

Educators' Experiences and Perceptions of School Violence

An Analysis of Causes, Triggers and the Role of Racism

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Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work, and that acknowledgement has been given to all sources used throughout this report. This report is submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts (Community-Based Counselling Psychology) to the Faculty of Humanities, at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

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Abstract

School violence is a pervasive social phenomenon within the global and South African context. Many factors are implicated in its genesis. Representations of such incidents in the media are racially described, with the violence seeming to occur between racial-others. This qualitative research report was informed by the completion of questionnaires by fifteen educators employed at large, co-educational high schools in the broader Johannesburg area. Thematic Content Analysis was used to explore the data which emerged. These findings suggest that school violence is a complex phenomenon which is difficult to define clearly. The school as the site of violence appears to be a critical part of the definition suggesting that youth violence in other domains does not elicit the same concern as violence within the school context. This may be linked to the school's function as a site of socialisation. All educators in the sample have observed or been informed of incidents of school violence within their school contexts, predominantly of the learner-on-learner type. Incidents range in both severity and frequency, with a multiplicity of perceived causes and triggers being identified. Educators identified the home as the primary site of the genesis of such violence, with school being described as a space which teaches and demonstrates multiculturalism and integration. Educators were divided with regards to the role of racism. Racism was either perceived as a scapegoat or as a genuine cause of violence, although the existence of racism within the school context was not denied. The impact of the violence on school functioning and the importance of intervention were all highlighted by the educators. Educators favoured a zero tolerance approach to school violence, with the option of expulsion being advocated for, which may indicate limited systemic understanding of school violence. Educators expressed that school violence was sensationalised in the media, and did not accurately represent the reality at all South African schools. Educators felt that at their schools, at least, violence was under control.

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Chapter One: Introduction

At one point police said, a girl dove under a table for cover and a gunman leaned down, smiled ‘peek-a-boo,’ and then shot her. (Fagan, Wallace & Van Derbeken, 1999, p. A1).

This statement is not a quotation from a crime novel or blockbuster movie; rather it formed part of a course of events on 20th of April 1999, which changed the way the world considered school safety and school violence (Leung & Ferris, 2008). At Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colorado in the United States of America, twenty-three people were killed by two senior learners who wielded shotguns, semiautomatic rifles and explosives. The two ended their violent rampage by taking their own lives (Fagan *et al.*, 1999). Although this was not by any means the first instance of school violence worldwide, it was the “one of bloodiest mass killings in US history” (Fagan *et al.*, 1999, p. A1) and the worst case of school violence reported at the time (Fagan *et al.*, 1999).

School violence is a worldwide concern that challenges and defies a school’s traditional role as a place of safety, learning and encouragement (Leung & Ferris, 2008). Globally, violence has become a common feature of school life (Burton, 2008).

South Africa is no different. A study undertaken by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) found that 15,3% of all South African learners have experienced incidents of school violence – extrapolations of this figure translate into approximately 1 821 054 learners having been either threatened, assaulted, robbed or sexually violated while at school (Burton, 2008).

A number of documented consequences arise from school violence: disruption in teaching and learning; absenteeism; injuries; medical conditions – including fits, fainting and hyperventilation; psychological distress; depression; anxiety; murder and suicide (Stockdale *et al.*, 2002; Leung & Ferris, 2008; Rudatsikira, Muula & Siziya, 2008). When one considers the outcomes and effects of school violence, it becomes clear that this problem cannot be

relegated exclusively to the arena of popular opinion and media debate; rather it also requires intensive academic enquiry and policy considerations. This research forms part of that effort.

Previous research into school violence has tended to centre on learners – both as the participants and as the subject matter of the research (Galand, Lecocq & Phillippot, 2007). Literature has suggested that it is critical to assess and consider school violence from the perspectives of various key figures in the school system (Benbenishty, Astor & Estrada, 2008). There is a paucity of research on educators' perceptions and experiences of school violence. The research that has involved educators concerns their well-being or professional disengagement (Galand *et al.*, 2007) and instances of educator-on-learner violence through so-called disciplinary measures (Burnett, 1998; Burton, 2008). However, educators have hardly been recognised for their value as observers of school violence or their position as victims at times. This research sought to begin to remedy this tendency.

Furthermore, in sharp contrast to attempts to show South Africa as a new, unified democratic state under the banner of a so-called *Rainbow Nation*, racism continues to be evident in the everyday experiences of its people. Despite a decade and a half of racial integration, racial classifications¹ and discourse continue to influence social and other interactions (Soudien, 2004; Duncan, Bowman, Stevens & Mdikana, 2007). Schools are no different.

An alleged racist attack at an Outdshoorn school has set tongues wagging. The education department announced this week it would be investigating an attack on Grade 9 pupil Pequestro Dyssel. The assault was captured on a cellphone and allegedly took place in full view of Pequestro's educator... [T]here had been reports of representatives marketing the school as one for Whites (Dippnall, 2007, p. 2).

Schools are thus continually faced with the challenge of integrating learners from different environments socially and racially. This can result in tensions and frustration within the school

¹ Despite the use of racial classifications throughout this report, it is necessary to bear in mind that these are not essentialist terms; but rather that these categories were socially and politically delineated. Their use is informed by the significant reporting of so-called racial incidents of school violence, and is not meant to be offensive to any reader.

system; especially where different cultural values and identities are present (Soudien, 2004). This is encapsulated most succinctly by a learner on the topic of racial integration at school: “I feel that if pupils from other races want to come to our school then they must adjust to the culture and norms of the school” (Soudien, 2004, p. 102). This sets up a situation where minority racial groups (the composition of a ‘minority’ group would differ from school to school) would have to take on the culture of the dominant culture group in order for harmony to be established. If these minority groups do not accept the school culture hostility and aggression may manifest throughout the school system. Since South Africa seeks to establish its place worldwide as a country of unity through diversity, such racist thoughts and behaviours need to be interrogated. The only effective way of achieving that goal would be its study and the recognition of the role that it plays in present-day South Africa. This study and others like it are thus necessary if South Africans ever hope to achieve racial unity and mutual respect. As the fundamental place of learning and socialisation, racism in schools needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This study hoped to contribute to this essential field of enquiry.

It is not incidental that school violence is a significant social concern in South Africa. Schools have long been sites of social unrest and violence. During the Apartheid years a common slogan amongst learners was “Liberation before Education” (Moodley, 2004, p. 1031). This was a result of the fervent activism of the youth at the time. Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement played a critical role at this historical juncture (Moodley, 2004). The Movement aimed to gather support and mobilise youths against the Apartheid education system, where races each had their own Departments of Education and curricula dependent on perceived racial needs (Vally, Dolombisa & Porteus, 2002). Two historically striking events require mention here. The first, the Soweto Students Uprising of the 1960s where students took an active stand against their inferior education system, the overcrowded classrooms with educator-student ratios of 1:100 and the adoption of Afrikaans as the language of instruction (Moodley, 2004). The second, 16th June 1976 - students once again resisted the Bantu Education system and lack of resources (Moodley, 2004). Hereafter, security forces were common sights at schools – both on the outside of school grounds and in the classrooms

(Moodley, 2004). It is here where South African schools became “highly politicized, chaotic and unsafe places” (Moodley, 2004)

Research Aims

Given the history and role of school amongst the most important socialising agents in South Africa, and as key sites of intervention for the establishment of non-racial, non-sexist and non-discriminatory environments as outlined by the Constitution of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, explorations of the apparent racialised nature of violence within the school setting are necessary. This research focused exclusively on educators, and thus the primary aim of this research was to explore broadly the perceptions South African educators have of school violence. Further it broadly aimed to explore the relationship between school violence and racism. The specific aims of the research involved establishing how educators define school violence, and to elicit first-hand experiences of such incidents. The identification of factors that educators deem to contribute to such acts of aggression and a determination of the educators’ understandings of causes of school violence was an additional aim.

As a possible factor, highlighted but not elaborated in the literature, the researcher aimed to explore explicitly the role of racism in these incidents. Specifically, this entailed determining whether educators believe racism plays a role as either as a precipitating factor, that is, do educators identify racism as a risk factor and/or trigger for such violence.

Finally, the researcher aimed to uncover whether the presence or absence of racist undertones would determine an educator’s course of action. This essentially involved a questioning of what it requires for educator to take action during or after an incident of school violence; and whether an educator would react differently if s/he suspected racist motives.

