

Shrouds of silence: A case study of sexual abuse in schools in the Limpopo Province in South Africa

Boledi Masehela

Venitha Pillay

This study seeks to understand the reasons that allow a parent, a principal and a teacher to maintain silence when young girls under their care are sexually abused. Put another way, it attempts to explain what it is about sexual abuse that makes these parties relinquish their role as protectors of innocent children. This paper, based on a larger study of sexual abuse in schools in the Limpopo Province, investigates the possibility that teacher/learner sexual abuse has, over the years, become imbued in a cultural silence linked to African cultural practices. It is argued here that the silence on sexual abuse might be rooted in traditional, patriarchal views on gender and social justice. The research findings indicate that there might well be a growing resistance to what is regarded by some communities as the imposition of liberal, urban, value systems on traditional, rural African people.

Key words: sexual abuse, rural schools, cultural silence; social justice, social power

Introduction

The Constitution of South Africa calls for all citizens to be treated equally irrespective of race, culture or any other difference. No person has the right to degrade, exploit or unfairly discriminate against others (RSA, 1996a). In direct contrast to this constitutional imperative, the most vulnerable sector of our communities, namely children, are frequently degraded, exploited or treated unfairly, ironically, by those who have been granted the responsibility for their well-being. Of particular concern is the continuing sexual exploitation of school children by their teachers (Masuku, 2008: 6).

Boledi Masehela
Rasekgala Secondary School
Maleboho Central Circuit (Senwabarwana)
E-mail: masehelats@gmail.com
Telephone: 076 494 0516

Venitha Pillay
Department of education Management and
Policy Studies,
University of Pretoria
E-mail: Venitha.pillay@up.ac.za
Telephone: 012 420 5574

In 2005, two teachers from Bolobedu in the Limpopo Province were found guilty of sexually abusing learners at the schools where they taught. In the one instance, the teacher was accused of adjusting the learners' marks in exchange for sexual favours; in the other, the teacher was caught red-handed having sexual intercourse with a learner (Matlala, 2005: 3). In 2007, a school principal and a teacher were accused of sexually abusing a number of girls under the age of 18, two of whom had fallen pregnant as a consequence. Charges against the principal were dropped owing to insufficient evidence, but the teacher concerned was arrested on charges of statutory rape (Mogakane & Mnisi, 2007: 15-16).

We cite only two incidents of abuse of children in disadvantaged communities although there is anecdotal evidence of this being a pervasive problem in the country. While many such incidents are known to the community, most go unreported. These incidents suggest that even though the Employment of Educators Act (76 of 1998) categorically declares such actions on the part of educators to be illegal, principals and teachers have been the perpetrators of sexual abuse of learners while simultaneously being vested with powers to protect learners' right to education, human dignity and a safe school environment. This paper offers some insight into this anomaly.

Literature review

Some of the literature linked to the research on sexual abuse offers tentative ways of understanding the problem. Hules (2005) states that African culture and religious tradition have a moral blind spot when confronted with sexual abuse; he ascribes the perpetuation of sexual abuse to gender inequalities that stem from ancient times. In the past, incidents of child sexual abuse were kept secret and were a regular occurrence. Accordingly, perpetrators took advantage of the silence and continued abusing children sexually, while the victims had no grounds on which to object.

In line with Hules (2005), the findings of research carried out by Vujovic (2008) indicate that the African tradition of a patriarchal social order forbids women and children from discussing sexual matters. Women and children are treated as men's property; a view which serves as a universal code of sexual conduct. Consequently, the cultural tradition of enforced silence has created an environment that is vulnerable and open to a variety of abuse. It is not surprising, therefore, that the silence surrounding the sexual exploitation of women and children has contributed to a high rate of sexual abuse in South Africa. According to the Medical Research Council, one in nine women in South Africa is reported to have been raped (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002).

In addition to the contributing factors indicated above, a high level of poverty renders women vulnerable to sexual abuse (Sikes, 2006; Van Niekerk, 2005). Men take advantage of this poverty, exercising their role as masculine providers to achieve more power over women and go to the extent of abusing women sexually because they are in control. A masculine provider with a high income has the

privilege of engaging multiple partners (Bhana & Pattman, 2011). In the poor rural area of Acornhoek in the Mpumalanga Province, for example, three-quarters of the community is unemployed and depends on government grants. Women depend on men for economic survival and when abuse occurs their silence is a form of payment or compensation for their survival. This reinforces Makgoka's (2007: 7) and Sikes's (2006) views that socio-cultural and socio-economic factors contribute to the sexual exploitation of women and children. In Acornhoek, only 2% of sexual abuse incidents were reported during an 18-month period. Most women were not even aware of the availability of help (Vetten, 2000).

