



Gender Bias in Leadership Attitudes Towards Men in Early Years Education in South Africa

1. Vusi Msiza (PhD), Associate Professor, University of South Africa, Early Childhood Education
2. Obakeng Kagola (PhD), Lecturer, Sol Plaatje University, Curriculum Studies

Vusi Msiza & Obakeng Kagola (2025). Gender bias in leadership attitudes towards men in early years education in South Africa. Paper presented at the EECERA SIG Gender Online Conference, 13.3.2025.

Introduction and Background

“Issues of sexual harassment, sexual abuse and sexual assault is number one. Men, any opportunity, and I am saying men because it's 99 point something per cent. Men, every opportunity they have, they grab the child. It doesn't matter where and therefore, those issues continue to be with us” (SACE CEO, September 2024)

- The paper was prompted by remarks made by the South African Council for Educators (SACE) about men at last year's DBE symposium.
- The South African Council for Educators (SACE) serves as the professional council for educators in South Africa. Its primary purpose is to enhance the status of the teaching profession and promote professional development among educators. SACE aims to uphold standards of professionalism, ethics and conduct.
- According to South African Police Services Crimes Statistics (2024), between October and December 2024. These are the following rape cases in educational institutions; **Day/After Care** (9 cases), **Schools** (74 cases) and **Special schools** (10 cases)

Rape Crime stats in Education facilities

Rape: educational premises: victims

October 2024 to December 2024

Educational place combined	Victims of education					Total
	Perpetrator	Learner	Student	Community member	Not specified	
Day care, crèche, nursery, pre-school	Acquaintance	2	0	0	1	3
	Employee	1	0	0	0	1
	Stranger	2	0	0	0	2
	Teacher/Principal	1	0	0	0	1
	Unknown	1	0	0	1	2
School	Acquaintance	2	0	0	0	2
	Ex-boyfriend	0	0	1	0	1
	Known by sight	1	0	0	0	1
	Learner	53	0	0	0	53
	Not specified	6	0	0	1	7
	Security	1	0	0	0	1
	Security(s)	1	0	0	0	1
	Stranger	2	0	2	0	4
	Teacher/Principal	3	0	0	0	3
	Uncle	0	0	0	1	1
Special needs school	Acquaintance	1	0	0	0	1
	Learner	8	0	0	0	8
	Not specified	1	0	0	0	1
Tertiary education e.g. university, college, technikon	Acquaintance	0	1	0	0	1
	Boyfriend	0	2	0	0	2
	Room mate	0	1	0	0	1
	Stranger	0	2	0	0	2
Total		86	6	3	4	99

*School: Primary, Secondary, High schools

These are crime scenes, not all victims are students or learners

Introduction and Background...

- Leadership in this paper; Comprises of SGB (Governance), Principals and other officials (Management).
- The concept of leadership in education generally is well-studied in South Africa.
- However, leadership in relation to the early years and gender is under-researched and theorised in South Africa.
- Existing work has studied the construction of identities by both in- and pre-service teachers in South Africa (Bhana & Moosa, 2016; Moosa & Bhana 2020; Msiza, 2020; Msiza & Msibi, 2024).
- The experiences of same-sex male desiring foundation phase teachers and how male teachers understand care in the early years (Kagola, 2024; Msiza, 2024).
- According to the OECD (2023), Globally, men in primary schools are about 15% while in ECE are 0.3%.

Theoretical Framework- Intersectionality

Intersectionality theory reveals how men in early childhood education simultaneously experience privilege (as men) and disadvantage (in a feminised profession).

Exposes how institutional power structures and leadership decisions create specific barriers for men in the early years of education.

Provides tools to identify multiple forms of discrimination and develop targeted approaches to address these inequities in South Africa.

Intersectionality theory assists us in understanding the paradoxical nature of hegemonic masculinities, for instance its omnipresence while also hiding in plain sight (Messerschmidt, 2018)

Methodology and data Insights

- Data is drawn from our unpublished masters dissertations and one published article.
- Both dissertations focused on men teaching in the foundation phase, (1) In Mpumalanga (Vusi) and the Eastern Cape (Obakeng).
- Both studies employed qualitative research methodologies.

Brief Data

“Bhuti [Brother] let me tell you this is my second time being in SGB. I have never seen or heard that the advertisement of foundation phase teacher is looking for a man, we always look for a woman . . . I think it is somewhere in those policies. (Ngezile)

Ngezile went on to say,

“My brother principals want only mamas there in the schools, and I tell you, they can change our decision . . . they do not favour men because they cannot control them. . .”

“When I started to look for job I had one experience in Middleburg of which the principal consulted with the UKZN and he said I have a post but let me think about it, especially when he saw the documentation he realised that I’m qualified there was a smile in his face but he was not sure, he said let me consult with the school governing body after six days he called back and said its mine of which I had already got this one by that time. I said to myself that I had a job but it touched me because I felt like I was denied opportunities because of the fact that I’m a male” (Phumelele)

Discussion and Conclusion

- The intersection of gender and violence in South Africa, reflected in police statistics, positions men as threats (generally). However, meaningful change requires targeted work with boys, men, and leaders through an intersectional approach.
- Our point of departure is; “Maybe if we didn’t generalise all men as inherently violent, we’d appreciate what makes so many deviate from the norm”. (Plank, 2019, p.60).

Remarks by the SACE CEO are;

- Factually unfounded but also undermines the strides scholars have made in promoting the inclusion of men in early childhood education.
- Stigmatizes male teachers through unsubstantiated generalisations and creates fear of entering the teaching profession.
- The remarks have implications for creating a diverse and gender-mixed ECE/FP workforce.
- Organisational structures and leaders are not gender-neutral (Acker, 1990). Yet addressing sex/gender complexities demands societal-level intervention (Mistry & Sood, 2015).

References

- Bhana, D., & Moosa, S. (2016). Failing to attract males in foundation phase teaching: An issue of masculinities. *Gender and Education*, 28(1), 1-19.
- Kagola, O. (2024). Positive inclusive experiences of a same-sex desiring male Foundation Phase teacher. *African Journal of Career Development*, 6(2), 144.
- Mistry, M., & Sood, K. (2015). Why are there still so few men within Early Years in primary schools: views from male trainee teachers and male leaders? *Education 3-13*, 43(2), 115–127.
- Moosa, S., & Bhana, D. (2020). Men teaching young children: “You can never be too sure what their intentions might be“. *Oxford Review of Education*, 46(2), 169-184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1644995>
- Msiza, V. (2020). ‘You are a male teacher but you have a woman’s heart’: Foundation phase teachers negotiating identities in South Africa. *Education 3-13*, 48(6), 651-660. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2019.1638957>
- OECD (2023), *Education at a glance*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en>
- Plank, L. (2019). *For the love of men: A new vision for mindful masculinity*. St. Martin’s Press.
- South African Police Service. (2024). Crime statistics: 3rd quarter 2024/2025 [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www.saps.gov.za/services/downloads/2024/2024_2025_3rd_Quarter_WEB.pdf

The End

Contact Details:

- Vusi Msiza (PhD), Associate Professor, University of South Africa, Early Childhood Education. Email:

emsizavj@unisa.ac.za

- Obakeng Kagola (PhD), Lecturer, Sol Plaatje University, Curriculum Studies. Email:

obakeng.kagola@spu.ac.za