Therefore, the consideration of the pervasive and historical nature of school violence, both globally and locally, as presented above, provided the foundation for this research. The emphasis on educators was due to their limited representation in research in this area. Since

educators are often the most in contact with their learners, their perceptions with regards to the definitions, causes and triggers of school violence are crucial. This is not only important on an academic level; but also influences their decision whether or not to intervene in certain instances. Furthermore, racism continues to be an underlying factor in social relations and the school context is no different. Determining whether educators believe that racism plays a role as a risk factor for and trigger of school violence is essential, especially for purposes of designing school violence prevention programmes. Such designs require evidence-based inputs, the likes of which this project hopes to deliver.

Chapter Structure

This section concludes the introductory chapter – **Chapter One** - of this research report. This chapter served to orientate the reader to the issue of school violence in general, as well as to the basic historical coordinates of school violence within the South African context. Further, it served to clarify the researcher's aims for this report.

Chapter Two comprises of the literature review and the theoretical framework underpinning this research. This literature draws on several theories of and explanations for school violence, racism and racialised school violence, whilst being firmly located within the South African context.

Chapter Three involves the description of the qualitative methods used in this study. Further, it provides an account of the particular approach utilised in this study, namely Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The stages of TCA engaged with for the purposes of data analysis will be presented. This chapter also discusses the sample and instruments used, as well as ethical issues involved in this research.

Chapter Four discusses the results of the research, with particular emphasis on addressing the research questions established for this study. This chapter further considers these results within the context of previous research, while ascertaining its relationship to such literature.

Finally, ***Chapter Five*** provides the conclusions of this study, while examining its limitations and implications. Recommendations will be presented within this chapter, concluding the report.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter explores the existing literature on school violence. Definitions and types of school violence in general will be described, as well as the manifestations of school violence within the South African extent. Attention will also be placed on the causes and triggers of school violence as identified by literature. This chapter further entails a discussion of racism – including types of racism, its development and manifestations. Finally an exploration of racialised school violence is undertaken. However, before exploring all the areas described above, it is necessary to consider briefly the role of the school in social functioning and the goals of such educational institutions.

Positioning the Role of the School

There has long existed considerable debate on the nature, function, purpose and position of the school. These debates have altered in their content as the school as an institution and a system has shifted its role. At present, the predominant view of the function of the school is that it is a site of socialisation (Wilkins, 2005). This research is based on this understanding of the school.

As a process of socialisation, the school is believed to function as an extension of the learners' parents by, firstly, supporting parents in their tasks of raising and educating their children, and secondly with educators "being in loco parentis" (Wilkins, 2005, p. 27). In this role, educators are "part-time parent-substitutes" (Wilkins, 2005, p. 27). Educators in particular within the education system, in general, have the function of guiding and moulding learners by "introducing them to the workings and norms of society, supporting them in coping with life and enabling them to realise their potential" (Wilkins, 2005, p. 27).

The *capital theory of school effectiveness and improvement* has four core components: outcomes, leverage, intellectual capital and social capital (Hargreaves, 2001). The matrix of these components can be used to determine a school's effective functioning, or its progress in

terms of improved of school functioning. The *outcomes* component relates to the degree to which the school has achieved its overt goals (Hargreaves, 2001). These goals are both cognitive and moral in nature. Cognitively, the goal is to produce intellectual excellence, with the learners gaining knowledge, skills, understanding and practical wisdom (Hargreaves, 2001). The moral goal involves “[enabling] its citizens to lead the good life” (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 488), while imposing discipline and structure. This ‘good life’ is not necessarily the life that the learners have chosen for themselves; but rather the life that they have been initiated and inducted into through the process of education (Hargreaves, 2001). *Leverage* is considered to be the relationship between teacher input and educational outputs as measured by impact on learners (Hargreaves, 2001). A high leverage relationship is deemed to exist when the educator needs to exert minimal energy yet yielding high output – this requires the educators to work smartly not hard (Hargreaves, 2001). The matrix below the possible relationships between input and output:

		Output: <i>Quality and Quantity of Impact on Learners</i>	
		LOW	HIGH
Educator input: <i>Energy</i>	HIGH	Exhaustion, frustration	Short-term effectiveness but burn-out
	LOW	Cynical tokenism	High leverage

Intellectual capital is considered to be the knowledge and experience within the school to generate wealth, and to transfer knowledge to its learners (Hargreaves, 2001). It is this that gives school their “competitive edge” (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 490). Finally, *social capital* – as defined by this model – is the networks, the mutual trust and shared norms within the school (Hargreaves, 2001).

An effective school therefore is one that utilises its social and intellectual capital to achieve its desired outcomes, through educators’ employment of high leverage strategies (Hargreaves,

2001). A “quality school” (Wilkins, 2005, p. 28) is deemed to be one that prepares learners for life in broader society, including developing high standards and aspirations, being able to function as a citizen within a democratic state, humanising learners to engage equitably and justly with others and training and enabling learners to “enrich the society of which they become a part” (Wilkins, 2005, p. 28).

Having clearly defined the role of the school in society in general, it is possible to begin the exploration of the form and ‘function’ of school violence. School violence in general and within the South African context in particular will be explored.

Introduction to School Violence

Definitions and Types of School Violence

Violence can be defined as a “physical act that is destructive in nature and which is performed by someone for the purpose of either hurting or morally degrading another human being” (Burnett, 1998, p. 790). By adapting Burnett’s (1998) definition, school violence can then be conceptualised as destructive physical acts performed by learners with the purpose of inflicting physical harm or injury; or causing humiliation, degradation or psychological distress on another learner or educator. Two key features of school violence are: firstly, its heterogeneity, *i.e.* it manifests differently in kind and degree in each school; and secondly, it is unstable in nature within the school – since the forms and severity of incidents change as school dynamics change (Benbenishty *et al.*, 2008).

School violence can take on various forms. Benbenishty *et al.* (2008) identified verbal, emotional and physical abuse, property damage, bullying and threats as forms of school violence. Weaver, Borkowski and Whitman (2008) specify incidents of violence including threatening harm, slapping, punching, hitting, attacking, stabbing or shooting other learners. Burton (2008) describes four forms of school violence: threats of violence and harm, sexual violence, physical assault and robbery. Bullying, in its various subtypes, is also considered a significant form of school violence (Stockdale *et al.*, 2002; Gumpel, 2008). There are two

principal subtypes of bullying: (1) physical bullying which is manifested in acts of aggression with the aim of achieving social dominance (Gumpel, 2008); and (2) social bullying which involves manipulation of social relationships in order to ensure humiliation and alienation, e.g. gossiping, threats of exclusion and social isolation (Gumpel, 2008). Thus, types of school violence can be classified into five categories: physical attacks/assault; sexual violence; robbery; bullying and threats of violence.

School Violence in South Africa

He covered his face and neck in black paint.... The masked [swordsman] drew a long sword from his side and slashed [Jacques] across the neck.... After the alleged murderer had slain Jacques, he went for another boy and cut him across the head. One centimetre deeper and he would have also died.... The swordsman also attacked two groundsman. Samson Mamelela put his arm up to deflect the blow aimed at his neck and then Joseph Kodeseng was slashed across the face.... The bloody attacks ended with the [swordsman] sticking one of swords into the ground and sitting down on a small brick wall as if nothing had happened. When the police came for him, he didn't resist. (Molosankwe, Eliseev, Foss & Serrao, 2008, p. 1).

Reading the above excerpt, one could be lead to believe that this was taken from a dramatic text or play; but rather it was taken from a newspaper report on a schoolyard murder in 2008. While the emotive and dramatic language utilised by the media in general, and this article in particular, lends itself to greater interest and following, and thus awareness; it seems to sensationalise the incident in such a way that its utility in developing an understanding of school violence is limited. This is important to bear in mind when considering that much of the discussions of school violence within the public sphere are based on anecdotal media reports rather than on limited social science research.

Jacques Pretorius, a Grade 9 learner at the ND Technical High School² in Krugersdorp, Gauteng was murdered on his school property on 18th of August 2008. His murderer, Morne Harmse, was not a known convict or a suspected criminal, but rather a “quiet boy” who on that day

² Please note that schools are referred to by their initials in this report.

“packed four terrifying masks and three Samurai swords” (Molosankwe *et al.*, 2008, p. 1). He also slashed another school learner, Stephenus Bouwer, who sustained injuries to his head and leg; and attacked two ground staff Malemela and Tsiamo Kodesang. For these crimes, Harmse was found guilty and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment³ on 10th of September 2009 (Langer, 2009). The minimum life sentence was not imposed as, following a psychological report, it was deemed that he was a juvenile and of immature disposition, with his character still developing (Langer, 2009).

