

LEARNING BRIEF 12

Schools as strategic entry points for area-based violence prevention interventions

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ABOUT THIS LEARNING BRIEF

Area-based violence prevention interventions (ABVPI)¹ are targeted approaches to bring about improved safety within a specific geographic area. They are designed to reduce crime and violence and address the root causes by using a combination of spatial, social and institutional interventions. ABVPI are a key preventative mechanism in reducing the incidence and impact of violence and crime. The predominant response to crime and violence is to pursue security initiatives, but there is growing evidence of a shift to include more preventative safety measures which focus on underlying risk and protective factors. Risk factors are those factors that increase risk or susceptibility while protective factors are those that encourage healthy and safe outcomes. These factors interplay with one another and can influence violence and crime at the individual. relationship, community or societal level - as seen in the socio-ecological model.²



This learning brief is focused on schools as a key entry point for critical crime and violence prevention interventions in South Africa. Beyond formal education, the school system offers a great opportunity to positively influence the development of young people, who are marked as a vulnerable social group to crime and violence. This brief unpacks a number of ways in which to capacitate youth to understand their emotions, make better decisions and offer social support, all with the aim of reducing their risk to becoming perpetrators or victims of crime and violence.

The learning brief is the result of the Community of Practice virtual learning event "Why schools are critical spaces for ABVPI", which was hosted by Isandla Institute on 16 February 2023 as part of the Safer Places: Resilient Institutions and Neighbourhoods Together (SPRINT) Project Community of Practice (CoP). The CoP is comprised of civil society organisations and representatives from different spheres of government. The learning brief draws on the presentation by Ruth Capon from the Western Cape Department of the Premier and the reflections and experiences shared by the participants, without directly attributing contributions to participants.



Schools are an infrastructural asset that can foster a sense of community and safety, but aren't always safe spaces. School-based and school-focused violence prevention interventions can play a critical role in tackling root causes of violence and crime.

INTRODUCTION

Violence and crime are issues deeply entrenched across South Africa and require interventions that address both the manifestations of crime and violence and the underlying causes. Schools offer a strategic opportunity to implement, or anchor, areabased violence prevention interventions (ABVPI) for a number of reasons.

Schools play an important role in providing spaces for learning and encouragement, and imparting life skills. Schools are also an infrastructural asset that can foster a sense of community and safety. But schools aren't always safe spaces, which means that learning outcomes are jeopardised.

School-based and school-focused initiatives can play a critical role in tackling root causes of violence and crime and ensure that these spaces are positive environments for learning and interaction. By instilling values and behaviours that create alternative pathways for youth, other than resorting to violence and/or crime, such initiatives will have further benefits for the community and society at large. Schools also have the opportunity to further involve community actors, such as enrolling parents and caregivers in school events, including initiatives focused on psychosocial and emotional support and wellbeing. Leveraging schools as community assets can also contribute to improved social cohesion and a sense of pride of place.

Schools can be a space of more than teaching, by becoming a point of access for the entire neighbourhood, creating social cohesion and togetherness.

WHY SCHOOLS ARE KEY ENTRY POINTS FOR AREA-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS

Schools are generally associated with young people, a marked high-risk social group, who are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of violence and crime in South Africa.³ Schools should be places where resilience is fostered and learning is prioritised and should be considered a beacon of safety and community.

There are four key reasons why schools are strategic entry points for area-based violence and crime prevention interventions.

First, schools can be unsafe spaces, where violence, vulnerability and fear occur, with implications for learning and educational outcomes. Violence in schools is of rising concern throughout the country. 4 A needs assessment study conducted in May 2021 in Cape Town found that experience and perpetration of violence often takes place in schools.5 Violence in schools can take multiple forms, including verbal and psychological bullying or physical assault and can be experienced and perpetuated by learners, educators and other school staff. This can have long lasting impacts on learners' ability to learn as well as their physical and emotional wellbeing. When children experience isolation and/or bullving/ violence it affects their ability to engage in school, and thus their educational outcomes. Crime and violence rates are generally higher in low socio-economic/marginalised areas where schools already suffer from low access to resources, potentially affecting educational outcomes. The experience of violence in these areas, and particularly in schools, can reinforce that outcome.

