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Educators' perceptions of school violence.

Trakman, Vanessa Monique

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

While school violence appears prevalent worldwide, recent research has shown that 'South African schools are in fact the most dangerous in the world' (South African Institute of Race Relations, [SAIRR], 2008). A survey conducted by the SAIRR (2008), revealed that only 23 % of pupils feel safe at South African schools. Figures such as these have called the Department of Education's ability to protect pupils in South Africa into question (Blaser, 2008b). Furthermore, calls for a National Safety Plan have emphasised that school violence directly undermines the country's drive to produce the "skills necessary to drive the South African economy" (Blaser, 2008b, p. 1).

Despite the lack of comprehensive and reliable data, current statistics on school violence in South Africa reveal that 160 learners per 1, 000 are violently victimised (Burton, 2008c). Additionally, in the National Schools Violence Study, it was revealed that 1 821 054 learners throughout South Africa are exposed to violence at schools (Burton, 2008c). These alarming statistics imply that research on school violence should be prioritised.

Various studies have been conducted on school violence; however, little attention has been paid to educators and their perceptions of this phenomenon both internationally and in South Africa. The majority of the data gathered on school violence has been obtained through the perspectives of learners within the school context. While learners undoubtedly provide valuable sources of information, the exclusion of educators as primary stakeholders in education and the community in school violence research is cause for concern (Fisher & Kettl, 2003). Indeed, exploring educators' perceptions of violence is vital to a more rounded and holistic understanding of the phenomenon. To this end, this study explores educators' perceptions of the complexities of school violence and its relationship to broader community contextual factors in Alexandra, South Africa.

1.1. RESEARCH RATIONALE

Research on school violence has become increasingly important, considering the increasing levels of violence that is characteristic of many schools across the globe. This has resulted in an expanding literature base internationally. In South Africa however, there still exists limited research in this area, particularly from an educators' perspective. Additionally, very few in-depth qualitative studies have been conducted on educators and their perceptions of school violence in the country (Booyens, 2003) Therefore, educator's perceptions have been relatively understudied within this already limited pool of literature (Fisher & Kettl, 2003). This is alarming as educators observe violence and are both perpetrators and victims of violence in schools, therefore warranting the need for more research in this area.

The effects of South Africa's past and its violent legacy are widespread. However, research has shown that South Africa's townships are particularly violent places. While explanations for this risk are complex, Eliasov & Frank (2000) argue that children from disadvantaged communities observe increased levels of violence which manifest in township schools (Motsei, 1998, as cited in Fisher & Kettl, 2003). The township of Alexandra in Gauteng, with its high levels of general and school violence seemingly driven by shared community-based contextual factors, appears to be a case in point. Given the paucity of qualitative research on educators' understandings of school violence in South Africa, this study aimed to qualitatively analyse educators' perceptions of school violence in the seemingly 'at risk' area of Alexandra township.

1.2. AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore educators' perceptions of school violence in the disadvantaged community of Alexandra Township. It further aimed to explore how violence in the broader community may be reflected in schools embedded as historical sites of violence. As public sites of education and general socialisation, schools have been linked to a number of factors that appear to drive the prevalence of violence -

both internationally and in South Africa. Thus, an exploration of school violence allows a more general examination of community-based violence.

1.3. CHAPTER ORGANISATION

Chapter Two provides a review of the applicable literature. Within this section, various theoretical frameworks exploring and describing school violence and violence in general have been identified. Additionally, the prevalence and extent of school violence has been highlighted. The research has been grounded within an ecological perspective in order to provide an adequate understanding of the school violence phenomenon.

Chapter Three provides the methodology employed in the study. Included within this section are the research design, aims of the research and research questions, rationale for using participants and participant demographics, data gathering procedures and the methods of analysis. Additionally, the ethical guidelines and procedures utilised within the study have been addressed in this section.

Chapter Four attends to the themes elicited within the discussions and provides interpretations of this data. The themes reflect the way in which the educators perceive school violence, their perceptions of the contributing factors and their identification of related contextual factors. Three broad themes were identified, namely overpowering learners versus powerless teachers, the complexity of violence and victimisation and perpetration.

Finally, Chapter Five provides a conclusion and a set of recommendations based on the research findings. Furthermore, the limitations and strengths of the study are described and future considerations relating to research in this area of study have been suggested.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

School violence in South Africa is relatively under-researched, yet it continues to impact the well-being of those involved. South Africa is frequently described as having a sustained 'culture of violence', where our society accepts violence as a means to solving problems (Volgeman & Lewis, 1993). This culture is evident in the way violence plays out on the school grounds and in the classrooms. In South Africa, many individuals have been affected by violence as a result of its past. It is therefore unsurprising that schools, as historical sites of conflict, remain unsafe and violent (Mogano, 1993).

While various studies have attempted to explore the relationship between school violence and a "culture of violence', they have predominantly been conducted based on learners' perceptions and accounts of school-based violence. It is the perception of learners that have informed much of the data elicited within the various studies conducted. As educators are integral members of the school community, it is disturbing that their perceptions of school violence appear relatively understudied. As key stakeholders in education and more generally in the community, educators are familiar with the broader societal and economic infrastructure in which their schools are positioned (Fisher & Kettl, 2003). Therefore, given the pivotal role that educators play, it is essential that their perceptions are considered in order to exhaustively understand this phenomenon.

As a means of examining the knowledge base in this area, the following literature review attempts to reveal that educators' perceptions are often excluded. It further attempts to examine existing definitions, the prevalence of school-based violence and the existing theoretical frameworks that are offered to explain it.

2.2. DEFINING VIOLENCE

The World Health Organisation's World's Report on Violence and Health (2002) offers a comprehensive definition of violence and is one that is widely utilised. It defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (p. 5). This definition has, to a large extent, been influenced by a Public Health approach to violence, as violence is considered a major Public Health problem globally and in South Africa.

As the youth constitute a significant percentage of the data pool on violence, there is a significant overlap between associated factors for general violence and its manifestation amongst youth. Therefore, it is essential to consider the definition used to describe violence occurring amongst the youth in order to obtain a clearer understanding. Youth violence in particular may be defined as "any intentional physical, sexual or psychological assault on another person (or persons) by one or more young people aged 12-19 years" (Totten, 2005, p.1).

This understanding of youth violence is important because much of the youth go to school. However, there is a difference between youth violence in general and school violence. Therefore, it is imperative that the focus is on the school as a site in which specific issues come into play, rather than on youth's experiences of violence. In considering the purpose of this study, therefore, the focus remains on the youth that go to school.

The term "school violence" is contentious and therefore defining it presents challenges due to the lack of clarity and disagreement amongst theorists (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). According to Furlong and Morrison (2000), the term 'school violence' is understood as a complex concept that includes aggression and violent acts occurring within schools. A connection between youth and school violence has been made as schools appear to be a convenient site in which exposure to, involvement in and perpetration of violence occur (Dryfoos, 1993, as cited in Furlong & Morrison, 2000). In addition, Furlong and Morrison (2000) assert that the term 'school violence' further reflects how youth violence has an affect on the schooling process which may hamper learning and prevent learners from doing well (Furlong & Morrison, 2000).

Moreover, according to Furlong and Morrison (2000), no specific definition of school violence and its dimensions currently exist. They contend that school violence is a matrix constituted by both perpetration and victimisation in the violence cycle, as well as antisocial and criminal behaviour (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). In support of the lack of clarity on the definition, Furlong and Morrison (2000) further suggest that the term 'school violence' may refer to many parameters, such as the crime that occurs within schools, violent victimisation, delinquent behaviour, possession of weapons, substance use, gang activities or conflict resolution styles. In addition, Burton (2008b) advocates that the many manifestations of school violence may also include schoolyard fights, drug abuse and bullying.

As stated by Burton (2008b), *"to assume a homogenous or uniform understanding of violence detracts from what is often concealed by a conspiracy of silence, particularly less overt forms of violence"*(p. 3). This statement is further supported by Toure (2007, as cited in Burton, 2008b) who contends that school violence extends beyond the conventional school fighting into a key part of a broader culture of violence (Burton, 2008b). This terminology is particularly useful when considering the South African context and the complexities around violence occurring within South African schools. This understanding further acknowledges that accounts of school violence must extend beyond school sites and actors in order to more fully incorporate the underlying drivers of the phenomenon.

It is essential to emphasise that the objective of this research is to consider that schools are in fact a site in which external community factors extend into the school environment. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it is important to understand the term "school" as referring to the "physical location for violence that has roots in the community" (Furlong & Morrison, 2000, p. 5). This understanding provides an anchoring point on which this study is based.

Due to the contestation of the term "school violence" the above perspectives and definitions of school violence create disputes amongst the theorists, to use either of the proposed definitions separately detracts from a holistic understanding of school violence. Additionally, important critical aspects surrounding the term 'school

violence' may be unintentionally excluded, as the above perspectives on school violence illustrate. It is therefore important to draw from all perspectives. The South African context is such that it becomes necessary for aspects of all these understandings to be used in order to create a useable conception of the term.

As definitions vary, it is important to consider that in order to describe school violence accurately, a broad range of explanations incorporating all relevant aspects surrounding school violence needs to be utilised and therefore will be adopted throughout the following discussion. As the purpose of the study is to explore educator's perceptions of violence the focus will remain on violent acts occurring on the school grounds, as well as the less overt forms of violence which, according to Burton (2008b), includes the conspiracy to 'silence violence'. In addition to the importance of accepting the above broad definitions when attempting to understand the school violence phenomenon, Burton (2008b) and Toure's (2007) conceptualisation of violence is particularly relevant, both for the purpose of this study and within South African society, as it stresses the importance of considering covert forms of violence that may often be overlooked or regarded as insignificant.

2.3. EXTENT OF YOUTH AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Internationally, and in South Africa, there has been an increase in the focus of violence occurring within schools. According to the World Health Organisation's World's Report on Violence and Health (2002), youth violence is perceived to be one of the most visible forms of violence occurring within society. As previously mentioned, school violence and youth violence overlap as the school appears to be a site in which much youth violence takes place.

The magnitude and prevalence of violence has been measured globally, regionally and nationally. However, Burton (2008b) suggests that there is lack of reliable and comprehensive data on the extent of school violence in South Africa, as well as internationally. He further contends that there are varying reasons for the lack of adequate data, such as the failure and reluctance to report incidences, the stigma attached to reporting such acts, and the decision of educators or principles not to report acts of violence for fear of reprisal, violent retribution, or earning a negative

reputation. This therefore impacts the collection of reliable information, making it impossible to ascertain if school violence is in fact increasing (Burton, 2008b).

As Burton (2008a,b,c) has offered extensive input on the explanations of school violence and provides an awareness of how school violence fits in with the broader picture, particular reference will be made to his recent research studies throughout this research report. There are other theorists that have conducted research into this phenomenon; however, Burton's studies have particular relevance within the South African context. He considers and accounts for the relatively recent form of school violence and its relation to community contextual factors that exist in South Africa. The objectives of Burton's (2008a,b,c) recent studies were to elicit empirical data that is representative of schools, in order to provide insight into the extent of school violence. Furthermore, the data obtained is intended to inform policies and strategies that may assist in dealing with this widespread problem. To this end, the above provides reason for the reference made to Burton (2008a,b,c) and the studies he has conducted. Additionally, the data gathered through Burton's (2008a,b,c) studies is the most accessible and reliable.

2.3.1. School Violence - A Global Problem

Data obtained from global statistics reflects that the nature of school violence worldwide is relatively high. In the USA, it is estimated that 23 000 homicides occur within schools each year; in 10% of these cases, the perpetrator is under 18 years of age (Shaffii & Shaffii, 2001). According to the Centre for the Study and Prevention of School Violence in the USA, 16 000 violent crimes occur daily within schools; one crime every six seconds (Fisher & Kettle, 2003). Moreover, data collected from the National Crime Victimisation Survey in the USA in 1996 revealed that 1.3 million violent crimes are committed against learners in schools and immediately surrounding areas (Kaufman *et al*., 1998, as cited in Fisher & Kettle, 2003). Currently, the latest data in the United States reveals that 57 per 1 000 learners are victims of violence occurring at schools (Burton, 2008c).

Burton (2008c) links American and South African statistics and states, "*In real terms, South African learners are victimised at a rate of 160 learners per 1, 000. This rate is significantly higher than, for example, the United States, where the latest data yields a*

rate of 57 learners per 1, 000" (p. 2). This statement reflects that a significantly lower rate of school violence occurs in the USA than in South Africa, indicating that school violence in South Africa is proportionately higher.

Data from high-middle-income countries such as Brazil indicate that 45% of learners are robbed at school. In addition, a recent study indicated a high prevalence rate of general school violence (Burton, 2008c). The above proportions attest to the fact that school violence is a global problem that seems to cross socio-economic divides, at least at macro level.

2.3.2. School Violence in South Africa

School violence is increasing and continues to be a problem in South Africa (Booysens, 2003). According to the South African Institute of Race Relations (SSAIR, 2008), only 23% of pupils report feeling safe at school. Furthermore, schools in South Africa have been reported as being the most dangerous in the world (Magome, 2008). Examples of the forms of danger are numerous[1] and racial violence at schools has also been reported to be on the increase (Doko, 2008).

In one of the studies conducted by Burton (2008c), it was found that schools are a common site where children and adolescents are at risk of experiencing violence and assault. The National Schools Violence Study (NSVS) reported that 15.3% of learners had experienced a form of violence during school hours (Burton, 2008c). This implies that 1 821 054 learners throughout the country have been exposed to such violence (Burton, 2008c). Furthermore, 20% of learners report experiencing physical assault while at school and a further 4.8% of female learners reported being sexually assaulted or raped (Burton, 2008c).

What is alarming is the role that educators play in the perpetuation of violence on school grounds (Burton, 2008b). Research studies state that seven out of ten learners report being physically beaten for doing something wrong at school (Burton, 2008b).