Jacques is but one learner who lost his life to violence by a fellow learner while at school in South Africa in 2008. Seventeen-year-old, Kufanele Hlongwa was fatally stabbed in the neck and chest at the WS School in Durban (Mail and Guardian, 2008). Moegamat Kannemeyer was also fatally stabbed while at his school in Eerste River, in the Western Cape (Mail and Guardian, 2008). Wilfred Kriel, aged eight, was beaten and hacked to death by two fellow learners at the N Primary School, Western Cape – his killers were aged seven and twelve at the time (Mail and Guardian, 2008). The deaths of Hlongwa, Kannemeyer and Kriel all occurred within a one-week period in the school year, 26th to the 30th of May 2008 (Mail and Guardian, 2008).

In the first six months of 2009, in the province of the Western Cape alone, sixty school stabbings have been reported, with fifty-six of these victims being learners, one teacher and three community members (Fredericks, 2009b). This figure of sixty stabbings represents more than double the number of similar incidents reported for the same period of 2008 (Fredericks, 2009b).

A number of independent schools within the Gauteng Province have been implicated in the media during 2009 for severe incidents of school violence. At PBHS, a violent initiation ceremony resulted in a media furore and the laying of charges. It is alleged that a group of twelve Matric learners residing at their school’s hostel dragged the Grade 11 learners out of

³ The sentence includes 18 years for murder, 8 years for the assault on Bouwer, and five years each for the assaults on the ground staff – these sentences will be run concurrently and thus in total he will serve 20 years, should he not be eligible for parole.

their beds at midnight and proceeded to demand that the learners strip naked, rub their genitals with Deep Heat, to proceed to the Matric learners armed with cricket bats, hockey sticks and golf clubs to be hit and finally to receive a whip-lashing from the hostel's head boy until blood was drawn either from their lower backs or buttocks (Serrao, 2009a; Serrao, 2009b). School management condemned this practice (Serrao, 2009a; Serrao, 2009b), and as punishment the Matric learners were made to receive counselling, to do community service, revoked of their Matric privileges and given a written warning (Serrao, 2009a). Following the public emergence of this incident, previous students of the school contacted several media sources either to condemn or defend the school (Serrao, 2009c). Charges of assault with intention to do grievous bodily harm were laid against the twelve Matriculants (Serrao 2009d). These charges produced various reactions – one parent responded: “I am so angry... Why must these kids be made to suffer like this? This just isn't fair. The school is being given a bad name when it's such a wonderful school” (Serrao, 2009d, p. 2). One of the accused responded to his arrest saying: “I am just a child. Why is this happening?” The accused are all aged between seventeen and eighteen years old (Serrao, 2009d). The court case began on Thursday, 03 September 2009 (SAPA, 2009). This was not the first incident at the school as a complaint had previously been laid with the South African Human Rights' Commission, following a severe assault on a learner who left the school consequently (Serrao, 2009c).

At SBC, it was alleged that a fourteen year old boy who weighed approximately 30kg during his Grade 8 year was subject to bullying, with beatings so severe that he was unable to “lift his head from the pillow” (Serrao, 2009e). The learner reported to his parents, and in an affidavit accompanying a charge of assault, that he was repeatedly and constantly pushed, hit, knocked over, insulted, humiliated and threatened by a fellow Grade 8 learner (Serrao, 2009e). These charges were allegedly met by threats from the alleged perpetrator's father against the victim's father, saying that he “should take him out the school and put him in a girls' school” (Serrao, 2009e, p. 1). Following this report in the media, a number of other allegations of violence at the school emerged, including learners being pushed down the stairs, and most severely an allegation of rape at the school (Serrao, 2009f). These allegations appear not to have been

reported or investigated at the school. The school management stated that they recognise that bullying and violence is a severe problem but asserted that when incidents are reported these are adequately dealt with (Serrao, 2009f). Further, school management assert that they engage with anti-bullying programmes at the school, and have teachers allocated to each grade to address these incidents (Serrao, 2009f).

Aggregations of these instances of school violence are alarming. As indicated in chapter one, recent research has indicated that 15.3% of all learners in South African school between grades 3 to Matric have been victims of school violence (Burton, 2008). The provinces of the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Limpopo endure the highest levels of school violence with the Eastern Cape most commonly experiencing violence in their primary schools; and Gauteng and Limpopo showing the highest rates of high school violence (Burton, 2008). In the Western Cape, government response to this crisis was to issue hand-held metal detectors to 109 schools that were deemed high-risk for school violence (Fredericks, 2009a). It is of interest that there has been little response from social scientists in general; and thus in this vacuum the media have been the primary public informants on these acts in an unmediated and often in a sensationalised way. There is no doubt therefore that this is a critical issue for all South African schools which needs to be explored and understood through the lens of social science theory in general.

Causes and Triggers of School Violence

A fight between two 16-year-old boys at their school has ended with one in critical condition and the other in jail. One, affectionately known by his friends as Phumba, was stabbed in the temple by a classmate at RPHS in Roodepoort on the West Rand yesterday. Pupils said the attacker, whose nickname is Zulu, was teasing Phumba incessantly in class. Phumba stood up and told Zulu to stop teasing him. However, Zulu carried on with this taunts until Phumba got up, pushed him and then punched him.... The fight went on and then Zulu picked up scissors and stabbed Phumba on the side of his head. It went in so deep he struggled to pull the scissors out again (Serrao, 2008, p. 1).

Causes of school violence are as diverse as its manifestations. Different researchers have emphasised different key factors. Aitken (2001) highlights changes in family structures; the increase in learners' time spent at school and the individualisation of members of communities and the consequent shift in values. Values are ideals which inform practice and interpersonal relationships (Weisner, 2000). Traditionally the values espoused in sub-Saharan Africa concern, at a start, the shared task of child-rearing (Weisner, 2000), with this being contained in the African proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child.' The education of children is not simply an academic endeavour but requires the division of family tasks and labour to all members of the family (Weisner, 2000). Children's deference and obedience to adults, compliance with instructions and providing assistance and support to younger relatives is encouraged and required of children (Weisner, 2000). Cultural beliefs and practice are somewhat adaptive, and thus when one moves from one setting to another these practices alter, consequently so too do the values (Weisner, 2000). Thus in South Africa, the shift from rural and traditional settings to urban, more Westernised settings brings with it value changes. Competitiveness, autonomy, searching for connections outside of the family networks, immediate as opposed to extended family networks, curiosity, and greater independence of children are encouraged within the urban, Westernised communities (Weisner, 2000). These changes can result in "higher levels of child-child and parent-child conflict and aggression, and lower levels of sociability and nurturance" (Weisner, 2000, p. 154). It can be noted that values of competitiveness and autonomy can in many cases lead to violence, especially where emotional conditions of frustration and desperation co-exist.

Family factors, such as a parents' style of discipline and a parents' use of aggression, may teach children that aggression functions as a tool to obtain what one desires (Fraser, 1996). Exposure to violence throughout early childhood and adolescence is also considered a critical factor in predicting whether an adolescent will be violent (Henrich, Brookmeyer & Shahar, 2005; Weaver *et al.*, 2008). Brezina (2008) suggests that school violence is an adolescent's expression of a need for autonomy and freedom – needs that are not being met within their home environment. School violence then is used as a means of compensating for these feelings of

weakness and lack of power in the home, by demonstrating power and control in the school environment over weaker peers (Brezina, 2008). Webster & Wilson (1994) list the economic opportunities available from illegal activities, availability of weapons and media violence as possible causes of youth violence. Finally, school factors cannot be ignored: the design of the school, *i.e.* there may be areas of school that enable incidents of violence to go unnoticed; class size; educator-learner ratio; social climate of the school and resources available to learners at school may all contribute to the violence plaguing schools (Limbos & Casteel, 2008).

The causes may be significant in understanding what contributes to this behaviour but what triggers these incidents and attacks? Often children who are teased and humiliated over long periods are likely to react more aggressively, *i.e.* they will not rely on negotiation but rather start a fight, when taunted in public – this may escalate a simple argument to a critical or fatal scene (Fraser, 1996; Leung & Ferris, 2008; Rudatsikira *et al.*, 2008). This is illustrated in the case of Phumba and Zulu shown above. Arguments over property may also result in an attack – Kufanele Hlongwa had been arguing with his killer about a cellphone that had allegedly been stolen shortly before he was fatally stabbed (Mail and Guardian, 2008).