Conceptual framework

This paper rests on two related conceptual frames. The first is Amadiume's (2005) discussion of sexuality in traditional African communities living in modern-day contexts. The second related concept is that of the value of cultural practices as part of a human rights discourse as a potentially liberatory tool for women in patriarchal societies.

Amadiume (2005) describes sexuality in terms of modernist and African religious traditions; acknowledging the existence of ambiguities regarding sexual behaviour in a post-colonial African society, ascribing them to the inevitable mix of modernist and traditional African mores and cultures. Sexuality in Africa is centred more on prescribed sexual practices than on individual sexual freedom. Such prescribed sexual practices often act as a form of resistance to the changes and challenges brought about by modernity. Women have become subservient to their husbands as a result of male power over female sexuality. Wives compete with daughters and younger females with the intention of securing their husband's attention. Male sexual controllers display extreme patriarchal power over their women. Amadiume argues that these practices are forms of serious sexual abuse.

Undoubtedly, describing sex and sexuality in terms of modernist and African traditions exposes the ambiguities that create confusion in post-colonial African society as a result of its mix of modernist and traditional African mores and cultures. Urbanites and western globalists regard themselves as superior to the uninformed or primitive societies of rural Africa (Rapport & Overing, 2000). In stark contrast to the above view, African communities want to retain their indigenous ways of doing things, and this has nothing to do with being inferior or superior. According to them, such practices help them to remain stable and maintain the political authority of the *amakhosi* (chiefs) (Maud, Murphy, Robinson & Kock, 2008). The security found in customary practice is also taken up by Waentjen and Mare (2010), who suggest that African communities cling to their customs regardless of how well these serve them, as long as their customs make them feel safe. Taboos could also make members blindly accept what their elders tell them because questioning traditional beliefs could result in punishment or exile (Jackson, Cassere & Hardacre, 2002). As a result,

when it comes to law enforcement, the patriarchal framework seems to take first preference.

Addressing the ambiguities outlined above, Cowan, Dembour and Wilson (2001) argue that society exaggerates the notion that culture and rights are at odds with no possibility of reconciliation. Such people believe that there is no common ground that could lead to social transformation. If this is the case, it would mean that African women would have to do away with their cultural traditions and beliefs before enjoying their rights as stated in the liberal laws (Tamale, 2008).

It is imperative to strike a balance between principle and practice in the implementation of human rights (Amadiume, 2005) by expanding sexual awareness while simultaneously incorporating the positive messages from cultures, religions, politics and science, without opting for the wholesale use of one at the expense of another. There is a need for a broader perspective (Mutua, 2001) which would gradually lead to social behavioural change.

Method

Data for the larger study were collected using both in-depth semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. However, for this paper only the data from the interviews are used as they produced the most data on the silence around sexual abuse. Given the sensitive nature of the problem under investigation, we knew that we had to get secondary school principals interested and involved in the research. As one of the researchers is a principal in the Senwabarwana District, she was able, at a meeting of principals, to tell other principals of the planned study.

At the meeting, the principals acknowledged that teacher-learner sexual abuse was a problem and suggested that the investigation be conducted in all the secondary schools in the circuit. This was not feasible and principals were then asked to participate voluntarily. From the volunteers, three schools whose learner enrolment is high and three whose enrolment is low were selected.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the principals of the six selected schools, with district and provincial officials involved in this area of work, and with two individuals from the South African Council for Educators (SACE) that is the gatekeeper of teacher conduct in schools. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were transcribed and thematic coding was used to analyse the data.

While the broad aim of the study was to understand specific contextual factors that might underline school-based sexual abuse in the Limpopo area, this paper focuses on a single finding from the study: the silence the surrounds sexual abuse.

The six schools selected as cases, referred to here as Schools A, B, C, D, E and F, are all located in Senwabarwana, in the Blouberg Municipality of the Limpopo Province.

The people of Blouberg, a deep rural, isolated area of Limpopo, are desperately poor and, in many cases, steeped in what could best be referred to as “traditional African ways”. Senwabarwana, one of the rural areas in Blouberg, is more than 100 kilometres from the city of Polokwane. Most of the villages in Senwabarwana have limited access to water and/or electricity. These schools were specifically selected for their rural location.

