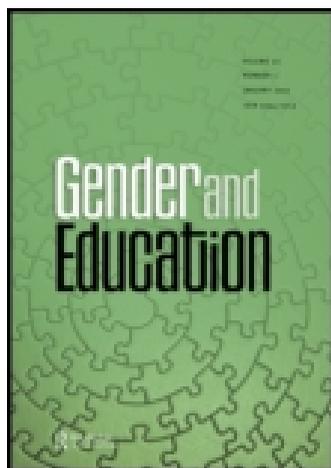


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Voices of women teachers about gender inequalities and gender-based violence in rural South Africa

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Gender-based violence is a reality in many societies and is linked to the spread of HIV and AIDS. There have been numerous studies that have attempted to acquire an understanding of the breadth and depth of the issues around gender-based violence. However, one area that has received scant attention is the voices of women teachers. Thus, in this article, drawing on qualitative research and focus group interviews, we explore the voices of women teachers who teach in a rural school in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, around their views of gender-based violence. We conclude that their voices, both in relation to broader societal issues as well as in the school context, speak about a strong awareness of what is generally regarded as the ‘foundation’ of gender-based violence, i.e. gender inequality.

Keywords: violence; women; teachers; secondary school; sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

Unless violence against women and children is addressed, the multi-billion dollar response to HIV/AIDS is bound to fail. (Global AIDS Report 2006, 1)

The Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) report of 1997 highlights the significance of addressing gender-based violence in South African schools, and the idea that education must play a dual role in relation to discrimination and gendered or sex-based harassment and violence (Department of Education [DoE] 1997, 225). Leach and Mitchell (2006), in their book, *Combating Violence in and Around Schools*, highlight the complexity of gender-based violence and gender inequality and call for a more nuanced understanding of the interplay of the lives of girls and women. What does it mean to be a woman and a teacher in contexts where male students and male colleagues may be harassing female students and teachers? However, the voices of women teachers are largely absent from the literature on gender-based violence in South African schools. How then does a group of women teachers working in a rural school view the issues of gender inequality and gender-based violence?

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In a previous article entitled *Male teachers talk about gender-based violence: 'Zulu men demand respect'* (Bhana, de Lange, and Mitchell 2009), we demonstrated how male teachers in a rural school in KwaZulu-Natal were found to be quite vocal about gender-based violence in their community and school. However, in the focus group interview with women teachers from the same school, we heard a more tentative voice, hesitant in identifying and ascribing blame to males in an outright way, but at the same time, very vocal about perceived gender inequalities. For example, while the male teachers talked about a serious incident involving gender-based violence that had recently happened in their school, the women teachers could only say: 'There is not much [gender-based violence in school] because we have codes of conduct'. It is true that codes of conduct are in place, as a South African study entitled, *Are schools safe havens for children?* (Management Systems International 2008, 22) states explicitly: 'a code of conduct for teachers, school personnel and students expressly prohibits gender violence . . . and includes a system for addressing violations of the code'. Codes of conduct are important in sensitising the school community to issues of gender-based violence. Codes also take on a preventative role preventing teachers and school children transgressing in terms of what would qualify as gender-based violence, and are meant not only to support and encourage professionalism in relation to curricular knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (teachers who are sensitive to student needs, who prepare thoroughly, who possess organisational skills) but also to encourage ethical behaviour (Van Nuland 2009). However, while the women teachers referred to the code of conduct, they were very tentative at presenting issues around gender-based violence.