Learners can be profoundly affected by such incidents – in terms of their schooling, they are less motivated due to fear and their educators' disengagement (Galand *et al.*, 2007); lower academic achievement can be noted (Aitken & Seedat, 2007; Burton, 2008); and they are often absent from school (Stockdale *et al.*, 2002). Psychologically, they experience negative impacts on their cognitive development and the development of their self worth (Burnett, 1998; Burton, 2008). Relations between learners also suffer as negative interactions between learners occur (Ochoa, Lopez & Emler, 2007), therefore there are less positive associations between peers which is a protective factor against violence (Henrich *et al.*, 2005; Weaver *et al.*, 2008). School violence does not simply affect the children or adolescents involved in the incidents. The following represents a short list of some of the consequences of school violence for educators: negative impact on their well-being, they are less able to engage their classes effectively due to anxiety, distraction or disengagement (Galand *et al.*, 2007). School violence also has significant

costs: medical expenses due to injury (Fraser, 1996) and personal losses through murder and suicide (Stockdale *et al.*, 2002; Leung & Ferris, 2008; Rudatsikira, Muula & Siziya, 2008).

Lindiwe Sidane (15) said pupils of all races should unite to resolve the matter [racial school violence]. “I believe that we are all one and we must all act as one. If we don’t address this problem as one family we will continue to fight (Bateman, 2008, p. 1).

Media reports have implicated racism as a cause of violence at schools (Dippnall, 2007; Stephen, 2007; Bateman, 2008). “Race-based incidents still ‘dogged’ some schools in the North West, Mpumalanga and Gauteng” (Stephen, 2007, p. 2). The incidents reported tend to reflect the more extreme manifestations of violence: “assault captured on a cellphone” (Dippnall, 2007, p. 2); “four coloured pupils were locked in a room by white matriculants and beaten with sjamboks” (Dippnall, 2007, p. 2). On reacting to these events, a Ward Councillor in Oudtshoorn – the area where the school is located - reflected that the incident was “blown up by the coloured community” (Dippnall, 2007, p. 2). A school principal in Pretoria reacted to an incident at his school by saying that “when there was an incident they didn’t look at the race of the pupils involved, but viewed the incident on its merits” (Bateman, 2008, p. 1). The media sensationalism and stakeholder reactions to these incidents begs one questions – are these incidents really racist attacks? An affirmative answer may be an uncomfortable one for many South Africans who have adopted the romanticised notion of the Rainbow Nation. In order to answer this question adequately an exploration of racism – its definitions, manifestations and development, is necessary. This is the basis for the subsequent section of this review.

Racism

Defining Racism

Definitions of racism differ – each with a different focus and understanding. Various definitions will be presented, with the major similarities and differences identified thereafter. Before defining racism, it is essential to define race. This can be understood to be a “social rather than a natural phenomenon, a construct which gives significance to superficial physical differences” (Duncan, *et al.*, 2007, p. 169).

Duncan *et al.* (2007) defined racism as an “ideology through which the domination or marginalisation of certain racialised groups by another racialised group is enacted and legitimated” (p. 170). Tatum (1997) defined racism as “a system of advantage based on race” (p. 7). Further Tatum (1997) described racism as prejudice in combination with social power - where prejudice is defined as a “preconceived judgement or opinion based on limited information” (p. 5). Racism as the “belief in the superiority of one’s own race over another and behavioural enactments that maintain those superior and inferior positions” is the definition put forth by Jones (1972) (as cited in Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001, p. 3). Finally, Miles (1989) defined racism as the “prediction of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purposes of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group” (p. 1938).

The most dominant themes that emerge from these definitions are (1) preference for one’s own race, and a dislike of out-groups (either a particular group or many); and (2) racism is about power differentials based on race; and exerting this power to ensure one’s own superiority. Essentially these definitions suggest that racism is a means to organise people hierarchically, where one’s race is deemed better than all others and thus occupying the top position of such an organisation. The differences between the definitions relate to the conceptual understanding of racism, *i.e.* an ideology as opposed to a system; a belief versus action – although these may be interlinked, they are conceptually different; for example, it is possible to have a racist system within a democratic ideology; or behave in racist ways without consciously holding racist beliefs. In order to best understand and address racism, it is imperative to acknowledge that all four components comprise racism, *i.e.* racism is an ideology of race and power relations that lead to systems that create advantages for one race, and not others. This leads to the development of beliefs of one’s superiority over another and thus causing individuals to act in accordance with these beliefs, in prejudiced ways.

Further, it is important to note that racism is expressed through stereotypes. It is widely acknowledged that stereotypes are used for categorisation, which simplifies the complexity of the world. Goldberg (1993) argues that stereotyping happens when “the economy and

efficiency of thoughts [occurs] only at the expense of accuracy” (p. 122). This is not to say that all stereotypes enable racist thinking, rather it is rigidity that enables this *i.e.* when one fails to acknowledge or admit they need to alter cognitive patterns in the light of new evidence (Goldberg, 1993).

Types of Racism

It is clear from the above that racism cannot be understood in simple terms. It can be both overt and covert. Contemporary racism does not involve blatant expression of racial dislike or hatred; nor is it necessarily manifested in avoidance of members of different races. These distinctions give rise to various types of racism.

Ambivalent racism entails the complex co-existence of contradictory feelings towards members of different races, *viz* positive and negative feelings towards racial-others. This type involves conflicts between central values of humanitarianism and egalitarianism versus individualisation and individual freedom (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001). This type of racism is enduring because the conflict is linked to one’s central values (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001).

Aversive racism is similar to ambivalent racism in that individual hopes to create and maintain an image of being non-prejudicial (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001). An aversive racist sympathises with the victims of past injustice and supports policies that encourage racial equality (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001). The difference therefore between an ambivalent racist and an aversive racist is then that the former recognises their negative feelings; while the latter does not. They consider themselves non-prejudicial but simultaneously experiences feelings of uneasiness, awkwardness and apprehension towards different racial groups (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001). They do not engage in harmful or dangerous behaviour towards racial-others, but rather avoid members of the different racial groups (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001).

Subtle racism is characterised by three essential components: firstly, defence of traditional values, secondly, an exaggeration of cultural differences and thirdly, a denial of positive emotions towards members of racial out-groups (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001). When comparing subtle and blatant racists, three categories emerge: bigots – score high on blatant and subtle racism scales; subtle – score low blatant scale but high on a subtle scale and finally, equalitarians who score low on both scales (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001).

‘Masks of Racism’: New Manifestations of Racism

Goldberg (1993) argues that race is a fluid concept linked to a particular point in time. Racism will then manifest differently over time. The concept is most clear when considering notions of a ‘new racism’. As stated above, racism in the modern-day context is not expressed in direct ways. It now lies behind various masks that have been adopted (Goldberg, 1993). In this section, a discussion of a few of these masks will be undertaken.

The first mask that disguises modern-day racism is that of class (Goldberg, 1993). Class allows for the construction of a social hierarchy; since ranking of social status occurs in relation to the position of others (Goldberg, 1993). This is reflected in education levels, lifestyle, language capability, residence type and location, and wealth (Goldberg, 1993). Thus, in the modern context one may discriminate on class as a way of hiding racist feelings. This may be especially true in the South African context, where great discrepancy between the rich and the poor continues to exist. Furthermore, this discrepancy occurs largely along racial lines, with the majority of Black South Africans continuing to live in poverty, while most White South Africans constitute the middle and upper classes.

The second mask for racism is culture. For many people the term race can simply be substituted for the word culture (Goldberg, 1993), *i.e.* concepts such as so-called ‘White culture’ and ‘Black culture’. Culture is considered to be a typical style of behaviour, dress, cuisine, and music associated with a particular language or religious group (Goldberg, 1993).

This group can also be identified by habits, common rules, norms and customs. Goldberg (1993) argues that when race is coded as culture, this is a form of new racism.

“Ethnorace” is the term used to describe a form of race classification and group categorisation based on ethnicity (Goldberg, 1993). Ethnicity can be described as a form of cultural identification and distinction (Goldberg, 1993). Furthermore, it concerns language, and values. Ethnic groups are not necessarily geographically bound; rather the boundaries concern in-groups and out-groups. Ethnocentrism is also considered a new form of racism (Goldberg, 1993).

The final mask of racism presented is nationalism (Goldberg, 1993). This concerns an involuntary tie to one’s country of birth, or country of residence. This concept, much like racism, is socially invented (Goldberg, 1993).

This ‘new racism’ essentially concerns the same power differentials, social organisation and inter-group interactions of ‘old racism.’ The main difference is that it is harder to find, and requires careful attention to the discourses used. This is exceptionally important to remember in the context of racism research, where participants may be more filtered so as to avoid social judgement for potentially harbouring racist feelings.

