



PRINCIPALS' SILENCE ON LEARNERS' SEXUAL ABUSE IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This article investigated the principals' silence on learner sexual abuse at rural secondary schools. This study is based on a larger analysis of sexual abuse in schools in the Province of Limpopo, which examines the notion that, over time, teacher-learner sexual abuse has become ingrained with a cultural silence associated with African cultural practices. Data was collected from school principals through semi-structured interviews. One key finding was that although female and male secondary school learners alike were sexually abused by their teachers, none of them talked about the abuse or did anything to stop it. The study contributed to a greater understanding of the impact of sociocultural and socioeconomic situations on people's behaviour. These factors should not influence the way school principals carry out the responsibility to ensure the safety of learners in schools as required by the South African Schools' Act. Principals do not report abuse to the relevant authorities. The focus was on possible reasons for their silence, which, if uncovered, could result in the design of strategies to deal with such abuse.

Keywords: Sexual abuse, silence, principal, patriarchy

1. Introduction

Child sexual abuse is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society" (Celik, 2024).

Braxton and Damoah (2024) found that motivations behind the decision to drop out may stem from family matters, school/teacher attitudes, and students/learner involvement. Vlăduțescu and Pitsoe (2024) found that the factual situation has the regime of anything from which it starts: it can be discovered, opened, and determined.

The study is grounded on a larger analysis of sexual abuse in schools in the Province of Limpopo that examines the notion that, over time, teacher-learner sexual abuse has become ingrained with a cultural silence. Six principals volunteered to participate in the study. They all worked in the Senwabarwana Cluster in the Blouberg Local Municipality, Limpopo Province.

South Africa has been identified as one of the countries with the highest rates of violence and sexual abuse, which refer to all sexual indiscretions, from harassment to intercourse (Ward et al., 2018). Learners are sexually abused before they turn 17 years of age (Artz et al., 2016). Despite the implementation of several laws and regulations intended to stop this kind of behaviour, child sexual abuse is nevertheless on the rise, especially in underdeveloped rural areas (Suriah & Nasrah, 2023). School learners are sexually abused at all levels of the schooling system (pre-primary, primary, and secondary) and in all school types (public, private, disabled, and rehabilitation schools). Sexual abuse of female and male learners is not confined to school premises such as school toilets, empty classrooms, and hallways only but also during sporting activities, camps, and excursions (Robertson et al., 2023).

Principals are expected to carry out their responsibility of care, and the relationship of trust requires them to operate in loco parentis (Coetzee, 2023). Sexually abused learners are psychologically, emotionally, and physically affected, which compromises the development of their cognitive abilities and skills (Diraditsile, 2018). Similarly, Rishel et al.'s (2019) study indicates that health care patients stated that trauma experiences in childhood are related to increased risk of mental health, substance use, and physical health disorders. These trauma experiences

are caused by emotional, sexual, and physical abuse. Sexual abuse constitutes a contravention of learners' human rights.

The South Africa Constitution and the Bill of Rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) accord all residents, including children, the right to human dignity, and therefore it is imperative to determine the reasons for the continued occurrence of sexual abuse. The researcher's broad-ranging study of sexual abuse of learners at selected rural schools in Senwabarwana area indicated that teachers were not abiding by the principles of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, or the South African Schools' Act (SASA) (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996b), all of which emphasise people's right to human dignity. Principals and teachers in schools where sexual abuse occurs seem to be either unaware or aware of the incidents that they fail to report.

1.1 Aim of the Research

The focus of this article is to explore the possible reasons for principals' silence on sexual abuse of learners in schools.