Women teachers' lives

The voices of women teachers are the central focus of this article. The specific body of literature on women teachers, international in scope and spanning several decades, suggests that the subject of 'woman + teacher' is, in and of itself a complex one. Its complexity is increased when it comes to studying gender and schooling, even more so in a study of how women teachers respond to and act on such issues as gender violence. Valerie Walkerdine's work in the UK in the 1980s and early 1990s, for example, draws attention to the idea of the impossible fiction of being a woman teacher. Walkerdine (1990), along with others writing in the Global North, note that the polarities of mind/body, womb/brain and intuition/intellect have a major impact on the identities of women teachers. Munro (1998, 1) goes on to write: '... to be a woman is to lack authority, knowledge and power. To be a teacher is to have authority, knowledge and power'. Brown and Gilligan (1992) in their innovative project on trying to understand girls' development and women's psychology found that the girls they studied lamented that their women teachers let them down. When they expected these women to speak out and 'lead', they often kept quiet (silent) or worse, silenced the girls (to be 'good girls'). Other authors such as Mitchell and Weber (1999) look at the female teaching body and the ways that it is regulated by institutional structures. Kirk's (2003) analysis of not just the 'women as teacher', but also the 'teacher as woman', particularly in the Global South, speaks to new impossible fictions: teachers as women role models for girls in girls' education programmes (and hence initiatives to get more women into leadership positions and positions as science and mathematics teachers), and teachers as women and women's empowerment in developmental contexts. Her careful analysis of gender, education and development suggests that the complex site of women as

teachers and teachers as women is one that requires a nuanced consideration of what it means to be a woman teacher in the age of AIDS and in a context where women and girls' bodies are a site for abuse and violence. Critically, as Stromquist, Klees, and Miske (2000, 255) write, 'It is not possible to isolate girls' education from the substance and politics of women's concerns'. And yet, as Kirk (2003) points out, this is precisely what happens. Policies related to girls and women are often detached from one another.

Gender-based violence in the context of HIV and AIDS

School children in Africa, and particularly in South Africa, are growing up in communities affected by HIV and AIDS (Walker 2004). Gender-based violence, in the context of HIV and AIDS, is fuelling the spread of the epidemic (Dunkle and Jewkes 2007), in particular exacerbating the vulnerability of girls and women who are often unable to negotiate safe sex (Ozra 2010). In southern Africa, for example, the first sexual experience of many girls is often a forced encounter; one in every five women is a victim of rape (United Nations 2009); and there is a high prevalence of intimate partner violence (Gass et al. 2011), which is also a risk factor for HIV (Jewkes et al. 2006). Cultural roles are closely connected to both gender-based violence and HIV risk. The face of the AIDS epidemic is a gendered one coming out of male dominance, power and gender inequalities (Strebel et al. 2006). Masculinity is socially constructed particularly in the context of class and race (Sathiparsad 2006) with traditional views of masculinity within a hierarchical, competitive and physical culture, contributing to gender-based violence (Ludsin and Vetten 2005). Dunkle and Jewkes (2007, 173) refer to how the "successful" performance of masculinity' depends on their ability to control their female partners, and this in turn places women at risk, even when there is no violence in the relationship. Thus, there are social and cultural forces that shape men's behaviour, while women's vulnerability is exacerbated by their economic, psychological and social dependence on men. Such power differentials directly influence the way in which AIDS affects women (Hoosen and Collins 2004), making it difficult to change gender attitudes. It is clear that 'active transformation of underlying gender norms that legitimate male power, male control, male violence and men's sexual risk taking' (Dunkle and Jewkes 2007, 173) is required.

Gender-based violence in and around schools in South Africa

The presence of gender-based violence in South African schools has been well documented. Studies range from the *Scared at School* study published by Human Rights Watch (2001), to the South Africa Human Rights Commission report on violence in schools (SAHRC 2008) and a study by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation entitled: *Waiting opportunities: Adolescent girls' experiences of gender-based violence at schools* (Haffejee 2006). Other related studies that consider the impact of gender inequalities in relation to reproductive health include, *Teenage pregnancy in South Africa with a specific focus on school-going learners* (Panday et al. 2009), Amnesty International's study on rural women living with HIV and including retrospective data on sexual violence in schools (Amnesty International 2008), and the HSRC's *South African national HIV prevalence, incidence, behaviour and communication study, 2008: A turning tide for teenagers* (HSRC 2008). There is a consistent (and unrelenting) theme of gender inequality that is seriously disabling when it comes to girls' safety and security in schools. This theme extends more broadly to

their reproductive health, in the context of their social and biological vulnerabilities, in relation to HIV and AIDS.

