



School-based Learner-on-Learner Violence

Assessing learners' experiences of violence in ten schools in the Cape Metropole

Policy Brief

June 2021

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1. Introduction

Schools in the Western Cape experience exceptionally high levels of violence. To better understand current experiences of violence by learners in the Western Cape, the Department of the Premier commissioned a needs assessment study to examine high school learners' experience of, and exposure to violence in a number of schools in the Cape Town Metropole. Following the completion of this study, this policy brief aims to provide context for the study and its methodology, present its key findings, explain the implications thereof and provide recommendations for a possible evidence-backed behavioural violence prevention intervention to reduce learner-on-learner violence at schools in the Western Cape.

2. Context

Violence (physical, psychological and sexual) within the context of Western Cape schools has consistently remained a significant problem for decades. Many of the victims and perpetrators of violent crime in South Africa are adolescents.¹ The 2012 school violence study by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) found that learners were responsible for the majority of sexual assaults, threats and thefts experienced by other learners. Furthermore, the CJCP study reported that learners perpetrated 69.8% of assaults in schools. Having delinquent peers, such as friends/acquaintances who bring illegal substances (such as drugs) and weapons to school, is strongly associated with violence victimisation.² Access to drugs and alcohol and gang violence in and out of school have been associated with school-related violence in the Western Cape.³

Addressing school violence requires the mitigation of the risk factors relating to both violence perpetration and victimisation. Ideally, this would require promoting safety on school premises and in after-school programmes; and improving the main walking routes and transport hubs that learners and teachers use to travel to and from schools, learners' homes and the neighbourhoods in which schools are located.⁴ By focusing on safety at and around schools, this would holistically address the various types of school-based violence, such as bullying, gang violence, educator on learner violence and sexual violence.⁵ To date, various interventions have been pursued in the Western Cape, such as the Safe Schools programme, the deployment of School Resource Officers, Walking Bus initiatives and the After-School Programme. However, given that violence in the school environment remains high in the Western Cape, there is a

¹ Lamb & Warton, 2016.

² Burton & Leoshcut, 2012.

³ Ward, Van der Merwe, & Dawes, 2012.

⁴ Lester et al, 2017.

⁵ Lester et al., 2017. Pg 175.

willingness to test other evidence-based violence prevention interventions in schools, and scale them up if they are successful.

3. Methodology

This policy brief draws on a needs assessment conducted by the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation and the Safety and Violence Initiative (University of Cape Town) on school learners' experience of violence in the Cape Metropole in March 2021. The research project focused on ten schools⁶ in the Cape Metropole, all of which are located in communities with high levels of poverty, unemployment and violent criminality. The study was intended to examine the experience of and exposure to violence of school learners in these areas. Furthermore, the study sought to understand how violence is internalised by these school learners and how it impacts their behaviour at school, in the community and at home. The objective of the needs assessment study was to determine whether there is a need for further interventions, such as a behaviourally inspired programme.

The needs assessment study collected both quantitative (surveying learners) and qualitative (focus groups with learners, key informative interviews with staff, observations) data from ten schools in four areas in the Cape Metropole. 217 questionnaires were completed across nine schools; while focus group discussions took place in five schools and 30 interviews were conducted across ten schools. Quantitative data was then analysed using statistical analysis software (SPSS) to extrapolate findings, using three different methods of analysis: psychometric validation of the measurement scales, one-way ANOVA and hierarchical multiple regression analyses.

The findings below are relevant to the learners who completed the survey questionnaire used in this needs assessment. Due to the small sample size, it is not possible to extrapolate further.

3.1 One-way ANOVA test⁷

The first method of analysis found that gender played a key role in risk and protective factors for violence. In this study, boys were more likely to perceive their

⁶ The ten schools which participated in the needs assessment were: Bulumko Secondary School, Crystal Sekondêr, Joe Slovo Secondary School, Leiden Secondary School, Manyano High School, Masibambisane Secondary School, Matthew Goniwe Memorial High School, Rosendaal Sekondêr, Voorbrug Sekondêr and Spine Road High School.

⁷ One-Way ANOVA ("analysis of variance") compares the means of two or more independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different. Kent State University, 2021. Available: <https://libguides.library.kent.edu/spss/onewayanova>

parents/guardians as approving of drugs and alcohol, perpetrate violence in school and feel more connected socially than girls.⁸

3.2 Multiple Regression analysis⁹

This brief uses the results of the multiple regression analysis to identify the key factors that impact violence at schools assessed for this study. Quantitative analysis showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between certain factors and learners' experience of peer victimisation (measured through attacks on property and physical victimisation), perpetration of violence or bullying behaviour and learners' experience of violence at school by staff members. These factors are:

1. Learners' experience of peer victimisation (attacks on property and physical victimisation)
Factors that are *positively* associated with learners' experience of peer victimisation (attacks on property and physical victimisation):
 - Exposure to community violence
 - Experience of racial discrimination
 - Experience of violence at school by staff members

This means that learners in this study who are exposed to community violence and those who experience racial discrimination and violence at school by staff members are more likely to be physically hurt by their peers and have their property violated (stolen, vandalised etc.).