[1] At Mbelebe High School, a 17 year old teenager went on a shooting spree and caused teachers and pupils to fear for their lives. Another incident occurred at Emanbuza High School weeks earlier where a teacher was held up in her class and robbed of R20. A pupil from Nkwenkwezi High School witnessed the murder of his friend at school. These all occurred in the Township of Umlazi Kwa Zulu Natal (Star Newspaper, 2008, February 14).

A further 14.9% of learners said that they had been assaulted by their teachers (Burton, 2008b). Blaser (2008a) contends that educators contribute to the existing 'culture of violence' and despite corporal punishment being prohibited, 50% of learners report being assaulted by their teachers. However, in contrast, a study conducted by the South African Institute of Race Relations (2008) revealed that 40% of educators also report feeling unsafe in schools. It is a matter of concern that 8.9% of school principles reported cases in which learners caused physical harm to their teachers.

Blaser (2008a) states that feeling unsafe may be linked to a decreased success in learning, as the research suggests. This implies that if a learner feels that their safety is threatened, they cannot learn and thus may not perform adequately. Additionally, it has been highlighted that if school violence is not addressed, it will continue to contribute to a culture of violence rather than provide opportunities for social development (International Reading Literacy Study, as cited in Blaser, 2008a).

The studies conducted by Burton (2008b) are important within the context of the overall study of researching educators' perceptions of school violence in South Africa. However, within the studies he conducted much data on school violence has been obtained though the perspectives of learners within the school context and educators' perceptions of the school violence phenomenon have been largely excluded. However, in one study, Burton (2008b) acknowledged that educators may offer some insight into the issue and data was gathered from educators and principles. Their responses regarding the increase of school violence revealed that it is a result of access to and availability of drugs and alcohol (Burton, 2008b). Despite this small contribution, the educators' perceptions within this study focused on the types of violence that occur against educators and educators as perpetrators, rather than providing an in-depth view of the factors contributing towards school violence.

2.4. EXPLANATIONS OF YOUTH AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Since there is no particular factor that explains an individual's tendency to be violent or why some communities are more prone to violence than others, the causal pathways that explain violence are complex. It is therefore useful to examine these

factors across the different systems of human interaction and functioning. A brief review of these factors will then inform a more focussed discussion of the evidence based on youth violence, as the majority of victims fall into this age cohort. Finally, the scope of these factors will then be narrowed to a discussion of their documented role in explaining school violence internationally and in South Africa.

A number of behavioural, psychological and biological traits have been linked to violence (Krug *et al*., 2002). Maree (2003) has highlighted important variables such as age and gender that have been shown to predispose individuals to both perpetrate and become victims of violence. Other research suggests that personality factors such as limited constraint and negative emotionality, low intelligence and low levels of achievement are highly correlated with violence (Maree, 2003).

In addition to these individual traits, the family environment and parental factors are fundamental in the pathways to violent behaviour (Krug et al., 2002). Associated factors such as poor supervision, weak family cohesion, harsh discipline, parental aggression and conflict, poor attachment between parents and children, and belonging to a large family have also been shown to drive aggression which, in turn, leads to violence (Krug *et al*., 2002).

A sizeable body of literature has also linked macro-processes such as societal transition to a risk of violence. This appears true of South Africa, where a culture of violence birthed under Apartheid seems to be spiking in various forms (Maree, 2003). The key contextual factors that have been associated with crime, violence and transition include weak economic and social support systems, poverty, high population growth, insufficient shelters, poor housing, poor education, poor health and welfare, urbanisation and high rates of unemployment. These factors have been shown to increase the likelihood that individuals may engage in violence (Farrington, 1991, as cited in Maree, 2003). In addition, global epidemiological data on violence suggests that youth form a particular at-risk group as both perpetrators and victims and this is echoed by South African profiles NIMSS, 2005 (Prinsloo, 2007)

2.4.1. Youth Violence

Poor attention and behavioural control, impulsiveness and hyperactivity are advanced as strong predictors of youth violence. In addition, the availability and high levels of alcohol and drug abuse amongst the youth has been shown to be particularly associated with risk of violence within this age group (Maree, 2003).

Although a breakdown of social and economic infrastructure has been linked to rates of violence, research suggests that the erosion of social capital is a particularly powerful driver of violent behaviour amongst youth (Krug *et al*., 2002). This driver may be especially significant in the South African context where social capital is being systematically eroded by the devastating mortality rates of HIV/AIDS (Maree, 2003). The above factors, along with a disruption in conventional family structures, demonstrate the immediate need to understand the prevalence of youth violence as articulated within a secondary socialisation unit such as the school.

More generally, it is not surprising that youth are at an at-risk category for violence in South Africa (Matthews, Griggs & Caine, 1999). Violence forms part of a systemic cycle that originated during Apartheid where violence became a way of life and where both liberation movements and Apartheid Government alike demonstrated that violence was a means for achieving change (Matthews, Griggs & Caine, 1999). This culture of violence became entrenched in townships where the cycle of violence was intensified by poor socio-economic conditions and poverty. This culture of violence is still characteristic of many schools, particularly in disadvantaged areas (Matthews, Griggs & Caine, 1999).

2.4.2. School Violence

Interdisciplinary studies have identified many associated factors of school violence. These factors include belonging to a family with a history of criminal violence, a history of abuse, gang membership, and abuse of alcohol and drugs (Zager *et al*., 1991, as cited in Garbarino, 1999). The risk is increased if a weapon is used, there is a history of arrest, impaired thinking and feeling due to neurological problems, and school difficulty accompanied with poor school attendance (Zager *et al*., 1991, as cited in Garbarino, 1999). The range of these factors is broad and most of the data from which they were identified were drawn from studies in the USA.

There is a considerable overlap in the literature between factors associated with youth and school violence. Individual characteristics such as alcohol and drug abuse, involvement in leisure activities, or time spent away from school and possibly on the streets, may lead individuals to engage in violence (Shruink, 1994, as cited in Davis, 2003). These characteristics play out at schools or after school hours and thus may serve as a risk factor (Davis, 2003).

Internationally, high rates of school violence have been associated with dysfunctional school systems; and weak infrastructure such as poor or non-existent facilities, under qualified teachers and failure of racial integration continue to marginalise the youth (Maree, 2003). Additionally, and relevant to international studies, are negative teacher relationships which have also been shown to contribute to the increase in school violence (Agnew 1985, as cited in Lilly et al., 1995).

Another contributing factor is the discrepancy and contrast between private and public schools, as this may create a sense of relative deprivation amongst the learners at public schools (Chaiken, 2000, as cited in Maree, 2003). School violence also increases with factors such as impoverishment, high failure-rates, school size and the number of students taught by each teacher (Chaiken, 2000, as cited in Maree, 2003). The consequences of these infrastructural drivers are far reaching and have been shown to impact directly on the lives of educators.

In unruly schools, educators may become disheartened with the circumstances in which they work and therefore stop making an effort to educate the pupils. Absenteeism of educators has a negative effect on learners as it sets an example of irresponsibility (Maree, 2003). Educators not only struggle to control learner's behaviour, but they feel they are not respected and fear for their own safety, as often learners may become aggressive and assaulting (Maree, 2003). This threat of violence consequently impacts the quality of education (Fisher & Kettl, 2003) which in turn drives general violence. Adolescents living in areas that lack social integration and social capital tend to perform poorly at school and drop out which in turn erodes social capital. Therefore, schools and education form a key component in the proverbial 'cycle of violence'. This is pronounced in the South African context.

2.4.3. School Violence in South Africa

School violence in South Africa is on the increase and continues to be a major problem. Some social commentators insist that spiking rates of school violence in South Africa can be directly attributable to its Apartheid past. Due to Apartheid, Black high school children were marginalised. Schools were oppressive and violence was an everyday experience. Such thinking has mobilised a variety of interventions such as the "Safer Schools Programme in South Africa" which regards Apartheid-related factors such as discrimination and inequality to be intricately linked to the problem (Davis, 2003).

Violence may be located in the broader context which includes social, cultural and political conditions. According to Pelser (2008), youth crime and violence serves as a function of the development of a "culture of violence". Violence and crime, particularly amongst the underprivileged and socially-excluded youth, is perceived to be a normal occurrence in everyday living (Pelser, 2008). According to Mogano (1994), the legacy of Apartheid continues to shape the intensity of violence. This does not preclude the fact that violence exists in all schools, but it is more prevalent in underprivileged schools, as this political legacy has governed the lives of the majority of these people. It is the school site where the legacy of Apartheid is transformed into violence (Mogano, 1993).

However, Mogano (1993) argues that the Apartheid struggle does not offer a comprehensive explanation of the intensity of school violence. The collapse of discipline and the deterioration of a culture of learning may also be considered a contributing factor for the occurrence of violence (Mogano, 1993). It is further argued that political movements raised awareness around educational issues and subsequently revealed flaws in the Apartheid education system (Mogano, 1993). While the effects of the political environment have changed, the material conditions in the school have not (Mogano, 1993). This continues to threaten the credibility of the educational system and violence results due to the frustration experienced by the learners (Mogano, 1993). Moreover, it seems that educators who are the immediate agents of authority become the targets of the learner's frustration and aggression (Mogano, 1993).

The Bantu Education Act (1953), with its roots in Apartheid ensured that Black children did not receive an adequate education that would equip them with the necessary skill to acquire the dominant employment positions held in society (Mogano, 1993). As mentioned earlier, the legacy of Apartheid education still exists within underprivileged schools (Mogano, 1993). There remains a shortage of classrooms and educators, and the school situation has shown no major improvement (Mogano, 1993).

Research in South Africa has shown that the geography of Apartheid has played a predominant role in shaping violence in schools. Although violence is not exclusive to townships, it is extremely prevalent in these areas. This has led some researchers to argue that children from these disadvantaged communities observe and experience a great deal of violence and this greater level of violence is reflected in township schools (Eliasov & Frank, 2000). The Township of Alexandra, situated in northern Johannesburg, provides one such case in point. Alexandra is characterised by a lack of infrastructure, overcrowding, and high rates of crime which contribute towards difficult living conditions.

There is much consensus and agreement amongst theorists regarding the influence of the Apartheid legacy in shaping violence in schools. For instance Matthews, Griggs & Caine (1999), in a study on the culture of violence conducted in order to inform intervention strategies revealed that the Apartheid era influenced the use of violence within homes, schools and communities and further produced this culture of violence which permeates the schools.

The Township of Alexandra and its schools are characterised by many of the features and factors that have been associated with violence, and while much is known about the factors and drivers of youth and school violence, it is evident that further research on the form that these risk factors take in this South African context is required.

Due to educational impoverishment many of South Africa's youth have been marginalised and therefore disempowered and unable to develop psychologically or economically (Mogano, 1993). As a result of Apartheid education, much of the youth

did not receive proper education (Mogano, 1993). However, despite being slightly older, many of these youngsters returned to school. This became problematic as the combination of young teenagers and young adults affected the process of discipline (Mogano, 1993). This may be further exacerbated by the fact that many of the educators are young themselves, and the learners they teach are in fact their contemporaries rather than school children (Mogano, 1993). Additionally, the marginalisation of the youth has contributed to a process whereby these young individuals are attempting to re-assert their power and influence within schools, therefore transforming schools into a site of 'new' struggle (Mogano, 1993).

Additionally, family and community factors have relevance in locating school violence within the South African context. Many sub-cultural formations exist as an alternative to the dominant culture as the youth feel excluded and marginalised. These sub-cultures serve as an alternative identity for some of these individuals. It is argued that due to a lack of educational and recreational facilities within underprivileged communities, these sub-cultures manifest in 'negative adventurism' (Mogano, 1993). This anti-social behaviour may be due to the disintegration of community life within townships, which is then revealed in schools (Mogano, 1993). It can be argued that mainstream culture of everyday life is violent, and often violence becomes an alternative practice. These two concepts are not mutually exclusive, as South Africa is described as having a 'culture of violence' where violence is accepted as a means of solving problems (Volgeman & Lewis, 1993).

It is also suggested that often certain groups endorse the use of violence and violence thus becomes pronounced (Volgeman & Lewis, 1993). One such example of a sub-culture is that of gang formation, where violence is used as method of impressing an indifferent society and to gain approval, power and pleasure (Volgeman & Lewis, 1993). Sub-cultural formations encourage violence as it is perceived as socially acceptable and useful (Volgeman & Lewis, 1993). In summary, the use of violence as an alternative practice, particularly within sub-cultural groups, is a way of reinforcing the violence that is common within lived culture. The individuals who utilise violence within schools as a method of achieving goals is in fact a form of violence that is reflected within a broader violent community.

Furthermore, it is essential to locate school violence within the broader context, such as the home environment, that invariably extends into the community (Burton, 2008b). Many individuals are continuously exposed to violence within the community they live in. Furthermore, learners often experience violence within their home and research such as the Youth Victimisation Study suggests that there are links between exposure to violence at school and exposure to violence in the home (Burton, 2008b). This study further revealed that most of the violence that learners are exposed to occurs on the school grounds. However, this form of violence that takes place at schools in fact reflects and replicates the violence that occurs in the community (Burton, 2008b). Communities characterised by a neglected psychical environment and a high crime rate are likely to influence a child's learning of violent behaviour (Burton, 2008b).

2.5. THEORETICAL EXPLANANTIONS

Although a number of theories exist and have been applied internationally when offering explanations of the existence of school violence, none of these individually offer an adequate explanation for the occurrence of school violence within the South African context (Burton, 2008a). Burton (2008a) therefore suggests that in order to provide a theoretical explanation of the complex problem of school violence in South Africa, it is essential that the central arguments from theories of the topic be adopted in an attempt to provide a greater understanding of why learners resort to violence within the South African school context. Specifically, Burton (2008a) points to the relevance of key elements from sociological theories, such as Agnew's General Strain Theory, Hirschi's Theory of Social Control and Sameroff's Transactional Ecological Model, as they are viewed as offering possible explanations for school violence within South Africa.

