



School Community Perceptions on Eradicating Gangsterism in Ekurhuleni Township Schools, South Africa

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Abstract

Gangsterism remains a significant challenge within South African schools, undermining the safety and well-being of learners and educators alike. Despite efforts by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to address this issue, inadequate funding and resources have hindered the implementation of effective strategies to combat gangsterism. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of the school community regarding their role in creating a secure learning environment while combating the pervasive influence of gangsterism within and around school premises. A qualitative research design was adopted, with 23 participants selected through purposive non-probability sampling. These included 5 school principals, 5 teachers, 5 School Governing Body (SGB) members, 5 security officers, 1 district officer, and 2 police officers. The study was guided by the Theory of Change, which provided a framework for understanding the processes involved in transforming the school environment and reducing gangsterism. The findings indicate that both educators and learners feel unsafe in the school environment, frequently fearing attacks, harassment, injury, or even death at the hands of gang members. This pervasive fear undermines the learning experience and negatively impacts the overall school climate. The study recommends that School Management Teams enforce clear safety policies and collaborate with stakeholders such as community leaders, law enforcement, parents, and non-governmental organisations to address school violence. A coordinated response aligned with the National School Safety Framework is essential to tackle the long-term challenges of gangsterism.

Keywords: Gangsterism, gang activities, school violence, community involvement, safety, Theory of Change

Introduction

A school is an institution that provides educational space for teaching and learning, both for teachers and learners, within a safe and secure environment, as part of formal education. Gwetha-Daza (2022) defines a school as a site of teaching and learning in an enabling environment that can deliver on the educational mandate under safe and secure conditions, free from threats of injury, violence, and crime.

It is an ideal environment that promotes the prevention of violence and has a significant role in protecting the school community (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019).

According to Roble (2023), a school should be a place where members of the school community feel safe while devoting themselves to teaching and learning without the fear of imminent attacks. However, gangsterism has become a common phenomenon, especially in secondary schools and surrounding residential areas in South Africa and globally (Teffo, Segalo & Ngobeni, 2024). Parents and society in general are increasingly concerned about the safety of children due to the rising prevalence of gang activity in and around schools across the country.

Schools are but one of many social institutions where interpersonal relations are exercised, and unfortunately, violence cannot be entirely circumvented. Nonetheless, schools are constitutionally bound to provide an environment that supports and promotes human dignity, the holistic development of learners, and the protection of all members of the school community (WHO, 2019). Mubita (2021) reiterates that members of the school community must first and foremost feel safe at school before effective teaching and learning can take place.

Despite these expectations, South African schools, particularly those in townships like Ekurhuleni, are increasingly affected by the prevalence of gangsterism and school violence, which severely compromise learner safety and academic performance (Curran, 2020). Many school communities have fallen victim to these violent dynamics, often finding themselves powerless during gang-related outbreaks. Schools have come under scrutiny for their inability to maintain secure and safe environments, despite concerted efforts by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and other stakeholders.

The DBE has acknowledged gangsterism in schools as a significant societal challenge that requires careful and strategic intervention to improve school safety and learner outcomes (Ferrara, France, Villian & Corsello, 2019). Initiatives to curb school violence are ongoing (Mguzulwa & Gxubane, 2019); however, gangsterism continues to rise, undermining these efforts and highlighting the persistent nature of this challenge in many township schools (Njoki, 2018; Winnaar, Arends & Beku, 2018; Mabasa, 2021). Grobler (2018) emphasises that gang-related violence is often linked to broader societal issues such as crime, poverty, and marginalisation, factors that deeply affect township communities.

If gangsterism is not effectively addressed, it will continue to hinder the creation of safe, well-managed school environments that are conducive to learning. A disciplined and orderly school community is more likely to foster positive social behaviour and deter gang involvement (Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014). Conversely, persistent gang-related violence threatens the well-being of learners and staff, disrupts the teaching process, and perpetuates cycles of fear and underperformance. Therefore, it is imperative to understand and address the perceptions of school communities regarding strategies to eradicate gangsterism, particularly in Ekurhuleni and other township schools. This understanding is essential for restoring peace, safety, and academic focus within affected learning environments.

