate to take immediate steps to address the violence girls face in school by fulfilling its responsibility to prohibit and protect girls against such abuses. Going forward, schools need to find ways to heal, rehabilitate, and build a culture of respect for girls and to address the trauma created by the violent crime experienced by so many children” (Scared at School, 2001).

INTRODUCTION

South Africa stands out as having a strong commitment to gender equality in political, social and economic life. It is signatory to several regional and global treaties and policy frameworks targeting gender inequality in all spheres of life, as well as in education. These include global frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as African agreements such as the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and the AU Second Decade of Action of Education. South Africa also has a strong policy framework for gender equality in education, with policies founded on commitments to equity and human rights in education. While the country has made huge strides in enrolling girls in primary education specifically, but with high gender parity indexes at all levels, the sustained participation of girls in the education system, and in particular the poor quality of their educational experience, affecting access and participation, remains an area requiring investigation. One of the most pervasive reasons for the poor participation and low success of girls in the schooling system is gender inequality, and in particular, its manifestations in violence against girls and women, and the consequent developmental problems including health (most notably HIV infections and reproductive health). In addition, social problems such as socio-economic conditions in families and communities and the HIV epidemic, have a significant impact on girls’ experiences of school. In 2001, the Human Rights Watch report, “Scared at School” noted above reported high levels of sexual violence in South African schools. Almost ten years later, this paper explores the progress we have made in addressing the challenges raised in this and other reports.
The paper is divided into three sections: The first section of the paper considers the extensive research-base produced over the last decade in South Africa that documents gender violence and inequalities in and around schools. In particular, this section seeks to contextualize socially and historically the confounding discourses of gender based violence and the gendered face of HIV&AIDS in relation to South African girlhood in the age of AIDS. Using a mapping framework according to the various sectors, methods, foci and recommended strategies of the different studies and reports, this section is meant to situate the ‘progress or retreat?’ question we pose in the paper.

Set against this backdrop, the next section of the paper reflects on interventions that currently aim to address the challenges brought about by these interrelationships, including policies and programs by government, NGOs and institutions of higher education and schools themselves. The section looks beyond the strong and positive policy framework for gender equality in South African schools to examine the interventions currently in place to improve the experience of girls in schools. It explores the types of programs that have been put in place to address, in particular, gender-based violence, and other social problems negatively affecting girls’ experience of education. It examines the inter-relationships among gender inequality, HIV infection, sexual violence, and their effect on girls’ access to and success in education. It maps some successful initiatives, but also highlights gaps in intervention, and approaches that may need improvement. It reflects on the political and social challenges of building gender equitable schools in a human rights-driven society with continued high levels of gender inequality.

From the above analysis, the third section of the paper identifies possibilities for effective and efficient partnerships for intervening against the negative impacts of GBV, HIV & AIDS and school access and success for girls. We attempt to address questions which include:

- Why does the country’s highly lauded policy framework continue to fail girl children in terms of their access to and success in education?
- To what extent is the silencing of their voices in policy-making a contributing factor?
- Could institution-level policies and disciplinary measures to deal with GBV improve the situation?

**MAPPING THE STORY**

If policy or at least policy-related texts such as reports, commissions and task teams can tell a story, the story we offer in this section is one that should offer hope, and expectations for change (and an improved landscape). We say ‘should offer hope’ because as far back as 1997 in the Report of the Gender Equity Task Team, *Gender Equity in Education* sexual violence in and around schools was clearly ‘on the agenda’ of the newly formed National Department of Education. In that report which reviewed virtually every sector of the Education system and remains as one of the most comprehensive analyses of an education system anywhere in the world identified as a first step the need to ensure that girls could be guaranteed a safe and security environment in which to learn. A number of reports followed the GETT Report, each in turn offering dramatic instances of the magnitude of the issues that confront girls, and significantly, key recommendations and strategies on what needs to happen. Between 2001 and 2004, CIETafrica (CIETInternational, 2004) carried out the first national youth survey of sexual violence in the country. The results exposed the cultural roots of sexual violence and also confirmed
the connection between sexual violence and HIV and AIDS (CIETInternational, 2004). From the Scared at School study published by Human Rights Watch (2001), the Violence against women: A national survey study (Rasool et al, 2002), the South Africa Human Rights Commission report on violence in schools (SAHRC, 2008), the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, South Africa study Waiting opportunities: Adolescent girls’ experiences of gender based violence at schools (Haffejee, 2006), to related studies which consider the impact of gender inequalities in relation to reproductive health, Teenage pregnancy in South Africa with a specific focus on school-going learners (Panday et al, 2009), Amnesty International’s study, “I am at the lowest end of all” on rural women living with HIV and including retrospective data on sexual violence in schools (Amnesty International, 2008), and the HSRC’s South African national HIV prevalence, incidence, behaviour and communication study, 2008: A turning tide for teenagers, there is a consistent (and unrelenting) theme of gender inequality that is seriously disabling when it comes to girls’ safety and security in schools and to their reproductive health more broadly in the context of their social and biological vulnerabilities in relation to HIV&AIDS. Critically, should young women manage to complete matriculation and go on to university in South Africa, they are still not safe. As the recent HEAIDS study, HIV Prevalance and Related Factors: Higher Education Sector Study, 2009-2009, reveals (HEAIDS, 2010), only 38 per cent of university student respondents agreed that female students were safe from sexual harassment. In the same study female students were found to be three times more likely than their male counterparts to be HIV positive.