Gender-based violence is linked to bullying, corporal punishment, verbal abuse and sexual violence in schools, and it is often the authoritarian school that allows gender-based violence to flourish (Leach 2002). Women teachers and girls are vulnerable to aggressive sexual advances from male learners and male educators within the school and also males outside the school (e.g. gangs and taxi drivers). As Leach (2002) observes, too often gender violence appears to be part of school life and as such contributes to the socialisation of both males and females. According to Prinsloo (2006), more than 30% of girls in southern Africa are raped in and around school. This betrayal, as the *Human Rights Watch Report* (2001) points out, can lead to many girls leaving school early and others suffering in silence (Prinsloo 2006). Thus, the school, which should be a safe institution for teaching and learning in general, but also for learning about safe sex and sexuality, is a high-risk site (Leach 2002).

The context and setting of the study

Since 2004, we, the authors, along with other colleagues, have been working as a research team in a rural district in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Our research has focused on addressing issues around HIV and AIDS, as we are aware that the prevalence rate for HIV and AIDS is still highest in this province (Motsoaledi 2010). In our work we have engaged community health workers, educators, learners and even parents in participatory research and have tested out various visual participatory methodologies with a 'research as change' focus, raising awareness of gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS and HIV-related stigma (Mitchell et al. 2005; Moletsane et al. 2007). The importance of not ignoring gender-based violence and its connectedness to HIV and AIDS in a school context is underscored by the fact that schools are often presented 'as if they were not sites of power and struggle, but rather places of rational instruction, engagement and action' (Morrell et al. 2009, 22). While exploring, through participatory video work, the most critical issues in their daily lives, five of the six learner groups constructed their videos around the issue of gender-based violence. Titles of their videos point to the occurrence of gender-based violence at their school, for example, *Rape at school: Trust no one* (a story of an educator sexually abusing a learner), *How raping got me HIV and AIDS* (a story of a girl who was raped and the teacher assisted in getting the rapist behind bars) and *Rape* (a story of a three boys raping a school girl) (see Mitchell and de Lange 2011). One of the most poignant videos and which is particularly relevant to this analysis of women teachers' responses was produced by a group of girls entitled: *Protect the children*. This video addresses the ways in which all the significant adult women (the mother, a female neighbour, the aunt) in the life of the girl protagonist (a victim of incest) do nothing when they are told by the girl that her father has been touching her and having sexual relations with her (see also Moletsane et al. 2008).

Research design and methodology

In this qualitative, explorative and contextual study (Creswell 1994), we drew on an interpretive approach to explore the women teachers' constructions of gender-based violence. The convenience sample consisted of six women teachers teaching at one Senior Secondary school. Their ages ranged from early twenties to mid-forties and

their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 20 years. All were first language isiZulu speakers. We thought it was important to engage with the women teachers and men teachers in separate focus group interviews in order to create a space for an open discussion of gender-based violence. As a team of women researchers working with the two groups, we were very much aware of our own positions and how 'gender filters knowledge' (Denzin 1989, 116). In the case of the women teachers, we were both insiders and outsiders. On the one hand, we appreciate Oakley's ideas on the social context of women interviewing women (Oakley 1981). On the other, we were mindful of issues of race (an Indian woman and a white woman interviewing Zulu women or men) and location (rural teachers, urban academics). Although these are key areas of concern (and remain so in academic research in South Africa), we had been working closely with the teachers in the school for several years in the Learning Together project and throughout had been using visual participatory methodologies in relation to addressing HIV&AIDS.¹ The sensitive nature of this previous work and the approaches we were taking had contributed to building some rapport and trust. In this regard we did not feel that the women teachers were intimidated by the questions we were asking. In each of the focus group interviews (one with men teachers and one with women teachers), we gave an overview of the project and then posed one main question: 'Tell us how you understand gender-based violence', followed by clarifying and probing questions when needed. The focus group interviews were audio-taped, with the permission of the participants and later transcribed. In the analysis of the data, we first used Tesch's open coding (Creswell 1994) to identify units of meaning. These were then categorised, allowing themes to emerge. Alongside this type of open coding we also carried out a secondary textual analysis which we term 'interrogating the text', where as a research team we asked questions about 'presence' and 'absence' in the text. This approach is based on Morgan and Youssef's (2006) work on addressing sexual violence in a Caribbean context, and drawing on discourse analysis. For example, as observed in the introduction, we found that in the transcripts of the male teachers, there were many strongly vocalised references to gender-based violence. However, in the transcripts of the women teachers, despite encountering many direct references to gender inequality, a more tentative approach and fewer direct references to gender-based violence were observed. Thus, while in this article we do not carry out a complete comparative analysis of the two sets of data, our analysis of the transcripts of the women teachers is informed by the interviews with the male teachers.

