



**EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL-RELATED
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE: A CASE STUDY OF
THEMBEKA HIGH SCHOOL IN MBOMBELA, SOUTH
AFRICA**

May 2023



PROJECT BACKGROUND

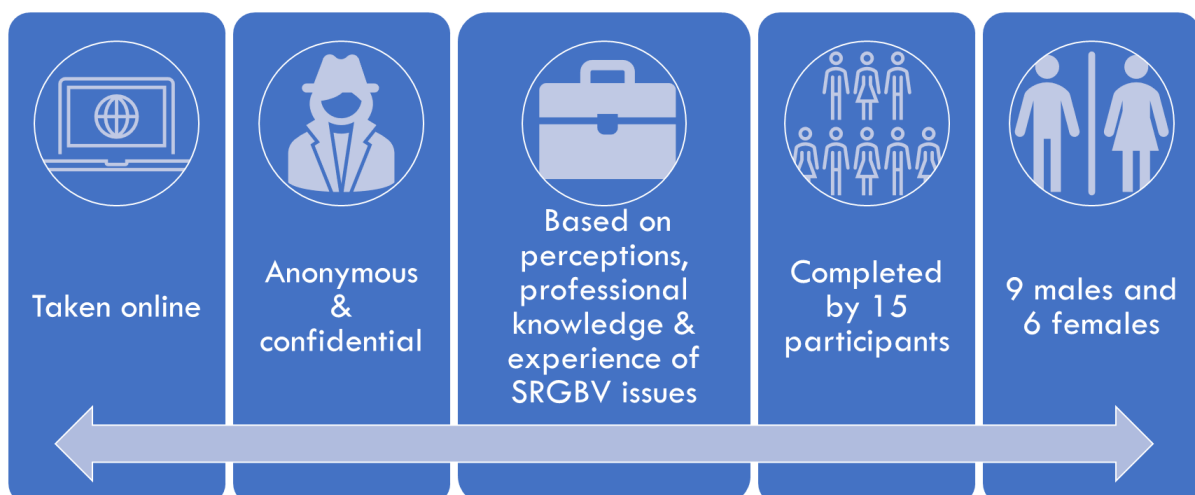
The Masiphephe Network, hereinafter referred to as “the Network”, has been working with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on the development of local, community-based strategies to address school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) violence in 12 schools in Gauteng (GP), Mpumalanga (MP) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN). The Network is funded by the United States Agency for International Agency (USAID) and its implementation is led by the Centre for Communication Impact (CCI). CCI works in partnership with the University of Cape Town’s (UCT) Gender, Health, and Justice Research Unit (GHRJU) as well as six community partner organisations, namely: Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT), Sonke Gender Justice (Sonke), Ethembeni Crisis Care Centre (ECCC), Gugu Dlamini Foundation (GDF) and Project Association Southern Africa (PSASA).

The Gender, Health and Justice Unit (GHJRU) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) conducted a baseline study through a survey in 12 schools, on behalf of the Network. Thembeke High School, in Mbombela, was one of the schools that participated in the study. A baseline study is the collection of data to analyse an existing situation to identify the starting point for an intervention or a support response. The purpose of the survey was to gain some understanding of the nature of SRGBV in the specific school.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed methods approach. The initial stage of this research involved conducting a survey to gather data from a sample of 15 educators. An educator in the context of this study includes administrative staff, learner support agent (LSA), school-based support team (SBST), teacher, teacher’s assistant (TA) and member of the school management team (SMT).

Figure 1: Summary of Research Methodology (Survey)



The professional capacities represented were as follows: teacher (n=9), administrative staff (n=1), SMT (n=4) and SBST (n=1). The survey did not ask the educators to discuss any specific stories or incidents. Also, learners did not participate in this survey. In certain cases, the total number of responses in this report may not equate to 15 due to the respondents having the option to select multiple choices.

Consequently, the total number of responses could exceed 15. Additionally, for non-mandatory questions, the number of responses may be lower than 15.