In deprived neighbourhoods where gangs persist, gang-related violence has become a major concern due to an increase in gang-activity within and around schools, often resulting in violence perpetrated within school grounds, between learners, between learners and teachers as well as gang members trespassing, perpetrating crime and intimidation on school property. An example of this is a hostage situation between gang members and staff at Kagiso Secondary School in the Gauteng province, in which a teacher saved the principal's life by drawing and shooting their firearm.

Secondly, schools are facilities where children and youth spend a significant portion of their weekday and where learning and resilience can/should be cultivated. Schools shape their learners, caretakers, staff and their surrounding neighbourhood, but are also shaped by them. Beyond formal education, schools are places where young minds are shaped, ways of thinking are developed, and a sense of self is fostered. The needs assessment study conducted in Cape Town shows that there is a high need for resilience to be fostered amongst learners, particularly from violent communities. As such, the structure, resources and time spent at school can be leveraged for training that can help foster youth resilience through building healthy social connections and wellbeing, which are key components in crime and violence prevention amongst youth. 10

Thirdly, school-based interventions focused on crime and violence prevention can have broader and long-term community and social impacts. Instilling core values and life skills in children and youth will support them in making positive choices during adolescence and adulthood, thereby contributing to a safer society. It will also empower youth to become role models to peers and adults, by demonstrating alternative behaviour when faced with disappointment, frustration, anger or peer pressure. Another possibility is to combine learner-focused interventions for violence and crime prevention with social outreach (e.g., working with

parents and caregivers), to build understanding and support for the initiative and possibly even to offer psychosocial training to caregivers.

Lastly, schools are public infrastructure and neighbourhood assets, which can be leveraged for violence and crime prevention interventions and to build a sense of community and social cohesion. While schools are important places of learning, they are also a critical part of the infrastructure of the broader community surrounding them and should be seen as community assets. John Dewey, an education philosopher, described communities as "living classrooms" and stated that schools should be treated as a "social centre" in a community. 11 Beyond traditional, formal education, schools can be social resources in neighbourhoods and act as points of gathering for a number of communal needs, including social support meetings, political events and (adult) learning opportunities, or provide a broader communal benefit, such as having a communal food garden. Through gathering in spaces such as schools, there are opportunities to include new and/or otherwise excluded members of the community. For instance, school grounds could be utilised for after hour classes, building knowledge, skills, interests and fostering social cohesion. These classes could be used for training to upskill people in the surrounding community through economic development programmes, finance programmes for small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), or interest related programmes such as birdwatching or arts and crafts. In other instances, schools and the areas and pathways surrounding it have been used as a communal hub and routes to access service delivery. It is important to ensure that these routes and pathways are safe so that schools can truly become a beacon of safety and community pride within marginalised communities.

Through this, schools become more than spaces of teaching, and instead points of access into the entire neighbourhood. These spaces can be used to create social cohesion and togetherness of a community, which is important for civic action and makes communities less prone to crime and violence.

Violence does not only occur within the confines of the school grounds and the routes to and from schools may be unsafe for students and/or staff. Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) could ensure that the immediate area adjacent to, and leading towards, schools is safer.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

The reasons for using schools as strategic entry points in area-based violence and crime prevention initiatives suggest that there are clear opportunities to do so. There are a number of initiatives that relate to one or more of the potential areas of intervention identified

To address the issue of safety in schools and improve the teaching and learning environment, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the South African Police Services (SAPS) are collaborating on an initiative whereby schools are linked with police stations through school safety audits, which are conducted by the schools themselves. SAPS have also closed down illegal liquor distributions and outlets located near schools, which aids in the reduction of access to liquor by both students and community members, increasing overall safety in areas adjacent to schools. Other government initiatives include the distribution of drug testing manuals amongst affected schools. ¹²