The Development of Racism

The complexity of racism – its definitions, its understandings and its manifestations – extends to the diverse ways in which it can develop. This section will attempt to describe some of the key understandings of the developmental trajectories of this concept – namely, basic errors, emotional maladjustment, social reflection, sociocognitive theory and social identity theory. This does not, by any means, present a complete picture of how racist feelings, attitudes and values come to exist in an individual.

Three basic errors contribute to racist thinking: fundamental attribution error; confusion of social kinds with natural kinds and overgeneralisations (Goldberg, 1993). The first error – known as the fundamental attribution error - relates to explaining the negative behaviour of others in terms of core traits, *i.e.* attributing their behaviours to racially specific negative traits and attributing others' positive behaviour to environmental factors; while explaining one's own behaviour in opposite terms – *i.e.* negative behaviour is attributed to environmental factors, and positive behaviour is personally attributed (Goldberg, 1993). This essentially means that a racial-other can never perform successfully of their own accord; but rather as a result of some environmental influence. The second error involves accepting as truth artificial social constructions and believing that these are natural and biological in nature (Goldberg, 1993). In this case, it means accepting as truth that there are fundamental differences between racial groups beyond their skin tones and features, despite proof that these differences are not natural or organic in nature (Goldberg, 1993). Finally, overgeneralisations entail exaggerations of inter-group differences, and the ignoring of inter-group similarities (Goldberg, 1993). Further, the differences are attributed to what racist individuals perceive as racialised ways of being. This leads to many factual errors, yet they are convinced of their own accuracy.

Emotional maladjustment attributes the development of prejudice, and racism, to the development of an authoritarian personality (Nesdale, 2001). This position links the harsh upbringing of individuals who develop this personality type to the frustrations, anger and hostility that they experience towards their parents. Since they are unable to show these hostile feelings in relation to their parents, they displace them on weaker and less powerful scapegoats – these tend to be racial others who are marginalised or alienation in that context (Nesdale, 2001). Although this position is a plausible one, it fails to explain why manifestations of racism are similar across individuals and groups (Nesdale, 2001). It also fails to explain why some groups are scapegoated, while others are not (Nesdale, 2001) – why according to race, and not gender, or religion, or age, and so forth.

Social reflection suggests that children's prejudices are a reflection of the attitudes and values of the community in which the child is located (Nesdale, 2001). This is a social learning approach whereby children learn these attitudes and values through either direct training or observation of significant adults' behaviours or both (Nesdale, 2001). Here the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of the parents are key to understanding children's prejudices in general and racism in particular.

Sociocognitive theory posits that children's relations with other children are influenced by two developmental processes that occur: (1) the process that dominates the child's experience at a particular time – *i.e.* where the child is in terms of cognitive development; and (2) changes in the child's focus of attention (Nesdale, 2001). These two processes overlap in time. The first process is initially occupied affective-perceptual processes whereby the child is firmly attached to the familiar, with a great fear of the unknown. This leads to a preference for an in-group and a rejection of the out-group (Nesdale, 2001). For a child, the out-group is determined by clear physical features, including race. As time progresses, the child's cognitive functioning improves so that the child is able to judge individuals and not just groups. The second process entails shifting from the ego-centric ways of thinking in early childhood to older children's organization of people into categories or groups (Nesdale, 2001). It has been found that children's in-group preference and out-group rejection peaks at seven years old but as children's cognitive functioning becomes more sophisticated, then group-based biases decline since they are better able to differentiate between individuals without relying on group status (Nesdale, 2001).

Finally, social identity theory suggests that individuals want to be associated with superior groups (Nesdale, 2001). This is no different for children (Nesdale, 2001). In order to boost one's own self-esteem, one discriminates against groups that are perceived as weak or 'bad,' choosing rather to associate with groups that are perceived as good and positive (Nesdale, 2001). For children, in-groups are good because they are familiar and known to them; but out-groups are bad because they are different (Nesdale, 2001). Children as young as three are able to make social comparisons and determine which group is in a better position (Nesdale, 2001).

When considered together, these theories all recognise that racism develops out of a fear for the unknown and a preference for the familiar. Further, the out-group is also selected for being considered to be in a socially inferior position. Beyond all this, the context the child finds him or herself in is critical – parents who are racist are likely to raise children to become racist.

Thus, in summation, racism is based on stereotypes, errors and developmental factors (Tatum, 1997). Due to the young ages at which the racism can begin to develop and manifest, its impact can be felt from an early age (Tatum, 1997). It is for this reason, that studies into racism at school need to be undertaken, especially where the outcome is violence.

Racialised School Violence

It is not sufficient to present these two concepts without reconciling them by attempting to construct an understanding of how racialised violence can manifest in a school context.

The key point is that the experience of violent racism is not reducible to an isolated incident, or even a collection of incidents. Victimization and racialization – the processes by which a person becomes a victim of this form of crime are cumulative, comprised of various encounters with racism, some of which may be physically violent, some lying only at the fringes of what most people would define as violent or aggressive. Some of these experiences are subtle and amount to no more than becoming aware that someone is annoyed or disgusted by the presence of Black people or fleeting instances such as a half-hearted racist joke or epithet (Bowling, 1998 as cited in Waddington, 2000, p. 532).

The above quotation makes an important point that racialised incidents of violence are cumulative, and just like violence and racism in general – it has various forms. It is not only extreme acts such as assaults and murders, but also more subtle forms such as bullying and teasing. It is thus essential to put in place a theoretical framework from which racist incidents of school violence can be viewed. Throughout this literature review contextual factors have been indicated to be important in the development and maintenance of racist behaviour – it is for this reason that a socio-ecological framework will be adopted.

Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Ecological Systems posits that individuals are nested within various levels or systems. These systems are: micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono-systems (Visser, 2007). The micro-system involves relationships where the individual has direct interaction and contact (Visser, 2007). The meso-system represents the linkages between the micro-systems, whereby the greater the congruence between the systems the more effectively the child develops (Visser, 2007). The exo-system comprises systems where the individual has no direct contact but is still influenced by, *e.g.* a parent's place of work (Visser, 2007). The macro-system entails the large-scale social structures, ideologies and practices that ultimately effect behaviour (Visser, 2007). The chrono-system represents the element of time (Ward, 2007). It is through this lens that racialised incidents of school violence will be explored.

The Individual

Before embarking on a socio-ecological explanation beyond the individual, the personal characteristics that place an individual at greater risk for becoming violent must be presented. The first risk factor is being male - boys are more likely to develop externalising disorders and carry out acts of aggression and violence than their female counterparts (Ward, 2007). In many cases this is because boys have been socialised into believing that violence is a part of being a man (Ward, 2007). The next critical factor is age; the younger the child becomes aggressive, the more likely it is that the child will become violent (Ward, 2007). Further, being the victim of abuse or violence places one at a greater risk of becoming violent – these tend to approve aggression as a social response and have difficulty in understanding social cues (Ward, 2007).

Micro-System

The above simply reflect risk factors, how these are responded to in the individual's contexts determines whether these will be entrenched or modified and thus trigger aggression in particular circumstances (Ward, 2007). Three significant micro-systems exist in the life of an adolescent: family, school and peers.

Family factors are key contributors to the development of racism and violence. As indicated above, in the social reflection hypothesis – children’s prejudices are a reflection of the prejudices of significant adult figures, especially parents. The family is severely implicated the development of aggression and violence. In homes where violence is pervasive this can be internalised as a normal and appropriate response (Ward, 2007). Further where harsh disciplinary practices are instilled, the child may not develop adequate capacity for guilt which would stop the child from acting violently with another (Ward, 2007). Poor family management, large families, low maternal education and poor monitoring of the child are all significant factors contributing to violent responses.

The school is a key socialising force. Schools that encourage achievement, provide high-quality teaching and track their learners’ progress will generally have a learner-body with a repertoire of pro-social behaviours (Ward, 2007). Unfortunately, however, this is not the picture at most South African schools. In most instances, schools are over-crowded with limited resources and under-staffed in terms of educators (Ward, 2007).

One’s peer group is another significant factor. Youths seek approval from their peers – where peers engage in pro-social behaviour, this is desired. However, in many cases, youths seek approval from older youths – many of whom may be simply delinquent, or even affiliated with gangs (Ward, 2007). These will not only model violent behaviour but reward it; thus it becomes entrenched in the repertoire of behaviours (Ward, 2007).

