Perceived school and neighbourhood safety: insights from adolescent boys and girls in Soweto and Khayelitsha

Ayanda Magida 1, Clarence Yah 1, Nicolette Naidoo 1, C Nukeri 2, T. Gubesa 2, Saiga Mullick 1

1. Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute (Wits RHI), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
2. Grassroots Soccer

Background

South African children, particularly girls, are not safe in schools and communities. According to the recent “State of the South African Child Report” one in five cases of reported sexual abuse occurs in schools. Of greater concern, 51% of children falling victim to sexual abuse are under the age of 15 years1. It has also been reported that about 12.2% of high school learners feel unsafe at school and have been threatened or experienced some form of violence2.

Research suggest that children do not feel safe in schools and communities1. It is therefore important to understand the factors that place adolescent girls at risk of sexual and gender based violence and HIV in all settings, particularly as explored from their perspective. Part of the GAP Year Programme, a cRCT which seeks to empower school going adolescents as they transition through secondary school in Western Cape (Khayelitsha) and Gauteng (Soweto and Tembisa) in 26 schools among grade 9 learners; this formative research was conducted with learners in Soweto and Khayelitsha.

The objectives of this formative assessment were:
• To inform the implementation of the implementation approach prior to the intervention launch in the 3 townships.
• To explore possible practical challenges experienced by adolescents in these townships so as to inform the GAP year curriculum development, and program.
• To explore perceptions of school and neighbourhood safety among adolescent boys and girls in two largest townships in South Africa.

Although issues of safety have been explored, there is a dearth of qualitative studies that explore the subject of safety among school going adolescents boys and girls from their perspectives.

Methods

Qualitative research:

Data Collection:
1. Eleven Homogenous focus group discussions (FGD)
2. Six female and five male

Sampling:
1. Purposive
2. Females (13 -16 years old) n=62
3. Males (14-16 years old) n=50

Data Analysis:
Thematic analysis

Results

The participants reflected on their perceptions of safety and lack of protection and security in school premises, home and the community at large. Across all the groups, female participants reported feeling unsafe at school and the community. While their male counterparts reported feeling unsafe in the community, and public spaces such as parks.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Focus areas

Figure 2 Thematic map: emerging themes

Conclusion

The study findings confirm the results of the recent report released about the safety of children in South Africa. Adolescent girls and boys generally expressed that they do not feel safe in the school premises and neighbourhood.

Recommendation

The results highlight the need for strengthening adolescent programmes that address issues of safety in school and communities. A multipronged strategy is required to change the tide of neighbourhood and school safety and violence. In particular, create an enabling environment for adolescent girls by transforming schools into hubs of safety and support (in line with the NSSF) and increasing advocacy for safe spaces in the community which is what the GAP Year program seeks to achieve.

References

Corresponding Author:
Ayanda Magida
Email: AMagida@wrhi.ac.za
Website: www.wrhi.ac.za