

# **LEARNER EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE AT A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN LESOTHO**

By

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## **SUPERVISORS' STATEMENT**

This dissertation has been submitted with/ without my approval

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## DECLARATION

I, ‘Mamolibeli Ngakane, declare that this dissertation entitled, **“Learner experiences of school violence at a secondary school in Lesotho”**, is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

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## **DEDICATION**

**This work is dedicated to my late father Mr SEISA LAZARUS NGAKANE.  
Who passed away on the 24 September 2005. May his soul rest in peace.**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored learner experiences of school violence in a secondary school in Qacha's Nek, Lesotho. The aim of the study was to understand learners' experiences of violence as it happens in their school. Internationally, violence in schools is one of the most challenging issues facing educators and learners and school communities at large. The research design was a case study. The research method was the qualitative case study method. Data were collected through individual and focus group interviews with learners and document analysis. Fifteen learners participated in the study, 7 girls and 8 boys.

The study found that learners are exposed to complex patterns of violence in the school, and these are experienced in multiple forms that affect learners in different ways. Some of the patterns of violence could be seen in enactments such as solving problems with aggression, violence from teachers, the discourse of blame, collective bullying. The study also found that in certain ways schooling itself can be viewed as violence in that the school had an ethos of authoritarianism and control. Violence in the form of corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion emerged as the most tangible symbol of an authoritarian school. The study also found that violence was a gendered phenomenon at the school.

The study highlights the need for proactive programmes that are directed at the attaining goal of building school communities that are safe havens. The findings suggest that a key component of such programmes should be critical self-reflection and self-scrutiny by all members of the school community. In such a process teachers and learners would need to examine and challenge existing social attitudes, ideologies, norms, and injustices in school policies and practices.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

### **1. 1 Introduction**

A school is a place where learners ought to be allowed to achieve their optimum potential. This occurs only if the physical and psychosocial environment is conducive to learning and development. However, this might not be the case in many schools, internationally. Morrell (2002) asserts that in many contexts schools as institutions are associated with violence. Morrell (2002) argues that schools are far from being peaceful and safe places.

Abello (1997) cited by Harber (2004) argued that there is a relationship between schooling and violence, and that schooling can be a form of violence against children. For example, corporal punishment which is a form of violence is illegal in many schooling contexts internationally yet it is still used by educators as a means of discipline. Curcio and First (1993) suggest that often educators are reluctant to acknowledge the presence of violence in their school environments. Harber (2002) explains that students have little sense of identity or belonging in schooling contexts that breed violence, and such schools often reflect and entrench unequal power relations. Harber (2002) argues that unequal power relations within schools can be invisible, and are often embedded in pedagogical actions.

According to Kenway & Fitzclarence (1997) violence occurs along a continuum and involves physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse as well as the abuse of power at individual, group and social structure levels. This chapter focus on the aim and the rationale for the study, research questions, significance of the study, the context of the study and the structure of dissertation.

### **1.2 The Aim and Rationale for the Study**

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of school violence by secondary school learners in Lesotho. The choice of this topic was motivated by my personal experiences of violence in schools in Lesotho, and by my exposure to literature on the issue in my masters' programme. Being an educator at a secondary school in

Lesotho, I was exposed on many occasions to violence in schools and in the community in general. To give a few examples, I witnessed a learner being beaten by a group of teachers during the school assembly in the presence of other learners. I also experienced incidents such as learners burning educators' houses and breaking classroom's windows, and the abuse of learners by male educators. In the schools in which I taught, many learners were expelled as a result of the violent acts that they committed.

While studying the masters modules, 'Gender and Education ' and 'Peace Education and Conflict Resolution' in 2007 and 2008 I engaged with literature on violence. Engaging with research on the topic made me reflect on the issue of violence in Lesotho secondary schools. I began to realize that often educators and school leaders are reluctant to acknowledge the presence of violence in their school environments, and that there is an unfortunate tendency to accept aberrant behaviors as normal for children. For example, I found that fighting or teasing and the sexual harassment of girls is perceived by some educators as part of growing up. I also realized that corporal punishment, which is a common practice in Lesotho' schools, may be violence in itself. I therefore became curious to find out how learners in Lesotho secondary schools experience violence as it happen in their lives.

Violence in secondary schools in Lesotho is not a new phenomenon, but there is limited literature on the issue. Research topics that have received attention are: gender violence (Mturi & Hennink, 2005; Thurman, Brown, Kendall & Blom, 2006), child abuse (Monyane, 1999), and corporal punishment by educators (Monyooe 1996). De Wet (2007) undertook a survey study on educator and learner experiences and perceptions of violence in urban schools in Lesotho.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study had two research questions:

How do learners experience violence in their school?

Are the learners experiences of violence gendered?

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The results of the study could potentially be of value to the Lesotho Ministry of Education in that it will provide insight into how national policy on violence is interpreted, implemented, practiced and experienced in a schooling context. This study could serve as the springboard for further research on violence in Lesotho schools.

#### **1.5 Context of the study**

Lesotho is a landlocked independent country situated within South Africa. It is divided into ten districts. Lesotho is predominately a mountainous country. Schooling in Lesotho was introduced by the missionaries. Therefore many schools are owned by the churches while the government pays teachers and designs the curriculum. Churches own over 90% of the schools in Lesotho (de Wet, 2007).

Lesotho is predominately a Christian country. The gender order of Christian religion, which is patriarchal, is reflected in the ethos of church schools. The cultural beliefs and traditional practices of Basotho which are patriarchal are also reflected in schools. In Lesotho, girls outnumber boys in schools - a situation that is quite unique in Africa (Ansell, 2002). This is caused by herding the responsibility of boys and the gendered labour market which facilitates employment of minimally educated men. Although at secondary level more girls drop out of schools than boys, boys remain a minority even at the university.

Muzvidziwa & Seotsanyana (2002) report that since 1987/88 when Lesotho adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), the country has experienced problems of unemployment, crime, poverty and increased socio-economic vulnerability for the poor. Therefore the majority of learners in schools are from poor background. Despite the fact that many people are poor in Lesotho, school fees are high in secondary schools. The Ministry of Health through the Social Welfare Department and non-government organizations such as Save the Children Funds helps in paying the fees of needy learners.

## **1.6 Structure of the Dissertation**

This paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to the study. it provides a rationale for the study, research questions, significance of the study, the context of the study and the structure of dissertation.

Chapter two is a review of related literature on violence in schooling context. The review of literature is based on local and international research. This chapter also presents a conceptual framework within which data collected in this study is interpreted

Chapter three focus on the research design and methodology used to collect data. This study takes form of a case study, using two types of interviews, individual and focus group interviews and documents.

Chapter four presents the results of the study, data is presented, analysed and the findings are discussed in the form of themes which emerged from the data collected. The themes are web of violence, schooling as violence and violence as agendered phenomenon.

Chapter five concludes by drawing on the findings and giving implications of the study. In the study it was concluded that there is a problem of violence in this school under study, it was therefore recommended that peace education be implemented in the school curriculum and teacher professional development programmes be established to help in solving the problem of violence in that school.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This literature review will examine the concepts ‘violence’ and ‘school violence’. The notion of violence in schools has been theorised by various scholars internationally and from different disciplines. These perceptives will be used analyse experiences of violence.

### **2.2 What is Violence?**

Violence involves the act of causing pain to oneself or others physically and emotionally. Harber (2002) explains violence as the behaviour by people against people liable to cause physical and psychological harm. De Wet (2007) describes school violence as a multi-faceted construct. Kenway & Fitzclarence (1997) show that violence occurs along a continuum and involves physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuses of power at individual, group and social structural levels. Therefore, violence involves any act against a human being which can cause harm. This includes teasing, mocking verbally or physical threats, assaults of all kinds or racial harassment, bullying and robbery, which may occur in classrooms, the hallway, the school yard and on the school buses. Violence can be divided into three main categories: self-inflicted violence, interpersonal violence and organized violence.

De Wet (2007) shows that the academic debate on violence in schools concentrates on three categories of behaviour by learners: physical compulsion and physical injury, verbal aggression and mental cruelty, and bullying. Morrell (2002) mentions that violence in schools exists and it comes in different forms and impacts on teachers, learners, parents and the school itself.

### **2.3 Violence, Society and the School**

Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) show that many social institutions and cultural norms have been implicated in the cause of violence – the school is one of those institutions. They mention that violence is widespread in schools and that most often such violence is perpetrated by males. This could mean that school violence is an expression

of a certain type of masculinity. Bhana (2005) argues that levels of violence in schools are exacerbated by social constructions of masculinity and femininity. This means that the construction of what it means to be a boy or a girl nurtures gender violence. In this regard, schools do not exist in a social vacuum; they reflect and reproduce the power relations within a male dominated society. Morrell (2002) explains that male dominance is a global phenomenon and violent masculinity exists within homes and in the school across the world.

Jennings (1979) cited by Simiyu (2003) argues that the school is perceived, first and foremost, as a place to promote a social order conducive enough for individuals to pursue their goals and to development. The school as an institution in which children spend a significant amount of time (an average of seven hours a day in South Africa and Lesotho) should be a space where children feel safe and protected from violence in community. Sherry, Everett and James (1995) explain that the school offers a unique opportunity for the primary prevention of violence. Burton (2008) states that school, if considered holistically, is an environment where children do not only acquire knowledge but also learn to know, to be, and live together.

However, school environments are complex spaces as schools are the reflection of the society. For example, the problem of violence in society has become one of the most pressing educational issues in schools internationally (Netshitahane & Vollenhoven, 2002). Herr & Anderson (2003) argue that although schools are often characterized as a safe oasis in the inner city neighbourhoods that view is due to under theorization of violence. The discussion below attempts to elucidate some of the debates on violence in schools in different contexts.

Prinsloo (2006) reports that in South Africa many girls experience violence in schools which can be interpreted to mean that the school is not a safe place for girls. Male teachers may not provide girls with sufficient support and harassment from boys may occur. Mirembe and Davies (2001) in their study in Uganda revealed that there are strands of gender inequality rooted in patriarchal beliefs. These include male hegemony, 'normalized' heterosexuality and distinctive gender roles to which school children are introduced. Furthermore, schools are not divorced from cultural norms that maintain a power gap between male and female. Kenway & Fitzclarence (1997) explain that the



school is not the innocent victim of isolated incidents of violence, neither is it the safe haven for victims of outside violence. Mwashombela (2004) reports that in Tanzanian society male dominance at home is common and the victims are women and girls. This patriarchal social order is extended to schools. Mwashombela argues that school masculinity is not different from what is found in the broader society and it is the key feature of gender regimes of school and homes.

### **2.3.1 The concept of 'school violence'**

Morrell (2002) states that there is no doubt that violence in schools exist. It comes in different forms and impacts on teachers, learners, parents and the school themselves. Violence is a problem for women, men, and other socially marginalized groupings. Violence can take the form of physical injury as in assault. It can be abuse of power as in the case of bullying, where a more powerful person forces a weaker person to do certain things against their will. Violence can also be in the form of sexual harassment, usually committed against females which could indicate that violence is a manifestation of a certain kind of masculinity, that is, a hegemonic masculinity (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Morrell, 2002; Bhana, 2005).

