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THE MENTAL HEALTH FACTORS INFLUENCING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN GAUTENG

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Health Sciences,

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for a Master of Science Degree in Nursing.

Johannesburg 2024

DECLARATION

I, Wellington Thulani Nxumalo, declare that the research report on "The mental health factors influencing academic performance of Secondary School learners in Gauteng," is my own work. It is being submitted for the Degree Master of Nursing Science at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



31 October 2024

…… …….

Signature Date

Protocol number: **H22/11/47**

DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to my mother, Thabisile Nxumalo, and my nieces, Londiwe and Khanyisile. Additionally, I honour the memory of my late sister, Nkosingiphile.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My appreciation and sincere thanks to the several people who supported me throughout this study:

First, I wish to thank Almighty God for the abundant grace and favour that have guided me throughout my educational journey.

My supervisor, Dr Nokuthula Gloria Nkosi, whose expertise, and guidance have been instrumental in shaping my research skills and knowledge. Her mentorship has been an invaluable asset to my academic and professional growth.

My family members, Londiwe and Khanyisile. Their unwavering support, love, and inspiration have been the guiding lights throughout my academic journey.

The learners, and their parents for graciously agreeing to participate in my study. Thank you very much.

ABSTRACT

Background: Regardless of additional resources provided in schools, academic performance has not improved, especially in non-affluent schools. Resources alone are not necessarily the only key to academic performance. Therefore, other factors that can affect learners' performance need to be explored. Learners in secondary school are at high risk of experiencing mental health problems that negatively influence academic performance. These learners are at a teenage developmental stage, which involves cognitive development, where they are still learning how to think logically and relate socially. However, in South Africa, no studies are reporting on the mental health factors that influence academic performance.

Purpose of the study: This study aimed to explore and describe the mental health factors that influence the academic performance of secondary school learners. To gain an understanding of the common mental health factors that are perceived to influence the academic performance of learners.

Research setting: The setting of this study was a Secondary School in Gauteng, South Africa.

Research methods: This study adopted a qualitative approach with a qualitative, explorative, descriptive, and contextual design. The sample was purposefully selected from a population of grade 8 to 12 learners. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and saturation was reached at participant number 16. For the scoping review, the search terms *mental health, academic performance, academic achievement, learner, adolescence, and education* was used to search the following electronic databases: Psyche INFO, PubMed, CINAHL Plus, Scopus, and SABINET.

Data analysis: Data was analysed thematically, and triangulated.

Results: The findings of this research study revealed a range of mental health factors that have an influence on academic performance, organized into separate themes such as mental health factors, social factors, academic-related factors, and learners' needs.

Conclusion: The study provided insights into the mental health factors that impact on secondary school learners and their educational outcomes. These challenges, as expressed and recognized by learners themselves, can drastically hinder their performance in school.

Key words: Academic performance, academic achievement, psychosocial factors, mental health factors, secondary school learners

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NOMENCLATURE

DoBE	Departments of Basic Education
DoH	National Department of Health
EMS	Economic & Management Science
GDoBE	Gauteng Department of Basic Education
ISHP	Integrated School Health Programme
NASN	National Association of School Nurses
SCPHN	Specialist community public health nurses
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SES	Socio-economic status
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Resources to correct poor academic performance have been allocated in South African schools; however, academic performance remains poor (Van der Berg, 2006; Ogbonnaya and Awuah, 2019; Kutu et al. 2020). Kutu et al. (2020) explored the availability of educational resources and student academic performance. They recommended that several factors should be explored to improve academic performance. Concerns like mental health challenges are associated with dropping out of school and performing worse academically (Eisenberg et al. 2009). Grant et al. (2021) conducted a study on the development of a tool that could be used to identify mental health disorders. They identified a treatment gap for common mental health disorders in South Africa; therefore, the need to increase the identification of Common Mental health Disorders, including depression and anxiety, was also identified. Grant et al. 2021). Thus, the researcher aims to explore and understand these factors from the learner's perspective.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

When education occurs, it promises employment and good health, making progress toward the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, South Africa continues to perform poorly academically, for example, in Mathematics and Science (Badat, 2010; TIMSS, 2019). According to Suleman et al. (2012), the examinee viewed poor academic performance as failing the below minimum standard expected for the task. Academic performance remains at the lowest although the education expenditure has doubled in the national budget since 1994 (Kutu and Nzimande 2020). But less attention has been given to other factors that directly impact academic performance. For example, South African School environments are characterized by gang membership, hostility, and violence are typical signs of mental health difficulties (Mfidi, 2017). Also, on the news were learners assaulting and killing teachers or each other (News24, 2019; The Mercury, 2012; Cape Argus, 2012). These behaviours directly impact learners' academic performance. Additionally, poor socioeconomic status contributes to learners' academic performance (Farooq et al. 2011). For example, when learners do not obtain adequate nutrition, it results in poor academic performance (Kapur, 2018). Moreover, parental anxiety

influences the academic performance of learners (Hafeez et al. 2022). All of these have an impact on learners' academic performance. Mental health is characterized by people realizing their potential, managing life's daily stressors, functioning well at work, and giving back to the community (World Health Organization (WHO), 2013). Research carried out within the borders of the United States of America revealed that more than twenty percent of adolescents present with mental health disorders. Their psychological profile has been characterized by a variety of mental health classifications, including oppositional defiant disorder, bipolar disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, impulsive disorders, as well as obsessive-compulsive disorder (Bas, 2021). The author further revealed that when adolescents struggle with mental health problems they often have poor school attendance, difficulty completing assignments, and increased conflicts with adults and peers (Bas, 2021).

Duncan et al. (2021) conducted research among secondary school learners in Canada. Their findings indicated that depression and anxiety stand out as prominent mental health problems among learners and have often been associated with poor school performance in adolescents (Duncan et al. 2021). Additionally, authors disclosed that mental health issues including anxiety and academic stress put extra pressure on learners' ability to cope (Hafeez et al. 2022). Similarly, in South Africa, mental health affects academic performance (Mfidi, 2017).

The South African Department of Health (DoH) created a plan of action for school health promotion in schools, placing the nurse as an integral part of this service (ISHP, 2012). Despite all these efforts, learners are still experiencing mental health problems that affect their academic performance (Mfidi, 2017). A school health nurse's main responsibility is to detect and manage psychological issues so that learners can concentrate on their studies (Maughan et al. 2017).

Significantly, the World Health Organization (2020) stated that identifying mental health factors that could impact learners' academic achievement is pivotal for the future of every country (Puskar and Bernardo, 2007; WHO, 2020). The school health nurse is placed correctly to identify and refer learners with mental health problems (National Association of School Nurses (NASN), 2016). These nurses are not permanently based at the school but provide services once or twice a week. However, without a knowledge of common mental health factors experienced by the learners, the school health nurses might miss an opportunity to refer them for early management. As a result, the mental health problems might only be identified when the learner has failed a grade.

Directly linked to mental health and academic performance is how learners perceive themselves in terms of academic performance. Marsh and Martin, (2011) defines self-concept as an essential concept that directly links to academic performance. Self-concept is how an individual sees and measures themselves, such as a person may describe and evaluate themselves as a hard worker and successful in academics (Marsh and Martin, 2011). In South Africa, Weybright et al. (2017) discovered that lower motivation levels among secondary school learners were significantly related to school dropout (Weybright et al. 2017). Jaiswal and Choudhuri (2017) conducted a study in India, Varanasasi which showed a positive correlation between academic achievement and identity among 615 secondary school learners.

A study by Siegle et al. (2017) shows that high achievers at school had more positive academic self-perception than low achieving learners. A low self-perception is an indication of mental health problems. Therefore, it is crucial to assess adolescents thinking about themselves academically (Marsh and Martin, 2011; Mathew, 2017).

Poor academic performance directly impacts the 2030 National Development Plan, when all children would be expected to embrace their full potential in a country where opportunities are determined by potential and ability, education, and hard work (National Planning Commission, 2012). Improving academic performance cannot be achieved merely by teachers in the classroom, but the school health nurse plays a critical role here (ISHP, 2012). The nurse does the health and well-being screening, diagnosing, and early detection of psychological challenges, provision of suitable therapies, and appropriate referral (Dibakwane and Peu, 2018). As a result, learners can be referred for further management and support in the multidisciplinary team immediately, promising healthier learners and possibly improved academic achievements (ISHP, 2012).

The prevalence of mental health disorders among adolescents in South Africa is reflecting increase in mental health challenges in this age group. More than 10% of adolescents in South Africa are estimated to have a diagnosable and treatable mental health disorder. This includes conditions such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, conduct disorders, learning disorders, and substance use disorders (Sorsdahl et al. 2023).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Poor school performance is concerning in South Africa, and it affects the country's development (Jansen, 2014; Pretorius, 2014). While there seems to be a challenge in solving

this problem, Rice (2019) asserts that everybody concurs that despite all laws enacted to improve the quality of education, this dream remains vague because nobody knows what needs to be done to ensure academic success (Rice, 2019). This fact is echoed by Kutu and Nzimande (2020), who recommended that other factors that influence academic performance need to be explored in South Africa. While based on the literature, several factors need to be considered, for example factors related to mental health are known to impact learners' academic performance (Mfidi, 2017).

The school health nurse is at an advantage within the multidisciplinary team as the first point of contact for the learners. The school health nurse should also perform a basic mental health assessment to identify risks, including mental health factors that influence learners' academic performance (ISHP, 2012). To this date, no study has been conducted at the specific school to identify common mental health factors that can affect the learners' academic productivity and overall performance.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question for the study was:

What are the common mental health factors that affect the academic performance of secondary school learners?

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore and describe the mental health factors that influence the academic performance of secondary school learners. To gain an understanding of the common mental health factors that are perceived to influence the academic performance of secondary school learners.

1.6 OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the study were to:

Phase 1:

- Explore and describe the mental health factors affecting the academic performance of secondary school learners and how best to identify and manage them.

Phase 2:

- Conduct a scoping review to explore the literature on mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Research on this topic has not been conducted in the South African setting, and it will offer valuable insights into the subject matter. The findings of this study can contribute to providing more straightforward ways or guidelines on how to improve education outcomes for secondary school learners. Most significantly, it could provide a point of departure for the school health nurse in mental health nursing. Possibly researchers could utilize the findings of this research to create tools for evaluating the mental health features of learners. Also, interventions can be formulated focusing on how nurses can intervene to improve learners' mental health.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

In order to ensure clarity in the following discussions, the following definitions outline the critical terms relevant to this study.

1.8.1 Academic achievement:

Refers to the extent of a learner's success in performing specific academic tasks, typically assessed through grades or test scores. It includes not only the attainment of knowledge but also the development of skills and competencies in various subjects (Ozcan, 2021). In this study, academic achievement will refer to the learners' knowledge achievement and skill development, while being influenced by a range of personal and environmental factors.

1.8.2 Academic performance:

Academic performance reflects the culmination of a learner's educational experiences, indicating how well they have absorbed and applied knowledge acquired during their studies. The concept encompasses various dimensions, including cognitive abilities, emotional intelligence, motivation, study habits, and the quality of the educational environment. These factors collectively influence how well a learner performs academically (Farooq et al. 2011).

1.8.3 Adolescence:

Refers to a unique stage of human development and an important time for laying the foundations of good health. During this phase, adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive

and psychosocial growth, which affects how they feel, think, make decisions, and interact with the world around them (WHO, 2020). In this study, it will mean those learners at the school registered for grades 8 to 12 during the study period.

1.8.4 A Learner:

Is described as a person who is still learning or receiving education (Department of Basic Education, 2011). According to the South African Schools Act, (1996), a learner refers to any person who is registered and receiving education or accommodated to receive education at a school. In this study, a learner will mean a person enrolled and receiving education at a specific school during the research project. The age range of learners by grade is as follows: Grade 8 includes learners who are approximately 13 to 14 years old, Grade 9 consists of learners around 14 to 15 years old, Grade 10 consists of learners aged approximately 15 to 16 years, Grade 11 includes learners who are about 16 to 17 years old, and Grade 12 consists of learners aged around 17 to 18 years.

1.8.5 Mental health factors:

Mental health factors encompass a range of biological, psychological, and social influences that affect an individual's emotional and cognitive well-being. These factors are critical in understanding how mental health impacts the academic performance of secondary school learners (WHO, 2022).

1.8.6 Mental Health:

Is a state of well-being where an individual can realize their abilities, manage the normal stresses of life, work productively, and make contributions to their community (WHO, 2013). In this study, mental health will mean mental health factors described by the learners.

1.8.7 Prolonged engagement:

Refers to the in-depth interaction and sustained involvement with participants or subjects in qualitative research. This approach allows researchers to gather richer and more comprehensive data by building trust and rapport, leading to deeper insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives (Dado et al. 2023).

1.8.8 School:

Refers to a public school or an independent school registered under the Department of education and registers learners in one or more grades starting from grade R to grade twelve

(South African Schools Act,1996). While a Secondary School, **r**efers to a school in South Africa that provides education for five years, starting from grade 8 to 12, divided into two phases, lower and upper secondary (Macha, 2017)**.** In this study, a school refers to a public school that is registered under the department of education and registers learners in one or more grades starting from grade eight to twelve while a secondary school will mean a school that provides education for five years, starting from grade 8 to 12.

1.8.9 School health nurses:

Are referred to as specialized community public health nurses (SCPHNs) striving to decrease disparities and vulnerabilities while promoting health and well-being in school-aged children, adolescents, and their families (NASN, 2016). In this study, school health nurses will mean the nurses who play a key role in identifying mental health problems, providing support, and facilitating interventions that can positively impact learners' academic success.

1.8.10 School nursing:

Refers to a specialized nursing practice, that focuses on enhancing the health, classroom performance, and broader life goals of learners. In this study, school nursing will mean a nurse employed or assigned to work at a specific school (NASN, 2016).

1.8.11 Triangulation:

Triangulation involves combining different approaches to verify findings and reduce biases inherent in any single method. It is primarily utilised in qualitative research but can also be applied in quantitative studies and mixed methods research (Donkoh and Mensah, 2023).

1.8.12 Well-being:

Well-being in the context of mental health refers to a holistic state that encompasses emotional, psychological, and social aspects of an individual's life. It is not merely the absence of mental illness but rather a dynamic state that allows individuals to thrive and cope with life's challenges (WHO, 2022).

1.9 RESEARCH SETTING

The research setting was a Secondary School in Gauteng, South Africa. It is a school starting from Grade 8 to Grade 12 and registered with the Gauteng Department of Basic Education (GDoBE), which has fifteen Districts. During the period of the study the school had 1 645 learners and 53 teachers. The school is categorised under quantile 3 because of its socio-

economic conditions and funding needs. Quantile 3 level includes schools that have a mix of funding sources, including some fees from parents.

1.10 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study used a qualitative approach, and the methods were semi-structured interviews and a scoping review. The target population included all the learners who were in grades 8 to 12 at a secondary school. Only n=16 learners gave consent to take part. The data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews with secondary school learners and scoping reviews to examine the literature. Chapter 3 offers a thorough explanation of the research methodologies.

1.11 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

The research report is divided into seven chapters:
Chapter 1: Overview of the study
Chapter 2: Literature review
Chapter 3: Research methodology
Chapter 4: Phase 1: Semi-structured interviews
Chapter 5: Phase 2: Scoping review
Chapter 6: Integration, discussion, and conclusion
Chapter 7: Summary, limitations, recommendations, and conclusion

1.12 SUMMARY

The chapter has presented the research topic and the rationale for conducting this study using a qualitative approach. The present study outlined its problem statement, research question, and objectives. For data collection, two methods were utilized: semi-structured interviews and a scoping review. The following chapter will offer a concise summary of the literature pertinent to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains a review of national and international literature on the mental health factors influencing the academic performance of secondary school learners. The literature review process includes gathering and evaluating what has already been written and published by other researchers on the chosen topic (Tabuena, 2021). Consequently, a brief literature review was performed to enhance the researcher's awareness and understanding of the subject. The literature review included an electronic search using Psyche INFO, PubMed, CINAHL Plus, Scopus, SABINET and Google Scholar that was done using a combination of keywords such as mental health, academic performance, academic achievement, learner, adolescence, education and secondary schools between 2012 and 2023. The literature review is important to the research process as it provides initial knowledge, highlight gaps, guide methodological choices, prevent redundancy, enhance credibility, and create existing information into a clear understanding of the topic at hand.

2.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE ADOLESCENT STAGE

The transitional stage of physical and psychological development known as adolescence often happens between puberty and maturity (Jaworska and MacQueen, 2015). According to the WHO, adolescence periods are from ages 10 to 19. The three primary developmental stages of adolescence are early adolescence which is 10 to 13 years, middle adolescence which is 14 to 17 years, and late adolescence which is 18 to 21 years (Kapur, 2015).

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development suggests that adolescence is a critical phase for identity formation, as indicated by the stages of adolescent development. Erikson introduced eight stages of psychosocial development, with adolescence representing the fifth stage known as identity versus role confusion. This stage falls within the age range of 12 to 18 years, and the primary task is to establish a sense of self and personal identity. The adolescent brain develops in a way that supports the process of identity formation, as highlighted by Wright and Kutcher, (2016).

Piaget's theory describes adolescence as the formal operational stage, where individuals' thoughts start taking a wider perspective, allowing them to think hypothetically and deductively. This stage signifies a transition from the ability to reason based on concrete, observable events to the capability to an ability to solve problems through intellectual concepts (Konrad et al. 2013).

Problems with adolescent brain development, as well as other psychological challenges, can stem from exposures during this critical stage, increasing the likelihood of anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions. Exposure to stress during adolescence can impact brain maturation. Chronic stress can lead to long-term effects on learning, memory, emotional control, and decision-making abilities (Eiland and Romeo, 2013).

2.3 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

2.3.1 Internationally

In secondary education, the degree of achievement for learners serves as a key indication of their academic performance and has been linked to several factors related to their mental health. It determines eligibility for postsecondary education in addition to serving as a measure of academic achievement (Duncan et al., (2021). Consequently, efforts should be directed towards identifying the factors that influence academic performance in adolescents.

According to Pascoe et al. (2020), learners in secondary school face various ongoing pressures linked to academic demands. They argue that stress related to academics can hinder academic success, reduce motivation, and raise the likelihood of dropping out. Moreover, Persistent stress can ultimately lead to the emergence of more severe mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and substance abuse. (Pascoe et al. 2020). Research done in American and Hawaiian secondary schools showed that depressed symptoms were linked to poor academic performance as a result of poor sleep patterns, substance usage, difficulty focusing, and difficulty finishing schoolwork (Pascoe et al. 2020).

2.3.2 Nationally

Research indicates that the reasons behind South Africa's underperformance in academics are extensive and multifaceted. Key contributing factors often involve low socioeconomic status and inadequate resources, both of which significantly impact learners' academic success (Adebayo et al. 2020).

A learner's academic success is influenced by several elements, including their familial history, their level of resilience, and their teachers' motivation (Adebayo et al. 2020). A previous study by Adebayo et al. (2020) in South Africa examined the relationship between a learner's socioeconomic background, access to essential resources, and sociocultural characteristics, and how these factors influence their academic performance. The findings showed that a thorough grasp of the background variables influencing learners' performance may serve as a policy indicator to help decision-makers create more targeted policies regarding the history of the schools (Adebayo et al. 2020). The mental well-being of adolescents in South Africa is a concerning matter. Furthermore, Das-Munshi et al. (2016) found that a significant proportion of young individuals in South Africa are affected by prevalent mental health conditions such as depression (41%), anxiety (16%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (21%).

Obstacles to delivering mental health services to adolescents in South Africa include a range of systemic, social, and resource-related challenges. According to Saade et al. (2023), there is a substantial gap between the demand for mental health services and the availability of such services, due to limited access. This indicates a substantial lack of access to mental health for adolescents in South Africa. Sorsdahl et al. (2021) asserted that adolescents in South Africa underutilize mental health services and this may be attributed to various factors, including stigma, lack of awareness, and lack of availability of youth-friendly mental health services. According to Tomlinson et al. (2022), the limitations in resources and reductions in healthcare expenditure present challenges to service provision in the adolescent mental healthcare division in South Africa. As a result, limitations in resources can affect both the accessibility and the standard of mental health services for adolescents. Addressing these challenges effectively necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes policy revisions, resource allocation, community involvement, and establishing youth-friendly mental health services to guarantee that adolescents in South Africa receive the necessary mental health assistance.

2.4 MENTAL HEALTH FACTORS AFFECTING SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

Mental health is a state of health whereby individuals manage to identify their capabilities, survive in life and work, and contribute productively towards the communities in which they live (WHO, 2003). A study was conducted in South Africa to explore the perspectives of school teachers and school health nurses regarding addressing mental health problems among secondary school learners. The study showed that mental health problems occur when adolescents mishandle emotions and that there is a need for intervention (Mfidi, 2017).

For example, adolescents face difficulty in self-regulation and emotional management, which leads them to respond to conflicts impulsively and disruptively, rather than calmly and assertively. This manifests through engaging in risky behaviors, displaying a lack of respect, and exhibiting insensitivity towards teachers, parents, and peers. Another factor contributing to this challenge is poor screening leading to adolescents being undiagnosed and not treated (Lustig et al. 2023). Collaboratively, teachers and school health nurses are tasked with promoting mental health within schools by promptly identifying mental health problems and intervening early (Mfidi, 2017). For example, in South Africa, some policies are provided by the Department of Health (DoH) and Department of Basic Education (DoBE) that offer guidance to teachers and school health nurses on identifying, treating, and managing the mental health of learners (ISHP, 2012).

People's mental health is influenced by their surroundings and the things they encounter daily. According to research by Molano et al. (2018) and Busby et al. (2013), a child's mental health is negatively impacted by unfavourable neighbourhood features. According to a 2013 study by Busby et al. on the impacts of community violence, a rise in violent behaviors is associated with poor academic achievement. Additionally, researchers have discovered predicted characteristics that teachers can employ to help pupils succeed in school by early detection of their academic challenges (Battaglia et al. 2017; Waenerlund et al. 2016).