Findings and discussion

In this section, we present the findings and contextualise the discussion thereof within the existing literature. The first emerging theme revolves around inequality, in particular gender inequality, as the women participants make the connection between gender-based violence and gender inequality. The second theme looks at the difficulty in changing the *status quo*, the third highlights the reality of gender-based violence in school, while the last theme focuses on what the school is doing to address gender-based violence.

Living with gender inequality

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996a) as well as the South African Schools Act of 1996 (RSA 1996b) provide the framework for bringing

about equality in society and school. However, it appears difficult to implement such legislation, given the context of a country that contains such diversity in terms of who the people are, where they come from and where they live. Given such diversity, it was clear that the women participants would draw heavily on what they already knew and had experienced, be it their own story, or their tradition and culture, with its gender roles. Their voices do not present a single view for all women teachers working in South African rural areas. However, this is what they know. What is also clear is that these women see the reciprocal influence of home, school, work and society on each other, in a way that Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) see the various systems within an ecosystemic framework speaking to and being influenced by each other. Such a systems view underscores the complexity and interlinked nature of gender inequality.

We draw on Amartya Sen's explanation of equality (1992, cited in Morrell et al. 2009, 12) in that it relates to the 'freedoms people have to achieve valuable objectives ... or the real opportunities people have to achieve valued objectives'. This implies that 'being born a boy or girl or into a poor family does not constrain capabilities or the range of valued alternatives from which a person can choose' (Morrell et al. 2009, 12). The women teachers in this study voiced their understanding of gender-based violence in terms of inequality, not in the way Sen explains equality, but rather around their socialised roles as women and men in their community. Women are presented as being less capable and holding an inferior position, and being unable to take up the 'freedoms' that Sen writes about. Women teachers described having to turn down promotions to become head teachers in order to avoid being accused by the community of having had sex with a male in power as a pathway to promotion (Mitchell 1996).

According to the women teachers in this study, the inequality is visible and begins at home. However, it is further played out in the school, the workplace and the community:

I am also thinking that we are also at the school ... are contributing to this kind of environment. Like when we do the cleaning roster, we like the girls to be the ones to be responsible for the cleaning of the classrooms ... And this thing is indirectly saying to the males that the females are just the good caretaker of the homes ...

It also connects to the workplace. Sometimes, males think they are the superiors over the females at the work and they think the females are not capable ...

... also in the community ... I also read eh ... a bit there in the book there was a part whereby there was a meeting, the meeting where the males meet together and also eh ... the women were left at home ... so it means that in the community the women are taken as the inferior ... they do.

The above quotations demonstrate that the teachers think about how both boys and girls are socialised into their particular roles – acknowledging their own complicity – in school, their workplace and the broader community.

Changing status of men and women

Linked to the above constructions of inequality, as a curtailment of their freedom, and tied to the notion of culture as static, the women teachers in the next quotation put forward an argument that the power to change the *status quo* lies in the hands of the

men, as ‘they [men] have to change’, with women being unable to influence any such change. This raises the issue of how to ‘re-vision, hegemonic discourses in ways that affirm, challenge, or subvert’ (Flockemann 2005, 130) the gendered practices in the family, the school and the community, in ways that can bring about and sustain equality.