Despite the richness (and abundance) of these studies of the last decade, and the various recommendations and interventions to which we refer in the next section, the school environment for many girls remains hostile and even life-threatening. The climate is far less hopeful than one would imagine would be the case after a decade of dedicated scholarship and advocacy. We can probably not blame the reports any more than we can blame the proverbial messenger, but perhaps by interrogating this work through a mapping framework according to the various sectors, methods, foci and recommended strategies we might get a better idea of why we are left with the a ‘progress or retreat?’ question.

Inspired by mapping work in the area of girlhood studies (see Mitchell, 2004, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2009; Moletsane, Mitchell, Smith and Chisholm, 2008), and informed by a robust literature on girls’ education and feminist methodologies, the set of questions below, while far from exhaustive is meant to highlight what a mapping framework for interrogating work in the area of gender violence in and around schools in the age of AIDS might look like and how it could work.

1. Which sector takes the lead?
2. What methods are used?
3. Who are the participants
4. How are boys and men involved?
5. Are there studies which draw on the participation of girls?
6. How does the study take up location: rural, urban, townships?
7. In the case of school-based studies how are the various sectors and levels of education implicated (policy, HEIs, training, etc.)?
Applied to the various reports and studies noted above, the mapping framework offers its own critique, not of the individual reports, but rather their relevance to the story that is evolving.

**Sector analysis:** We highlight sector analysis because the nature of the questions, the methods, the participants and even the recommendations are often sector specific. For example, the 2001 *Scared at School* report, although focusing on schools, is actually (and logically) framed in the context of the law and human rights abuses. The main participants in the study were girls who had already filed legal complaints about rape, and many of the subsequent interviews with adults pertained to the parents and teachers in the school. The actual number of interviews conducted with girls who had filed complaints, understandably, was not large, given that reporting rape rests on a foundation where there are structures in place. At the time that the *Scared at School* study was carried out there were few structures of policies. Indeed that was the point of the study. At the same time, the interviews with the victims were carefully conducted and drew on the experiences of the Human Rights Watch teams working across human rights abuses in a variety of cultural contexts, many far worse than South Africa. By comparison the *CIET* studies, the first national survey of sexual violence and young people in South Africa involved over 280,000 participants in all nine provinces and in both rural and urban settings, although it too speaks more to the legal and human rights sector. Critically its recommendations are more slanted toward codes of conduct, reporting systems, connections to the policy and enforcement of policies, and less toward the educational and pedagogical aspects of schools. The reference to work with teachers, for example, speaks to the whole area of teacher training in colleges even though by the time the study was launched the college system was being incorporated into faculties of education in universities.

Studies of sexual violence that are located in the health sector clearly have a different slant in terms of recommendations for access to PEP, but also to deepening an understanding of epidemiological data. And while research studies conducted by individual researchers working in the area of health may work closely with participants, the larger scale studies tend to rely more on household surveys and secondary data. The implications for school-based sexual violence may be limited. At the same time, it is noteworthy that where there is a study initiated by the Education sector, *Teenage pregnancy in South Africa with a specific focus on school-going learners*, the study does not deal directly with fieldwork with either girls or teachers.

**Which sectors of Education?** We pose the question of sectors within Education because there are many distinctions between and among the various role players in education. It is also worth noting that the *Gender Equity Task Team* report was itself very much influenced by sectors, so that there is a section on Management and Human Resource Development, another on Early Childhood Education and so on. The newly established ministries of Basic Education Higher Education and Training point even dramatically to a sector-mentality in the whole area of Education. As noted above, teacher training and the preparation of teachers (new and in-service) is noted as a critical area for development in several of the studies (see for example, *Scared at School*, 20010). However, a gap in most of the literature exists in terms of teacher educators as a key set of players, potentially in addressing gender violence. One exception is a recent HEAIDS study, *Becoming a teacher in the age of AIDS* which worked with a sample of 50-60 teacher educators and over 5000 beginning and in-service teachers. The study offers some findings related to gender and
sexual violence, with one of the key findings being that in actual fact there were very few changes in the attitudes of the 5000 teachers who participated in the study when it came to gender discrimination even after they had gone through the module, *Becoming a teacher in the context of the AIDS pandemic*. To date this is probably one of the few national studies of teacher educators as a group, but powerfully shows the importance of this sector in bringing about change in the schools, through pre-service work, as well as through in-service training programs (for example, the Advanced Certificate in Education or ACE and the National Professional Diploma in Education or NPDE programs).

