

The Influence of School Organisational Variables on School Violence in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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Abstract

This article reports the findings of a sequential mixed-method study about the influence of school organisational variables on school violence in the Eastern Cape Province. An adapted version of the California School Climate and Survey – Short Form (CSCSS-SF) was used as data collection instrument during the first phase of the investigation. The questionnaire was completed by 900 Grade 10-12 learners, half of which were from high-risk schools, and the rest from low-risk schools. During the second phase of the study, in-depth, personal interviews were conducted with eight learners from four schools: two high-risk schools and two low-risk schools from the Queenstown District. The purpose of the interview was to complement and elucidate the quantitative results. The results revealed that campus disruption, drug abuse and carrying weapons were realities at both the high-risk and the low-risk schools that participated in the study. However, statistically, respondents from high-risk schools felt significantly more unsafe than those attending low-risk schools. Furthermore, it transpired that statistically, significantly more respondents at high-risk schools, than learners at low-risk schools were the victims of school violence. These results were confirmed by the findings from the second phase of the study. The close connection between a positive school climate and culture and school safety not only transpires from the quantitative results, but also from the narratives.

Keywords: mixed method, school climate, school violence, South Africa

1. Introduction

In 2002, the South African National Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Health, published a report resultant from a survey about dangerous behavioural patterns amongst school-going youth. In the foreword, the former Minister of Education, Kader Asmal (Republic of South Africa, 2002) stated that the safety of learners and teachers, as well as the prevention of violence at South African schools posed enormous challenges. In the report, further concerns were expressed about the levels of violence, as well as the apparent increase in violence at South African schools. The report also reached the conclusion that violence at South African schools was a problem that had to be addressed. From the report (Republic of South Africa, 2002) it further transpired that 16.7% of South African learners took weapons to school, 41% were harassed, 30.2% had already been involved in physical fights, and 14.3% were gang members. Newspaper headings like, *Two pupils hurt in gang violence* (Ndabeni, 2009), *Boy shot in school fight over cellphone* (Dimbaza, 2009) and *Teen fights for his life after school stabbing* (Jack, 2006) in *The Herald*, an Eastern Cape Province regional newspaper, contribute to the situation that the Eastern Cape public and parents increasingly became concerned about the safety and welfare of learners during school hours. It also contributed to the perception by the public in general that school violence was the order of the day. Research has largely proven that Eastern Cape parents should be concerned for the safety of their children (De Wet, 2003; Mlisa, Ward, Flisher & Lombard, 2008). The Eastern Cape is not only a province where violence is rife at schools, but corruption prevailed in education (Ellis, 2010; Fengu, 2011). Unemployment and poverty are acute (Mlisa *et al.*, 2008) and a decline in family structures occurs in rural areas (Mlisa *et al.*, 2008). The latter could also be ascribed to the migration of parents to urban areas in Gauteng to find work and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The preceding negative scenario of the Eastern Cape Province in general and, more specifically, education, does not mean that education in the Eastern Cape is in a total state of disarray and that violence is rife at all schools. The Eastern Cape Department of Education, like the Western Cape Department of Education (2003), draws a distinction

between high-risk and low-risk schools. While the Western Cape Department of Education (2003), in line with the argument by Dunbar-Krige, Pillay and Henning (2010) as well as Masitsa (2011), places the environment where the school is situated at the centre in their classification of schools as high-risk or low-risk schools, the Eastern Cape Department of Education (2010) places the school at the centre. According to a spokesperson from the Eastern Cape Department of Education, schools in this province are classified as high-risk schools on the grounds of the "number of incidences of violence reported at schools". It did not transpire during the telephone conversation between the first author of this article and a departmental spokesperson about the correlation between incidences of violence and number of learners and whether a distinction can be drawn between different types of violent behaviour. Benbenishty and Astor (2008), as well as Furlong and Morrison (2000) also place the school at the centre with regard to violence at schools. According to Furlong and Morrison (2000), schools must assume educational ownership for school violence. This means that issues within the everyday management of schooling tasks largely determine safety at schools. Against the background of the preceding, we shall argue in this article that school-organisational variables (school climate, violence and safety) have an influence on school violence. This study is lead by the following primary question: What effect does school culture and school climate have on violence in the Eastern Cape (South Africa)? In the search for an answer to this question, a quantitative investigation was firstly launched to determine the influence of school-organisational variables on school violence. Secondly, an attempt was made to supplement and clarify the quantitative results with the help of in-depth, individual interviews. The results shall be reported against the background of an exposition of the key concepts and a theoretical framework.