You find out there is still the stereotype ’cause there is the teachings from home. So there is nothing we [women] can change even if you try to make them [the men] realize that. They have to change their thinking, attitudes . . . that you find that they believe it is like that in our culture, we have to do it this way.

Moletsane et al. (2008, 23) explain how the notion of ‘our culture’² is used to ‘justify the oppression of girls and women by regulating what they may or may not do’. A constant ‘invoking [of] the patriarchal content of Zulu culture’ (Bhana, de Lange, and Mitchell, 2009, 50) underpins the expectations for a Zulu woman to on the one hand uphold the culture, take her place in the kitchen, take care of the children, remain faithful to her husband, and so on, while on the other hand it also points to male ‘. . . anger, fear and hostilities around gender equality . . . located in the context of women’s increasing (political) autonomy’ (Bhana, de Lange, and Mitchell, 2009, 49). In our work with male teachers (see Bhana, de Lange, and Mitchell, 2009), we heard that ‘it’s not that easy, to us as Zulu people . . . there is that patriarchal thing in our community whereby we, we really cannot accept that women are being raised to now . . . to the standard, and to the level, you see, this equality’ (Bhana, de Lange, and Mitchell, 2009, 49). The unwillingness of these men to relinquish their position contributes to keeping women ‘in their place’, and could also contribute to gender-based violence, something the women clearly seem aware of, even as they appear to tiptoe around expressing their views on gender-based violence.

The difficulty in changing the *status quo* – the position of men and women in a community (ethnic group) in terms of communicating, work division and power distribution – is emphasised in the following quotation:

Boys um . . . and they got a belief that when you speak to them you mustn’t just say things anyhow [in any way] . . . so they’re easily offended and they think the only way then overcoming their problems is to be aggressive.

The women shared the frustrations of their roles and not being allowed to participate in decision-making pertaining to their family and community (Moletsane et al. 2008), as this is a right reserved for men and boys.

So women are taken as . . . slaves. They . . . do their . . . work at home, collect . . . the wood and also fetch water . . . and the males they go out and discuss [with] their community, the news about the community and they also take decisions themselves without consulting the women . . .

A participant indicated that men may direct their anger towards women who appear to be usurping their power (even though women continue to carry out traditional responsibilities).

. . . it’s the violence that occurs between the . . . males and the females. This is especially eh instigated by the males ’cause they think they’re more powerful than the females.

Women teachers also consider the impact of education on employment possibilities and talk about boys who did not finish schooling (UNGEI Report, n.d., cited in Moletsane et al. 2008, 14) or further their qualifications and who thus have to take up blue collar work to make a living or otherwise remain unemployed.

Most of them [the men in the community] did not go through high school. So when they go out looking for jobs they find that they did not have the basic matric results that . . . they are used when they are short-listed for interviews.

Besides not having qualifications to access decent employment, the unqualified persons earn wages which are insufficient for sustaining families, as the following quotation indicates.

Loading it into the trucks, weeding eh blunting the forest and they do not got [get] much payment there. The salaries are very low, they . . . they can just not make anything out of that salaries.

The women teachers also know that it is easier for women to find employment, often as nurses or teachers, and are therefore financially independent (Unterhalter 2002). This situation influences the family dynamics, because the male, who traditionally holds the power of being the family breadwinner, and who thus holds the purse, is no longer in such a strong position. Such disruption of the traditional roles is seen as contributing to gender-based violence. Odora Hoppers (2005) too, points to the connection between women's rise in society and the increase in gender-based violence and the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Sometimes you'll find that the . . . that the females are working and the males are not working, then the violence starts between those lines. You can find that the . . . female she is the bread winner at home. So the . . . male . . . he will see himself as . . . the male, he would . . . look at . . . himself as if she is nothing at home yeah because he's . . . useless because he's . . . looking after . . . home and he's doing nothing.

While it is significant that these women teachers have been educated and can contribute to the development needs of the community, it is worth noting that 'gender inequalities in families, communities and educational institutions remain endemic' (Moletsane 1995, cited in Moletsane et al. 2008, 9).