Literature Review

Gangsterism in schools represents a growing global crisis, and South Africa is no exception (Khumalo, 2019 & Sitoyi, 2020). Despite the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa providing resources aimed at curbing gangsterism across various provinces (Mguzulwa & Gxubane, 2019; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013), significant challenges persist. Studies show that interventions to mitigate gangsterism in schools have often fallen short, largely because gang-related behaviour is deeply connected to broader criminal activities (Wegner, Behardien, Loubser, Ryklief & Smith, 2016). These

interconnected issues highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to ensure student safety, improve well-being, and restore academic focus (Ferrara et al., 2019).

The Persistent Challenge of Gangsterism in Schools

In recent years, South African schools have been grappling with an alarming rise in gang violence, which severely disrupts the learning environment. Teachers are no longer solely tasked with delivering educational content; they are also expected to manage and counteract the pervasive threat of gangsterism in schools (Petrus, 2021). Despite efforts to address these challenges, gangsterism remains widespread, with learners involved in street gang activities continuing to spread violence within school grounds (Mguzulwa & Gxubane, 2019).

The growing perception that schools are unsafe due to gang activity is alarming. According to Meyer (2005) and Ncontsa & Shumba (2013), schools have become increasingly high-risk environments where both learners and teachers face physical threats. Gang-related behaviours, originating from street gangs, have worsened the school violence issue, creating a culture of fear that hinders both teaching and learning (Carson & Esbensen, 2019). As gang members bring their violent practices into schools, the safety of the entire school community is at stake.

Gender Dynamics in Gang Violence

While both male and female learners are affected by gangsterism in schools, male learners are more often involved in violent confrontations (Maphalala, 2014). Gang violence in schools is influenced by social and gender dynamics, with boys being more likely to engage in physical fights (Davids & Waghid, 2016). Nevertheless, learners of all genders can be either victims or perpetrators of gang-related violence (Dube & Hlalele, 2018). This highlights the widespread impact of gangsterism, which affects all learners, regardless of gender.

Furthermore, teachers, as pointed out by Gibbs (2013) and Hlatshwayo (2018), live in constant fear of escalating gang violence. The spread of gangsterism not only puts learners' safety in jeopardy but also impedes the ability of educators to perform their role effectively. The DBE's efforts have been criticised for lacking effectiveness, particularly in providing adequate support to schools in high-risk areas. Many schools appear isolated from broader community issues, believing they are immune to gang violence, which has hindered meaningful intervention (Khumalo, 2019).

Public Perceptions and Media Coverage

The public's perception of gangsterism in schools is often understated. Many view gang violence as nothing more than typical schoolyard fighting, without recognising its connection to broader gang activities (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). This underestimation has led to delayed or inadequate responses to the problem. The media's portrayal of such incidents, often focusing only on extreme cases where fatalities occur, fails to address the systematic nature of school violence. The lack of a comprehensive understanding of the issue prevents effective action from being taken until the situation escalates into a tragedy (Musu-Gillette, Zhang, Wang, Zhang & Oudekerk, 2017).

Ineffectiveness of DBE Interventions

Despite the DBE's efforts to create policies and implement programmes aimed at reducing school violence, these interventions have had limited success. For instance, gang violence remains prevalent in areas like Gauteng and Western Cape Provincial schools, where, despite numerous initiatives, no significant decrease in violence has been observed (Wegner et al., 2016). Furthermore, reports of incidents like stabbings and physical assaults on both learners and teachers continue to surface, underscoring the ineffectiveness of current strategies. The alarming resignation rates of teachers due to safety concerns, as reported by the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) (Hlatshwayo, 2018 & Mncube & Steinmann, 2014), further demonstrate the gravity of the situation.

The Impact of Gang Violence on School Culture

Khuzwayo (2021) underscores that schools, as social institutions, have a fundamental role in nurturing children to become responsible citizens. Beyond their educational mandate, schools also bear a significant social responsibility to ensure the safety and security of their communities. Nevertheless, gangsterism has emerged as a pervasive social challenge within South African schools, where many learners face the threat of violence both on school premises and during their commutes (De Wet, 2016; Akanni, 2023).

Schools, traditionally places of discipline and order, have increasingly become sites of fear and lawlessness due to gang violence. Gang members often bring weapons, such as knives and firearms, to school, using them to intimidate and attack non-gang members (Maphalala & Mabunda, 2014). The presence of weapons not only instils fear in non-gang learners but also normalises violence as a tool for conflict resolution. The psychological toll this has on learners cannot be exaggerated, as the constant threat of violence undermines their sense of security and well-being (Horowitz & Schwartz, 2011, as cited in Magidi, Schenk, & Erasmus, 2016).