Meso-System

This system involves the connections between the Micro-systems. The principle of *Interdependence* is a significant one in this framework in general, and this level in particular, as it suggests that risk in one system implies risk in another (Visser, 2007) – thus if the home environment places the adolescent in great risk of developing racist or violent (or both) practices and the school is a violent and racist place, the behaviour is more likely to emerge. However, protective factors are also of great significance, thus if the home is not a violent

place, but the school is, it is possible, and likely, that the adolescent will avoid aggressive incidents (Ward, 2007).

Exo-System

The neighbourhood and the media are two examples of Exo-systems. Where neighbourhoods are disorganised, prone to crime and individualistic in nature, it is likely that an adolescent is at risk of becoming violent (Ward, 2007). This is since social support factors are unable to buffer the adolescent from incidents of violence and because the community is unable to exert control over its functioning and security. The media (especially free-to-air mediums and the state broadcaster – since they have a wider reach than subscription services) play a significant role in the development of aggression, since they determine how much violence is broadcast on television and radio (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2002). Where a child is in an already-violent situation and is then further exposed to violence through television, it is likely that he or she will become more aggressive (WHO, 2002; Ward, 2007). This effect can be exaggerated in homes where monitoring and supervision of the child is not commonplace (WHO, 2002).

Macro-System

Government policies form part of the Macro-system. With regards to racial violence at schools, the policy of desegregation and integration of schools is key. Formal desegregation occurred in 1993, whereby schools were to become racially mixed and diverse. When learners of a different racial group joined a school, it was anticipated that these would adopt the schools' cultural values and practices (Vally *et al.*, 2002; Moodley, 2004), thus differences are somewhat ignored and the pre-existing cultural milieu continued to flourish. Beyond this, social and economic discrepancies and challenges continue to exist; these form obstacles to realisation of full integration. Distance from schools and transport to them continues to be problematic for many Black families; as are the school fees of many schools.

Chrono-System

The dimension of time is a critical one to understand the current condition of South African schools. These cannot be examined separately to an acknowledgement of the legacy of

Apartheid. The Nationalist view of education is concisely captured by this extract from the 1943 Christian National Educational Policy:

Our culture must be carried into the school and that cannot be done merely by having our language as a medium. More is needed. Our Afrikaans schools must not merely be mother-tongue schools; they must be places where our children will be imbued with the Christian and national spiritual and cultural material of our Nation.... We wish to have no mixing of languages, no mixing of cultures, no mixing of religions and no mixing of races” (Instituut vir Christelike-Nasionale Onderwys, 1943 as cited in Moodley, 2004).

As can be inferred from the extract, education in the Apartheid era was precisely segregated with each racial group having its own department of education, funding and curricula based on that group’s ‘needs’ (Moodley, 2004). In terms of funding, White learners had per capita subsidies of R2 365 whereas Black learners received subsidies from between R262 and R572 per capita (Vally *et al.*, 2002).

In 1990, White state schools were allowed to accept learners from other races, where parental consent had been obtained (Moodley, 2004). Three school models emerged – with each school having the choice of which model to adopt. Model A schools declared themselves private; Model B schools could continue operating as they were, *i.e.* White majority – these could decide their own admission criteria, and Model C schools which were free to admit all learners. The latter become state-funded – as were the educators’ salaries (Moodley, 2004).

With the advent of democracy in South Africa, the education system became subject to a great deal of attention, and stress. The task of uplifting former Black schools was a mammoth one – one which continues to be undertaken. Where the country as a whole faced the challenge of nation building, schools were thrust into the task more quickly with hope that it would all go smoothly. “Schools all over the world are the laboratories for racial harmony or conflict, a microcosm of the society at large, challenged to transcend institutional and educational racism with alternatives of multicultural or antiracist education” (Moodley, 2004, p. 1035). Educators were not formally prepared for the multiculturalism that faced them post-1994 nor were

programmes implemented to help learners adjust to the historical changes that they were a part of (Vally *et al.*, 2002).

Further in terms of the chrono-system, the question that may be asked in present day South Africa is how can racist ideologies and beliefs continue to exist in this new post-Apartheid generation, the colloquially called the *Born-Frees*? The concept of habitus is a useful one here.

Habitus is a socialised body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world... and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world (Bourdieu, 1998 as cited in Reay, 2004, p. 432).

In other words, not only is the individual located within a social world; but so the social world resides in the individual (Reay, 2004). This essentially leads to way in which the individual views and perceives the world (Reay, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, Goar & Embrick, 2006). It is expressed in the behavioural repertoire of the individual, even as crudely as the way a person eats, stands, walks, thinks and feels (Reay, 2004). Habitus does not suggest that the individual acts mechanistically according to a social world; but rather acts in predictable ways because he or she is acting in accordance with a deeply embedded cultural understanding and conditioning (Bonilla-Silva *et al.*, 2006); *i.e.* “habitus does not determine action, it orients action” (Bonilla-Silva *et al.*, 2006, p. 233). Thus, in the South African context racism is deeply entrenched in the cultural sphere. It was encouraged by legislation for half a century and thus it has formed a significant part of the understanding South Africans have of the world. As much non-racist individuals are located in a racist world, so the racist world can be found within a non-racist individual. Adolescents then act in racist ways because of the broader cultural conditioning. It is essential to keep this in mind when considering racialised incidents of school violence in South Africa.

The socio-ecological exploration indicates that conditions for many South African youths are dire. It is clear that these conditions could easily lead to becoming distracted from pro-social goals and objectives. This is in line with how frustration has been defined in the *frustration-*

aggression hypothesis, where frustration is “an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response at its proper time in the behaviour sequence” (Dollard, 1939 as cited in Berkowitz, 1989, p. 60). This hypothesis supposes that “aggression is always a consequence of frustration” (Berkowitz, 1989, p. 60). The severity of the aggression is dependent on motivation to attain the goal, the degree of the interference and the number of times that attaining that goal has been frustrated (Berkowitz, 1989). This is a useful conceptualisation as it may provide an explanation for the locality of school violence (*i.e.* why some schools and not others) and the degree of violence exerted (*e.g.* bullying versus stabbing).

It may be significant to consider that South Africa has emerged from a period of history where racialised violence was the norm. Yet, in this its new political dispensation, South Africa reacts with shock and surprise at every act of racialised violence (Valji, 2004). This is most succinctly captured in the words of the Mayor of Kuruman in 2003:

...we never gave it [racism] special attention and thought it would wear off. We shouldn't have waited for things to come up, though we did try when we came into office. This thing of the rainbow nation, we took it as something that happens instantly (Valji, 2004, p. 8).

It is clear that racialised school violence is a complex yet critical issue in South African society that affects the learners, the educators and communities at large. Its causes are multiplicative in nature and the triggers diverse. The consequences arising from these incidents point to the urgency of the problem. The media has not helped in its reporting of such incidents as the most extreme acts often take precedence; however daily occurrences of bullying, theft, less grave assaults, threats and sexual violence appear to go unnoticed in the public sphere (Aitken & Seedat, 2007; Benbenishty *et al.*, 2008).

In the same way racism at schools is under-represented in research and yet reports of such behaviour abound: “at school functions White pupils are the only ones catered for. Only boeremusiek is played, which makes pupils of colour feel unwelcome, yet they are accused of not supporting their school” (Bateman, 2008, p. 1) – at this school two White learners were

stabbed by three Coloured pupils during a fight (Bateman, 2008); and “a school in Richards Bay... was still flying the old South African flag – and had an album of the country’s presidents that did not include Nelson Mandela or Thabo Mbeki” (Stephen, 2007, p. 2).

Studies into this area are thus crucial, since currently there is a vacuum on this topic. This research hoped to engage the often silent yet profoundly affected witnesses of these incidents – educators - on all the issues indicated above: exactly how this was achieved will be elaborated on in the section below.

Chapter Three: Methods

This chapter involves the description and exploration of the methodological facets of this study. It includes a consideration of the research design, the sample and sampling issues, the analytic technique employed and the ethical concerns underpinning this study. Further an explicit statement of the research questions is included.

Research Design

The study focused on eliciting the ideas, perceptions and experiences of educators with regards to school violence. These ideas, perceptions and experiences formed the basis of the data. The researcher aimed to elicit from the educators common understandings and themes regarding school violence – the perceived causes, triggers and the role of racism. Burnett (1998) contends that “the depth of violence experienced in the school context could hardly be measured quantitatively” (p. 791). While quantitative studies have proved to be rich sources of data; statistical terminology such as variables, relationships and causation were not of relevance in this study. This study was therefore qualitative in design. This design was chosen as it was concerned with engaging participants’ insights (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and gaining an understanding of their experiences. Further it allowed for the acknowledgement of the context of the participant (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Since “questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105), before embarking on the discussion of the methods to be employed in the research, it is necessary to consider briefly the paradigm within which it is located, where a paradigm is defined to be a “worldview” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105; Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002, p. 718) that guides the researcher in the process of generating knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Fossey *et al.*, 2002). These paradigms are premised on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Fossey *et al.*, 2002). This research was firmly based within an interpretative paradigm, whereby the researcher aimed to understand the social context and experiences of the participants (Fossey *et al.*,

2002). Specifically, this research was phenomenological in nature as it aimed to “study the ordinary life world [and is] interested in the way people experiences their world, what it is like for them and how best to understand their experiences” (Fossey *et al.*, 2002, p. 720).