2. Perpetration of violence or bullying behaviour at school
Factors that are significantly associated with perpetration of violence/bullying behaviour at school (varied depending on model):
 - *positively* associated with exposure to gang activity among peers
 - *negatively* associated with adult role models' disapproval of fighting
 - *positively* associated with experience of violence/abuse at home
 - *positively* associated with being male

This means that learners in this study who are exposed to gang activity among their peers, experience violence/abuse at home and are male are more likely to perpetrate violence or display bullying behaviour at school. On the other hand,

⁸ This analysis should be considered with caution, as demographic variables are insufficient explanations of violent behaviour by themselves and do not point to any form of causality. This is particularly the cases in this study as the data is only a cross-section and not representative of the population we aimed to survey (gender and school-wise).

⁹ Multiple regression generally explains the relationship between multiple independent or predictor variables and one dependent or criterion variable. A dependent variable is modelled as a function of several independent variables with corresponding coefficients, along with the constant term. Multiple regression requires two or more predictor variables, and this is why it is called multiple regression. Statistic Solutions, 2021. <https://www.statisticssolutions.com/free-resources/directory-of-statistical-analyses/multiple-regression/>

learners who have adult role models who disapprove of fighting are less likely to perpetrate violence or display bullying behaviour at school.

3. Experience of violence at school by staff members

Factors that are *positively* associated with experience of violence at school by staff members:

- Learners with one or more parents deceased
- Learners who experience high levels of peer victimisation (attacks on property and physical victimisation)
- Learners who report that they engage in high levels of bullying behaviour towards their peers

Within the context of the schools surveyed, this means that learners with one or more parents deceased, who experience high levels of peer victimisation and engage in high levels of bullying behaviour towards their peers, are more likely to experience violence at school by staff members than learners who do not share these attributes.

The next section presents further data to illustrate the extent of these statistically significant factors.

4. Key Findings

4.1 School

High levels of violence present in the broader community and at home, spill over into schools. This study confirms other literature findings that experiencing and perpetrating violence, and victimising peers often take place at school. Relevant statistically significant factors that contribute to this includes racial/ethnic discrimination, physical victimization and vandalism and theft, and experience of violence perpetrated by school staff.



In this study, peer victimisation refers to attacks on learners' property and physical victimisation. It is very prevalent at the schools surveyed for this study. Approximately 65% of learners report that in the last school year, another learner has taken something that belonged to them without their permission at least once or twice. Just under 40% of learners have experienced another learner trying to break something that belonged to them at least once or twice in the last school year. **70% of learners have had something stolen from them by another learner at least once or twice in the last school year.** Worryingly, 22% of learners report that this happened many times. 40% of learners have had something belonging to them deliberately damaged by another learner in the last school year.

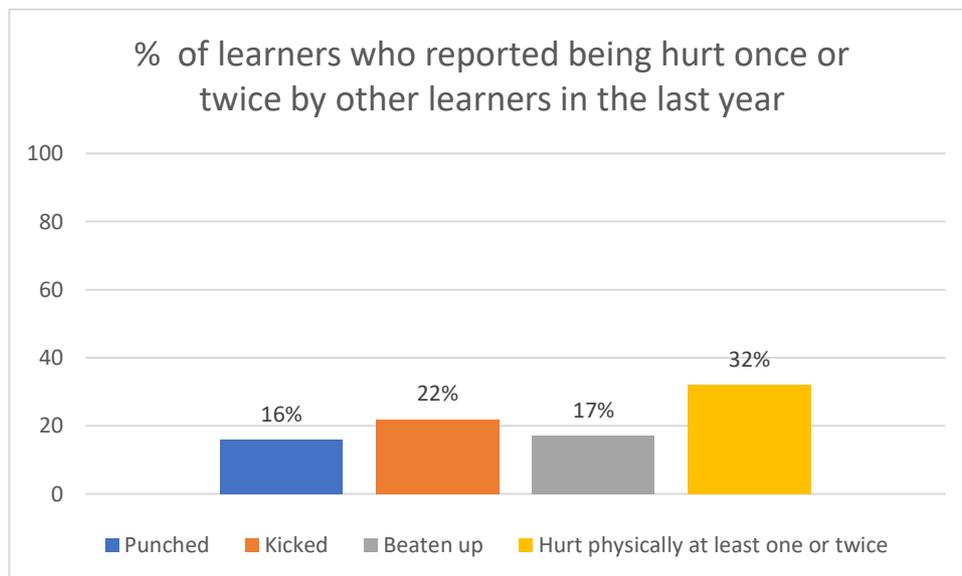


Figure 1: Percentage learners who reported being hurt once or twice by other learners in the last year

Figure 1 illustrates that a large proportion of learners reported having been hurt by other learners at their school. Indeed, approximately 16% of learners have been

punched, 22% kicked, 17% beaten up and 32% hurt physically by another learner at least once or twice in the last year. **This is evidence of high levels of learner-on-learner violence at school.** While violence does spill over from outside of school (e.g. community violence, gangs etc.), this evidence shows that violence also occurs within schools.