Bhana (2005) argues that social and economic disadvantage increases children's vulnerability to violence. She explains that in the situations of poverty, violence and the threat of violence are the most effective means to get a material reward. A study conducted by Bhana (2002) at a primary school in South Africa revealed that many of the children in her research site eat one meal a day, and sometimes the school feeding scheme is their only hot meal for the day. In this context it was found that many learners, boys and girls, resort to violence towards one another to obtain food from others. Internationally it has been found that against a backdrop of massive structural inequalities, social conflicts shift quickly and easily to violence. In this regard, Skelton (2001) and Kenway & Fitzclarence (1997) point out that the conditions of poverty and inequality are fertile grounds for inciting violence against women. Morrell (2002) contends that young black working class men are more likely to resort to violence because of their material circumstances. This means that poverty or material inequalities may perpetuate violence.

Literature suggests that school violence can be linked to family and home circumstances (for example, Elliot, Hamburg and Williams, 1998; Leoshut, 2006). Most of the exposure to violence occurs while children are still young - a time when these experiences are most likely to impact negatively on their development. The end result is that children who live in homes where their parents and caregivers model violent behavior, aggressive behavior patterns tend to become violent. Leoshut (2006) shows that violence within families occurs in different forms, ranging from arguments to physical violence. Elliot, Hamburg and Williams (1998) argue that involvement in violent activities is most likely to be found in youth with decreased levels of empathy, hopelessness and low self-esteem which have their roots in the home.

Bhana (2005) reports that in her study, made in a primary school in South Africa learners were violent, for example, 'tsotsi' boys beating girls and girls who have acquired hard femininity beating other girls. Furthermore, teachers in the school were found to be using corporal punishment. Such early experiences of violence make children think that violence is acceptable. A violent social context breeds violence (Bhana 2005; de Wet, 2007; Humphreys, 2008).

### **2.3.2 Gender relations and gender violence in schools**

In the above discussion, I alluded to the fact that research is showing that inequitable power relations between boys and girls and males and females are all too often expressed in violence. Morrell (2002) drawing from his research in the South African context argues that violence is often a gendered phenomenon. I will explore this issue in the context of the school as a social institution in more detail in this section.

The school as a social arena is marked by asymmetrical power relations that are enacted not only through gender but also through age and authority (Dunne, Humphrey and Leach, 2004). These authors explain that gender relations within the school are part of the hidden curriculum, through which feminine and masculine identities are constructed and reinforced. The hidden curriculum refers to unwritten social rules and expectations of behaviour that we all seem to know, but were never taught explicitly or overtly in the classroom. It emerges through the culture of the school. The

hidden curriculum consists of those things pupils learn through the experience of attending school. Marland (1983, p, 18) explains,

*In every classroom there is an unofficial curriculum, a part of the learning experience that is determined by the teachers' attitudes and behavior rather than by a formal syllabus. Because teachers are often unaware of the ways in which the educational experiences of boys and girls differ, the reinforcing of sex typing in the classroom is often referred to as a hidden curriculum.*

Dunne et al., (2004) mention that in many African schools girls are predominantly responsible for cleaning and boys for digging the school grounds. Boys ring the school bell for assembly. Boys are allocated higher status as public tasks are allocated to boys, and domestic private tasks to girls. Mirembe and Davies (2001) explain that in Ugandan schools, leadership is defined in male terms and that the ideal candidates for leadership roles are 'tough' ones. According to male teachers in the study by Mirembe and Davies (2001), toughness and firmness are the qualities found among males only.

Unequal gender relations in schools are also reinforced through discipline. Mirembe and Davies (2001) report that in Zimbabwe the nature of girls' hair styles were strictly controlled while nobody minded the nature of boy's hair styles. The issue of strict adherence to wearing the school uniform was stressed more with girls than boys. In addition, corporal punishment was used differently with boys and girls. According to Morrell (2001) the justification for using corporal punishment with boys was that it taught boys to be tough and uncomplaining. On the other hand, it taught girls that they had to be submissive and unquestioning.

Mirembe and Davies (2001) found that in many schools in Uganda, the formal curriculum is used to promote gender roles, that is girls and boys are channelled into the appropriate future careers. For instance, girls do home management which is composed of sewing, cookery, washing skirts and keeping the home, while boys study food and nutrition because it is seen as technical. Wolpe, Quinlan and Martinez (1997) argue that in every day classroom practices teachers in South Africa may consciously or subconsciously denigrate girl's attainment levels in suggesting that boys have to answer questions or participate actively in the classroom, and girls are expected to behave in a

quiet and submissive manner. In addition, boys are taught to be experiential, outgoing, questioning and highly active. The classroom cultures are key symbols of gender identification and differentiation, and are constantly practiced within schools. Such classroom processes sustain inequalities and in so doing promote the conditions for gender violence (Leach & Humphreys 2007). These researchers conclude that the social practices of schooling both operate within, and serve to sustain, a gender regime which promotes aggressive masculinities and compliant femininities while discouraging other ways of being.

A further understanding of gender relations in schools can be gained in the context of research into compulsory heterosexuality. This work suggests that gender positioning may occur through formal and informal institutional rules and practices that differentiate for instance separate queues for boys and girls or that privilege male power (Dunne et al., 2006). A study made by Mirembe and Davies (2001) in Uganda found the norm of compulsory heterosexuality operating within the school culture. Both girls and boys in the school actively engaged in ‘policing’ the boundaries of acceptable gender identities and relations and punishing transgression. The incidents are unreported because female students fear victimization, punishment or ridicule. Furthermore, such ‘policing’ behaviours are normalized, that is, they are not recognized as violations.

## **2.4 Forms of violence in the schools**

In this section, I will examine the various forms of school violence documented in research locally and internationally.

### **2.4.1 Sexual violence**

Tolerance of gender-based violence in schools is a serious form of discriminatory treatment that compromises the learning environment and educational opportunities for girls (Human rights watch, 2001). Sexual harassment is one form of sexual violence. Prinsloo (2006) defines sexual harassment as “unwanted conduct of a sexual nature.” Brown, Thurman, Bloem and Kendall (2006) define sexual violence as a continuum of non-consensual sexual experiences that range from the use of threats and intimidation to unwanted touching and forced sex. The World Health Organization

(WHO) defines sexual harassment as a sexual act; an attempt to obtain a sexual act; unwanted sexual comments or advances; acts to traffic or acts otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (WHO, 2002, p. 14). Zeira, Astor and Benbenishty (2002) argue that acts of sexual harassment are diverse sets of behaviours that share a common goal of humiliating, intimidating, establishing dominance and hierarchy, and victimizing students based on their gender and by psychological and physical sexual means. Sexual harassment takes any form, it can involve physical contact, and for instance, when a girl is patted, stroked, hugged or held against her will. It can be verbal and psychological which includes staring, standing too close for comfort, being followed, threatening body exposures, sexual remarks, obscene gestures or jokes, explicit pressure for sexual activity (Hanson, 1998, Klein, 2006). Zeira *et al* (2002) argue that sexual harassment is a reflection of a larger patriarchal pattern, and that sexual harassment is a reflection of the society's mores and views towards the male and female relationship.

Sexual violence in schools is well documented in the literature. A research report by Human Rights Watch (2001) in South African schools titled, '*Scared at schools: Sexual violence against girls in South African schools*', found that many girls experience violence in schools. They are raped, sexually abused, sexually harassed and assaulted at school by learners and educators. The report noted that, although girls in South Africa have better access to school than their counterparts in other sub-Saharan states, they are confronted with levels of sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools that impede their access to education on equal terms with male students. Many interrupt or leave school altogether because they feel unsafe in such violent environments. Other girls stay at school but suffer in silence, having learned that submission is a survival skill and sexual violence at school is inescapable (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Prinsloo (2006) argues that the provision made in the South African Constitution of 1996, Section 9 is meant to ensure equal schooling opportunities for boys and girls. The common law principle forces educators to protect learners against dangers which learners may be exposed to at schools. This means that educators are legally obliged to ensure the physical and psychological safety of learners in their care.

However, learners suffer sexual harassment in the hands of the educators. Human Rights Watch (2001) states that girls reported sexual harassment by the teachers, as well as psychological coercion to engage in dating relationships. Some girls respond to sexual demands from teachers because of fears that they would be physically punished if they refused. In other cases, teachers abused their positions of authority by promising better grades or money in exchange for sex. The study by Zeira *et al* (2002) in Jewish and Arab public schools in Israel revealed that more boys than girls are victims of sexual harassment in Israeli schools. These findings disagree with the general public's belief that sexual harassment is directed primarily at girls.

Mirembe & Davies (2001) reported that sexual harassment was and is still ignored in most of the schools in Africa. They reported from their study in Uganda an incident in which the School Governing Board dismissed a case where a boy had touched a girl inappropriately, as their view was that pupils were merely having fun. Halson (1998) mentions that some forms of sexual harassment are always dismissed as inoffensive or friendly and just teasing. Klein (2006) shows that masked signs of imminent violence hidden in normalized masculinity expectations and the view that 'boys will be boys' allow daily violence to occur freely. Halson (1998) agrees that many schools do nothing to address the problem of sexual harassment of young women. Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) argue that if schools implicitly subscribe to and endorse hegemonic versions of masculinity, particularly in their more exaggerated forms, then they are complicit in the production of violence. Morrell (2002) argues that educators whose identities are vested in power and hierarchy contribute to violence by condoning violence.

#### **2.4.2. Male teachers as perpetrators of sexual violence**

The perpetrators of sexual harassment in schools are both male students and teachers (Mwahombela, 2004). In this section the focus is on male teachers as the perpetrators of sexual violence. Human Rights Watch (2001) found that girls interviewed reported sexual harassment by teachers and psychological coercion to engage in dating relationship. Leach and Humphreys (2007) report that studies made in eight countries at sub-Saharan Africa depict consistent patterns of sexual abuse and harassment of female

students by both teachers and male students. Those studies report male teachers demanding sexual favours from girls in return for good grades, preferential treatment in class or money in exchange for sex. The study in Lesotho by de Wet (2007) reported that educators in Lesotho verbally, physically and sexually abused their learners. In Zimbabwean schools learners were sexually abused by their educators in dark places, in store-rooms and raped in the maize field (Mitchell & Mothobi-Tapela, 2004).

### **2.4.3. Male students as perpetrators of sexual violence**

Human Rights Watch (2001) and Dunne *et al* (2006) in their studies reported that girls complained that boys would show sexual pictures, photographs and illustrations or write them sexual messages. Boys would also call girls degrading names, for instance, slut. Boys comment inappropriately on girls' appearance, touch their breasts and buttocks, and make comments or joke about menstruation in order to embarrass girls. Klein (2006) argues that boys typically acquire negative attitudes from parents, teachers, peers and other important figures in their lives who perpetuate the widely accepted belief that boys should dominate and control girls.

A study on sexual violence in Lesotho by Thurman, Brown, Kendall and Brown (2005) found that 33% of the women interviewed reported having experienced forced sex by the age of 18. Boyfriends were the most common perpetrators of forced sex. The problem of forced sex and rape was aggravated by the fact that male adolescents in Lesotho after returning from the initiation schools show a strong desire to manifest their masculinity. This often leads to rape and abuse of women (Mturi & Hennink, 2005). The study conducted in Lesotho by de Wet (2007) reports that 10,66% of the male respondents share the view that learners in their school had raped someone.