*Location:* The everyday realities of growing up in South Africa vary greatly according to location, both in relation to such variables as rural, urban and township life, and in those provinces that are overall more rural than urban, a point well developed in the Amnesty International study (AI, 2008) *"I am at the lowest end of all"*. The CIET studies make it quite clear that they involved young people from all provinces and from a variety of locations. The *Scared at School* study explicitly states that for the most part the interviews with girls, teachers and parents were primarily in urban areas. The AI study, noting the gaps in how rural life is understood for women, particularly in the context of HIV&AIDS and access to resources focused entirely on rural women in two of the most rural provinces, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu- Natal, two provinces which are also notably the poorest. Perhaps what that study does most is to draw attention to the absences of a rural voice in several other studies.

*Methods:* As noted above, the *Scared at School* report drew on very insensitive in-depth interviews where it was vital that the safety and security of the girls who were being interviewed was maintained. Although the CIET report similarly made sure that the 280,000 participants were protected in the sense that they filled out the surveys in secure areas, the survey nature of the reporting offers a different type of data. Other studies such as Panday et al’s (2009) study, *Teenage pregnancy in South Africa with a specific focus on school-going learners* (Panday et al, 2009), have relied entirely on desk reviews and secondary data. And where such are able to give life to important demographic data and play a critical role in terms of offering a synthesis of the literature, the findings and recommendations are skewed perhaps towards policy and less towards deepening an understanding of the reality of what it means to be a pregnant teenager. This in no way invalidates the study, but rather calls for complementary studies of the lived experiences of girls in attempting to navigate the system, and approaches that can capture the impact of particular policies and practices. For example, how could retrospective and memory-work studies complement and enrich studies of the “right now”?

*Participants:* In those studies that do conduct fieldwork with participants, who are they? How are they recruited? What difference does it make, for example, to base a study of sexual violence in and around schools on interviews with girls who have reported rape, and reporting by girls who may or may not have been victims of extreme forms of sexual violence? How can we evaluate retrospective data where the participants are women who asked to look back and remember as we see in the Amnesty International Study (AI), 2008? How are boys and men involved? The *Scared at School* study focused primarily on girls as victims of rape, while the CIET survey was completed by males and females. An important finding of that study was that boys as well as girls are victims of violence in schools, and that female teachers are perpetrators of violence in classrooms. What is lost then when we speak only to girls and women?
Participatory processes: Given the growing recognition of the value of participatory methodologies such as the visual (photography, video, drawings) in engaging girls in particular to become active agents in knowledge production (see for example Moletsane et al, 2008; Mitchell, Walsh and Moletsane, 2006; Mitchell, 2009), and a greater emphasis on the idea of ‘research as social change’ (Schratz and Walker, 1995). To what extent are girls themselves part of the interpretive process? None of the studies noted above could be regarded as having this type of framework. And while such studies, because of the in-depth qualitative approaches that they require might rule out large scale studies (288,000 participants), it is noteworthy that the Scared at School study, arguably the most cited study in the area of sexual violence in and around schools in South Africa, did not involve a large number of girls as participants. This, in our estimation paves the way for more studies that draw on the participatory engagement of young people, both girls and boys.

What this mapping exercise demonstrates is a need to revisit the studies and perhaps ask a new set of questions. Do we have the whole picture? What else do we need to know? How, in citing the same studies over and over again do we miss important nuances of the data? Are there new studies required? We offer this last question cautiously since one of the points of our analysis is that so many studies have been carried out that all say similar things, and yet, as our analysis shows, not nearly enough has been done, and there the incidents of gender violence in and around school are still too high.

POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS

As has been noted in the section above, there is considerable evidence of the high levels of gender-based violence in South African society and the effect that it has on girls’ experiences of schooling and access to schooling. This section of the paper reflects on national level policy and interventions, particularly those developed and implemented by the national education department(s).

The post-apartheid government, intent on addressing historical inequalities (including gender and race), established a ‘National Gender Machinery’. Through the National Policy Framework for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality (2000), it set up an extensive network of ‘gender focal points’1 in all government departments. In relation to education, this was supported by extensive recommendations made in an earlier report, the Gender Equity Task Team report, which was published in 1997. Each provincial education department was to have a dedicated staff member or members responsible for gender equity issues in the province. Very few have been placed at senior management level, but where they are senior managers, they have joint responsibility for a number of different projects. This varies from province to province.

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1 The terminology used in the National Gender Policy Framework for government units focusing on gender issues
A Gender Equity Directorate (hereafter referred to as the GED) was also set up in 2000 in the national Department of Education. The gender focal persons from the nine provincial education departments and the national GED meet quarterly as an inter-provincial group to discuss the work of all units. The national GED has a responsibility to monitor the system and its performance while coordinating activities and policy development across the system. The network of gender focal points and the 'National Gender Machinery in government more broadly has been criticized for poor performance, despite many gender equality achievements (see for example, Gouws, 2006), and has resulted, in part, in the setting up of a new Ministry for Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities after the 2009 elections. The work of this Department has yet to shift the individual departmental responses to gender equity challenges and has not yet changed the way in which the gender equity focal points work within the schooling system.