The South African Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to education in a safe, non-violent environment (Constitution of South Africa, 1996). However, the persistent presence of gangsterism in schools violates this right, fostering a culture of fear that undermines the educational process. This widespread issue often hinders learners from exercising their basic Constitutional right to an education in a safe and secure environment, a right that is essential for their academic success and personal development (Arhuis-Inca, Ipanaque-Zapata, Bazalar-Palacios, Quevedo-Calderon & Gaete, 2021 & Mdhluli, 2018). The DBE, as well as schools themselves, have a constitutional obligation to ensure the safety of learners and educators alike, yet gang-related violence continues to threaten this fundamental right. Addressing the perceptions of school communities regarding the eradication of gangsterism is crucial, as it directly influences their ability to create safe spaces where effective teaching and learning can thrive.

The presence of gangsterism in South African schools, especially in townships like those in Ekurhuleni, remains a complex and urgent issue. The literature highlights the deep-rooted nature of this problem, where gang violence is intricately tied to broader social, economic, and criminal dynamics. Gangsterism in schools cannot be eliminated merely by avoiding or condemning it. Instead, a more practical approach requires actively managing and controlling its root causes (UNESCO, 1997). While the DBE and schools have made attempts to address these challenges, their efforts have proven ineffective. Effective solutions must go beyond surface-level interventions and take a comprehensive approach to tackling the root causes of gangsterism, ensuring that schools are safe spaces for learning and personal development. Additionally, public perception and media representation must shift to fully recognise the gravity of the issue, enabling a more coordinated and effective response to this growing crisis.

Parental involvement

Parental involvement plays a critical role in ensuring learner safety and reducing the influence of gangsterism in schools. The underlying belief is that parents are primary role models and protectors, and their presence and engagement significantly shape children's behaviour. As Lynn (2018) notes, when parents fail to provide consistent guidance and control, children become uncertain and directionless, often turning to external influences for a sense of belonging. This is echoed in the South African Council of Educators Handbook for Teachers (2020), which warns that poor parental involvement creates a vacuum, allowing children to adopt antisocial behaviours and harmful practices from the streets.

Parents must work collaboratively with teachers to instil discipline and ensure that their children behave appropriately at school (Divecha, 2019). It should not be the sole responsibility of the school principal or educators to manage ill-disciplined learners. Rather, school safety is a shared

responsibility between the school and the home. Children emulate their parents' behaviour; thus, family dynamics directly affect learner conduct. Hlatswayo (2018) asserts that families who resolve conflict through violence inadvertently teach children to normalise such behaviour. This explains the appeal of gang membership, where affection, acceptance, and belonging are offered, filling the emotional void left at home.

Popenoe (1998) reinforces this by stating that children who witness violence or instability at home often replicate these behaviours at school. The African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," underscores the collective responsibility of raising well-adjusted children. When parents, extended families, and communities work together, children are more likely to develop positive values. Similarly, the expression "Charity begins at home" speaks to the foundational influence of parenting on child behaviour.

Recent literature affirms that parental engagement in school safety initiatives can significantly reduce risk behaviour in learners. When children perceive that their parents are actively involved in their school life, attending meetings, monitoring academic progress, and reinforcing positive behaviour, they are less likely to engage in violent or gang-related conduct (Akanni, 2023). Parental involvement not only supports emotional and social stability but also communicates consistent safety-promoting messages between home and school.

Children from single-parent households are particularly vulnerable to the lure of gangs, especially when the present parent is overwhelmed with responsibilities and unable to monitor their children's activities (South African Council of Educators Handbook for Teachers, 2020). Hlatswayo (2018) highlights that children who are left unattended due to parental work commitments are often drawn into the dangerous social circles of gangsterism. Dysfunctional family environments can lead children to escape into the streets, where they are gradually absorbed into gang culture (Albertse, 2007).

It is, therefore, imperative for parents to know their children's whereabouts, establish open lines of communication, and offer emotional support. Encouraging children to talk about their challenges can significantly reduce the risk of them turning to gangs for comfort or identity. As such, the role of parents in school safety must be seen as foundational and ongoing, not as a supplementary effort but as a core element in eradicating gangsterism from school environments.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Change is foundational to this study, offering a structured approach for understanding how schools can systematically address gangsterism practices and foster a more stable, safer environment for learners and educators. According to the Organizational Research Services (2004), change is a gradual process and is often not immediately recognised when it occurs. Therefore, school managers must not only identify the desired outcomes but also communicate clearly with stakeholders about the long-term nature of the change and the challenges involved in eradicating gangsterism practices (Kumarasinghe & Dilan, 2021).

