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Schools defenceless against violent tide

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'Until we begin to roll back the flood of violence in communities, there is very little schools can do to prevent violent behaviour among pupils coming through the school gates."

These are the words of the dean of education at the University of Pretoria, Professor Jonathan Jansen.

A spate of violent incidents at school has led to a public outcry and given rise to the perception that children were becoming increasingly violent.

Many organisations and experts say the criminal activities children are exposed to in their communities are to blame for this.

But the question remains: what can be done to curb this trend of violence in South African schools?

Jansen said it was high time for the public to be realistic about what schools could and could not achieve.

Jansen said: "Students observe, and might even participate, in violence in their communities.

"The abuse of women, broken families, the brutality of criminals, the availability of dangerous weapons - these are things that many of our children are exposed to on a daily basis," he said.

Wally Morrow, former chairperson of the Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education, said South Africa was faced with numerous social problems and

that such matters could not be solved solely by schools.

Morrow said: "This situation of violence in schools is not unique to South Africa.

"It is all good and well for the department of education to send out notices to schools, stating that it is the schools' responsibility to ensure the safety and security of pupils, but teachers are not trained in this regard.

"South African society has a tendency of being violent, mainly because of the increasing levels of poverty and unemployment.

"We are faced with a situation where violence is a mechanism of survival for many people.

"The country is ignoring the actual realities on the ground, which are what pupils are exposed to in their homes and communities."