Disturbingly, members of school staff are also perpetrators of violence at school. While two thirds of learners have never been verbally abused by a member of the school staff, 50% of learners report having *witnessed others* being verbally abused by a member of the school staff at least once or twice. **Just over half (52%) of learners have seen other learners being hit by a member of the school staff.**

The sections below reflect on the qualitative data – obtained through focus group discussions with learners and interviews with staff. They outline that the nature of violence at school was closely linked to bullying and varied by gender and age.

4.1.1 *Bullying and fighting*

Bullying and fighting were found to be closely linked together. For instance, it was reported that younger learners were often bullied into carrying weapons into schools that the older learners felt they may require, as the younger learners were searched less frequently than the older ones.

Learners from all the schools reported bullying in their respective schools, although very few saw this as something wrong. Of course, in the context of focus group discussions, those learners who may be the target of bullying would be very unlikely to indicate that it was a problem. This said, the learners cited a number of examples of bullying, the most common one being the older learners taking away money from the younger ones or requesting payment to use the bathroom, teasing each other over a variety of topics, destroying each other's personal property and various forms of verbal threats and attacks.

While all the schools prohibited the use of mobile phones in the school grounds, only some of the schools surveyed had had any success in limiting their use. It became apparent that this was related to both bullying and fighting, as several learners reported that social media was used both as a vehicle to air disagreements and a means of bullying one another. It was also used as a tool for organisation, around which fights may be scheduled.

4.1.2 *Gender*

As highlighted above, the needs assessment found that learners frequently engage in physical violence. The focus group discussions revealed that fighting is as common, if not more so, amongst girls as it is amongst boys. However, the focus groups revealed that the forms this violence takes was usually different. Girls reported fighting with one another more frequently but in a "less serious" or less violent manner, whereas boys reported fighting less often but used more extreme forms of violence. The quantitative

analysis supports the qualitative findings, indicating that boys were more likely to perpetrate violence (physical violence and theft and vandalism) in school than girls.

The interviews suggested that the school staff also tended to react differently to fights between girls and boys, with fights between girls not being viewed as seriously as fights between boys. This is problematic, as it uses the extremity of violence as a barometer for seriousness. This in turn discounts both emotional violence such as long-term bullying that may have occurred before any physical altercation takes place, as well as the psychological impact of fighting on learners irrespective of the physical nature of the fighting.

Gender dynamics also shaped the use of weapons in fights. The learners and staff surveyed reported that in their experience, boys were far more likely to use weapons, whereas fights between girls rarely employed them. Knives or sharp implements of various sorts were the most common weapons used, ranging from large pangas and bush knives to sharpened scissors. Interviews with principals revealed that when caught, some learners indicated that they had carried the weapon so as they could defend themselves while traveling to and from the school. This was cited more frequently in schools that were bordered by gang territories.

4.1.3 Age

All the schools reported that younger learners from the lower grades fought far more than learners in the higher grades. In particular, most of the staff interviewed noted that fights were more common amongst learners in grades 8 and 9. There were several reasons cited for this – younger learners having something to prove, problematic feeder (primary) schools and not being busy enough with a lighter academic workload. One principal shared that “mostly our grade 8 and 9s [are involved in fights]. I think it is almost a perception, you know ‘I am at high school, I am big’, it is that type of perception, and the feeder schools that we get our learners from, it is almost as if the learners are allowed to do as they please and it is a real struggle to get them into a disciplined, orderly pattern here at our school”.

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- Principal

4.2 Community

The study confirmed what many other studies have already established – that there are notably high levels of violence in the broader communities of the learners, with significant indicators illustrating that most learners are exposed to high levels of

community violence, accept gangs as part of society and struggle with social connection.

Many of the principals and teachers noted that while every effort can be made to make the school itself a safe place, the communities around the schools can be a source of physical insecurity to the learners and staff. During focus group discussions, learners often talked about violent events in their community and would compare “war stories” during the discussions. As noted below, strong positive relationships between the school and the community is a key protective factor and has led to a decrease in violence at school, as well as a more conducive learning environment.