School managers should work collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders, including community leaders, law enforcement, parents, and non-governmental organisations. These partnerships are essential for tackling the root causes of gangsterism and ensuring that the interventions are effective. Change is not solely the responsibility of the school but rather a collective effort that incorporates various social structures to maintain long-term stability (Lawson, Jones, Beddoes, Estes, Morris, Mitchel & van der Mars, 2021). This is where the Theory of Change plays a pivotal role, as it encourages a collaborative, strategic approach to combating gangsterism in schools.

This theory is sometimes referred to as the "pathway of change," "engine of change," "blueprint," or "logic model" (Organizational Research Services, 2004). It emphasises that successful change is not just about external outcomes but also about transforming the knowledge, skills, and

behaviours of individuals, whether that be learners, teachers, or the broader school community. In the case of gangsterism, the goal is to change the behaviours of those involved in gang-related activities while also improving the overall school environment.

The researchers selected this framework to highlight the necessity for significant change in the school system to combat gangsterism effectively. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) needs to develop targeted strategies for monitoring, controlling, and ultimately eradicating gangsterism within schools. Such strategies must be grounded in transparent, long-term strategic plans that involve all relevant stakeholders and consider the complexities of the issue at hand. This will ensure that the efforts are both practical and sustainable.

In line with the United Nations Development Group, the Theory of Change also provides a framework for understanding how interventions can bring about developmental change. At its core, this theory posits that individual change, whether in terms of behaviour, knowledge, or social norms, is the essential starting point for larger-scale changes. For example, a programme aimed at reducing gangsterism can initially focus on changing the behaviour of individual learners, which, over time, can fall into broader shifts in school culture and community dynamics. Individual change, as the foundational building block, is critical to promoting a culture of peace and safety in schools.

The Theory of Change highlights the importance of involving key stakeholders in every stage of the intervention process. This inclusivity is particularly important in diverse contexts like those found in Ekurhuleni township schools, where the causes and manifestations of gangsterism may differ across communities. By engaging stakeholders in identifying what works and what does not, the theory ensures that interventions are contextually appropriate and targeted.

Gangsterism in schools is a longstanding, global challenge, and various governmental and non-governmental agencies have been involved in efforts to address this issue over the years (Milligan, Doss & Zungu, 2024). The Theory of Change is instrumental for identifying practical solutions and addressing the core causes of gangsterism, which hampers progress toward peace, safety, and social cohesion within schools. School managers need a clear, strategic approach to confronting gangsterism. The theory provides a useful framework for developing and implementing this strategy, ultimately enabling schools to either uproot the problem or at least prevent it from becoming an overwhelming challenge.

In summary, the Theory of Change is instrumental in guiding this study's exploration of how schools can effectively address and eradicate gangsterism. It emphasises the need for systemic, transparent, and collaborative efforts, focusing on creating lasting change at both the individual and collective levels within school communities.

Research Methodology

This study employed qualitative methods, using semi-structured interviews to explore school communities' perceptions of strategies to eliminate gangsterism in township schools. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure the inclusion of information-rich participants who hold direct or institutional knowledge of the problem. Participants were selected based on their professional roles, responsibilities, and first-hand experiences with school safety and gang-related issues (Stratton, 2024). This approach allowed the researchers to gather diverse yet complementary perspectives from individuals actively engaged in school management, safety, and community liaison.

The study involved a total of 23 participants. The first group consisted of members of the school community: 5 school principals, 5 teachers, 5 School Governing Body (SGB) members, and 5 security officers. The second group comprised external stakeholders: 1 district education officer and 2 police officers. All selected participants were drawn from schools identified as having ongoing gang-related challenges, despite existing community interventions. The researchers personally conducted all

interviews to maintain consistency and ensure that data collection remained focused on the core research objectives.

Due to ethical considerations and the sensitive nature of gangsterism, learners were excluded from the study. While their exclusion limits direct insight into how gangsterism affects learners lived experiences, this decision was made to protect their psychological well-being and avoid potential harm. Instead, adults who interact with learners daily and are tasked with ensuring school safety were included to provide proxy insights into learner experiences. Documents related to school gangsterism were also consulted to help contextualise the challenges faced in schools.