These various theoretical models have been offered as attempts to account for the interaction of the complex levels and causal paths described above. In using a psychological theory to explain the occurrence of school violence, it would emphasise that individuals are essentially responsible for their developmental outcomes (Burton, 2008a). However, as a result, the convergence of risk and protective factors are likely to be ignored, and it is these external environmental influences that actually dictate

the outcome of one's adaptation to the environment (Burton, 2008a). Although psychological theories are not thoroughly accounted for in current research, this emphasises the need for a multi-disciplinary focus in research that incorporates not only psychological perspectives, but also sociological explanations. Further research should adopt this particular focus in order to expand on other alternative explanations.

These approaches are largely based on the study of criminal violence and have roots in the practice of criminology. However, in spite of these theories holding utility in criminology, they have additionally been documented for their usefulness in explaining school violence.

2.5.1. Strain Theories

One way of understanding the problem of crime and violence is from the perspective of strain theory. Variations of strain theory exist; however, the central focus within these approaches is the experience of strain or stress. Structural strain refers to a process by which inadequate regulation at societal levels impacts how an individual views their needs. In comparison, individual strain refers to the friction experienced by individuals as they assess ways in which their needs may be met (O'Connor, 2007).

For Agnew (1962), strain is perceived as emotional and further involves a breakdown of beliefs (Mizruchi & Perucci, 1962, as cited in O'Connor, 2007). Episodic state anger is the focus of Agnew's theory and he points out that the avoidance of noxious events impacts one's ability to maintain relationships, therefore resulting in reactions of alienation (O'Connor, 2007). Furthermore, it is the perception of an adverse environment that may cause negative emotions thus motivating one to become involved in violence (O'Connor, 2007). Akers (2000, as cited in O'Connor, 2007) has, to a large extent, adopted Agnew's view, but has operationalised specific variables within this approach.

With specific regard to the South African context, the failure to achieve positively valued goals becomes relevant (O'Connor, 2007). By this it is meant that a gap exists between expectations and actual achievements. In such a way, individuals' beliefs pertaining to the outcome of the goal and the actual result tends to be incongruent

(O'Connor, 2007). The process and incongruence results in individuals who come to realise that certain goals may not be achieved due to unavoidable circumstances, including weakness and blocked opportunities. This implies that individuals who cannot obtain wealth, power, life comforts or material possessions through reasonable channels may feel a sense of strain which refers to their feelings of anger, resentment and frustration (Joubert, 2003). On a personal level, what can then transpire is the development of personal disappointment, low self-esteem and a lack of motivation to aim for goals as goals are believed to be unobtainable, which contributes to a sense of personal disappointment and a lack of desire (O'Connor, 2007). In summation, this process causes frustration which leads to strain, anger, aggression and then possibly crime or violence (O'Connor, 2007).

In moving beyond the level of the individual, Durkheim's theory of anomie appears a very useful theoretical construct. For Durkheim, by anomie it is meant a total absence of moral sense with a disregard for conformity (Joubert, 2003). An anomic society, according to Durkheim, is characterised by broken-down norms and rules of behaviour as a result of social crisis or rapid change (Joubert, 2003). With specific regard to the context of South Africa, it can be argued that with political transition much change has taken place; that is, with the move to Democracy, many South Africans developed high expectations regarding their futures, the quality of life they would live and the like. It should be noted that this took place particularly within previously disadvantaged groups where proper housing, job opportunities and a quality education was assured (Joubert, 2003). However, fourteen years into Democracy, many of these promises have not adequately been met. In such a way, drawing on the understandings of strain theory, much frustration and discontent has developed within South Africa (Joubert, 2003).

Furthermore, Joubert (2003) contends that an anomic society which is characterised by a lack of norms and rules is unable to manage human demands, and therefore this anomie weakens the control that society exerts.

For Agnew (1992), it is the strain on children within a school environment that contributes to the likelihood of violent crime (Burton, 2008a). According to Merton (1938, as cited in Joubert, 2003), underprivileged individuals are prevented from

acquiring success through receiving a good education which in turn leads to frustration. Focus is therefore placed on the social inequalities that exist within society.

2.5.2. Social Control Theory

Hirschi's theory of social control has been applied in many contexts and has held influence for many years. It provides the foundation for exploring the school environment and delinquency relationship (Joubert, 2008). Hirschi adopts the view that human behaviour is a result of the socialisation process (Elis & Walsh, 2000, as cited in Joubert, 2003). Hirschi argues that if children are socialised adequately, attach to others and have a belief in the morality of law, then social bonds (societal bonding) will develop; however, if ineffective, impulses will remain unrestrained (Empey et al., 1999, as cited in Joubert, 2003). Essential to the socialisation process is the role of the family as they are perceived to be the agents of this process (O'Connor, 2006). As said, certain conditions occurring within these structures may impact the likelihood that some individuals will engage in crime and violence (O'Connor, 2006). Such conditions considered to be influencing factors include parental imprisonment, punitive parenting styles, incompetent parenting and single parenting (O'Connor, 2006) which are common within the South African population if contextual factors are considered.

Worthy of specific mention is the single parenting variable, as this seems prevalent in the South African context. Research conducted by McCarthy *et al*. (1982, as cited in O'Connor, 2006) on single parenting as a contributing factor has found that in situations where a father figure is absent or unknown, this may serve to predict possible delinquency (O'Connor, 2006). Additionally, there is common consensus among theorists that violence breeds violence and therefore punitive parenting may become an essential factor when accounting for the causal pathways of violence.

Based on a research study conducted by Mathew (1995) on Attachment Theory and Delinquency, it was found that a relationship exists between insecure patterns of attachment and deficits in social problem-solving. Further revealed is that the tendency to attribute hostile intentions to neutral social interactions may be a result of attachment styles (Mathew, 1995). It is asserted that early experiences with one's

caregivers affect the forming of other "affectional bonds" (Bowlby, 1980, as cited in Mathew, 1995). Additionally, from an Attachment Theory perspective, one can understand the relationship between the family, social competence and problematic behaviours (Mathew, 1995). It is believed that inconsistent parental behaviours and parental rejection leaves a child feeling unsure regarding the emotional availability of their caregiver (Mathew, 1995). As a result, this may lead to intense feelings of frustration and anger, and these elements of insecurity and anger became central features characteristic of their relationships (Mathew, 1995). Furthermore, it is this anger that is then displaced onto inappropriate sources and consequently anti-social behaviour may result (Mathew, 1995).

Hirschi further states that the school environment serves as a means of creating social bonds (Burton, 2008a). These social bonds function in two ways; they may either serve to restrain adolescents from resorting to violence, or alternatively increase pressure to engage in antisocial behaviour (Burton, 2008a). Hirschi further postulates that there exist four elements that contribute to the social bond; namely attachment (sensitivity and affection towards others), commitment (investment in conventional society), involvement (school factors and the involvement in conventional activities) and belief (extent to which individuals believe they should obey the law) (Burton, 2008b). Specific to the belief component, Hirschi found a correlation between self-reported delinquency and the statement "It's okay to get around the law if you can get away with it" (Hirschi, 1969, as cited in O'Connor, 2006, p. 2).

It is further asserted by Hirschi (1969, as cited in O'Connor, 2006) that the elements mentioned above, if present, may serve as protective factors enhancing resiliency. However, the absence of these elements may increase the likelihood that individuals may engage in delinquent behaviour. If a strong commitment to school is threatened by unfavourable experiences such as violence, it may place individuals at risk for committing violence or engaging in delinquent behaviour (Burton, 2008b). Gottfredson (1990, as cited in Burton, 2008b), co-author to Hirschi, argues that factors such as weak attachments to school, impulsiveness, weak moral beliefs and a lack of commitment to achieving educational goals contribute to the likelihood that learners may engage in violence at school. This therefore reflects that the school environment serves as a critical social context in which violence exists.

In support of assessing the efficacy of this theory across settings, Rebellon & Strauss (2004) conducted research into the general theory of violent crime and its applicability, which formed the basis for Hirschi's social control theory. In conclusion, their study stated that there remains a concern regarding cross-national applicability (Rebellon & Strauss, 2004). It is further stated that existing research is incapable of assessing applicability in non-western settings (Rebellon & Strauss, 2004). However, according to Burton (2008a), as mentioned earlier, no individual approach provides an adequate explanation for school violence within the South African context. Therefore, adopting elements from various key approaches such as this, potentially provides a greater understanding of the problem.

2.5.3. Ecological Models

In keeping with the public health approach, ecological models are essential to an explanation of school violence across a range of potential biological, psychological, social and environmental roots, each corresponding to a level of risk (Krug et al., 2002). Specifically, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of ecological systems describes an individual as existing within levels of social relationships, such as micro-systems (family system), exo-systems (neighbourhood) and macro-systems (society) (Krug *et al*., 2003). Therefore, in order to understand human behaviour, one needs to consider an individual's context (Krug *et al*., 2003). These systems are in constant interaction and influence each other. However, there is no particular factor that accounts for an individual's tendency to be violent or why some communities are more prone to violence than others (Krug *et al*., 2003). From this perspective, violence is a consequence of the interaction between the individual, social, cultural and environmental aspects (Krug *et al*., 2003). This model provides an account for all the interactions as mentioned in the analysis section of this report.

An extension to the ecological model is Sameroff's Transactional Ecological Development Model. This model provides a more relevant point of view on school-based violence in particular, as it refers to learners within the school context and specifically to the development of adolescents at different levels (Burton, 2008a).

Sameroff (as cited in Burton, 2008a) contends that those environments in which individuals develop and acquire knowledge need to be considered as learners cannot be separated from these contexts (Burton, 2008a). This model explains school violence in terms of understanding the development of children and adolescents on various levels. The levels postulated within this paradigm include the micro-level (unique biological characteristics), mid-level (current transactions within the environment) and macro-level (external factors, such as the family, peer group, school and the community) (Burton, 2008a). Central to this approach is that risk and protective factors influenced by the environment dictate an individual's adaptation to their environment (Burton, 2008a).

To this end, the above theories explain violence largely in terms of the social environment. They include family, school, peer groups, community and society as the focus of inclusion. By this it is meant that these different levels interact with each other to cause and compound the issue of school-based violence. However, each theory may offer a different account or understanding of the relationship between the social context and the issue of violence.

In summary, three characteristics of school violence in South Africa have been identified and need to be addressed within the larger contextual framework. The identified characteristics as mentioned by Burton (2008a) include the understanding that violence in schools is entrenched in a broader violent society, violence contains cultural and structural dimensions, and that schools as social institutions reflect violence and promote the occurrence of violence.

The above-mentioned approaches account for these factors within their theoretical frameworks, therefore providing an explanation for the contextual and structural factors that are relevant and significant in South Africa. This therefore provides a justification for the use of these approaches in understanding school violence within the South African context.

2.6. CONCLUSION

Violence in South African schools is entrenched in the broader South African context, which has structural and cultural dimensions (Burton, 2008a). While much is known about the drivers and risk factors for the experience and perpetration of violence within schools, little is known about what educators perceive to be contributing to school violence, and their valuable perceptions have thus been overlooked.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides justification for the aims, research questions, instrumentation, data collection procedures, analysis and ethical considerations that were utilised in the study. It further locates the research within the qualitative research paradigm.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative research approach as it offers an interpretive account and analysis through description. Qualitative methodology therefore makes it possible to see the social world through the eyes of ones subject, where behaviour may be understood within the context of meaningful systems utilised by a specific group of individuals (Bryman, 1984). This methodology enables descriptive data to be produced (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). In this context, descriptive data implies people's written or spoken words and observable behaviour. In comparison to a quantitative methodology, qualitative data produces descriptions of how the social world may be viewed by participants involved in a study (Zhang, 1996), rather than merely gathering quantitative descriptions that may provide little meaning.

Furthermore, qualitative methods are useful for exploring and discovering the thoughts and experiences of people (Morgan, 1998). This method therefore provides an insider perspective where rich data revealing depth may be produced (Bryman, 1984).

3.3. AIM

The study aimed to explore educators' perceptions of school violence in the disadvantaged community of Alexandra Township. Alexandra is one of the poorest areas in Gauteng, where overcrowding and uncontrolled crime and violence make living conditions difficult. South African township schools feature historically as sites of violence and more recently, among schools in general as significantly violent spaces. As public sites of education and general socialisation, schools have been

linked to a number of factors that appear to drive the prevalence of violence both internationally and in South Africa. Furthermore, as educators are integral members of the school community, it is most alarming that the perceptions of school violence held and shared by these stakeholders appear relatively understudied. Three key questions appeared useful in servicing this primary aim. These were:

1. What do educators perceive to be the consequences and causes of school violence?
2. What is the impact of school violence on educators directly?
3. What are the risk factors that predispose individuals to commit violence at school?

3.4. SAMPLE

3.4.1. Site

The Township of Alexandra is considered one of the poorest areas of the region. The existing lack of infrastructure, overcrowding and high rates of crime contribute towards difficult living conditions (PPT Pilots Project, 2004). Isserow and Everett (1998) found that 83% of Alexandra's population thought that crime had increased post-1994. Of all crimes reported in Alexandra car-jacking (28%), rape (23%), housebreaking (18%), murder (17%) and child abuse (6%) are the most prevalent, and women and children represent the majority of victims of violence in this township (SA Census 2001). The intensity and prevalence of general violence seems to be reflected in the high rates of violence within the township's schools (Motsei, 1998, as cited in Fisher & Kettl, 2003).

Estimates for Alexandra in 1997 reflected a population of 120 000, with unofficial statistics suggesting that there may in fact be a population of 700 000 (Statistics South Africa, 2001). Alexandra's population is characterised by young people with an average age of 17-35 years. The factors accounting for this young population may include the high density of people, high incidents of HIV and the increased crime rate (Statistics South Africa, 2001).