4.2.1 High level of exposure to community violence

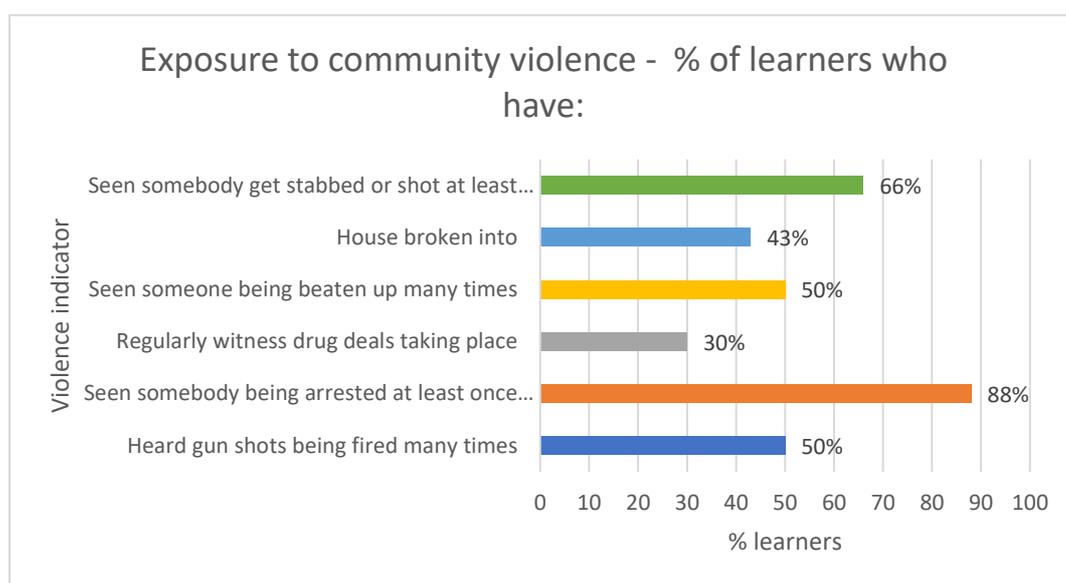


Figure 2: Exposure to community violence– % of learners who have

Learners reported high levels of community violence, both through the surveys and the focus group discussions. As illustrated in Figure 2, 50% of learners have heard gun shots being fired many times. Furthermore, **88% of learners reported having seen somebody being arrested at least once or twice**, 30% of learners said that they regularly witness drug deals taking place, **50% of learners have seen someone being beaten up many times**. Just under half the learners (43%) have had their houses broken into and 66% of learners have seen somebody get stabbed or shot at least once or twice. These are extremely troublesome figures and indicate the heightened levels of resilience needed by learners coming from violent communities if they wish to thrive in their studies and more broadly in their lives. High exposure to community violence and crime has repeatedly been found as an important risk factor for violence, as it provides easy access to weapons and substances (drugs and alcohol), increases

chances of joining gangs and is evidence of embedded social values, patriarchal norms, and violent masculinities, which in turn normalise violence.¹⁰

Physical threats to learner safety may also “jump the fence” into the schools, with some schools reporting that criminal gang members were entering the schools and threatening individuals on the grounds. In one school, a fight that led to the fatal stabbing of a learner two years ago was initiated by a gang member who was on the school ground despite not being a learner at the school. One interviewee shared that “there is always a threat outside ... just in terms of maintaining the safety inside the school we could manage, but it is always what happens outside the school that comes into the school ... access to drugs, the absence of fathers ... those are recipes for what we as a school suffer.

“There is always a threat outside ... just in terms of maintaining the safety inside the school we could manage, but it is always **what happens outside the school that comes into the school** ... access to drugs, the absence of fathers ... those are recipes for what we as a school suffer.” - Interviewee

The safety and security of learners is fundamentally interwoven with the safety and the security of the community in which the school is located. Interventions cannot simply seek to engage with learners and ignore the wider context in which they live – “Schools are not islands” as an interviewee noted. A teacher added, “The influences from outside ... you need to protect yourself most of the time...Inside the school is relatively calm, but the threat is from what happens outside the school are social and economic environment around the school.”

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¹⁰ Department of Social Development & UNICEF. 2016. Pg 45-47.

4.2.2 *Gangs accepted as part of society*



Gangs are a common threat to community safety. In the needs assessment study, 22% of learners reported having friends at school who belong to a gang, 29% have friends outside of school that belong to a gang, and 28% of learners have family members who belong to a gang or used to belong to a gang. Community threats may undermine the physical safety and security of learners directly, such as in instances where learners must cross different gang territories in travelling from their home to the school.

Learners noted in the focus group discussions that the easiest way of preventing being attacked by a gang when travelling across different gang territories was to become a member of a gang. This has the effect of encouraging learners – through necessity and fear – to become affiliated with gangs. Such affiliations affect all aspects of learners' lives. In one focus group for example, three groups of boys who were all affiliated to different gangs in the area refused to talk or be seated near one another.

The majority of principals interviewed believed that one of the primary reasons for learners fighting amongst themselves, joining criminal gangs, or committing crime was the lack of afterschool programs and sporting activities – “to keep them busy so they don't do these things”.