Boys are usually the perpetrators of sex based harassment directed at their own sex and the opposite sex. Morrell (2002) argues that violence is a problem for both women and men in that men are violent to women and men. Boys striving to conform to the dictates of hegemonic masculinity are themselves exposed to violence and suffer the emotional and physical consequences of this violence.

#### **2.4.4 Corporal punishment**

Corporal punishment refers to the act of causing physical pain to the learner by an educator or a child by a parent (Mwahombela, 2004). This could mean that corporal punishment is the punishment which involves hitting someone as a penalty for doing something which is disapproved at home and school.

Corporal punishment persists in schools in many national contexts where it has been banned (Morrell, 2001; Humphreys, 2008). In Zimbabwe and South Africa corporal punishment is banned but is still practised (Morrell, 2002). This persistent use of corporal punishment could be linked to patriarchal norms of society. The study made by Tafa (2002) reveals that corporal punishment is legal in Botswana. In Lesotho the use of corporal punishment is permissible (de Wet, 2007). This means that in Lesotho corporal punishment can be used but to a certain extent.

The literature argues that corporal punishment teaches students that violence is the solution when one disapproves of other people's action (Bhana, 2005; de Wet, 2007; Humphreys, 2008). For instance, in the study by Bhana (2005) in a South African primary school, boys she termed 'tsotsi boys' hit others for material needs. Even teachers use corporal punishment to punish students. This gives the impression that correcting children with experiences of pain is acceptable. Corporal punishment produces children who are emotionally unstable and who cannot tolerate others, and resort to violence. Thus violence breeds violence (de Wet, 2007; Humphreys, 2008; Bhana, 2005).

Kenway & Fitzclarence (1997) contend that aggressive and violent masculinities arise in schools with harsh and authoritarian school disciplinary systems. Internationally, it has been found that boys both in the home and at school are physically punished more often than girls (Zeira et al, 2002) The reason is that corporal punishment is used to symbolize and secure hierarchical dominance of the adult over child, teacher over learner, male over female.

Humphreys (2008) and Tafa (2002) report that in the study made in Botswana the use of corporal punishment is legal. It can be ordered as a punishment by the judiciary both customarily and through a magistrate court, and can be applied in a school. In Botswana corporal punishment is used differently for girls and boys. This suggests that it is a gendered practice, for instance, in both primary and secondary schools caning can be



carried out by the headmaster or a boarding master or matron to whom authority to administer it has been delegated - No male teacher except the headmaster is allowed to inflict corporal punishment upon a female pupil. In primary schools it is not allowed to beat girls on the buttocks but only on the backs of the calves or on the palms of the hand. Male teachers beat harder and harsher than female teachers do (Humphreys, 2008).

Many South African homes are dominated by patriarchy and discipline received at home contributes towards the shaping of masculinity and masculinity among black boys and men has been shaped by power, and this spills over into schools (Morrell, 2005). This exercise of power promotes dominance and supports a particular form of masculinity. According to Msani (2007) this is the reason boys in schools are constantly involved in fighting and bullying.

Corporal punishment continues to be more commonly experienced among African male learners. A key reason for this is that their families still use corporal punishment in the home and this legitimates its use in schools. Construction of masculinity also plays an important part in perpetuating the practice. These masculinities can be misogynistic, violent and uncritical accepting and rejecting of authority, according to Morrell (2001).

#### **2.4.4.1. The new legislation on corporal punishment in Lesotho**

There is no explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in schools at Lesotho, except in section 4 (5) of the Education Bill which was drafted in 2006 which states; “no child shall be subjected to inhuman and degrading punishment including corporal punishment.” (Global Progress, 2007). The Minister of Education and Training presented this new Education Bill, 2009 in the national assembly which among others seeks to abolish corporal punishment in schools (Lesotho News Agency, 2009). When the Minister of Education present the Educational Bill at the Senate, the members objected to the section which abolish corporal punishment in schools, they said that the proposed education law is against the culture of Basotho which allow parents to reprimand they children with corporal punishment therefore should be practised in schools (Tefo, 2009).

### **2.4.5 Bullying**

Bullying is another kind of violence in schools. The term ‘bullying’ refers to a special variation of violence, encompassing both the physical and mental components. It involves a victim and perpetrator relationship, in which the weaker individual is regularly taunted and oppressed (De Wet, 2006). Roberts (2006) defines bullying as a combination of verbal and physical aggression, and aggravations directed from an agent towards the victim. Bullying has an influence on the victim’s physical, emotional, social and educational wellbeing. Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) report that, the effect of bullying on its victims include a loss of self-esteem, post traumatic stress, anxiety, depression and feelings of isolation. Physical effects can be headaches, bed-wetting, and loss of appetite, poor posture and stomach problems. Emotional problems of victims of bullying are depression, suicidal tendencies and actual suicides, tension and fear. Resulting social problems could be isolation and loneliness, and educational consequences include absenteeism, withdrawal from social activities at school, and loss of concentration (De Wet, 2005). Therefore bullying includes the intentional use of aggression, an unbalanced relationship of power between the bully and the victim and the causing of physical pain and emotional misery. Randall (1996) shows that bullying is the aggressive systematic abuse of power. Olweus (2000) stresses that the word ‘bullying’ is not used when two students of the same strength are fighting or quarrelling but is used where there is a power imbalance. Bullying can take many forms such as physical violence, threats, name-calling, sarcasm, rumours, persistent teasing, and exclusion from a group, tormenting, ridicule, humiliation and even abusive comments. The forms of bullying are divided into direct and indirect bullying.

The roots of violence reach into the schools from communities they serve. Randall (1996) reports that many of the examples of bullying give hints that factors outside schools are influencing the behaviour of children and young people within them. Children subjected to harsh discipline at home, to the extent that they are bullied by their parents, are more likely to be aggressive to young and more vulnerable (Besag, 1989; Roberts, 2006). The home life for the bully may not be a happy one and violence in their homes may be a frequent occurrence (Roberts, 2006). Morrell (2002) agrees with the above idea when stating that a bully is never the happy and best-adjusted learner in a

school but is generally from a background of family violence and may often be amongst the most traumatized of the school's learners.

Harber (2004) mentions that though there are variations in the type of bullying, bullying is carried out by both males and females and both males and females are the victims. Bullying with physical means is more common in boys than girls while girls use more subtle and indirect ways of harassment such as slandering, spreading of rumours, and manipulation of friendship relationships. Besag (1989) mentions that boys bully both boys and girls but mainly other boys whereas girls bully other girls.

Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) conducted a study in the Philadelphia public system in the USA to examine how the frequency of aggressive behaviours experienced by students as perpetrators and victims contributed to their interpretation of their school's psychosocial environment and how those environments affect the existence of ongoing aggressive and avoidance behaviours. The following findings emerged in this study:

- victimization by bullying behaviours and contributing to bullying behaviours were significant negative predictors of the psychosocial environment of the school,
- When a student who is victimized by or contributes to bullying behaviours, the student's perception of the psychosocial environment of the school is negative. There is a higher likelihood that he/she can react either aggressively by carrying a weapon or by skipping school or cutting class (p. 212).

The study in Free State province, South Africa by De Wet (2005) reports that direct and indirect bullying are the common forms of bullying many respondents experienced and witnessed. Learners were usually bullied by members of the same gender and boys were not the only perpetrators of bullying. Girls were also found to be perpetrators. There was also evidence of physical violence during bullying. In the study, 13 girls interviewed were injured by members of the same gender. Boys reported they were kicked and beaten by other boys on regular basis.

## **2. 5 Schooling as violence?**

There is a significant body of research that has explored the theory of 'schooling as violence' (Herr & Anderson, 2003; Harber, 2002; Abello, 1997). Herr & Anderson (2003) argue that social norms of dominant groups, for example, the middle class are imposed through social institutions such as the school. This represents a form of symbolic violence.. Other examples of symbolic violence can be seen in the differential treatment of children from different backgrounds, different constructions of parents, the authoritarian organization of schooling, a culture of control and regulation, authoritarian teaching methods that instil fear of failure. This sub-section below will discuss some of these issues.

### **2.5.1. Authoritarian organization of the school**

Harber (2002) shows that the origins of mass schooling as a form of social control means that the predominant form of schooling internationally has always been authoritarian with learners having little control or power over school curriculum or organization, and are seen as the recipients of knowledge and instructions. The main characters of the authoritarian relationships is the perceived right of teachers to punish, to control and order in the traditional school setting. Abello (1997) found that the various kinds of verbal and physical violence directed at pupils in schools are characterized by authoritarian forms of school organization in Columbia. A further example is the use of corporal punishment in schools internationally, for instance, in Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho (Tafa, 2002; de Wet; 2007; Morrell, 2002). Corporal punishment or caning is the most ritualized form of physical punishment violence against pupils (Harber, 2002). Human Rights watch (2001) reports that in Kenya violence is a regular part of the school experience. Teachers use caning, slapping and whipping to maintain classroom discipline and to punish pupils for poor academic performance. Authoritarisation in schools and classrooms and the attendant use of violent punishment is not only contravention of the human rights of children but has negative consequences for society as a whole.

Harber (2004) mentions that the problem of violence is worse with a large number of pupils which suggests that the impersonal nature of the large institutions contributes to deterioration in interpersonal relations and feelings for self-esteem of the

pupils. Student's frustration may be expressed as violence towards a teacher. Ross-Epp (1996) cited by Harber (2002) states that systematic violence begins with the expectation that all students of similar ages should and can learn the same things. Children are placed with large groups of similarly aged students and teachers are forced to adopt methods of control and routine that would be better if left to the military.

### **2.5.2. School rules**

In schools children are controlled by rules and regulations. Harber (2002) explains that in the UK students are monitored in their coming and going, they are required to carry hall passes, and must ask for permission when they want to leave the room. Their activities are directed and timed and their learning is scheduled into periods of work followed by breaks. He continues and points out that this kind of school's regime requires that there must be rules and processes of punishment which rely on different power relations. In many schools children do not have the freedom to develop on their own.

Save the Children (2007) noted in countries such as India, Mali, Lebanon, Mozambique, Pakistan, Mongolia, Ethiopia and Peru, that it could be damaging for children to be in schools. Children in schools develop emotionally, physically and mentally by being rendered passive and having to spend hours each day in a crowded room under the control of an individual who punishes them for moving or speaking.

### **2.5.3. Authoritarian teaching methods**

Authoritarian teaching methods in schools are another example of symbolic violence in schools. Watkins (1999) cited in Harber (2002) reports that authoritarian teaching methods and the consequent fear of punishment and humiliation are the main causes of non-attendance at schools in Cambodia, Pakistan and Mozambique. The teaching methods require children to be passive recipients of knowledge which involves frontal teaching and hours of inactivity and sitting silent. Fullan (1991) found that schools in Canada evidenced a theme he calls 'the alienation theme'. The study revealed that students were critical of a lack of communication, dialogue, participation and engagement in the process of learning. The students had little sense of identity or

belonging in the schooling contexts. Rooth (2000) argues that for children to develop intellectually they have to engage in learning which allows participation and empowerment. All these cultures in schools reflect unequal power relations (Harber, 2002). Unequal relations of power within schools becomes more effective when carried out through pedagogical actions.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The literature reviewed gives evidence of experiences of violence in schools local and internationally. Studies show that violence in schools is complex and multifaceted, and can often be rendered invisible. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology and design.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research methodology of the study, and the design which includes the context and sampling, conceptual framework, data collection methods, data analysis and the ethical considerations.