The data collection process involved semi-structured interviews with participants from five different schools, each representing a diverse set of stakeholders working to maintain the safety of learners. The aim was to gather detailed information on how the community, educators, and law enforcement perceive and handle the issue of gangsterism in schools. Thematic data analysis, which involves breaking down qualitative data into manageable themes, patterns, and relationships to derive meaning, was utilised. In this study, the researchers followed a systematic process that included organising and rearranging data materials, listening to recorded interviews, and interpreting the collected data. This approach allowed for the identification of recurring themes and insights that reflect the perceptions and experiences of the participants.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the criteria of credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability, as reiterated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), were considered essential. These strategies enhanced the rigour of the research process and ensured that the findings accurately reflect the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Findings

This study revealed several key perceptions within school communities regarding gangsterism practices in township schools.

Learner aggression and the entrenchment of gang culture in schools

The majority of participants felt unsafe due to learners bringing dangerous weapons such as knives, self-made knives, firearms, and drugs to school. The learners were reported to be uncontrollable, with police officers often called to search them. Participants described learners as exhibiting aggressive behaviours, sometimes becoming "possessed" and engaging in violent fights or displaying strange behaviours. These behaviours were indicative of the broader gangsterism issues within the schools.

A school principal in one of the schools stated: *"Gangsterism practices in schools are not a new thing. It was there before and is here to stay; maybe we should develop a curriculum that embraces gangsterism practices. As schools, we must learn to normalise it because whether we like it or not, gangsterism is part of our community. Even if we can fight it in schools, learners are members of street gangs. Their gang leaders will assign them duties to carry at school"*.

Learner Rights versus Teacher Control

Another major concern raised by participants was the perception that learners had more rights than teachers, particularly following the eradication of corporal punishment. Teachers expressed frustration with their inability to discipline learners as they once could, and learners were often observed acting disrespectfully and ignoring school rules. Some participants argued that learners' behaviour was facilitated by a lack of accountability for violating the school code of conduct.

Teachers elucidated: *"We are now forbidden to use corporal punishment. It becomes difficult for us to insist on the maintenance of discipline or instil morals in learners because they have more rights than teachers. Learners are now disrespectful to teachers, and we can no longer control them because they have rights, and they do as they wish. Once you use corporal punishment, you lose the job"*.

External Threats and the Compromised Role of Law Enforcement in School Discipline

Furthermore, the involvement of the public in the sale of drugs to students was also a significant issue. Participants acknowledged that drug use among learners was prevalent, driven by the actions of external factors such as drug dealers and vendors. It was also argued that the school community finds it difficult

to trust the police officers because some of them were implicated in being part of gangs, whereas others were taking bribes to protect drug dealers and members of the gangs.

Participants specifically mentioned the problematic practice of selling items, including drugs, through openings in the school fences, a practice that began during the COVID-19 pandemic but had continued afterward.

A liaison officer reiterated: *“That selling through palisade openings was introduced during COVID-19 to control the spread of the Coronavirus. Since then, it has become acceptable practice for vendors to sell food to learners through palisade openings”*.

One police officer participant pointed out the increase in police calls to schools for minor disciplinary issues that teachers previously handled themselves. This is what the officer had to say:

“We are always called to schools, sometimes for a minor challenge that can be handled at the school level. But because disciplinary powers are withdrawn from teachers’ hands, they call us to intervene in reprimanding learners. We will take them (alleged learners) to the police station, sit down with their parents and warn them not to repeat the same mistake”.

Parental Absence, Disciplinary Breakdown, and Gang Affiliation

This shift in responsibility illustrated the loss of teachers' and parents' disciplinary power, leaving police to intervene in school matters more frequently. It is a good initiative to involve parents, as this could also help parents to instil and enforce discipline or morals in their children. School Governing Body members agree that learners who come from a disorganised or broken family are sometimes compelled to join gangs because they need security and love that they are not getting from their parents.

This is alluded to by an SGB member: *“Some learners are from poor families. In other families, you may find that no one is working. They feel obliged to carry out some petty assignment so that they may receive some small compensation in return. They want to assist at home by providing basic food to their siblings”*.

SGB members believed that: *“Learners who come from low-income conditions, where no one is employed and are experiencing poor living conditions, are usually attracted to be members of the gangs, because being a member of the gang makes them feel more important and have more power in school”*.