1.2 Research Question

The following questions were asked:

1.2.1 Why does school-based sexual abuse exist?

1.2.2 Why do schools and communities hide sexual abuse incidents under a veil of secrecy?

1.2.3 What could be done to address this problem?

2. Power Dynamics

Most sociological theories are predicated on the idea that a person's behaviour is shaped, controlled, or measured by the cultural background of the community to which they belong. Most sociological theories are based on the notion that an individual's conduct is influenced, regulated, or assessed by the cultural context of the group they are a part of (Maraña et al., 2023). In other words, cultural heritage, values, norms, beliefs, and practices to which the group subscribes are transferred from generation to generation while at the same time safeguarding the survival and social harmony in the group (Tonsing & Fiji, 2019).

Therefore, the cultural legacy needs to be preserved and safeguarded. Any member of the group who disregards, disparages, or threatens the group's legacy, poses a threat to the group's survival and cohesiveness. Consequently, the concerned member would have to be duly punished or expelled from the group (Maraña et al., 2023). In schools, there is spatial punishment which is the creation of distance between perpetrator and the victim because of sexual abuse (Cooper-Knock & Super, 2022). It is acknowledged that no cultural activity is created in a vacuum and that its significance is ingrained in the respected framework of the group or organisation in question's values and practices. Most of these behaviours, regardless of the setting in which they take place, are predicated on normative conceptions of inter-gender power dynamics.

Women have written several works that describe the struggles and experiences they face in a society where men predominate. (Ibitoye-Ayeni & Oyimbo, 2022). In old patriarchal societies, it was normal for husbands and fathers to mistreat their wives and children because they were considered the property of their males (Ademiluka, 2018). Furthermore, in biblical times, for example, neither child sexual abuse nor rape were considered a criminal offence. Although the abuse might have been secret, this could not be ascribed to shame but to prevailing norms that were in place at the time (Stiebert, 2019). In Australia, the Royal Commission tried to find a solution about sexual abuse by instructing priests to confess sins of child abuse and to report themselves to the authorities (Introvigne, 2022).

2.1 Traditional African culture

In traditional, patriarchal African culture, men had the right to abuse or assault women and children without facing any repercussions for themselves. This continued to be the standard of masculine dominance and power (Tonsing & Fiji, 2019). Due to these sociocultural conditions and normative cultural prescriptions of male dominance and privilege, African girls and women become vulnerable to many forms of sexual abuse, including but not limited to rape, disease, and death. Learners who grow up in cultures where sexual abuse is commonplace may view males' intimidation or sexual abuse of girls as normal. (Latiff et al., 2024). Pedersen et al. (2022) argue that adolescent sexual assaults seem to be committed by an acquaintance of the victims. Adolescents' sexual activity is seen by several traditional African communities as a normal and essential aspect of life.

Some traditional African cultures regard sex amongst adolescents as a natural and necessary part of life. In these cultural groups, sexual desires are assumed to be caused by "heated blood" (Thornton, 2003), which can only be excreted in the exchange of male and female blood during sexual intercourse. Peragine et al. (2022) argue that absence at sexual debut may play an unacknowledged role in differentiating sexual desire. Adolescents'

sexual activities are assumed to facilitate adolescents' successful maturation. Boys are mostly engaging in extreme sexual coercion (using physical force or threat of violence) and exhibit violent behaviour outside of sexual situations (Glowacz, 2018). These non-consensual sexual activities are regarded as rape in the real world because of the lack of a victim's consent (Humble, 2022).

Discussions about sex are generally frowned upon in public, and elders use metaphors to explain them. They are discussed at the initiation schools where teenagers are taught how to use their reproductive organs for sex, patience, dignity, responsibility, and accountability to become 'proper' men or women (Mulaudzi, 2015). Teenagers are indoctrinated to keep their sexuality private, even when they are coerced into having sex with older people. Muchali (2022) concurs with Mulaudzi et al., (2015) that girl-child initiation training and activities. are designed to shape young girls into women and urge them to get married at the appropriate age. Strangely, these discussions often encourage young girls to experiment with sex and use the lessons they have been taught about covert sexual behaviour (Mulaudzi, 2003).