2.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENTS

The importance of mental health for adolescents cannot be overstated, as it severely impacts their overall well-being and prospects. Adolescence is a critical stage characterized by extreme physical, emotional, and social changes, making young people vulnerable to mental health problems. Globally, about 1 in 7 adolescents experience mental health conditions, yet many cases go unrecognized and untreated. Mental health is critical in shaping adolescents' social and emotional habits, affecting their ability to manage emotions, solve problems, and maintain healthy relationships.

Factors such as exposure to danger, violence, poor parenting, and socioeconomic problems can contribute to stress and impact the mental health of adolescents negatively (Mojtabai et al. 2016). Adolescents experiencing poor mental health may struggle with various aspects of life, including school performance, decision-making, and overall health, which emphasizes the need for early intervention and support. Early intervention and treatment can significantly reduce the impact of mental health disorders on adolescents' lives (Sankar et al. 2017).

Mental health problems in adolescence can have long-term consequences, affecting social, career, and interpersonal contributions to society and carrying over into adulthood, impacting economic productivity and responsible citizenship (Brännlund et al. 2017). Efforts have been made to integrate community health worker-delivered counseling for common mental disorders into primary health care services in South Africa. While these initiatives have been started to address the treatment gap, it was uncovered that adolescents rarely utilize health services offered on the primary care platform, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions to reach adolescents (Sorsdahl et al. 2021).

Prioritizing mental health in adolescents is important for their well-being and academic achievement. By identifying the importance of mental health in adolescents, providing support, and early interventions, adolescents can be assisted in navigating the challenges of this critical developmental stage and build a foundation for a healthy and fulfilling life.

2.6 PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH FOR ADOLESCENTS

Promoting mental health for adolescents involves various strategies aimed at supporting their psychological, social, and emotional well-being. Promoting mental well-being in adolescents involves vital steps such as encouraging them to seek help and facilitating connections with mentors and supportive adults (Cavell et al. 2021). Mental health promotion in adolescents involves addressing various factors like family conflict, loss of supportive friendships or family relationships to create a supportive environment that promotes positive mental well-being (Santre, 2022). Supporting adolescents in developing and maintaining healthy relationships with friends and family is essential for their social and emotional development. Creating a supportive educational setting, enhancing initiatives that foster positive growth, and offering diverse support systems to address the social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health requirements of adolescents are essential measures in promoting mental well-being (Cavell et al. 2021).

Recognizing the signs of mental health problems in adolescents early and providing timely interventions through mental health specialists can prevent the increase of mental health problems. Encouraging adolescents to reach out for help when needed and providing access to therapy or counselling can promote mental health awareness and support (Colizzi et al. 2020). By creating a supportive environment that prioritizes mental health education, positive coping mechanisms, healthy relationships, and early intervention when needed, it is possible to promote adolescents' mental well-being effectively.

2.6.1 Assessment of the mental health factors of adolescent learners.

Mental health in adolescents involves psychological, social, and emotional well-being, which are essential for healthy development and for building positive skills and behaviors (Cavioni et al. 2021). Factors such as self-esteem, behavioral issues, resilience, hyperactivity, coping strategies, and life satisfaction are important considerations in evaluating the mental health of adolescent learners (Sulistiowati et al. 2020). The school environment has a notable impact on the mental well-being of learners, where elements such as learner-teacher relationships, school community cohesion, and school adaptation influence the mental health outcomes of adolescents (Hinze et al. 2023).

Signs of mental health challenges in adolescents within a school setting may manifest as poor school adaptation, decreased focus, academic underachievement, interpersonal issues, substance misuse, and dropout rates (Cavioni et al. 2021). Assessing individual factors like life satisfaction and contextual factors such as school relations can provide insights into the mental health status of adolescent learners (Cavioni et al. 2021). Identifying mental health challenges early on through assessments and interventions can help prevent negative outcomes and promote the overall well-being of adolescent learners (Santre, 2022). Assessing the mental health factors of adolescent learners involves a comprehensive evaluation of their psychological, social, and emotional well-being within the school environment while considering protective and risk factors that influence their mental health outcomes. By understanding these factors and promoting mental health through early interventions and support systems, it is possible to enhance the well-being of adolescent learners effectively.

2.7 THE IMPACT OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENT LEARNERS IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

According to McLeod et al. (2012), four types of mental problems have the strongest relations with academic achievement among adolescents: namely depression, attention problems, delinquency, and substance use. According to Strydom et al. (2012) many countries, including South Africa, have demonstrated that the impact of mental problems on teenagers lowers scholastic success. A history of depression and anxiety disorders is linked to a higher likelihood of not finishing secondary education. Alongside demonstrating inadequate academic adaptation, diminished focus, academic struggles, challenging social relationships, and increased engagement in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, school dropout, and

expulsion, learners facing mental health difficulties at school often engage in these behaviors as well (Cavioni et al. 2021).

A study conducted in Canada by Duncan et al. (2021) found that anxiety and depression are among the most prevalent mental health challenges faced by young people, and these conditions are often linked to adolescents' academic performance. The study also showed that among learners in secondary schools, anxiety was linked to missing more classes, missing more days of school due to illness, and frequently leaving homework unfinished, which led to expulsion. Depression was also linked to academic performance (Duncan et al. 2021).

Agnafors et al. (2021) asserted that learners struggling with mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, are less likely to complete their secondary education. Furthermore, behavioral issues linked to conduct disorders can affect classroom behavior and subsequently academic success. Mental health challenges in adolescents increase the risk of academic underperformance, highlighting the importance of intervention and awareness to provide equal educational opportunities. Timely identification and interventions are crucial upon recognizing a connection between adolescent mental health and academic achievement (Agnafors et al. 2021).

Studies have shown that learners with mental health problems present with poor academic achievement because of poor performance (McLeod et al., 2012 & Verboom et al. 2014). A study conducted in Tanzania showed that mental health problems can result in a lack of productivity and poor academic performance by learners (Nkuba et al. 2018). Additionally, research has revealed widespread mental health issues in low- and middle-income countries, including Brazil, Ethiopia, and South Africa (Nkuba et al. 2018).

2.8 MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT RESOURCES

Resources such as school-based mental health services, delivered by trained professionals like school psychologists, counselors, and nurses, can help learners access needed services during the school day (Sapthiang et al. 2019). Schools can support the mental health of adolescent learners in various ways. Schools can train teachers and staff to recognize signs of mental health concerns in learners, enabling early identification and intervention. Incorporating mental health education into the curriculum helps reduce stigma and discrimination, fostering understanding and empathy among learners (Shelemy et al. 2019).

Encouraging positive relationships among peers, supporting family involvement, and providing time off for mental health support are essential strategies for creating a supportive environment (Schulte-Körne, 2016). Parents, families, and healthcare providers also have essential roles in supporting youth mental health through open communication, positive parenting practices, engagement in school activities, and routine health screenings that include discussions about family relationships and school experiences (Brännlund et al. 2017). It is crucial to establish supportive environments, foster mental health awareness, and ensure access to high-quality mental health care for adolescents to thrive emotionally and socially (Racine et al. 2021). Through the implementation of these strategies, schools can play a vital role in fostering the mental well-being of their adolescent learners, fostering a positive and nurturing environment that promotes well-being and academic success.

2.9 SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

Ensuring the health and readiness of learners for learning necessitates a strategy that is acceptable to the education and health sectors. To promote learners' physical, mental, and emotional growth, this strategy pushes schools to attend to their health requirements. School health services include providing preventive care, conducting screenings, and referrals to primary care providers for identified health problems to ensure continuity of care (Lewallen et al. 2015) state that these services are provided in response to current and suspected health issues. These services are delivered by licensed practitioners, physician assistants, dentists, school nurses, nurse practitioners, health educators, and allied health staff.

2.9.1 Physical Health

In addition to providing opportunities for physical activity and a healthy diet, schools also should make sure that kids have safe places, resources, and tools for both physical and mental well-being (Centers for Disease Control Healthy Schools, 2021). Physical health is a significant aspect of comprehensive school health services. The early adolescent phase is characterized by dynamic neurobiological and psychosocial development, according to Telzer et al. (2023). Hence, for this age group, physical activity may promote favorable brain alterations, enhance cognitive function, and raise scholastic achievement. Enhancing cognitive function and academic achievement can also be accomplished through physical education initiatives that promote activity. Empirical data suggests a connection between academic achievement and mental and physical health.

2.9.2 Mental health

According to Shelemy et al. (2019), a study that was conducted in the United Kingdom showed that there is a need for teachers to understand the common mental health problems of learners. In the United Kingdom schools are expected to identify learners with mental health problems and refer them to relevant services. Beames et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of clearly defined professional roles and measures to effectively address the mental health needs of learners. They advocate for the development of strategies to overcome barriers to accessing mental health care by offering services within secondary schools for convenient learner access. According to Rossen and Cowan (2015), learners battling with mental health problems cannot succeed or learn to their ability.

Therefore, addressing the mental health needs of learners is a requirement for learning and achievement. Schools are required to employ mental health professionals such as nurses who will work with teachers to effectively address the learning and mental health needs of learners (Rossen & Cowan, 2015). Additionally, contact with mental health professionals in school decreases the barriers that inhibit the desire to seek help for mental health intervention (Rossen & Cowan, 2015). Given these studies, it is evident that mental health issues can hinder academic performance and, consequently, overall achievement. This stresses the necessity for schools to implement school-based mental health services.

2.10 THE ROLE OF SCHOOL HEALTH NURSES

The role of a school nurse in mental health nursing is crucial in supporting learners' well-being and addressing mental health concerns.

2.10.1 International role

According to the Southern African National School Health Policy and Implementation Guidelines (2003), a school nurse is a health worker who has undergone training and possesses the necessary skills that are necessary for the provision of school health services. According to Cordery-Bruce, (2023), school nurses are often the first point of contact for learners experiencing mental health issues, as they can identify symptoms and provide initial support (Cordery-Bruce, 2023). According to Anttila, (2020), the school health nurse plays a vital role in early detection, offering a low-threshold service for mental health problems (Anttila, 2020).

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016), the original purpose of the school nursing role was to support educational attainment by enhancing student attendance. However,

the role of the school nurse has since expanded to incorporate crucial responsibilities, including health monitoring, chronic condition management, emergency planning, behavioral health evaluation, health education, and case coordination. The school health nurse is exclusively positioned to address and coordinate the healthcare needs of children and adolescents (American Academy of Paediatrics Council on School Health, 2016).

A study that was conducted in the United States, revealed that more than 40% of school-aged children and teenagers have at least one chronic health condition. Some learners with chronic conditions may miss school more often than others, which can affect their academic performance. For these learners, school nurses offer necessary help in managing their conditions (CDC Healthy Schools, 2021). Additionally, according to Wang et al. (2014), the role of a school health nurse is essential to ensure coordinated care for learners with health and mental health problems.

According to McDermott et al. (2017), in promoting positive behavioral health outcomes, school nurses collaborate with school personnel, healthcare professionals, learners, and families to assess, identify, intervene, refer, and follow up on children in need of behavioural health services. They act as advocates, facilitators, and counsellors for behavioural health services within the school environment and the community.

2.10.2 National role

In South Africa, the Department of Health, in partnership with the Department of Basic Education, has established the Integrated School Health Policy, a guiding framework that teachers and school health nurses are required to follow. Screening and referral to support learners' mental well-being fall within the scope of school nursing practice and align with the objectives outlined in the policy (ISHP, 2012).

In South Africa, school health nurses serve as crucial frontline professionals who identify mental health issues among learners, thereby playing a vital role in mental health nursing. Their responsibilities include identifying mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and behavioral health issues within the school setting (Alburquerque-Sendín et al. 2018).

School nurses in South Africa are trained to provide basic services for mental health problems and are often the first point of entry into behavioral health services for learners (McDermott et al. 2017). School health nurses, in collaboration with teachers, are tasked with the responsibility

of promoting mental health in schools, early identification of mental health problems, and providing timely interventions (Mfidi, 2017).

School health services are essential in supporting learners by providing health education, promoting healthy lifestyles, and addressing different health problems. School health nurses are able to provide mental health education thus impacting on the well-being of learners and mental health (Bjørnsen et al. 2019). Furthermore, school nurses in South Africa are essential in promoting positive behavioural health outcomes by collaborating with school personnel, healthcare professionals, learners, and families to assess, identify, intervene, refer, and follow up on learners in need of behavioural health services. They serve as advocates, facilitators, and for behavioural health services within the school environment and the community. School nurses are exceptionally positioned to engage in mental wellness promotion activities, conduct screenings, and develop individualized health care plans for learners (McDermott et al. 2017).

School health nurses in South Africa are essential in supporting learners' mental health needs by providing early detection, support, advocacy, referrals, counselling, education, and coordination of care. Their role extends beyond physical health to include a holistic approach that addresses the behavioral and emotional well-being of learners within the school setting.

2.11 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the correlation between mental health and academic achievement in secondary school learners, analysing the global perspective with a specific focus on South Africa. It highlighted the significance of addressing mental health problems in adolescents and emphasized the promotion of mental well-being among adolescents. The negative impact of inadequate mental health on academic achievement was explored, together with discussions on available mental health support resources, school health services, and the critical role played by school health nurses in aiding and guidance to learners facing mental health challenges.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented different research studies about the influence of mental health factors on the academic performance of adolescent learners. This chapter outlines the research design and method employed in the study, providing a detailed discussion of the research setting, population, and sampling procedures. The data collection, analysis, and measures applied to ensure research validity are detailed as applied in the research.

3.2 RESEARCH PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the mental health factors that influence the academic performance of secondary school learners, to gain an understanding of the common mental health factors that are perceived to affect the learners' academic performance. The objectives of this study were to:

Phase 1

- Explore and describe the mental health factors affecting the academic performance of secondary school learners and how best to identify and manage them.

Phase 2

- Conduct a scoping review to explore the literature on mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design includes the fundamental choices of the researcher regarding the approach used in the study. This decision represents a philosophical assumption that the researcher brings to the research process or inquiry procedure (Creswell, 2018). The research design details the core methodological strategies the researcher implemented to investigate their research questions. (Polit and Beck, 2017). The study used a qualitative approach, where the researcher combined two qualitative methods to achieve a more comprehensive insight into the topic being studied (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015). It was selected and found to be appropriate for the study

since it had two phases whereby the first phase followed a descriptive qualitative approach, and the second phase followed a scoping review approach.

3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted in two phases: a descriptive qualitative and a scoping review described separately, and the last part was done to integrate the findings of the scoping and semi-structured interviews.

3.4.1 Phase 1: Semi-structured interviews

This phase will be described in terms of the research designs, research setting, population and sample size, data collection, and analysis process.

3.4.1.1 Qualitative design

According to Polit and Beck (2017), qualitative design is defined as an approach known for its thorough and comprehensive exploration of phenomena through the collection of detailed data using a flexible research design. The qualitative design was applicable in this study as the researcher aimed to explore and understand a specific phenomenon, namely the mental health factors influencing learners' academic performance as described by them.

Qualitative research is a structured, subjective methodology that aims to capture life experiences and situations, attributing significance to them. This approach originated from the behavioral and social sciences to grasp the intricate, dynamic, and holistic essence of human nature. The philosophical foundation of qualitative research is rooted in interpretivism, humanism, and naturalism, focusing on understanding the meaning of social interactions from the perspectives of those involved. (Creswell, 2018; Burns and Grove, 2017). The qualitative researcher needs to deeply engage, sometimes spending extended periods in the field. Data is analysed on an ongoing basis through the individual interpretation of words. Data analysis focuses on words rather than numbers (Burns and Grove, 2017; Polit and Beck, 2017).

According to Gelling (2015), qualitative research is described as a scientific inquiry approach that enables researchers to delve into human experiences within personal and social settings, leading to a deeper comprehension of the factors that shape these experiences. By understanding the influences on an individual's quality of life, strategies can be developed to enhance and sustain their well-being. The researcher uses the qualitative approach to explore

learners' behavior, perspectives, experiences, and feelings and emphasize the understanding of these elements.

The researcher focused on the participants' perspectives to achieve the view and understand the mental health factors influencing the academic performance of secondary school learners. The rationale for using a qualitative approach in this research was to explore and describe the perception of learners on the mental health factors influencing their academic performance and how they can be identified and managed at the school level by the school health nurse.

3.4.1.2 Explorative design

The research design is explorative in nature when it provides more insight into the nature of the phenomenon (Burns and Grove, 2017). Polit and Beck (2017) suggest that exploratory studies are conducted when a new area is being investigated or there is limited knowledge about a specific topic. This approach is used to comprehensively understand the phenomenon and its related factors (Polit and Beck, 2017). In this study, the mental health factors influencing the academic performance of secondary school learners in Gauteng were explored using open-ended questions during individual interviews that allowed learners to explore their experiences in detail. The exploration provided the researcher with insight into the influence of mental health factors on the academic performance of secondary school learners in a specific school.

3.4.1.3 Descriptive design

According to Polit and Beck (2017) and Burns and Grove (2017), a descriptive study is a research approach with the primary goal of accurately depicting the characteristics of individuals, situations, or groups. This approach is intended to present a realistic picture of a situation as it naturally occurs. In this study, a descriptive design was used as the researcher aimed to obtain a picture of learners' opinions and to accurately portray the mental health factors influencing the academic performance of secondary school learners. The researcher aimed to capture the real situation and the participants' perceptions. Therefore, they were allowed to express their feelings about the phenomenon in their own words while the researcher tried to understand and interpret their views (Burns and Grove, 2017).

3.4.1.4 Contextual design

A contextual design is defined as a framework of individual characteristics, language, and issues that are distinct to each person, enabling a comprehensive understanding of that

individual, while also emphasizing specific occurrences (Burns and Grove, 2017). The context plays a crucial role in qualitative research. As outlined by Korstjens and Moser (2017), the context encompasses the social setting and circumstances in which the research is conducted, along with the cultural background of the participants and the study location (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). The participants in this study were secondary school learners. The mental health factors influencing academic performance as experienced by learners in a specific context were explored and described, and the setting was Secondary School in Gauteng.

3.4.1.5 Research setting

The research setting refers to the specific location where the research is conducted. It is recommended that the setting be conducive to relaxation, providing space for participants to sit comfortably (Burns and Grove, 2017). The research setting was Secondary School in Gauteng, South Africa. It is a school starting from Grade 8 to Grade 12 and registered with the Gauteng Department of Basic Education which has fifteen Districts and the school falls under District. The school had 1 645 learners and 53 teachers. It caters mainly to the community of Extension 12 and 13 in .

3.4.1.6 Research population and sampling

The population is defined as a specific group of individuals who meet the inclusion criteria for a research study (Burns and Grove, 2017). Polit and Beck (2017) further described that the population refers to the units from which the sample is selected and from which data is collected. The population of this study included learners who are currently in grades 8 to 12 at Secondary School. Target population refers to the entire population meeting the criteria of interest to the researcher/research team (Martinez-Mesa et al. 2016; Burns and Grove, 2017). For this study, the target population was learners performing below average academically. These learners often experience significant barriers to academic success, including mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, which can aggravate their academic struggles. By concentrating on this group, the study aims to identify specific mental health factors that may be contributing to their poor performance, thereby informing the interventions. The focus on below average learners may yield findings that are specific to this group, potentially limiting generalizability. The insights gained will be important for understanding this particular group, but they may not apply to average or high performing learners who may experience different challenges related to mental health.

Purposive sampling was used in this study, involving the deliberate selection of participants based on specific criteria by the researcher. This method, also known as judgmental sampling, focuses on recruiting individuals who can offer valuable insights to achieve the study objectives (Seetharaman, 2016; Burns and Grove, 2017). In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally choose individuals and locations to gain a deeper understanding of the central phenomenon. The selection of participants and sites is based on their potential to provide rich information (Creswell, 2018). The participants were chosen according to predefined sampling criteria.

The sampling criteria involve the selection of a population with the required characteristics relevant to the phenomenon being studied. These criteria, also referred to as eligibility criteria, consist of a list of essential characteristics for membership in the target population (Burns and Grove, 2017). Sampling criteria entail the selection of individuals who meet the predetermined criteria considered crucial for the study (Seetharaman, 2016). In this study, learners who were registered and attending the specific secondary school in Gauteng were the eligible population. The participants were selected by using the following inclusion criteria to obtain the best possible data:

- who are willing to participate.
- currently registered at the school in grades 8 to 12, and
- are performing below average score of 50% to 60% academically.

Participants' willingness to participate in the research was demonstrated through the completion of the assent form (**Annexure F**) by the participants themselves and the consent form by their parents or guardians (**Annexure I**). This indicated their voluntary decision to share their experiences and perspectives without coercion or intimidation. Given the research's emphasis on emotions and feelings, as well as the need for detailed descriptions, their openness to providing information is crucial. Participants should feel comfortable discussing their experiences, including personal details, in a safe and supportive environment.

There is a need to conduct research in future, incorporating learners from various academic performance levels that will allow the researcher to capture a more comprehensive view of how mental health influences academic outcomes. Different performance levels may interact with mental health factors in unique ways, revealing insights that are not apparent when only focusing on below average performers (Murphy, et al. 2015). Studying a broader range of learners can help identify factors that contribute to resilience in the face of mental health challenges. For example, high performing learners may exhibit different behaviours or have

access to resources that mitigate the negative effects of stress or anxiety compared to their lower performing peers. Understanding these differences can inform interventions that support all learners, not just those at risk of underperformance (Wood, 2023). Such research will not only facilitate a more comprehensive view but also informs effective interventions and policies aimed at supporting all learners, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes and well-being of secondary school learners.