In addition, the data collected were read alongside relevant policy documents and the minutes of selected school meetings. Given the sensitive nature of this study, it was important to obtain the necessary permission from school principals and provincial officials before conducting the research.

One of the pertinent limitations of this study is that the interview data from principals and other figures of authority could not be triangulated by similar interviews with learners. Given the sensitive nature of the topic it was felt that interviewing learners on their knowledge and experience of sexual abuse could open wounds that the researchers were not in a position to address.

Findings

The silence of parents

Examples of silence from parents abound in the stories told by the principals interviewed. In School C the principal was informed that one of the best performing girls in his school had been raped by a fellow learner. He called the parents to the school to discuss the matter. Having heard all the details, the parents decided not to report the matter to the police. Instead they opted to settle the matter with the perpetrator’s family, insisting on monetary compensation for the harm done and the loss of respect that the girl’s family would have to endure as a consequence. With regard to the family’s reputation, justice seemed to have been served according to custom. What was left unanswered was whether justice had been served for the young girl. While it is arguable that traditional justice might have been served for the family, it is unclear whether any form of justice, legal or customary, was accorded to the young girl in question. Indeed, in this story the voice of the young girl is eerily silent. Ironically, the fact that payment was made by the perpetrator’s family might be construed as an admission of guilt. Despite this, the parents saw no reason to seek legal justice for their child. The outcome of the “case” echoes Amadiume’s (2005) view that sexuality in African communities is often about prescribed sexual behaviour and what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable behaviour for the community and is not viewed as a matter of individual infringement.

Principal B indicated that there had also been a sexually related incident at his school, between one of his learners and a teacher from a neighbouring school. Upon hearing of the alleged abuse, the principal offered to take the girl and her mother to the doctor and the police station in his own car, but the mother refused. She

wanted to consult her relatives first, particularly the girl's uncle, on whom they were financially dependent. After the consultation, the mother informed the principal that the incident would be dealt with as a family matter and that one of the family members had already been delegated to demand payment from the perpetrator. She then instructed the principal to drop the matter and the girl not to discuss it at school. As Waentjen and Mare (2010) argue, African families often seek safety in customary practices regardless of whether this serves them well or not. Some months later the girl had a spontaneous abortion in the school toilet. She failed at the end of the year and dropped out of school. The notion of justice is questionable in this regard. The principal failed to act on his obligation in terms of the Sexual Offences Act (RSA, 2007) which required that he report the case to the police. In this regard, traditional beliefs gainsay democratic human rights.

Mulaudzi (2003) indicates that cultural taboos prevent parents from discussing sexual matters with children. Sex and sexuality are only discussed at initiation schools which are administered by the elders who have been tasked with doing so. On the other hand, modern liberal values encourage openness and reporting of cases, yet parents tend to resort to their cultural values. Instead of discussing and reporting sexual abuse cases, they resort to silence. Any actions showing disrespect are punishable. They demand compensation for the damage (e.g. pregnancy) or simply turn a blind eye to incidents of sexual abuse. The private ways of dealing with sexual infractions are aligned with tradition and culture.

The data yielded an example in which a woman was blamed for her daughter's predicament and was faced with two challenges because her daughter had become pregnant as a result of sexual abuse by a teacher. On the one hand, according to African tradition, she could not break the taboo against discussing sexual matters with her daughter but, on the other, the school should have conformed to the modernist aspirations to a safe school environment. Accordingly, such cases of sexual abuse are regarded as criminal cases and should be reported (Amadiume, 2005).

The silence of victims

The silence of those hurt seemed intuitively easier to understand. However, these silences are often aided and encouraged by the adults who surround them.

In School D, a male teacher was accused of inviting girl learners to his cottage, showing them pornographic videos and ordering them to perform actual intercourse like the ones on the video. The principal, having been informed of this teacher-learner sexual abuse, confronted the learners concerned. At first, they admitted that the incident had occurred, claiming that they had been invited to the teacher's cottage under false pretences. According to them, he had offered to help them with one of their subjects. The next day, when their parents arrived at school as per the principal's request, the girls recanted. Their new story was that the teacher showed them the video to teach them Life Sciences. The principal had to drop the

case but, since then, relations between him and his staff have been extremely tense. In another incident a learner fell pregnant by a teacher, and her mother, who was unemployed, reported the matter to the principal. However, when no action was taken, the learner attempted to abort the foetus. The abortion was unsuccessful but she had a miscarriage and lost the baby anyway. The father of the baby dumped the girl and she dropped out of school. Neither she nor her mother claimed or was offered any compensation for her loss of dignity or for the shame that the teacher had brought on the family.