2. Concept Elucidation

School culture and school climate are two different, but highly related and interactive dimensions in the functioning of a school. Both school culture and school climate are concepts that can be linked to the atmosphere at a school, but which could influence circumstances at the school in different ways. Both concepts are important in determining the quality of the circumstances and the ability to ensure positive learning outcomes. This includes high academic as well as non-academic achievements, like well-developed citizens and positive school environments (Saufler, 2005). School culture is defined as an underlying set of norms, values, beliefs, rituals and traditions that directs members of a school's thoughts, feelings and actions (Peterson & Deal, 2002). School climate refers to the quality and characteristics of school life. School climate is based on the personal experiences of learners, teachers and parents with regard to school life. It reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relations, teaching and learning, as well as the organisational structures of a school (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2008). Although there are differences in nuances between the concepts *school culture* and *climate*, the instrument used in this study does not draw a distinction, and uses the inclusive notion of "school culture and climate". The differences in nuances between the two notions will consequently not be discussed further in this article.

Furlong and Morrison (2000:71) define violence at schools as "a multifaceted construct that involves both criminal acts and aggression in schools, which inhibit development and learning, as well as harm the school's climate". Violence at schools is therefore negative behavioural patterns that can blemish a school's pedagogical mission. This definition recognises the interconnected nature of school culture and school climate.

Opposed to this, a safe school is described as a place where the school climate allows learners, teachers, administrators, parents and visitors to communicate with one another in a positive and non-threatening manner (Bucher & Manning, 2005). A safe school is a place where education can take place in an environment free of intimidation, violence and fear (Mabie, 2003; Masitsa, 2011). According to Mabie (2003), such an environment results in an educational climate reflecting a spirit of acceptance and care. It will also be a place free of harassment where expected behavioural actions will be communicated clearly, consistently and fairly. Dwyer, Osher and Warger (1998) also classify safe schools as schools where strong leadership, parental and community involvement, high levels of learner participation and behavioural codes prevail in order to ensure responsible behaviour. Safe schools are therefore characterised by good discipline, communication, a culture and climate conducive to teaching and learning, good administrative practices and an absence of any levels of crime and violence.

3. Theoretical Framework

Although many traditional and integrated theories regarding violence exist (cf. Bender & Emslie, 2010; Klewin, Tillmann & Weingart, 2003; Kruger, 2011), violence at schools shall come up for review from a bio-ecologic perspective, as adapted by Benbenishty and Astor (2003), for the purposes of this study. The theory can be used as the basis for illustrating the

mutual bond between the individual, manifold environments and patterns of violent behaviour. According to Benbenishty and Astor (2008), Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecologic theory creates a notion of violence as interaction between relevant subsystems. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979:3), "the ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls". This theory therefore illustrates the interaction between a person's characteristics and environmental variables (socially and physically). The environment under discussion could include other people who are involved in the situations (co-learners, teachers), as well as the physical environment (school, class size, school structures). Whilst other bio-ecological models place the individual at the centre (cf. Dunbar-Krige *et al.*, 2011; Kruger, 2011), Benbenishty and Astor (2008) position the school context at the centre. This model serves as an indicator for the conceptualisation of ideas and analysis of data in this study, because the objective of this article is to investigate the influence of school-organisational variables on school violence.

4. Empirical Investigation

In this research, the multi-method research design was used. According to Creswell (2008), the use of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches could result in a better understanding of the research problem. In this study, the explanatory multi-method design was used. This model, also known as the two-phase model, consists of data that were firstly gathered by means of the quantitative method and then by means of the qualitative data. The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data give a general picture of the research problem, while the qualitative data are used to refine, expand or explain the general picture (Creswell, 2008).

4.1 First Phase of the Study

4.1.1 Research Instrument

The California School Climate and Survey – Short Form (CSCSS-SF) was adapted and used as the data collection instrument. Items relating to demographic information were changed to suit the South African secondary school contexts. Some minor changes were furthermore made in terms of wording of some items to allow for the South African context. The CSCSS-SF was developed by the Centre for School-Based Youth Development in California. It is a structured questionnaire for learners exclusively directed at the determination of school culture, school climate and school safety. According to Barnes (2010), this instrument has already been used in international studies to investigate school culture, climate and school safety.