Research Questions

Primary Research Question

What do educators perceive to be the causal and precipitating factors of school violence, and what role, if any, do they attribute to racism?

Secondary Research Questions

- a. How do educators define school violence?
- b. Have the educators in the sample experienced incidents of school violence themselves in their professional capacity, either (a) learner-on-learner; or (b) learner-on-educator?
- c. Which are the trigger factors that educators believe spark incidents of school violence?
- d. What do educators believe to be the dominant causes of school violence?
- e. Do educators experience racism as a common cause of school violence?
- f. Have the educators in the sample experienced racist incidents of school violence?
- g. Does the presence of racist undertones/risk factors/triggers change the way an educator intervenes in such incidents?

Research Procedure

The initial stage of the research process entailed the selection of a suitable school. A large, co-educational government high school was preferable since, despite recent incidents reflected in the media, acts of school violence have been most commonly reported in large government schools (Leung & Ferris, 2008) – this may partly be since smaller/private schools have their own selection protocols by which certain learners may be excluded upfront (Leung & Ferris, 2008). A co-educational school was preferable as it would allow for observations of different types of violence - as indicated above boys tend to engage in more physically aggressive acts whereas girls’ violence tends to be related to name-calling, bullying and so forth (Ward, 2007). Further,

in South Africa, government schools have undergone the most racial integration (Soudien, 2004) – thus its heterogeneity was favoured above the homogeneity of same-sex schools, or schools with overwhelming racial majorities. In order to access this type of school the relevant permissions needed to be sought. The *Gauteng Department of Education* was contacted to this end. The Department required the school's co-operation first; and thus several schools meeting the above criteria were contacted. Since any schools' participation would be voluntary in nature, only schools willing to avail themselves could be used. GHS was the only school to respond to the research request and thus the research proceeded using this school's educators as the participants for the research. Co-operation from the school was secured, and the official research request form submitted to the Department. Permission was granted (See Appendix 1), and a follow-up meeting was scheduled with the principal of GHS. It was agreed between the researcher and the principal that a minimum of fifteen questionnaires would need to be returned, so that saturation could be reached.

The researcher was invited to a staff meeting where educators were informed of and invited to participate in the research. The voluntary nature of the participation was emphasised. Initially, twenty research packs, comprising of the cover sheet containing all the relevant information, the questionnaires and an A5 book within which to record the answers, were distributed to the interested educators. They were informed that completion of the questionnaire would be regarded as informed consent. Extra copies of the questionnaire were left in the reception area of the school. A sealed box for the drop-off of the questionnaires was left in the reception since educators felt that that would be the most convenient location. After a two-week period, the researcher returned to the school to collect the books. It was found that eight questionnaires had been returned, since this number was insufficient GHS was contacted again, and a further ten questionnaires were distributed. This yielded only a further two questionnaires. A request to distribute a final batch of questionnaires was initially granted, although later revoked.

The Department of Education was contacted in order to ascertain whether it would be possible to contact a number of educators in their personal capacities in order to achieve the minimum

number of questionnaires required. This was granted. Approximately fifteen questionnaires were distributed, utilising a snowball sampling strategy, with five questionnaires being returned. Once the time period given to educators lapsed, the questionnaires were collected and collated. Following this, data analysis – in the form of thematic content analysis – was undertaken.

Sample and Sampling

The sample of the study was constituted by secondary school educators. As indicated above, school violence appears to be most prevalent within the secondary school environment (as opposed to primary school) and much research into school violence has ignored important perspectives of the educators.

The ideal school for this study was one which had undergone demographic shifts in the last decade or so. The following factors needed to be considered when selecting the school: firstly, there has been a departure of learners from formerly Black urban schools; secondly, White, coloured and Indian children have not been moving towards formerly Black schools; thirdly, Black children are not generally moving into Afrikaans-medium schools; fourthly, schools located on or near major roads, bus or train routes have received an influx of learners and finally, schools perceived to be of a high standard have been recipients of a great number of learners (Soudien, 2004). Therefore, the ideal school was one which was a formerly White school, which was perceived to be of a high standard. Furthermore, the school should be English-medium and geographically located on major routes – road, bus and possibly, even train. Several schools meeting the above criteria were contacted; and GHS availed itself for the research. It had been anticipated that between fifteen and twenty questionnaires would be returned. Ten questionnaires were collected through GHS, and five educators employed at various high schools meeting the above criteria throughout the province of Gauteng. It is notable that that since educators were largely based at a particular school that conclusions draw from this research must be done so with caution; *i.e.* the findings may not necessarily be representative of the overall South African school context. However, it must be noted further

that the experiences and perceptions of educators based at GHS did not appear to vary significantly from those who were not based at the school.

Once this school had been selected, the sampling strategy that was employed was non-probability, convenience sampling as each member of the population (*i.e.*, educators) had an unknown, non-equal probability of being part of the sample as the sample was gathered based on who was available (Whitley, 2001). It was convenient (Whitley, 2001) since educators were sampled from one school. Further, this strategy was employed as each educator participates on a voluntary basis. No random selection took place. However, an adaption to this strategy was required when GHS did not yield sufficient participants, and thus a snowball sampling strategy was employed. This entailed an initial sample being based on convenience, *i.e.* individuals who were known to the researcher as being educators, and these individuals nominated individuals whom they felt would participate in the research (Whitley, 2001).

Instruments

The instrument of choice in this study was a researcher-developed questionnaire. This comprised a series of open-ended questions created to satisfy the research aims and to answer the research questions (See Appendix 2). Certain demographic and professional questions were asked to ascertain whether these factors influenced their perceptions and experiences of school violence, and racism's role (See Appendix 3). The questionnaires were accompanied by a cover sheet outlining the research and important information (See Appendix 4). An A5 book within which to answer the questions was provided to each participating educator. This was done so as to ensure that educators were given the space that they each require in order to answer the questions freely and without the restriction of limited space. A number of educators chose to type their answers.

This instrument had distinct advantages over other methods for this study, namely – the questionnaire format allowed already-burdened educators to participate, at their own pace, as opposed to setting aside a given period of time to meet with the researcher. Finding time in

the day could be difficult for most educators since many coordinate or are involved in extra-curricular activities, over and above ordinary administrative tasks, such as marking. It was hoped that this would result in a higher return/participation rate. It is recognised that this method did not allow specifically for the development of rapport between the researcher and the participants, which may have added further depth to the research. Despite this and not yielding a high return rate, the depth of data captured by the questionnaires still justified the choice of this method.

In answering the open-ended questions on paper, the educators were able to express their ideas and experiences in their own words, in their own time, without distraction or interruption from the researcher. In addition, the researcher was able to tailor the questionnaire to ensure that only questions relevant to the study were asked. The questionnaire format thus allowed the educators to feel more at ease – since there was no way that the researcher will be able and to identify the educator, and thus report them. This form of data collection also eliminated the potential errors that may arise in the process of recording and transcription. Finally, having the data already in text enabled the researcher to launch into data analysis without having to engage with potentially problematic transcription.

Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was deemed by the researcher as the most appropriate method for data analysis in the study. Thematic content analysis is defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hseih & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278.).

There are several factors informing the decision to use this method. Content analysis is considered a useful and powerful tool for qualitative research. Some reasons for this include: its applicability to a wide range of text data, *i.e.* flexibility and data that is independent of theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006); and it is able to elicit rich and meaningful information from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Further, Content Analysis is able to cope with data that is not

structured (Krippendorff, 1980). Despite, being able to cope with unstructured data, an advantage of this technique is that is systematic and transparent, thus where errors do occur it is possible to rectify these. Finally, it is considered to be simple in its technique; yet it is able to produce complex accounts of the data (Krippendorff, 1980).

Thematic content analysis occurs through a step-by-by process which is outlined by Anderson (1997) and Braun & Clarke (2006). It is generally accepted that this a six step process beginning with immersion in the data, and ending with the writing of a report. The application of this method to this study is described below.