4.2.3 *Social connection and support*

Building positive social connections (with peers, relatives and members of their community) is an important protective factor in preventing violence. However, most learners (60%) surveyed in this study feel at least slightly disconnected from the world around them. Learners are approximately equally divided as to their sense of belonging and sense of togetherness with their peers. However, approximately two thirds (68%) of learners feel a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood among their friends. This shows how the strength of friendships are rare forms of connection in learners' lives. In this study, social connection was identified as a key demographic variable and the

quantitative analysis indicates that boys feel more socially connected to their peers than girls.

Related to social connection, the study also surveyed learners' perceptions of social support from adults, the results of which are capture below in Figure 3. Most learners agree or strongly agree that their parents/caregivers give them help and support when they need it, that in their neighbourhood there are lots of people who care about them, and that their teachers really care about them. However, there are a significant number of learners who are not sure if people care about them in their neighbourhood or if their teachers really care about them. The lowest perceived support is that of the neighbourhood.

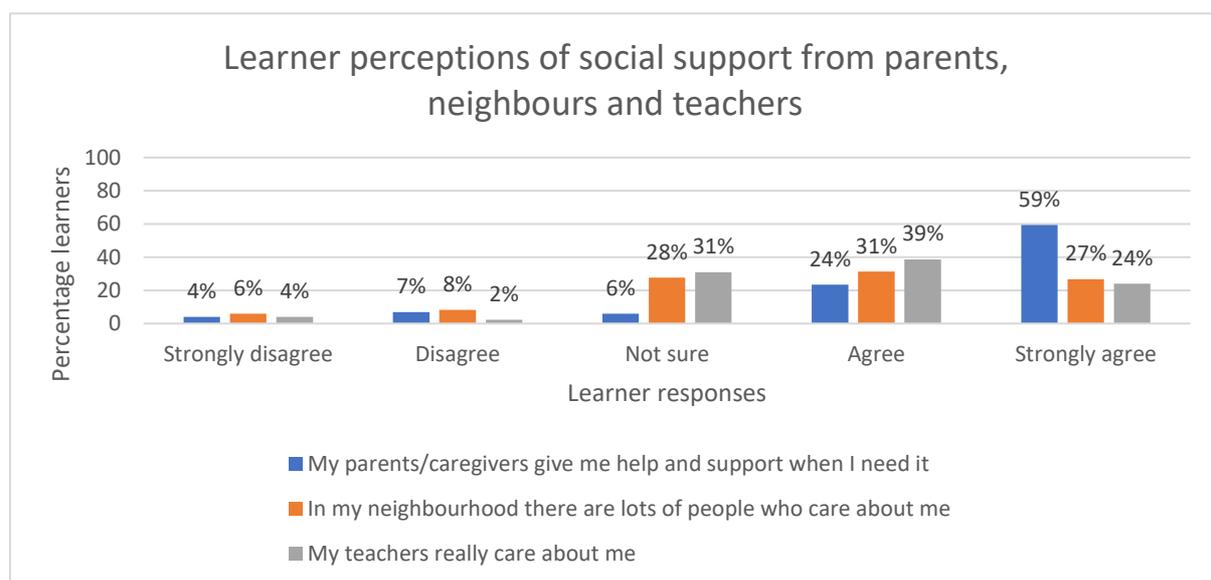


Figure 3: Learner perceptions of social support from parents, neighbours and teachers

4.3 Home

This study finds that violence is modelled to learners to be acceptable in certain contexts – for parents/caregivers' use in the home and in the advice they receive from adults.

4.3.1 Many parents and caregivers are violent in the home

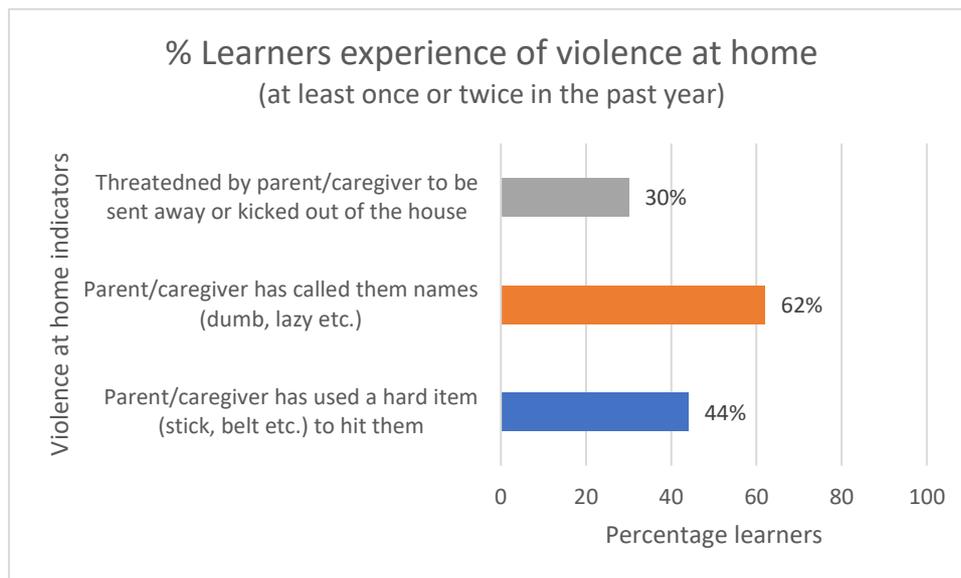


Figure 4: Percentage learners experience of violence at home (at least once or twice in the past year)

