

When caring is not enough: The limits of teachers' support for South African primary school-girls in the context of sexual violence

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Description:

Between 2011 and 2012, 40.1% of all sexual offences in South Africa involved children under 18. Important scholarship has demonstrated how large-scale social and economic inequalities structure African girls' risk to and experience of sexual violence leading to a condemnation of violent masculinities and the social processes that produce it. Under conditions of chronic poverty and unstable living conditions, girls' vulnerability to sexual violence is increased. Schools located in extreme settings, without adequate material and social resources are often in the frontline in dealing with sexual violence. This paper examines how a selected group of teachers located in a township primary school understand their role in the social protection of young girls in the context of sexual violence. An ethic of care dominated teachers' responses to girls' rendered vulnerable to sexual violence, but as this paper argues, caring is both vital and inadequate. This point becomes particularly clear as turbulent social conditions and material struggles beyond the school limit teachers' potential to safeguard the needs of girls, resulting in their silence and fear contracted by their difficulty to work with parents. These social processes underscore the need to attend to interconnected interventions beyond and within education recognizing that teachers' work in addressing sexual violence in extreme setting exceeds the terrain of schools. The paper concludes with recommendations within schools and beyond that address teachers and the social, gendered and economic contexts which give rises to girls' sexual vulnerability.

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