Such experimentation could be one of the reasons for a disproportionately high number of women in the rural areas of the Vhembe District suffering from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Maputle & Lebeso, 2019). Olamijuwon and Odimegwu (2022) believe that if the cultural circumstances of such efforts are not taken into consideration, young people's uncritical attitudes about sexual health information could offer negative unintended consequences and reinforce existing gender norms. In line with Olamijuwon and Odimegwu (2022), Mulaudzi et al. (2015) further argue that although traditional, patriarchal VhaVenda gender and power dynamics are acknowledged, socioeconomic, psychological, and sociocultural factors also play a role. They should be provided with some ethical recommendations that could aid in limiting the transmission of STDs. Teenagers are expected to deal with challenges related to sexuality, authority, and self-esteem issues (Martin, 2018). These factors affect their social interaction and academic performance and undermine their ability to make informed decisions about the enactment of sexual abuse.

2.2 School culture

Learner sexual abuse is a serious problem in contemporary global societies worldwide (Pur et al., 2016), including the sexual abuse of learners by their teachers (St. George, 2017). Very little is known about how school culture affects students' and teachers' perceptions of the contribution of sociocultural and/or socioeconomic factors to gender-based violence, as well as the proper pedagogical response to such violence (Le Mat et al., 2019). Since schools are inherently extensions of society, it stands to reason that the values and customs of the surrounding cultures will have some impact on the school's culture (Okafor et al., 2024). Given the prevalence of patriarchal African attitudes and behaviours in the community, it indicates that the schools would to some extent mirror these norms.

Schools in areas where customary beliefs about children's rights diverge from legal rights are more likely to highlight the differences between the community's and the school's cultures and the potential effects these differences may have on learners' behaviour and teacher-learner relationships. Principals and teachers in these kinds of institutions may find themselves caught in a cultural conundrum. The findings of the study on which this article is based suggest that learners and principals' silence about sexual abuse at their schools might well be due to such a conflict. South African schools are managed in terms of the rules and regulations stipulated in SASA (1996b) to ensure that the human rights accorded to children in the RSA Constitution are protected, respected, and promoted (RSA, 1996a), and, therefore, by implication, learner sexual abuse is not allowed in schools. Notwithstanding these regulations, learner sexual abuse continues unabated as an ongoing activity in rural African and Asian schools. However, the silence surrounding the sexual abuse of learners makes it difficult to determine the extent of its occurrence. Sexual abuse continues in schools due to societal ignorance and the silence around it; as a result, perpetrators are not punished (Ngidi, 2023).

Socioeconomic and sociocultural beliefs about age, the exercise of authority, and the power invested in teachers' positions are said to be some of the reasons that make learners submissive to the sexual demands of teachers. Young girls growing up in traditional African cultures might believe that the abuse of women is a normal part of daily life (Ngidi, 2018). If such learners fall pregnant, it would simply be evidence of their fertility and successful womanhood.

Some African communities expect damages to be paid to the girl's family as compensation for a pregnancy. Impregnated learners could simply see it as a means of economically supporting their families because of sociocultural factors (Lubbe, 2020). Since cultural behaviour is generationally transmitted (Latiff et al., 2024), it is improbable that female learners who grew up in cultures or communities where sexual abuse is either accepted or frowned upon will disclose such abuse (Lebeso et al., 2011). Having been taught to respect the normative social hierarchies of their cultural group regarding age, gender, and power imbalances, learners could well, out of

respect passively endure sexual advances. Teachers, being aware of these beliefs, could also be using their knowledge of learners' socioeconomic status to bribe them, promising them monetary benefits if they submit to their sexual demands (Ngidi, 2023). The silence surrounding the sexual abuse of learners could, therefore, be attributed to sociocultural and/or socioeconomic factors.