As illustrated in **Error! Reference source not found.** above, many learners experience violence at the hands of their parents/caregivers at home. As many as 44% of learners report that a parent/caregiver has used a hard item (stick, belt, etc) to hit them at least once or twice in the past year, **62% of learners report that a parent/caregiver has called them names (dumb, lazy etc.) at least once or twice in the past year** and 30% of learners have been threatened by a parent/caregiver to be sent away or kicked out of the house at least once or twice in the past year. This reflects exceptionally high levels of violence in the home, a key risk factor for other forms of violence against children ¹¹, and testimony of the continuing cycle of intergenerational violence.¹² A teacher interviewed noted that learners' anger often stems from issues at home: "Fighting, it is increasing. Especially when you go deeper you find out, especially when you talk to parents or whatever, you find out in most learners that are bullying each other, there are disturbances at home, there are situations at home, because the learner has that anger and they transfer the anger to other learners."

4.3.2 Adults advise that violence is acceptable in retaliation

Many of the staff interviewed indicated that those learners who were involved in fights at school often had difficulties at home, including economic concerns, a lack of parental oversight and learning difficulties. This was further reflected

55% of learners have been advised by adults that it's **OK to fight**

¹¹ Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014. Pg 31.

¹² Department of Social Development & UNICEF. 2016. Pg 44.

in the survey, in which 55% of learners indicated that adults have advised them that violence is acceptable in retaliation.

Overall, one of the key results derived from the interviews is that the relationships that exist between the school and the parents of learners, as well as those between the school and the wider community, are fundamentally important in preventing violence amongst learners. Schools that had fostered effective and meaningful relationships with parents were far more successful both at instilling discipline and mitigating violence/bullying amongst learners.

Moreover, such relationships are important for an effective learning environment, both at school and home. These relationships may also provide the backbone for a consistent nurturing environment, in which learners have multiple points of contact with caring adults. In totality, these relationships thus not only provide a network of support for learners, but also provide a seamless continuation of the learning environment between school and home.

4.4 Individual attitudes/beliefs

Learners responses indicate that although they know they should not resort to fighting, they still fight at **high-stake moments** – when **retaliating** or when trying **to impress their peers**. This study found that violence at an individual level is reflected in beliefs about retaliation, how learners respond to **feeling anger** and how they respond when challenged in front of their friends. There is also a significant number of learners who indicate signs of **anxiety and depression**.

"Fighting, it is increasing. Especially when you go deeper you find out, especially when you talk to parents or whatever, you find out in most learners that are bullying each other, there are **disturbances at home**, there are **situations at home**, because the learner has that anger and they **transfer the anger to other learners.**"

- Teacher

4.4.1 Violence is acceptable in retaliation

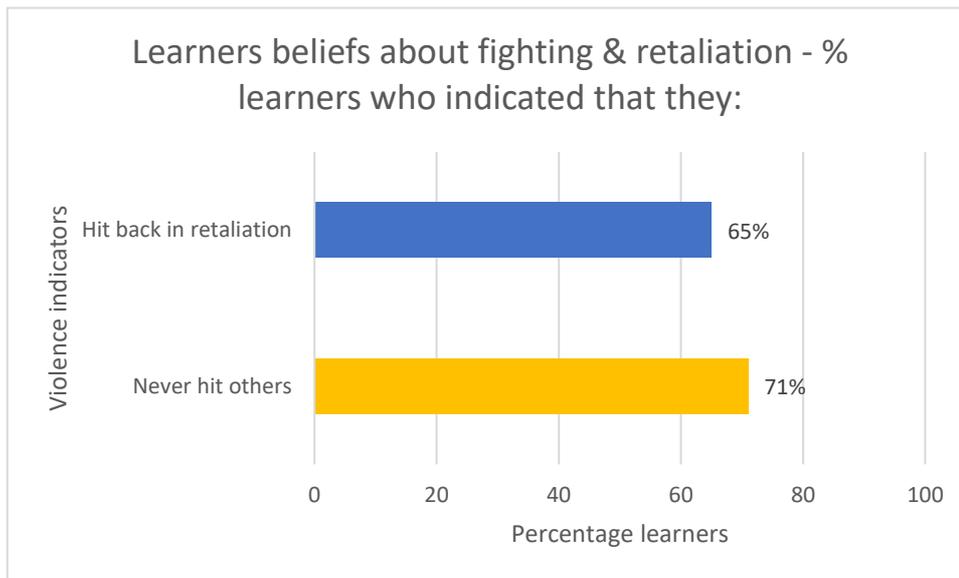


Figure 5: Learners beliefs about fighting & retaliation

Figure 5 reflects that learners' views on whether it is acceptable to hit others, differs depending if it is in retaliation or not. The majority (71%) of learners' report that they never hit others, but 65% of learners indicate that they have hit back at least once or twice when someone hits them first.