### **3.2. Research Design**

In this research a qualitative approach was used. Qualitative research collects rich descriptive data in respect of the phenomenon with the intention of developing an understanding of what is being studied (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Lauer (2006) contends that in qualitative research, the data are narrative descriptions. Thus the richness of data in qualitative research permits a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under study. Best and Kahn (2003) show that qualitative research offers a chance for conducting exploratory and descriptive research which uses the context or setting in a search for a deeper understanding of the person(s) being studied. Qualitative research relies on the meanings, concepts, context and descriptions.

Nieuwenhuis (2007) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003) define qualitative research as the study of things in their natural settings and of phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them. Best and Kahn (2003) describe qualitative research as studying real-world situations in a natural setting, and being nonmanipulative and noncontrolling. Qualitative research describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions. Thus qualitative researchers collect data by interacting with selected persons in their setting and by obtaining relevant documents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that the only way to find out or understand how human beings interpret phenomenon is to attempt to get deeper to the essence of the phenomenon, and that is possible through qualitative approach. Qualitative researchers look at the individuals in their natural settings and try to understand meanings that people give to their deeds. This means that qualitative

researchers collect data in the field where participants live and experience the problem under study. They do not bring participants into a laboratory nor do they send out the instruments for collecting data for individuals to complete. I chose qualitative research in order to gain an understanding of learners' experiences of and interpretations of violence as it happens in their school setting.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) show that qualitative research also uses various methods of collecting data and the use of multiple methods reflects an attempt to get an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in question. Then the researcher reviews all the data, makes sense of it and organizes it into categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources (Creswell, 2009). In this study, I used different methods of collecting data in order to have in-depth information about violence in that school.

This study adopted a qualitative case study design. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 75) case study research is a "systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest." Picciano (2004) points out that a case study can be used to explore, to describe, and to explain a phenomenon. This means that the purpose of a case study is to examine in detail a specific activity, event, organization or people.

Stake (2003) shows that in a case study the assumption is that a phenomenon is investigated as a 'bounded system'. Henning et al., (2004) argue that the unity of the system depends on what the researcher wants to find out and the unit of the analysis directs the boundaries of the case. The unit of analysis may be a person, a family, a social group, a social institution or a community (Best & Kahn, 2003). In the present study, the 'bounded system' was the school context, and the unit of analysis was a group of learners.

Case study research is descriptive, and therefore involves describing and interpreting events, conditions and situations that are occurring (Picciano, 2004). The exploration and description of a case takes place through multiple ways of collecting data involving sources of information that are rich in context such as interviews, documentation and observation. In this study, two kinds of interview, individual interviews and focus group interviews were used. Documents were also one of the data sources.



### **3.2.1 Conceptual framework**

This study had a conceptual framework - the concept was the notion of 'school violence'. This notion has been discussed in some length in chapter two..

### **3.2.2. The school context**

The research was conducted in a secondary school in the southern part of Lesotho at Qacha's Nek district. The school is a co-educational church school in the rural area. The school was a boarding school. At the time of research, however, the boarding facilities at the school were closed down. The reason being that a strike by learners ended in violence and vandalism. The school has five hundred and sixty-nine learners and twenty-two teachers. In this school, like many secondary schools in Lesotho, the majority of learners are from poor families.

### **3.2.3 Sampling**

In order to obtain rich data, a purposeful sampling technique was used to select the school. Purposive sampling means that the context and participants are selected because of certain defining characteristics that make them the holders of data needed for the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Suter, 2006). In this study, the particular school was chosen because of its reputation for violence. I am a teacher in Lesotho and I am aware of incidents of violence in this school. The participants in the study were adolescents between ages 13-17 years from Form C, D and E ( Grade 10, 11 and 12). There were 15 learners (8 boys and 7 girls) selected randomly but stratified by gender.

### **3.2.4 Data production techniques**

The data collection techniques were the interview and document analysis. Semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interviews were conducted with learners. The interview is a social, interpersonal encounter not merely a data collection tool. Therefore, the researcher has to conduct the interview carefully and sensitively (Cohen et al., 2007). The interview method involves questioning or discussing issues with people. The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in someone's mind (Best

& Kahn, 2003). In an interview the researcher is in a sense also a research instrument as the effectiveness of the interview is based on interaction and communication.

The documents in the study included minutes of meetings, and school policy documents and school regulations.

#### ***3.2.4.1 Individual semi structured interview***

Semi-structured interviews were used to generate information from students. The advantages of the semi-structured interviews is that it enables probing and clarification of issues. Semi-structured interviews have the ability to gather descriptive data from a few participants who have the knowledge of the phenomenon. The aim is to obtain rich descriptive data to understand the participants' construction of their experiences and social reality (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The interviews were conducted during the weekends in the staffroom. The interviews were conducted in Sesotho, the language which learners understand better than English. This was done to allow learners to express their views without language constraints. The individual interviews took 45 minutes to an hour depending on how quick the respondent understood and answered the questions. Seidman (1998) points an hour can be considered a standard unit of time for individual interviews.

Flick (2006) argues that the success of interviews depend on the interviewer competence in asking questions. In this study, I piloted the interview questions in order to gain competence in researching with young learners.

I was very aware that the study dealt with a sensitive and personal issue which had the possibility of evoking emotions. I paid attention for non-verbal cues that may suggest that learners were uncomfortable with aspects of the discussion. However, I found no evidence of emotional trauma in any of the learners who agreed to participate in the study..

Fifteen learners were interviewed individually. Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed. Hand written notes were taken on non-verbal response. The transcribed interviews were translated into English.

The use of the audio-tape resulted in problems for the study. Certain learners refused to participate in the interviews if their responses were audio-taped. As Bell

(2005) highlighted the researcher should not assume that all the participants will be willing for their responses to be recorded. I assured learners that the audio-tapes would be treated with the strictest confidentiality and used only by me for the purpose of the research. There were a few learners who were not convinced and refused to participate in the study. To add to the complexity, I collected my data at the time when there was a Commission of Inquiry in the school investigating a recent learner strike. I gathered that some learners did not trust me as they thought I was part of the commission.

#### ***3.2.4.2. Focus group interviews***

Two focus group interviews were conducted. Key issues that arose in the individual interviews were raised with learners for discussion. The focus group interview is based on the assumption that group interaction will be effective in widening the range of responses and activating forgotten details of experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007). In the focus group interview, a social environment is created to enable group members to be stimulated by one another's perceptions and ideas. This can increase the quality and richness of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). I employed this technique to encourage open discussion about violence and also to complement the individual interviews. Focus group interview enabled the participants to answer questions freely. There were two focus groups with seven learners in the group of girls and eight in the group of boys as learners were divided according to gender. I separated boys and girls to ensure open and free discussion, in particular experiences of violence girls against boys and vice versa. The interviews were audio-taped, later transcribed and translated into English. The questions were asked in Sesotho to allow learners to express themselves without language constraints.

#### ***3.2.4.3 Document analysis***

Documents were another data generation technique which I used. Document analysis as a research instrument entails reading and analyzing written and visual documents. Documents are a major source of data in qualitative research and can help the researcher to uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Best & Kahn, 2003). Duffy (2005) shows that documentary

analysis can also be used to supplement information obtained by other methods. It can be central or even exclusive method of research. According to Flick (2002, p. 246) “documents are standardized artifacts, in so far as they typically occur in particular formats: as notes, case reports, contracts, drafts, death certificates, remarks, diaries.” Henning et al. (2004) show that when documents are used as a method along with other methods, documents are collected as entities of data and they follow the same route through analysis and interpretation. In this study I was able to access from the school the records of critical incidents of violence that participants reported to staff, records of reports of incidents of violence, minutes of parents’ meetings, and school policy documents and school regulations.

### **3.2.5 Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis aims at examining the meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). It tries to establish how participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon by analyzing their understandings, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences.

Data were analyzed using content analysis (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell, 2009). This involved studying and coding the data, noting similarities, differences, relationships, and categorising these into patterns or categories of meaning. Babbie and Mouton (2001) make a distinction between coding the manifest content - the visible, surface content; and the latent content, that is, its underlying meaning. This is the approach I followed in the study. Throughout I was informed by my research questions, my conceptual framework and the literature I studied. Broad themes that emerged from this process are presented and discussed in the next chapter.

### **3.2.6 Trustworthiness**

Validity is the key to effective research (Cohen et al., 2007; Flick, 2006). The following have been identified as the dimensions which increase trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2007). Credibility is enhanced by member checking of data, persistent observation and prolonged engagement in the field. Transferability refers to the

researcher's ability to make explicit the nature of the participants and setting to enable comparison by other researchers. In this study, I have given a clear in-depth description of the research design so that others can decide on the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other situation. Dependability refers to the degree to which the researcher can achieve rich and detailed description that shows how certain actions and opinions are rooted in and develop out of contextual interactions. In this research, an audio-tape was used to capture all the data during interviews. Transcription of the information was presented to the participants for verification – this was a form of member checking. Thick, descriptive data was obtained through individual interviews and focus group interviews. The study involved prolonged engagement in the school setting, it took me two weeks to do the interviews in that school. There were multiple methods of generating data in the study.

### **3.3 Ethical considerations**

Maree and van de Westhuizen (2007) explain that an important ethical aspect is the issue of confidentiality regarding participants' identities and the data that emerges in the study. Confidentiality, anonymity, caring and fairness are the key principles to protect the rights of research participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Cohen et al., (2007) state that informed consent involves comprehension, competence, voluntarism and access to full information. If the participant is a minor, consent should be sought from parents or guardians. The consent process involved multiple levels.

- The Senior Education Officer in the Qacha's Nek district in Lesotho. The purpose of the research was fully explained to him.
- The principal of the school to obtain permission to conduct the research at his school.
- The participants of the study were the learners, therefore permission to interview them was obtained from the parents, I translated the letter requesting permission from parents to interview learners into sesotho to assist in understanding of the letter. Fortunately I did not meet challenges see appendix Db (p. 73).

- Informed consent was obtained from the learners. Care was taken to give children a credible and meaningful explanation about the underlying intentions of the research. Children were told that their participation was voluntary and that they had the power to end participation at any time during the research, without negative or undesirable consequences to them. They were also assured that all information obtained from them would be handled with the strictest confidentiality, used only for the purposes of the study, and that their anonymity would be maintained.
- Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Office, University of KwaZulu-Natal. The ethical clearance number is: HSS/0107/09M.

### **3.4 Limitations of the study**

I did not use reviewers to assess whether the English version was a valid translation of Sesotho and that may have impacted the rigour of the research.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the research design and methodology and the specific methods of data collection in response to the questions about the experiences of learners on violence in a secondary school. The sample and the method of inquiry that the study has adopted have been presented and justified. The chapter also reported on the ethical issues and the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness. The next chapter will present the research findings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The study explored learners' experiences of violence at their school. The research questions were:

- How do learners experience and interpret violence at their school?
- Are the learners' experiences of violence gendered?

In this chapter, I will focus on the complex and multiple ways in which learners experienced violence at the school.

In the study, three themes emerged which provided insight into how learners interpret violence. These are: webs of violence; schooling as violence and violence as gendered phenomenon. Each of the themes will be discussed in sections below.