Learner sexual abuse is generally not reported because, as victims, learners may be afraid of being blamed for these incidents or further be victimised by the perpetrators (Diraditsile, 2018). Learner participants of the broad-ranging study suggested that single-sex schools could possibly be one of the solutions to prevent the sexual abuse of learners. However, given the exposure of the sexual abuse of male learners by Roman Catholic priests, even their attendance at a single-sex school is no assurance that learners will not be abused. Such affected learners only disclosed their abuse once they had left school (Ballano, 2024).

3. Method

While the focus of the mixed-methods case study by Cohen et al. (2000) on which this article is based was on the sexual abuse of school learners, the focus of the article is on school principals' silence about its occurrence. Participants were selected by means of a purposive, snowball, and random sampling that were appropriate and relevant to the study. Following the presentation of the researcher's intended study at one of the provincial secondary school principals' meetings, six principals volunteered to participate in the study. All principals worked in the Senwabarwana Cluster in the Blouberg Local Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa. In addition to principals as participants in the study, the researcher was also referred to the Departmental of Education officials and the South African Council for Educators (SACE), which is the council that is responsible for the code of conduct for teachers. The school learners present in the schools of the participating principals voluntarily participated in the study. Six secondary schools were classified as Quintile 1 schools, which were exempt from paying school fees due to the rural and community poverty levels.

3.1 Data collection

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews, and the researcher supplemented the predetermined, open-ended questions in the interview schedule with ad hoc, in-depth probes. The sample consisted of six principals of the selected schools. This enabled the researcher to gain a critical understanding of participating principals' awareness of and response to the possible sexual abuse of the learners at their schools.

3.2 Data analysis

Having used open, selective, and axial coding to analyse the data, the researcher interpreted the emerging findings in terms of two frames of reference, namely, culture and context. It was in terms of these frames of reference that the reasons for school principals' silence on the sexual abuse of their learners are discussed in this article. The analysis of the data used open, selective, and axial coding and provided a structured approach to identifying and interpreted key themes regarding school principals' silence on the issue of sexual abuse. By framing the findings through the lenses of culture and context, the researcher highlighted how these elements influenced the decision-making and responses of principals. Open coding was involved in identifying various factors and themes from the data, such as fear of repercussions, cultural stigma, or lack of resources. Key concepts included power dynamics, societal norms, and individual beliefs about abuse. The researcher focused on the most significant themes that emerged, such as the pressure to maintain a positive school image or the perceived inadequacy of support systems. This stage helped the researcher to narrow down the findings to core issues that were relevant to the silence surrounding sexual abuse.

4. Findings

Warning: The findings contain sensitive information that may affect sensitive readers.

There are reasons that emerged in the corpus of literature dealing with the sexual abuse of women and children in traditional African cultures and in the context of school culture itself. Key reasons, among others, are traditional patriarchal views on gender inequality relations and sexual behaviours (Pierik, 2022). Findings from the study indicate that the principals' silence on sexual abuse of learners in schools may well be due to the sociocultural and socioeconomic value systems upheld by the communities in which their schools are located.

Principal participants indicated that they were aware of the sexual abuse of school learners. They stated that learners' sexual abuse is an ongoing occurrence and that it affects both secondary and primary schools. According to the interviewed principals, the actual scope of the abuse of learners could not be accurately determined because many of the incidents were either not reported and/or published. The interviewees further narrated incidents of which they were aware in which teachers and principals were alleged to have been involved in sexual

abuse activities of some or other kind. Included in their narratives were the outcomes of these incidents, some legal, some administrative, and some sociocultural.

4.1 Teachers as perpetrators

The interviewed principals argued that some teachers were allegedly accused of abusing learners sexually in Senwabarwana schools. One principal mentioned a case in one of the secondary schools in which a female teacher's daughter was raped by a drunken teacher during a Grade 12 farewell function. This incident was reported to the police, and the accused was subsequently arrested. In another incident, a secondary school teacher was accused and found guilty of sexually abusing two female learners at the school where he was employed. Although he was subsequently dismissed, one of the abuser's boyfriends confronted him. The teacher in return shot the girl dead. The teacher was arrested and found guilty of murder. In another incident, secondary school teachers were accused of sexually abusing girl learners in the school toilets. The abused learners' parents reported the matter to the principal, who further reported the case to the relevant Department of Education. The Department of Education summarily instituted a disciplinary hearing. During the first disciplinary hearing session, the girl learners confirmed that they had been sexually molested. During the second session of the disciplinary hearing, however, the unions of which the accused teachers were members pleaded with departmental officials present to issue the accused with warnings only. The officials having conceded, the case was never reported to the police, and the teachers are still employed at the same school.