3.4.2. Participants

As the purpose of this study was to understand the factors relating to school violence from educators' perceptions within the community of Alexandra Township, an area characterised by overcrowding and uncontrolled crime, teachers from two conveniently selected schools in the area constituted the participants in the study. These schools were convenient sample sites as they formed part of the broader community intervention undertaken by the researcher[2]. The names of these two high schools will not be disclosed in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants involved in the study.

The participants were required to meet the following criteria for inclusion into the sample:

1. The participant must currently be employed as an educator at one of the two school sites
2. They must have a minimum of two years experience in the field
3. They must be fluent in English so as to avoid the use of a translator as often valuable information is lost through translation.

The study comprised a total of twelve participants from the two high schools. The focus group discussions were facilitated by the researcher and ran for approximately one hour each, by which time, thematic saturation appeared to have been reached, as Terre Blanche & Kelley (1999) suggest.

3.4.3. Participant demographics

The study included two focus groups comprising of twelve participants, six people within each focus group. Each focus group was further divided up into three male and three female participants. This was largely in an attempt to find an equable gender balance. All the participants were Black South Africans and were in the age group of approximately 35 to 56 years of age. The participants had at least two years experience in the field which formed part of the sample criteria.

[2] As part of a community practical requirement, work was conducted with the learners at one of the schools utilised within this study on a weekly basis for a period of one year. This involved conducting a needs assessment followed by performing workshops relating to the identified needs and a further training of learners as peer counsellors.

Of the 12 participants, 11 of them resided in the Township of Alexandra and were therefore aware of the difficulties the community may face and were able to accurately describe the area in which they live.

3.5. DATA COLLECTION METHODS (INSTRUMENTATION)

Data was collected through focus group discussions using a semi-structured audio-recorded interview schedule where the participants were prompted through predetermined questions. Kelly (1999, as cited in Terre Blanche & Durrheim) describes a focus group as "a group of people who share a similar type of experience, but that is not 'naturally' constituted as an existing social group" (p. 388). Focus groups were selected in order to capitalise on a presumably divergent range of experiences within the specified parameters of the intended area of focus (Kelly, 1999, as cited in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The focus group technique is conventionally used to collect data at the level of content and group process. According to Kitzinger (1995), prompting and facilitating discussion amongst several participants yields diverse data and allows the participants to interactively generate insider views for group discussion. This facilitates greater interaction, dialogue and stimulation, as focus group discussions draw on the communication between participants in order to produce data (Kitzinger, 1995).

Given the diverse scope of community and school familiarity required by the study, focus groups appeared a viable research instrument. In addition, the variety and scope of perceptions of the factors anticipated by the literature will be better serviced by focus groups than one-on-one interviews. This method was deemed favourable as it explores individual's knowledge and experiences and encourages the exploration and clarification of their views in accessible ways (Kitzinger, 1995). The focus group technique was therefore utilised as it allowed a clearer understanding of the perceptions of school violence to emerge.

3.6. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Two focus groups were conducted in August 2008. All participants were educators, selected from two high schools in the Township of Alexandra. As the research was conducted on the school grounds, the focus group discussions were held after school for approximately one hour each. Permission to conduct the study was secured from the Department of Education and entry was gained via the school principles. After the participants were invited to take part in the study, consent forms and a subject information sheet was presented to all the participants. These documents highlighted the nature of the study and issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity. Consent was obtained from the participants to take part in the study, to audio-record the interview and to ensure group confidentiality. It was further highlighted to the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time. The focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed verbatim and then subjected to a thematic content analysis.

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

The data elicited from the focus group discussions was analysed using a thematic content analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within data" (p. 79). In concurrence, Boyatzis (1998, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006) further suggests that a thematic analysis provides an interpretation of the various aspects of the research topic. Conducting a thematic analysis is useful in this case, as it facilitates identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes elicited within the data. Furthermore, it allows for the interpretation of certain aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis forms part of the qualitative research paradigm and therefore identifying themes and patterns within data allows for the researcher to produce descriptions of how the participants may view the social world.

As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) and supported by Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999), a thematic analysis of data progresses through six phases. All six phases were employed for the analysis of the elicited data.

In accordance with **Phase 1**, familiarisation of self within the data in order to become familiar with the depth of the content was undertaken (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As this is vital the researcher immersed herself within the data, which involved the repeated reading of transcripts (thematising and categorising) in an active way in order to search for meanings and patterns, as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). The aim was to elaborate and interpret the data towards identifying what lay beneath the material and according to Terre Blanche & Kelly (1999), this is essential. The data was further broken down and then built up again in original ways, as recommended (Terre Blanche & Kelly (1999). This coding process was developed and continued throughout the analysis through making notes on the available data. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), this forms part of the coding process.

In accordance with **Phase 2**, initial codes were generated. This phase commenced after the initial set of ideas regarding the data was generated. This is supported by Braun & Clarke (2006), who suggest that this phase involves generating codes that appear interesting to the researcher. The data was assessed in a meaningful way and was further organised into meaningful groups. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), this process is suggested before broader themes are developed. Potential patterns were sought within the data material and thus most of the data extracts were coded. Key advice offered by Braun & Clarke (2006) is to code for as many potential themes as possible, which was attempted.

In keeping with **Phase 3**, the search for themes began only once the data had been coded and collated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were identified through a visual representation. Braun & Clarke (2006) refer to this visual representation as a thematic map. Through this representation, potential overarching themes and relevant sub-themes were identified.

Phase 4 involved the reviewing of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher refined the potential themes and sub-themes while assessing their relevance in an attempt to assess if they formed a coherent pattern. This is supported by Braun & Clarke (2006).

In accordance with **Phase 5**, as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006), the themes were further refined in order to determine what they captured. An analysis of each theme was conducted. As Braun & Clarke (2006) recommend, it is important to consider how an identified theme tells a story and further fits into a broader picture. Following this, the themes were named.

Phase 6 entails the writing of the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The report involves a narrative that illustrates what the themes account for and is presented in the form of an argument that relates to the research questions.

3.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PROCEDURE

The research was conducted in accordance with the protocols and procedures specified by the University Ethics Committee of the University of the Witwatersrand. It further adhered to the requirements as specified by the Health Professions Council of South Africa [H.P.C.S.A] (2006) which states that all research should be conducted in compliance with the law and internationally acceptable standards (H.P.C.S.A., 2006). The H.P.C.S.A. (2006) further outlines that approval from the organisation concerned be obtained prior to conducting research (H.P.C.S.A., 2006). As such, permission for undertaking the study was obtained by the National Department of Education. Privacy and confidentiality was strictly adhered to and the autonomy of all persons participating in the study was respected.

Furthermore this study did not harm the research participants in any way, as stipulated by the guidelines set out by the Professional Board (H.P.C.S.A., 2006). Informed consent was obtained from participants and they were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Limitations to confidentiality and anonymity were highlighted within the consent forms. Although the research could not guarantee anonymity, pseudonyms were used to identify the participant's responses, but no identifying information has been used.

Results will be made available to the participants and school sites in the form of a one page summary.

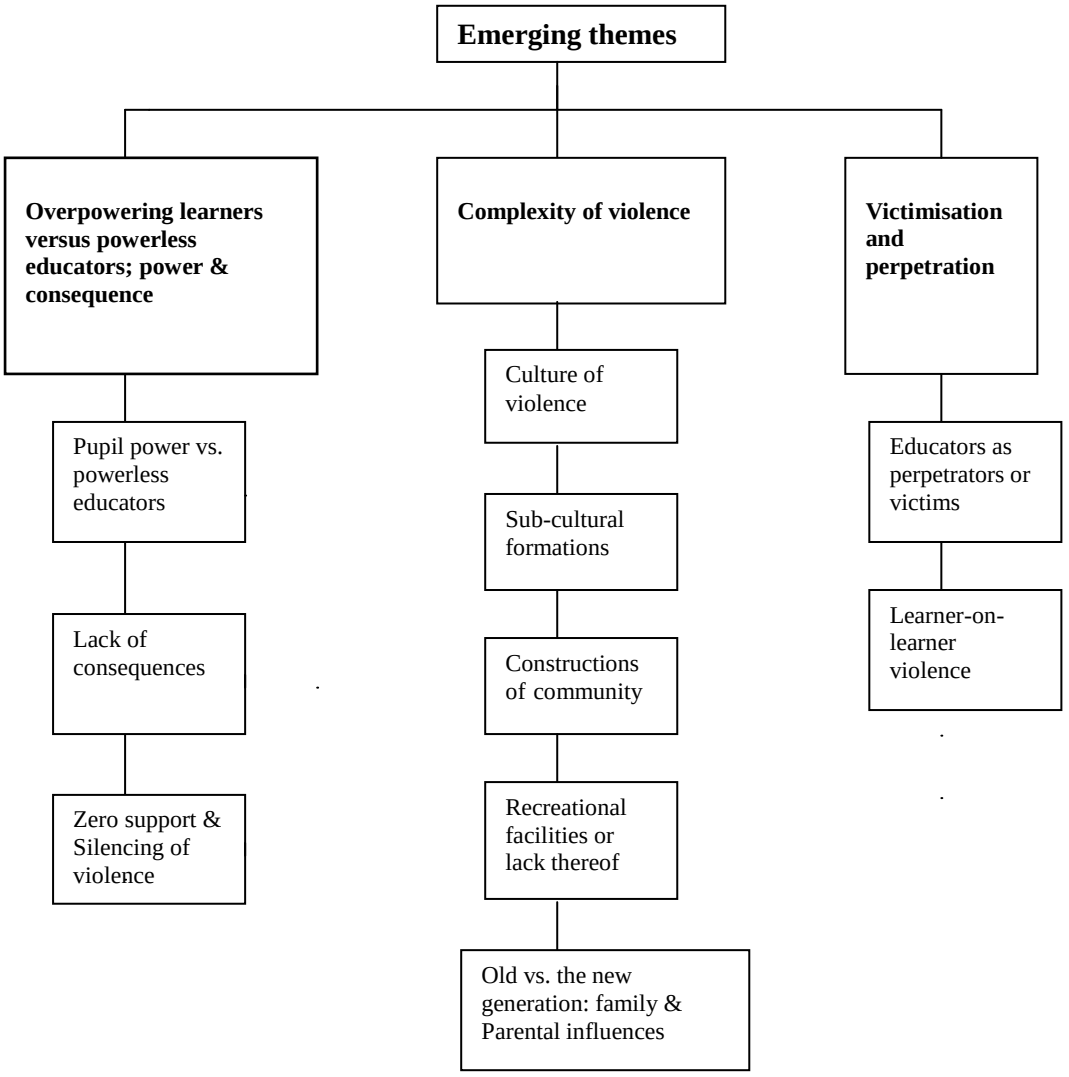
3.9. CONCLUSION

The above section provided a description of the methods and procedures utilised within the study. The next chapter presents the findings elicited from the focus group discussions and provides a detailed description of the identified significant themes.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses an analysis of the results found from the focus group discussions. The six steps, as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006), have been utilised in the analysis and identification of emerging themes. These steps include: familiarising self with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. A visual representation referred to as a thematic map by Braun & Clarke (2006) was utilised in order to make sense of the data and is represented in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Thematic map: Emerging themes



The salient themes identified and discussed were informed by the literature review, theoretical framework and the research questions employed in the study.

4.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Three broad themes were identified based on the research questions. These include the lack of consequence and its contribution to the uneven power relationships that exist, the complexities of violence, and victimisation and perpetration. The themes presented are a reflection of the aim of the study and arose from the researcher's subjective analysis. As a result, some themes may have been omitted or ignored intentionally or unintentionally.

4.2.1 OVERPOWERING LEARNERS VERSUS POWERLESS EDUCATORS POWER AND CONSEQUENCE

Within this section, various themes regarding educators' perceptions about the lack of consequences for today's youth are discussed. Through discussion, issues around power emerged and this extended into a discussion regarding the power that learners hold in relation to educators' powerlessness. The salient themes identified that support this uneven relationship include pupil power, powerless educators, a lack of support, an inability to instil discipline, the lack of resources and support received, coping mechanisms and the inadequacy of the South African justice system. What appeared to be a significant contribution to school violence from educators' perceptions was the impact that a lack of consequence holds for learners and educators. The educators' perceptions regarding this occurrence were similar and consensus and agreement was reached by the participants.

a). Pupil power versus powerless educators

The educators placed significance on the role that rights play within the context of violence amongst school youth and youth in general. What was noticeably evident was the importance that was placed on how these rights given to learners serve to negatively reinforce the occurrence of violence within schools and the misplacement of power. Due to rights given to the youth of today, it has indirectly stripped the

educators of their rights. It appears that learners have access to power and educators do not, which leads to a power struggle and the unsuccessful renegotiation of positions of power.

The educators emphasised the limiting influence that this 'pupil power' has over their capacity to maintain order and discipline within the school and the role it plays within the occurrence of violence. The educators asserted within the focus group discussions that the youth do not have an adequate understanding of what these rights represent and therefore these are abused. It is also reflected by the educators that the abuse of rights is related to a conflicting African system and a breakdown within the family structure. This is demonstrated by the following quotes:

'Now the problem left now, two systems today, another system which advocates human rights and then you have a system, an African system that does not talk about human rights.'
Participant 1: FG1

'Unfortunately the human rights, it has bestowed a lot of rights to these young fellows, most of them do not know them, they abuse them…'
Participant 1: FG1

'The breakdown in the family structure which we never knew as Africans…Nowadays young boys or young girls they can stand up to me and say no you are not going to do that, that's why we always have conflict with them and at the end it leads to violence…'
Participant 1: FG1

'So now they will tell you about rights and even though these rights are limited but within them they feel they have the latitude to do whatever they want to do…'
Participant 5: FG2

So he knows that he cannot be charged or anything cannot be done to him because he is a minor, hence I say they need to revisit the rights and responsibilities because these kids concentrate on their rights and forget about their responsibilities, there are no accountabilities'
Participant 3: FG1

It appears that from educators' perceptions, learners do not actually understand the rights they have access to. This is backed up by Participant 1 in Focus Group 1 where it is stated that learners abuse their rights. From the educators' perceptions, the learners interpret their given rights as the right to do whatever they want. Consequently, as a result of the learners' misunderstanding, other individual's rights may be abused, specifically the educators and other learners. Furthermore, the educators asserted that traditional African systems are in contrast to the new system that is presented currently. This implies that the new system which developed post-1994 may have changed society due to the new rights given to our youth, and is different to how the educators knew the traditional system to be. In response, the differences and conflicts between the old system and new system may be a contributing factor towards the experienced violence, specifically on the school grounds. This is supported by Participant 1, Focus Group 1 in the above quote.