South Africa’s successful gender parity policies mask the ways in which discrimination still negatively affects girls of school-going age. To illustrate, the strong human rights framework of the education system is reflected in post-1994 education policies, grounded in the Constitution (1996). The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) also has a strong human rights foundation, in recognition of a firm break from a divisive and racist past. Issues that relate to gender inequity have been given prominence in different ways in this new education dispensation. These include infrastructure development (where poor sanitation and unsafe school infrastructure can expose girls to danger and unhealthy environments), at least on paper. They also include curriculum development that recognizes the need to instil respect for democracy and human rights, a focus on developing scarce skills areas such as maths and science, and in particular areas where girls have been under-represented through discriminatory practices. In addition, clear programs that protect girls from violence and support their right to education regardless of motherhood status or pregnancy have been developed. Some of these developments are reported in the OECD review of education policies produced in 2008 (OECD, 2008). These programs and policy developments, however, take place within a context of profound patriarchy and sexism. Furthermore, the implementation of changes that recognize the need for gender equity requires commitment and attitude transformation that is difficult to achieve across a huge schooling system, involving some 12 million learners and 400 000 teachers, and officials at district, provincial and national level.

Specifically, the approach of the gender equity ‘machinery’ in the Department of Education has been to create interventions in a number of different areas. These include peer education programs, essential for empowering young people to tackle exclusionary practices and learn gender responsive and value-driven behaviour. In addition, key officials have been/are being trained to identify and respond to major gender equity-related problems in schools, support materials for teachers and officials and guidelines for school managers and education officials have been developed, and advocacy work to support policy implementation undertaken. These have been informed by the recognition that in order to address complex social problems, a multi-pronged strategy is necessary. All levels of the system must be targeted, learners and teachers and officials must understand their

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2 After the 2009 national elections, government created two Departments from the old Department of Education: a Department of Basic Education, and a Department of Higher Education and Training. The split into the two departments took place formally from 1 April 2010. This unit is located in the Department of Basic Education.
rights and responsibilities, and a supportive environment must be created to allow prevention work and firm responses to discrimination, violence and harassment.

In particular, the GED has focused on two major areas of work: the impact of teenage pregnancy on girls’ schooling, and the high levels of gender-based violence in society which spills over into schools. First, teenage pregnancy amongst schoolgirls has been a focus of sustained media attention in South Africa in recent years. “One high school, one hundred pregnancies”, “Scandal as teacher fathers child with pupil”, “Teen gives birth on school premises” are some of the headlines from a local newspaper in 2008. Teenage pregnancy and early sexual activity among school-goers is a worldwide phenomenon. South Africa has the lowest rates of teen fertility in Africa, but high rates compared to the developed world (Panday et al, 2009).

Discussions on teenage pregnancy in South Africa frame it as a moral problem, requiring solutions grounded in morality and ethics. These solutions have included education workshops targeted at girls and focusing on abstinence and delayed sexual debut. They have also included virginity testing for girls. The criticism against these has been that they tend to construct girls’ sexuality as problematic and girls’ promiscuity and sexual activity as to blame for problems ranging from teenage pregnancy to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. To illustrate, the Commission for Gender Equality has strongly opposed virginity testing as unconstitutional (CGE, 2008) and as a denial of girls’ rights to dignity and privacy. There is also some evidence that programs focusing on moral behaviour alone, such as abstinence-only programs have been less successful in changing behaviour than comprehensive sexuality programs. (Panday et al, 2009).

However, these moralistic approaches do co-exist with more gender aware interventions, such as mass media campaigns targeting young people with awareness of the dangers of early and unprotected sex, empowerment work with young people, and working on understanding rights and personal responsibility. Non-governmental organizations working in this area are numerous, and their programs varied. For example, large organizations such as Soul City and loveLife work alongside many smaller community interventions, church initiatives and some government programs. Approaches vary depending on the nature of the organization.

Government policy on teenage pregnancy is rights-based, and recognises the socio-economic context within which girls in South Africa fall pregnant. Levels of teen pregnancy are higher in poor areas, particularly rural areas and urban informal settlements (Panday et al, 2009). In terms of education policy, girls have a right to be in school while pregnant, and return to school after giving birth. While there are no firm boundaries to this, there is some flexibility for girls, depending on their negotiations between the family and the school. In 2007, the Department of Education released and distributed the Measures for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy. This document, intended as a support for schools in preventing and managing schoolgirl pregnancy, created a great deal of confusion about the Department’s approach to teenage pregnancy. While it was well-intentioned, it may actually have led to greater discrimination in some schools. For example, evidence that some principals and officials have used the Measures to exclude girls who are pregnant or mothers, citing a controversial clause that suggests some girls may need to take up to two years of school off after giving birth, has emerged (Department of Education, 2007). Specifically, there have been incidences of girls being told that they must take two years off.
This is in spite of findings which suggest that the longer a girl stays out of school after giving birth, the less likely she is to return to school (see for example, Panday et al, 2009).