Items in the questionnaire dealing with school safety can be divided into subdivisions, namely campus disruption and drug abuse, as well as the carrying of weapons. The first of these subdivisions indicates less serious events such as theft, fights and vandalism, while the second subdivision represents serious activities. The items in this section have been designed to measure respondents' perceptions of the occurrence of dangerous activities on the school premises. According to a five-point Likert scale, which varies from *not at all* to *regularly*, respondents are requested to indicate how often activities such as drug abuse, vandalism and the carrying of weapons occur on the school premises. A high score in the subscales shall indicate a high incidence of campus disruption and drug abuse, as well as carrying weapons.

The section on school culture and school climate measures respondents' perceptions pertaining to the school environment. Respondents must answer questions about aspects relating to safety, respect, support and interpersonal relations at the school. Items in this section are divided into ten subdivisions: rules and norms; physical safety; social and emotional security; support for learning; social and civil learning; respect for diversity; social support – adults; social support – learners; school attachment and physical environment. In this division, a five-point Likert scale was used, which varies from *disagree entirely* to *agree entirely*. A high score in these subscales indicates that respondents experience school culture and school climate as positive support.

The section on violence at schools in the questionnaire measures the scope of incidents of violence at schools. Respondents were asked to indicate their personal experiences during the preceding 12 months (not what had been perceived by them) with regard to victimisation. Items in this section were divided into ten subdivisions: physical and verbal harassment, weapons and physical attacks, and sexual harassment. The five-point Likert scale was also used in this section, with answers varying from *not at all* to *constantly*. A high score in the subscales indicates a high level of experiencing victimisation.

4.1.2 Composition of and background information about the research group

In the composition of the research group, non-probability sampling was used. The sample was performed in a non-random manner; the schools and learners were therefore approached purposefully, according to their availability. Thirty schools in the Eastern Cape Province offering Grade 10 to Grade 12 were used as a convenience sample for the study.

The schools were divided into two risk categories: the schools that were regarded as a high risk and those regarded as a low risk. For the purposes of this study, schools that are not regarded by the Eastern Cape Department of Education as dangerous are referred to as low-risk schools. Fifteen schools regarded as high-risk schools were selected from a list made available by the Eastern Cape Department of Education to the researchers. All 15 these schools are situated either in townships or in rural villages in the East London District (7), Queenstown District (2), Lady Frere District (5) and the King Williamstown District (1). From the category for low-risk schools, schools from the districts of Queenstown (11) and East London (4) were included. With the exception of one township school, all the low-risk schools are former Model C schools. The low-risk schools are therefore predominantly situated in urban areas

Ten learners each from Grades 10, 11 and 12 were selected at each school to complete the questionnaire. Schools were requested to make equal numbers of boys and girls available from each grade. In total, 900 learners participated in the study. From this total, 49% were boys and 51% girls. With regard to the number of learners from the different grades, the schools were requested to make the same number of learners from the different grades available. From the total number of learners, Grade 10 represented 32.9%, Grade 11, 33.8% and Grade 12, 33.3%.

Each school was visited by the first author between 28 April 2010 and 21 May 2010. The administration and taking down of the tests were performed by the author in person. In that way, he could ensure that the respondents understood the questionnaire, he could clarify any obscurities regarding questions and he could ensure that all questions on the questionnaires were answered. At the same time, he could also ensure that the correct number of learners per school completed the questionnaires.

4.1.3 Quality Criteria

In an attempt to enhance the validity of the questionnaire, attention was paid to form and content validity (cf. Pieterse & Maree, 2007). A statistician, as well as other experts in the field of research, checked the questionnaire before dissemination in order to determine whether the instrument was valid and covered the content of the research area in full. The use of an existing instrument also enhanced the validity of the study (cf. Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006). A pilot study was also undertaken. After ten learners from a senior secondary school that was not involved in the research had completed the questionnaires, the necessary changes were made to the content and structure of the questionnaire. The internal consistency, with which the items of the three scales of the CSCSS-SF are measured, was calculated with the help of Cronbach's coefficient. The alpha coefficients for the scales for school safety, school culture and violence at schools were 0.709, 0.760 and 0.815, respectively. The internal consistency was therefore at acceptable levels (cf. Pieterse & Maree, 2007).