The above quotes reflect the importance that educators attach to the abuse of rights and its relationship to a conflicting African system and the consequence of a lack of respect for educators which feeds into their lack of power. The salient factors further revealed were the imbalance of power in the educator-pupil relationship, and their inability to instil appropriate discipline. This reflects the incapacity of educators to take control over issues that occur within schools, further alluding to the fact that through being unable to gain control and demonstrate discipline, the problem of school violence continues to exist and negatively impacts those involved.

Being unable to instil discipline was highlighted by educators as a major problem and they consequently labelled themselves 'lame ducks'. They perceive themselves as paralysed in this process and therefore feel powerless in their attempt to decrease violence occurring at school. This reveals that educators believe that they have not been successful in their efforts and require help and assistance. Additionally, educators feel they do not have the means to control violence at any level and therefore feel that nothing can be done. This reflects their powerlessness and helplessness within the situation they find themselves. The following statement highlights this perception:

'Learners they know that I can come here and cause a fight and nobody will say anything to me and then we are lame ducks, instilling discipline is a problem'
Participant 1: FG1

From the above, it is clear that from the educators' perceptions this shift in power is one of the many factors that have created an environment where school violence cannot be reduced or controlled due to the educators' inability to maintain discipline and command respect.

As confirmed in the literature review, findings such as these are not restricted to the participants in Alexandra Township. For example, Mogano (1993) asserts that the appearance of pupil power may in fact explain violence occurring in South African schools. Mogano (1993) explains that the education crisis, collapse of discipline and the deterioration of the culture of learning manifests in disruption at schools, thus creating a challenge for educational authorities. However, Mogano's (1993) argument may be contended as his discussion extended to include the collapse of discipline as a factor accounting for existing violence. How can teachers discipline under these conditions with the compounding effect of lack of support?

Furthermore, the abolition of corporal punishment leaves the educators with no means of achieving order within schools. This alludes to the fact that the cycle of violence still continues. The current problem of instilling discipline due to its previous breakdown reinforces disruption at schools and subsequently gives pupils power. However, this may present as problematic as it appears that from the educators' perceptions, appropriate discipline should be instilled through the use of corporal punishment. Blaser (2008a) agrees that educators contribute to the 'culture of violence' that exists at schools through the use of corporal punishment, despite the fact that it is prohibited.

What appears significant is the way educators conceptualise violence, as corporal punishment is in fact a form of violence. Powerless educators need violence to prevent violence. This reinforces their powerless state and the lack of support they receive. There appears to be a lack of reflexivity from the educators themselves as they feel helpless. This may be attributed to the fact that the government abolished

corporal punishment as a form of discipline and thus took away the predominant form of behaviour regulation. However, it did not provide alternate mechanisms to take its place, leaving the educators with no solution but to want to use violence to regain control. In summation, what currently exists is a form of lost authority; educator's hands are in fact irrefutably tied.

The period under review of which Mogano speaks, was during the Apartheid era, and despite this, much of what was mentioned still exists today, as it appears in the findings of this research report.

In explaining the discourse of 'pupil power', Mogano (1993) refers to it as an organic crisis which implies the crisis of authority. He explains that this organic crisis became apparent during the 1970's and 80's in a response to target educators as the agents of oppression and an inadequate educational system. This 'pupil power' fundamentally implies an alteration in power relations, a new origin of authority and self-made rules and regulations which are owned by the learners (Mogano, 1993). The existing forms of maintaining discipline have been replaced by apparent forms of intimidation by learners to educators in response to opposing discipline. As mentioned above, due to the abolition of corporal punishment, the educators have highlighted the difficulties that arise around discipline. This is noted in the following statement:

'With the abolition of corporal punishment it is difficult to discipline a learner as so you rather just call the parent in but after two days you find that the learner just changes back to how they were '
Participant 6: FG2

'And sometimes you suspend a learner and the next day they are back at school as if nothing happened…'
Participant 3: FG2

Mogano (1993) further stated in his report that it is unlikely that in the upcoming future learners will openly accept the authority of educators, and therefore educators will remain at the receiving end of a displaced hostility. Pupils will therefore ultimately remain as those possessing power (Mogano, 1993). In relating this to the

current situation of school violence, it appears that the phenomenon of 'pupil power' has continued to manipulate the school system, therefore leaving educators unable to dictate the school process. As a result, this reinforces their role as 'lame ducks' and furthermore, as implied by the educators, there is a need for violence to stop violence.

b). Lack of consequence

A central feature of the two focus group discussions was the emphasis placed on the lack of consequence that exists within schools. These descriptions served to highlight what the contribution of the lack of consequence has on the intensity and prevalence of violence that occurs on school grounds. It is perceived by the educators that the lack of consequence, particularly in the South African context, allows the learners to do what they want and get away with it, thus reinforcing that violence may be a means of achieving goals and objectives. Furthermore, learners believe that due to a lack of consequence, their behaviour will not be addressed. The following views reflect these beliefs:

'They are aware that they are not going to be arrested, if they are arrested they are usually referred to the parents. They know all these things, even the adult, they know at the end of the day they won't be apprehended'
Participant 3: FG2

'In South Africa, well its not only in the school children, there is a tendency of I will always get away with it, I can do something wrong and get away with it, it comes from leadership, top and it filters down to grass roots, not so, even learners they know that I can come here and cause a fight and nobody will say anything to me…'
Participant 1: FG1

What is additionally reflected within the above statement is that this lack of consequence also extends into leadership sectors, thereby sending a message to people that there are no consequences for inappropriate behaviour.

In support of the above, O'Connor (2006) in his explanation of Hirschi's theory of social control, states that human behaviour is a result of the socialisation process. Through this, children develop beliefs regarding the morality of the law and if the

socialisation process is at an adequate level, this will lead to societal bonding, therefore restraining impulses, delinquent behaviour and violence (O'Connor, 2006). In order for a social bond to develop the four elements namely attachment, involvement, commitment and belief need to exist (O'Connor, 2006). However, significant to this research is the belief component as emphasised in Hirschi's theory. This supports the idea that the lack of consequence may lead to violence as it fails to serve as a deterrent. Due to the lack of consequences existing within society, it contributes to the attitude learners adopt. This is reflected in the following statement, "It's okay to get around the law if you can get away with it" (O'Connor, 2006, p.2).

c). Zero support, denial, the silencing of violence and the exclusion of key stakeholders

Tied in with the perception of powerlessness is the lack of support that educators receive when attempting to address the problem of school violence. A salient factor emerging within the educators' descriptions was the belief that they in fact have zero support and therefore have no choice but to provide themselves with alternate solutions.

As educators, they are forced to rely on themselves or other educators to work through the difficulties that are presented when attempting to address violence. They further recognise the failure of government and policies to assist them. This is reflected in the following statements:

'Most of the violence which happens at schools we don't know what brought it, but we know that we are going to get zero response '
Participant 1: FG1

'Those are the problems we are facing here, no support at all '
Participant 2 & 6: FG1

This severely impacts the educators' motivation and the value they attach to their role in educating learners. They feel demoralised as they are not acknowledged for their attempts at providing an education for the learners which then leads to feelings of demotivation and apathy. Furthermore, these feelings may also be linked to the

difficult circumstances in which educators work and as a result, they invest less effort when educating learners (Maree, 2003).

The above explanations draw on the **inadequacy of the justice system** as well as the lack of support and government assistance received. Many of the participants alluded to the fact that the South African justice system is in fact inadequate and fails to address problems involving violence. This includes the inadequacy of the police force.

'Our justice system, I think they need to review it'
Participant 3: FG1

'If we identify one learner maybe you know who is having a gun they will arrest the child but then tomorrow you will see the child coming back to school or going to the street'
Participant 3: FG 2

'I think the police are aware of this but they don't have the powers because they arrest learners but they don't stay in very long. They don't have powers and they will be released…'
Participant 3: FG1

Educators further believe that the government, police and authorities have no interest in assisting educators and that they are left to deal with violence alone. The educators therefore perceive there to be no support from those in power, but rather denial and resistance.

'The problem of government being too soft, the government is very soft, because you will even call the police with a problem here, even our officials here. Here is a boy, he has done this, this and this, they will tell hay man solve that thing there. Even our supervisors they don't put their jobs properly '
Participant 2: FG1

What was clearly apparent was the salience of the extent to which **violence is silenced.** The educators asserted that violence directed towards educators is played down by authorities and concealed. It is almost as if authorities pretend that violence

occurring at school does not exist. This was strongly revealed by the participants and is reflected in the following quote:

'Fighting amongst the learners is a common thing, it's very common. Unfortunately you see in South Africa a lot of wrongs, I hope you are going to say that in your thesis, we like concealing information that pretend as if things don't happen, let me tell you one thing school violence across all schools, it transcends race and what, its there and the problem is that the authorities they do what, they down play it'
Participant 1: FG1

It is presumed by educators that there is awareness that violence exists but nothing is being done to address it. They stress the need for structural change and this is illustrated by the following quote:

'…she knows the extent of violence, there's nothing which she can do, she just talk on paper but solving it is very difficult [,] the whole structural change it needs a lot of rudeness, the community structures, the teachers, all the parents, all those people '
Participant 1: FG1

From the educators' perspective, there appears to be a marked lack of interest from the dominant leaders within society. The educators attribute this to being in a comfort zone and that possibly they do not even know how to address the problem. These perceptions are reflected in the following quotes:

'They know exactly what is happening here and you see now I am a teacher here, if I can get lets say for example, promotion to go to head office all of a sudden I'm going to say there is no school violence because I'm where, I'm in a comfort zone. You see when you are in a comfort zone you can utter any statement or any nonsense because they do not directly affect you'
Participant 1: FG1

'There is no help to do it; they don't know how to address it themselves…'
Participant 1: FG1

It is implied in the above quotes that there is a lack of faith in the system in terms of addressing violence and as a result the educators feel helpless. This is further exacerbated by the fact that there is a strong resistance by those in power against dealing with violence. This may be attributed to the fact that they too feel there is nothing that can be done, and that it is more convenient to not acknowledge that violence exists within the school parameters. This delays the attempts to search for solutions and reflects the underlying issues whereby educators feel that nothing can and will be done.

'The most important thing, we are afraid to face the truth and you see a problem cannot solve it if you don't want to acknowledge it. When they do they put them under the carpets and they pile up and some of us want to know what happens, it explodes and it reappears… But the truth, we know the truth, we know it'
Participants 1, 3 & 5: FG1

'We don't want to acknowledge that it is happening, that is why we cannot come up with corrective measures to remedy the situation because instead of coming up with corrective measures what do we do, we are hampering the progress…'
Participants 1, 3 & 5: FG1

This silence and denial directly leads to the lack of support that educators receive in their response to violence. Depending on the nature and extensiveness of the problem, educators have developed their own internal policies and coping mechanisms, as discussed below. However, it is quite clear that these mechanisms are not adequate and they continue to feel disempowered.

'We have developed a mechanism, a natural mechanism of how to cope with school violence because there is absolutely zero support'
Participant 1: FG1

In view of the lack of external assistance, the educators tend to rely on each other for support and have developed structures to ensure their safety. They have structured the classrooms in such a way whereby the female teachers are protected by the male teachers when problems arise. The male teachers occupy all corner classrooms and this will ensure that they are able to respond if a female teacher is exposed to any

threat or danger. This does not however offer any protection for the male teachers if these situations arise, and it can also not be guaranteed that the male teachers can in fact offer full protection. However, it does provide some form of security.

In response to the problem of school violence educators have also developed **internal policies** in an attempt to ensure their safety. These vary within the two particular schools that formed part of this research. It was mentioned by the educators at School 1 that they have developed a mechanism that allows them to identify 'problematic' learners early in the year and refer them to another institution. However, this does not eradicate the problem as that learner will present with the same behaviour at the alternate institution. This has been conducted in response to the issues around expulsion and suspension. From the educators' perceptions, the current mechanisms used to instil discipline such as suspension and expulsion, are ineffective due to the lack of support received from the authorities. This does not enforce change within the learners and implies that the concept of discipline within the community has changed.

It is further noted by the educators that various educational policies have been developed without any input from the educators. The educators believe that they have valuable contributions to make and should be included in the development of these policies; as they are faced with the problems of school violence on a daily basis, work directly with the learners and have first-hand knowledge of what really happens within the institutions. This is reflected in the following statement:

'Policies are decided on by the people who have never been teachers, the politicians they just sit here, they don't even involve teachers, maybe they will send white paper here but it doesn't even come to our school, it doesn't even come to educators, they go to people working here and there and then afterwards they impose it to us'
Participants 5: FG2

'So it becomes very difficult for us to apply it because if they involve educators we can assist them to tell them what can be done because government can ask us and we can come up with something'
Participants 5: FG2

Despite the lack of research evidence supporting the above, it appears that these issues are pertinent and need to be accounted for. In the few research studies conducted on school violence, these significant issues have not been highlighted, despite their relevance to this problem and importance for developing a more in-depth understanding of the problem. As mentioned in the literature review, this further reflects the exclusion of educators as primary stakeholders and assessing their perceptions would certainly contribute to South African and international literature on school violence.