Discussion

These findings are consistent with the literature and theoretical framework discussed earlier, particularly in terms of the Theory of Change and the challenges of gangsterism in schools. The Theory of Change emphasised the need for structural change within schools, and these findings highlight that despite multiple interventions, gangsterism remains deeply rooted in the school environment. School communities are caught in a cycle where the underlying causes of gangsterism are not fully addressed, leaving some participants resigned to the idea that gangsterism cannot be eradicated, only controlled or managed.

The findings also support the notion that disciplinary power in schools is essential for instilling morals and values. Participants' concerns about the loss of authority for teachers and parents align with the idea that disciplinary measures are key to shaping student behaviour. However, as the literature suggests, the banning of corporal punishment does not mean that disciplinary actions must be eliminated; rather, it calls for the use of alternative, non-violent strategies to maintain order and promote student well-being (Ferrara et al., 2019).

In line with Meyer (2005), who asserts that schools are increasingly unsafe, the participants' views reflect a consensus that gangsterism is now seen as a norm in some areas. One principal's comment about normalising gangsterism echoes a growing sentiment in the community that gang practices have become so prevalent that they must be accepted as part of school life, which could be viewed as a failure to challenge the status quo of violence in schools. This perception underscores the need for community-wide change as highlighted by the Theory of Change, where change must come from multiple stakeholders, teachers, parents, the police, and even learners themselves to address the root causes of violence in schools (Petrus, 2021). This theory also emphasises that individual change, whether in behaviour, knowledge, or social norms, serves as the foundational starting point for broader, large-scale transformations. Regarding the concerns about police involvement, this finding also ties into the theoretical framework's importance in stakeholder engagement. The lack of trust in law

enforcement due to allegations of corruption and involvement in illicit activities reflects a gap in the support system for schools. It also highlights a mistrust of external interventions, which can further isolate schools from the help they need. The findings underscore the vital role of parental involvement as a protective factor in preventing youth involvement in gangsterism and drug-related activities. Active parental engagement, consistent monitoring, and the provision of emotional and moral support contribute significantly to steering children away from negative peer influences and criminal behaviour within the community.

This research contributes to the broader understanding of gangsterism practices in South African schools, a topic that has been underexplored in the literature. The findings demonstrate how gangsterism has become an entrenched issue that extends beyond the classroom into the broader community, as evidenced by the involvement of parents and outsiders in perpetuating these behaviours. The study also contributes to the dialogue on how schools can more effectively address school violence and gang-related behaviours by emphasising the importance of community involvement, disciplinary authority, and the use of alternative strategies for school management.

In conclusion, the research highlights the ongoing challenges in addressing gangsterism in schools, the importance of stakeholder engagement, and the need for systemic change to improve safety and discipline. The perceptions of the school community align with the Theory of Change, suggesting that substantial transformation in addressing gangsterism requires collaborative efforts and context-specific strategies.

Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for a coordinated, systemic response that aligns with South Africa's National School Safety Framework (NSSF) and broader education and child protection policies. Schools should actively engage with the community to combat drug sales and publicly condemn gangsterism practices. In addition, School Management Teams (SMTs) must implement firm and clear school safety policies specifically designed to address violence and gangsterism within the school environment. To enhance security, the practice of selling food and contraband through palisade openings should be abolished. Regular patrolling by community patrollers and police wardens should be instituted to prevent security breaches. Furthermore, SMTs should take an active role in discouraging gangsterism and drug use among learners through open dialogue and awareness campaigns. Finally, to address issues of police corruption, any officers implicated in corrupt practices should be reported and removed to restore public confidence and integrity within the police force.

Conclusion

Gangsterism remains a significant challenge in South African schools, with Ekurhuleni township schools reflecting a broader national trend of escalating school-based violence despite various interventions. The presence of gang-affiliated learners who bring dangerous weapons into schools has severely compromised safety and disrupted the learning environment. This situation has forced educators to divert their focus from teaching to managing violence and disorder. Addressing gangsterism requires more than isolated disciplinary measures; it calls for addressing underlying socio-economic inequalities, improving school-community-police collaboration, and ensuring that policies on learner discipline, school safety, and parental involvement are effectively implemented. While the study is situated in Ekurhuleni, its insights are relevant to other township and rural schools across South Africa and in similar regional contexts where poverty, fractured families, and ineffective disciplinary structures create fertile ground for gang activities. A proactive and holistic national strategy rooted in prevention, social support, and accountability is essential to create safer, more inclusive school environments.

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