In another incident, a female teacher was allegedly accused of sexually abusing male learners at her cottage. One of the learners' parents reported the matter to the principal. During the disciplinary hearing process, the accused female teacher was represented by her teacher union. During the sitting, the parents and the School Governing Body (SGB) members excused the principal from the meeting and decided to treat the incident as a family matter. The principal later discovered that the parents and the SGB members had dropped the case because they had been 'paid off'.

Another male teacher was allegedly accused of inviting male learners to his cottage and then showing them pornographic videos. The learners were ordered to perform sexual activities that included actual intercourse, such as shown in the video. The principal, having been informed of this, confronted the learners concerned. At first, the learners admitted that the incident occurred, claiming that they had been invited to his cottage under false pretenses and that he had offered to help them with one of their subjects. During the subsequent meeting with the learners' parents, the learners recanted. They indicated that the videos were used to teach them life sciences. The principal dropped the allegations, but since then, according to the narrators, his relationship between himself and his staff has been marked by unwelcome tension.

There was another incident reported of a learner who was impregnated by one of her teachers. Their affair was only discovered when the learner was admitted to the hospital following complications arising from a botched abortion of the fetus. There were, however, no repercussions. The alleged teacher paid for the abortion and compensated the learner's mother with money and groceries. Both the mother and the daughter remained silent about the affair and the identity of the teacher. The learner's father accused her mother of condoning their daughter's relationship with the teacher. Although the parents had been divorced for some time after the incident, her father claimed that his wife failed to carry out her responsibility of taking care of their daughter, and the consequences brought shame on him as the official head of the household.

4.2 Principals as perpetrators

According to the principals, there were incidents of learner sexual abuse that involved the principal of a secondary school in the Senwabarwana School Cluster. The media was informed by an unidentified 'whistleblower' about the principal, who regularly abused girl learners at his school. Even though teachers and some community members were aware of these incidents, nobody ever reported or spoke about them. Even when two of the learners fell pregnant, no action was taken. The parents refused to talk to the media and prevented their daughters from giving evidence. According to the parents, the principal was not supposed to be punished because he was taking care of the children he had fathered—allegedly by paying them money and groceries to silence them.

Table 1: Incidents of sexual abuse at participating principals’ schools

Response by principal	Type of incident	Perpetrator	Incident report to relevant officials (Yes/No)	Incident resolved (Yes/NO)	Compensation paid (Yes/No)	Other ways used to settle the matter
A	Sexual abuse on female learner	Teacher	No	Yes	Yes	Family settled for child maintenance
B	Sexual abuse on female learner	Teacher	Yes	Yes	Yes	Family settled for compensation
C	Sexual abuse on female learner	Teacher	Yes	Yes	No	The school principal ignored the case
	Sexual abuse on female learner	Teacher	Yes	No	No	The principal organised a transfer for the teacher and advised for out of court child maintenance settlement.
	Sexual abuse on female learner	Teacher	Yes	No	No	The principal organised a cross transfer for the teacher
D	Sexual abuse on female learner	Teacher	Yes	No	Yes	The perpetrator and the parents are suspected to have made a payment settlement.
	Sexual abuse on female learners	Teachers	Yes	No	No	The principal was threatened by the accused teachers.
	Sexual abuse on female learner	Teacher	No	Yes	No	The accused teacher was served with summon papers for child maintenance
E	No	No	No	No	No	No
F	No	No	No	No	No	No

The six principals ascribed the community's silence on sexual abuse incidents to tribal traditions, poverty, and illiteracy, all of which are still typical of rural areas. According to them, incentives were mostly used to buy off parents to remain silent when it came to the abuse of their children. Principals argued that parents seem not to know children's rights and were unwilling to accept responsibility for protecting the rights of their own offspring. It was, therefore, not surprising that parents were easily manipulated into keeping quiet about the sexual abuse of their children, even when the perpetrator was their child's teacher.