4.4.2 Anger triggers violence

37% of learners reported having been involved in fights at least once or twice in the past year because they were angry.

37% of learners fight because they are **angry**

4.4.3 Refusing to resort to violence is weak

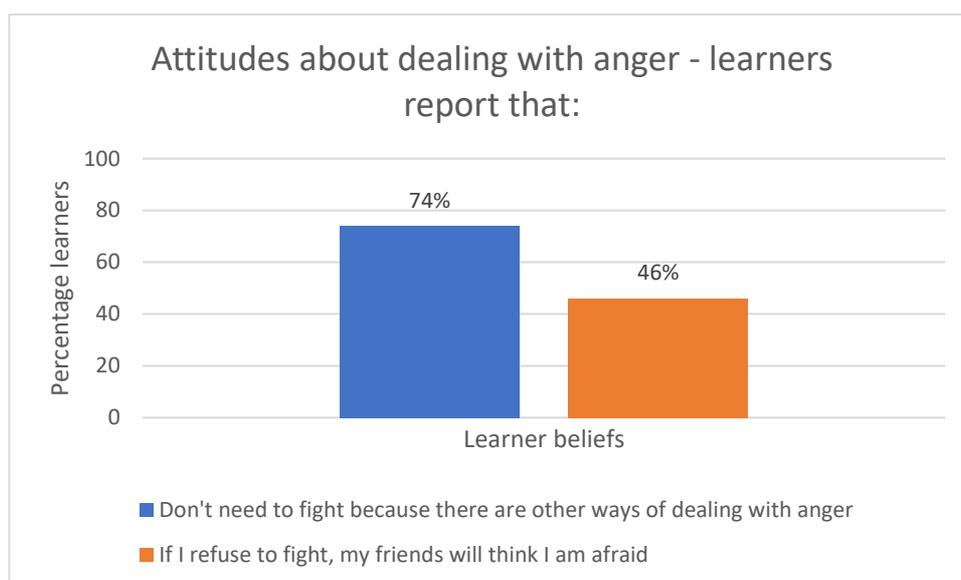


Figure 6: Attitudes about dealing with anger

As illustrated in Figure 6, learners beliefs about fighting differ depending on whether or not they consider their friends' views. Most learners (74%) agree or strongly agree that they don't need to fight because there are other ways of dealing with anger. However, just under half (46%) of learners agree or strongly agree that if they refuse to fight, their friends will think that they are afraid.

Learners believe violence is generally not acceptable, but this changes dramatically when a learner is hit first – violence is considered acceptable in retaliation. Violence is also an immediate, automatic response to anger. Learners are aware that they should deal with anger in ways other than fighting, but do not want to be looked down on by their peers for being afraid. Both these instances are **high-stakes** – when a learner is confronted (when hit by another learner) and when a learner is confronted in front of their peers. This points to norms and beliefs that violence is justified, and that **automatic responses to difficulty or confrontation tend to be violent.**

4.4.4 Anxiety and Depression

Many learners who participated in this study reported poor mental health. Between a quarter and half of learners report **frequent feelings of anxiety**, such as feeling tense or wound up most of the time (23% of learners), feelings of sudden panic (37% of learners), feeling 'butterflies' in the stomach (43% of learners) and having worrying thoughts going through their minds a lot of or most of the time (44% of learners). It is unclear how learners cope with those emotional challenges and whether they rely on peers, their parents, school staff (social workers, psychologists or teachers) to get help, or whether they do not see this as being something that they should worry about.

Measuring learners' depression indicators, just over half (52%) of learners report that they don't enjoy things as much as they used to. However, 65% of learners can laugh and see the funny side of things as much as they always could and **most learners (83%) feel cheerful at least sometimes**.

5. Implications

The findings of the needs assessment show that violence is pervasive at all levels – at school, in the broader community, at home and in individual decision-making. While a lot of support exists in schools already, this needs assessment points to the need to pilot an additional, evidence-based, violence prevention intervention in schools for possible scale-up if successful.

These findings point to the need to help learners develop alternative, positive automatic responses and change their beliefs and norms about the acceptance of violence in retaliation and in front of peers, bullying and racial discrimination. It also speaks to the need for developing positive group identities alternative to gang membership and to provide positive adult role models, particularly for boys. Given the high levels of anxiety, depression and social disconnection; mental health support for learners needs to be strengthened. Finally, there is a clear need for safe spaces for learners who experience violence at home and in their communities.