3.4.1.7 The sample

The sample of Grades 8 to 12 poor-performing learners was purposively selected about the results that they obtained. The June/July examination schedule was used because it provides insight into learners' performance from January to June. A sample of the bottom ten learners from each class across all grades was selected based on their merit, and the necessary records were obtained with permission from the school principal.

3.4.1.8 Sample size

Johnson et al. (2020) contend that the sample size does not impact the significance or quality of a study and emphasize the absence of fixed guidelines for determining sample size in qualitative research. Consequently, accurately estimating a sample size during the initial stages of qualitative research can be challenging. The guiding principle employed is 'data saturation' (Seetharaman, 2016; Johnson et al. 2020), which involves gathering data until no new information is forthcoming from participants. Normally, the participant count is deemed sufficient when data saturation is reached in the study (Burns and Grove, 2017). Care was taken that sufficient quantity and quality of data was collected before concluding that data saturation had been achieved.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is the process of identifying and recruiting participants, followed by the collection of data from them (Burns and Grove, 2017). Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method for the initial phase of this study after a pilot interview was done

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews (Phase 1)

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Burns and Grove (2017) describe an interview as a verbal interaction between the researcher and the participant, where information is shared with the researcher. Semi-structured interviews are considered a type of

self-report method. Self-reporting involves directly collecting data through individuals providing information about themselves. Typically acquired through interviews, self-reports foster conversational exchanges that empower respondents to define key aspects of a phenomenon and elaborate on their perspectives, rather than being led by the researcher (Polit and Beck, 2017).

A semi-structured interview is a type of interview where the researcher has a set of predetermined research questions that must be answered by the participant. **(Annexure A).** If the researcher wishes to understand individuals' emotions or beliefs, the most direct strategy is to inquire directly. An interview guide is used to guarantee thorough coverage of all question areas (Polit and Beck, 2017). Specific questions were asked, but the researcher remained open to how the participant responded and asked follow-up questions to explore emerging themes and obtain more information.

3.5.1.1 Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews

According to Burns and Grove (2017) a semi-structured interview has the following advantages:

- Flexibility which allows the researcher to explore a greater depth of meaning;
- It will enable the researcher to use interpersonal skills to facilitate the interview and elicit more information;
- It has a higher response rate than questionnaires; and
- Participants are less likely to misunderstand the questions, as the interviewers can assess whether the questions have been understood.
- Interviewers can produce additional information by observing the respondents' living environments and levels of cooperation during the interview.

According to Burns and Grove (2017), a semi-structured interview has the following disadvantages:

- It relies heavily on the interpersonal and interviewing abilities of the researcher.
- The researcher might assume that the information provided is correct.

3.5.1.2 Pilot interview

The pilot testing was done before the formal data collection commenced to determine the practical aspects of the research study. The purpose of the pilot study was to assess whether the interviewer would carry out the interviews as intended, to test the research questions, and to

determine if the selected setting and timing were feasible. Additionally, it was used to identify any potential problems with the data collection instrument and analysis plan (Burns and Grove, 2017). An interview was done by asking one central question. A minimum of two learners who met the sampling criteria were interviewed, and data were analysed.

3.6 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Creswell (2018) highlights the importance of the researcher serving as the primary data collection tool, emphasizing the need to acknowledge personal values, assumptions, and biases at the study's onset. Burns and Grove (2017) also note that researchers consistently utilize ethical principles, interpersonal skills, and problem-solving abilities during data collection activities. In this study, the researcher's role was demonstrated through practices such as bracketing, intuition, and reflexivity.

3.6.1 Bracketing

Bracketing is a process where the researcher identifies and temporarily suspends their preconceived ideas and biases about the phenomenon being studied. Although complete bracketing is impossible, the researcher should aim to minimize presuppositions to ensure a pure and unbiased analysis of the data. This process involves ongoing evaluation and feedback to refine the bracketing (Polit and Beck, 2017).

Qualitative researchers use bracketing to improve rigor and reduce bias in research. According to Dörfler and Stierand (2020), bracketing involves the researcher's attempt to suspend their pre-existing understandings and assumptions to prevent them from interfering with or influencing the participants' experiences. Burns and Grove (2017), further explain that bracketing requires the researcher to set aside their knowledge about the phenomenon being studied. Bracketing was therefore done throughout. Bracketing allowed the researcher to focus on the participants' experiences and shape the data collection process according to them.

Bracketing in this study was achieved through the following:

- Burns and Grove (2017) mention that some researchers choose not to engage in bracketing but rather recognize and record their beliefs, preconceptions, and assumptions related to the research topic at the beginning of the study for self-assessment and external analysis. The researcher wrote a narrative description of his personal opinion of mental health factors influencing learners' academic performance. This was to express the researcher's thoughts

and set them aside, which helped to maintain an open approach when interviewing the participants and analysing the findings.

- Although a pilot study is not part of qualitative research, individual interviews were conducted with two learners that met the eligibility criteria as a practical experience in conducting interviews with informants with a clear and open mind and to discover the uniqueness of understanding regarding the phenomenon. This helped the researcher with bracketing when approaching participants in the formal study and seeing them as unique individuals regarding their own experiences.

3.6.2 Intuiting

According to Polit and Beck (2017), the process of intuiting requires the researcher to be open and attentive to the meanings that those who have directly experienced the phenomenon attribute to it. To interpret the subject's experience, the researcher must engage with it. It is essential to remain receptive to the participants' perspectives rather than imposing meaning onto the experience (Burns and Grove, 2017). The researcher set aside preconceived notions and maintained an open-minded approach while observing the participants' encounters with the phenomenon.

Intuiting was achieved through the following:

- According to Kump (2022), intuition is a non-sequential information processing approach that involves both intellectual and affective elements, resulting in immediate knowing without the application of conscious reasoning.
- The researcher avoided all criticism, evaluation, and opinion and paid attention to how the phenomenon under investigation was described. The researcher was an “instrument” during the interview process. The researcher was the tool for data collection and listened to the learners’ opinions of mental health factors influencing academic performance. The researcher studied the data as they would be transcribed and reviewed to determine what the participants had described as their opinion of mental health factors influencing academic performance.

3.6.3 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher assumes the dual role of both researcher and participant and cannot be separated from the phenomenon under study. Ngozwana (2018) emphasizes that reflexivity is a critical process to safeguard the study's credibility by ensuring the researcher's

involvement does not compromise the research. It also aims to prevent the researcher from influencing the study with deeply held perceptions, emotions, and experiences during the research process (Ngozwana, 2018). Reflexivity involves recognizing and acknowledging one's biases and past experiences that could impact interactions with participants or data interpretation (Burns and Grove, 2017). Galvin (2016) suggests that researchers should reflect on their actions, emotions, and challenges encountered during the research. To enhance the study's credibility, the researcher maintained a self-critical approach toward the study, participants, roles, relationships, and assumptions. Conducting reflexivity is challenging, as it requires stepping back to evaluate the impact of one's preconceptions. Documenting these experiences and potential biases before and during the study, and remaining mindful of them during the analysis phase, can aid in this process (Burns and Grove, 2017).

The three reasons for reflexivity are:

- Helping the researcher with self-monitoring to spot if something is going wrong and correct it.
- Analysis of the data and finding a way through the mass data.
- Self-injunction and showing others to believe in the researcher's interpretation.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Burns and Grove (2017), the objective of data analysis is to structure and organize data in a way that enables the extraction of significant insights. Data analysis entails categorizing and grouping data into relevant themes (Burns and Grove, 2017).

The principles of handling qualitative data and the six steps of analysis were used as described by Creswell (2018):

• **Step 1:** Data was organized and prepared for analysis. This process involved transcribing the interviews and thoroughly reading through all the transcripts.

• **Step 2:** All the interviews were read to obtain a general sense of the information, illuminate what was being said, and reflect on its overall meaning. All the transcripts were read repeatedly to ensure that all significant statements were identified.

• **Step 3:** The researcher began a detailed analysis with a coding process. All significant statements were extracted and organized to make them ready to be categorized into themes and arranged in columns.

• **Step 4:** This step involves the coding process used to generate a description of the themes for analysis.

• **Step 5:** The most descriptive wording for each theme was selected, and themes were divided into main themes and sub-themes. A table was used to summarise the main themes, categories, and sub-categories.
• **Step 6:** This step in data analysis involves interpreting the data.

The first phase involved collecting data through semi-structured interviews, which were analysed using established principles for handling qualitative data and following six systematic steps of analysis. The insights gained from this analysis provided a foundation for the second phase, where a scoping review was conducted to explore the existing literature and further contextualise the findings.

3.8 Phase 2: the exploration of literature regarding the mental health factors influencing the academic performance of secondary school learners

3.8.1 Scoping review

A scoping review is defined as a method used to systematically gather scientific evidence through structured and transparent processes (Tricco et al., 2018). According to Munn et al. (2018), a scoping review is a valuable method for mapping the scope and range of literature on a particular topic, offering a comprehensive summary of the existing research and its focus. The main purpose of conducting scoping reviews is to identify and chart the available evidence (Munn et al., 2018). The methodology used for this phase involved a scoping review following the framework established by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), which involved the process outlined below:

- **Research Question**

"*What are the common mental health factors affecting learners' academic achievement?"*.

- **Identifying Relevant Studies**

The search *terms psychological factors, academic achievement, secondary school, and Learners* were used to search the following electronic databases: Web of Science, PsychINFO, Science Direct, ERIC, and CINAHL Ultimate as well as grey literature.

- **Study Selection**

Studies that address the research question were considered. The inclusion criteria included studies conducted within ten years (January 2013 to December 2023), journal articles in English. The exclusion criteria included wrong population, wrong outcomes and wrong study design

- **Charting the Data**

A data extraction sheet (Table 5.3) was used to capture the data from the different articles.

- **Collate, summarise, and report results.**

According to Arksey and O'Malley (2005), this stage involved presenting the findings in two ways: Firstly, through basic numerical analysis depicting the scope, characteristics, and distribution of the studies included in the review using tables and charts that illustrate the intervention types, research methodologies, and geographical locations. After that, the literature was organized thematically (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005).

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In qualitative research, trustworthiness involves the researcher's confidence in evaluating data through four essential components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Polit and Beck, 2017). The credibility of the findings in a qualitative study is determined by the researcher's transparency, provision of genuine results, allocation of sufficient time, and transformation of data into meaningful insights (Burns and Grove, 2017). Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation, and methodologies used to ensure the overall quality of the study. It is the researcher's responsibility to establish the necessary protocols and procedures for the study to be considered reliable (Connelly, 2016). In this study, trustworthiness is maintained by the researcher based on the elements endorsed by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Creswell, 2018).

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the data, reflecting how believable and reliable the research findings are. It evaluates whether the collected data accurately represents the phenomenon under investigation and ensures that the findings genuinely reflect the participants' experiences (Henry, 2015). According to Polit and Beck (2017), credibility is related to the trustworthiness of the data. Credibility is achieved when the research findings accurately reflect the perceptions of the study participants.

Prolonged engagement

The researcher engaged in a comprehensive interaction with the participants to obtain adequate data. The participants were interviewed until saturation was reached to ensure credibility.

Triangulation

Data collection involved a combination of a scoping review and semi-structured interviews with learners to gather information and capture various perspectives. Local and international literature was reviewed to validate the data and compare the information gathered during the interviews. The researcher compared results from semi-structured interviews with existing studies identified in the literature search. This comparison helped confirm whether the insights gained from interviews align with broader trends observed in published research.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent of the results obtained from the data are applicable in a different setting. As outlined by Squires and Dorsen (2018), transferability implies that the conclusions of a research undertaking can be utilized in a different environment involving a comparable participant group with minimal deviation.

- **Thick description**

Polit and Beck (2017), define thick description as an in-depth and comprehensive interpretation of the research environment, including the interactions and procedures observed throughout the study. The researcher ensured the transferability of the findings by offering a comprehensive description of the setting and context, as well as including direct quotes from the research report. This allows other researchers to compare the provided details with their contexts.

3.9.3 Dependability

Dependability focuses on the consistency of the findings across time. It emphasises the reliability of research findings, indicating that if a study were to be repeated under similar conditions, it would yield comparable results (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Dependability was met through the researcher's description of ways attempted to ensure that the findings were presented objectively and that actions were taken to minimize bias during the research process (Squires and Dorsen, 2018). In this study, this activity would be a means of establishing the confirmability of the research.

3.9.4 Confirmability

Polit and Beck (2017), define confirmability as the objectivity or neutrality of the data. The concern with confirmability centers on the properties of the data itself, ensuring that the

research outcomes are a direct result of the investigation rather than influenced by the researcher's biases and preconceptions. According to Squires and Dorsen (2018), the presence of an audit trail documenting the study implementation should be ensured, as it allows for tracing the data back to its sources. This enables others to follow the researcher's path in arriving at the constructs, themes, and interpretations. In this study, the researcher underwent an audit of the research process under the supervision of the supervisors.

- **Audit trail.**

The researcher retained the original recordings of interviews, transcripts, and analysis outputs to establish an audit trail.

- **Reflexivity**

The researcher's assumptions were stated clearly. He continuously reflected on his characteristics, experiences, and knowledge, examined how they could influence the data collection and analysis and tried to avoid bias (Polit and Beck, 2017).

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The personal rights, confidentiality, and privacy of the learners were protected throughout the study. The researcher obtained the necessary permissions from the relevant authorities. Approval and ethical clearance were obtained from the School of Therapeutic Sciences, the Post Graduate Research Committee, the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Witwatersrand (Ethics clearance certificate) **Annexure: N**, the Gauteng Department of Education (permission letter) **Annexure: K**, the Department of Basic Education – West District (permission letter) **Annexure: L**, and the specific secondary school in Gauteng (permission letter) **Annexure: M**. Grades 8 to 12 learners provided assent, and their parents provided consent for the study to be conducted. The objective of the study was explained verbally, information letters were issued, and the participants were assured that the information obtained during interviews would be kept confidential.

The information letter included contact details for the Psychiatric Specialist, School Health Nurse, Social Worker, and the Local Clinic to ensure the emotional well-being of the participants is protected.

According to Burns and Grove (2017), it is essential to safeguard the rights of individuals and others within the research setting. The researcher adhered to the principles articulated in the Belmont Report, which include beneficence, respect for human dignity, and justice.

3.10.1 The principle of beneficence

The principle of beneficence refers to the right of research participants, which maintains that the participants must not be harmed (Burns and Grove, 2017). Participants were safeguarded from discomfort and harm, and the potential benefits of the study were carefully considered against the potential risks. The researcher considered that the psychological consequences needed sensitivity; therefore, he was sensitive to the participants' emotions when asking probing questions that could psychologically harm the participants. In the information letter provided to participants, the researcher communicated that if any part of the interview became overwhelming, participants had the option to withdraw from the study or decline to answer specific questions. Participants were also made aware of their right to terminate the interview at any time (Burns and Grove, 2017).

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life and some of the questions asked may make the learner feel sad or upset. If this happens, I would have stopped the interview and continue another time. If the learners needed some support or counseling services following the interview, these were available free of charge by the mental health nurse specialist and counsellor and at the local clinic. The name of the counselor was Mr. Takalani J. Mashadzha, and the contact details for the counseling service were 076 944 1882.

Participants were assured that their identities would be kept confidential and not linked to their data (Polit and Beck, 2017). All information provided by the participants was handled with the highest level of confidentiality and safeguarded from harm.

3.10.2 Principle of human dignity

The researcher honored the participants' autonomy, ensuring they were not pressured or coerced into taking part in the study. This principle affirms that participants have the autonomy to choose whether to take part without facing any consequences (Polit and Beck, 2017). Participants were approached, the study's objectives were clarified, and they were provided with comprehensive and accurate information to make an informed decision about their participation. No compensation was offered, and participants were informed of their ability to withdraw at any point during the research, with consent obtained before their involvement.

3.10.3 Principle of justice

This principle involves the participants' right to fair treatment and privacy. Participants were informed that their privacy would be protected by not using their names, and they were assured that the research records would not be linked to them. They were also granted the ability to access their records if desired. The right to privacy ensures that the information provided by participants will not be shared without their consent (Burns and Grove, 2017).

3.11 DATA MANAGEMENT

The data management procedure included the recording of interviews and their storage in a password-protected file, with access exclusively granted to the researcher and the supervisor. This practice ensured the security and confidentiality of the data, in accordance with ethical standards, while also protecting the privacy of the participants. By restricting access to authorized individuals, the integrity of the data was upheld, thereby minimizing the risk of unauthorized disclosure or misuse. Moreover, the implementation of password protection provided an additional layer of security, safeguarding the sensitive information contained in the recordings. Regular backups of the data were conducted to avert loss or corruption, further enhancing the reliability and accessibility of the research data throughout the duration of the study.

3. 12 SUMMARY

This chapter offered a comprehensive overview of the research design and method used to answer the research question. It detailed the accessible target population, and the sampling technique utilized. The study adopted a qualitative approach, specifically focusing on exploratory, descriptive, and contextual research design. The chapter explained the design of data collection methods, outlining the procedures and strategies applied to maintain the trustworthiness of the research findings. Furthermore, the chapter detailed the ethical considerations undertaken to safeguard the human rights of the research participants, ensuring adherence to ethical standards and protocols throughout the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR

PHASE 1: RESULTS OF THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter described the research methodology that was used in this study. This chapter outlines the findings from Phase 1 of the study. This study attempted to answer the research question, "What are the common mental health factors that affect the academic performance of secondary school learners?"

4.2 FINDINGS: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The semi-structured interviews were conducted between 02 October 2023 to 14 November 2023 at the selected secondary school to describe the mental health factors influencing their academic performance. Data saturation was reached with the sixteenth participants in the study. Nine participants were males and seven were females, they were all in Grade 8 – 12 and were between the ages of 14 to 19. The data was analysed thematically. Table 4.1 displays the characteristics of the participants.

Table 4.1: Demographic characteristics

Learners	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Age	14 – 15	5	31.25%
	16 – 17	7	43.75%
	18 – 19	4	25%
Gender	Male	9	56.25%
	Female	7	43.75%
Grade	Grade 8	2	12.5%
	Grade 9	7	43.75%
	Grade 10	4	25%
	Grade 11	2	12.5%
	Grade 12	1	6.25%

The interviews were conducted as follows: fourteen in English and two in isiZulu. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher translated the interviews that were conducted in isiZulu into English. Numbers were assigned to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The transcribed coded interviews were provided to the study supervisor to verify that the correct method was used for the coding of data. A discussion took place between the researcher and the supervisor until an agreement was reached on the themes and sub-themes see (Table 4.2). As summarized below four themes were yielded it included mental health factors, social factors, and academic-related factors.

TABLE 4.2 Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	**Sub-themes**
4.2.1 Mental health factors	4.2.1.1 Feelings of sadness 4.2.1.2 Low self-esteem 4.2.1.3 Fear 4.2.1.4 Stress 4.2.1.5 Bullying
4.2.2 Social factors	4.2.2.1 Poor family dynamics 4.2.2.2 Peer behaviors
4.2.3 Academic-related factors	4.2.3.1 Unconducive learning environment 4.2.3.2 Unavailable academic support 4.2.3.3 Poor attitude of teachers 4.2.3.4 Lack of commitment from teachers 4.2.3.5 Lack of access to online resources
4.2.4 Learners' needs	4.2.4.1 Provision of academic support 4.2.4.2 Increased motivation from teachers 4.2.4.3 Restructuring of academic calendar 4.2.4.4 Increased commitment from teachers 4.2.4.5 Increased self-commitment and preparation

4.2.1 Theme 1: Mental health factors

According to Mfidi (2017), approximately 20% of adolescents experience mental health problems, which can lead to academic under achievement and poor quality of life. Addressing these problems through early intervention is crucial, due to the negative impact on academic performance. However, there is a significant treatment gap for mental health services in South Africa, with adolescents often underutilizing available resources (Sorsdahl et al. 2021). On the theme mental health factors, the following sub-themes were generated as expressed by the participants: feelings of sadness, low self-esteem, fear, stress, and bullying.

4.2.1.1 Sub-theme: Feelings of sadness

Feelings of sadness can impact the academic performance of secondary school learners. When learners experience sadness, their mental capacity is often consumed by worrisome thoughts, making it challenging for them to focus on positive thoughts (McCurdy et al. 2023). Two participants related their feelings as depicted below:

P1 expressed a feeling of sadness due to accusations at home:

> *"For the past months, I think I felt down because of being accused of stealing something. At home, they say I stole something and that stresses me a lot to my academic results."*

P14 stated how the death of parents affected their academic performance. For example, P14 said that:

> *"Every day my spirit is low and even now I feel down because I lost my parents at an early age. When I think about that pain, I am unable to get over it. I know others lost their parents, but I am unable to get over it as I am still studying."*

Feelings of sadness can hurt the academic performance of secondary school learners by hindering their ability to focus, engage in social activities, and maintain emotional well-being, all of which are essential for academic success.

4.2.1.2 Sub-theme: Low self-esteem

P9 expressed the feeling of low self-esteem:

> *"Sometimes I see myself being unsuccessful in my academic life. I sometimes like trapped and unable to get out of the confined space. I want to progress but sometimes*

I give up and say to myself what is reason for me to be alive because I don't see positive in life."

P8 further expressed how other learners' negative remarks can impact in one's confidence and self-esteem:

"There are some learners they like to take you down. I failed my term, there are some learners who also failed term two, some learners tell us that we are failures. That make us to have no confidence in their future life."

Low self-esteem adversely affects learners by influencing their emotional well-being, cognitive engagement, and social interactions, ultimately leading to reduced academic performance. Interventions aimed at improving learners' self-esteem could play a vital role in enhancing their educational experiences and outcomes (Camel, 2020).

4.2.1.3 Sub-theme: Fear

Fear influences academic performance through processes such as fear of failure, academic-related stress, classroom anxiety, and feelings of safety. Addressing these fears is essential for improving the overall educational experience and outcomes for secondary school learners (Cashman et al. 2024).