It is important to note that violence does not only occur within the confines of the school grounds and that the routes to and from schools may be unsafe for students and/or staff. Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) could ensure that the immediate area adjacent to, and leading towards, schools is safer. Basic design and planning elements such as the presence of lighting, trimmed vegetation, no blind corners, managed public space and the presence of community surveillance on these routes all play a large role making these spaces feel safe. ¹³ In addition to this, there are

effective innovations such as the "walking bus" initiative, in which community members ensure that children are able to access their school safely.¹⁴

Another practical example of creating safe, user-friendly spaces close to the school comes from Jeppe Park in the City of Johannesburg, where there has been success in working with two primary schools and an early childhood development centre to design, activate and manage the park. The co-production of this space with the schools has meant that the space created was beneficial and useful to its intended users. Once completed, the schools used the park as part of their everyday activities for play and sports. This process was mutually beneficial. Not only did it activate the park, keeping it busy and safe from being used for anti-social activities; it also provided much needed public space for the schoolchildren and surrounding communities. This is vital for building social cohesion and connected communities, ultimately having a large role in crime reduction.

Other initiatives focus on psychosocial support and youth resilience. Among youth and during adolescence, there is often a weak link between the choices they make and the consequences of their actions. Youth may be easily influenced and susceptible to delinguency by their peers. 15 In poor socio-economic environments, where gangs and crime are rife, it can be particularly challenging for youth to make positive choices. Evidence suggests that initiatives around cognitive behavioural therapy can help individuals foster socio-emotional skills, assist in violence prevention initiatives and help individuals avoid crime. Helping young people better understand themselves and their emotions as well as build healthy ways of interacting with others plays a critical role in building up resilience to crime and violence, and ultimately fostering safer communities and schools. 16 One example of this kind of work is the Masifunde Changemakers Programme, which works to capitate and build resilience amongst youth in high schools. 17 Another example is the Shukuma Programme, which is a partnership initiative aimed at high school learners in the Western Cape (see case study).

The introduction of sports tournaments and programmes in partnership with schools could be a great way to strengthen social cohesion and keep youth away from crime. School resources such as the field grounds could be used to host these events, with the supervision of teachers. Studies have shown that keeping youth busy and engaged with activities that they enjoy has a key role in deterring them from engaging in antisocial activities. This idea is similar to successful interventions that have been carried out by eKhaya neighbourhood 18 and the City of Johannesburg at End Street North Park¹⁹, where activation and sports tournaments played a critical role in social cohesion and crime reduction. In addition to keeping children and youth engaged through sport, tournaments held at schools after hours or on weekends could draw in parents and other members of the surrounding community to support and get involved. Through this, community members start to become familiar with one another and build relationships, which strengthens social cohesion and can be a positive factor contributing to the reduction of crime and the active promotion of safety.









Initiatives focusing on cognitive behavioral therapy can help individuals foster socio-emotional skills, assist in violence prevention initiatives and help individuals avoid crime.

SHUKUMA

Moving Mindsets Programme (FORMERLY VPI@SCHOOLS)

The Shukuma Programme is an initiative of the Western Cape Government in partnership with Department of the Premier (DotP), Western Cape Education Department (WCED) and J-PAL Africa, which was developed as an innovative solution to address crime and violence and is in response to the increasing levels of learner-on-learner violence in schools throughout the province.

The programme sets out to teach learners social and emotional skills to slow down their automatic responses to violence. The aim of the programme is to give young people the tools they need to regulate their emotions as well as providing psychosocial support to understand underlying drivers of beliefs and actions. The programme also aims to provide an honest and safe space for learners to talk and to engage with positive role models (facilitators). Ultimately, this leads to a reduction of crime and violence within

schools and their surrounding communities. Facilitators are tasked with delivering weekly sessions following a specific curriculum, which has been developed by international and local curriculum experts. These sessions are delivered on a weekly basis to grade 8 and 9 learners during school hours. Given the busyness of the school day, the sessions have been integrated into Life Orientation subject sessions. As such, the developers ensure there is enough alignment between the Shukuma curriculum and the CAPS curriculum, Fach of the Shukuma curriculum sessions start with a check-in process where learners reflect on their well-being through the PIES (physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually) process. The sessions each touch on important issues and use different methods to get learners to engage.