Another reason, allied to the afore-mentioned ones, according to the principals, could be the fact that teachers and school principals were regarded as having a higher social status in their communities. Both teachers and principals occupy a high position of authority at school and are respected by parents and the community, and the social status of parents would be enhanced if people knew that the father of their daughter's child was a learned person of authority.

5. Discussion- Conclusions

5.1 Discussion

Findings accruing from this study indicate that the perpetuation and silence of learner sexual abuse in the research area, namely, in Senwabarwana, Blouberg Municipality of the Limpopo Province, is a reality. Four of the six principals in the research area reported on learners' sexual abuse as a serious offense and that it was supposed to be prevented at all costs. Additionally, they said that until someone else—typically a third party—reported the sexual assault instances to them, they were unaware of the incidents.

While the principals' inability to detect sexual activities at their own schools should be a matter of concern, a bigger concern should be, if they had known about these instances, would they have informed the appropriate authorities? The reviewed literature indicates that there might be several reasons why principals may fail to report incidents despite extensive legal and ethical consequences (McKee, 2017). They might be silent to avoid bad publicity of their schools and/or legal ramifications for themselves (Grant et al., 2017).

Although there was no explicit evidence of either of these possible reasons in the data, both might be implied in the preventive actions taken by the two participating principals, who, contrary to indications from learner data, claimed that learner sexual abuse does not exist at their schools because of their preventive interventions. One of the participating principals also raised the idea that principals believed they would endanger their lives if they reported the incident to the authorities. Motivated by their fears that those who wanted to maintain the silence surrounding the sexual abuse of learners might therefore simply accept that the 'social justice' consequences to the perpetrator, as decided by the community, were sufficient 'punishment'.

Principals' lack of confidence in the educational system could still be another factor. Indications from the data are that even when teachers had been found guilty of learner's sexual abuse, punitive actions were random and inconsistent. Some of the offenders received just reprimands and/or were transferred to different schools, while others faced summary dismissal and/or imprisonment in certain cases. These discrepancies may be the result of legal systemic flaws that let offenders escape punishment with no convictions even in cases where child welfare or criminal justice authorities have been notified of the instances in question. These inconsistencies could possibly be due to gaps in the legal system, gaps that allow perpetrators to walk away from the legal process with clean records even when the incidents concerned had been properly reported to child welfare or criminal justice agencies (Rockowitz, 2024).

What could be inferred from these possibilities is that the principals of schools located in patriarchal rural communities may find themselves captured between two cultures (Okafor et al., 2024), the one mandated by the state and the other adhered to by different communities. Principals are employed by the state, and they should perform their duties in accordance with the specifications of SASA (RSA, 1996a). They are legally bound to ensure that schools have a zero-tolerance policy on learner sexual abuse (Seidule & Pollack, 2018). In addition, principals oversee ensuring that all teachers working under their direction adhere to this policy and put the needs of their learners before their own. They must report to the Provincial Head of Education on the success or failure of this policy's implementation (Prinsloo, 2016).

Implied in the reasons above, there is also a possibility that school principals in contexts like the ones described in this article have little if any chance of turning around the tide of learner sexual abuse at their schools. They should refute the idea that human rights and Indigenous culture are incompatible in this case.