According to the principal of School A, a learner from another secondary school was admitted to hospital after she had gone to have an abortion at the expense of the man who had impregnated her – one of her teachers. The teacher was never reported. The girl's parents were divorced and, according to the mother, the father blamed her for condoning the daughter's "affair" with the teacher. The father, as head of the family, accused the mother of failing to carry out her responsibility of taking care of the daughter.

Researchers Levitan, Rector, Sheldon and Goering (2003) ascribe a victim's silence to guilt, shame and self-blame. The investigation at selected schools indicates that learners describe their feelings as shock, hurt, hopelessness, worthlessness, anger, confusion and frustration. Modernist values regard school sexual abuse as an illegal, immoral act (DoE 2001) which has a negative impact on the psychological, physical and educational development of the victim. Accordingly, victims are encouraged to break the silence by reporting such cases.

Traditional culture regards sex as being part of nature (Waetjen & Mare, 2010). Sexual activities such as *ukuthwala* and *ukumetsha* (see definitions sections) form part of these natural tendencies (Thornton, 2003). Hules (2005) indicates that children of all ages have silently been used as sex objects. The abuser is not accused of committing a criminal offence; instead the matter is settled between the two families in the form of compensation payments.

It is arguable that the reasons for the silence on sexual abuse, and the abuse of women and children in particular, are encapsulated in cultural and traditional beliefs. Evidence for this claim can be found in the reasons that school principals give for the silence on teacher–learner abuse; in the victims' decisions not to tell their parents or teachers about the abuse; in the pressure that the community places on the victims and their parents (firstly to honour traditional taboos and, secondly, to accept the advice of male elders); in the parents' choice for material compensation rather than legal justice; and in the manipulation of disciplinary processes and outcomes by teacher unions. In fact, the reasons for the silence are neatly encapsulated in those given by the national Department of Education, namely fear, unequal power relations, cultural taboos, confusion and uncertainty.

Child victims are afraid that reporting the abuse would lead to retribution by the teacher concerned (falling grades, harsh punishment, public humiliation), punishment by their parents (traditional values forcing children not to discuss sexual matters), inability to survive due to loss of income (termination of child maintenance payments) and alienation from the community and its (emotional and social) resources. The conflict between modernist (urging to report) and traditional values (against discussions about sex and sexuality) leaves victims caught in the middle, and as a result, they resort to silence.

The silence of schools

The stories of those interviewed seem to reflect that the entire school with all its surrounding support structures is maintaining the silence.

One of the principals interviewed told of an incident where a member of the school management team, a friend of the previous principal, was sexually involved with both a female teacher and a girl learner at the same school. When the girl, who had given birth to the teacher's child, found out about the teacher's "other" girlfriend, she arranged with some of her relatives and friends (fellow learners) to beat up the female teacher. They did so at her cottage. When the matter was reported to the principal, he organised transfers for both teachers and advised the male teacher to arrange an out-of-court maintenance settlement for the girl concerned. The case was never reported to anyone else.

In School D, the parent of a girl who fell pregnant after being sexually abused by one of her teachers came to the principal to ask for advice on how to deal with the matter. Unfortunately, the principal was not at work on that particular day, so the mother spoke to the deputy principal, now the acting principal. He reported the matter to the principal who, once again, without initiating disciplinary measures, arranged an exchange transfer to another school for the accused teacher. The sexual incident was a closed case.

Yet another example was to be found in School A. In this instance, a whistle blower (an unknown person who was aware of the incident) informed the media that the principal of one of the secondary schools in the cluster had regularly abused girl learners. Although teachers and some community members were aware of the situation, the matter was kept under wraps. Even when two of the girls fell pregnant, no action was taken: the parents, who allegedly had been "paid" in groceries and money, refused to talk to the media and prevented their daughters from giving evidence. According to the parents, the principal in question was taking care of his children born to the girls and was not supposed to be punished.

Principal A ascribes the secrecy around the sexual abuse of learners to tribal traditions, poverty and illiteracy, all of which are still typical of rural areas. According to him, there is no independent thinking and most of the time parents are bribed with small incentives. Moreover, parents do not seem to be aware of the fact that

children have rights, and are unwilling to accept responsibility for protecting the rights of their own offspring. It is not surprising, according to him, that parents are easily manipulated into keeping quiet about the sexual abuse of their children, even when the perpetrator is their child's teacher.

