

## 27 complaints of sexual misconduct against South African teachers

Written by reporter

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Twenty-seven complaints of sexual misconduct against teachers were received by the SA Council of Educators between January and October this year.

In some cases teacher-pupil relationships took place with the consent of the children's parents, said SACE CEO Rej Brijraj on Thursday.

"Especially where you find learners are grown learners [you find] there is some arrangement between the teacher and parent, where some kind of financial agreement has been swung.

"In dire socio-economic conditions... there are some educators who will exploit and take advantage of the situation and poor unsuspecting parents may give in, thinking it is a promise for future marriage, [while actually the teacher is] just exploiting the young children for carnal use."

Brijraj said that about 80 percent of the cases involved male teachers having relationships with female students. There were cases of female teachers liaising with male students, as well as some same-sex relationships.

He said most of the complaints involved children nearing Grade 12.

"It has been very disturbing that there have been cases where students have been minors."

Children as young as nine had been found to be involved with teachers. There had also been cases of impregnation.

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"Council finds that completely intolerable. While girl learners are abused by other members of society, we definitely have jurisdiction over teachers.

"The age of learners, their consent, parental consent or their location in a different school will not mitigate the culpability of a teacher in this regard."

He said of the 27 complaints, seven teachers had already been found guilty and were struck off the roll -- a register of all teachers lawfully entitled to teach in the country. The SACE was still in the process of investigating the other complaints.

Brijraj said the council followed up on the complaints by doing a series of in-depth investigations. A court-like hearing was then held in front of a panel of teachers and professionals.

The panel reached a finding, which was then recommended to the council who took a final decision. Brijraj said in proven cases the council would not hesitate to strike the teacher off the roll indefinitely, report the matter to the police or publish the name of the teacher involved.

The council received about three complaints about sexual misconduct a month. Brijraj said while the council conducted its investigations with sensitivity and confidentiality, and also referred the matters to the relevant authorities, more needed to be done to help the students involved.

"Not enough is being done in terms of post-traumatic counselling for learners," he said.

"It is absolutely forbidden for teachers to have liaisons with learners. Those that have this tendency should leave the profession immediately."