

# Perspectives

## on KwaZulu-Natal

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### **On conflict and violence towards girls and young women: Hearing the children...**

Research conducted by the Crime Reduction in Schools Project (Crisp), which merged with the Independent Projects Trust in April, has enabled the recording of comments about school and youth related crime. **Colin Collett van Rooyen** was tasked with giving a presentation that would enable educators to "hear the voices of the children" at a conference hosted by Unique and the South African Council for Educators in Pretoria in November.

The mandate here is to "hear the voices of the children" and so I will do just that. The voices below range in age. All of the children have strong feelings to share about their experiences of violence, in particular against women and girls. Much of what they say may not have happened within the school grounds but hear them out. Schools are indeed a reflection of broader society. Excuse the possible over emphasis and repetition that may occur. It is intentional. Some discomfort may result; even anger. But see this as a catalyst for change. A starting point maybe?

#### **Quotes from high school students**

As part of this research responses were gathered from high school learners attending a Durban high school with about 900 learners. Almost 60 percent of the pupils in the research sample were female, with the majority of learners coming from homes where isiZulu was their first language.

#### **Sexual advances**

"...touching us...Yes - in our private places; looking up our skirts." (Grade 9: Female)

"...this one girl in our class... the boy was looking up her skirt and then the girl turned around and slapped him".

"... you are upset... and you want to slap him".

"... because he did it in front of the class and she got embarrassed..." (Grade 8: Female)

"...they demand a kiss".

"...they just say 'please kiss me' and even if you don't want to...they force you". (Grade 9: Female)

Boys look up girl's skirts "because they don't have their own girlfriend".

"... want to see it, maybe he hasn't seen it before." (Grade 8: Male)

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## **Physical abuse of girls by male learners**

Feelings...

"Depressed."

"Unwanted." (Grade 8: Female)

"We think about next year - will we ever get there or not... if you fight... they are like gangsters and have guns. If you fight they can...just lose their temper and you are gone." (Grade 10: Female)

## **Hurt and love**

"Sometimes, say, like, she goes out with every boy. When you hit her - that's when maybe she goes right. You are helping her parents as well as helping yourself." (Grade 8: Male)

"Sometimes your brother - you go to your brother and you ask for advice, and sometimes he will tell you to hit her." (Grade 10: Male)

"They'll say 'you're scared of the girl' - there's (a) lot of pressure to fight her or hit her." (Grade 8: Male)

"Sometimes your boyfriend can hit you." (Grade 9: Female)

"They will say to you 'if he hits you that means he loves you'." (Grade 8: Female)

"They say if they hit us they love us."

"They love us even more."

"Like if it's a boy he can come and hit you - he's got that sort of power." (Grade 9: Female)

"When we do something wrong they hit us - when they do something wrong we cannot do anything." (Grade 10: Female)

"I want to tell them... 'I want to end the relationship' - you (are scared) because ... they are going to hit you." (Grade 10: Female)

## **Rationalisation**

"...boys like to see girls get hit - they always say 'hit her, hit her, she is playing fools with you'."

"they encourage him to do it (hit the girl) to prove that he is a man." (Grade 8: Female)

"When you have any problems, you have to hit the girl." (Grade 8: Male)

"...if [ending a relationship] is not for a good reason you have to beat her because you lost everything now, money..." (Grade 8: Male)

"The man is always strong... even with Adam and Eve, the man was strong." (Grade 9: Male)

## **Personal accounts of crime**

The following extracts were gathered in a project entitled 'Crimes I have Seen' - an exercise

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commissioned by the Crime Reduction in Schools Project and originally gathered by Ted Leggett.

"One day when the girl was angry with a boy (they were lovers), the girl told the boy that she didn't need him anymore...three weeks later the boy saw the girl walking with her friends...he was hitting the girl. He was kicking her like she was a dog that hasn't gone home. He was hitting the girl with bricks...They should take this problem to the police - so the boy will know what is wrong to do." (Female: 15 years)

"My cousin was raped... he said to me 'hey you little bitch - switch off the television...stay in the kitchen' while he and my cousin are going to 'play the little game of sex'...He started beating her up and she fell on the bed...and he raped her. I heard her crying. She told them to stop - she said 'stop, stop, stop' and the blood was all over my mother's bed." (Female: 14 years)

"Ever since the age of six I've been petrified of men older than me... I was molested, he touched me all over... he...." (Female: 13 years)

"I saw these bastards rape my sister - they tore her clothes... I was angry and disappointed at myself because I was powerless. I couldn't do anything. After a few months my sister was carrying a child - she didn't know who the father was. She was terrified...But luckily she got through it." (Female: 12 years)

### **Responses and solutions**

It is perhaps appropriate to turn to the younger children for potential solutions.

One Crisp researcher worked with young children in Grade 7. She noted that these children displayed strong attitudes of intolerance and a lack of faith and trust in our criminal justice system. This is an extract from her report.

"The majority of the class (84.6%) were in favour of communities enforcing the law. They said that the police and justice system could not be trusted, and described them as "corrupt and useless". They had very strong views on crime and believed that communities themselves should be able to punish criminals, to "ensure justice was served".

[The children said:]

"...community should punish those people who make our country an unsafe place...they should actually burn them to death..."

"If someone steals or rapes a child or woman (which is the biggest crime) I think they should take immediate action against those people."

The children voiced a strong intolerance for crimes committed against women and children and gave 'suggestions' on ways in which communities should deal with criminals or perpetrators.

"...yes, I do say it better to sjambok the child molesters ..."

"...they should be hit hard by the people and burnt to death..."

The children displayed a total lack of faith in the police and justice systems. They described the

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police as being "weak, corrupt, useless" and even accused the police of committing crimes themselves.

"The police are also not good because they might not take the matter seriously and only to find out that person is the police's friend."

"...the police also do wrong."

"...some police are rapists..."

Most of the learners were extremely critical of the police and justice system. They believed that criminals were not made to 'pay for their crimes' and 'got away with murder'. They said that jail sentences were too short and that criminals should get harsher sentencing.

"People who rape and kill get one or two years, but people who do less serious crimes get 20 years to life in jail..."

The remaining 15.4 percent of the class felt that communities should not punish criminals and that the police should enforce the law. Their reasons for this were that innocent people may be accused of crimes they did not commit and that every person is entitled to a fair trial before being punished. They did state however, that criminals should be more strictly dealt with (longer jail sentences) and that the death penalty should be re-introduced.

## **Conclusion**

The mandate from the children is clear: Something must be done. Children are suffering and experience fear as a daily part of their lives. Young women, girls and babies are increasingly the focus of harsh criminal activity. Let us hear them and act with and for them.

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