P6 described the threats from other people makes them worried and affect their ability to focus on learning while at school:

"There are a lot, it's a long story but let me cut it short. There's this other guy who lives in our neighborhood, he's like a drug addict he has serious problems with me and my family because, he keeps assuming that we are witches, every time whenever I come across him on the road, he threatens to kidnap me. So that bothers me and sometimes affects my academics."

P8 expressed the fear of failure and worry:

"When in term two the time I found my report saying not promoted, I felt so sad. I am so worried that I will fail again because I never liked to disappoint my mother."

Fear greatly shapes learners' experiences by creating barriers to effective learning and engagement. Its influence can lead to reduced academic performance through cognitive impairment, decreased motivation, and increased absenteeism (Cashman et al. 2024).

4.2.1.4 Sub-theme: Stress

P7 told the researcher about experiencing stress due to academic performance in one of the subjects:

> *"I was stressed about my performance when it comes to Physical Science subject. I can be assisted if they can make extra classes at school, or we can like make a study group."*

P12 described the challenges that they experience at home and in the society:

> *"Some learners when they come to school, they eat but when they are at home, they stress about what are they going to eat, at least at school they have breakfast and lunch. At home they get stressed about hunger that will affect their performance. Stress and a lot of riots."*

Stress affects learners by influencing their emotional well-being, cognitive engagement, and social interactions, ultimately leading to diminished academic performance (Hachintu and Kasisi, 2021).

4.2.1.5 Sub-theme: Bullying

P5 explained the incidents of bullying in the school which has an impact on academic performance:

> "*If you go around the school you find people, fighting, that's what you see every day, we are not even surprised when you see it."*

P10 explained the challenges that they experience at school:

> *"I would say peer pressure and things like we face at school every day like bullying. For example, emotional bullying, cyber bullying, and physical bullying are forms of. we face every day in our school, and it affects our school studies. We experience that a lot in school. We do report it but some of the teachers do not take it seriously. They think it is how we play at school like using vulgar language and fighting."*

P2 was troubled by bullying. For participants they believed other learners intentionally and repeatedly tried to harm others because they considered them as weak:

> *"Beating up other people bullying, something like that is very common. Sometimes people feel vulnerable and are unable to concentrate."*

Victims of bullying often experience heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. These emotional challenges can lead to a negative self-image and feelings of isolation, making it difficult for learners to engage fully in their educational environment (Rivara and Le Menestrel, 2014).

This theme highlights that the participants were experiencing a range of problems that had negatively impacted their mental health, with the potential to also affect their academic performance.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Social factors

Several social factors can have an impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. Social challenges can have adverse effects on learners' educational outcomes and can lead to emotional and social imbalances, potentially resulting in further problems like unhealthy behaviors that hinder social adjustment (Whylken et al. 2022). Furthermore, factors such as gender, school location, and parental socio-economic background also influence learners' academic performance (Wali et al. 2023).

4.2.2.1 Sub-theme: Poor family dynamics

P13 explained how the experience of abuse by family members has affected their academic performance:

> *"It affects me, I used to pass but since I came here from grade 8 when they started abusing me, I started failing. Since they started abusing me, I can't focus."*

P13 also expressed family situations as a reason for lack of concentration:

> *"Yes, I think a lot at school because of the situation at home, when I come back from school I greet, I am not the type of a child who does not greet. When I greet, they do not respond. When I do something, they beat me up. I don't concentrate at school; I think a lot (too much) and I am a child."*

P6 also mentioned family and personal problems are disturbing their concentration:

> *"It's family and personal. More of a personal experience that involves family. It might affect my performance because sometimes I struggle to concentrate. Whenever I try to study, those things always come back, I have flashbacks, it does affect me."*

P9 related to the difficulty in understanding some of what has been taught due to the situation at home:

> *"I speak to people, maybe like ask them to assist me in some areas, however even when they assist, I still do not understand. I am unable to focus because I think about what is happening at home (about the situation at home)."*

P3 expressed the lack of family support and its impact to the studies:

> *"At home I don't have enough time. When I'm at home I'm just playing and not worried about the school. Sometimes cleaning and washing dishes. Not thinking about homework and stuff."*

Learners who experience instability at home often have lower grades and test scores compared to their peers from more stable backgrounds. Factors such as parental conflict and financial instability contribute significantly to this decline (Booth and Dunn, 2013).

4.2.2.2 Sub-theme: Peer behaviours

P3 mentioned that being playful interferes with concentration:

> *"Sometimes I concentrate but sometimes in class, I can't concentrate, friends call me, and I go to them, and we play, and we leave the class sometimes but not every day. We are playing inside the class when the teacher is in class and teaching."*

P7 explained the bad behavior of other learners:

> *"Other learners do as they wish, even if the teacher wants to come to class, they refuse. Most of them are smoking, they no longer want to be educated, and it affects me, as they also would chase the teacher away, they rob us of the opportunity to education."*

P10 explained that carrying of cell phones to class disrupts learners' concentrating:

> *"Carrying of cellphones affects performance at school. Learners bring cellphones and when the teacher is teaching, they are busy listening to music or playing games and end up not listening to the teacher."*

Research indicates a strong correlation between peer behaviors and academic outcomes. Positive peer influences are associated with higher academic achievement due to increased motivation and engagement in learning activities. In contrast, negative peer behaviors can lead to lower grades and decreased educational aspirations among learners (Jiang, 2023).

This theme emphasized how the absence of family support and negative behavior displayed by learners can adversely impact the academic performance. Inadequate family environments characterized by conflict, lack of emotional support, and broken family structures can hinder learners from receiving the essential support for their academic performance.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Academic-related factors

Several academic-related factors can influence the academic performance of learners. The school's physical and social environment, including factors such as classroom comfort, availability of resources, and teacher-student relationships, can impact learner's learning and academic outcomes (Onyara, 2013). The academic-related factors that can influence secondary school learners' performance include the learning environment, teaching methods, curriculum design, student study habits and motivation, as well as their individual background (Tanga and Mushoriwa, 2019).

4.2.3.1 Sub-theme: Unconducive learning environment

A conducive learning environment is essential for promoting learner engagement, focus, and academic success. Some participants reflected on experiences and views that affect their learning:

P2 related to the school environment and activities taking place that affect the academic performance:

> *"Smoking, they come with knives, with Nyaope (substance of abuse) they do it at the back of the classes, smoking there it affects us so much because we cannot even concentrate."*

Some participants reflected on experiences and views that affect their learning:
P2 was troubled by noise:

> *"My class is very noisy; they don't listen others are getting attitude from their friends because they are doing bad things smoking."*

P10 explained that the learners are chasing the teacher out of class:

> *"Also, the environment that we are in is not good, because sometimes the other learners destruct the teacher and even chase the teacher out of the classroom. The teacher ends up not coming to the class and that affect our studies because we are unable to continue studying because of other learners."*

P10 further explained how learners ignore teachers until they give up and leave class:

> *"Sometimes he comes to class, the learners would make noise and not listen when the teacher reprimands them. The teacher then reaches a point where he would say it's either the learners go out of the class, or he leaves. The learners wouldn't go out, then the teacher would leave the classroom and stop teaching us. Them we are left without."*

A lack of safety in the school environment can lead to anxiety and stress among learners. When learners do not feel secure, they are less likely to engage actively in learning activities, which can diminish their overall educational experience (Edgerton and McKechnie, 2023).

4.2.3.2 Sub-theme: Unavailable academic support

P2 explained the support that is required from the teachers to improve academic performance:

> *"There are empty classes, just call us for free classes and say come to school at the morning and we will do something every subject you see. We must come to school, they teach us, and we go home. Every time, tomorrow is a free day I'm going to wake up at 09h00 and what am I going to do is cook, clean and do some stuff. Instead of that time I must be at school studying other subjects that I'm struggling with, Mathematics, Natural Sciences. Every day instead of preparing extra classes for us because there are classes that are empty, they lock them."*

P9 expressed the support needed to cope with academics to succeed:

> *"Perhaps assisting in my studies. I have many wishes, like being successful as that is my wish to see myself progressing in life, going to college or university and graduating with a degree. I need assistance in my studies to pass but I don't have."*

P4 expressed the lack of clarity from a subject teacher:

> *"Teachers give us homework. When they give you homework some do not explain. They just give you papers and go write. Like History, we have never written anything and now they are giving us essays to go and write and didn't teach us anything. We never wrote anything in History since January."*

Unavailable academic support can influence learners' experiences and have a negative impact on their academic performance. The absence of adequate support systems such as tutoring, counselling, and mentoring can create barriers that hinder learners' educational success.

4.2.3.3 Sub-theme: Poor attitude of teachers

The participants reflected on the negative experiences from teachers:
P2 explained the school environment relating it to the attitude of the educators:

> *"Teachers are rude. Always call us and say feel free to tell us everything and when we go to them, they just say Oh my Gosh I don't have time for you, just sit over there and when they come, they say "I have a lot of work" just go and leave it there standing. Sometimes you feel sad and feel like they don't even care about you, what you are going through, that's the thing. They are always rude. Some others do support, and some don't."*

P2 Some participants reflected on the lack of support from the teachers:

> *"Teachers are rude…… They are always rude. Some others do support, and some don't."*

P5 reflected on the negative attitude of teachers:

> *"They are always rude, and some don't support us in our academics."*

Negative teacher attitudes can lead to increased anxiety and stress among learners. When teachers display indifference, hostility, or lack of support, learners may feel unappreciated and demotivated, which can reduce their overall school experience (James, 2018).

4.2.3.4 Sub-theme: Lack of commitment from teachers

P5 mentioned the unacceptable of the behavior of teachers towards learners:

> *"There's one learner who was in my class last year he failed and didn't move to the next grade. Now he started to smoke and to do all those things, failing pushes you to drugs and drugs pushes you to failure. You abandon your schoolwork, and I've asked a teacher once if it is possible that learners will be gambling if every teacher could be in all these classes? No. Can you believe you are a student, and you are being told that school/education is not the only thing to take you to success there's a lot of things you can do. The same school, they don't believe in education."*

P5 further illustrated the challenges that are faced by learners:

> *"Even now you can go to class there are no teachers especially when the Matriculants are writing, there are no teachers They are telling us that the teachers are invigilating,*

what about us? Just because we are not matriculants, it doesn't mean that we do not deserve the attention. So, there's a lot of abandonment in the school. There is no care like parent and child, there's nothing like that here."

P2 told the researcher that the teachers do not go to class every day as expected:

"You need time to like to read and the teachers don't come every day to class. They just sit in their office they just want us to come and fetch them and say Sir this is your period you didn't teach us we are so much backward we need to be far, other children in their classes are far with their subjects."

P3 told the researcher about the behavior of educators toward learners:

"Normally the Mathematics teacher is not in class. When she is not in class we don't care about the work. When we go to her, she tells us about her problems/challenges. So, we don't care, and Mathematics is problematic and tough."

The participants told the researcher about the experiences of teacher absenteeism in school:

P15: *"During the day, two or three teachers come to class and others do not come.*

When teachers show a lack of commitment, learners may feel less motivated to engage in the learning process. Teachers who are not dedicated often fail to create an improving learning environment, leading to learners' disengagement towards their studies.

4.2.3.5 Sub-theme: Lack of access to online resources

Three participants expressed the lack of resources:
P1 further stated that the family's inability to provide internet, smartphone or to buy data affected them:

"I can say first is the Internet. Low accessibility to the Internet so that I can get more knowledge and financially". "In terms of buying data, cell phone, smartphone or laptop so that I can have access to the Internet."

P7 expressed the inability to buy data as a barrier to academic participation:

"Before we were still rotating, we did not have time to like, we couldn't get enough knowledge about the subject, so now the problem I have is the lack of resources because most of the work they are sending on the WhatsApp group, and I do not have a

cellphone. The Physical science teacher sends the work on the WhatsApp group. I have to write it the following day, because I did not see when it was shared."

P12 also emphasized on the Internet issue:

"Yes, nowadays you get a lot of things on the internet. The thing that makes me sad is that I don't have a phone to do my schoolwork.

Learners without access to online resources miss out on a wealth of information and learning materials that can enhance their understanding of subjects.

This theme highlighted the experiences of negative teacher attitudes, lack of academic support and limited access to educational resources can have a negative impact on learners' academic performance. Teachers who encourage learners can help them to develop a stronger sense of self-confidence and motivation. Therefore, it is critical for teachers to develop a positive and supportive relationships with their learners to create a conducive learning environment and promote academic performance.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Learners' needs

Schools can support learners with academic needs by applying strategies that address different aspects of learning and creating a conducive environment for learning. Teachers contribute to academic support and are responsible for monitoring student performance and learning needs (Blazer and Gonzalez Hernandez, 2018). This theme yielded sub-themes such as absenteeism of educators, availability of educators, teacher-learner relationship, and teacher's behavior highlighting on academic support for learners.

4.2.4.1 Sub-theme: Provision of academic support

P10 explained the support that is required from the teachers to improve academic performance and the need for extra lessons:

"*They should give us extra lessons to assist us to be successful/ succeed in our studies, give us enough information and textbooks also."*

P12 told the researcher about the need to be provided with extra lessons:

"By attending extra lessons, at least I will have to ask questions, make sure that I understand, and don't have to stress about who helps me at home or finding a neighbor."

The provision of academic support enhances learners' experiences by increasing engagement, reducing anxiety and promoting emotional well-being.

4.2.4.2 Sub-theme: Increased motivation from teachers

P7 and P14 expressed the importance of teacher encouragement for enhancing learner academic performance:

> P7: *"I think maybe they can encourage us to do better and help us. In mobile classes we don't have teachers, we are always outside, if they can give us their time, they can make an effort to class to show that they want to teach us, that will assist us. If they could make an effort to come and teach us because we are far behind."*

> P 14: *"Encouragement to concentrate on my schoolwork because most people do not have support from outside especially their parents. Teachers are like parents to us; therefore, we must look up to them and listen to what they are telling us."*

Increased motivation from teachers influences learners' experiences and has a great impact on their academic performance. Motivated teachers create an environment that promotes learner engagement, enthusiasm, and achievement.

4.2.4.3 Sub-theme: Restructuring of academic calendar

P3, P4 and P12 expressed the need to come to school every day:

> P3: *"To make us go to school every day. When we are at home, we are unable to do homework, and we are failing. We concentrate on doing bad things. The classes are available at school. We do not write homework. We write only when we are in class. The bad things that I do when I'm at home is smoking "hubbly" (a type of water pipe used for smoking flavoured tobacco) and playing with my PC and playing street soccer the whole day. My other friends are not going to school because they are not schooling, they left school at a younger age because of their family problems."*

> P4: *"The teachers must come to class every day and we must come to school Monday to Friday because we are rotating. We come to school three days and sometimes two days in a week."*

> P12: *"We come to school five days, and we don't come for seven days. In a week two or three days. Some learners are slow and need to come and need to come to school every day because situations at home are not the same."*

P15 expressed a need to attend school every day:

> *"I would request that we attend school every day, because when I stay at home the whole week I may not pass. I will request that we attend every day and the teachers to attend. During the day, two or three teachers come to class and others do not come to class. We come to school two or three times a week. We alternate, we stay seven days at home. At school we concentrate, other teachers give us homework to do at home and expect us to pass the subjects that they did not teach us."*

Restructuring the academic calendar would be crucial for continuous learning opportunities and allowing learners to retain knowledge more effectively.

4.2.4.4 Sub-theme: Increased commitment from teachers

P8, reflected on the positive attitude of teachers:

> *"Even teachers, I spoke to my Geography teacher he said I should come to his office when I am free and will help me about my subject."*

P14 explained the support that is offered by the teachers at school:

> *"I will need more support from the teachers at school. When I ask questions, they don't have to lose patience, but rather they assist me."*

P15 told the researcher about the support that is provided by the teachers at school:

> "At *school I will need support from the teachers where I'm struggling."*

Increased teacher commitment promotes positive relationships between educators and learners. When teachers are dedicated, they are more approachable and willing to provide support, which encourages learners to seek help and engage in discussions.

4.2.4.5 Sub-theme: Increased self-commitment and preparation

The participants indicated the belief in their capabilities to achieve the academic goals:
P1 told the researcher about his personal dedication and motivation towards the studies:

> *"My study time and how I manage my time will make me to improve my marks."*

P1 further explained to the researcher about the study group with classmates and the confidence to improve the performance:

"I have some studies after school with my classmates, so we study together. That's where I find more knowledge and at home, I make my study time. My performance is great for this term because now I'm preparing for my trial examination. I think it will be better than June examination. I'm confident that I will do better."

Some learners expressed adjustments they made to increase their commitment to academic success as:

P13: *"I am going to pass I need to study hard so that I get out of the situation that I am going through, because if I play, I will not get out."*

P10: *"I would say 60% to 70% confident. I am putting a lot of focus because I know that I am struggling a lot with Mathematics, so every time when I am free or feel bored, I practice Mathematics, practice those methods that are difficult so that I am able to understand them for when I write examinations."*

P5: *"I have stopped to go to the field and play soccer every day. I am now focusing on books more than on soccer because in term two I was focusing on soccer more than books."*

Increased self-commitment and preparation influence learners' experiences and have an impact on their academic performance. When learners are committed to their academic goals and adequately prepared for their studies, they are more likely to engage positively in the learning process.

This theme highlighted the various needs expressed by the learners, including, the provision of extra classes at school, the importance of attending school every day of the week, and the support provided by teachers. Additionally, the learners expressed a strong commitment to their studies.

4.3 SUMMARY

This chapter delved into the correlation between adolescents' mental health factors and their impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners, as articulated by the learners themselves. The research identified various factors that could potentially affect the mental well-being of these learners. These factors include feelings of sadness, low self-esteem, fear, stress, bullying, poor family dynamics, peer behaviors, an unsupportive learning environment, lack of available academic support, negative teacher attitudes, and insufficient teacher commitment. Additionally, issues such as limited access to online resources, inadequate academic support,

enhanced teacher motivation, academic calendar restructuring, increased teacher commitment, heightened self-dedication, and better preparation were highlighted. Collectively, these factors significantly influence the academic achievements and performance of secondary school learners. The findings and interpretations presented in this chapter are substantiated by existing literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

PHASE 2: SCOPING REVIEW FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented and discussed the results of the study, which were collected through semi-structured interviews. A scoping review is an essential tool for synthesizing a wide range of evidence concerning mental health factors identified through interviews. This process not only informs future research but also improves mental health practices. This chapter is the presentation and discussion of the results obtained from the study. The findings and outcomes of the research are examined and interpreted in this chapter. The data collected in this study highlighted various mental health factors affecting learners. This study attempted to answer the research question, "What are the common mental health factors that affect the academic performance of secondary school learners?" The findings presented in this study were derived from a comprehensive scoping review, which involved a systematic examination of existing literature to identify and synthesize relevant information.

5.2 STAGE 1: IDENTIFYING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The scoping review question was framed based on the PCC (Population, Concept, and Context) elements (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015). The scoping question was**: "*What are the common mental health factors affecting learners' academic achievement?"***. The population consisted of learners from grade 8 to grade 12. The concept involved mental health factors influencing academic achievement. The context was not restricted to a particular geographical location because the initial search revealed there were scanty studies done in low- and middle-income countries; hence, the need to include all locations.

5.3 STAGE 2: IDENTIFYING RELEVANT STUDY

The three-step strategy proposed by Joanna Briggs Institute was used to identify relevant studies (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015). The first step involved conducting a limited search of at least two databases that were relevant to the topic. The second step involved conducting another search using all the index terms that were identified in the first step. The final step involved searching the reference list of all identified studies for additional and related studies.

5.3.1 Step 1: Initial search

Two databases (CINAHL Ultimate and Psych Info) were used for the initial search. The search terms were mental health, factors, academic achievement, learners, and secondary school. Boolean operators like 'OR', 'AND' were used to link the words for the search. The search was limited to January 2013 to December 2023, journal articles in English. One hundred and thirty-six and forty-three articles were retrieved from CINAHL Ultimate and PsychINFO, respectively.

5.3.2 Step 2: Search across five databases

Five databases were searched, namely CINAHL Ultimate, ERIC, Science Direct, Psych INFO and Web of science. Grey literature was also searched for on Google Scholar. The following keywords were used: mental health, factors, academic achievement, secondary school, and learners. The keywords with their respective alternative words are described in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1 Keywords and alternative words for database search

Keyword	**Alternative words**
Psychological factors	Psychological factors, psychological determinants, psychological correlates, psychological indicators, psychological predictors, psychological influences, emotional factors, emotional determinants, emotional correlates, emotional indicators, emotional predictors, emotional influences, mental factors, mental determinants, mental correlates, mental indicators, mental predictors, mental influences"
Academic achievement	academic outcome, academic performance, academic attainment, student achievement, student attainment, student performance, student success, student outcome, learning outcome, learning achievement, educational attainment
Secondary school	secondary education, high school, middle school
Learners	Learners, pupils

Table 5.1 describes the five keywords that were used in the search across the databases, along with their corresponding alternative words.