4.2.2 THE COMPLEXITY OF VIOLENCE

In this section, a breakdown of the participants' perceived causal factors will be discussed. Included here are the explanations of the origins of school violence as well as the factors that may contribute towards the complexity of violence occurring at school. The following factors are placed within the context of Apartheid and the consequent formation of a culture of violence.

a). It's a way of life: A culture of violence

This theme was portrayed by most of the participants in both focus group discussions. The educators acknowledged that we live in a society characterised by violence and political unrest. They further assert that the violence one is exposed to is a way of life.

'Sometimes when you live in a violent society you sometimes get used to violence, even if it happens its usual, it's a way of life'
Participants 1: FG1

'This society is very very violent because people they have got that mentality that I can do it and get away with it, I can drink and drive and get away with it'
Participants 1: FG1

The access to weapons makes it easier to engage in violence and with the lack of consequences as mentioned above, violence continues to exist and is out of control. Violence has become a natural part of life and the formed culture of violence reinforces that violence is an acceptable means of attaining goals. Society is perceived

as being responsible for violence. This was confirmed by all the participants within Focus Group 1.

'They are the product of what, the products of a violent society'
Participants 1: FG1

'The way South Africa is so violent, there's no single place which is safe now'
Participants 2: FG1

As mentioned by Volgeman & Lewis (1993), South Africa has a prolonged 'culture of violence' which has led society to believe that violence is acceptable. This statement is confirmed by the educators and forms part of their belief system. However, it is asserted and acknowledged by educators that the way in which violence plays out in schools has roots in South Africa's political history of Apartheid. This therefore highlights the salience of **political influence**. Supported by Matthews, Griggs & Caine (1999), it is suggested that the cycle of violence that originated during the Apartheid era has placed the youth at risk, as the use of violence was demonstrated by the Apartheid Government during the liberation movement in the attempt to achieve change. This culture of violence is considered to be ingrained in South African Townships as poverty and poor socio-economic conditions are intensified in these areas. It is also argued by Mogano (1993) that children from disadvantaged communities such as Alexandra, observe and experience greater levels of violence which extends into the schools. The following description highlights Apartheid influences and contributions and was confirmed by the other participants:

'The Apartheid past in South Africa has contributed a great deal because the learners, these youngsters their parents were involved in the struggles and there was a lot of violence…it looks like they've internalised this, the parents have internalised this violence and there was not enough education to teach people that this was not acceptable during the liberation struggles, that behaviour now it cant work…Its that kind of behaviour that is transferred into school violence, they tend to behave like their parents'
Participants 4: FG1

The Social learning theory offers an explanation for the learning of criminal activity. Despite the theory accounting for criminal behaviour it can be applied to the context

of school violence. In terms of explaining the learning of beliefs and attitudes, various aspects from the theory can be applied in this context. As much as there is violence at schools there is also crime. With this in mind, Joubert (2003) contends that learning behaviour occurs within the context of interpersonal groups of significant others, such as the family. It is through these interpersonal relationships that misconduct and attitude development occurs (Joubert, 2003). According to Siegel (2001, as cited in Joubert, 2003), criminal behaviour is a product of ideas and beliefs and is normal learned behaviour.

From this perspective, it would appear that some individuals see and replicate observed and learned behaviour. Furthermore, it was highlighted by the educators that school violence is predominantly due to existing external factors that spill into the school grounds. Additionally, these external influences are mentioned by the educators as extending into the political arena as well. The educators asserted that the influence of a violent society occurs globally and is not only confined to the South African context.

'Violence is the way of life, not in South Africa, in the world. So it is why it spills into the schools, it spills into the political arena. Whoever thought that politicians could stab one another with knives'
Participants 1: FG1

b). Sub-cultural formations

The influence of the external environment takes shape within sub-cultural formations. The educators believe that sub-cultures originate internationally and are brought into the South African context. Furthermore, they describe that a sub-culture develops in a group where young people identify with the group which may then influence their behaviour. It is perceived that these groups are responsible for supplying drugs and influencing what activities will take place in the schools. It was mentioned that learners join these groups in order to feel recognised, powerful and accepted. This could be due to the failure of unmet needs within the home environment, as well as low self-esteem. Furthermore, being a member of a particular group provides the individual with a sense of belonging. Examples of these types of groups are provided in the following statements:

'From a cultural point you get kids going to Muslim things, I don't know what if it's a church or what's happening… and if you look at all these kids who go into this church, they turn into hooligans and you start wandering what kind of church is this and why are all these kids who smoke dagga and glue, they want to go to that church and then they will want to bring that into the school.'
Participants 3: FG1

'They wear these hats in the school premises and they appear to be big, it was like so proud, I am the supplier and supplies them'
Participants 3: FG1

'…they provide them with something. That's why they go to the church'
Participant 3: FG1

From the educators' perceptions, the above quotes reflect the type of affiliation some of the learners have to these particular groups. It further reflects the type of influence that these groups may exert on individuals.

It is further postulated by the educators when discussing environmental causal factors, that the formation of gangs is significant when accounting for school violence. They specifically referred to the COSAS (Congress of South African Students) group as exerting a lot of power and influence over the learners.

'And sometimes they call COSAS, their mother boat so we fail at the end'
Participants 1: FG2

When attempting to clarify the role of this COSAS group, the educators mentioned that it has a lot of influence and highlighted the following:

'It's a congress, a union, ya. It represents the learners'
Participants 3: FG2

As Mogano (1993) explains, the COSAS group was established in 1979 in response to the banning of the Black Consciousness movement where learners sought other forms of political expression. This student organisation adopted a position founded in the

Freedom Charter. The struggles that occurred within schools were perceived by the COSAS group as forming part of a broader struggle against oppression by the South African Government (Mogano, 1993). However, the period under review within this current research is Post-Apartheid, yet this group currently remains in a powerful position and continues to exert control over the student members. Despite the country's transition, it appears that the COSAS group continues to fight for something, but the question elicited is what? It is strongly emphasised by the educators that they in general have no power over decisions made and often the activities of the COSAS group ends in violence. This is reflected in the following statement:

'You cannot tell them anything, when they decide that tomorrow is a bash, there is nothing that you can say and when they come within the school carrying bags, there is anything liquor, drugs, anything inside those bags. They smoke, they drink, they fight after that'
Participants 4: FG2

This possibly reflects that the underlying meaning that originally contributed to the formation of this group is not clearly understood by the learners of today; this explains the misuse of this group to achieve objectives that do not form part of the original COSAS tradition. What the COSAS group originally was is now distorted and used as a means of power.

This group previously and currently contributes to the potential for conflict to arise between students and teachers as it affords power to the learners, leaving the educators powerless.

Furthermore, as highlighted by Mogano (1993), sub-cultural formations exist as an alternative to the dominant cultures in which learners feel marginalised and excluded, and these sub-cultures provide an alternative identity for individuals. Sub-cultures manifest in 'negative adventurism' which is a form of antisocial behaviour due to community disintegration (Mogano, 1993).

c). Constructions of community

Emphasis was placed on the impacts of psychosocial factors such as **poverty and HIV**. Poverty was stressed by the educators to be a contributing factor. They explained that the learners have grown up in a community characterised by poverty, poor living conditions and abuse which often leads to feelings of hopelessness. This is reflected by the participants and is illustrated in the following descriptions of their community:

'You see many people are staying in one room, the child will be born in that same room, he's gonna grow there and there will be another child in the same room…Maybe you saw the shacks there next to one another, in another shack there is fighting so that is how they see. Maybe they are making love, you can't be sure…'
Participants 3: FG2

'And there is no promise that one day they are going to leave this place'
Participants 3: FG2

'…Most of the learners don't go home, they hang around here because they are scared of the uncles, the step-fathers, the grandfathers that are abusing them so they feel safe when they are next to or when they come to school. So life is not okay'
Participants 5: FG2

As reflected by Participant 5, Focus Group 2 in the above quote, it appears that in contrast to what is previously stated by the educators, learners are in fact fearful, particularly of becoming a victim of abuse. Violence is played out in their personal lives and this implies that there are situations that are feared which may play a role in the cycle of violence. Educators are aware of the experiences that learners are exposed to, but are helpless in providing assistance.

According to Maree (2002), key contextual factors such as poverty are associated with violence and transition, and may further contribute to the likelihood that individuals may engage in violence.

The development of **inbuilt anger** ties into the above description regarding the construction of the community and the psychosocial factors that the community face.

From what was mentioned, this can be linked to the description the educators gave regarding the inbuilt anger that has developed internally within many learners. It appears that for many of the learners, a strong feeling of anger presents and is often misplaced in other areas.

'I'm saying there's a lot of anger, so you can see he's got his own anger '
Participants 3: FG1

d). Recreational facilities or lack thereof

The participants from School 1 mentioned that recreational facilities are available, and that there is much offered to the learners within the school and outside the school parameters but the learners make no use of these. However, the participants from school 2 revealed that there are in fact no recreational facilities offered within the community. However, it is interesting to take note that the educators from both schools asserted that learners display no interest in sports or recreational activities, in spite of the contradiction.

The educators believe that generally, learners' and youth's interests lie elsewhere. The alternatives for the learners are to rather listen to music, hang around the taverns or on the streets. As highlighted by Davis (as cited in Bezuidenhout & Joubert, 2003), too much involvement in leisure activities and time spent away from school and on the streets may lead individuals to engage in violence. This presents a problem as the educators feel that the learners' marked lack of interest leads them to engage in activities that may not be appropriate and may lead to violence.

The contradiction in the differing perceptions regarding recreational facilities or lack thereof is captured in the following statements made by participants from the two schools:

'With all the recreational facilities there is swimming, there is golf, there is squash, there is cricket, there is basketball but these kids they are never interested, they are interested in what, putting gadgets in their ears, listening to snoopy doggy dog, swearing, swearing '
Participants 1: FG1

'…I think there are very few playing grounds, there are parks, as you move around here you will see parks and stuff like that but they are not at that standard, its just that there are parks there but most of the learners they don't use them they will rather go around doing other things, they rather use taverns or something like that'
Participants 5: FG2

The participants also alluded to the fact that the Government had indeed attempted to address the problem of the lack of facilities and sports available. It was suggested that schools would have a sports master to regulate sports within schools. However, this project failed due to the lack of financial resources and these individuals could not be paid. It was also revealed that Alexandra is extremely crowded; therefore, if a space is available it will not be used for recreational purposes, but rather for creating a living space. It appears that as far as the residents of Alexandra are concerned, there is a greater need for accommodation and this takes precedence over recreational facilities.

The educators believe that the learners of today show no interest in their future or the potential careers offered, and rather make excuses for not displaying interest in furthering their development. The educators believe that individual's interests are different in comparison to those of the past, and that the youth today invest their interests in the material world. The learners are believed to have no interest in education and are full of excuses. They would rather attribute their lack of interest to the unequal distribution of resources. Educators disagree and feel that the learners would rather substitute their lack of interest with excuses. The following statement highlights this perception:

'They will say that unequal distribution of whatever is there but if you really want to play cricket even if you are staying in very serious bundoos if you are really interested there are plans around. So they've just got excuses for everything including not wanting to study. You always tell them the majority of blacks we have police, teachers and nurses in the olden days, they've got all the choices but they don't want them '
Participants 2: FG1

The educators attribute this to the differing generations and the recent **breakdown in community solidarity**. The following extract provides a description of how previous

generations attended to the lack of resources and attempts to display the reasons why the educators feel there is a breakdown in community solidarity:

'You see when I grew up I was never exposed to a lot of recreational facilities like the generation today. You know when I grew up the only sport which we could play, it was soccer, we did not have a proper soccer ball we had to improvise and take what you call a lady's pantyhose and do some ball there and play but we did not have the high level of violence because the community then were strong, were strong, you see I speak to you, we this age group, this is the last generation of a solid, a solid community'
Participants 1: FG1

What is also implied in the above description is the comparison between the previous levels of violence in the past to the current higher levels of violence, as well as the impact this has on community cohesion. The educators compared the strength of previous generations to the current community which is characterised by a breakdown of solidarity and support. This implies that due to the community cohesion that was apparent in the past, the levels of violence were lower; whereas currently, the failure of community solidarity and support has contributed to the high levels of violence that now exists.

This led into a discussion around the **basics of life** and the exclusion of this today. From the educators' perceptions people no longer rely on each other for support. Consequently, the community is torn apart. This is reflected in the following quote:

'You see everything fails, we, everything fails…what do you do you go back to the basics…You will group and you will go take strength…If we live by the basics of life'
Participants 1: FG1

The problems that have emerged from the above discussions may be linked to the lack of resources, anger, frustration, boredom and the belief that things will not get better. There are no alternatives for the learners and therefore problems arise.

e). The old versus the new generation: Family and parental influences

A striking feature raised within the focus group discussions was the way in which the educators constructed and described the role of patriarchy and male dominance and its

influence over violence that plays out in schools. These portrayals served to highlight the importance of family influence and structure, and its contribution to the violence displayed by youth in school.

From the educators' perspective the old and new systems are in conflict. Specifically, this refers to the current system versus the African system, whereby the current system advocates human rights and the African system does not. What was implied here is that an African system is hierarchical where a male is placed at the top, exerting power and influence, followed by submissive females. Traditionally within this system, women were perceived as passive and subservient. However, bearing in mind that this report focuses on educators' perceptions, it offers one view regarding male dominance and patriarchy today.

In relation to the above, the educators asserted that the old system placed men in power and emphasised male dominance. However, this system has now fallen away and the educators assert that this has affected the roles played within families and that as a result, effective methods of discipline no longer exist. The perceived decrease in patriarchal authority leads the educators to believe that this largely influences of the increase of violence amongst the youth today.

Further to this, the educators emphasised that there exists a lack of interest in child rearing and a shirking of responsibility which consequently affects the respect that children relay to significant others and people in general. This is reflected in the following quote:

'Now you find that in most households the male if he is there, that male runs away from responsibility, most of the males in the families have shunned their responsibilities'
Participants 1: FG1

What the above quote elicits is that the learners bring this lack of discipline received at home into the schools and thus do not adequately respect the educators, therefore making it difficult to instil discipline or maintain order.