The second phase of the research involved conducting a validation workshop with a group of educators, comprising both survey participants and non-participants. A total of 11 educators actively participated in the workshop. The purpose of the validation workshop was for the members of staff/research respondents to authenticate the research findings as a true reflection of the situation at the school.

The next phase of the research involved a review of the code of conduct. The question we aimed at answering through the review of the code of conduct for learners is: *“Does the school code of conduct for learners meet the minimum requirements prescribed by the DBE?”* To answer this question, the schools were requested to submit their current copy of the code of conduct for learners. The documents were evaluated to determine whether they meet the criteria of what a code of conduct for learners should entail as highlighted in the NSSF and the school governing body (SGB) Records Manual. The code of conduct for learners was reviewed and the recommendations derived from the review are integrated into the latter part of this report.

Lastly, a DBE district/provincial validation workshop was held, on 4 April 2023. Twenty-six (26) individuals attended the workshop. The delegates represented the DBE (district, provincial and national); the schools (i.e. Thembeke and Mayibuye), South African Council for Educators (SACE) and the Masiphephe Network. Important to note is that even though a total of four schools in the Mpumalanga province participated in the project the DBE validation workshops were divided into two due to the distance between Mbombela and Emalahleni.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

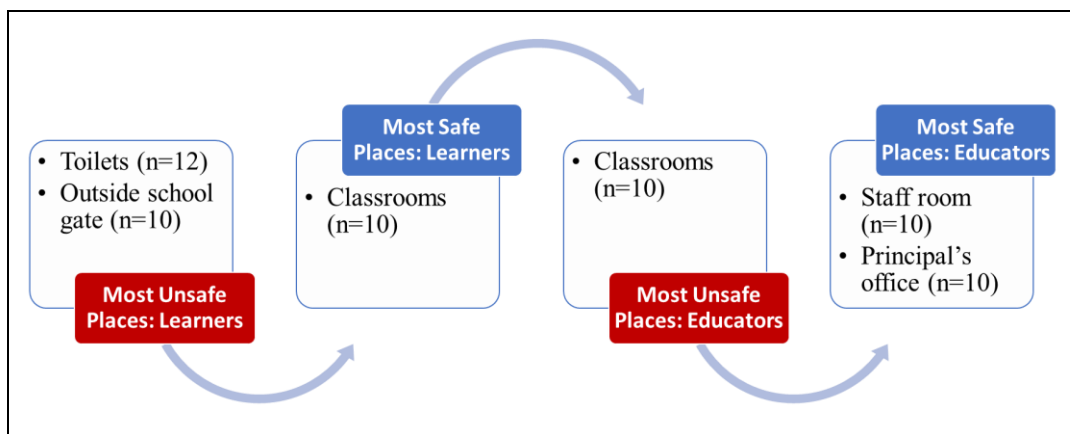
The numbers and percentages, throughout this report, refer to the number of times a specific option was selected by the respondents who took the survey. This report should be read in conjunction with the provincial report which provides a detailed discussion of the findings.

1. MOST COMMON TYPES OF SRGBV

Learner-on-learner violence	Learner-on-educator violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical abuse (n=15) • Bullying (n=15) • Verbal abuse (n=14) • Cyberbullying (n=14) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal abuse (n=14) • Physical abuse (n=11) • Bullying (n=10) • Cyberbullying (n=9)
Educator-on-learner violence	Educator-on-educator violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal abuse (n=13) • Bullying (n=7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal abuse (n=11) • Bullying (n=9)

It was reported that learner-on-learner sexual harassment is common in the school, especially by boys against girls.