### **4.2 Webs of Violence**

#### **4.2.1 Introduction**

Morrell (2002) argues that the phenomenon of violence in schools exists in South Africa. It comes in different forms and impacts on teachers, learners, parents and the schools themselves. Violence is complex because it happens in multiple forms and affects different people in different ways. Morrison (2001) shows that violence casts a web of harm that captures the victims, offenders and their communities. For offenders, there is often a continuity of aggressive and dominating behaviours over time. Victims carry with them the emotional scars from suffering the long term effects of perpetual victimhood. Both victims and offenders experience being alienated from the communities in which they live in their own ways. Different people use violence for various reasons including for the exercise of power and to solve conflicts.

All the participants in the study experienced violence either as witnesses or targets. Physical violence experienced involved fighting and bullying. Some of the fights in this school could be attributed to the demonstration of hegemonic masculinity because the perpetrators of violence are male, both teachers and learners. According to Kenway &

Fitzclarence (1997, p. 121) “hegemonic masculinity mobilises around physical strength, adventurousness, emotional neutrality, certainty, control, assertiveness, self-reliance, individuality, competitiveness, instrumental skills, public knowledge, discipline, reason, objectivity and rationality.” Assertiveness may be associated with aggression, toughness with the physical beating of others and bravery to cruelty. Dunne et al., (2004) argue that violence is perpetrated more often by boys and on both girls and other boys, for example, on boys who do not conform to dominant norms of masculinity or on girls who are not sufficiently modest and retiring in their feminine demeanour. The participants in the study mentioned that boys fight with other boys using knives and stones. It was also evident that when boys are at the sports ground they fight with other boys as they cannot accept defeat. Male teachers fight physically over their responsibilities such as being a coach or trainer. The following section explores the different ways in which learners in this school experience physical violence.

#### **4.2.2 Solving problems with aggression**

Nadasan (2004) defines aggression as,

*Any act or behaviour that involves, might involve and/or to some extent can be considered as aiming the infliction of injury or discomfort; also manifestations of inner reactions such as feelings or thoughts that can be considered to have such aims are regarded as aggression responses (p. 9).*

Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) shows that aggression is instinctive, and violence occurs because in some individuals the aggressive drive is abnormally strong. Aggressiveness in school can be motivated by the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinities. Morrell (2001) in a study conducted in South Africa found that masculinity among black boys and men has been shaped by power. This spills over into school, and this exercising of male power promotes dominance and supports a particular form of masculinity. This makes males to be aggressive when solving conflicts.

In the present study, physical fighting was a common experience. The findings showed that learners fought for different reasons and the fights involved



individual against individual and group against group. When relating their experiences of violence, they mentioned that stones and knives were the main weapons used for fighting. A female learner in Form C, who had been in the school for three years, was asked to describe the experiences of violence in school. She responded,

*“Students fight against each other especially boys, they stab each other with knives, and for instance last year a boy insulted another boy. The other responded with an insult then he kicked him on the face. The opponent had a knife, he took it and stabbed him at the back and he was taken to hospital. He recovered.” (Learner A, Form C, female).*

A male learner responded,

*“I experienced physical violence because I once fought at school with another student. We had different opinions over the match played by our team and that developed into conflict. I had not planned to fight him it happened out of anger. I kicked him several times he tried to do the same. I threw him down and when he was down I kneeled on him and beat him with the fists. Other boys reported this to the boarding master who stopped us. My opponent was injured and there was blood on his body and he was taken to the hospital. I was taken to the disciplinary committee and was suspended for a week and my parents paid for the medical expenses.” (Learner H, Form C, male).*

A male learner interviewed indicated that learners in this school use violence and aggression to solve their problems in the school.

*“When students were not satisfied with food which was served to them, they got angry and threw stones at teachers’ houses, doors and windows were broken, they also broke kitchen store.” (Learner I, Form C, male).*

Stones, knives and sticks are the main weapons used to fight because they are weapons available to the students.

There were other accounts of learners resorting to violence to solve conflicts. A sixteen-year girl in Form C related a case of two boys who fought over money which they found on their way home from school. They could not agree on who saw the money first and how to share the money. She mentioned that they argued until they fought physically. The response of a male learner interviewed about causes of violence suggests that violence stems from poor problem solving in situations of conflict,

*“Difference in opinion causes violence; for instance, if we are in the television room one want to watch soccer and the other wants to watch the movie, and if none of us is willing to make a sacrifice -that is where the problem starts. They would quarrel until that result into a physical fight.” (Learner B, female, Form C).*

Male learners in this school also used collective violence, that is, actions of violence are group related. In one incident recounted, boys from the school fought with boys from another school because they could not accept that they had been fairly defeated in sports tournament. A female learner related it in this way,

*“While we went at the sports tournament at the district level the boys from our school fought with the boys from another school. The reason was that our soccer team was defeated. Boys from our school threw stones at boys from the other school. They responded by throwing stones everywhere. Girls and teachers tried to run away but there was no place to hide.*

*Many people including teachers and girls were injured; the police came and stopped the fight.”* (Learner, Form E, female).

According to Wrangham & Wilson (2004) collective violence is more destructive than personal violence as individual members participating in a group feel less responsible for their activities. They commit greater destruction because they believe that they are acting in the name of a higher cause such as loyalty to certain group. The use of physical violence to resolve individual status competitions is an important predictor of collective violence at the gang level (Wrangham & Wilson, 2004).

#### **4.2.3 The discourse of blame**

Poggenpoel & Myburgh (2007) in a study undertaken in South Africa reported that learners use defence mechanisms in the context of violence such as repression of inner feelings, rationalism about other individuals’ aggression, and denying responsibility for own behaviour. In a similar pattern, the data in the present study suggests that learners in this school blame other people for acts of violence they perpetrate. For instance, in one incident when learners found that the principal was not acting to improve meals at the school, learners decided to go on strike. During this incident learners destroyed teachers’ houses on the school premises. Most learners blamed the violent acts of learners that ensued on the staff at the school.

According to a female learner in Form D,

*“Students threw stones at the houses of teachers and broke the windows and door. They were not satisfied with food which they were given, as they were paying a lot of money in the school fees.”* (Learner I, Form D, female).

In the female focus group interviews, a learner justified the violent actions of learners during the strike,

*“Violence is the proper way of responding to violence because for a long time learners told the principal that we are given*

*little food and we also asked him to improve the quality of menu, serve us mince meat. In order to force the principal to respond, boys had to go on strike.” (Learner, female focus group).*

In another incident recounted, boys at the school engaged in violence directed at villagers and learners from another school. However, in the responses of participants it was evident that learners accorded blame to the villagers who beat a player from their school:

*“Our school hosted a sports tournament at school cluster level. We won soccer match against a team which had high ambitions to reach the district level tournaments. Losing the game against us had made them to fail. Two of their supporters beat our best soccer player who scored two goals with a whip. This led to a physical fight. Many from both sides were injured.” (Learner I, Form C, male).*

People who blame other people for their actions or circumstance say that they were made to commit acts of violence instead of acknowledging that they had a choice about how to respond to the situation and failed to choose wisely, according to Simon (2009). This highlights the complexity of violence as victims and perpetrators experience and interpret violent acts in multiple ways. Blaming the other can be viewed as a defence mechanism. Gouws, Kruger & Burger (2000) assert that “these defence mechanisms enable learners to safeguard themselves against anything that poses a threat to them including experienced aggression” (p. 79).

#### **4.2.4 Violence breeds violence: the case of teachers**

In an interview with learners it was revealed that fighting is not the problem of learners alone, and that even teachers fight physically. Studies have shown that often

school violence breeds school violence (for example, de Wet, 2007; Humphreys, 2008; Bhana, 2005). It is likely that where teachers fight in school, learners may emulate teachers who serve as poor role models. Bhana (2002) in a study conducted at a primary school in South Africa suggests that violence on the part of learners may be associated with the culture of violence in the school as a whole. Corporal punishment was rife at the school.

In the present study, it was found that violence perpetrated by teachers occurred often. A female learner explained an incident she had witnessed,

*“Two male teachers quarrelled while at the shebeen in the village, when they reached the school premises they fought. Both had knives but were stopped before they could use them because a student staying at teachers’ residences went to report to the security guard who stopped them.”* (Learner F, Form D, female).

Maxwell, Enslin and Maxwell (2004) argue that children growing up in the community of violence are at risk of developmental harm. For those children, the consequences may be emotional trauma, fear, violence and hatred. Stavrou (1992, p. 13-14) identifies six emotional and behavioural consequences of children’ exposure to violence. These are:

- Lack of ability to trust and to love
- Loss of self-esteem and feelings of personal power
- Dehumanization and desensitization
- Adoption of culture of violence
- Children becoming violent
- Self-destruction behaviour

The above research suggests that learners in this school may engage in acts of violence as they have poor role models.

#### 4.2.5 Power, complicity and resistance: the case of bullying

Learners interviewed mentioned that in this school new learners experience bullying in the school from returning learners. It is viewed as the ‘socialization’ of the new learners. The study revealed that new learners are often beaten and made to run errands for the older learners. This kind of ‘socialization’ is perpetrated by both boys and girls. Harber (2004) reports that authoritarian forms of socialization in the community or society seem to play a major part in increasing the likelihood of violent behaviour through imitation and the legitimating of that behaviour. De Wet (2005), in her study conducted in a secondary school in South Africa, found that victims were generally bullied by learners in a higher grade rather than by learners in lower grades. In the current study, senior learners forced junior learners to perform personal tasks, among others they had to wash senior learners’ shirts and socks. If they refused they were beaten up.

In the present study, a female learner recounted her experience of bullying,

*“I was once a perpetrator of violence because at the beginning of this year I forced the Form A students to wash my clothes. In the case of those who refused I beat up them but in most cases they did what I wanted them to do because I am a senior to them and a friend to the matron.”*(Learner B, female, Form E).

According to Nadasan (2004) bullies are aware of what they are doing and the act of violence is a planned one. Bullies know how to oppress a vulnerable individual, and continue to do it in order to achieve personal satisfaction. In the present study, the analysis of school records indicated that acts of bullying were a challenge for teachers. In the minutes of a staff meeting held in February 2009 teachers reported that Form A students were victims of bullying. Teachers discussed ways to address the problem. The kind of bullying recorded at this school was direct bullying. It included physical aggression and the use of offensive words as in the study by de Wet (2005). Bullying of new learners in this school could be attributed to unequal power relations whereby older learners used their age and the number of years they had been at the school as a source of power. Field (1999) cited in Nadasan (2004) explains that the issue of power is a central concept in bullying. Bullying is abuse of power. Bullies often report feeling powerful and

justified in their actions (Baumeister, 2001; Bullock, 2002). De Wet (2005) explains that imbalance of power between the bullies and the victims. The victims are powerless and often cannot defend themselves. The pattern of bullying in the school in the present study reflects that the main intention is to dominate others who are weaker or less powerful.

In the present study, it was found that learners in this school do not only bully new learners in their school, they also bully learners from other schools. One incident reported by learners occurred on a bus trip with learners from another school.

*“When we went for an athletic competition at the district level, we had a shared bus trip with a nearby school; we were using the same bus to reduce transport cost. The boys from our school forced the boys from the other school to stand in the bus. One of them refused and that resulted in the fight that involved the whole group.”* (Learner E, Form E, male).