The sessions are as follows:

| Topic Details

1 Orientation: Intro to Programme and Values

Introduction to the key programme concepts and values of the programme.

2 Five Emotions

Exploration and group definition of the five basic emotions: anger, sadness, fear, joy, and shame.

3 Integrity Role Play

Learners get an introduction to the core concepts of integrity and accountability, then have the option to reflect on a real example from their own life.

4 Empathy Game

Learners read and respond to situation cards depicting difficult life situations and how they would feel if they were placed in that situation.

5 Reflecting Listening

learners engage in a reflective learning exercise and practice empathy.

6 Boxes - Part I

Learners identify learned words/feelings/judgments/about the opposite sex and same sex, and how those words/feelings/judgments are true, untrue, oppressive, or liberating.

7 Boxes - Part II

Learners identify learned words/feelings/judgments/about the opposite sex and same sex, and how those words/feelings/judgments are true, untrue, oppressive, or liberating.

8 Deep Check-Ins

Following the regular check-in process, the facilitator initiates additional prompts for the group to engage in a "deeper" check-in.

9 Conflict

Participants develop a new awareness of conflict, how they respond to conflict presently, and an alternative approach to dealing with conflict

#	Topic Details
10	Deep Breathing Introduction to the practice of mindfulness and deep breathing.
11	The Shadow Through role play and lecture learners explore the concept of having a "shadow" parts of themselves that they hide or suppress and the importance of being aware of those things.
12	Vision Through brief guided visualization, learners develop a positive vision for themselves and their community.
13	Restorative Circle Learners will learn a useful method for resolving conflict, understand the difference between intention and impact, and have an opportunity to experience the definition of the value of accountability.
14	Golden Hot Seat Learners will see positive aspects of themselves and their character that may be unknown to them.
15	Termination celebration (deep breathing) Celebrate the learners for their work throughout the year and terminate the group in a healthy way.

The facilitators play an integral role in the process of this psychosocial support training.

Each facilitator works 2 days a week and gives 2-3 topics to around 10-15 learners in each session. During the hours they are not busy with the sessions, they offer a supporting role to teachers such as light admin, break duty or assisting with afterschool programmes. Keeping the facilitators as involved in the school as possible during these hours allows them to build important trusting

relationships and comfortability with the students, which is key to the success of this programme. Originally, the programme consisted of 14 volunteer facilitators with a background in social work or psychology from UCT. It then scaled up to 200 facilitators in the pilot phase and could include anyone with a matric, who was between the ages 18-35 and who had experience working with youth. The role became a paid position using the National Jobs Fund to fund the stipend. The facilitators were taken through process and received the Shukuma curriculum training as participants received facilitation training, two full days of personal and professional development per guarter and are assigned a mentor who maintains accountability for them. Given the complex and sensitive nature of the work, the facilitators are offered support when things are causing a strong are also trained on understanding what is and is not within their scope of ability, as well as who to refer learners to when they are not able to assist with specific and personal issues.

The programme originated with a test phase beginning in August 2021 and started with four schools in the Cape Metropolitan running between September and October. After the success of the test phase, the programme was scaled up into a pilot phase, which included fortyfive (45) schools across the Cape Metro and extended to the Cape Winelands District Municipality. The selection of schools was evidence informed. Medium and high-risk schools were chosen from a provincial list of 'priority areas' based on the level of violence at the school and murder statistics. in the area in which it is located. They also tried to ensure that the chosen schools were a mix of urban, rural and semi-rural areas with a diversity of language including English and Afrikaans teaching schools as well as those with isiXhosa speaking learners. Approximately 4,000 learners completed the programme in 2021. Given the success of the project and the positive feedback, the goal is to roll out the programme again in 2022 with around 20-25 session between April and September and get 8,000 learners to complete it.

KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS

The Shukuma programme has been very successful, with immediate and tangible benefits to participating learners and schools. Among the various factors that contributed to its success, the following stand out:

1: Drawing on evidence to design impactful interventions - Good practice is and should be informed by evidence. This ensures both that the correct issues are uncovered and that the resulting interventions will be relevant, useful and successful in the long term. This is also an important step in ensuring there is no duplication of existing efforts, but rather producing initiatives that will actively contribute to the success of the initiative. In this instance, the intention was to address the issue of the increase in learner-on-learner violence. A needs assessment study was undertaken to understand the drivers of this across high schools in the Cape Metro, which then helped uncover the root issues needing to be addressed. Further research resulted in understanding the application of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in settings similar to the Western Cape and how that could be adapted to address current issues. Beyond this. statistics and further research was used to ensure the correct schools were targeted with the programme. Using evidence to inform this practice ensured that they were offering something that was unique, needed and context appropriate to ensure success.

2: Focus on psychosocial skills and well-being initiatives - Through the needs assessment study that was undertaken it became apparent that a key issue was that learners were unable to control their responses to certain situations, thus retaliating with violence, even when they knew it was wrong. The curriculum was set up to help learners' process, understand and respond to their emotions in healthier manners, resulting in better-adjusted individuals. Addressing the root causes of the problem before it escalates is critical in prevention work and is key in creating safer schools and spaces.

3: Investing in value-added partnerships – Key to the success of the initiative was the collaboration between the different project partners. While the programme was co-designed and co-implemented, each institution/department came with their own strength, sphere of influence and resources that contributed to its success. For instance, J-Pal Africa and DotP undertook the research that ensured the process was evidence informed and useful. WCED helped to get schools to buy into the programme and allocate time for their students to participate in it, which is particularly difficult given the current school pressures. UCT, J-PAL and DotP helped to source students as the successful first round of volunteer facilitators, while WCED, Safe Schools and YearBeyond helped with support systems for the programmes, including referral pathways, support to facilitators and programme oversight. As we know, working towards holistic and integrated urban safety requires a whole of society and whole of government approach, where we all need to work together. As such, it is important for project partners and assisting organisations to come together and lean on one another's strengths, particularly where skills are lacking, and share workload to bring about the success of the initiatives and build safer spaces.

Violence and crime prevention interventions in schools need to be adaptive to meet the different needs of learners and staff in different contexts.

TOWARDS GOOD PRACTICE

As some of the examples from practice show, there are different ways in which schools can be leveraged for violence and crime prevention, ranging from working with learners (and the broader school community) to ensuring that areas in proximity to schools are more safe (as per SAPS action to close down liquor outlets close to schools). The education system and schools themselves have a critical role to play, through curriculum development, safety measures at schools and enrolling parents and caregivers in school initiatives and events, including those focused on psychosocial and emotional support. But even for actors outside the education system schools can be strategic entry points for ABVPI.

Invest in school-based and/or school-supported initiatives that build life skills and youth resilience

Both as a particular risk group to violence and crime and as future adults, who become role models to future generations, youth are a particularly important group to work with and build resilience. This can be done in a variety of ways, including through after-school sports, culture and art programmes, which equip youth with important social, emotional and life skills. Schools grounds and facilities, such as sports fields, could be utilised for this purpose. Similarly, schools programmes – whereby organisations develop activities at schools to build awareness and skills – can also be very impactful. As mentioned before, these initiatives promote positive choices, peer relations and life skills, and can reduce the rate of learners and youth influenced into gang-related activities and violence.

Work with learners as co-creators of safe schools and safe communities

Learners can provide valuable insights into the state of safety, both within and surrounding schools, based on their first-hand experience. Beyond the school grounds, they often have to traverse streets and spaces, including bus stops and taxi ranks, that may be experienced as hostile, scary or unsafe. Children and youth should not feel stressed about coming to school or going home after school, as this affects their ability to learn; they should also not be exposed to opportunities that get them into difficult situations. Engaging learners in safety audits, focused on the school environment and/or the community at large, is therefore a practical example of using a participatory methodology, whereby those directly affected have a voice in the process. A creative example is to develop a school-based competition to gain feedback on community safety concerns, which can inform localised interventions.