Are schools safe? Is gender-based violence real in schools?

This third theme highlights the school as an unsafe place and reveals various forms of gender-based violence that the women teachers are aware of in their school, even though, as we indicated earlier, their voices were more tentative. In working towards addressing gender-based violence in schools, the DoE, as early as 2001 published a school-based module, *Opening our eyes: Addressing gender-based violence in South African schools* (Mlamleli et al. 2001), to be used by teachers to create safer schools. However, a 2008 report, *Are schools safe havens for children? Examining school-related gender-based violence* (MSI 2008), demonstrates that school violence committed by school children and teachers, and directed at other school children, resulting in physical, sexual and psychological abuse, still exists.

Interestingly, the women teachers refer only to the physical violence between and among school children, even though it is widely reported that male teachers have sexual relationships with school girls (Morrell et al. 2009), and that male teachers harass women teachers (Sebakwane 1993/1994).

... violence between the sexes, but in most cases males are more violent than the women.

Sometimes fighting ... the girls, maybe a boy fighting, the girl, sometimes ...

One cannot easily untangle the complexity of the systemic causes of gender-based violence. Having mentioned patriarchy and power in terms of gender issues, the women participants also spoke of socio-economic issues in relation to gender-based violence. In a society focused on material possessions, tension between those who have and those who do not, particularly in a rural community where most people live in poverty and resources are scarce, could contribute towards gender-based violence. An example of emotional bullying, linked to gender, is presented by the women teachers, where girls who are higher achievers, are pulled down because of their apparently better socio-economic status in the community. It is not clear whether these teachers then address the injustice done or whether they remain silent:

... like when you've got this eh young girl who's very clever, always wearing very neat school uniform. She'll just be eh eh ill-treated for being in that state and being ready to be educated. Eh! 'cause eh ... that told us that would be a sign that, eh, she comes from a family that can take care of her ...

Earlier we referred to the communication between men and women and how expectations are tied to roles as they occur 'in our culture'. An example of verbal abuse was given, and was described as 'words' that hurt, specifically where a male shows disrespect for the worth of women and their ideas, creating a hostile work environment, the effect of which is often underestimated:

Sometimes ... [a male teacher] passes words that hurts women and they [men] know about it, yeah, and they just feel great that, that, they say those words.

Taking into consideration the examples the women teachers gave, supports Mitchell's (2005, 18) findings that 'stories of girls' sexual abuse and rape, heightened by unsafe passages to school as well as spaces within schools, are legion'. In spite of the various policies put in place, a code of conduct and efforts to raise awareness of gender-based violence, schools remain unsafe environments.

How the school addresses gender-based violence

The women educators reflected on what the school does to address gender-based violence, and referred to the roles of teachers, learners and parents.

Teachers are held to their code of conduct

South African teachers are all regulated by a Code of Professional Ethics (South African Council of Educators 2010), which emphasises the need to ensure that schools are safe for both learners and teachers. As noted, the women spoke of the

code and the fact that all teachers should adhere to it. They also spoke of the potential for gender workshops to assist all teachers in understanding gender-based violence and to contribute towards changing the *status quo*:

... we minimize the violence 'cause we have codes of conduct for them to be served. Basically they [codes] are trying to fight against the violence.

... if we can all attend these gender workshops.

This raises the issue of whether knowing about a code or attending gender workshops, translates into a reduction in the incidents of gender-based violence. Will women and girls tell? In the video entitled, *Rape at school: Trust no one*, the male teacher who sexually abuses a girl threatens her as he leaves the classroom, 'You tell, you're dead' (Our Stories 2005). And if a girl dares to tell, who would listen or respond? Are the women teachers able to respond to the girls who confide in them? Furthermore, who monitors the conduct? And what would the consequences of misconduct be? While these are all issues that are taken up in a code of conduct, it seems clear that there is much to be done in terms of implementation. There are several media reports on teachers who have abused their position and engaged sexually with school children. De Wet and Oosthuizen (2010) refer to Louw (2003, 6), who reported in 2002 that the cases of 'rape of girls under the age of 15 has doubled since 1990, and that educators were the perpetrators in a third of the cases'; that in 2002, 15 educators had been dismissed due to 'this form of misconduct'; while Govender (2005, 1) reports that 49 educators had been found 'guilty of rape, sexual harassment or sexual relationships with learners of their school' between May 2004 and August 2005. This speaks to the 'gendered and unequal socio-cultural context in which girls experience their childhood in schools and communities' (Moletsane et al. 2008, 7) and the need to 'create safe school environments' (Moletsane et al. 2008, 19).