Teacher unions, meant to be the custodians of teacher behaviour in schools, were also partners in the veil of secrecy. In School F, in an incident reported to the principal by parents, teachers were accused of engaging in sexual activities with girl learners in the school toilets. The department, having been notified of the incident, instituted a disciplinary hearing. During the first session of the hearing, learners admitted that the incident had indeed occurred. During the second session, the unions of which the accused teachers were members, pleaded with departmental officials present to issue the accused with warnings only. The case was consequently not reported to the police and the teachers are still employed at the school. This implies that the principal, teacher union and the departmental official protected the perpetrators at the expense of the learners.

Schools operate according to the values of the Constitution, although some of them exist in communities that uphold cultural values. Consequently, all stakeholders are caught between western liberal laws and traditional values. The modernist approach encourages a school culture that is open to discussions on sexuality which might include breaking the silence, whereas African traditional culture prohibits such discussions. The research findings show that the sexual abuse of school children evokes fear in all concerned. Some of the principals who participated in the study indicated that their lives had been threatened when they confronted the teacher culprits.

Others, like the former principal of one of the schools, not only kept quiet, but did everything in his power to protect offenders, even transferring them to other schools, in order to "make the problem go away". In doing so, such principals ensure that culprits are not found out. Some principals even go as far as ensuring that the culprits' jobs are secured and that the image or reputation of their schools remains intact. Sexual abuse reported to principals and teachers by victims or parents is often ignored. Furthermore, the silence might be exacerbated by the fact that even some principals, according to the media, are culprits of learner sexual abuse. They use their engendered positions of power to abuse defenceless learners and silence them with incentives. A school exists within a community and parents are central players in the modernist institution of the school. Research findings indicate that communities trapped in cultural, traditional values present a challenge for the implementation of modernist values.

Poverty and silence

There were repeated examples of parents accepting some form of compensation, such as money or cattle, for the abuse of their children.

In School F, a female teacher was accused of sexually abusing male learners; this was also reported by parents. There was a disciplinary hearing and learners gave evidence with the accused teacher being represented by her union. On the last day of the disciplinary hearing the learners' parents and the school governing body decided to treat the incident as a family matter. The principal was left out of the discussions and discovered afterwards that the parents and the school governing body had withdrawn because they had been "paid off".

Data collected during the course of the investigation – at local, provincial and national levels – indicate that learners and their parents are willing to keep quiet about sexual abuse in exchange for food and/or money. Although they might not initiate sexual activity in exchange for incentives, some of the children in the sample, as well as some of those interviewed by SACE, indicated that they were offered incentives in exchange for sex. Most of the girls who fell pregnant as a result of their sexual engagement with teachers, played the "victim" card afterwards, reporting the teacher either to the police or to their parents (resulting in an out-of-court settlement) in order to receive maintenance money for their illegitimate child. Parents are prepared to go to the extent of sacrificing their daughters' honour for food and money. This act is against modernist values which would regard such arrangements as prostitution.

Ironically, as poverty culture theorists Murray (1999) and Anderson (1999) argue, it is their "pathological" victim mentality – their feelings of helplessness, inferiority and low self-esteem – in conjunction with their selfishness, disregard for the law and self-defeating cultural values and practices that will destroy their chances of ever improving their socio-economic condition. This attitude is also self-defeating in terms of overcoming their fears, stress and confusion. In particular, most of the girls who fall pregnant as a result of teacher–learner sexual abuse tend to leave school to care for their babies. As a result, learner victims of sexual abuse might never get the opportunity of studying further, something that, according to Hunter (2010), is crucial to their upward mobility. By implication, their sexual behaviour traps them in an everlasting cycle of poverty.

Conclusion: silence versus speaking

Despite the resounding silence from parents, principals, victims and other stakeholders, there was consensus among the learners who responded to the questionnaire that it is government's responsibility to keep schools safe, to protect learners and to punish teachers where applicable. There is no doubt that abuse has a negative impact on learners – both physical and psychological. For this purpose, it is argued that the government should monitor teacher behaviour and ensure that the requisite laws and policies are implemented in schools. In breaking the silence, the illegal behaviour of teachers, principals, teachers' union representatives and departmental officials who contribute to the abuse should be reported.

The increase in reported cases of sexual abuse at both provincial and national levels suggests that the veil of silence could be penetrated and that, by implication, cultural conflicts could be resolved to the advantage of the poor. Indications are that the silence could be broken as a result of the fusion of managerial, legal and socio-cultural notions on the best way to approach the problem. This fusion is evident in recent joint government–stakeholder initiatives aimed at community and victim empowerment and support. This approach, based on an awareness of cultural differences and the devastating effect of sexual abuse on those who are most vulnerable, has the best chance of stopping the tide of child sexual abuse that is threatening to engulf the nation.