'You see boys at home do not have a father figure, its going to difficult for a mother to raise those boys because we men in most cases what do they do, instead of taking those boys head on they will always try to appease boys in order to do what, even if they do wrong things they appease them. Then that boy will come with that mentality here at school and say for example, if I cannot be disciplined at home, who are you to discipline me '
Participants 1: FG1

The salient issues identified here include the difficulties around parenting and a dysfunctional home environment. Again, this is explained as being a significant feature in explaining why schools are characterised by much violence. The challenges around parenting are reflected in the following quotes:

'Now you find that in most households the male if he is there, that male runs away from responsibility, most of the males in the families have shunned their responsibilities'
Participants 1: FG1

'There is power struggle between the parents and the child, so the child comes with that anger from home and when he gets to school he starts bullying other kids, he wants to prove a point'
Participants 1: FG1

'Its lack of parenting, for example, if you can look into the families of the kids who are violent at school'
Participants 1: FG1

Furthermore, the educators again stressed the importance of single-parent homes and the impact of this on the learners. The educators posited that how things work at home is perceived by the learners to occur in the same way at schools. This possibly leads to anger stemming from the inadequacy of the home environment, filtering into the school where the specific learner incorrectly displaces their anger onto the educators. This is supported by Attachment Theory provided in the literature review above. From this perspective, insecure attachments are linked to social problem-solving difficulties which may contribute towards hostile tendencies (Bowlby, 1980, as cited in Mathew, 1995).

It appears that the educators' perceptions imply that learners may have had difficulties with developing affectional bonds. Additionally, as there is a link between family, social competence and problematic behaviours for some of the learners, their difficulties may have arisen out of the lack of emotional availability and inconsistent parenting styles. As a result, they may develop intense feelings of anger and frustration which is then displaced onto others (Mathew, 1995). In this instance, the educators have become the targets of the learner's misplaced anger.

This may also explain the reasons why the educators experience so much defiance from the learners. This perception is demonstrated in the following statements:

'Once more the boy was just targeting you as a family figure'
Participants 5: FG1

'Maybe he was being defiant to the male [teacher] because there is no male at home' (authors own insertion)
Participants 3: FG1

In contextualising this theme, one can draw on the discussion of the previous themes. Many of the above inferences, such as the breakdown in community solidarity, can be applied to the way in which this plays out here. The educators claim that there is a perceived breakdown of community support and solidarity, where in the past there was more respect and a collective, joined parenting style. Everyone in the community played a part in taking responsibility for the youth and assisted in instilling discipline. It was agreed upon that a child is the product of a community. Today, this assistance no longer exists. This is reflected in the following quote:

'In the olden days, in particular black societies you do not have such problems because that child of my neighbour was my child and he or she will give me respect'
Participants 5: FG1

In addition, what was noteworthy was the perceived lack of interest that parents show in their children in general, and specifically in their progress at school. However, for educators in Focus Group 1, it is felt that parents only show interest when their child

has experienced conflict with an educator. Often parents do not see fault in their children and therefore when violence is committed by a child, it is not acknowledged. Parents do not seem interested in whether their child is right or wrong. This is again linked to the fact that violence is silenced. The parents' lack of interest in their child's progress is reflected in the following quote:

'The parents you call them to come and discuss a problem of a child, an academic problem, they wont come, but clap one child, you will see the mother she will come, just clap one child, but for the child to progress she will never come, there is no time…They always see faults with teachers'
Participants 2: FG1

The participants in Focus Group 2 further discussed the use of strangers as parents; for example, if a problem arises, a letter is sent to the parents via the learner stating that they need to attend a meeting at school. Those that do not have parents pick people along the street and ask them to attend the meeting with them. Even those who have parents tend to do this. Additionally, many parents were identified as using their children to sell drugs in an attempt to support their families. These learners are given money in order to entice them into this process.

As demonstrated in the literature review, research supports the role that family factors may play in explaining violence occurring in schools. As Krug *et al* (2002) refers to the influence of the family environment and parental factors as serving to predispose individuals to both perpetrate and become victims of violence. The factors highlighted by Krug *et al* (2002) as playing a contributory role include poor supervision, weak family cohesion, harsh discipline, parental aggression and conflict, poor attachment between parents and children and belonging to a large family. Furthermore, links were found in the Youth Victimisation Study between the exposure to violence within the home and the community, and exposure to violence at school (Burton, 2008b). Many of these were clearly outlined by the educators within the focus group discussions. Additionally, this may be related to the social learning theoretical framework as mentioned above.

As outlined by O'Connor (2006) in providing an account of Hirsch's theory of social control, it is stated that incompetent and single parenting influences ones' predisposition to becoming violent. Single parenting appears to be a common phenomenon in South Africa and is strongly linked with the cycle of violence (O'Connor, 2006).

However, whilst the above discussion served to account for these factors as predisposing individuals to use violence they did not reveal the use of these factors in predisposing individuals to becoming victims of violence.

4.2.3 VICTIMISATION AND PERPETRATION

As demonstrated in the literature review, most of the research conducted on school violence has continuously focused on this occurrence from the perspective of learners. It fails to acknowledge the value that educators may contribute to the building of knowledge in this area. Within the focus group discussions, the educators' perspective of the violence that occurs towards educators and by educators was accounted for, offering an alternative view. It further yielded explanations regarding learner-on-learner violence and provided possible explanations for this phenomenon.

a). Educators as perpetrators or victims

In general, **educators as perpetrators** appear to be the focus of attention in research and highlighted by the media. As demonstrated in research conducted by Burton (2008), educators are involved in the perpetuation of school violence which is often in the form of physical assault. It was additionally highlighted by Lilly et al (1995) that negative teacher relationships may also contribute towards increased violence. However, in contrast, an additional study revealed that educators have also reported feeling unsafe at school (SAIRR, 2008).

It was acknowledged by the educators that this phenomenon does exist, albeit quite rarely when compared to the past. This is in contrast to the picture the media portrays, and educators attribute this misrepresentation to the fact that it is only when educators are violent with learners, that the media shows strong interest and publishes this information. Consequently, the educators receive less support from parents and

authorities and are further blamed when things do not go well at school or when the educational system becomes questionable. This is demonstrated in the following statements:

'But if you can beat up a boy, a boy comes with a knife, you beat him up and you stab, you take that knife and you stab him, the district will come very hard, very fast. You violate the rights of a minor but when that minor is pointing a gun at you they don't come they will say solve that problem'
Participants 1: FG1

'…he comes with a gun, he points a gun at me, lets say I have mine, I use a gun its who fires the first one, I shoot him, it depends, I will be guilty, the media will be saying we'll find him guilty, I'll undergo a trial by the media, I'll be proved guilty before finding the evidence what led to that situation'
Participants 1: FG1

From the educators' perspective, they feel that the media should create a more accurate, realistic portrayal of school violence, highlighting the educators' role as adequate teachers and in turn, reveal that learners may also be perpetrators. More importantly, the events that lead educators to resort to violence, which has been revealed in this analysis, should be exposed rather than concealed. This is however, in contrast to recent newspaper articles where learners in particular, are revealed to be involved in much of the violence committed towards other learners and educators. It is possible that the educators' belief in the media runs deeper than just exposing learners as perpetrators, and that they hope to receive more validation and acknowledgement of the importance of their role and assistance they provide for learners.

'I think it can be an appeal to the powers that be, through the media maybe. The problem of violence must not be tampered with, it's still there, the papers must keep on talking, maybe they will come to our rescue'
Participants 2: FG1

Additionally, both groups mentioned that more often than not, their roles as educators extend beyond their training, and they are required to perform many duties not

outlined in their job description. The educators mentioned that they often become 'midwives' and assist in the delivery of babies born to learners. This is reflected in the following quotes:

'Teachers, lady teachers they must do what you call midwifery'
Participants 1: FG1

'We are not mid-wives but we are supposed to be for the department of education, you become a mother of all faculties, we become social workers, we become midwives, we become mothers, we become police, all faculties. And the media will never report on that one, they will only report on negative things'
Participants 4: FG2

The above educators' perceptions reflect the fact that their role extends beyond teaching. They do a lot, yet receive no acknowledgement or support; rather they are criticised and blamed. Society constructs misconceptions about educators and they are not perceived as important but are rather discarded and left alone to fight a losing battle.

In discussing educators as perpetrators, a picture regarding these types of acts was provided. However, there appeared to be some contradiction between the two schools involved in this research when explanations provided intensified the problem at differing degrees. School 1 accounted for the acts of violence conducted by educators on learners in various ways, and provided explanations in support of their statements. It was acknowledged by the educators that there are times where educators are punitive, but stated that this is out of desperation, intolerance and frustration. They deal with violence using more extreme measures that may be considered inappropriate as they feel they have no other option. This again reinforces the educator's need to use violence in order to stop violence, and may be due to their feelings of helplessness. The following description describes the intensity of educator-perpetration as revealed by school 2:

'…corporal punishment was working but with our generation with this generation they are soft and they die easily so if you apply it and many of the learners have become injured, dies and stuff like that so educators got into trouble '
Participants 5: FG2

There appears to be misrecognition by the educators as it seems that they do not realise that corporal punishment and the use of violence on learners is also a form of violence. This essentially contributes towards the existing culture of violence. Perhaps from the educators' perception, corporal punishment is a controlled form of discipline; however, their response regarding this issue is problematic as it represents discrepancies and incongruence in their current frame of thinking. Corporal punishment and the use of violence on learners is in itself a violation of rights, and thus should be replaced with more appropriate mechanisms of behavioural control. However, perhaps the school system is not recognised as forming part of the established culture of violence that exists within the community.

In contrast to School 2, the educators confirmed that they do play a role in educator-on-learner violence, but added that their role in the violent acts towards learners is minor and does not frequently occur. More often, the educators perceive themselves as victims, rather than perpetrators. However as indicated, there are instances where educators instigate violence, and learners are used as pawns in an attempt to achieve their aims and objectives. Additionally, the problem of educators blackmailing learners, such as threatening to fail a learner if they do not engage in sexual activities, is common.

A great deal of focus remains on educators as perpetrators; however, little attention is paid to the incident of **educators as targets** of much anger, aggression and violence. This has been reflected in previous research conducted as well as in media reports. The educators indicated that they are often the targets of violence, are further provoked by learners and receive many threats to their safety and lives. They feel unsafe and fear that their lives are in danger. As demonstrated in the literature review, and as mentioned by Burton (2008b), this contributes to the lack of adequate and reliable data on the extent of school violence. He attributes one of the reasons for this lack of data to the reluctance of educators to report acts of violence for fear of reprisal

or earning a negative reputation. This was revealed by the educators as they believe that if they report such acts of violence perpetrated by learners, their lives may be in danger as they have often received threats. Furthermore, when acts are reported, nothing is done and thus the educators fail to report incidences. In cases where these occurrences have been reported, the educators are indirectly blamed and made to feel that they are not capable of solving these problems. This contributes to the complexities of addressing school violence as the extent is not accurately revealed.

b). Learner-on-Learner violence

There is an extensive amount of learner-on-learner violence occurring within schools. This is supported by the alarming statitistics revealed in the literature review, where it is reported that only 23% of learners feel safe at school (SAIRR, 2008). Extrapolating this proportion to the approximately 1500 learners in School 1 leaves 1155 of these learners feeling unsafe. This reflects the intensity and extent of the problem of school violence.

Included in this section are some explanations that were highlighted by the educators as being factors that contribute towards learner-on-learner violence. The educators perceived that the use of violence from learners to other learners is a form of intimidation.

What was significantly stressed by the educators within the focus group discussions was the influence and risk that an individual's **age** may have on the use of violence. They further elaborated on the importance of age as an indicator of violence by describing that it appears that the older learners in the school present problems for various reasons.

The educators believe that it is difficult for these individuals who are not able to compete academically, to accept that they have failed standards and therefore have had to repeat grades. This leads to much frustration and in response these learners tend to take it out on other learners through the use of intimidation, threats or violence. The learners who are the appropriate age for the particular grade feel intimidated and comply with demands placed on them by these older individuals. It was highlighted that often there is an age difference of 4 years. For example, the

appropriate age for a specific grade is 13 or 14 years of age, yet some learners in this grade are 18 years old. This presents many complications and one of these is the differing developmental stages of these individuals. As demonstrated in the literature review, Maree (2003) contends that biological traits are linked to violence and factors such as age or gender are relevant for this account. Furthermore, other research has also revealed that personality factors such as low levels of achievement are correlated with violence. This is supported by the educators' accounts of low academic achievement and violence.

Other salient factors accounting for learner-on-learner violence, as mentioned by the educators, include the use of violence or intimidation when competing for furniture, peer pressure, lack of resources, difficult school conditions, the high volume of learners per class and the influence of other individuals entering the school premises during school hours. The above-mentioned factors stem from underlying feelings of frustration and anger which may have roots in the Apartheid legacy.

Mogano (1993) revealed in his report on school violence that a shortage of classrooms and teachers, and underprivileged schools that show no major improvements, have roots in the Apartheid Education Act and contributes to the feelings of frustration which may play out in the form of violence. Furthermore, as revealed by Joubert (2003), the political transition created high expectations regarding the quality of education. These have not adequately been met in the proposed time period and therefore contribute to feelings of frustration and discontent.

Additionally, many of the learners are short of money or materials and this may lead to frustration which can be expressed through the use of violence. This is reflected in the following quote:

'Closer around townships there are these uncles, older people, they never worked in their lives and they are driving fast cars, good houses, so the school boys love to immediate that and he brings that sometimes to school. This week he got a lot of money and next week he doesn't have money, maybe they will laugh at him, he starts now being violent with others'
Participants 2: FG1

It was further mentioned by the educators that violence may also be used in an attempt to gain recognition and confidence. This is linked to the failure of competing academically, and therefore, in order for the individual to gain recognition or interest from the opposite sex, they use violence. This contributes to an improved self-esteem and the young individual then feels proud and confident.