2. VIEWS OF SAFETY



3. MOST COMMON SRGBV ROOT CAUSES

- Violence in the home (n=13)
- Alcohol or substance abuse by learners (n=11)
- Inappropriate discipline by parents or caregivers (n=11)

3.1 WEAPONS

- Weapons are brought to school by learners (n=14).
- The most common types of weapons brought to school by learners are knives (n=14).
- In-school weapons used by learners during acts of violence are school desks and chairs (n=13), pens, pencils and rulers (n=10) and broom sticks (n=7).
- Learners bring weapons for revenge (n=12) and protection (n=9).
- Weapons are mostly confiscated during fights between learners (n=10), following reports by fellow learners (n=9) and during searches at the gate (n=8).

3.2 THE USE OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER SUBSTANCES BY LEARNERS

- Learners are more likely than educators to attend school intoxicated or use substances on school premises (n=11).
- Types of substances used by learners are alcohol (n=14), tobacco products (n=13) and marijuana (n=10). It was reported that community members have hijacked an old school hostel building next to the school and are bringing drugs into the school.

4. MOST COMMON IMPACT OF SRGBV ON VICTIMS

4.1 Impact on Learners

Emotional/Psychological Impact	Physical Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having low self-esteem (n=11) • Feeling sad and hurt (n=9) • Feeling angry (n=9) • Feeling embarrassed (n=8) • Blaming self (n=8) • Having suicidal thoughts (n=7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor to mild wounds (n=10) • Physical fighting at school (n=9) • Serious wounds, bruises and fractures (n=7)

Sexual Impact	School-related Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwanted pregnancy (n=11) • Engaging in risky sexual behaviour (n=10) • Contraction of HIV and other STIs (n=7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing school (i.e. truancy) (n=11) • Experiencing difficulties concentrating in class (n=10) • Dropping out of school (n=8) • Failing or doing poorly at school (n=8)

4.2 Impact on Educators

Emotional/Psychological Impact	Work-related Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling angry (n=9) • Feeling helpless and demoralised (n=8) • Having low self-esteem (n=6) • Feeling sad and hurt (n=6) • Feeling embarrassed (n=6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absenteeism (n=9) • Resigning from work (n=8) • Ineffective teaching (n=7)

5. DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS

- Disciplinary hearing (n=9), verbal (n=9) and written (n=8) warnings are the common types of actions taken in the school against learner perpetrators of SRGBV.
- Three (3) respondents reported that verbal warning is used as a disciplinary measure to discipline educators who perpetrate SRGBV. Most of the respondents (n=10) reported that they did not know what actions are taken against educator perpetrators because issues of discipline are between the concerned educator and the principal.

6. REPORTING PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

- Fourteen (14) respondents reported that the school does have a formal SRGBV reporting process in place.
- Learners report mostly to educators (n=8) whereas educators report mostly to the principal (n=8).

7. SUPPORT

7.1 AVAILABILITY OF SOCIAL WORKER

- Ten (10) respondents reported that there is no social worker available to the school while one (1) reported that there is a full-time social worker on duty, and four (4) reported that there is a social worker that assists when requested by the school.
- It was established during the validation workshop that the school does not have an in-house social worker but cases are referred to a non-government organisation (NGO) called Family Restoration.

7.2 STAKEHOLDERS OFFERING SUPPORT TO VICTIMS

- The SAPS (n=10), peer educators (n=10), district circuit manager (n=7) and school social worker (n=6) are the main stakeholders that offer support to the school.

- Victims are referred for SRGBV services through the SGB (n=8) or the SMT (n=5).

8. CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING

8.1 EDUCATORS AND SGB TRAINED TO DEAL WITH SRGBV

- Ten (10) respondents out of 15 said educators and SGB have been trained on how to deal with SRGBV issues.
- Of concern, educators have not been trained on the mandatory reporting of child abuse and maltreatment. For details on mandatory reporting, please refer to the recommendations section in this report. For a more comprehensive discussion, consult the provincial report.