School children are advised, punished or suspended

The role of the school is to educate learners for work and living, and also includes guiding and admonishing when doing wrong. However, these teachers feel that since the abolition of corporal punishment (Abolition of Corporal Punishment, Act 33, of 1997, RSA 1997) their ability to set learners on the right path when they have committed some offence (including a gender-based violent offence) is diminished. This theme speaks to all teachers, but particularly to women teachers' lack of agency in addressing gender-based violence.

... we have nothing much to do with them since the government eh there's an act that we mustn't eh apply this eh corporal punishment to them, so we just discuss the issues with them, trying to ... advise them, give them the good advices that we think are lacking at home. So if they don't take your advice then there is nothing much you can do.

A disciplinary committee exists within the structure of the school to hear and address the transgression. It is an all male committee made up of the more senior teachers, adhering to African tradition that men lead (Brown and Duku 2008).

After the hearing the ... learner is punished. It depends to ... to the weight of the ... of what the child have done.

Since there are no corporal punishment anymore . . . they are suspended.

In our work with these teachers at their school, they unanimously agreed that their school did not have a policy on gender-based violence (Mitchell and de Lange 2011). Hence, there was no means to raise awareness of gender-based violence, identifying and naming its different forms and how to respond to or address such behaviour, but also how to ensure that school is a safe space for all. The need for a collaborative process to construct such a policy could go a long way to raise awareness of the challenges to addressing 'gender-based violence [which] has become endemic' (Moletsane et al. 2008, 18).

Parents are called in

Another way in which the school responds to learner-initiated gender-based violence is to call in the parents to discuss their child's transgression with the disciplinary committee. In previous work with the school, we learnt that most parents are disengaged from the school as an institution, while Khumalo (2006) indicates that parents from poor households demonstrate particularly low levels of engagement. A study by Strassburg, Meny-Gilbert, and Russell (2010), *More than getting through the school gates*, refers to varying levels of parental engagement that also relate to levels of education. Parents may feel unable to contribute to their children's education because they are not respected by their children and therefore they are unable to control their children's actions or behaviour. Being summoned to school might thus be a daunting prospect for the parents, but may also be a futile way of controlling learner behaviour.

Parents come to discuss it with committee. . . . disciplinary committee.

Parents who live in rural areas are steeped in a 'culture' that informs 'beliefs and ways of relating to each other across various boundaries, including gender, age, sex . . .' (Moletsane et al. 2008, 24). It is far from straightforward to convince them to adjust their expected norms for roles and positions of girls and boys in order to address gender-based violence and inequality. It requires a deeper and more systemic approach, than simply 'calling parents in'. In the interview with the teachers, the teachers spoke about how a father had threatened a learner who had complained about his child's behavior. This raises the issue of danger when reporting or revealing misconduct. Teachers are also afraid to reprimand learners, often fearing for their own safety.

Towards a pedagogy of reflexivity

As noted in the beginning of this article, the women teachers were less outspoken than the male teachers when discussing gender-based violence. At the same time, as interpreted through the eyes of the school children in the participatory videos they made, and in the interviews with the male teachers, gender-based violence is clearly a challenge for the school in question. It is tempting to interpret some of the comments of the women teachers as either a means of constructing their own realities, or, through their silence, contributing to victimhood (St. Pierre 2000). However, the extensive comments of the women on gender inequality, both in relation to broader societal issues as well as in the school context, speak very much to a strong awareness of what is generally regarded as the 'foundation' of gender-based violence.