Human rights are a permanent and unchangeable concept, whereas culture is by its very nature dynamic and reactive. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the distinctions between human rights and culture, the possibility of cultural fusion could result in the creation of a "new," more accommodating culture (Hossain & Ballardini, 2021). African perspectives on conventional male-female roles and relationships should be reevaluated considering evolving opportunities and socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions. Principals of schools in primarily

patriarchal societies should have the opportunity to openly discuss and resolve the issue of sexual abuse in an open and effective manner.

5.1.1 Prevention strategies

Breaking the silence must be used as a strategy in preventing sexual abuse in schools (Rashid & Barron, 2022). Society needs to be encouraged to improve in breaking the silence of abuse (O'Halloran, 2022). In South Africa, through the Department of Basic Education, schools are advised to use a zero-tolerance approach to learner sexual abuse. Schools are helped to develop policies and procedures that are in line with the department's legal obligations, including the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010 (O'Halloran, 2022). Schools must create forums where learners are free to break the silence by talking about their sexual abuse, and the learners feel safe and protected in breaking the silence. These support networks can serve as a strategy to help sexually abused learners break the silence (Nazareno, Vidu, Merodio & Valls, 2022).

Learner sexual abuse can be prevented by using education awareness through technological advancement and by creating conducive policies and a cultural environment of free communication. Social workers can be used in schools by parents to assist in monitoring online communication and be able to block inappropriate websites, which makes learners vulnerable to sexual abuse incidents (Patterson et al., 2022). Teacher training courses can be used as a prevention strategy by including risk protection discourses to protect the learners' rights and the risk of being sexually abused. Another strategy that can be adopted by schools is to use the breaking-the-silence approach through comprehensive sexuality education by teaching learners about sexual abuse, their body parts, and how to protect their bodies (Hanass-Hancock et al., 2018). Schools should develop support networks that can serve as a strategy to help sexually abused learners to break the silence.

Schools can design supportive educational network programs to assist them and the communities to understand the learners sexual abuse and its impact on them. The programs should focus on the support and intervention strategies to assist the abused learners to feel free and to be able to break the silence (Gruenfelder, 2020). For example, in Spain, workshops are organised to discuss relevant aspects of child sexual abuse. Adults, parents, teachers, and learners are involved. This can help them to engage in developing policies to prevent the abuse and encourage the abused learners to break the silence of such incidents (Ferragut et al., 2022). Breaking the silence has been identified as a strategy for policy and legislative reforms to address institutional abuse in Australia, Ireland, and the UK. The rights, welfare, safety, rehabilitation, and support provisions were noted and prioritised in their policies developed by religious entities, including the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) and various Protestant denominations, along within the Hindu and Jewish religious communities (Rashid & Barron, 2022). Unfortunately, the JW in the USA, Canada, Australia, the UK, and the Netherlands have hindered all the efforts that could lead to the disclosure of children's sexual abuse cases and destroyed evidence to avoid judicial hearings.

5.2 Conclusions

Informed by the findings of the research conducted, the researcher contends that the Department of Basic Education should address the cultural flaws identified in the discussion to date on the sexual abuse of learners. The department could, for example, use principals' meetings as training opportunities where information could be presented on cultural merging strategies while at the same time facilitating discussions amongst attending school principals from different sociocultural and socioeconomic groups. In this instance, principals can be given an opportunity to discuss ways in which their cultures could be brought closer to one another and possible ways in which they could facilitate cultural merges in school communities. This could well guide them towards the development of a communal and school culture that represents a reconciliation between traditional/customary and liberal/modernist views on sexual behaviour. In so doing, the training undergone should pave ways in which different parties' beliefs, needs, and ambitions could be acknowledged and accommodated. This could enable school principals to facilitate open, honest discussions about issues related to the sexual abuse of learners in their schools and facilitate the gradual development of a new culture that mirrors caring and cohesion principles, which are the bedrock of Ubuntu. It is recommended that teacher training be used as a prevention strategy by including risk protection courses to protect learners' rights and the risks of being sexually abused in schools.

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