This study has shown that cases reported with evidence have been attended to. Perpetrators have been arrested and charged and, in some cases summons were issued, forcing them to maintain their children born of such liaisons. SACE indicated, in particular, that it takes any form of reporting seriously, whether formal or informal.

The silence is most prevalent in provinces that are least urbanised and in communities in deep rural areas (Bhana & Pattman, 2011). As argued above, the reasons for the silence are cultural in nature (socio-cultural and socio-economic), and strategies for breaking the silence should take cognisance of this fact. In attempting to change behaviour with regard to school-based sexual abuse, it is necessary to create a balanced approach in dealing with sex and sexuality. One should consider addressing both cultural tradition on sexuality and liberal laws in order to break the silence which makes learners vulnerable to sexual abuse and incurable sexual diseases (Bhana & Pattman, 2011).

Social capitalist theorists would probably ascribe the silence either to the “pathology” of poverty cultures (Murray 1999; Anderson 1999) or the resistance capital of marginalised communities – capital that they use to manipulate social systems whose “wealth” and “power” would otherwise not be available to them (Solorozano & Delgado, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

It is possible that learners submit to abuse in exchange for material or scholastic benefits, some for pleasure, some to escape punishment or avoid being humiliated by the teacher concerned, and others by peer pressure. It is possible that because of the unequal power relationship between teachers and learners, confusion about social roles, as well as conflicting positions regarding traditional and emergent/modernist value systems will persist unless there is conscious and direct intervention from parents, the community and the school and that such intervention seeks to protect the child.

Research evidence on the effectiveness of current strategies aimed at the prevention of sexual abuse and the breaking of silence in this regard indicates that success has been mixed (DoE, 2002). Government institutions have done what bureaucracies do best, that is, create the necessary structures, procedures and

processes to curb sexual abuse at schools, but these have not been particularly effective if official statistics are to be believed. Other initiatives, launched by organisations that focus more on empowerment and support rather than on management and control, seem to have been more successful. Innovative approaches that are not only culturally sensitive, but that regard the cultural capital of traditional communities as a resource for transformation rather than as a stumbling block in the way, are more likely to be effective.

During the whole process of moving towards a solution, those who have to sacrifice what they hold dear need to be made to feel valued and worthy. Telling them that their ways are illegal and/or out-dated will not endear the cause to them. Instead, it is best to think of noble ways of incorporating things that worked in the past into strategies for the future. Workshops could serve this purpose, but not if their focus is on laws, processes and procedures. Rather, they should serve as clearing houses where people feel safe enough to express their fears, anger, sorrow and frustration about the way things are changing, without worrying that there will be repercussions. Only when the air is clear should the transformational leader take their hands, metaphorically speaking, and lead them on new paths alongside him or her.

Communities that are close knit, with a common history and a common culture, that care about and for one another, are much more likely to consider changing their ways if the emphasis in workshops is based on sharing – sharing ownership, responsibility and values. Even parents with stereotypical thinking might reconsider whether they benefit or not. Perhaps then parents will have the courage to stand up against those who sexually abuse their children and intimidate the parents to keep quiet.

Finally, creating and maintaining a culture and climate that foster quality learning and teaching is crucial to the health of the school as an organisation and, by implication, to the health of education systems. Therefore, it is the obligation of school governing bodies (RSA, 1996b) to ensure that any form of child abuse is reported to the police or to the welfare.

Definitions:

Ukuthwala is a very common practice in the rural black communities of KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces (South Africa) whereby young men abduct young girls and forcing them into marriage, often with the consent of their parents. The man can invite his peers to assist him in carrying the girl if he experiences any form of resistance. Force can be applied and the man's peers can hold the girl down, assisting his penetration. The girl's family will be offered a cow in compensation. In this culture, the act is not referred to as sexual abuse; instead it serves as an act that unites the girl and the man, or their two families (refer to Wood, 2005).

Ukumetsha is mostly practiced among the black cultures such as the Xhosa-speaking Transkei region of the Eastern Cape, whereby rural elders encourage ukumetsha (sweet-hearting). This activity was historically condoned in unmarried unions. In this act, boys are allowed to sleep with girls through an indirect penetration of thighs without sexual intercourse. The boy's family are then expected to offer an animal in exchange for this act, which is seen as a natural activity in a teenager's life (refer to Wood, 2005).

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