The rights-based policy is not likely to change, because it recognizes that girls do not always choose to fall pregnant, and that pregnancy is often influenced by complex circumstances, including poverty, gender-based violence and sexual coercion, gender-power relations that favour men, trade-offs that young women make between economic and personal security, as well as risky behaviour. In this regard, Panday et al (2009, p108) recommended that:

Given the multiple levels of influence on adolescent sexual behaviour, and, in turn, pregnancy, single intervention strategies by single sectors of society will not solve teenage pregnancy. What is required is comprehensive approaches within the home, the school, the community, the health-care setting and at a structural level. In addition, while each sector should act within its strength and foster linkages with other sectors, an integrated strategy is required to ensure that all sectors act towards achieving a common goal.

The detail of teenage pregnancy policy is currently being revised, and a policy document expanded to respond to some of the reported cases of discrimination, and the recommendations of the above-mentioned report. Based on these, the response is likely to include a number of different interventions designed to prevent teenage pregnancy. For example, an inter-sectoral task team has been mooted to address issues under the control of other government departments, such as Social Development and Health. In addition, advocacy programs aimed to ensure that people working in the system understand the policy and its rationale, and to ensure action will be taken against those who breach policy are also being discussed. In terms of the curriculum, the new interventions will also focus on improving sexuality education within schools.

In order to mitigate the negative impacts of poverty and arguably to facilitate the young mother’s return to school, the Department of Social Development provides a Child Social Grant3. Unfortunately, public discourse, including among those working in the education system in relation to this is that this has provided a financial incentive for young people to fall pregnant early. This informs their attitudes towards pregnant schoolgirls, whom they interpret as choosing to fall pregnant and hence as truant and irresponsible. This is in spite of available research which suggests that these perceptions have no basis in fact (see for example, Makiwane et al, 2006) and the fact that there is no evidence that pregnancy numbers are rising and certainly teenage fertility is not4.

The public perception that teenage pregnancy is on the rise due to a decline in morality tends to inform responses by education officials and educators in the education system. For example, on the one hand, South Africa has a rights-based termination of pregnancy (TOP) law which allows young people to seek legal termination in the public health system. As such, greater visibility of teenage pregnancy and young mothers could also be a result of better reporting and response and a more supportive framework for young parents and pregnant girls. On the other hand, research evidence suggests that young people do not use legal TOP services in large numbers due to the stigma of pregnancy at a young age, and the

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3 A monthly grant from the South African government given to family and/or care-givers of children who are in need of financial support.

4 Fertility refers to live births rather than pregnancy which may or may not result in a live birth.
disapproval of health workers (*Panday et al, 2009*). Thus, a combination of weak policy communication, moralistic attitudes that blame girls for falling pregnant (without recognizing the complex socio-environmental circumstances that affect sexual behaviour), and a tendency for sexist attitudes to shape responses to teenage pregnancy may have hindered the impact of a rights-based policy.

The debates will continue amongst demographers, health professionals, teachers, policy makers and journalists, but it is clear that in managing such complexity with the aim of ensuring a girls’ right to education, one cannot be neutral. A clear bias is required towards understanding the complex reasons schoolgirls fall pregnant, and firmly protecting their right to education, regardless of one’s personal views. Thankfully there is evidence of a shift in this regard. A report in the *Sowetan* provides an example of a provincial education department taking action against a school for forcing a pregnant learner to interrupt her schooling during pregnancy (*Sowetan, 14 April 2010*).

The above discussion suggests that South Africa is full of contradictions, and one of these is the gap between the progressive legislation put in place to protect women and girls, and the reality of the daily experience of violence and harassment of many women. To illustrate, available research suggests that inter-generational sexual relationships between (primarily male) teachers and students (mainly female) persist. In 2001, a Human Rights Watch report on sexual violence against girls in South African schools noted that these kinds of relationships appeared to be widespread (*Human Rights Watch, 2001*). One of the reasons identified for these relations is that the economic circumstances of many girls tend to force them into making financial trade-offs with their teachers and other adult men (*Human Rights Watch, 2001*).

In an attempt to address violence in and around schools, particularly gender based violence, in February 2008, the Department of Education conducted an intensive week-long national training workshop for education officials in all provinces, based on a training manual entitled *Opening our Eyes* (*DOE, 2001*). This manual deals extensively with different forms of gender-based and violence. The trainers report from the workshop notes that the officials who attended were not necessarily the right people to participate in such sensitive training, because some of them exhibited sexist attitudes, and a lack of interest in combating gender-based violence. To illustrate, one participant in the workshop, looking for the workshop venue was overheard saying that he was looking for the “train the trainer workshop”. When asked about the focus of the workshop as there were two education department workshops happening at the same venue on the same day, he indicated that he only knew it was a “train the trainer workshop”, but had no knowledge of what kind of content would be addressed.

The Gender Equity Task Team report (*1997*) discussed above asserted that:

> The existence of violence, then, is related to its social context. South African history has generated conditions in which violence can operate. A number of structural elements perpetuate this. In educational institutions, the absence of coherent and regulative policies permits sexual violence in particular to go unchallenged (*GETT, 1997, p51*).

To address this, the report made several recommendations on the need for standardized procedures and protocols for intervening in child abuse, and sexual harassment and violence in schools. The report also made recommendations regarding the staffing levels, and reporting location of the GED. However, the Department of Education failed to heed all the advice of the GETT. Instead, some provinces allocated low level staff with few resources
to do gender equity work. This may have had an effect on the efficacy of the units. However, it is not the only reason for slow progress in this area.