While we are not sure what to make of the relative absence of a national discussion forum concerning gender-based violence, we can say that 14 years after the release of the GETT report (DoE 1997), there remains a great deal to be done to ‘level the playing fields’ for girls and women, but equally important, to ‘start with ourselves’. At the risk of reading too much into what the women teachers said (or did not say), we speculate here that a critical entry point to addressing gender-based violence in South African schools is to not only draw on the kinds of discussions that we had with the women teachers, but to extend them – to make more of women teachers’ experiences and perspectives. How can we understand their statements about gender inequality at a deeper level? How do they regard their own issues of safety and security? How do we understand their silence around gender-based violence that is directed at them? It is impossible to understand the inequalities in relation to girls’ lives and girls’ education without understanding gender inequalities and gender construction in the lives of adult women (including teachers). When women teachers are not confident and willing to speak out, Brown and Gilligan (1992) observe, the silence may be picked up by girls.

While one focus group interview with a group of six women teachers in one rural school is far from conclusive, it nonetheless maps out an important agenda for future work in the area of gender-based violence, not least of which is to talk more to women teachers about their present and past experiences of gender inequality and gender violence. Methodologically, ‘woman + teacher’ calls for studies that seek to ‘connect’ girls and women. In the context of gender-based violence, this is a study that appears particularly relevant. Teni-Atinga (2006) in a study of young women preparing to become teachers in Ghana notes the high incidence of gender-based violence in their lives as school girls. She considers that it is vital to ‘bring on board’ these young women and their experiences, in order to deepen an understanding of violence, and of course to combat gender-based violence with a new generation of young women. Similarly, Chege (2006) uses memory work with young women teachers as an ‘entry point’ to address gender-based violence in schools. The work of Khau (2011) in studying women teachers’ memories and reflection on sexuality education also interrogated the role of women teachers in understanding sexuality and combating gender inequalities. These authors consider that this type of action does not take place simply by virtue of being ‘woman + teacher’. On the contrary, it is only by being in a position to look back and simultaneously look forward that they are able to see ways of acting and doing.

But besides looking back so as to look forward, we also think that it is critical to include the ‘now’ of gender-based violence. We have, since the production of the participatory videos noted above, continued to work with the schools and in particular the teachers. We have developed a teaching guide to accompany a composite video: *Seeing for ourselves*, which consists of a collection of some of the videos on gender-based violence that the learners had made and which teachers can and have been using to address gender-based violence. Developing the guide was a collaborative and participative process as we developed a draft, presented it to the educators for discussion and refinement in a workshop situation, and facilitated a discussion on how they could use it with their learners. To what extent does the teachers’ participation in initiatives such as this one have an impact on how they see their role in combating gender violence?

Conclusion

Moletsane, Mitchell, and Lewin (2010) observe that there are few references in studies of gender-based violence in South Africa to past (and present) intergenerational

experiences and discourses of gender-based violence. A 2008 Amnesty International study is one of the few that has, and which highlights work with adult women, some of whom looked back and reflected on their pasts. We think that this is a critical point to understand so as to more fully appreciate the impact of gender-based violence on schools and learners. We are seeing the need for studies of some breadth and depth to take into consideration the need to recognise the long-term impact on former learners who have been victims of teachers' misconduct, victims or survivors of gang violence or pregnant girls who have been victims of unsympathetic school bodies and having to leave school as a result and hence abandoning hopes and dreams for a career – to name only some of the violations. Clearly, this calls for refined and nuanced methodologies on memory work, along with other autobiographical approaches of self-study and auto-ethnography. Such studies, we argue, hold promise for progress in combating gender violence in and around rural schools.

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Notes

1. The 'Learning together: Towards an integrated participatory approach to youth, gender and HIV/AIDS interventions in rural KwaZulu-Natal' project was active from 2004 to 2006.
2. The extensive work on Zulu culture by Carton, Laband, and Sithole 2009. *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, speaks not only on the fluidity of Zulu identity, but also the tensions between traditional and contemporary perspectives.

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