Engaging learners in safety audits, focused on the school environment and/ or the community at large, is a practical example of using a participatory methodology, whereby those directly affected have a voice in the process.

Make pathways to and from areas surrounding schools, safe for learners

The safety audits or conversations with learners (and teachers) about their experiences of the surrounding environment can be used to inform targeted interventions to improve safety. This may include designing clear walkways, pedestrian crossings, speedhumps and bus/taxi stops. It may also include the installation and maintenance of streetlights and dealing with derelict buildings or spaces. Physical obstructions, including vegetation, could be cleared to ensure that there are no blind corners and to improve community surveillance. Parents, caregivers and local volunteers could be drawn into a 'walking bus' initiative, to provide safety and oversight during the walk to and from school. These interventions would not only benefit learners and teachers, but also other members of the community.



4

Initiate conversations with community actors on how schools can be leveraged for public benefit, as neighbourhood assets

There are many different ways in which schools can potentially contribute to overall community wellbeing. We already see some examples of where schools as public infrastructure are leveraged for public benefit, namely as voting stations during elections. Another example is to establish school food gardens, which can serve a dual function of being both a learning lab and a point of fresh food distribution to learners and community members. Consideration could also be given to using schools as venues for soup kitchens or meeting places for community events and meetings. Many other examples could be considered, bearing in mind that the safety and security of the school and its primary target group (i.e. learners) remains paramount. Therefore, certain restrictions - such as a curb on the consumption of alcohol in schools – may need to be considered. The argument here is that this should be a topic of conversation with community stakeholders and that possibilities, risks and limitations/restrictions need to be discussed and clarified with these local stakeholders.



Schools have the potential to meaningfully contribute to overall community wellbeing for both the learners and school staff, and the whole community.

IN SUMMARY

- 1: Youth are disproportionately vulnerable to being perpetrators or victims of crime and violence. Influencing factors include their lack of ability to understand, control and appropriately respond to their emotions, as well as their susceptibility to peer influence.
 - **2: Schools provide an entry point for ABVPI,** as they are places where children and youth spend a significant amount of time. They are also spaces that government can access with relative ease to institute widespread interventions, including integrating initiatives and programmes into the curriculum.
 - **3: Resilience, including resilience to crime and violence,** is built and directed through psychosocial and emotional understanding, and fostering healthy social connections.
 - **4:** Working with children and youth to build their resilience and emotional wellbeing does not only equip them better to navigate challenging situations; it also has **broader social dividends** as youth become role models in their community and turn into adults.
 - 5: Interventions with learners may be useful learning for members of the broader community including their caregivers. Lessons that young people are taught in schools should be reflected and upheld in the home and in the community for better effectiveness.
 - **6: Both learners and facilitators are impacted** by the initiatives and programmes implemented. Youth develop positive role models and form a sense of relatability and trust with facilitators. Likewise, facilitators have a renewed sense of purpose and gain critical skills.

- 7: The safeguarding of the schooling environment, i.e. ensuring that the school is a safe space for learners and staff, can include a range of interventions such as anti-bullying campaigns, drug testing and school safety audits.
- 8: Urban design and physical interventions help ensure that both the school and the spaces surrounding it are safe so that members of the school as well as the broader community can navigate these spaces without fear.
- 9: Community focused activations enable the physical infrastructure of the school to be leveraged constructively for the community as a public space and asset, while promoting upskilling, education and social cohesion.
- **10:** Institutionalisation of initiatives are important to move beyond pockets of excellence towards more widespread and sustainable crime and violence prevention. To enable this, the buy-in of stakeholders in decision-making positions is essential.



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The SPRINT Project is a joint initiative of the South African-German Development Cooperation with the support of the Violence and Crime Prevention (VCP) Programme, implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) as the commissioning party and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) as co-financing partner. The SPRINT Project is implemented by Isandla Institute and Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU).

The primary objective of the SPRINT Project is to institutionalise area-based violence prevention intervention (ABVPI) approaches in public policy, programmes and practices in order to upscale them and have a sustainable impact.



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