Furthermore, the GETT report recommended specific legislation for the education sector on its role in preventing discrimination and harassment, and making sexual harassment illegal in educational contexts. To a certain extent this has been put in place. The Employment of Educators Act (1998) makes sexual relationships between teachers and learners a dismissible offence, and the South African Council of Educators Code of Professional Conduct outlaws sexual relationships between teachers and learners (Ramagoshi, 2004). There is, however, no specific article of legislation focusing solely on sexual and gender based violence in South African schools. The implementation of the Act is also problematic as many incidents are either not reported, and if they are, witnesses are often reluctant to give evidence and there is no follow up and the perpetrators are seldom punished.

A national policy on “sex and gender based harassment and violence” as proposed by the GETT report, would have outlined the responsibility of education managers to “take reasonable steps to prevent gendered violence, including sexual harassment, in the sites for which they are responsible” (DOE, 1997: p227). In the absence of such a binding policy, the decision on whether to act on gender based violence has been left to the discretion of individual staff members at schools. The Gender Equity Task Team noted high levels of ignorance amongst education staff about what to do in cases of sexual harassment and violence. No policy guidelines existed at that time. Recommendations included were to adopt a National Plan of Action on Sexual Violence and Harassment in Schools, guidelines detailing appropriate responses, referral and support systems etc, and codes of conduct (GETT, 1997).

However, the Scared at School report noted the lack of progress in implementing legislation in this area:

Although there are teachers’ union rules and legislation prohibiting sexual relations between teachers and students, school officials seem to be at a loss as to what to do when rules are violated (Human Rights Watch, 2001, p8).

When the “Scared and School” report came out in 2001, the GED had only just been set up. Since that time there has been progress, and many of the recommendations of that report and others (for example Haffajee, 2006) as well as the GETT report, have been put in place.

For example, in 2008, the Department of Education released the Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Public Schools (2008). The Guidelines were developed to assist public schools in maintaining minimum standard procedures to addressing allegations of sexual violence and harassment, and to specifically detail how public schools should treat victims of sexual violence and harassment, and those who have, or are alleged to have, committed such acts. They were also intended to assist victims of sexual violence and harassment with reporting procedures and in seeking intervention. The Guidelines were widely distributed to all public schools, and to support their release, the Department implemented a number of linked programs. These included a series of support materials for teachers, distributed in the Teacher newspaper, a publication that is sent to all schools in South Africa. These materials, entitled Genderations, focus on information that teachers need to prevent sexual violence and harassment, and outline their responsibilities as teachers in taking action. The Genderations series also focused on teenage pregnancy (Department Of Education, 2008/9).
Training on the Guidelines was held in three provinces identified by the national Department, in consultation with provinces. The training was targeted at district officials and the role that they can play in supporting schools on such issues. Other initiatives to support the release of the guidelines were implemented by individual provincial education departments. While a formal evaluation has not yet been conducted of the effect of the Guidelines on the management of sexual violence and harassment in schools, there is some anecdotal evidence of positive shifts. The Free State education department recently took action against a school principal and deputy principal who refused to assist a learner claiming that a teacher at the school raped her. Furthermore, in line with international trends across Africa, in 2003, the Department started the Girls’ and Boys’ Education Movement program (GEM/BEM), supported by UNICEF. Although there may have been up to 2000 clubs once registered as active, there has been a reduction to between 600 and 700 active clubs in secondary schools across the country (information obtained from the Gender Equity Directorate: April 2010). The GEM/BEM movement consists of school-based clubs, created by learners themselves and supported by teachers. Every club is different, and the activities of clubs vary, depending on their contexts, but they are explicitly committed to promoting gender equity in schooling and particularly empowering girls in schools. A guidebook for setting up GEM/BEM clubs is available from the Department (Department of Education/UNICEF, 2008).

As part of the Torch of Peace\(^5\) celebrations for 2009, the Department of Education organized a program for a group of GEM/BEM club members during which they developed a series of art works focusing on their experiences and views of gender-based violence. This artwork was distributed at the Torch of Peace handover from the Minister of Education to the Minister of Justice in 2009, and formed part of an exhibition in the Department of Education building in Pretoria, commemorating Women’s Day in 2009. A national GEM/BEM camp was also held in 2008, and is planned for every two years, focusing on issues of human rights and gender equity in schooling, as well as building life skills.

A handbook for school-going learners is forthcoming from the newly-established Department of Basic Education, focusing on recognizing and managing sexual harassment and violence. This handbook will be widely distributed to young people through GEM/BEM clubs, schools, youth organizations and other public forums, to ensure that school-goers are informed about their rights in relation to sexual harassment and violence.

At the same time, broader work is being done on educating young people about constitutional rights and responsibilities, through a series of initiatives, such as national and provincial youth dialogues, the development of a “Bill of Responsibilities”, a direct mirror of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution (Department of Education, 2008), and more recently, a guide for teachers entitled, "Building Humanity and Responsibility in Schools" (available from the Department of Education). These programs are aimed at giving young people the tools to live in a democratic and diverse society with a terrible history of discrimination, and building new forms of citizenship.

