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Exploring teachers' experiences in idealing with social problems faced by adolescent learners : the case of two high schools in Diepsloot and Tembisa, Gauteng

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is often a difficult transitional period and adolescents need to feel supported in all aspects of their lives. They desire social and emotional support to reach psychosocial well-being. Researchers world-wide are of the same opinion that due to the adolescent stage having many challenges, children in this phase of development require support in order to cope as they continue to develop. As learners spend most of their time within the school environment it is vital for schools to have both formal and informal support systems in place that will serve as support for adolescents in dealing with the social problems that they face.

The objective of the study was to explore the experiences of teachers in dealing with social issues faced by learners given the available resources within the educational context. The research approach employed was qualitative in nature and collective case studies were utilized as the research design. The participants comprised of educators of two high schools, one in the Diepsloot and a second in Tembisa in Gauteng. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 participants, five from each of the schools. In-depth interviews were used to collect data and a semi-structured interview schedule was utilized as the research instrument. Thematic content analysis was applied as the method of data analysis.

The findings of the study showed that the most prevalent social issue occurring within school communities is the issue of child- headed households. Other prevalent social problems that were identified were teenage pregnancy, drug/substance use, conditions of unemployment or poverty and bullying. The lack of parental support or parental involvement as well as not being adequately equipped to assist were majorly reported as challenges faced by teachers in dealing with learners' facing social problems. The School-Based Support Team was identified as the most utilized and most often, the only internal resource. Lastly, a lack of training, equipping teachers to assist learners facing social problems was majorly reported majority reported in this study.

The argument underpinning this study is that teachers are mandated to teach and as such, should be expected to teach and not fulfil a counselling role. Thus based on the findings, the recommendations made include the development of policies that will promote collaborative family-school partnerships as well as create a supportive psychosocial school climate. There

is a need for improvement of internal support systems in schools which can include learner involvement. The Department of Education can assist with the provision of support services or systems such as social workers and other allied health professionals as well as ensuring that teachers are adequately trained to assist learners. Lastly, collaborative relationships between schools and support service providers in communities should exist.

KEY WORDS: adolescent, social problems, teacher, learner, support services