In a scoping review, in order not to miss out on any study or article, it is always important to construct a comprehensive search. For a particular keyword, alternative keywords were used. For example, a phrase like psychological factors, and alternative keywords such as psychological determinants, psychological correlates, psychological indicators, psychological predictors, psychological influences, emotional factors, emotional determinants, emotional correlates, and emotional indicators were used. Boolean operators like 'OR' and 'AND' were used to link the words for the search. Table 5.2 provides information on how the search was conducted across the five databases:

Table 5.2 Details of search across five databases

Database	Date of search	Search criteria	Number of studies
Web of science	22/01/2024	(("Psychological factors" OR "psychological determinants" OR "psychological correlates" OR "psychological indicators" OR "psychological predictors" OR "psychological influences" OR "emotional factors" OR "emotional determinants" OR "emotional correlates" OR "emotional indicators" OR "emotional predictors" OR "emotional influences" OR "mental factors" OR "mental determinants" OR "mental correlates" OR "mental indicators" OR "mental predictors" OR "mental influences") AND ("academic achievement" OR "academic outcome" OR "academic performance" OR "academic attainment" OR "student achievement" OR "student attainment" OR "student performance" OR "student success" OR "student outcome" OR "learning outcome" OR "learning achievement" OR "educational attainment") AND ("secondary school" OR "secondary education" OR "high school" OR "middle school") AND (learners OR learners OR pupils)) 2013-2023, Articles, English	33
Psych INFO		(psychological factors OR psychological determinants OR psychological correlates OR psychological indicators OR psychological predictors OR psychological influences OR emotional factors OR emotional determinants OR emotional correlates OR emotional indicators OR emotional predictors OR emotional influences OR mental factors OR mental determinants OR mental correlates OR mental indicators OR mental predictors OR mental influences) AND (academic achievement OR	153

		academic outcome OR academic performance OR academic attainment OR student achievement OR student attainment OR student performance OR student success OR student outcome OR learning outcome OR learning achievement OR educational attainment) AND (secondary school OR secondary education OR high school OR middle school) AND (learners OR learners OR pupils) Limiters - Publication Date: 20130101-20231231; Peer Reviewed; English language. Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	
Science Direct		("psychological factors" OR "psychological determinants" OR "psychological correlates") AND ("academic achievement" OR "academic performance") AND ("secondary school" OR "secondary education") AND (learners OR learners)	203
ERIC		(psychological factors OR psychological determinants OR psychological correlates OR psychological indicators OR psychological predictors OR psychological influences OR emotional factors OR emotional determinants OR emotional correlates OR emotional indicators OR emotional predictors OR emotional influences OR mental factors OR mental determinants OR mental correlates OR mental indicators OR mental predictors OR mental influences) AND (academic achievement OR academic outcome OR academic performance OR academic attainment OR student achievement OR student attainment OR student performance OR student success OR student outcome OR learning outcome OR learning achievement OR educational attainment) AND (secondary school OR secondary education OR high school OR middle school) AND (learners OR learners OR pupils) **Limiters** - Peer Reviewed; Publication Date: 20130101-20231231; Journal or Document: Journal Article (EJ); Language: English **Search modes** - Boolean/Phrase	148
CINAHL Ultimate		(psychological factors OR psychological determinants OR psychological correlates OR psychological indicators OR psychological predictors OR psychological influences OR emotional factors OR emotional determinants OR emotional correlates OR emotional indicators OR emotional predictors OR emotional influences OR mental factors	59

		OR mental determinants OR mental correlates OR mental indicators OR mental predictors OR mental influences) AND (academic achievement OR academic outcome OR academic performance OR academic attainment OR student achievement OR student attainment OR student performance OR student success OR student outcome OR learning outcome OR learning achievement OR educational attainment) AND (secondary school OR secondary education OR high school OR middle school) AND (learners OR learners OR pupils) Limiters - Full Text; Publication Date: 20130101-20231231; English Language; Peer Reviewed; Research Article; Human Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	

The table above provides details of how the search was done on Web of Science, PsychINFO, Science Direct, ERIC, and CINAHL Ultimate.

5.3.3 Step 3: Searching the reference list of identified studies/other sources.

The reference lists of the identified studies were searched to identify additional studies. The process did not generate any new articles to be included in the scoping review.

5.4 STAGE 3: STUDY SELECTION

The studies were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria (outlined in Table 5.2). The articles were imported to Covidence (a review management system) for screening. After the import, 89 duplicates were removed. The screening of the titles and the abstract was done independently by three reviewers (WT, NN and DAA) for eligibility. The reviewers were guided through this process by the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study. The screening of titles and abstracts was followed by a full text review done independently by three reviewers (WT, NN and DAA). A total of 17 studies were included in the scoping review. The process followed in retrieving the studies is presented in the PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 5.1:

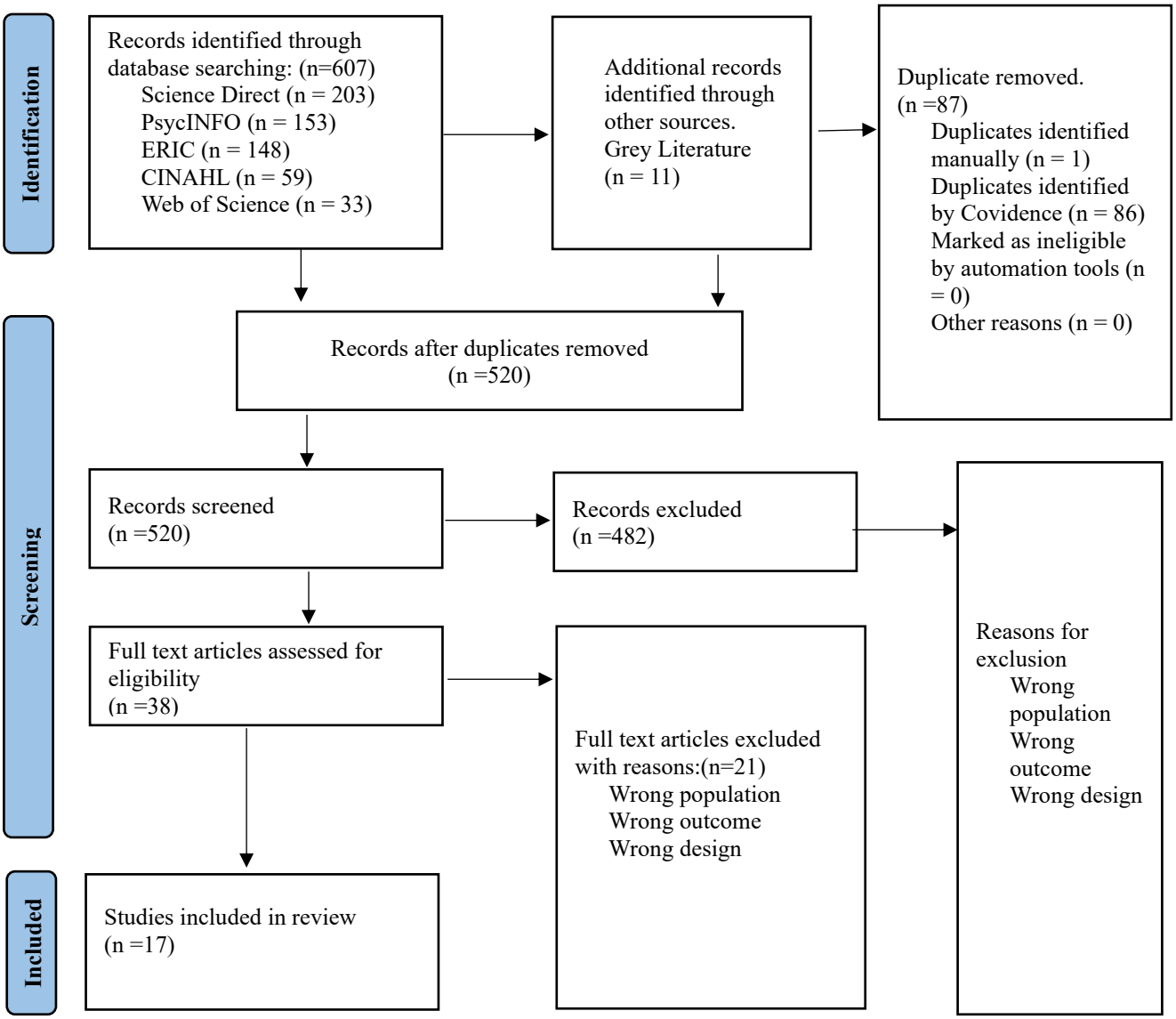


Figure 5.1: PRISMA flow diagram for the scoping review article selection process

The PRISMA flow diagram, as indicated in Figure 5.1 provides details on the number of studies identified through the search across five databases and grey literature, the number of duplicates removed, the number of studies screened, and those that were excluded with reasons. The last part of the flow diagram describes the number of studies included in the scoping review process.

5.5 STAGE 4: CHARTING THE RESULTS

The information retrieved from the selected studies was charted using the following headings: author(s), year of publication, origin/country of origin, purpose of study, study population and sample size, research design, intervention type, outcome measures, and key findings. Table 5.3 provides details of the data extracted from the 17 studies included in the scoping review:

Table 5.3 Characteristics of studies

AUTHOR/ YEAR OF PUBLICATION/ COUNTRY	PURPOSE	STUDY POPULATION	RESEARCH DESIGN	SAMPLING TECHNIQUE	OUTCOMES	KEY FINDINGS
Ah Gang Grace (2020) Malaysia	To examine the psychological factors enhancing the academic achievement of Kadazandusun rural learners.	668 participants Age: 15–17 years, with a mean age of 15.37 (SD=.52) Sex: Male: 282 Female: 385	Survey design	Not indicated	**Psychological factors** ▪ Achievement motivation ▪ Academic self-efficacy ▪ Psychological well-being **Dependent variable** ▪ Academic achievement	Achievement motivation showed a significant and positive effect on academic achievement. Psychological well-being also showed a positive contribution to learners' academic achievement Academic self-efficacy also contributes to learners' academic performance.
Alemu and Feyssa (2020) Ethiopia	To examine the relationships between test anxiety and academic achievement among secondary school learners.	308 participants Sex: Male: 176 Female: 132 Grade: 10	Descriptive correlation, cross sectional design	Stratified Sampling	**Psychological factors** ▪ Test Anxiety **Dependent variable** ▪ Academic achievement	test anxiety scores of the female learners were higher than male learners

Ansong et al. (2019) Ghana	To find out the association of academic self-efficacy and academic aspirations and achievement among Junior High Learners	4282 adolescents Sex: Males: 2077 Females: 2205	Cluster randomised pretest-posttest design	Not indicated	**Psychological factors** ▪ Academic self-efficacy ▪ Educational aspirations **Dependent variable** ▪ Academic achievement	Children's academic self-efficacy shaped their educational aspirations, which in turn shaped their academic achievement. Boys and girls vary in how their academic self-efficacy beliefs indirectly affected their academic achievement.
Ayyash-Abdo, Sanchez-Ruiz and Barnari (2016) Lebanon	To investigate resiliency factors and hope as predictors of academic performance	599 Lebanese learners Age: 11-19 Mean age of 15 (SD=1.76) Gender Male: 269 Female: 330	Not described	Convenience sampling	**Psychological factors** ▪ Resilience ▪ Hope **Dependent variable** ▪ Academic performance (GPA)	Resiliency showed validity in predicting academic performance over gender, tuition fees and hope
Li (2020) China	What are the interrelationships among learners' TEI, FLE, self-perceived and actual English achievement? Does FLE play a mediating role in	1307 learners Sex: Males: 672 Females: 635 Age Mean age-16.83 SD= .76	Not described	Not described	**Psychological factors** ▪ Emotional intelligence **Dependent variable** ▪ English achievement	Trait emotional intelligence was found to be correlated to self-perceived English achievement and actual English achievement

	the relationship between TEI and perceived achievement?	Second year senior high school				
Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu (2017) Nigeria	to predict learners' academic performance in mathematics at the thinking level from learners' psychological factors (Self-concept, test anxiety, interest in schooling, attitude towards mathematics, motivation and locus of control) and performance at the lower cognitive levels (knowledge and understanding).	289 participants	Causal-comparative design	simple random sampling	**Psychological factors** ▪ Interest ▪ Attitude ▪ Achievement motivation ▪ Self-concept ▪ Test anxiety ▪ Locus of control **Dependent variable** ▪ Student performance	Positive interest in schooling enhanced learners' achievement in Mathematics Positive attitude towards mathematics enhanced achievement in mathematics at the thinking level Negative relationship between motivation and academic achievement Positive relationship between self-concept and academic achievement means that if one feels that he is able to perform a task he/she will work hard to maintain such feelings. Test anxiety has a significant positive relationship with academic achievement.

						There was no direct effect of locus of control on student's
Duncan et al., (2021) Canada	To assess whether symptoms of mental illness (depression and anxiety) and mental well-being (psychosocial well-being) are associated with self-reported grades (in their primary language [English or French] and math courses) and education behaviours (school days missed due to health, truancy, and frequency of incomplete homework)	57, 394 adolescents **Sex:** Male: 28, 479 Female: 28, 580 **Age:** 15.6 (SD) 9th to 12th Grade	Cross sectional design	Convenience sampling	**Psychological factors** ▪ Depression ▪ Anxiety ▪ Psychological well-being **Dependent variable** ▪ Educational behaviours ▪ Academic performance	Lower depression and higher psychosocial well-being scores were associated with better grade levels in both math and language courses, as well as better education behaviours. Anxiety scores were inversely related to academic performance
Fairless et al. (2021) USA	To examine the role of intrapersonal and microsystem factors in academic	379 high school learners Sex: Males: 176 Females: 193	Not described	Not described	**Psychological factors** ▪ Social emotional learning ▪ Self-efficacy	Social emotional learning had significant relationship with academic relationship, however, it was not a

	performance of high school adolescents.	9^{th} to 12^{th} Grade			**Others** • Socio economic status • Parental involvement • Peer support • Teacher support **Dependent variable** ▪ Academic achievement	strong contributor to academic performance. Self-efficacy was strongly correlated to academic achievement than any other variable. Adolescents with high socio-economic status, parental involvement, and teacher support were likely to do well in school. Peer support had a negative correlation with academic achievement. Peer support could be a protective of risk factor
Gana, Ugwunyi and Ageda (2019) Nigeria	To determine the predictive powers of motivation, self-efficacy and locus of control on learners' academic achievement in physics.	375 learners	Correlational survey research design	Multistage sampling procedure	**Psychological factors** ▪ Motivation ▪ Self-efficacy ▪ Locus of control **Dependent variable** ▪ Academic achievement	Motivation, self-efficacy and locus of control predicted student's academic achievement

Gangolou (2020) India	To assess the personal adjustment as predictor of academic achievement of high school learners. To examine the emotional intelligence as predictor of academic achievement of high school learners	200 learners Sex Male: 100 Female:100 9th grade	Not described	Not described	**Psychological factors** ▪ Personal adjustment ▪ Emotional intelligence **Dependent variable** ▪ Academic achievement	Personal (Submissiveness-Assertiveness) adjustment and Emotional intelligence are the significant predictors of academic achievement.
Gutiérrez Tapia et al. (2019) Mexico	To examine the psychosocial factors of academic achievement using three different theoretical models	725 public high school learners Sex Male:291 Female: 434 Age Mean=18 SD=1.09	Not described	Not described	**Psychological factors** ▪ Self-efficacy ▪ Neuroticism ▪ Conscientiousness ▪ Extraversion ▪ Academic self-concept **Other factors** ▪ Middle school GPA **Dependent variable**	There is a relationship between self-efficacy and high school academic achievement. The best predictor of high school academic achievement was middle school academic achievement. Neuroticism was significantly related to high school academic achievement.

					▪ Academic achievement	Conscientiousness was significantly related to high school academic achievement
Hagger and Hamilton (2018) Australia	To study the motivational predictors of participation in science learning activities in secondary-school learners	117 school learners Sex Male: 58 Female: 59 Age: Grade 7	Correlational design	Not described	**Psychological factors** ▪ Autonomous motivation **Dependent variable** ▪ Academic attainment	Autonomous motivation affected science learning activities across educational and out-of-school contexts. Autonomous motivation affected participation in out-of-school science learning activities set by teachers and academic attainment.
Ebenezer & Ermie (2018) Nigeria	To investigate psychological factors influencing academic achievement of secondary school adolescents.	300 secondary school adolescents	Ex-post-facto	Simple random technique	**Psychological factors** ▪ School phobia ▪ Achievement motivation **Dependent variable** ▪ Academic achievement	School phobia significantly influence academic achievement of learners. Achievement motivation does influence academic achievement of learners
Jin and Lin (2018) China	To investigate into Senior High School Learners' Psychological Quality and Its Relationship with	139 senior high school learners	Quantitative design	Not described	**Psychological factors** ▪ Psychological quality: Initiative Self-confidence Responsibility Self-control	There is a positive and strong correlation between English performance and initiative, self-confidence, responsibility, self-

	Their English Performance				Methods Independence Monitoring Frustration Endurance Independence Thinking ability Innovation **Dependent variable** English performance	control, methods, independence and persistence. There is a correlation between English performance and monitoring, frustration endurance and independence. There is no correlation between English performance and thinking ability and Innovation.
Kienngam et al. (2022) Thailand	To examine the direct and indirect effects of interpersonal relationships, life satisfaction, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression on the academic achievement of senior high school learners.	285 learners Sex: Males: 123 Females: 162 Age: 14 to 19 years private, government, or demonstration high school)	Not described	stratified random sampling	**Psychological factors** ▪ Anxiety ▪ Depression ▪ Self-esteem ▪ Life satisfaction ▪ Interpersonal relationships **Dependent variable** Academic Achievement	Anxiety levels had a significantly positive direct effect on achievement, whereas depression had a negative direct effect on achievement. Additionally, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and interpersonal relationships had negative indirect effects on depression and anxiety.

Negriy (2016) Russia		120 learners, Sex: Males: 52 Females: 68 grades 9-11			**Psychological factors** ▪ Defense mechanisms: devaluation rationalization moralization **Dependent variable** ▪ academic achievement	Defense mechanisms explain the level of academic achievement only for learners with a low achievement level.
Njega, Njoka and Ndung'u (2019) Kenya	To assess the perceived psychosocial dynamics and their influence on academic performance in secondary schools in Murang'a and Kirinyaga counties.	412 secondary school learners Sex: Males: 183 Females: 229	Not described	Stratified simple random sampling	**Psychological factors** ▪ Self-efficacy ▪ School conduciveness ▪ Family supportiveness **Dependent variable**	A positive relationship exists between psychosocial dynamics and academic performance of the learners. Male learners are psychosocially better than the female learners but the difference is insignificance. The influence of self-efficacy on academic performance was statistically significant. Self-efficacy influences academic performance, as self-efficacy increases, academic performance increases.

5. 6 STAGE 5: COLLATING, SUMMARIZING AND REPORTING THE RESULTS

The results were summarised using multiple methods: numeric, narrative, and thematic approaches. The studies were summarised under the headings, distribution by geographical location, journals, year of publication, number of participants and analysis of themes.

5. 6.1 Distribution of the studies

The number of studies included in the scoping review was 17. The studies evaluated psychological or mental health factors influencing academic performance among secondary school learners.

5. 6.1.1 Geographic distribution of the articles

Majority of studies were conducted from Asia (n=6, 35.3 %) and Africa (n=6, 35.3%), followed by North America (n=3, 17.6%), Europe (n=1, 5.8 %) and Australia (n=1, 5.8%). No study was found in South America and Antarctica. Details are provided in Table 5.4 below:

Table 5.4 Distribution of articles by location

Continent	Country	Number of studies
North America	Canada	1
	USA	1
	Mexico	1
Australia	Australia	1
Europe	Russia	1
Asia	Malaysia	1
	Lebanon	1
	China	2
	India	1
	Thailand	1
Africa	Nigeria	3
	Ethiopia	1
	Ghana	1
	Kenya	1

5. 6.1.2 Distribution of articles by journal

Two studies were published in the Learning and Individual Differences. The remaining studies (n=15) were published in separate journals. The details of the article publication in the journals are described in Table 5.5:

Table 5.5 Article distribution by journals

Journal name	**Number of articles**	**Article**
Moldavian Journal for Education and Social Psychology	1	Ah Gang, 2020
African Educational Research Journal	1	Aleymu & Feyssa, 2020
Journal of Adolescence	1	Ansong et al., 2019
Learning and Individual Differences	2	Ayyash-Abdo, Sanchez-Ruiz & Barbari., 2016 Hagger & Hamilton, 20
Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development	1	Chengchen Li, 2020
Canadian Journal of School Psychology	1	Duncan et al., 2021
International Journal of Innovative Education Research	1	Ebenezer & Ermie, 2018
IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education	1	Eduwem, Umoinyang, & Otu, 2017
Education and Urban Society	1	Fairless et al., 2021
International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science	1	Gana, Ugwuanyi & Ageda, 2019
Journal of Psychosocial Research	1	Gangolu, 2020
Acta de Investigation Psiologica	1	Gutiérrez Tapia et al., 2019
English Language Teaching	1	Jin & Lin, 2018
Healthcare	1	Kienngam et al., 2022
Social and Behavioral Sciences	1	Negriy, 2016
Journal of Arts & Humanities	1	Njega1, Njoka, & Ndung'u, 2019

5. 6.1.3 Distribution of articles by year of publication

The studies included in the scoping review were published between 2016 and 2022. Distribution of article per year of publication is described in figure 5.2:

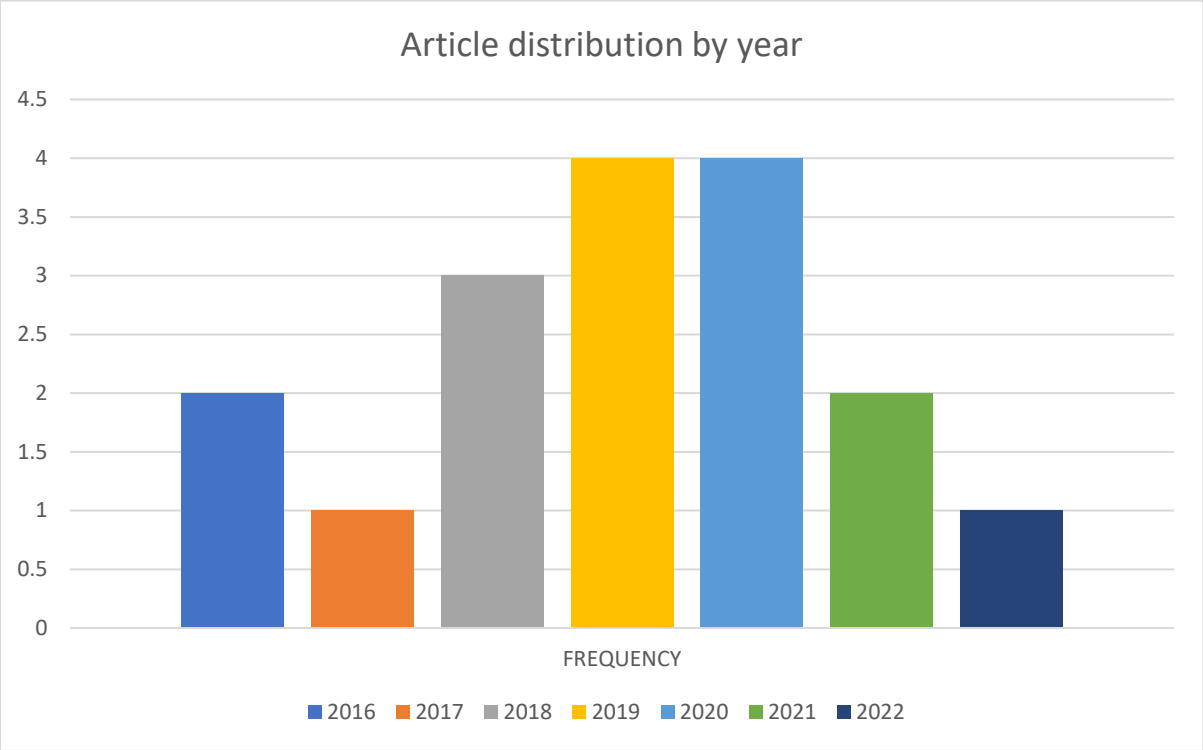


Figure 5.2 Article distribution by year of publication

Figure 2 indicates that four studies were published in 2020 (n=4, 23.5%), four (n=4, 23.5%) in 2019, three (n=3, 17.7%) in 2018, two (n=2, 11.8%) in 2021, two (n=2, 11.8%) in 2016. In 2017 and 2022, one study was published each (n=2, 11.8%).