4.3 CONCLUSION

The causal pathways for explaining violence are complex. No single causal factor, as mentioned by the educators, may account for the multi-faceted phenomenon of school violence. It is suggested that rather, there are various compounding factors that contribute and sustain violence in schools.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

This research study explored educators' perceptions of school violence, and its causes and consequences. Based on the analysis, this chapter will provide conclusions, followed by recommendations and areas that require further research. Finally, the strengths, weaknesses and implications of the study will be evaluated.

5.1. CONCLUSIONS

School violence in South Africa is prevalent and a characteristic of many schools, especially within disadvantaged areas. Several studies have highlighted the alarming occurrence of school violence in South Africa. The theories offered in accounting for school violence are based largely within an ecological approach, emphasising the role of external factors in accounting for developmental outcomes and explanations for the existence of school violence. These approaches therefore offer an integrative description, emphasising the relationship between individual, community and societal factors. However, no single disciplinary theoretical explanation of school violence within the South African context may fully account for its occurrence. Therefore, this study incorporated key elements from sociological and ecological theoretical explanations in order to understand the existence of school violence and contributing factors.

The educators' perceptions of school violence were consistent with the findings revealed in other studies conducted in the area of school violence generally. However, through a closer examination of school violence from educators' perceptions, more salient features where highlighted regarding the essence of how school violence plays out and its underlying contributing factors and consequences.

As no specific definition of the dimensions of school violence currently exists, it is viewed as a pattern that comprises both perpetration and victimisation, and extends to include many parameters such as violent crime occurring at school, delinquency, substance abuse and gang activities. Furthermore, as previously suggested, there is an overlap between general violence and youth violence.

Additionally, forming part of the objective of this study, schools were considered a site in which external community factors play out on the school grounds. Therefore, schools were essentially considered as the physical location where external community factors exert influence. Findings from this study further imply that school violence needs to be understood as being entrenched in a broader violent society, as violence contains cultural and structural dimensions and schools as social institutions reflect and promote the occurrence of violence.

The educators engaged well with the topic of school violence and this may be attributed to the fact that arising out of the discussions was the opportunity for the educators to reflect their views and to be heard. One of the most dominant and relevant findings from the research conducted, centred on the issue of pupil power and lost authority. The educators emphasised the imbalance of power held by learners and the consequent loss of authority that characterise their role as educators. What this in fact implies is that the educators are faced with an inability to instil discipline. This is exacerbated by the lack of consequences, coping mechanisms, the failure and inadequacy of the justice system and a lack of necessary support.

Being unable to instil discipline leaves the educators feeling paralysed and powerless in their attempt to decrease the violence that occurs at school. The educators continuously emphasised that they require help and assistance as they feel they do not have the means to control violence at any level. In addition, and corroborated by Mogano (1993), it is not likely that learners will accept the authority of educators. Therefore, educators will remain at the receiving end of a displaced hostility which may contribute to their feelings of helplessness and inability to dictate the school process.

In relation to the above, what is additionally highlighted as a significant and relevant finding, is the educators' perception that only violence could stop violence. It appears that the way the educators' conceptualised violence was incongruous to a rights-based approach to schooling. They expressed a strong need to stop and further prevent violence occurring at schools; however, at the same time they conveyed the need to bring corporal punishment back into the system, not acknowledging that corporal punishment is in fact a form of violence.

It appears that through their desperation, educators feel that being violent in response to violence is the only solution. This reflects the entrenchment of the 'culture of violence' that exists, which has been suggested in the literature review and further echoed by Blaser (2008b) who stated that educators also contribute to the 'culture of violence' through the use of corporal punishment, despite being proscribed. As corporal punishment, which was previously considered an accepted method of behavioural control, was abolished without being replaced by any other mode of less brutal discipline, the educators may be unaware of alternative forms of discipline. They have been left to deal with the problem of school violence alone, thus leaving them in a state of helplessness.

Furthermore, the exclusion of educators as primary stakeholders in research is reflected in policy and practice. The educators emphasised that educational policies have been developed and imposed on them without their input making it difficult for them to apply them practically. It was suggested that their valuable input should be considered when attempts are made to address the issues, including school violence, that occur at schools.

Educators as targets was another key theme that emerged from the study. Much attention has been given to educators' roles as perpetrators; however, their role as targets has been extensively avoided. The educators did acknowledge that there are instances where they can be considered perpetrators of violence towards learners, but firmly believe that they are more often the targets of much anger, aggression and violence. This belief has contributed to the intense fear that educators have for their lives.

Finally, the significance of 'guns, drugs and gangs' as drivers of violence was highlighted by the educators. The educators believe that these contributing and causal factors appear to play a vital role in the occurrence of school violence. The formation of gangs, as suggested by the educators, may be directly linked to sub-cultural formations and the fulfilment of unmet needs. It is often the behaviours that are valued by members of these gangs that leads to violence. Furthermore, gangs appear to provide the individuals with a sense of power. The educators highlighted that gang formations satisfy a basic need to belong to a group and create a self-identity.

Furthermore, this may be linked to a society which is characterised by broken-down social order and the lack of alternative shared cultural behaviours as highlighted by Krug *et al* (2002).

The access and availability of weapons contributes to the occurrence of violence at schools as it makes it easier to engage in violence. Additionally, the availability of drugs and alcohol as risk factors for violence contributes largely to violence committed by youth (Maree, 2003). These activities involve elements of violence and often individuals become involved in drug dealing as a means to provide an income to support themselves and their families (Maree, 2003). Moreover, the educators in this study regarded the use of drugs and alcohol to be prevalent amongst the learners, and a contributor to both community-based and school violence. These findings together suggest that educators attribute much of the violence that occurs at school to factors filtering in from the broader community. It should therefore be noted that in the educators' opinion, school violence cannot be understood without recognising the effects of external influences and broader community contextual factors.

5.2. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A significant strength of this research lies in utilising educators' perceptions in describing and accounting for school violence. This study may further contribute towards possible future interventions that will assist in improving the well-being of learners and educators. As this research was exploratory in nature, it allowed significant themes to arise through the descriptions of the participants involved and thus further revealed rich data. Additionally, through the use of thematic content analysis, interpretations of the data elicited and descriptions of the way the participants viewed the social world was made possible. The use of qualitative methodology provided open discussions in which the educators were able to participate and express their views concerning the topic.

Potential weaknesses in this study involved gathering data from the perceptions of educators that work in schools situated in disadvantaged communities, without considering a comparison of educators working in the more advantaged sectors. It may have been interesting to assess if the contributing factors that the participants

mentioned extended into all communities; however, considering that school violence in these areas is prevalent, this data may differ substantially. Additionally, it may have also proved useful to consider the learners' perspective in comparison to the educators. Additionally, the voices of the female participants were lost at times, and therefore the information revealed may reflect a dominant male perspective.

5.3. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributed to the existing knowledge base on school violence generally and specifically provided an account of school violence from educators' perceptions. It provided insight into the experiences of educators and allowed for a new form of data to be utilised for future interventions. Therefore, due to the paucity of research on educators' perceptions, this research may provide valuable data for conceptualising school violence and furthermore represent a new viewpoint that may be considered.

As this study focused specifically on educators' perceptions, it highlighted significant factors relevant to the understanding of school violence. Many of the findings were also consistent with other research conducted on school violence generally. However, this study emphasised the importance of including educators and their perceptions in understanding school violence. This reinforces the need to consider educators when addressing or examining the school violence phenomenon. Interventions cannot be formed or implemented without considering educators' views, as they are key stakeholders directly involved in school processes and are thus impacted on many levels by violence occurring at schools.

As previously emphasised, one must be cognisant that addressing school violence extends beyond just addressing violence at school sites. The underlying broader community factors need to be taken into account when considering interventions. However, addressing contributing factors such as poverty, marginalisation, lack of resources, disintegrated family structures, lack of government support and the inadequacy of the justice system remains difficult. Further research should therefore consider the inclusion of the perceptions of a wider group of community actors, including parents, police, healthcare workers and pupils, in order to better understand

the complexity and interaction of broader community factors in precipitating and sustaining school violence in South Africa.

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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

School of Human and Community Development

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,

Johannesburg, South African

Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011)

717-4559

Email: 018lucy@muse.wits.ac.za

Hello,
My name is Vanessa Trakman, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is that of educators' perceptions of school violence. We live in a society where school violence is increasing and impacts negatively on learners and educators. Through this research, I hope to gain a greater understanding of school violence from educator's perceptions and the possible factors that contribute to the prevalence of school violence. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will entail being part of a focus group with five other participants. Focus groups will entail discussions around the perceptions of school violence. The focus groups will take place at a time and place that is convenient for the participants and will last for approximately one hour. With your permission the focus group will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy and consent will be required to use quotes from the focus groups during the writing of the research report. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. Due to focus groups this research cannot guarantee confidentiality however, each participant will be asked to sign a confidentiality form prior to each focus group to safeguard against this. The research cannot guarantee anonymity, however pseudonyms will be used to identify the different participant's responses in the research report and no identifying information will be used in the research report. Each participant will be required before the focus group to sign a confidentiality form to uphold this.

The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation other than myself, my supervisor and a transcriber and it will only be processed by them. The raw data will be kept in a safe and secure location with restricted access. Once the research report has been accepted for qualification, the recordings and transcriptions from the focus group will be destroyed. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. There are no direct benefits to participating in the study and this is a minimal risk study as there is minimal

likelihood of harm as the study is non-invasive. However, if participation leads to distressing feelings the individual can withdraw immediately and a contact number for Ikhaya Lethemba has been provided in this form. The results will be made available in the form of a one page summary which will be accessible to participants and the schools will be given a copy of the research report. If you choose to participate in the study please fill in your details on the form below and return to me. Alternatively I can be contacted telephonically at 082 348 6293 or via e-mail at vanessatrak@vodamail.co.za.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute both to a larger body of knowledge on perceptions of school violence and contribute further towards understanding the negative impact of violence occurring within schools

Kind Regards
Vanessa Trakman

Additional contact numbers:
Research Supervisor: Brett Bowman
011 717-8335
Ikhaya Lethemba:
011 321-4111

Appendix B: Consent Form for Focus Groups

I_____ consent to being interviewed by Vanessa Trakman for her study on educator's perceptions of school violence.
I understand that:

- As confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, this will be negotiated in the signing of confidentiality agreements.
- There are no direct benefits in participation in this study.
- Participation in this focus group is voluntary.
- I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report other than direct quotes but through the use of pseudonyms in the writing of the research report, the researcher will keep the responses as anonymous as possible.

Signed_____

Appendix C: Consent Form for Recording

I _____ consent to my interview with Vanessa Trakman for her study on educator's perceptions of school violence being tape recorded.

I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will be kept in a safe and secure location with restricted access.
- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation other than the researcher, her supervisor and the transcriber, and will only be processed by them.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the research report as the researcher will use pseudonyms in identifying different participants.

I further give consent to Vanessa Trakman to use direct quotes free of identifying information.

Signed_____

Appendix D: Confidentiality Agreement

I _____ agree to keep all disclosed information in this focus group confidential.

I understand that anything discussed during this focus group is to be used for research purposes only and I will not disclose any of the information shared by other participants.

Signed_____

Appendix E: School Participation Request

Educator's perceptions of school violence.

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Vanessa Trakman, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters Degree in Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is on educators perceptions of school violence. The aim of the research is to gain in-depth descriptions as well as the valuable understanding from educators' perceptions of the problem of school violence with the intention of initiating possible future interventions. I would like to interview educators in the form of focus group discussions, which would take place after school hours and on the school premises. The length of the focus group shall not exceed two hours.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study and kindly request your assistance. Participation in this study is voluntary and the participants will be able to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence or prejudice. Due to focus groups, this research cannot guarantee confidentiality; however, each participant will be asked to sign a confidentiality form prior to each focus group to safeguard against this. The research also cannot guarantee anonymity; however, pseudonyms will be used to identify the different participant's responses in the research report and no identifying information will be used in the report. Each participant will be required before the focus group to sign a confidentiality form to uphold this. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation other than myself, my supervisor and a transcriber, and it will only be processed by them. The raw data will be kept in a safe and secure location with restricted access. Once the research report has been accepted for qualification, the recordings and transcriptions from the focus group will be destroyed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and please do not hesitate to contact me on 082 348 6293 or email vanessatrak@vodamail.co.za, you can also contact my supervisor, Brett Bowman on 011 717-8335 if you should require more details.

Thanking you in anticipation,
Vanessa Trakman.

Appendix F: Interview schedule

1. What do you as an educator perceive to be the causes of school violence?
2. What do you as an educator perceive to be the consequences of school violence?
3. What is the prevalence and extent of school violence?
4. How do you as an educator deal and cope with school violence?
5. What are the direct effects and impact of school violence on educators?
6. How would you as an educator describe your community / broadly and the surrounding area?
7. What role if any do educators play in violence against learners?
   (The literature suggests that often educators may be involved in acts of violence towards learners, such as harassment).
8. What is your experience as an educator related to violent acts while teaching?
   (Any direct experience of violence during the school day)
9. How does the school respond to violence?
   (Is there a policy in place, do the police get involved or is it dealt with internally)
10. What resources do educators have to diffuse dangerous behaviours or violent acts?
    (What support do educators receive?)
11. What are your perceptions of the following contributing factors to youth violence?
    - Individual (perceptions of age, drugs and alcohol, and gender influencing violence?)
    - Family (How do you perceive familial factors as contributing towards youth violence and the role of discipline)
    - School (Lack of discipline, peer pressure)
    - Community (What resources are in place, such as recreational centres, churches, areas with higher recreational facilities and link to violence. The role of political parties, crime)