8.2 LEARNERS EDUCATED ON ISSUES OF SRGBV

8.2.1 Issues of SRGBV Included in the School Curriculum

- Thirteen (13) respondents reported that SRGBV issues are included in the school curriculum through learner driven activities (n=15).
- This is the only school that did not mention that SRGBV issues are covered in Life Orientation (LO). It was reported that LO does not cover SRGBV issues sufficiently, but supplementary programmes are facilitated by SANCA , for example, where learners are addressed during assembly.

8.2.2 Existence of Peer Educator Programmes: Girls/Boys Empowerment Movement

- The school does not have GBEM clubs.
- “The aim of GBEM is to encourage girls and boys to work together as equals and to foster respect for the human dignity and rights of both sexes. This is to foster gender equality values and promote positive gender norms through peer education and life skills” (DBE, 2021, n.p.). Peer education is one of effective ways of learning in that through teaching each other students are able to solidify their knowledge and spread it within their community (Western Governors University, 2022).

9. LAWS AND POLICIES THAT ADDRESS SRGBV

- In general knowledge of primary policies and frameworks that deal with issues of violence and GBV was very low among the respondents.
- The school has a separate educators’ policy in addition to the SACE Code of Professional Ethics. However, not all educators were trained on the educators’ policy.
- The school has no separate policies on bullying and harassment (general and sexual). Issues of bullying and harassment are imbedded in the code of conduct for learners.
- Most of the educators who participated in this study were not aware of the National Schools Safety Framework (NSSF). It, therefore, could not be established if the NSSF is implemented fully in the school.
- Not all educators who participated in this study had knowledge of the Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment. Therefore, the protocol may not be fully implemented in the school. This means that not all staff may be aware of the process to be followed when reporting offences that are sexual in nature as outlined in the protocol.

9.1 EXISTING SCHOOL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LEARNERS

- The school has a code of conduct.
- Eight (8) educators reported that parents do sign the school code of conduct.
- Nine (9) educators reported that learners do sign the school code of conduct.
- When asked if issues of SRGBV are included in the school code of conduct 11 respondents said yes.
- A review of the code of conduct could not be done because the school did not submit it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) *General Code of Conduct Recommendations*

- Workshop the entire school community – learners, educators, administrators, parents, and other community stakeholders. The school needs to, through advocacy, ensure that everyone knows and understand the content of the code of conduct.
- Review the code of conduct annually and ensure that learners are part of the process.
- Ensure that the code of conduct meets the criteria stipulated by the DBE as per above recommendations.
- Includes sections that deal specifically with SRGBV.

Moreover, even though it was revealed that issues of bullying and harassment (general and sexual harassment) are included in the code of conduct, the school needs to develop standalone policies dealing with these issues.

(ii) *Safety and Security*

We noticed during the validation workshop that the school does not have formal security and therefore recommend that the SMT and the SGB prioritise safety and security by including the hiring of official security officers in the schools' annual budget. The SGB should also be trained and capacitated on fund raising so that they can raise funds for security if the school budget is limited.

(iii) *Removal of Hostel Hijackers*

It was explained that due to floods, individuals who were affected were moved by the Disaster Management Team to the old school hostel which is next to the school. It was, however, explained that the community has hijacked the building and they are bringing substances to the school.

(iv) *Psychological Support*

Educators expressed that they need psychosocial support and debriefing services. During the district workshop the DBE encouraged educators to access these services through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

(v) *The Need for an In-House Social Worker*

The school does not have its own social worker and we recommend for one to be hired. It is important that one is hired as soon as possible to assist the educators with learners depicting problematic behaviour

and or need psychosocial services. As submitted by the National Association of School Workers (NASW), school social workers are vital because they “are an integral link between school, home, and community in helping students achieve academic success. They work directly with school administrations as well as students and families, providing leadership in forming school discipline policies, mental health intervention, crisis management, and support services” (n.d.: np).

(vi) *Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)*

The findings show that unwanted pregnancy is very high in the school. Therefore, we recommend that the school make sexual and reproductive health and rights training and awareness for learners a priority and support girls who fall pregnant to stay in school.