5. 6.1.4 Participants

The total number of participants across the 17 studies involved in the scoping review were n=67, 246. The majority of the studies (n=14) reported the gender distribution of participants, detailing the number of males and females included. Three studies did not indicate gender of their participants and a total of 814 participants were in those studies. Only few studies (n=3) indicated that males were more than females. Figure 5.3 provides the male to female ratio of the participants involved in the study:

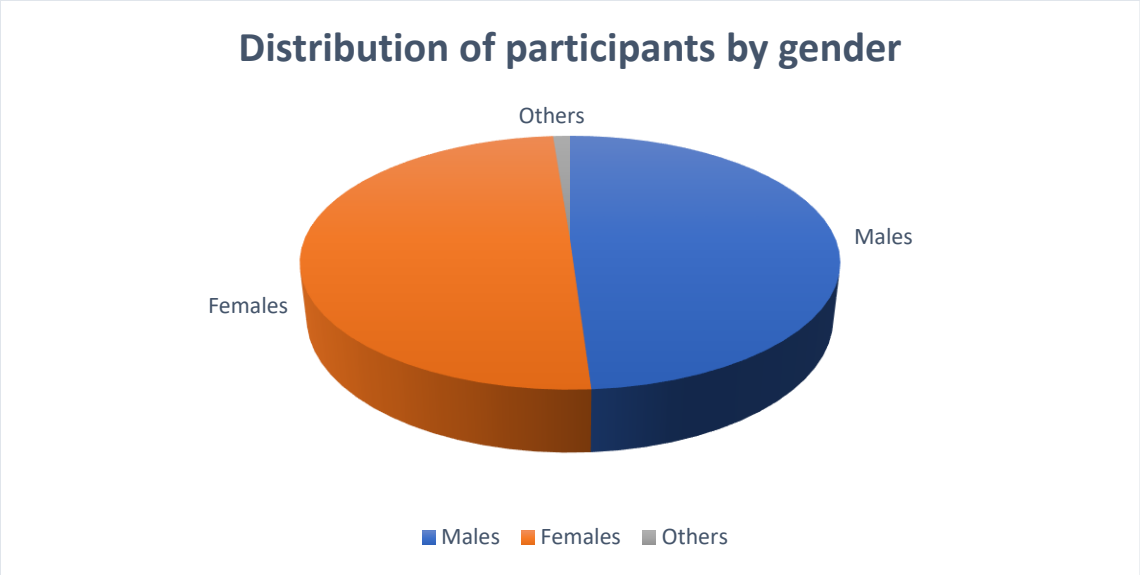


Figure 5.3 Distribution of participants by gender

Majority of the participants were females (n=33, 512; 50%), males were (n= 32, 920; 49%) The participants not specified was n=814 representing 1%.

5.6.2 Outcomes in the studies used in the scoping review

The studies included in the scoping review reported on a wide range of outcomes; however, the study limited its report to those relating to well-being. Table 5.6 provides the outcome measures reported by the various studies included in the scoping review:

Table 5.6 Psychological factors influencing academic achievement/outcomes of the study

Authors	Self-efficacy	Motivation	Anxiety	Locus of control	Self-concept	Emotional intelligence	Depression
Ah Gang Grace, 2020	✓	✓					
Alemiu and Feyysa, 2020			✓				
Ansong et al. 2019	✓						
Ayyash-Abdo et al. 2021							
Chengchen Li. 2020						✓	✓
Duncan et al. 2021			✓				
Ebenezer and Ermie, 2018		✓	✓				
Eduwem et al. 2018		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Fairless et al. 2020	✓						
Gana et al. 2017	✓	✓		✓			
Gangolu, 2020						✓	
Gutiérrez Tapia et al. 2020	✓				✓		
Hagger and Hamilton. 2018		✓					
Jin and Lin, 2018							
Kienngam et al. 2022			✓				✓
Negriy, 2014							
Njega et al. 2019	✓						

Details on the outcomes as shown in table 5.6 are as follows: self-efficacy (n=6), motivation (n=5), anxiety (n=5), locus of control (n=2), self-concept (n=2), emotional intelligence (n=2) and depression (n=2). Other psychological factors mentioned by only one study includes: psychological well-being, educational aspirations, hope, resilience, attitude, interest, social emotional learning, personal adjustment, neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, psychological quality, self-esteem, life satisfaction, defence mechanisms and interpersonal relationship.

5.6.2.1 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy was mentioned six times across studies (Ansong et al. 2019; Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019; Gutiérrez Tapia et al. 2019; Njega, Njoka and Ndung'u, 2019; Ah Gang Grace, 2020; Fairless et al. 2021). All the studies found significant relationship with academic performance (Ansong et al. 2019; Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019; Gutiérrez Tapia et al. 2019; Njega, Njoka and Ndung'u, 2019; Ah Gang Grace, 2020; Fairless et al. 2021). Fairless et al. (2021) found that self-efficacy was more strongly correlated with achievement than any other variable in their study. Similarly, (Njega, Njoka and Ndung'u, 2019) reported that self-efficacy was a significant predictor of achievement.

While some studies reported a direct relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement (Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019; Njega, Njoka and Ndung'u, 2019; Ah Gang Grace, 2020; Fairless et al. 2021), other studies did not report same. For example, Ansong et al. (2019) reported an indirect relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement. According to their study, self-efficacy shape learners' educational aspirations, which in turn shape their academic achievement. Gutiérrez Tapia et al. (2019) also reported that self-efficacy was a mediator between personality traits and academic achievement.

5.6.2.2 Motivation

Motivation as a psychological factor affecting academic achievement was mentioned by five studies (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Ebenezer and Eremie, 2018; Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019; Ah Gang Grace, 2020; Hagger and Hamilton, 2018). The role of motivation on academic achievement is not consistent among studies included in this scoping review. While some studies have (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017) reported a negative relationship between motivation and academic achievement (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017), other studies did

not find a significant relationship between motivation (Ebenezer and Eremie, 2018). Some studies reported a positive relationship between motivation and academic achievement (Hagger and Hamilton, 2018; Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019; Ah Gang Grace, 2020). In some of the studies, the type of motivation was not stated whether extrinsic or intrinsic (Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019). Different forms of motivation are indicated in the studies; achievement motivation (Ebenezer and Eremie, 2018; Ah Gang Grace, 2020); autonomous motivation (Hagger and Hamilton, 2018).

5. 6.2.3 Anxiety

Four studies mentioned anxiety as a psychological factor affecting the academic performance of learners in high school (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Ebenezer and Eremie, 2018; Alemu and Feyssa, 2020; Duncan, Patte and Leatherdale, 2021; Kienngam et al. 2022). Different forms of anxiety are indicated by the studies, test anxiety (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Alemu and Feyssa, 2020), school phobia (Ebenezer and Eremie, 2018), and anxiety (Duncan, Patte and Leatherdale, 2021). Anxiety has been linked to poor academic achievement and the relationship is negative (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Ebenezer and Eremie, 2018). On the contrary, Duncan, Patte and Leatherdale (2021), reported a positive relationship such that higher anxiety scores increased the likelihood of having higher language grades among secondary school learners.

5. 6.2.4 Locus of control

Two studies mentioned locus of control as psychological factor affecting the academic performance of learners in high school (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019). Locus of control is described as factors which a student attributes to his or her success (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019). The concept is described as internal and external locus of control. The two studies agree that learners who achieve success by internal locus of control attribute it to their own effort (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019). On the contrary, those learners who achieve success by external locus of control attribute it to chance or someone's actions (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019). The studies do not explicitly indicate whether the locus of control considered in the study was internal or external (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda, 2019). While Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu (2017) did not find any significant relationship between locus of control and academic

achievement, Gana, Ugwuanyi and Ageda (2019) reported that locus control was a significant predictor of academic achievement.

5. 6.2.5 Self-concept

Self-concept as psychological factor affecting academic achievement was mentioned by two studies (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017; Gutiérrez Tapia et al. 2019). While Gutiérrez Tapia et al. (2019) reported an indirect relationship between self-concept and academic achievement, Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu (2017) repoted a direct relationship. Self-concept was reported to be positively related to academic achievement (Eduwem, Umoinyang and Otu, 2017).

5. 6.2.6 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence was mentioned twice across studies. All the studies found significant relationship with academic performance (Gangolu, 2020; Li, 2020). Li (2020) focused on trait emotional intelligence, while (Gangolu, 2020) did not specify. Both studies highlight that emotional intelligence has to do with coping and dealing with emotions such that learners are not overwhelmed (Gangolu, 2020; Li, 2020). Emotional intelligence is positively and significantly related to academic achievement (Gangolu, 2020; Li, 2020).

5.6.2.7 Depression

Depression as psychological factor affecting academic achievement was mentioned by two studies (Duncan, Patte and Leatherdale, 2021; Kienngam et al. 2022). Lower levels of depression has been associated with high academic achievement (Duncan, Patte and Leatherdale, 2021). (Kienngam et al. 2022) reported that the relationship between depression and academic performance is bidirectional.

5.7 SUMMARY

This chapter explored the correlation between mental health factors among adolescents and their influence on the academic performance of secondary school learners, drawing insights from existing research. Utilizing a scoping review methodology, the research identified key factors that could impact the mental well-being of secondary school learners. These factors include self-efficacy, motivation, anxiety, locus of control, self-concept, emotional intelligence, and depression. Furthermore, the study highlighted various psychological factors, including psychological well-being, educational aspirations, hope, resilience, attitude, interest, social

emotional learning, personal adjustment, neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, psychological quality, self-esteem, life satisfaction, defence mechanisms, and interpersonal relationships. The conclusions and analyses in this chapter are supported by existing literature

CHAPTER SIX

INTEGRATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of the study presented the results obtained from data collected through semi-structured interviews and the scoping review. This chapter focuses on integrating the findings derived from the data gathered through semi-structured interviews and a scoping review. The data gathered from semi-structured interviews provides an in-depth exploration of participants' personal experiences and perspectives. On the other hand, a scoping review provides a broad overview of existing literature, identifying key concepts, theories, and evidence related to the research topic (Osman et al. 2018).

Table 6.1 Integration of the data collected through semi-structured interviews and a scoping review

	Semi-structured interviews	**Scoping review**	**The mental health effects**
Themes	**Sub-themes**	**Sub-themes**	**Data from interviews and scoping review**
Mental health factors	Feelings of sadness Low self-esteem Fear Stress Bullying	Emotional intelligence Self-concept Depression Anxiety	Feelings of sadness Low self-esteem Fear Stress Bullying Emotional intelligence Anxiety Self-concept
Social factors	Poor family dynamics Peer behaviors	Locus of control Socio-economic status Interpersonal relationships	Poor family dynamics Peer behaviours/support Socio-economic status Interpersonal relationships

		Family-support Peer support	
Academic-related factors	Unconducive learning environment Unavailable academic support Poor attitude of teachers Lack of commitment from teachers Lack of access to online resources	School conduciveness Academic-self-efficacy Educational aspirations	Unconducive learning environment Unavailable academic support Poor attitude of teachers Lack of commitment from teachers Lack of access to online resources Academic-self-efficacy Educational aspirations
Learners' needs	Provision of academic support Increased motivation from teachers Restructuring of academic calendar Increased commitment from teachers Increased self-commitment and preparation	Self-concept Achievement Autonomous motivation Teacher support Self-efficacy Personal adjustment Self-confidence	Provision of academic support Increased motivation from teachers Restructuring of academic calendar Increased commitment from teachers Increased self-commitment and preparation

6.2 DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

This study aimed to describe the mental health factors that negatively impact the academic performance of secondary school learners. In addition, the study sought to gain an understanding of the common mental health factors that are perceived to influence the academic performance of learners. Results indicated that various mental health factors affect academic performance, and they were categorized into themes and sub-themes. Four themes were generated, namely, mental health factors, social factors, Academic-related factors, and Learners' needs, and these themes will guide the discussion of the study.

6.2.1 Mental health factors

The mental health needs of secondary school learners are diverse and crucial for their overall well-being and academic success. Some common mental health needs include stress and anxiety, bullying, family problems, depression, and substance abuse (Richter at al. 2022). These mental health challenges can significantly impact learners' well-being, academic performance, and overall quality of life (National Association of School Psychologists, 2021).

- **Feelings of sadness**

Participants expressed feelings of sadness. Sadness is described as a natural human emotion that can be triggered by a wide range of experiences, including the loss of a loved one, the end of a relationship, a significant life change, or a traumatic event (Forgas, 2017). Schools can play a critical role in addressing these emotional needs by implementing policies that support learners with mental health challenges, providing resources such as counselling sessions, and creating a positive school climate that fosters well-being and academic success (Lester and Cross, 2015). Additionally, schools can address the emotional needs of secondary school learners through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs. By prioritizing mental health programmes within schools and providing support for emotional development and empowerment, South African schools can positively impact learners' well-being and academic success (Coetzee et al. 2022).

- **Low self-esteem**

Learners with low self-esteem may have reduced motivation to learn, struggle to focus, and be less willing to take academic activities. This lack of confidence can hinder a learner's ability to engage effectively in learning activities and can lead to academic underachievement (Alghamdi et al. 2023). Teachers can play a vital role in supporting learners with low self-esteem by fostering a positive learning environment and providing encouragement and opportunities for success.

- **Fear**

Fear is an unpleasant emotion triggered by the anticipation or awareness of danger, or any threatening situation. It is a distressing feeling of being afraid, characterized by anxiety and a desire to escape or confront the perceived threat (Perusini. and Fanselow, 2015). The participant’s fear was attributed to life experiences, which influenced the ability to focus on learning. Other participants associated their fear with self-doubt and the fear of failure. Fear

can have a significant impact on the academic performance and mental health of secondary school learners. Fear can greatly affect the academic performance and mental well-being of secondary school learners.

- **Anxiety**

Anxiety, which is closely related to fear, can lower the level of academic performance among learners. It triggers confusion, and difficulty in comprehension, and can lead to a decrease in academic achievement (Meiyi and Liu, 2022). Several studies have confirmed a relationship between anxiety and academic achievement (Oluoch et al. 2018; Syokwaa et al. 2014; Alemiu and Feyyse, 2020). However other studies did not find a relationship between anxiety and academic achievement (Dordi et al. 2011; Yousef et al. 2010). Some level of anxiety is good for academic achievement. However, no anxiety leads to poor academics (Oluoch et al 2018). High levels of anxiety could cause inattentiveness, forgetfulness, or lack of motivation (Ebenezer and Ermie, 2019). Increased anxiety can lead to nervousness during test. When this happens, learners find themselves forgetting what they have learned before the exams (Alemiu and Feyysa, 2020). Factors contributing to anxiety include adequate preparation (Eduwem et al. 2017). Anxiety can lead to low self-esteem and depression (Kienngan et al. 2022) which could further hamper the academic achievement of the learners. Addressing fear and anxiety in learners is crucial for promoting a positive learning environment and enhancing academic performance.

- **Stress**

Stress can be described as a state of worry or mental tension caused by challenging situations, prompting a natural human response that can manifest in various ways (Russell and Lightman, 2019). Stress can lead to decreased academic achievement, reduced motivation, and an increased risk of school dropout among learners (Pascoe et al. 2020). Additionally, stress can result in negative attitudes towards school, failed subjects, strained relationships with teachers, and a lack of confidence in academic work, all of which can hinder learners' academic success (Hachintu and Kasisi, 2021).

- **Bullying**

Social dynamics within the school environment, including peer relationships and bullying, can have a profound impact on learners' mental health (Scheffler, 2019). Bullying leads to lower academic achievement and poorer grades. Learners who are repeatedly bullied tend to receive

lower grades and participate less in class discussions (Samara et al. 2021). Bullying, whether from peers or teachers, can significantly undermine the academic performance of secondary school learners by reducing their motivation, engagement, and sense of belonging, as well as causing psychological and physical distress (Samara et al. 2021).

- **Emotional intelligence**

Emotional intelligence is linked to achievement. By teaching emotional and social skills in schools, the ability to succeed in academics will be improved. Emotionally intelligent learners would have improved academic achievement and would have a greater likelihood of academic success (Joibari and Mohammadtaheri, 2011). Individuals with high emotional intelligence have certain characteristics that help with academic achievement. Schneider et al. (2013) indicated that individuals with high emotional intelligence are more resilient. As a result, they can easily adapt to changes.

Also, in a learning environment where there are high levels of stress, they can react better under stressful conditions. Thus, they can cope well with academic challenges and difficulties. Eryilmaz (2011) also reported that those who score high on emotional intelligence are happier compared to those who score low. They are also able to manage their social relationships well (Eryilmaz, 2011) leading to higher social networks and better friendships quality (Brackett et al. 2005; Eryilmaz, 2011). Similarly, having a greater social network in a classroom might stimulate an adequate social environment for better cooperative work, better group learning, greater support from classmates (Hogan et al. 2010), and better relationships with teachers (Di Fabio and Kenny, 2015).

6.2.2 Social factors

Social factors can have a significant impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. These factors include gender, location of the school, socio-economic background of parents, poverty, bullying, low self-esteem, and parental unemployment, (Wali et al. 2023).

- **Poor family dynamics**

Poor family dynamics can have a significant impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. The dynamics within a family, encompassing relationship quality, parental conflict, and stability, are critical in influencing the learners' emotional, behavioral, and academic development. When learners are exposed to unstable family environments characterized by conflict, tension, and unresolved issues, they may experience increased stress,

lack of motivation, and emotional challenges that can hinder their academic success (Sakirudeen, 2018). Learners from unstable family environments may struggle to cope with emotional turmoil, leading to academic underachievement, negative peer relationships, and psychological symptoms like anxiety, depression, and withdrawal (Brew, 2021).

- **Peer behaviors**

The participants explained their experiences about the negative peer behaviors in class and around the school. Negative peer behaviors, such as aggression and inappropriate, such as emotions, can disrupt the learning environment and hinder the academic success of secondary school learners (Mikami, 2017). Bullying and negative social interactions among peers can make learners feel unsafe, uncomfortable, and less connected to their school, which impairs their ability to focus on their studies (Whylken et al. 2022).

- **Locus of control**

The belief of an individual regarding what influences their experiences is referred to as locus of control which could be internal or external (Gana et al. 2019). Locus of control influences attitudes towards learning (Gana et al. 2019). Learners with external locus of control may attribute failure in an examination to an unfair test or teacher's fault (Eduwem et al. 2017). Learners with internal locus of control are likely to procrastinate or experience high levels of anxiety (Eduwem et al. 2017). As such, they tend to achieve high in their academics. Both internal and external locus of control have been reported to be important predictors of academic achievement.

6.2.3 Academic-related factors

The influence of learning infrastructure on the academic performance of secondary school learners is important. Inadequate infrastructure negatively influences academic performance, highlighting the importance of proper school facilities like classrooms, laboratories, libraries, in enhancing learner outcomes. Investing in school infrastructure is crucial for creating a positive learning environment and improving student engagement and performance (Mgimba and Mwila, 2022). Efforts to enhance school infrastructure are essential for ensuring quality education and supporting learners' learning experiences and it plays a crucial role in promotion positive learning outcomes and achievement (Barrett et al. 2019).

- **Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is a significant factor in terms of student achievement. Several studies have documented that self-efficacy improves academic achievement (Van der Werthuizen et al. 2014; Ah Gang Grace, 2020; Ansong et al. 2019). Self-efficacy has been described as the most important predictor of academic achievement. There is a correlation between how learners perceive their academic effort and self-efficacy. For example, self-efficacy increases when learners feel that their efforts are successful (Schunk and Usher, 2011). Factors such as culture have been identified to affect one's self-efficacy. While individualistic cultures report high self-efficacy, collectivist cultures report low self-efficacy (Schunk and Usher, 2011). Self-efficacy influences methods used by learners in learning, how learners exert effort, and how learners undertake difficult and challenging tasks (Gana et al. 2019).