4.1.4 Processing of Data

In order to determine on which of the CSCSS scales significant differences in means occurred for the low-risk and high-risk schools, unidirectional variance analyses were made. The 1% level of significance was used in this study. However, in order to give an informed answer as well about the practical interest of statistically significant results that would be determined with the research, the practical significance of the results were also studied. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2009), the following guideline values (f^2) can be used for the regression analyses: 0.10 = small effect; 0.15 = medium effect and 0.35 = major effect.

Statistical calculations were done with the help of SPSS computer software programme.

4.2 Second phase of the study

4.2.1 Participants

During the second phase of the study, in-depth, personal interviews were conducted with eight learners from four schools: two high-risk schools and two low-risk schools from the Queenstown District. Participants were identified with the help of the principal in order to get learners who could make a valuable and meaningful contribution to the study. For the

low-risk schools, a girls' school and a mixed-gender Afrikaans school were identified. From each school, except for the girls' school, two learners each, a boy and a girl, were identified for the interviews. The reason for this was to let the biographic profile of the participants in the qualitative research correspond as far as possible with the biographic profiles of the learners in the quantitative investigation. Furthermore, the identification of learners by the principals was of importance, because they were familiar with their learners' linguistic proficiency. The interviews with six of the learners took place in their second language, namely English. The interviews with two of the learners were conducted in Afrikaans. As theoretic saturation had been reached with the qualitative research, the personal views of eight learners were considered sufficient for this investigation. Participants A–D came from high-risk schools and Participants E–H from low-risk schools. Participants A, C, E, F and G were girls.

4.2.2 Data Collection

Data for the second phase of the study were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews. Because the aim of the second phase of the study was to refine, expand, or explain the results gathered during the first phase, the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews were virtually the same as the items in the three sections of the SCSS-SF questionnaire.

The interviews were conducted outside official school hours. Appointments were made with learners to determine times and meeting places that suited the learners. After the interviews, any lack of clarity that could arise from questions and answers, as well as the first author's interpretations of the contributions was briefly discussed in order to clarify uncertainties.

During the interviews, supporting questions were also asked to clarify the existing questions, because learners each had their own unique circumstances. The aim of the supporting questions was also to encourage the learners to report as comprehensively as possible. The duration of the interviews varied between 25 en 45 minutes.

4.2.3 Data analysis

The data analysis of the learners' answers to the semi-structured interview was a systematic process to identify and summarise the data content that is of importance for the study. After each interview, the tape recording was played back, and the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Themes and sub-themes were identified, the data were analysed according to the themes and sub-themes, and taken up in a matrix table. The data were checked once again to ensure that all relevant issues were identified.

A clear picture was obtained when the eight interviews in the encoding table were combined, where after the themes and sub-themes were compared. This method ensured that issues, similarities, differences and relationships that were repeated could be perceived. A report about the interviews was drafted after all the above steps had been completed.

4.3 Ethical aspects

The appropriateness of the principle of permission already became clear during the initial phase of the research project. A supporting letter of motivation by the University of the Free State was attached to the letter, requesting permission from the Eastern Cape Department of Education and schools (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). The participants' dignity, privacy and interests were respected at all times. The questionnaires did not contain any identifying signs, names, addresses or encoding symbols. Prior to completing the questionnaires, the learners were also ensured that the process was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the process at any time during the process. The first author, who was always present during the completion of all the questionnaires, was available, if necessary, to support traumatised respondents and to refer them for counselling.

Prior to the interviews, the learners were informed about the purpose of the study, and that the answers would only reflect their personal opinions and experiences. Written permission to tape their answers for transcription and encoding purposes was obtained from each learner as well as his/her parents. Learners and their parents were also ensured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their contributions. It was also stated to them that the interviews and information would be treated as confidential and would only be used with a view to research.

5. Results

5.1 First Phase of the Study

In order to determine on which of the CSCSS- SF scales significant differences in means occur between the two school environments (high-/low-risk) unidirectional variance analyses were done. The results with regard to the scales, together with the calculated effect sizes (*f*) appear in Table 1.