The above incident suggests that learners used collective bullying. According to Besag (1994) collective bullying involves incidents in which one or two individuals trigger an initial attack or when a mob forms in a casual fashion to perpetrate a violent act due to a promise of excitement.

### **4.3 Schooling as Violence: Interrogating the Impact**

In the present study, learners revealed that they experience corporal punishment at the school and that it is used to maintain order, discipline, and ensure that learners abide by the harsh school regulations. This issue will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

#### **4.3.1. Violence in the form of corporal punishment**

Humphreys (2008) defines corporal punishment in the school context as the sanctioned and unsanctioned physical punishment of a student or students by teachers or the head teacher of a school for disciplinary purposes. Corporal punishment includes caning a learner for breach of school regulations. A broader definition is given by Morrell

(2001) who states that corporal punishment includes physical labour, such as cleaning pit latrines or non-physical punishment such as kneeling on the floor or standing in the front of the class. A school culture that sanctions corporal punishment will most likely impart messages about violent attitudes and behaviours to children. Children often imitate the behaviour of adults in society's institutions as they are powerful models (Bandura, 1986). The socialisation of learners in school that integrates corporal punishment leads learners to adopt the aggressive behaviours displayed by their teachers. Using corporal punishment to discipline children sends a message to learners that it is acceptable to adopt the violent behaviours they witness. This kind of behaviour displayed by teachers can also develop and reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Kenway & Fitzclarence (2001) contends that aggressive and violent masculinities arise in schools with harsh and authoritarian disciplinary systems.

In the present study, learners mentioned that they experienced violence in the form of corporal punishment. In this school, corporal punishment is used to enforce discipline and maintain a culture of learning. A male participant in boys' focus group interview reported,

*“When I am beaten by teachers I feel happy because that will help me in correcting mistakes so that next time I will be able to perform better especially if it concerns bad academic performance”* (Learner , male focus group).

A female learner reported,

*“I have experienced physical violence at the school. One of the teachers beat me in the classroom because I did not answer the question, but I did not know the answer to that question she was asking. She used a big stick which she usually carries to class to beat us.”*(Learner B, Form E, female).



A female learner in the focus group interview recounted her experience of violence perpetrated by teachers,

*“Teachers...they beat us when we have made mistakes, and even when we have not made a mistake.”* (Learner B, Form E, female).

Tafa (2002) argues that the use of the cane in a school is the most tangible symbol of an authoritarian school regime. In a similar vein, Noguera (1997) asserts that in schools the exercise of discipline in the form of caning is seen as primary means through which symbols of power and authority are reinforced. At school in the present study, teachers used caning, slapping and whipping to maintain classroom discipline, and to punish learners for poor academic performance. Humphreys (2008) found in her study conducted in Botswana that certain male learners interviewed were of the view that corporal punishment was acceptable provided that it was administered fairly, and for reasonable offences.

However, the overall findings in the present study suggests that corporal punishment used in the teaching and learning context was viewed as unfair and unjust by learners. For example, the school policy laid down that learners could not use ‘Sesotho’, their mother tongue, as a medium of communication in the school. The following excerpts from the school language policy document indicate exclusionary policy and practices at the school. The findings revealed that punishment meted out for contravention of the school language policy is often of a violent nature.

*“Lesotho and Basotho are part of the bigger world and it is therefore very important that young people at school learn to speak and write well at least one international language. Moreover, all internal and external tests and examination (except Sesotho) are set in English.”*

*“All students are therefore expected to speak in English at all times, whenever on school compound or during any school activity outside school. Those who break this rule shall be punished at the end of every school day.”*

(Hareeng High School, School Regulations, 2003)

The prefects are required to write down the names of those learners they observe communicating in ‘Sesotho’. In the afternoon assembly, all the offenders are punished and the main punishment is in the form of caning. One female learner reported the following during a focus group interview,

*“There is a lot of violence in this school; you may find that a learner may be beaten by many teachers at the assembly after school. It is likely that a learner receives fifteen strokes for speaking Sesotho “(Learner, female focus group interview).*

Humphreys (2008) in her study in Botswana found that both prefects and class monitors report the wrongdoers to the staff so they could be punished, often with a cane. The main task of the prefects is to write the names of those who break the regulations so that they are identified for beatings. In the present study a similar pattern was evident. The duty of the prefects was to write down the names of those who contravened the school regulations so that those identified as offenders are punished by beatings at the end of afternoon assembly. A critical concern is that teachers and school leaders do not seem to understand that corporal punishment is a violation of a learner’s human rights. Alternate ways of disciplining learners does not seem to be on the school’s agenda. Dunne et al. (2004) argue that often schools as institutions normalize violence through control mechanisms embedded in regulations and policies. Learners voices suggest that this is the case in the school in the present study.

#### **4.3.2. School’s response to violence: a cycle of violence?**

High-level school violence, for example, possession and use of weapons, severe physical attacks, results in implementation of zero tolerance policies and procedures, such as locker searches, security personnel and expulsion in many schools internationally (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008). In the school in the present study, the response to violence seems rather exclusionary, and could be viewed as a form of structural violence in that school policy may be denying learners their right to education – which is a basic human right (Sandkull, 2005). Whenever learners have engaged in the acts of violence they are either expelled or suspended from the school for some time. The school as an institution is thus perpetrating a form of violence against learners. A female learner explained,

*“The board of governors is called in to the school for serious cases of violence which always results in expulsion and or suspension.”* (Learner D, Form C, female).

One female learner lamented that the school fails to seek alternative strategies to respond to violence and that there is a zero tolerance policy,

*“The student that is always engaged in violence and has been reported several times is sent to the disciplinary committee which has the authority to expel that student from the school.”*  
(Learner C, Form E, female).

Another learner voiced his concern that reported that learners from poor families who were expelled often dropped out of school because they could not continue schooling if they had no access to boarding facilities,

*Yes, some students are from poor families while others are orphans; the boarding facilities are closed to them. It becomes expensive for them to attend a day school. It is painful because these students still want to attend school.”*  
(Learner H, Form C, male).

The strategy of expulsion and suspension as the way of dealing with violence is documented in the minutes of the school's disciplinary committee meetings and in the minutes of staff meetings. Expulsion and suspension of learners as part of dealing with violence in the school can be viewed as part of the hidden curriculum, a form of symbolic violence that helps to perpetuate patriarchal dominance (Stoudt, 2006). It teaches learners that violence is punished by violence. This may perpetuate a vicious circle of violence because outside the school dropouts may be vulnerable to more violence as victims or perpetrators. This kind of response to violence which was reported to be applied by the school under study is contrary to the Lesotho Education Amendment Bill of 1995 which made primary education free and compulsory, and legislated to protect children from arbitrary suspension, expulsion and institutionalised violence (Ministry of Education, 1995). The school is obviously not seeking more sound strategies to deal with violence.

#### **4. 4. Violence as a Gendered Phenomenon**

School based gender violence is often associated with everyday institutional structures and practices and sexualized encounters in the school context (Dunne et al, 2006). It includes gender violence perpetrated by learners on other learners, by teachers on students and students on teachers. According to Dunne et al (2006) gender relations and boundaries within the school as an institution are part of the hidden curriculum through which feminine and masculine identities are constructed and reinforced.

Mitchell (2005) reports that the recent 'Dossier of shame' report carried out by five non-government organizations (NGOs) on sexual violence in and around schools in South Africa, showed evidence of rape of children by male teachers, as well as sexual abuse of female learners, some as young as six years, by gangs of boys.

##### **4. 4. 1. 'Boys will be boys' discourse: examining the problem**

The discourse of 'boys will be boys' is rooted in the ways in which boys are socialized to express and defend their masculinities. Often parents, community members, teachers and peers perpetuate the widely accepted belief that boys should dominate and control. Klein (2006) argues that sexual violence by boys emanates from the 'boys discourse' in which they are taught to express and defend their masculinity through

domination. Leach and Humphreys (2007) contend that the social practices of school operate within and serve to sustain a gender regime which promotes aggressive masculinities and compliant femininities while discouraging other ways of being.

Violence by males against females most commonly takes the form of rape and sexual abuse, domestic violence, verbal and physical harassment (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Klein, 2006). In the present study, the data provide evidence of male learners being violent towards girls. Learners explained that some of the reasons included situations where girls refused to have relationships with boys, and the rejection by a female learner of sexual advances made by a boy. A learner explained,

*“Boys insult girls when they refuse to fall in love with them, after evening study they would pour water on them or burn grass and force girls to jump over that fire. Boys would also force us to kiss them and sometimes they would touch us on the buttocks especially after evening studies when we return to the residence.”* (Learner A, Form E, female).

Klein (2006) argues that when boys are rejected or otherwise frustrated by girls whom they are supposed to dominate this may lead to gender violence. Social pressure to have power over women is related to normalized masculinity expectations. Boys perceive the experience of rejection by girls as the unbearable reversal of traditional roles; therefore, they may resort to the use of violence and aggression. This was the case in the present study.

#### **4.4.2. Complexity of sexual harassment in schools**

The complex ways in which sexual violence is experienced, constructed and interpreted is evident in the reporting of a case of sexual violence by two learners (Refer to Box 1).

*Box 1: Sexual violence: learner interpretations of critical incident*

*“A friend of mine left the school because she was raped by a group of boys; she told me that there were four boys. She told me that after the night function, a ‘dance’ at school, as she was going to the dormitory, she was among the last to leave the hall, she met four boys. They actually stood on the way. She had earlier refused a love proposal from one of them. She told me that other students saw the rape but no one came to her rescue” (Learner F, Form C, female)*

*“It happened that one girl was gang raped by a group of boys. She was a girl who was popular, she would sing and dance in the hall, she was not shy, and she wore fashionable clothes. Boys in our school think that kind of a girl is sexually active and has many boyfriends. But she did not have those characteristics. They trapped her after the night dance at the school and raped her. I do not really know what was done by the teachers but she is not at school now” (Learner H, Form C, male).*

The critical incident above suggests perpetrators and most likely the onlookers who chose not to act were of the view that the victim was acting against the standard norms of the society whereby girls are expected to be quiet, submissive and not outgoing. The fact that she behaved contrary to the norm constructed her as loose and sexually active. Burton (2008) states that the link between participation, empowerment of women, and male violence are complex, and there is evidence that violence against women increases in intensity where gender relations are being transformed and male privilege is challenged.

A complex dimension of the above incident is the fact that certain learners chose not to act or intervene. This is similar to the case which was of a 15 year old girl who was raped in Richmond, California, at a homecoming dance on a school campus.

More than twenty learners watched. None of them phoned the police, sought help, or intervened. There were some learners present who even took photographs. Van der Zande (2009) in her analysis of the incident explains that most gang rapes happen because the perpetrators have lost their capacity to be compassionate and become caught up in a group mentality that makes violence seem acceptable. Alcohol and/or drug abuse are almost always a part of these assaults. She argues that the bystander effect operates at many levels in this incident: learners may have been afraid, they may have been in disbelief, or they did not know what to do. At another level, leading up to the attack, teachers at the school knew that the particular area of the school campus was notorious yet there was no supervision. There was a history of sexual harassment of girls at the school and nothing was done about it. Learners were not taught skills on how to deal with sexual abuse both as a victim and bystander. Mirembe and Davies (2001) in their study conducted in Uganda found that neither female students nor female teachers reported sexual harassment and in some ways sexual harassment was seen as 'normal' and difficult to challenge. Thus they chose not to act. This could also mean that females have internalised violence and accept it as normal. Learners in the present study, including female learners, witnessed the attack and did not intervene. It may be that similar dynamics are being played out in the school in the present study.