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\(^5\) The Torch of Peace is a symbolic government program, linked to the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children, taking place from the start of the 16 Days program, and linked to other national days of recognition.
From the literature reviewed in this article, indications are that the broader social context profoundly impacts on schooling in South Africa, and in particular on the quality of the schooling experience, regardless of progress made in the legal and policy context. Addressing gender based violence and harassment requires special attitudes, policies and interventions and indeed these cannot be successful without strong partnerships within schools and school communities. As Chisholm and September (2004, p8) assert:

There is a dire need for understanding the link between intervention at school level but also at a family and community level in order to influence the current patterns of socialisation.

As discussed above, there are some solid signs of improvement, in that the reporting of gender-based violence and harassment in schools has increased significantly. The South African Council of Educators (SACE) has also become more vocal about its role in preventing sexual relationships between teachers and learners. In 2009 the Council announced that it would be making available a database of teachers who had been found guilty of sexual harassment or misconduct to potential employers. Teachers who are found guilty are de-registered with SACE, and must be dismissed. However, a detailed evaluation would be required to see what progress has been made.

There is a new area of backlash however, that relates to what some see as an excessive focus on girls and a neglect of boys. Certainly there is evidence that boys are also victims of sexual harassment and violence and programs in schools must not ignore this reality. There are a number of programs targeting young boys only in response to programs such as Cell C’s ‘Take a Girl Child to Work’ day. These programs are welcome, as they teach important lifeskills to boys, but there is no evidence that they help to decrease gender inequities, by building in gender-focused educational and support programs. Jane Kenway has written about this form of backlash in Australia, in what she calls a form of “gender fundamentalism”. She argues that:

…the gender reform agenda clearly cannot be left in the hands of the boys’ movement or the gender fundamentalists with their reductionist binary logic and their trivialisation of the complex links between education and gender and gender and culture and society (Kenway, 2004, p51).

What is needed going forward are a number of focused interventions at policy level, at community level, and most importantly in schools. In particular, a continued strategy that includes focused policies, professional and organisational development and curricula aimed at empowering and supporting young people (boys and girls) as well as those who must deal with violence in schools, is needed. These are discussed in the next section.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The sections above have addressed the questions: Why does the country’s highly lauded policy framework continue to fail girl children in terms of their access to and success in education? To what extent is the silencing of girls’ (and women’s) voices in policy-making and interventions a contributing factor? From the above analysis, the third section of the paper identifies possibilities for effective and efficient partnerships for intervening against the negative impacts of GBV, HIV & AIDS and school access and success for girls. The
section addresses the questions: What are the possibilities for effective and efficient interventions against GBV and related health, social and educational problems and lead to improved achievement by girls (and boys) in schools? Could institution-level policies and interventions to deal with GBV improve the situation?

Translating Policy into Practice
We end this paper with some considerations of how the negative impacts of violence in schools might be addressed. In particular, how can we create the kinds of teaching and learning spaces that are conducive to effective educating? Ultimately, the biggest gains in addressing gender-based violence in and around schools will only be made when the political will is in place to address the deep-seated gender prejudices in all aspects of South African life. This is the most important requirement for change. In line with this, the notion of the school as a microcosm of society implies that the ongoing development and transformation project in the country must bear positive fruit before we can expect schools and classrooms to transform for the better (for teachers and other adults to change their ways of seeing the child, the curriculum and learning and the role of schooling). This means that we will not be able to change schools unless we transform our wider society. In the meantime, what can we do? In particular, how can we create the kinds of teaching and learning spaces that are conducive to effective learning for girls (and boys)?

First, we believe that political and professional leadership on gender issues will help bring about attitude change at all levels and help to challenge resistance. In particular, a clear policy guiding gender equity in schools and a linked implementation plan must be put in place. This policy framework must be able to talk to teachers, school managers and education officials about their own responsibilities in relation to the framework and the consequences of not taking action on some of these matters. To help achieve this, institution-level policies and interventions are needed. These must include Codes of Conduct in schools which specifically and clearly address gender-based violence and harassment.

While our discussion above suggests that progress has been made in terms of policy framework aimed at addressing GBV and related social and educational problems for girls in schools, we also acknowledge the reality that such policies (and related interventions) continue to marginalise the voices of those most impacted by GBV in and around schools (women and girls). We believe participatory methodologies for research and interventions are key to addressing this challenge and to access the silenced voices.