Table 1. F values of the unidirectional variance analysis to test for differences in mean scores on CSCSS-SF scales for the low-risk and high-risk schools

CSCSS-SF scales	Low risk (n=450)		High risk (n=450)		F value	p	f
	\bar{x}	S	\bar{x}	S			
School safety:							
Scale 1 – Campus disruption	2.71	0.81	2.54	0.81	9.186*	0.003	0.10
Scale 2 – Drug abuse and carrying weapons	2.09	0.99	2.27	0.98	6.784*	0.009	0.07
School culture and climate:							
Rules and norms	3.98	0.94	3.49	1.01	54.719*	0.000	0.57
Physical safety	3.84	1.12	3.41	1.28	27.908*	0.000	0.30
Social and emotional security	3.57	0.81	3.29	0.77	28.226*	0.000	0.30
Support for learning	3.95	0.86	4.16	0.74	15.387*	0.000	0.17
Social support – learners	4.31	0.81	3.85	0.99	57.728*	0.000	0.60
School alliance	4.21	0.67	4.03	0.73	13.755*	0.000	0.15
Physical environments	3.57	1.09	2.64	1.05	166.538*	0.000	1.56
School violence:							
Physical and verbal bullying	1.85	0.68	1.97	0.72	6.754*	0.010	0.07
Weapons and physical attacks	1.16	0.42	1.27	0.46	14.095*	0.000	0.15
Sexual bullying	1.23	0.62	1.40	0.77	12.745*	0.000	0.14
Total	1.51	0.47	1.64	0.51	14.324*	0.000	0.16

*p<=0.01

It is clear from Table 1 that there are differences in group means for high-risk and low-risk schools with regard to the following: school safety (both scales); school culture and climate (rules and norms; physical safety; social and emotional security; support for learning; social support – learners; school commitment and physical environments) and school violence (physical and verbal bullying; weapons and physical attacks; sexual harassment; total). The latter of which is significantly on the 1% level.

With regard to the school safety scales (scale 1 and 2), as well as all the school violence scales, small effect sizes are involved. With regard to school culture and climate, five scales (rules and norms; physical safety; social and emotional security; social support – learners; physical environments) medium to large-effect sizes and the results are therefore definitely of practical importance. It is clear that learners coming from low-risk schools scored significantly higher in all five the school and climate scales.

5.2 Findings from the Second Phase of the Study

Next, the findings of the qualitative research investigation that was undertaken by means of interviews are discussed. The purpose of the second phase of the study was, as already mentioned, to refine, expand or explain the results obtained during the first phase. During the interviews, attention was firstly paid to items in the CSCSS-SF scales on school safety and school violence; next, aspects that influence school culture and violence were subjected to scrutiny (cf. Table 1).

5.2.1 School Safety and Violence

The interviews on school safety revolved around the indicators of campus disruption, alcohol and drug abuse and the carrying of weapons. To get clarity on school violence, questions about physical and verbal, as well as sexual harassment, were put to the participants.

All four participants from the high-risk schools indicated that violent behaviour regularly occurred at their schools. Mention was made of teachers who hit learners, learners who fight on school premises, push one another around, swear at one another or even attack teachers. Three of the four participants from the low-risk schools indicated that incidents of violence did occur, although not regularly. Participant E, for instance, reported that during her four years at school, she had only been aware of two incidents of fights. Participant F reported that there was no violence at the school.

From the analysis of the data, it transpires that participants from both high-risk and low-risk schools had perceived physical fights at their respective school premises. Participant D had personally been involved in a fight ("I had to support him in his fight"). Furthermore, it is apparent from the narratives that both boys and girls become involved in physical fights. According to Participant D, group fights also occur. Although the participants at low-risk schools reported incidents of fights, this was not a general tendency.

From the participants' answers to a question whether bullying occurred at their respective schools, it is clear that bullying was a general problem at both high-risk and low-risk schools. However, the following narratives indicate that the intensity of bullying between the two types of schools does differ:

*Learners will threaten other learners ... they will take their lunch ... make them do things they don't like. There are also boys who will hurt the smaller ones ... pushing and pinching (Participant D).
Throwing them on the ground and say[ing] bad words to them (Participant C).*

While the preceding narratives by learners at high-risk schools referred to specific incidents of bullying, participants from low-risk school did not refer to specific incidents. These incidents are also of a less serious nature. Participant G, for example, stated, "I do not think it is that serious". Participant H reported that she "[was] not aware of serious problems with regard to bullies at our school".