Banyard, Plante and Moynihan (2005) undertook interesting research in the USA focusing on the 'bystander' drawing on broader literature from social and community psychology. In their paper, they present an evaluation of a bystander education programme. Results revealed that participants in the treatment conditions showed improvements across measures of attitudes, knowledge and behaviour while the control group did not, demonstrating the value of using a bystander approach to sexual violence prevention. The study was grounded in community models of change. Students learned from material and examples directly connected to their own community. This fits with principles in community psychology that highlight the need to make prevention messages directly relevant to the community with which one is working. Such studies have implications for interventions at school level.

Vogelman & Lewis (1993) explains that rape is one of the ways in which women are dehumanised, and it is an extension and a more extreme form of the broader

social oppression and subjugation to which women are subjected. Kenway & Fitzclarence (1997) asserts that there are many generally accepted social beliefs which develop a cultural tolerance of rape and other sorts of violence against women and girls. This could suggest that boys in this study engaged in acts of rape or harassment activities because of prevailing cultural beliefs. Rape like all forms of male violence against women, is connected to the broad socio-cultural milieu which reinforces and entrenches beliefs of male dominance, supremacy and aggression (Vogelman & Lewis, 1993). Rape is expression of power by male over females.

In analysing the above critical incident, it seems that boys could not accept rejection by the girl, and that a girl who is outgoing, confident and popular is constructed as promiscuous. Bhana (2005) suggests that this type of violence may be viewed as the violent expression of masculinity. De Wet (2007) argues that school violence in Lesotho is a manifestation of gender inequality and violence in society. Most often violence in Lesotho schools is perpetrated by boys. Harber (2004) suggests that violence is overwhelmingly a male problem, and the roots for this appear to be primarily social rather than biological highlighting the inadequacies of the socialization of male children.

#### **4.4.3. Male teachers as the perpetrators of sexual violence**

Internationally it has been found that some male teachers may be the perpetrators of sexual violence in schools (Jones, Moore, Villar-Marques & Broadbent, 2008; Leach & Humphreys, 2007; Timmerman, 2003). The Human Rights Watch (2001) and Leach and Humphreys (2007) revealed that within schools, male teachers are the perpetrators, either directly or indirectly by promising better grades or marks, money or dating relationships. Some male employees and visitors in schools have also been found to be perpetrators of sexual violence in schools. In a 2001 study by Human Rights Watch in South Africa, 37 rape survivors (7%) indicated that a school teacher or principal had raped them (Human Rights Watch, 2001)..

Learners in the present study alluded to sexual violence by teachers at the school. One of the male learners interviewed mentioned that learners are able to identify the girls who have refused sexual relationships with teachers and those who have had relationships with male teachers. Learners have observed male teachers' differential



treatment of girls with whom they have sexual relations and those who have rejected male teachers. Learner comments were as follows,

*“ If they refused the proposal from a teacher, teachers beat them up and reduce marks which makes them to agree to being abused by teachers ”* (Learner C, Form D, female).

*“Male teachers propose love to girls if they refuse their proposal, that girl will be beaten up several times and her grades will also be reduced or her work will be marked strictly. When the teacher makes examples related to bad behaviour she will use her name. For instance, if students arrive late in his class if the girl, Nthabiseng, has refused him is among those, the teacher would say “Nthabiseng you are teaching innocent students bad things.””* (Learner H, Form C, male).

The above excerpts allude to the harassment and humiliation meted out to girls who reject sexual advances from teachers. A report by Human Rights Watch (2001) based on research in South African schools suggests that in some cases female learners agree to satisfy teachers' sexual demand because of fear that they will be physically punished by the teachers if they reject teacher advances, and that teachers abuse their position of power by promising better marks and money in exchange to sex. Dunne et al. (2006) cites a study in Kenya by Omale (1999) which revealed that sexual harassment and incidents of rape of girls on the way from school by teachers. Teachers were found guilty of having sex with students and in some cases impregnating them. The critical concern is that female learners experience sexual violence from people who are supposed to be their role models and protectors.

#### **4.4.3 Gendered discipline**

Mirembe and Davies (2001) argue that often the school culture reinforces particular conceptions of what it means to be a girl or a boy through its policies and practices. In the present study, findings reveal that the way in which learners are disciplined in the school is often gendered. Many studies on corporal punishment have shown that boys are often beaten more severely and more harshly than girls in schools (for example, Morrell, 2001; Humphreys, 2008; Dunne et al., 2004; Dunne et al., 2006). According to Morrell (2001) perception in these schooling contexts is that the differential use of corporal punishment on boys and girls teaches boys to be tough and uncomplaining, and it teaches girls to be submissive and unquestioning. Humphreys (2008) in a study that explored corporal punishment in Botswana examined the Education Act of 1978 and found that it stated that corporal punishment should be used differently for boys and girls. In primary school, girls are not allowed to be beaten on the buttocks as boys are, but on the backs of their calves or on the palms of the hand. Similar findings emerged in studies by Humphreys (2008) and Morrell (2001).

In the present study, the general perception of learners was that boys are beaten harshly and that teachers adopt a more lenient attitude towards disciplining girls. A female learner drew attention to the issue of gendered discipline at the school;

*“Boys are beaten more than girls by teachers in the school. They are even beaten on the buttocks while girls are beaten on the palm of their hands.”* (Learner C, Form D, female).

A female learner explained unfair and differential discipline practices based on gender,

*“Violence is serious in the school because our teachers are not fair when disciplining the students, for instance, when the case is between a boy and a girl, the boy is given harsh punishment. When the girl is the one who is wrong, she is only given minor punishment. Thus boys take revenge or beat the*

*girls instead of reporting to the teachers.” (Learner C, Form D, female).*

The intersection of masculinities, gender and discipline was also evident in the data. If boys reported being harassed or insulted by girls, they would be derided by teachers for being weak. Boys are expected to be strong and to have the power to deal with harassment and intimidation from girls. Morrell (2001), in his 1998 study of corporal punishment in 16 government schools in the Durban area of South Africa, explored the connection between school beatings and constructions of masculinity. He concluded that violent hegemonic masculinity plays an important role in perpetuating the corporal punishment practice. It can be concluded that corporal punishment plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of a masculine authoritarian disciplinary system, which in turn, shapes gender and authoritarian relationships. Male learners had this to say about this issue,

*“When girls have insulted boys, and if they report it, teachers do not do anything instead they would laugh at the boys, and show him that they are not behaving like boys – the boys are told they are weak.” (Learner H, Form C, male).*

*“Sometimes if we have been insulted by a girl and you come to report it, teachers laugh at us. This is painful.” (Learner, male focus group two).*

The above excerpts support what Humphreys (2008) points out: that corporal punishment is integrally bound up with performances of masculine authority, enacted by both female and male teachers in relation to differing student masculinities and femininities.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented findings in the study, and has illuminated the key research questions. The findings are presented and discussed in the form of themes which

emerged from the data collected, those themes are web of violence, schooling as violence and violence as a gendered phenomenon. The final chapter will reflect on the findings, and draw some implications for intervention to address violence in schools and for developing socially just school cultures.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was motivated by the prevalence of violence in schools in the Qacha's Nek district in Lesotho. It sought to explore how secondary learners' experience violence as it occurs in their schools, and the gendered nature of violence in schools.

Violence is a problem in school under study and little is being done to address the problem. As observed by Brickmore (2007/2008) steep hierarchies divide in-groups from out-groups. Some students are placed at the pinnacle and others at the margins. The present study found that the pattern of violence is between learners who are newcomers to the schools and returning older learners, male learners against female learners, and teachers against learners. Violence takes place in different forms, including physical, emotional and sexual. The study revealed that the most obvious manifestation of violence is unequal power relations, and this is linked to domination, oppression and marginalization of vulnerable groups in a school. Young (1990) defines oppression as the disadvantages and injustices some people suffer in everyday practices of society, in this case schooling. Hardiman & Jackson (1997) suggest that oppression exists when one social group exploits another for its own benefit. They argue that oppression is a systematic phenomenon that involves ideological domination, institutional control and the promulgation of a dominant group's ideology of domination. This suggests that the dominant group has power to define and enact reality. The dominant group defines what is viewed as normal, real and acceptable. Bell (2007) explains that oppression operates through everyday practices that do not question the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules.

Bell (2007) contends that the dominant group can project its particular way of seeing social reality so successfully that its view is accepted as common sense, as part of the natural order, even by those who are in fact disempowered by it, for example, the victims of violence in schools. The study showed that most of the acts of violence in the schools are perpetrated by males targeting other males and females, and can be linked to the notion of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony is maintained through discourse embedded in ideas, texts, theories and language. The discourse of 'boys will be boys' encourages violence among males and domination of the other groups by males.

Brickmore (2007/2008) stresses that schools need to develop gender-equitable environments that encourage the social acceptance of non-violent expressions of masculinity, de-normalise aggression, and address human rights violations.

The issue is what is it that the school can do to combat the scourge of violence. One possible route may be the implementation of a peace education curriculum in schools. It can either be taught as a subject or be integrated in the existing subjects. Maxwell et al. (2004) report a study that introduced peace education at preschool level in 40 Methodist pre-schools. In the evaluation of the programme, it was found that peace education has the ability to reduce learner aggression and increase in pro-social behaviour. Dovey (1996) argues that peace education has the potential to help learners develop self-confidence and an understanding of themselves and others. It can develop mutual respect, tolerance and appreciation of difference. It can develop learner ability to take responsibility for their actions and become equipped to deal with conflict in constructive ways. Carl and Swartz (1996, p.2) asserts that “educating for peace is an educational process aimed at instilling in people essential values, attitudes, knowledge and skills which enable them to resolve conflict”. Implementation of peace education may be effective in reducing depressing levels of violence in the study schools.

The current study highlights the authoritarian nature of the school, with an ethos of control and punishment. School management and teachers have the right to punish and exclude to maintain control and order. As described by Porteus, Vally & Ruth (2001), corporal punishment as a method of discipline suggests that schools view discipline and pain as synonymous. Harber (2002) stresses that authoritarianism in schools and classrooms and the use of violent punishment is not only a violation of the human rights of children, but has a negative impact in that pain and fear get to be associated with learning. In-service professional development has to be established in order to equip teachers and school management with alternative ways of resolving conflict and disciplining learners. Dovey (1996) suggested that in-service training opportunities focusing on peaceful classroom management, conflict resolution and cooperative learning strategies should be provided for teachers and principals in order to build peaceful and non-violent schools. Brickmore (2007; 2008) states that sources of violence need to be

addressed early and consistently if the goal is to build sustainable and safe school communities. Programmes have to be pro-active.

Conflict and violence between teachers was evident in the study. Teachers are expected to serve as role models to learners (De Wet, 2007; Humphreys, 2008; Bhana, 2005). Teacher professional development programmes need to be established in order to develop a critical consciousness in teachers, and engage them in the interrogation of their own assumptions, beliefs and values about how they view the world, their place in it, and their relationship with their colleagues and students. Painter-Morland (2008) stresses that school leaders and teachers have to be both ethical and accountable, and constantly build an ethical responsiveness within the school. The goal should be to build safe havens for all.