(vii) *Training and Capacity Building on SRGBV Issues and Important Policies*

It is recommended for the SMT to train or arrange with the DBE district department responsible for training to train educators and the SGB on important policies such as the NSSF, and the Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools, and Alternatives to Corporal Punishment: A Practical Guide for Educators, to name a few. The SMT should ensure that the safety and disciplinary committees as well as the SBST are also well trained and capacitated. The educators who attended the validation workshop highlighted the impracticality of the policies, which makes their implementation challenging. Therefore, it is crucial that educators receive comprehensive training that includes guidance on adapting the policies to their specific school context. This will enable them to effectively localise and implement the policies.

The SGB plays a very pivotal role in the school, therefore it is important that all members of the SGB, are immediately trained on their roles and responsibilities and on how to deal with issues of SRGBV after being elected to office.

Learners could learn issues of SRGBV through peer learning activities such as GBEM. It is therefore important for the school to encourage learners to form these clubs. The LSA plays a crucial role in this context particularly in facilitating peer learning activities.

(viii) *Mandatory Reporting Training*

Educators also need to be trained on mandatory reporting. Educators have an obligation, to report to a relevant authority, any offences against a child (i.e., learner) such as a sexual offence or any form of child abuse or maltreatment if they have knowledge, reasonable belief, or suspicion of it. There are different laws which cover this, as well as who to report to. We provide below examples of the laws which address these issues. The *Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools* (2019) sets out the reporting process for sexual offences.

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act Amendment Act 13 of 2021 sets out the mandatory reporting of sexual offences, stating that any person:

- ... who has knowledge that a sexual offence has been committed against a *child* must report such knowledge immediately to a police official.
- ... who has knowledge, reasonable belief or suspicion that a sexual offence has been committed against a person who is *mentally disabled* must report such knowledge, reasonable belief or suspicion immediately to a police official.

- A person who in good faith reports such reasonable belief or suspicion shall not be liable to any civil or criminal proceedings by reason of making such report.

The *Children’s Act* (No. 38 of 2005) also covers reporting of sexual offences against children:

The Children’s Act states that if there is a reasonable suspicion (on the part of particular professionals dealing with a child) that the child is being abused in a way that causes physical injury, sexual abuse or neglect, this must be reported. Persons in this category include a range of professions including legal practitioners, medical practitioners, traditional and religious leaders, psychologists and social workers, teachers and persons working in care facilities, amongst others.

If any person suspects that a child is being abused or in need of care and protection, they must report to a social worker, a designated child protection unit or organisation or to the police.

There are also a number of other mechanisms for child protection:

The *Domestic Violence Act* (1998) and the *Domestic Violence Amendment Act* (2022) allow a child who is experiencing any form of abuse – whether it is physical, sexual, psychological or emotional (amongst other acts of harm including harassment, intimidation or stalking) – to apply for a protection order. This order can be applied for by the child, a parent or legal guardian, or any other person with a ‘material interest’ in the protection of the child. A person with ‘material interest’ can include: a counsellor, a health service provider, a member of the South African Police Service, a social worker or a teacher, who has a material interest in the well-being of a complainant.

(ix) Collaboration with Stakeholders

It is recommended for the school to collaborate with other statutory (i.e., Department of Social Development, Department of Health, Thuthuzela Care Centre, etc.) and non-statutory stakeholders (i.e., community-based organisation and non-governmental organisations). GBV issues are complex and cannot be handled by the school alone, it is thus important for the school to build relationships with stakeholders offering GBV services for support.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Department of Basic Education. (2021). Presentation to the portfolio committee on Basic Education, 17 August. Retrieved from: [Enter Title here \(pmg.org.za\)](#).
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (n.d.). School social work. Retrieved from: [School Social Work \(socialworkers.org\)](#).
- Western Governors University. (2022). Peer learning: Overview, benefits, and models. Retrieved from: [Peer Learning: Overview, Benefits, and Models \(wgu.edu\)](#).