All eight participants were of the opinion that theft occurred at their schools. From the answers of participants at low-risk schools, apparently only small and unimportant articles, like pens, pencils, pencil cases and sometimes textbooks were stolen at these schools. The exception was Participant G, who mentioned the theft of a mobile phone. According to Participant G, learners at their school were not allowed to take valuable articles like mobile phones to school. The participants from high-risk schools reported that not only small and unimportant articles, but also valuable articles like money, clothes and mobile phones were stolen at their schools.

All the participants made mention of vandalism at their respective schools. Amongst others, participants from high-risk schools referred to the vandalising of windows, chairs, doors, ceilings and school desks. Learners from low-risk schools reported about graffiti on school desks and washroom walls. According to Participant E, vandalism at her school was a rare occurrence: "Learners will not break things on purpose ... we don't go out of our way to break stuff."

Six of the eight participants revealed that some learners at their respective schools brought alcohol to school. Apart from the use of alcohol, Participant A also reported that learners smoked on the school premises, while Participant C reported that learners often smoked cannabis at that school. Two participants from low-risk schools alleged that no alcohol was consumed on their school premises during school hours, but that it was not an unusual phenomenon during school dances and "particularly in the hostel". Although all the participants agreed that the consumption of alcohol on school premises should not be tolerated, Participant B, from a high-risk school, reported that the consumption of alcohol visibly happened at his school ("Some of the boys will bring beer ... but we keep quiet... we are afraid of them.")

While all four learners from the high-risk school mentioned during their interviews that carrying weapons like knives, arms and sharp objects was a general phenomenon at their schools, only one participant from the low-risk school knew about an incident where weapons had been involved: "Yes, this year we got a boy with a knife with him ... it was confiscated ... and he went to the office about that" (Participant H).

As is the case with the use of alcohol, it seems as if learners at high-risk schools were too afraid of denounce the culprits: "...we just keep quiet ... they will have revenge on me" (Participant A).

From answers to the question about the nature and scope of sexual harassment at their respective schools, it is clear that it was a rare phenomenon, of which none of the eight participants had direct knowledge. For example, Participant C stated, "I heard stories, but I have not seen it." Further to this, Participant D stated, "Sometimes it is rumours." According to another participant from a high-risk school, Participant A, "it does not happen in our school ... it sometimes happens outside the school". Participants from low-risk schools agreed that no incidents of sexual harassment occurred at their schools, e.g., "I do not believe it happens at our school" (Participant H).

5.2.2 School Culture and Climate

The interviews about school culture and climate revolved around school rules and norms, physical safety at the school, participants' social and emotional security, support for learning, the social support of learners, school commitment and physical environment.

With the exception of Participant F, all the participants agreed that their schools' anti-violence rules were clear and appropriate. However, Participant A felt that more should be done to establish stricter rules and that more effort should be put into making learners aware of violence. She stated:

Our rules are very nice ... they keep us safe ... but there are not enough against violence ... something more should be done to make everybody aware.

At the high-risk schools, participants experienced that not all learners respected the rules. For example, Participants B, C and D reported that learners broke the rules and showed no respect: amongst others, learners did not go back to class when the bell went, and some of the learners smoked and used alcohol on the school premises.

Participants from the low-risk schools reported that rules pertaining to violence were applied strictly. However, Participant F was of the opinion that the rule with regard to school violence was too vague:

I don't think there are pertinent rules against violence ... rules are more general like you must not get violent against each other.

In response to a question how safe the participants felt at their respective schools, seven of the eight participants let on that they felt safe at school. Participant A stated that there were safety measures like security fencing at their school. Only Participant C felt unsafe at school. According to her, some people gave her "strange" looks.

To get clarity on the social and emotional support by teachers to victims of violence, participants were asked whether they would report incidents to bullying to teachers, as well as what the most likely reaction of the teachers would be. From the high-risk schools, only Participant A felt happy about reporting bullying. All three other participants had a negative view of the possible reactions of their teachers. The answer of Participant B indicated that nobody at their school trusted the teachers enough to go and talk to one of them in private ("I will go with somebody ... I will not go alone"). It appears as if no culture of trust existed between the learners and their teachers. At the low-risk schools, the situation differed entirely from that at the high-risk schools with regard to reporting bullying. All four participants from low-risk schools indicated that they would not encounter any problems if they were to report incidents of bullying. According to Participant G, systems were in place at her school to report bullying. Participant stated that there were enough teachers at her school to report incidents to and she was comfortable about doing that. Participant F said she would not hesitate to report bullying.