Our discussion above also points to the poor or lack of understanding and acceptance of the policies among those charged with implementing them (teachers and education officials). As such, advocacy and clear communication about policy and the non-negotiables with built in monitoring strategies are an essential part of making policies work. The teenage pregnancy policy confusion (discussed in the preceding section) is an example of how poor communication can affect the reality of girls’ experiences at school. Any new programs must include a strong advocacy and communication plan. It is only when teachers and school managers understand and accept the principles contained in policies that such policies can be effectively translated into practice that makes a difference in girls’ (and boys’) lives vis-à-vis gender based violence.
Second, in addition to understanding and accepting the policy framework, we believe that interventions that particularly target GBV and related issues must be developed and implemented and monitoring strategies put in place to continually measure progress. These include creating and changing schools into youth- and particularly girl-friendly schools. Such interventions must involve transforming our (teachers and parents and youth’s) understandings of GBV not only as a human rights issue, but also as a gendered practice informed by the dominant beliefs about gender hierarchies and authority in schools and other institutions (the church, the family and others). To be effective, efforts that aim to address GBV need to take the democratic project as intended in the various human rights informed policies seriously. For example, what would happen if:

- schools and classrooms were to be truly democratic and participatory in their decision-making and day to day functioning;
- communities, represented by parents and others, were to be truly involved in making key decisions about their children’s schooling;
- the children themselves were seen as true partners in decision-making regarding their own schooling (e.g., through the LRCs); and
- outside of schools, the ending of GBV was integrated into interventions that target domestic or family violence and violence in the wider community?

Such interventions have implications for curriculum development in and for schools. For example, formal curricula that aim to empower young men and women (through lifeskills related to responding to and challenging GBV in schools) are needed. The programs that work towards the empowerment of young men and women must be strengthened and continued. These include formal (Life Orientation) and informal lifeskills programs in schools. Life Orientation is a compulsory subject all the way through school. Programs that support young people in developing skills, understanding their rights and personal responsibilities, and supporting them outside of school hours must also be developed and implemented. These must focus explicitly on gender inequality, gender based violence and their consequences, as well as on strategies needed to effectively and efficiently address them.

In addition, while teachers and education officials are the key implementers of gender equity policy in schools, such a program, aimed at challenging inequality and attitudes that perpetuate discriminatory attitudes and practices would require strong inter- and multi-sectoral partnerships. Programs such as the Safe and Caring Child-Friendly Schools program, and others could be strengthened and continued. Partnerships with teacher unions, a powerful force in the South African education system, are particularly important. In addition, efforts by various government departments must be consolidated into integrated programs that target GBV, health and welfare of young people.

Obviously, for such an integrated program to be successful, those charged with implementation must have the understanding as well as the skills to perform their responsibilities and to integrate these with the activities of others in different sectors and government departments. As such, more and better professional and organizational development is needed. In particular, some good resources are available, such as the Opening our Eyes manual mentioned above. However, future training will need to be integrated into existing training such as School Governing Body training, management courses for school managers, pre-service teacher training courses, in-service teacher development programs, the training of departmental officials, and partnerships with universities must be established.
Unless we significantly transform the gendered beliefs among parents, teachers and children themselves, the negative notions of power and authority, and of the need for respect for such authority, will remain the main social project in communities and other social institutions, and gendered (and even sexualised) violence, including GBV, the only viable solution for maintaining the hierarchy between men and women, and boys and girls. A further area for partnership is with organisations that work within a progressive framework for gender equity with men and boys. There has been a growth of such organisations in South Africa (such as Sonke Gender Justice) that share the focus on changing negative attitudes towards women and working towards a society in which men also take responsibility for building gender equality.

Lastly, in the first section of this paper we mapped the various sectors, methods, foci and recommended strategies from different research studies and reports, to contextualize socially and historically the confounding discourses of gender based violence and the gendered face of HIV&AIDS in relation to South African girlhood in the age of AIDS and to situate the ‘progress or retreat?’ question we pose in the paper. For us, the mapping exercise identified a need for further studies in this area, not only to fill the various gaps in research, but to also consider the possibilities for obtaining and analysing data that would provide better understanding of the problem, and to suggest effective and efficient strategies for intervention.

As an example of “what else is needed’ within our ‘progress or retreat” analysis, we are interested in some of the absences in the large scale studies noted above. For example, there is almost no reference in studies to past (and present) intergenerational experiences and discourses of Gender based violence. The Amnesty International study is one of the few that does, working as it does with adult women (some of whom look back and reflect on their pasts). We think that this is a critical point in order to fully appreciate the impact of gender based violence in schools on learners. We might hear back to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings that served as an entry point for the ordinary citizen and government to simultaneously come to recognition of the long term impact of apartheid on the country. We needed to look back in order to go forward. We are not necessarily here suggesting a Truth and Reconciliation on gender based violence, so much as calling for studies of some breadth and depth that take into consideration the need to recognize the long term impact on former learners who have been victims of teachers’ misconduct, victims or survivors of gang violence, or experiences of having to leave school as a result of pregnancy and hence abandoning hopes and dreams for a career -- to name only some of the violations. What is the social impact of gender based violence in schools? What is the economic impact? Some of the health impacts have been acknowledged in studies that look at the links between HIV&AIDS and gender based violence., but there is otherwise almost a ‘so what?’ of gender based violence in schools. Clearly, this situation also calls for refined and nuanced methodologies on memory work, along with other autobiographical approaches of self-study and auto-ethnography. Progress or retreat? Such studies, we would argue, have the potential to give new meaning to ‘opening our eyes’. When it comes to policy making, that should hold promise for progress.
References