The findings in the study seem to suggest that schools tend to mirror society, and tend to create little space for reframing of traditional gender beliefs and practices. The critical issue in developing an anti-violence programme in schools is that attention would have to be given to challenging the gendered hierarchies of society and traditional notions of masculinity to enable, an alternate understanding of gender identity (de Wet, 2007). A culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate approach is vital to any programme. Stromquist (2007) stresses that the power of education lies in its capacity to raise critical consciousness through knowledge. Schools need to take a more proactive role to achieve change in social attitudes and ideologies.

Violence at all its form may have negative impact in the lives of the learners especially at adolescence stage, I therefore recommend that issue concerned with identity formation, sexuality and violence in adolescence stage need to be researched in future.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Consent Letter: School Principal

University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Edgewood campus  
Kinnoull Flat 2  
Room 72  
12 January 2009

Dear Sir,

*Re: Request Permission to conduct the research in your school*

I am a Masters in education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal conducting a research project titled; “Learner interpretations of school violence: A case study at a secondary school in Lesotho.”

I am interested in ways in which learners experience and think about violence as it happens in their schools. I kindly request permission to conduct my study at your school. Learners in Form B, C, D and E will be the participants in my study. They will be required to participate in individual and focus group interviews.

Please note that

- There will be no benefits that participants will for participation in this research project.
- The learners will be expected to respond to each question in the manner that will reflect their own personal opinion.
- Their identity will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- There is no right or wrong answer.
- All their responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (real names of the participants and the institution will not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to them.

- The participants will not under any circumstances be forced to disclose what they do not want to reveal.
- Audio recording of interviews will only be done if the permission of the participant is obtained,
- Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed by burning.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully

---

‘Mamolibeli Ngakane

0312603540 or 0789144371 or

[207525015@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:207525015@ukzn.ac.za) or [forcem@webmail.co.za](mailto:forcem@webmail.co.za)

Supervisor: Professor Nithi Muthukrishna

0312602494

[muthukri@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:muthukri@ukzn.ac.za)

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**CONSENT FORM:**

If you allow me to conduct the research in the school, please sign the form below.

I..... (Full Name) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I hereby grant permission for the researcher to conduct the research project in my school. I understand that learners are free to withdraw from the project at any time, should they so desire.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Consent Letter: District Education officer**

University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Edgewood campus  
Kinnoull Flat 2  
Room 72  
12 January 2009

Dear Sir,

*Re: Request Permission to conduct the research in the district*

I am a Masters in education student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal conducting a research project titled; “Learner interpretations of school violence: A case study at a secondary school in Lesotho.”

I am interested in ways in which learners experience and think about violence as it happens in their schools. I kindly request permission to conduct my study at your school. Learners in Form B, C, D and E will be the participants in my study. They will be required to participate in individual and focus group interviews.

Please note that

- There will be no benefits that participants will for participation in this research project.
- The learners will be expected to respond to each question in the manner that will reflect their own personal opinion.
- Their identity will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- There is no right or wrong answer.
- All their responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (real names of the participants and the institution will not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to them.
- The participants will not under any circumstances be forced to disclose what they do not want to reveal.

- Audio recording of interviews will only be done if the permission of the participant is obtained,
- Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed by burning.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully

---

‘Mamolibeli Ngakane  
0312603540 or 0789144371 or  
[207525015@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:207525015@ukzn.ac.za) or [forcem@webmail.co.za](mailto:forcem@webmail.co.za)

Supervisor: Professor Nithi Muthukrishna  
0312602494  
[muthukri@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:muthukri@ukzn.ac.za)

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**CONSENT FORM:**

If you allow me to conduct the research in the school in the district, please sign the form below.

I..... (Full Name) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I hereby grant permission for the researcher to conduct the research project in my school. I understand that learners are free to withdraw from the project at any time, should they so desire.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent for the Learner.

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Edgewood campus

Kinnoull Flat 2

Room 72

12 January 2009

Dear Student,

I am a Masters in Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, conducting a research project titled; “Learner interpretations of school violence: A case study at a secondary school in Lesotho.” I am keen to find out about your experiences of violence in your school and what you think about violence in your school.

I kindly request you to assist me in this research by being a participant. I will interview you about violence in your school on your own, and then I will interview in a group with other learners. The interviews will take place at your school premises.

I want you to know the following things:

1. There will be no benefits that participants will receive for taking part in this research.
2. You will be required to respond to each question in the manner that will reflect your own personal opinion.
3. Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstance.
4. There is no right or wrong answer.
5. All your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
6. Pseudonyms will be used (real names of the participants / institution will not be used throughout the research process).
7. Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants are free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to them.
8. The participants will not under any circumstances be forced to disclose what they do not want to reveal.
9. Audio- recording will only be done through the permission of the participant.

10. Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed by burning.

Thanks in advance for your assistance

Yours faithfully

---

‘Mamolibeli Ngakane

Cell 031 2603540 or 078 9144371

E-mail address: [207525015@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:207525015@ukzn.ac.za) or [forcem@webmail.co.za](mailto:forcem@webmail.co.za)

This study is supervised by: Professor Nithi Muthukrishna. Tel: 031 2602494. E-mail address: [muthukri@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:muthukri@ukzn.ac.za)

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If you agree to participate, please sign the declaration form.

### **CONSENT FORM**

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at anytime, should I desire so.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### Letter of Consent: Parent

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Edgewood campus

Kinnoull Flat 2

Room 72

12 January 2009

Dear Parent,

*Re: Permission for your child to participate in my research project*

I am a Masters in education student at the University of kwazulu- Natal conducting a research project titled; “Learner interpretations of school violence: A case study at a secondary school in Lesotho.”

I am interested in ways in which learners experience and think about violence as it happens in their schools. I request your permission for your child to participate in the study. This will involve individual and focus group interviews.

Please note that:

- There will be no benefits that your child will receive for taking part in this research project.
- Your child will be expected to respond to each question in the manner that will reflect his/ her own personal opinion.
- Your child’s identity will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- There is no right or wrong answer.
- All your child’s responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (real names of your child and the school will not be used throughout the research).
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, your child is free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to him or her.
- Your child will not under any circumstances be forced to disclose what they do not want to reveal.

- Audio recording will only be done once permission is obtained from your child.
- Data will be stored in a University locked cupboard for a maximum period of five years thereafter it will be destroyed by burning.

Thanking you  
Yours faithfully

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mamolibeli Ngakane  
0312603540 or 0789144371 or  
[207525015@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:207525015@ukzn.ac.za) or [forcem@webmail.co.za](mailto:forcem@webmail.co.za)

Supervisor: Professor Nithi Muthukrishna  
0312602494  
[muthukri@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:muthukri@ukzn.ac.za)

### CONSENT FORM

**If you agree for your child to participate in the research, please complete the form below.**

I..... (Full Names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to allow my child to participate in the research project.

I understand that he is free to withdraw from the project at anytime, should he/she so desires.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX Db

### LENGOLO LA KOPO EA TUMELLO EA HO BOTSOA NGOANA LIPOTSO HO MOTSOALI

University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Edgewood campus  
Kinnoull Flat 2  
Room 72  
12 January 2009

Motsoali,

*Re:kopo ea ho botsa ngoana oa hao lipotso tse amanang le boithuto ba ka.*

Ke moithuti ea etsang Masters in education Universiting ea kwazulu- Natal me ke etsa research project (boithuto) molemo oa ho phethela lithuto tsa ka. Sehlooho ke “Learner experiences of school violence: A case study at a secondary school in Lesotho.”

Ke na le thahasello ea ho tseba ka litaba tsa likhohlano le lithlekefetso tse etsahalang sekolong sa bona. Ke kopa hore tumello ea ho botsa ngoana oa hao lipotso taba tsena tsa boithuto baka. Ke tla mo botsa lipotso a le mong kamorao ho moo ke tla mo botsa hammoho le bana ba bang.

Ke kopa o ele hloko litaba tsena:

- Ha ho patala eo ngoana a tla e fumana ha nka karolo litabeng tsena tsa boithuto bona.
- Ngoana oa hao o lebeletsoe ho araba lipotso ho ea ka maikutlo a hae a ‘nete litabeng tsena.
- Lebitso la ngoana oa hao le ke ke la sebelisoa ha ho ngoloa ho hang.
- Ha ho karabo e nepahetseng kapa e fosahetseng lipotsong tseo ke lebeletseng hore a li arabe.
- Likarabo tsa ngoana li tla bolokoa e le lekunutu li ke ke tsa bolelloa mang kapa mang.

- Lebitso la ngoana esita le la sekolo li ke ke tsa sebelisoa empa ho tla sebelisoa mabitso a boiqapelo.
- Ho nka karolo li litabeng tsena ke boithatelo ha ho tlame ka hona a ka tlohela ho nka karolo nako eohle ha a khahloa ho etsa joang me ha ho letho le lebe le ka mo hlahelang ha a ka etsa joalo.
- Ngoana a ke ke a tlameoa ho ho bua se a sa rateng ho se bua.
- Puisano e tla hatisoa empa ka tumellano le ngoana.
- Litaba tsa puisano li tla bolokoa moo li notleletsoeng universiting ka nako ea lilemo tse hlano kamorao hoo moo li tla chesoa.

Ke tla leboha thuso ea hao

Oa hao

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‘Mamolibeli Ngakane

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## **TUMELLANO**

**Haeba o lamella ngoana oa hao ho nka karolo boithutong bona, ke kopa hore o tlatse form e na e ka tlase:**

‘Na..... (mabitso ka botlalo) ke pakahatsa hore ke utloisisa litaba tse ngotsoeng mona le mofuta oa boithuto, ‘ me ke lumella ngoana oa ka ho nka karolo litabeng tsa boithuto ba hao.

Ke ea utloisisa hore a ka tlohela nako engoe lengoe ha a batla.

Motekeno \_\_\_\_\_

Letsatsi \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Guide: individual interviews

- Tell me about your school? What do you like about it? What would you change?  
Do you feel safe in school? Do you feel unsafe at school at any time?
- Tell me about experiences of violence in your school?
- Have there been any acts of violence by girls at your school? Have there been any acts of violence by boys at your school? Explain incidents.
- Have there been acts of violence against girls and against boys in the school? Explain incidents.
- Have there been acts of violence by teachers or school management? Have there been acts of violence against teachers?
- Does the school support you? Explain.
- What are the different kinds of violence you experience at your school?
- What do you think causes violence in your school?
- In your opinion who are the targets of most violence in your school?
- Describe the perpetrator of violence? Were you a perpetrator? Explain.
- Describe the victim of violence. Were you a victim? Explain.
- Describe the student in your school who is popular  
Describe the student in your school who is unpopular.
- Describe two critical incidents of violence that you experienced in the school.
- How serious is violence in your school? Why do you think so?
- Describe the teacher who is a perpetrator of violence in your school?
- Describe the teacher who is a victim of violence in your school.
- How do you respond to violence in your school if you are a witness or target?
- How does the school respond to violence in your school?
- How do teachers respond to violence?
- How do parents respond to violence in school?