In the participants' discussion of the (possible) reactions of teachers to reports of violent behaviour, there was a clear difference between the narratives of participants from high-risk and low-risk schools. The participants from the high-risk schools experienced a negative feeling regarding the reactions of the teachers. Participant A, for example, reported that the teachers would not deal with the problems themselves, but would rather delegate it to somebody else. Participant A further alleged that the teachers were not serious about their problems. Participant B alleged that they would easily be expelled; therefore, they were scared of reporting incidents. Participant C thought that the teachers would not act. Only Participant D experienced the teachers' reactions to this aspect positively. Participants from the low-risk schools agreed that teachers would act decisively and correctly if they had to report incidents of violence. Remarks like teachers being well prepared, that they would to the correct thing and that they would handle the situation well, underlined this statement. Although Participant F stated that she did not feel comfortable about reporting violent incidents, she conceded that the teachers would go out of their way to set them at ease.

During the interviews, the researcher also tried to get clarity about the support the teachers would give to learners at an academic level. In answer to a question on how the participants experienced the guidance of teachers with regard to study methods, it appeared as if learners at high-risk schools received more support from their teachers with regard to study methods, compared to learners at low-risk schools. Only Participant B experienced a negative feeling with regard to study guidance ("There is no guidance in the school"). The participants at the low-risk schools gave divergent answers. Participants E and H experienced the assistance with regard to study methods inadequate. They reported that no teachers at their schools provided study guidance. Participant F stated that only one teacher at her school provided study guidance, while Participant G alleged that learners at her school received assistance in the lower classes, but not in the higher classes.

During the interviews, information was also gathered about the social and academic support learners received from co-learners. Only Participant G experienced a positive reaction from other learners with regard to personal problems. All the other participants revealed that they did not trust their co-learners enough to entrust them with their personal problems. Words like *gossip*, *distrust* and *not taking seriously*, support this conclusion. From the interviews, it furthermore transpired that all the participants, except Participant H, felt free to ask a friend when they did not understand work and/or needed assistance with homework. Participant D, for example, said, "We do help each other." However, Participant H was of the opinion that "few children would help you".

Participants were also questioned about the physical appearance of their respective schools. Participants A and B, both from high-risk schools, experienced the physical appearance of the schools negatively (e.g. "I think it is bad"). Participant C was of the opinion that the appearance of the school was not too bad, but that he found the environment where the school was situated unacceptable. Participants from the low-risk schools were in general satisfied with the appearance of schools. However, Participants E and F experienced the interior of their respective schools negatively. Participant F compared it with the interior of a hospital. From the participants' answers, it is clear that there is a difference between the experiences of the participants from the high-risk schools and those from the low-risk schools with regard to the general condition of the school buildings and the premises. The participants from the high-risk schools experienced the general condition of the school as negative. For example, Participant B reported that the building was dusty, while Participants B and C reported that the toilets were dirty. Participant D had the following to say about the appearance of his school: "Area full of papers. No garden". All the participants from the low-risk schools reported that their schools were in a good condition.

6. Discussion

Campus disruption, drug abuse and carrying weapons are realities at both the high-risk and the low-risk schools in the Eastern Cape that participated in the study. However, respondents at high-risk schools statistically feel significantly more unsafe than at low-risk schools. Furthermore, it transpires that statistically, significantly more respondents at high-risk schools than at low-risk schools became the victims of school violence. The preceding results were underwritten during the second phase of the study. Learners at high-risk schools, for example, reported alcohol abuse during and after school hours, learners who attended school armed and incidences of violence in which teachers and learners were involved. Intimidation and fear of retaliation resulted in offenders not being exposed. Low-risk schools are not safeguarded against violence. However, it appears as if this negative behaviour is the exception, rather than the rule. The seriousness of the offences also differs.

The close connection between a positive school climate and culture and school safety is not only apparent from the quantitative results, but also from the narratives. Learners at low-risk schools feel physically, socially and emotionally secure – school rules are in place to protect them against violence, and they feel at liberty to discuss incidents of violence with their teachers. They know that the teachers will act with the necessary seriousness. Contrary to this, it appears as if some of the participants at high-risk schools hold anti-violence rules in contempt, and question their teachers' willingness and ability to deal with incidences of violence. Consequently, they do not report incidences of violence to teachers. However, from the interviews it transpires that learners at both groups of schools are satisfied with the physical security measures at their schools.