- **Non-conducive learning environment**

A conducive learning environment positively impacts the academic performance of secondary school learners. Research confirms that learners in schools with pleasant physical environments perform better than those in less conducive settings (Baafi, 2020). The classroom environment is a motivating factor that enhances academic performance, with a positive correlation between the classroom environment and learners' academic success (Akomolafe and Adesua, 2015). Additionally, a learning environment that is conducive increases motivation to learn, leading to improved academic performance (Yahya and Nur, 2023).

Participants reflected on the experiences and views that affect the school environment, including lack of learner motivation, discipline issues, poor attendance, and negative school climate among others. All these factors can collectively impact the academic performance of secondary school learners by influencing their emotional well-being, behavior, engagement in learning activities, and overall academic achievement. A negative school climate is associated with decreased, poor learner achievement, opportunities for bullying and violence, decline in psychosocial and behavioral adjustment (Maxwell et al. 2017).

The disruptive behavior of learners towards teachers can hurt the academic performance of secondary school learners. Disruptive behavior not only affects individual learners but also impacts the teacher-learner relationship. Teachers may react negatively not only to disruptive learners but to the entire class, leading to a breakdown in communication and trust (Mareš, 2018). Addressing negative experiences and factors is crucial for creating a supportive and

conducive learning environment that promotes the academic success of secondary school learners.

- **Unavailable academic support**

The participants reflected on to the negative experiences in the school environment, including the behavior of other learners. The safety in the school premises was also a concern. Several challenges were mentioned, including not attending school every day and the teachers going to class every day as expected. The behavior of the learners and the approach of the educators towards them have negatively influenced the teaching and learning process. The way the learners interact with each other, and the way educators engage with them have both impacted on the educational experience.

The study conducted by Berman et al. (2018), indicates that school environmental conditions, including factors like school building conditions, physical environment, and community aspects, are associated with academic performance. Additionally, the perceptions of safety and community factors play a crucial role in academic achievement and attendance. These findings emphasize the importance of considering environmental factors in educational settings to enhance academic performance and outcomes of secondary school learners.

- **Poor attitude of teachers**

The participants reflected on the attitudes of teachers, specifically focusing on both negative and positive aspects. The participants highlighted instances where teachers displayed a negative attitude towards them. They expressed concerns about the lack of encouragement and support from these teachers. On the contrary, some participants reflected on positive experiences with teachers who displayed a supportive and encouraging attitude. The negative attitude and behaviour of teachers can negatively impact the academic performance of secondary school learners. The study conducted by Tang and Hu, (2022), revealed that teacher discouraging attitudes and teaching approaches can lead to learner disappointment and demotivation, affecting their academic outcomes. When teachers display negative attitudes, learners may emotionally react with disappointment and decreased motivation, ultimately influencing their performance negatively (Tang and Hu, 2022).

The positive attitude and behavior of teachers have an important impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. Teachers who demonstrate positive attitudes create

a conducive and learner-friendly environment in the classroom, leading to enhanced learning outcomes for learners (Lone, S.A., 2019). Furthermore, the effects of teachers' attitudes extend beyond academic performance to impact learners' cognitive, affective, and social development (Kahveci, 2023). The impact of teacher attitudes on secondary school learners is profound. Positive attitudes can motivate learners and improve their performance, while negative attitudes can lead to disappointment, demotivation, and ultimately affect academic achievement negatively.

- **Lack of commitment from teachers**

The lack of commitment from teachers can have a significant negative impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. This is because teachers who are less committed to their learners and the teaching profession are less likely to invest the necessary time and effort to ensure learners achieve their full potential (Altun, 2017). Teachers who are less committed may not be as engaged in their work, leading to a decline in the quality of instruction and support provided to learners. This can result in learners not receiving the necessary guidance and resources to excel academically, ultimately affecting their performance (Obianwu and Benstowe, 2023).

- **Lack of access to online resources**

The availability and quality of resources can significantly influence the academic performance of secondary school learners. Participants expressed the lack of availability of resources, which includes internet. The lack of access to the internet can have a negative impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. The internet provides learners with access to a wealth of information, allowing them to broaden their academic knowledge, conduct research, and complete tasks more efficiently. It facilitates efficient communication, contributing to enhanced learning opportunities and academic success (Affum, 2022). Learners who lack access to the internet face challenges in participating and engaging in their education. Issues such as financial constraints, lack of internet service in residential areas, can hinder learners' ability to leverage digital resources for learning (KewalRamani et al. 2018). Children living in poverty may face challenges like limited access to resources, exposure to violence, and traumatic events such as divorce or domestic violence, all of which can contribute to mental health issues (Butler et al. 2022). Insufficient access to the latest trends, learning tools, and materials can hinder learners' ability to effectively study and understand subject matter (Wanswett and Nengnong, 2022).

6.2.4 Learners' needs

Learners with needs require academic support which has a significant impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. Learners with higher social support, especially from teachers and parents, tend to have stronger learning motivation and better academic performance (Peng et al. 2022 and Hoferichter et al. 2022). Additionally, academic support services provided by schools, such as tutoring and counseling, can contribute to learner success (Johnson et al. 2022). The lack of academic support can have a negative impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. Learners who fail eighth-grade English or mathematics are more likely to drop out of high school, hence, the academic support plays a crucial role in academic achievement (Peterson et al. 2014).

Therefore, academic support from various sources like family, teachers, and school services plays a vital role in boosting learners' self-esteem, motivation, and overall academic performance in secondary school settings. Whereas the absence of academic support can lead to increased dropout rates, lower academic achievement, and higher levels of stress among secondary school learners.

- **Provision of academic support**

The participants expressed the assistance offered by teachers and the support received from the school. On the contrary, some participants highlighted a perceived lack of support from the school, while others noted that the support provided was insufficient. Furthermore, participants shared with the researcher instances where teachers had been absent from class, impacting their learning experience. The availability of teachers has an impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. When teachers are present and actively engaged in the classroom, learners benefit from consistent instruction, guidance, and support, leading to improved learning outcomes (Medrano, 2019). The presence of teachers is critical in influencing academic success and overall educational experience of secondary school learners.

On the other hand, the unavailability of teachers, can have a negative impact on the academic performance of secondary school learners. The teacher absenteeism is associated with poor performance of learners (Ameeq et al. 2018). When teachers are absent, learners may miss critical lessons, leading to gaps in their learning and potential failures in examinations academic performance (Medrano, 2019).

- **Increased motivation from teachers**

Motivation plays a significant role in improving learners' academic performance. Teachers can establish a positive learning atmosphere that fosters learner engagement and active participation. The motivation of learners by teachers is necessary because it directly correlates with improved academic performance, learner engagement, positive relationships, and learner behavior. This active involvement in learning activities can boost student performance (Oluoch and Gogo, 2022). Teachers are more likely to build strong relationships with learners, fostering a supportive and encouraging atmosphere that can positively impact learner motivation and performance. Teacher motivation can influence learner behavior, attitudes, and effort in the classroom (Vero and Puka, 2017).

- **Restructuring of the academic calendar**

Participants explained the irregular attendance and the need to attend school every day. Regular attendance is associated with academic success and higher achievement levels. Every school day missed represents a lost opportunity for learners to learn and it can hinder even the teacher's ability to provide effective learning opportunities, impacting learner achievement (Hancock et al. 2013). Attending school every day is crucial for the academic performance of secondary school learners. Regular attendance is strongly linked to higher achievement levels, early indicators of success, and long-term educational outcomes.

- **Increased commitment from teachers**

Committed teachers are more likely to create an effective learning environment that enhances learners' abilities and leads to greater academic achievement. Teachers are encouraged to build strong, supportive relationships with their learners, which can have a significant influence on learners' academic achievement (Altun, 2017). Increased commitment from teachers is a crucial factor that contributes to enhanced academic achievement among secondary school learners. (Bibiso et al. 2017).

- **Increased self-commitment and preparation**

The participants expressed their belief in their capabilities to attain academic goals, highlighting their dedication, motivation toward studies, and confidence in enhancing academic performance. They also expressed their commitment to academic success and described the changes they have implemented to progress towards their educational goals. Self-

commitment plays a significant role in the academic performance of secondary school learners. The study that was conducted by Hayat et al. (2020) suggests that self-efficacy beliefs, which lead to increased commitment, effort, and perseverance, can positively impact academic performance. Commitment can enhance learners' motivation, engagement, and overall academic success (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023).

Self-commitment is a crucial factor in the academic performance of secondary school learners, as it promotes self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and engagement, ultimately leading to better academic performance.

- **Motivation**

Motivation could be intrinsic or extrinsic, while learners can motivate themselves intrinsically, extrinsic motivation could be obtained from people who are close learners like they are parents, teachers, and friends (Ah Gang Grace, 2020). Intrinsic motivation refers to behaviors that an individual engages in for one's pleasure (Deci and Ryan, 2012). The individual voluntarily performs an act in the absence of material rewards or constraints. Learners who are motivated intrinsically are considered to succeed better than those motivated extrinsically (Ebenezer and Ermie, 2019). It is not surprising that intrinsic motivation is more desirable by educators (Gana et al. 2019). This is because intrinsic motivation leads to better learning outcomes. One factor identified to facilitate intrinsic motivation is when learners receive positive feedback on their learning (Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Lens, and Sideridis, 2008).

On the other hand, a learner who engages in learning because of the possibility of some instrumental gain can be said to be extrinsically motivated (Cerasoli et al. 2014). The initial notion about extrinsic motivation was that individuals who were not self-determined were more likely to rely on extrinsic motivation, and thus relied heavily on external events to initiate activities (Vallerand, 2012). However, different types of extrinsic motivation have been suggested (Vallerand, 2012). Although some believe a student's extrinsic and intrinsic motivations may be separate and have no effect on each other (Emmett and McGee, 2013), others look at motivation as a complex system with intrinsic and extrinsic motives working simultaneously (Cerasoli et al. 2014; Lemos and Veríssimo, 2014).

Gender has been identified to play a role in motivation. Sikwani (2014) also posits that females are highly motivated than males.

6.3 SUMMARY

Research has not been done in the South African setting which could provide valuable information on the subject matter. The findings of this study can contribute to providing more straightforward ways or guidelines on how to improve education outcomes for secondary school learners. Most significantly, it could provide a foundational starting point for the school health nurse to enhance their practice in mental health nursing. Possibly scholars can use the findings of this study to develop instruments to assess the mental health factors of the learners. Also, interventions can be formulated focusing on how nurses can intervene to improve the learners' mental health.

The study employed a multi-method research design, incorporating both semi-structured interviews and a scoping review, to investigate the research question regarding the mental health factors influencing the academic performance of secondary school learners. The findings revealed the presence of several key factors. An integration of the data gathered from the structured interviews and the scoping review was conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

A summary of the study and a description of the limitations and recommendations are provided. The conclusion is also stated in this chapter.

7.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This study aims to describe the mental health factors that affect the academic performance of learners. To gain an understanding of the common mental health factors that are perceived to influence the academic performance of learners.

The objectives of the study were divided into two phases which included semi-structured interviews and the scoping review. Phase one was to explore and describe the mental health factors affecting the academic performance of secondary school learners and how best to identify and manage them. Phase two was to conduct a scoping review to explore the literature on mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners. The semi-structured interviews and scoping review were used to collect data. Individual interviews were conducted from October to November 2023, among grades 8 to 12 learners who were registered in a secondary school in Gauteng at the time of data collection. Data saturation was reached with the sixteenth participant in the study, which included nine male participants and seven female participants. The summary of the study is as follows:

In summary:

Semi-structured interviews and a scoping review were conducted and an interview guide with questions was used to serve as a roadmap, outlining a list of open-ended questions that were covered during the interview. Learners expressed a range of factors that had an influence on their academic performance, involving elements of psychological, social, and emotional well-being. Through their expressions, it became evident that these aspects play a significant role in shaping the educational outcomes and experiences of learners. By recognising and addressing the link between psychological, social, and emotional factors, educators can better support learners in achieving academic success. Mental health needs, coping strategies/mechanism

learning infrastructure and academic support were the themes formulated during data analysis of the study.

Participants expressed lack of support from educators within the school setting, leading to poor teacher-learner relationships. Their feedback emphasised the importance of active teacher involvement and the provision of essential support to encourage academic performance. Participants emphasized the important role teachers play in promoting a conducive learning environment and encouraging positive relationships with learners to improve educational outcomes. Other learners expressed concerns regarding the lack of support at home resulting from family stress, broken family structures, including family conflict, and poor family relationships. Their concerns shed light on the significant impact of family dynamics on their academic journey and overall well-being. Recognizing and addressing these familial challenges is crucial in providing comprehensive support to learners, encouraging resilience, and promoting positive academic outcomes.

Triangulation of data collected through a scoping review and individual interviews was conducted to enhance the strength and validity of the research findings. By employing triangulation approach, a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the research topic was achieved through the integration of diverse data sources and perspectives. This strategy not only enriched the depth of analysis but also provided a complete interpretation of the data, thereby strengthening the credibility and reliability of the study results.

7.3 LIMITATIONS

The study was confined to a single Secondary School in Gauteng and involved a scoping review, it is important to acknowledge that the findings cannot be generalised to incorporate learners in other Secondary Schools within Gauteng or South Africa. The limitations of the study's scope and focus on a specific school setting constrained the generalizability of the results beyond this particular context.

It was observed that some learners faced challenges expressing themselves fluently in English, which could have hindered their ability to provide accurate responses to the interview questions. Recognizing this barrier, the researcher demonstrated flexibility by permitting these learners to use their mother tongue during the interviews. Subsequently, the data collected in their home language was transcribed and carefully translated into English to ensure that all responses were accurately captured and interpreted. This approach not only facilitated effective

communication but also enabled a more inclusive and comprehensive analysis of the data, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study findings.

7.3.1 Absence of School Health Nurse Representation

The role of the school health nurse is mentioned only in Chapters 1 and 7, without any detailed discussion or analysis in the main body of the study. This omission limits the ability to assess how their involvement might have influenced the findings. Additionally, none of the identified themes or psychological factors discussed in the research mention the role of school health nurses. This exclusion may overlook crucial aspects of learners' health and well-being that are normally addressed by school health nurses.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the results from this study about the school authorities school health nursing, and nursing research. To effectively support learners' mental well-being and enhance their educational journey, it is imperative to provide access to mental health resources, including counselling services. Additionally, encouraging learners to seek help when needed promotes a culture of care and support. By implementing these strategies carefully and ensuring prompt referrals and interventions, educators and health practitioners can collectively contribute to improving learners' mental health and, consequently, promoting positive educational outcomes.

7.4.1 Recommendations Department of basic education and stakeholders

With the prevalence of mental health problems among secondary school learners, it is imperative to address these problems to ensure the well-being and academic success of learners. In the light of this, the following recommendations for the collaborative effort by the school authorities and school health nursing practice are made:

- According to Shung-King et al. (2013), implementation of the Integrated School Health Programme (ISHP) is crucial to increase knowledge and awareness of health-promoting behaviors, develop systems for care and support, facilitate early identification and treatment of health barriers to learning, and provide comprehensive health services for learners in primary and secondary schools.
- Provide Mental Health Support Services by ensuring that schools offer mental health support services through counsellors, social workers, or psychologists to create a healthy environment for learners. Allocating funds for mental health professionals and

establishing safe spaces for learners can significantly contribute to supporting their mental well-being (Ormiston et al. 2021).

- Collaborate with Mental Health Professionals by establishment of partnerships with mental health professionals to provide comprehensive support and services for learners with mental health challenges. According to Kern et al. (2017), collaborative efforts can ensure a holistic approach to addressing mental health problems within the school setting.
- School health nurses should be trained to recognize early warning signs of mental health issues in learners and facilitate timely referrals to appropriate mental health professionals for intervention and support (Ormiston et al. 2021).
- Promote mental health awareness by educating learners, teachers, and parents about mental health problems, prevention strategies, and available resources to create a supportive and informed school community (Ormiston et al. 2021).
- Create safe and supportive environments. According to Stanley, (2013), it is crucial to encouragement a caring space within the school where learners feel comfortable discussing their mental health concerns without fear of judgment, promoting open dialogue and destigmatizing mental health discussions.
- Train Teachers and Staff. According to Lever et al. (2017), it is imperative to provide training for teachers and staff on how to identify signs of mental health concerns in learners, respond appropriately, and create a supportive environment that prioritizes mental health awareness and well-being.

By implementing these recommendations in South African schools, authorities and school health nursing teams can play a crucial role in supporting the mental well-being of secondary school learners, promoting a positive learning environment conducive to academic success and overall academic performance.

7.4.2 Recommendations for Nursing Research

To ensure accurate and applicable insights for a broader population of learners, future research endeavours should consider incorporating multiple schools and diverse settings to enhance the external validity and generalizability of the findings.

To address these limitations and enhance the validity and applicability of research findings, future studies should consider incorporating multiple schools or diverse settings to ensure a more representative and detailed understanding of this topic.

Future studies should clearly include and analyse the role of school health nurses to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their impact on learners' health and educational outcomes.

7.5 CONCLUSION

In this study, it was discovered that adolescent learners face numerous challenges during their educational journey, which can have adverse effects on their mental well-being and academic success. These challenges, as expressed and recognized by learners themselves, can drastically hinder their performance in school. Early detection, intervention, and treatment are crucial in mitigating the influences of mental health problems on adolescents' academic achievements and overall academic performance.

Additionally, the study provided insights into the mental health factors that impact on secondary school learners and their educational outcomes. By shedding light on these influences, educators and school health nurses can identify and address mental health problems early. This stresses the significance of teachers and school health nurses in recognizing signs of mental health problems and facilitating timely referrals to appropriate services.

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LIST OF ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE: A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Demographic Data	
Age	
Grade	
Gender	
Guiding questions	

1. What can you tell me about your academic/school performance; how are you doing?
2. Please share with me how confident you have recently felt in your academic/school capabilities.
3. What confidence do you have that you can successfully focus on your school subjects?

Additional guiding questions:

- Please share with me any times you have been bothered by low feelings, stress, or sadness over the past few months.
- What are the problems that affect your performance in school?
- How do these problems affect your ability to perform in class?
- What is frustrating you? How do you plan to deal with that frustration?
- Please share with me how much emotional support you feel you have at school. What about at home?
- Given what you have told me today, what do you think teachers or other adults at school can do to help you better?

ANNEXURE: B

Requesting permission from Gauteng Department of Basic Education

University of Witwatersrand
Faculty of Health Science
Department of Nursing Education
7 York Rd
Parktown
2193

Gauteng Department of Basic Education,
111 Commissioner Street
Johannesburg
2001

Provincial Research Ethics Committee

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Wellington Thulani Nxumalo, am a postgraduate student currently pursuing my Masters degree in Nursing. I am currently registered at the University of Witwatersrand. As part of the fulfilment of my studies, I am required to conduct a study. I, therefore, with your permission, wish to conduct my study at Secondary School. The study title is: **"The mental health factors influencing academic performance of Secondary School learners in Gauteng."**

The purpose of this study is to describe the mental health factors that affect the academic performance of learners.

Research has not been done in the South African setting and will provide valuable information on the subject. The findings of this can contribute to providing simpler ways or guidelines on how to improve education outcomes for secondary school learners. You are kindly requested to grant permission for the performance of this qualitative study that will involve the voluntary participation of learners at the school.

Data will be collected by conducting individual interviews and a scoping review. The researcher requires the learners at the school. Participation is voluntary, and anonymity will be ensured by using pseudo names when reporting on the results of the study. The report of the study will be submitted to the University of Witwatersrand, Department of Nursing Education, and results can be made available to you, should you wish.

I am required to submit a letter of permission from you allowing me to access the research setting and collect data to obtain ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Witwatersrand. Data collection may only commence once the study is cleared by the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408,
Email: hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Please feel free to contact us should you require any further information or report an adverse event.

Researcher: Wellington Thulani Nxumalo
Mobile number: 0823955217
Email: thulanin82@gmail.com / 2425411@learners.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr Nokuthula Nkosi
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Co-Supervisor: Prof Thandisizwe Mavundla
Phone number: 011 488 4274
Email: Thandisizwe.mavundla@wits.ac.za

Your consideration will be highly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully

Wellington Thulani Nxumalo

(MSc Nursing Student)

ANNEXURE: C

Requesting permission from Department of Basic Education – West District

University of Witwatersrand
Faculty of Health Science
Department of Nursing Education
7 York Rd
Parktown
2193

Department of Basic Education – West District
Private Bag X

District Research Ethics Committee

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Wellington Thulani Nxumalo, am a postgraduate student currently pursuing my Masters degree in Nursing. I am currently registered at the University of Witwatersrand. As part of the fulfilment of my studies, I am required to conduct a study. I, therefore, with your permission, wish to conduct my study at Secondary School. The study title is: **"The mental health factors influencing academic performance of Secondary School learners in Gauteng."**

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Please feel free to contact us should you require any further information or report an adverse event.

Researcher: Wellington Thulani Nxumalo
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Your consideration will be highly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully

Wellington Thulani Nxumalo

(MSc Nursing Student)

ANNEXURE: D

Requesting permission from **Secondary School**

University of Witwatersrand
Faculty of Health Science
Department of Nursing Education
7 York Rd
Parktown
2193

The School Research Ethics Committee

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Wellington Thulani Nxumalo, am a postgraduate student currently pursuing my Masters degree in Nursing. I am currently registered at the University of Witwatersrand. As part of the fulfilment of my studies, I am required to conduct a study. I, therefore, with your permission, wish to conduct my study at Secondary School. The study title is: **"The mental health factors influencing academic performance of Secondary School learners in Gauteng."**

The purpose of this study is to describe the mental health factors that affect the academic performance of learners.

Research has not been done in the South African setting and will provide valuable information on the subject. The findings of this can contribute to providing simpler ways or guidelines on how to improve education outcomes for secondary school learners. You are kindly requested to grant permission for the performance of this qualitative study that will involve the voluntary participation of learners at the school.

Data will be collected by conducting individual interviews and a scoping review. The researcher requires the learners at the school. Participation is voluntary, and anonymity will be ensured by using pseudo names when reporting on the results of the study. The report of the study will be submitted to

the University of Witwatersrand, Department of Nursing Education, and results can be made available to you, should you wish.