Overall, we believe the findings in this brief make a broad case for the need for a behaviourally inspired programme to help learners reduce physical violence with their peers. The next section offers recommendations based on these findings. Examples of successful behaviourally inspired violence prevention intervention are presented in Annexure A.

6. Recommendations

The findings have important implications to inform a school-based intervention. We recommend an intervention that **addresses learners' automatic responses** through a **behaviourally inspired** programme.

This intervention **should target grade 8 and 9 learners**, as this is the age when most violence at school (e.g. fighting) happens. All learners should be included initially to avoid stigmatizing participation.

Additionally, **gender specific interventions should be pursued where possible**, given the observed disparity between male and female learners with regards to risk and protective factors for violence.

Given that **staff members are closely involved in violence**, programme facilitators should be externally sourced.

Furthermore, this report has illustrated the exceptionally high levels of violence that learners experience beyond learner-on-learner violence – from their teachers, their parents/caregivers and their broader community. A school-based violence prevention intervention should take a holistic approach to strengthen relationships between learners and their teachers/school staff, families and communities.

We propose to test the programme as a small pre-pilot, developed further as a pilot and then scaled up if the pilot proves successful. This programme will focus on **strengthening protective factors** for those learners most at risk of being victims of violence; and **reducing risk factors** for those learners most at risk of perpetrating violence. The proposed programme aims to help learners develop **alternative, positive automatic responses** and change their **beliefs and norms** about the acceptance of violence in retaliation. It aims to develop **positive group identities** alternative to gang membership and to provide **positive adult role models**, particularly for boys. Given the high levels of anxiety, depression and social disconnection, the programme aims to **strengthen mental health support** for learners. As part of the existing holistic approach to violence prevention, addressing violence in the home and in communities will also be explored through the pre-pilot and pilot.

7. Acknowledgements

This Policy Brief is based on a comprehensive needs assessment report drafted by the SaVI and SLF teams – Guy Lamb, Kamal Kweku Yakubu, Gill Black and Simon Howell. The Policy Brief was compiled by Ruth Capon, Lauren Roode, Winnie Arthur, Gwen Dereymaeker and Ammaarah Martinus from the WCG and JPAL based at UCT.

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9. Annexure A: Learning from other behaviourally inspired interventions

Evidence-based policy insights on how to reduce crime and violence is scarce. However, there is a strong foundation of evidence that a behaviourally inspired intervention can provide individuals with the socio-emotional skills needed to avoid criminal activity. Adolescents faced with these decisions are often heavily influenced by peers, a strong present bias, and a weak link between choices and consequences; as evidenced in the findings of this policy brief. One such behaviourally inspired approach is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Various studies have shown that CBT can be effective in strengthening mental health and can lead to improvements in functioning and quality of life. CBT typically entails efforts to alter problematic and harmful thoughts, behaviour and emotions. It can include facing one's fears instead of avoiding them, using role playing to prepare for possible problematic interactions with others and mindfulness. Studies have also shown that CBT can result in the reduction of various forms of violence. The potential effectiveness of using CBT in school environments has been demonstrated in various contexts.¹³

9.1.1 *What behavioural programmes have been evaluated?*

In [two randomized evaluations](#) of CBT-based programmes in Liberia and the US, interventions reduced criminal behaviour and increased graduation rates when delivered in schools.

- In Liberia, young men working in low-skill or illicit jobs (many of whom were former members of an armed group) who received access to a CBT-style programme were nearly 50% less likely to engage in aggressive or criminal behaviour in the weeks following the end of the intervention. These reductions persisted up to one year for participants who also received a cash transfer.¹⁴
- Administering CBT-inspired curriculum to at-risk male youth in low-income Chicago public schools reduced student arrests by 12% by the end of the programme. Recipients were also 9% more likely to graduate high school on time.¹⁵

9.1.2 *Why Choose a Behaviourally Inspired Violence Prevention Intervention in schools?*

Schools provide a viable setting to strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors for violence. Schools are an area in which government has relative control (compared to home or broader communities) and as evidenced in findings of this brief, are often the site of violence and bullying. Schools-based interventions can also

¹³ Barnes, Smith, & Miller, 2014; Feindler & Gerber, 2012; Larson, 1994; Lester, Lawrence, & Ward, 2017

¹⁴ Blattman et al., 2017.

¹⁵ Guryan et al., 2017.

be easily scaled. While a school-based violence prevention initiative will not address all the systemic and community-level risk factors faced by youth, it can equip them with the skills needed to make better decisions and enable them to navigate challenging, violent environments without becoming a criminal offender. This presents an exciting lever for change.

We are planning to pilot a behaviourally inspired programme with learners that will help learners slow down automatic reactions in the face of high-stakes situations. Our goal is to reduce crime and violence and increase learning outcomes in schools, as other similar programmes around the world have achieved.