It is interesting to note that, statistically, while learners at low-risk schools emotionally feel significantly safer than at high-risk schools, the opposite is true with regard to intellectual support. The results are confirmed by the narratives. Learners at low-risk schools, for example, reported that they seldom, if ever, received guidance about study methods from their teachers. Contrariwise, three of the four participants at high-risk schools had a lot of praise for the way in which their teachers assisted them with study methods.

Statistically, significantly more respondents at low-risk, than at high-risk schools indicated that they received social and emotional support from their peers. These results are not confirmed by the narratives. The participants at both the high-risk and low-risk schools indicated that they did not share personal problems with their peers. However, it did transpire from the interviews that learners were prepared to assist one another with schoolwork.

Statistically, significantly more respondents at low-risk schools are positive about the physical appearance and general condition of their schools, than at high-risk schools. The results are also of practical significance. The results are once again confirmed by the narratives. While participants at high-risk schools emphasised the squalor at their schools and the sites, those at low-risk schools stated that the buildings and the school sites were in a good condition and very clean (compare, for instance, to the interior of a hospital).

The identification of respondents and participants, as well as the analysis and interpretations of qualitative and

quantitative data in this study was largely directed by an external factor, namely the classification criteria of the Eastern Cape Department of Education. Little information about the criteria was provided to the researchers. However, it is clear from the statistical data that there are statistically and practically significant differences between the two groups of schools with regard to various aspects pertaining to schools safety, climate, culture and violence at schools. This study not only confirms the argument that the school-organisational variables lie at the core of school violence, but also validates the Eastern Cape Department of Education's classification criteria. However, this view does not negate findings by, amongst others, Bloch (2009), Masitsa (2011), and Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2010), namely that schools in townships are characterised by serious violence and that the violence at South African schools is a reflection of the community where the schools are situated. From the description of the random sample of this study, the agreement between what the Eastern Cape Department of Education classifies as high-risk and low-risk schools and the locality of the schools in townships, rural villages and urban areas clearly transpired. Dunbar-Krige *et al.* (2010:7) argue that learners at schools situated in "troubled communities or high-risk settings" have little chance to remain standing against, amongst others, violence.

Klewin *et al.* (2003:878) are of the opinion that "research into violence in schools is nearly always undertaken in the hope of making a contribution to improving school practice". The identification of risk factors should form the foundation for any preventative programme. In this study, the impact of school culture and climate on school safety is emphasised. Research-based anti-violence programmes focusing on the individual school as a social unit, should therefore be developed. Attention should be paid to school variables such as teacher attitude, learner motivation, school climate and the structural qualities of the school facilities in these programmes. Klewin *et al.* (2003:879) warn against any anti-violence programmes that "are not educationally based, but aim at technical forms of control and large-scale repression". Although a large variety of anti-violence programmes is available internationally, contrary to the situation in South Africa (cf. Masitsa 2011), few of the programmes are evaluated (Klewin *et al.*, 2003). The time is therefore ripe to develop, implement and evaluate a research-based, anti-violence programme for the South African context. Such a programme must make provision for the broad South African society as well as individual schools' social contexts.

This study, therefore, does not fail to appreciate, in keeping with the bio-ecological model, the influence of the following factors on school violence: personality characteristics of the individual, the family and the society. This means that any anti-violence programme had to get the collaboration of all role players, amongst others, the Department of Education, school psychology services, parent community, community leaders, and the South African Police Service. This is not impossible, as is apparent from the success stories of a few schools in violence-stricken communities in the Western Cape (Bloch, 2011).

7. Conclusion

Modelled on Benbenishty and Astor's (2008) interpretation of the bio-ecological model, we have placed the school central to school violence in this article. This study confirms our argument that school-organisational variables stand central to violence at schools. Qualitative and quantitative data have shown that the high-risk schools that participated in the study were characterised by a negative school culture and climate. Over and against that, learners at low-risk schools feel physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally safe. The results display contradictions – educational events are dynamic and the opinions of individuals were tested; therefore, we do not claim that the results of this research address the issues regarding school culture, climate and violence entirely accurately. However, there are enough departure points to emphasise the need for the establishment of a positive school culture and climate in order to try to prevent school violence.

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