I am required to submit a letter of permission from you allowing me to access the research setting and collect data to obtain ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Witwatersrand. Data collection may only commence once the study is cleared by the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408,
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Researcher: Wellington Thulani Nxumalo
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Phone number: 011 488 4274
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Your consideration will be highly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully

Wellington Thulani Nxumalo

(MSc Nursing Student)

ANNEXURE: E

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – LEARNERS

Good day

My name is Wellington Thulani Nxumalo. I am a Masters student in Nursing Science at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I am doing a study to figure out the mental health factors that affect the academic performance of learners at a secondary school level and how best to identify and manage them. The title of the study is "the mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners in Gauteng." You are being asked to take part in one interview session of the research study because you are a registered secondary school learner.

For this research, I will ask you some questions about how you feel about school, how you manage your schoolwork, how you cope at school, and what is affecting your school performance. The information collected about you during this study will be kept safely locked up. The study information about you will not be shared with your teachers or parent(s)/guardian(s). The researcher will not tell your friends or anyone else. Nobody will know it except my Supervisors from the University of the Witwatersrand.

If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 30 to 60 minutes. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. The interview will take place at the school at a date and time suitable for you after school.

I do not think that any big problems will happen to you as part of this study, but you might feel sad when I ask about bad things that happen at school. You also might be upset if I ask you about things that stress you.

You should know that:

- You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you say no, you will not get into trouble with the University of the Witwatersrand, your teachers, or the school.
- You may stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to.
- Your parent(s)/guardian(s) were asked if they would allow you to be in this study. Even if they say yes, it is still your choice whether or not to take part.
- You will not be paid for being in this research study.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, you or your parent(s)/guardian(s) can contact me or my supervisors on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher:

Mr. Wellington Thulani Nxumalo, email: 2425411@learners.wits.ac.za, phone number: 0823955217

Supervisor:

Dr Nokuthula Nkosi, email: nokuthula.nkosi1@wits.ac.za, phone number: 011 488 3094

Co-Supervisor:

Prof Thandisizwe Mavundla, email: Thandisizwe.mavundla@wits.ac.za, phone number: 011 488 4274

ANNEXURE: F

MINORS ASSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: The mental health factors influencing academic performance of Secondary School learners in Gauteng

NAME OF RESEARCHER: Wellington Thulani Nxumalo

I, ……., (the learner) agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report).	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

…… (Signature)
…… (Name of participant)
…… (Date)

…… (Signature)
…… (Name of researcher)
…… (Date)

ANNEXURE: G

ASSENT FOR MINORS TO VIEW ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE RESULTS

PROJECT TITLE: The mental health factors influencing academic performance of Secondary School learners in Gauteng.

NAME OF THE RESEARCHER: Wellington Thulani Nxumalo

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may access my academic performance results.	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher in their research report may use the information about my academic performance.	YES	NO
I agree that my academic performance results will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report).	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information provided in my academic performance results (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained), but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

…… (Signature)
…… (Name of participant)
…… (Date)

…… (Signature)
…… (Name of researcher)
…… (Date)

ANNEXURE: H

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S)

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Wellington Thulani Nxumalo. I am a Masters student in Nursing Science at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisors are Dr NG Nkosi and Prof. T Mavundla. I am conducting a research study about the mental health factors affecting academic performance learners at a secondary school level and how best to identify and manage them. The study title is the mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners in Gauteng.

I am inviting your child to take part in one interview session answering questions. If you allow the learner to take part, participation in this research study will last about 30 to 60 minutes. The interview will take place at the school at a date and time suitable for the learner after school. The learner was selected because his/her academic performance is reportedly below average. Therefore, the researcher would like to probe into the possible contributing factors.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in a locked cupboard in the Nursing Department for two years of the publication of the research findings and/or deleted after six years if no publications arise from this research. Only the researcher and the Supervisors will have access to the data.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the research study results, I will not include the learner's name or anything else that could identify him/her. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but the learner's name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If the learner decides to take part in the research study, it should be because you granted permission, and the learner also wants to volunteer. The learner does not have to take part. The learner can stop being in the study at any time. The learner does not have to answer any questions he/she does not want to. The learner will not get any direct benefits if he/she chooses to join the research study. The learner will not lose any services, benefits, or rights he/she would normally have if he/she decides not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. The learner will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life / some of the questions asked may make the learner feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time. If the learner needs some support or counseling services following the interview, these are available free of charge by the mental health nurse specialist and counsellor and at the local clinic.

The name of the counselor is Mr. Takalani J. Mashadzha, and the contact details for the counseling service are 076 944 1882.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisors on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher:
Mr. Wellington Thulani Nxumalo, email: 2425411@learners.wits.ac.za, phone number: 0823955217

Supervisor:
Dr Nokuthula Nkosi, email: nokuthula.nkosi1@wits.ac.za, phone number: 011 488 3094

Co-Supervisor:
Prof Thandisizwe Mavundla, email: Thandisizwe.mavundla@wits.ac.za, phone number: 011 488 4274

ANNEXURE: I

PARENT CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: The mental health factors influencing academic performance of Secondary School learners in Gauteng.

Name of researcher: Wellington Thulani Nxumalo

I, ……., agree that my child ……(child's name) can participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:
(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from the interview may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my child's participation will remain anonymous (his/her name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report).	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information he/she provides in the interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my child's name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

…… (Signature)
…… (Name of parent/guardian)
…… (Date)

…… (Signature)
…… (Name of researcher)
…… (Date)

ANNEXURE: J

PARENTS/GUARDIANS CONSENT TO VIEW LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE RESULTS

PROJECT TITLE: The mental health factors influencing academic performance of Secondary School learners in Gauteng.

NAME OF THE RESEARCHER: Wellington Thulani Nxumalo

I, ……., (parent/guardian's name), agree that my child ……., (learner's name) can participate in this research project

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

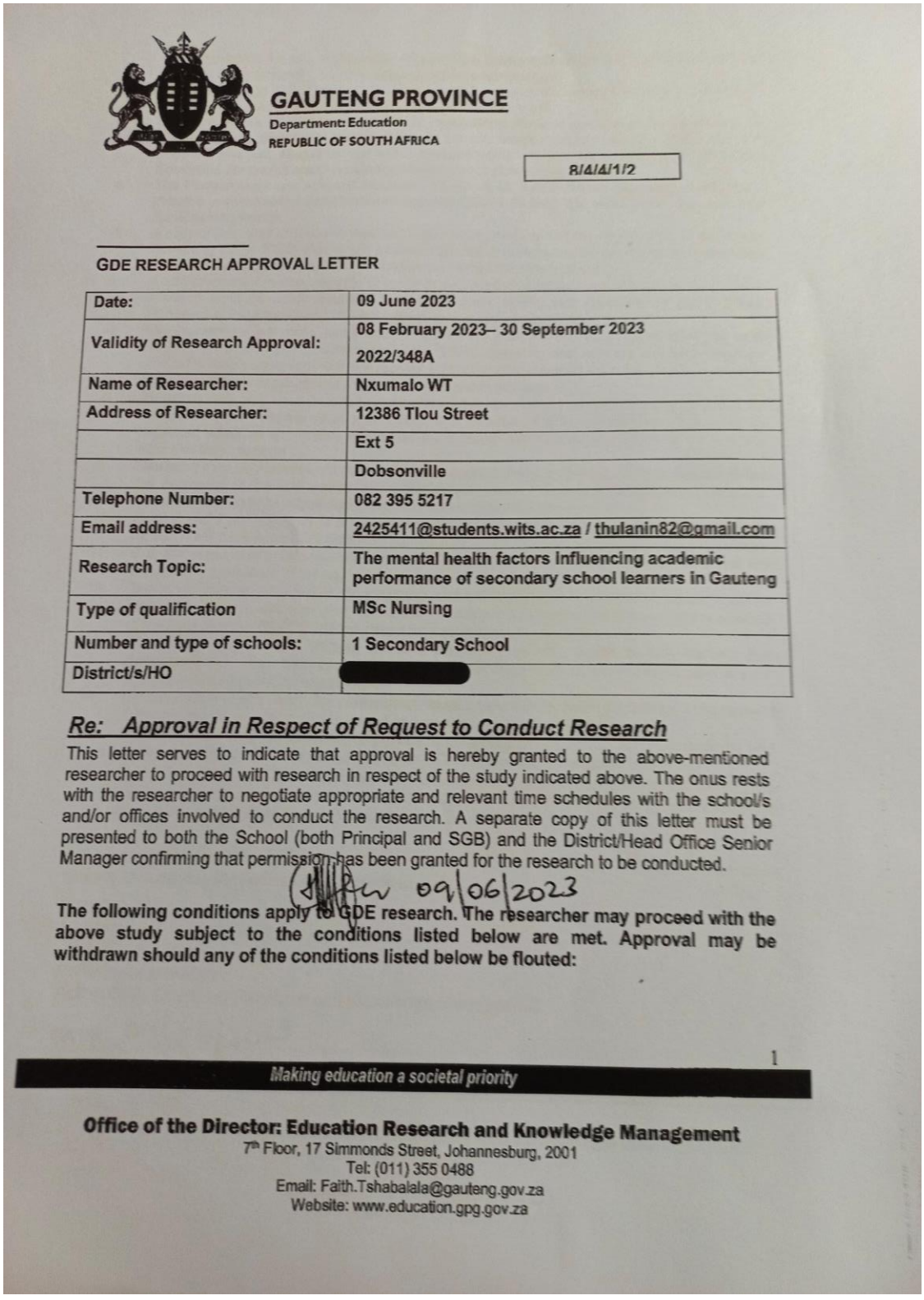
The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may access my child's academic performance results	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher in their research report may use the information about my child's academic performance.	YES	NO
I agree that my child's academic performance results will remain anonymous (the researcher in their research report will not use my child's name).	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information provided in my child's academic performance results (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained), but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

…… (Signature)
…… (Name of parent/guardian)
…… (Date)

…… (Signature)
…… (Name of researcher)
…… (Date)

ANNEXURE: K

Permission letter – Gauteng Department of Basic Education



GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

R/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	09 June 2023
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2023– 30 September 2023 2022/348A
Name of Researcher:	Nxumalo WT
Address of Researcher:	12386 Tlou Street
	Ext 5
	Dobsonville
Telephone Number:	082 395 5217
Email address:	2425411@students.wits.ac.za / thulanin82@gmail.com
Research Topic:	The mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners in Gauteng
Type of qualification	MSc Nursing
Number and type of schools:	1 Secondary School
District/s/HO	[redacted]

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

09/06/2023

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below are met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. *The letter would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. ***Because of the relaxation of COVID 19 regulations researchers can collect data online, telephonically, physically access schools, or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.***
4. ***The Researchers are advised to wear a mask at all times, Social distance at all times, Provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and Sanitise frequently.***
5. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s has been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
6. *A letter/document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs, and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
7. *The Researcher will make every effort to obtain the goodwill and cooperation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers, and learners involved. Persons who offer their cooperation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
8. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school program is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
9. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
10. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
11. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
12. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes, and telephones, and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
13. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers, and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
14. *On completion of the study, the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
15. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings, and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
16. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a summary of the purpose, findings, and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

.....

Dr. Gumani Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

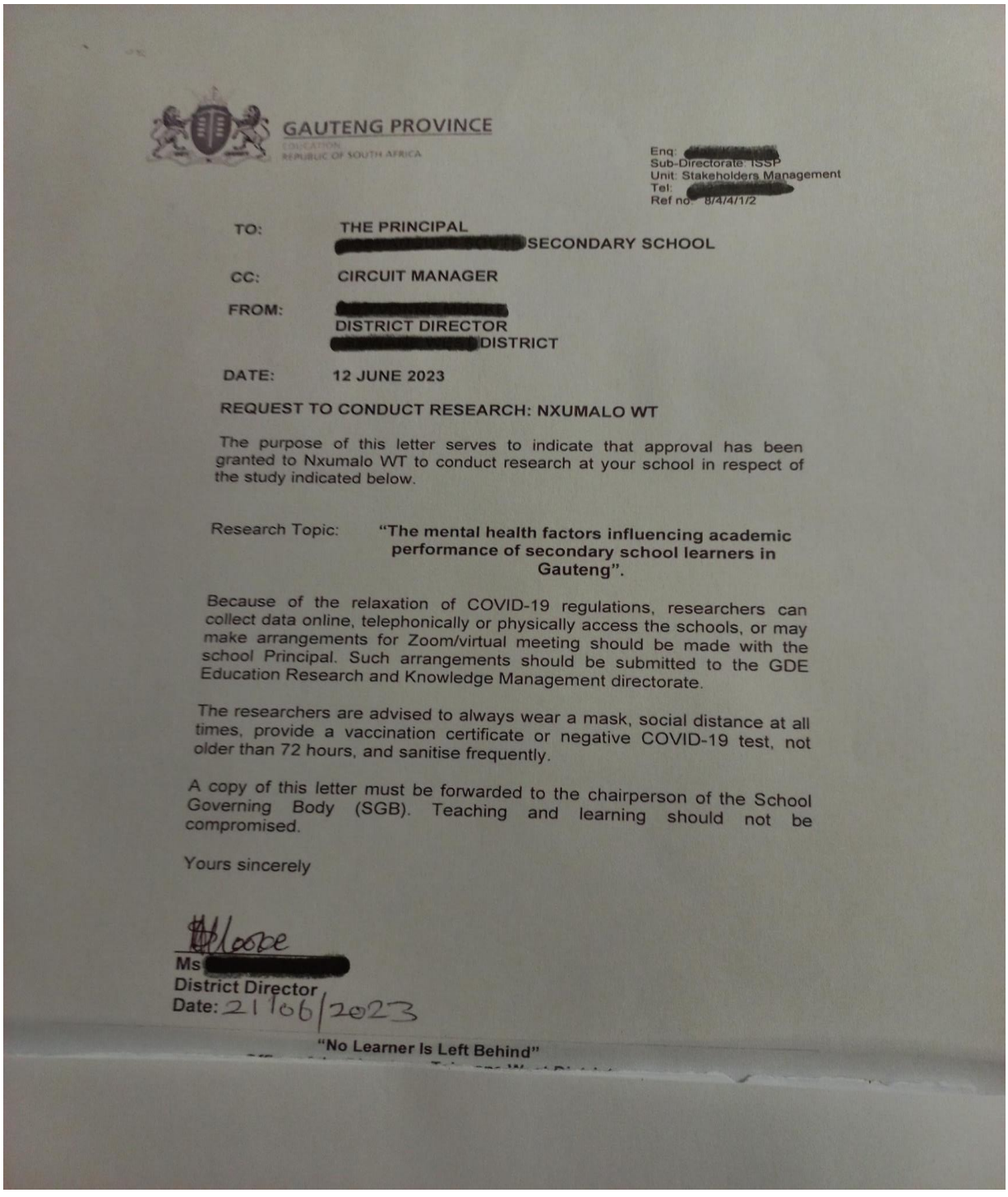
DATE: 09/06/2023

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

NB: The details of the school and district have been hidden to maintain anonymity.

ANNEXURE: L

Permission letter – Department of Basic Education: West District



GAUTENG PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Enq: [redacted]
Sub-Directorate: ISSP
Unit: Stakeholders Management
Tel: [redacted]
Ref no: 8/4/4/1/2

TO: THE PRINCIPAL
[redacted] SECONDARY SCHOOL

CC: CIRCUIT MANAGER

FROM: [redacted]
DISTRICT DIRECTOR
[redacted] DISTRICT

DATE: 12 JUNE 2023

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: NXUMALO WT

The purpose of this letter serves to indicate that approval has been granted to Nxumalo WT to conduct research at your school in respect of the study indicated below.

Research Topic: **"The mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners in Gauteng".**

Because of the relaxation of COVID-19 regulations, researchers can collect data online, telephonically or physically access the schools, or may make arrangements for Zoom/virtual meeting should be made with the school Principal. Such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.

The researchers are advised to always wear a mask, social distance at all times, provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and sanitise frequently.

A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB). Teaching and learning should not be compromised.

Yours sincerely

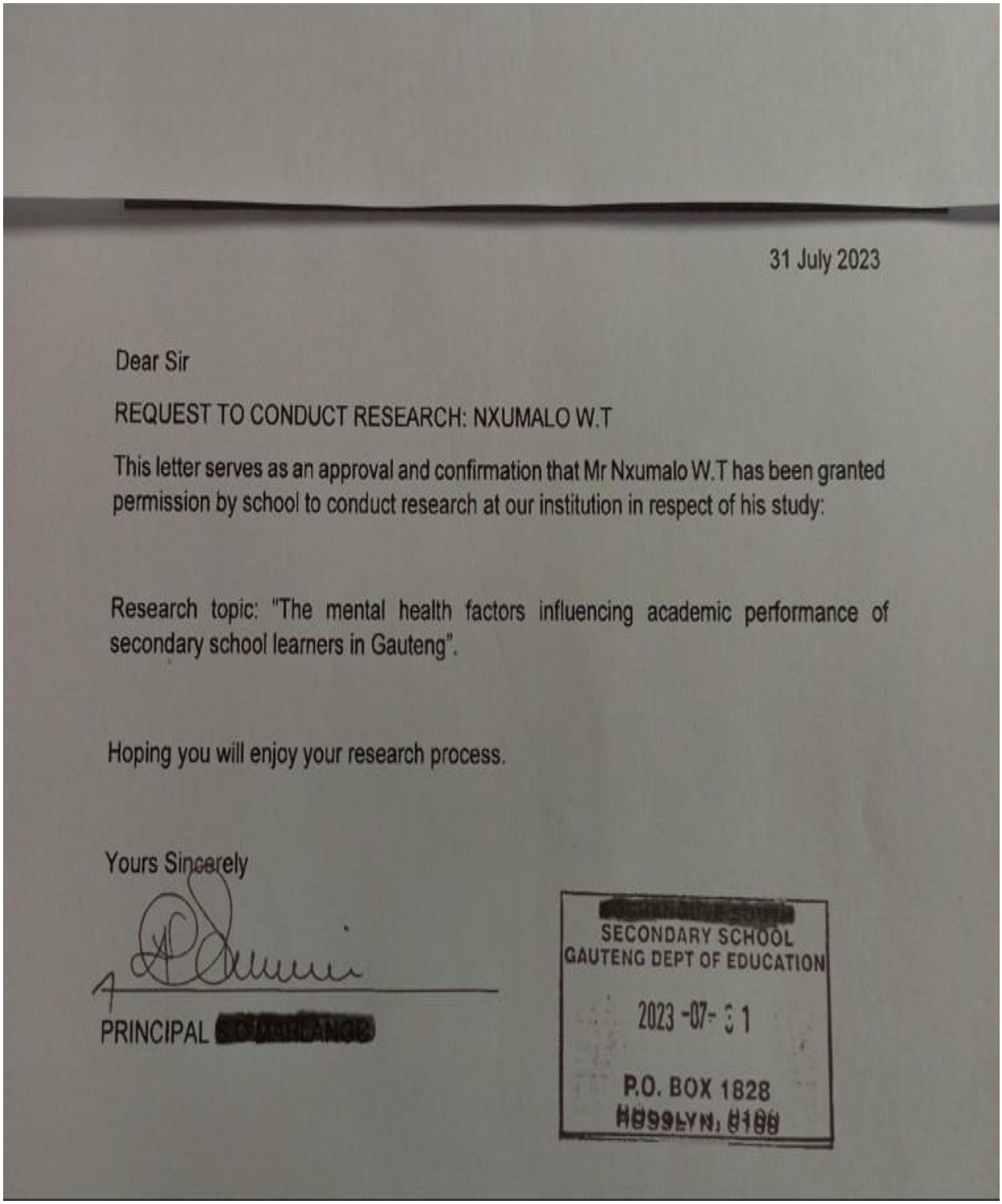
Ms [redacted]
District Director
Date: 21/06/2023

"No Learner Is Left Behind"

NB: The details of the school and district have been hidden to maintain anonymity.

ANNEXURE: M

Permission letter – **Secondary School**



[redacted]

31 July 2023

Dear Sir

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: NXUMALO W.T

This letter serves as an approval and confirmation that Mr Nxumalo W.T has been granted permission by school to conduct research at our institution in respect of his study:

Research topic: "The mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners in Gauteng".

Hoping you will enjoy your research process.

Yours Sincerely

PRINCIPAL [redacted]

[redacted]
SECONDARY SCHOOL
GAUTENG DEPT OF EDUCATION
2023 -07- 31
P.O. BOX 1828
[redacted]

NB: The details of the school and district have been hidden to maintain anonymity.

ANNEXURE: N

Ethical clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Nxumalo

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/11/47**
PROJECT TITLE	The mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners in Gauteng
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mr W Nxumalo
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	School of Therapeutic Sciences/
DATE CONSIDERED	18 November 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Low
EXPIRY DATE	14 June 2026

DATE 15 September 2023 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr N Nkosi and Prof T Mavundle

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **A SIGNED COPY** returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I/we agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low Risk studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

_____ 29/09/2023
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

ANNEXURE: O

Approval of Title

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Private Bag 3 Wits, 2050
Fax: 027117172119
Tel: 02711 7172076

Reference: Mrs Sandra Benn
E-mail: sandra.benn@wits.ac.za

29 July 2022
Person No: 2425411
PAG

Mr WT Nxumalo
12386
Tlou Street
Dobsonville Ext 5
1863
South Africa

Dear Mr Wellington Nxumalo

Master of Science in Nursing: Approval of Title

We have pleasure in advising that your proposal entitled *The mental health factors influencing academic performance of secondary school learners in Gauteng* has been approved. Please note that any amendments to this title have to be endorsed by the Faculty's higher degrees committee and formally approved.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Sandra Benn
Faculty Registrar
Faculty of Health Sciences