1. Immersion in the data:

This involves becoming acquainted with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since the data was in questionnaire format, it was not necessary to transcribe any data; thus the researcher became immersed by reading the corpus in a detailed way. Further, questionnaires were all collated into a single electronic document, the typing of which also contributed to immersion. Following this the researcher summarised the data by way of a separate document to ensure that the both of breadth and depth of the data was engaged with sufficiently.

2. Creating Codes:

After the data was familiar to the researcher, codes were generated in a data-driven way. This means that data was not coded according to an existing coding framework, but rather codes were generated in relation to what emerged from the educators' responses. This is described as 'inductive approach' to coding and thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this stage, the data was coded generously, *i.e.* coded for the possibility of many themes, doing so inclusively to ensure that all relevant data was coded.

3. Identifying Themes:

Following initial coding, themes were identified by sorting codes into thematic categories. All relevant codes were collated under these thematic categories. This stage concluded with the identification of a range of potential themes.

4. Revising Themes:

Emergent themes were revised. A number of themes collapsed into broader themes. Some themes were separated for coherence and comprehensiveness. These themes were then tested against the data and the codes.

5. Finalising Themes:

Themes were finalised. These were named according to the core of the data represented by the particular themes.

6. Writing up the Research:

This is the final step which involves providing appropriate excerpts to illustrate the themes; matching results to literature and finally generating the results and discussion pertaining to the analysis (Anderson, 1997; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step manifests in the chapter to follow.

Ethics

Four key ethical considerations were pertinent to this research: informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and avoidance of harm.

Informed consent formed the ethical basis upon which this study was established. It entailed providing the participants with all the relevant information they required in order to make a considered choice about participation (Whitley, 2001). All the relevant information included procedural information, *e.g.* duration of their participation; a point of contact concerning the research; risks or benefits of participation and researcher expectations of the participants (Whitley, 2001). In the study, this information was provided to the participants in two ways: firstly, in person at the meeting where the researcher invited the participants to complete the questionnaires; and secondly, on the cover sheet provided to the participants along with questionnaires.

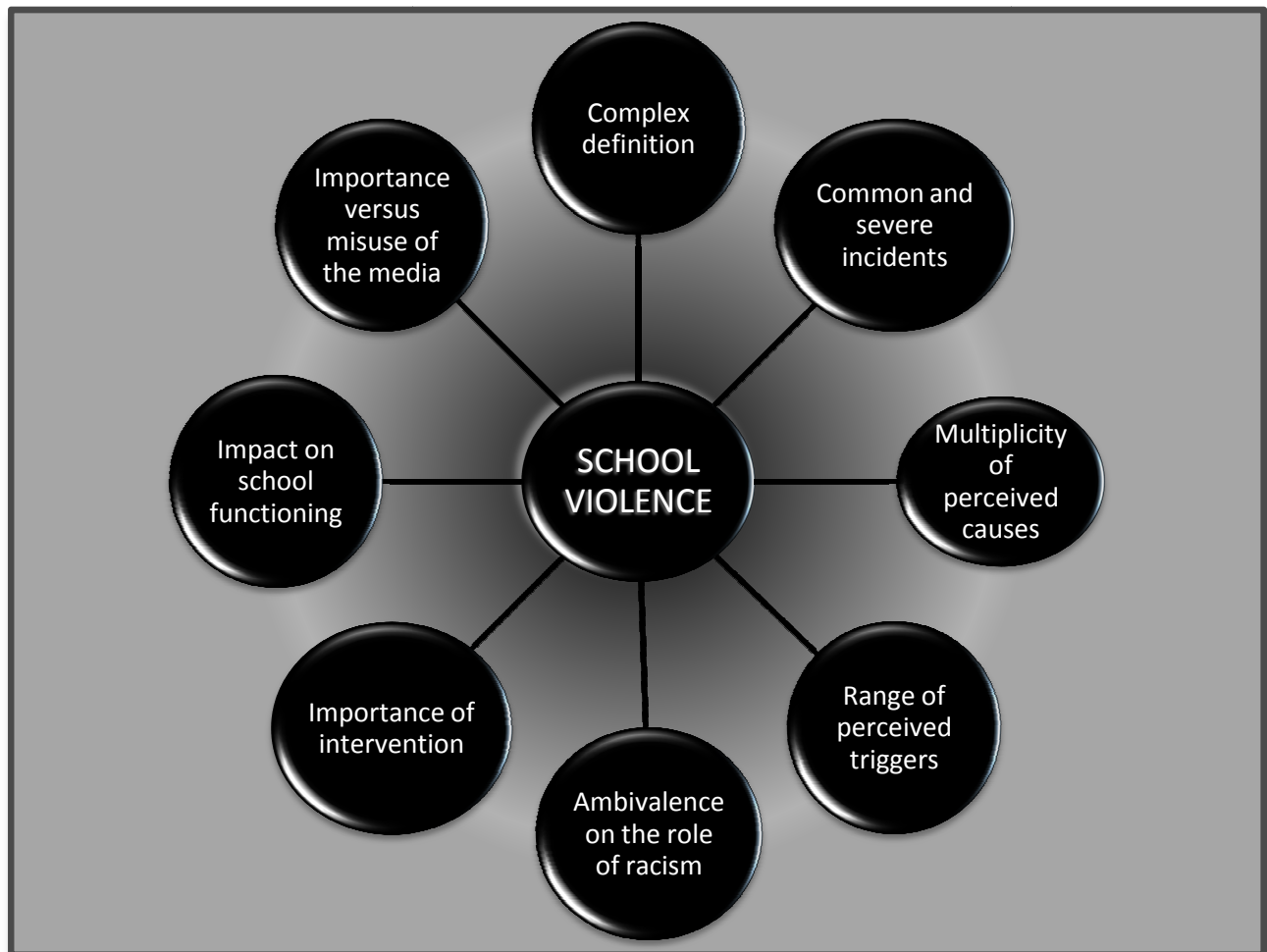
Voluntary participation allowed the participants the freedom to decide whether to contribute to research and furthermore it protected the participants' freedom to withdraw from the study at any time (Whitley, 2001). This was assured to all potential participants, and was emphasised in person and included on the cover sheet.

Confidentiality was guaranteed to the participants since no identifying information was required; and thus they could not be attached to their questionnaires in any way. Although demographic and professional questions were included, participants were assured that these would only be viewed by the researcher and the research supervisor. Further, since they did not sign a separate informed consent sheet, they could not, and cannot, be linked to the study in any way. The box where the questionnaires were contained during two-week period between distribution and collection was sealed and reinforced in such a way that no one had access to completed questionnaires. In line with this, they were once again assured that only the researcher, and potentially the research supervisor, would view the completed questionnaires. Further, participants were guaranteed that should quotations be used, these would be sanitised of any identifying information and pseudonyms will be used. Pseudonyms were chosen randomly and have no relation the participant.

The final ethical consideration that was key in this context was the avoidance of harm. Although great anxiety or distress should not have arisen from the questions posed, the participants were provided with the contact details of two places where they may receive free counselling, *i.e.* Lifeline and the South African Depression and Anxiety Group. Furthermore, the researcher made herself available for debriefing should the participant have requested it. No such request was made.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

Figure 1 – Diagrammatic representation of the major themes emerging from the corpus



The results of the thematic content analysis undertaken of the corpus are reported in this chapter. A number of themes were prominent across the questionnaires, although some thematic differences were noted between participants. This chapter will describe and discuss the themes emerging from the data within the context of recent and relevant literature. Description of the themes will be illustrated by the use of quotations taken from the participants. It is important to note that in line with ethical practice, pseudonyms have been used to ensure the anonymity of the participants who volunteered in this study. If relevant, the data will be linked to anecdotal evidence emerging from media representations of school violence.

The themes elicited are interconnected, and thus will be discussed in the order which best allows for cohesive and comprehensive description of the data. This discussion will begin with the complex definition of school violence as provided by the educators, followed by incidents that the educators have experienced. The causes, triggers and the role of racism will be elaborated upon thereafter, followed by the role of intervention, the impact on school functioning, and the role that the media play in relation to school violence.

Complex Definition of School Violence

Various understandings of school violence were provided in Chapter One. Five types of school violence, as drawn from the literature, were described in that chapter: physical attacks, sexual violence, robbery, bullying and threats of violence (Stockdale *et al.*, 2002; Benbenishty *et al.*, 2008; Burton, 2008; Gumpel, 2008; Weaver *et al.*, 2008).

There is little consensus on the definition of school violence amongst the educators who participated in the study. The array of definitions speaks to its complex nature. The educators presented definitions which encapsulated varying degrees and types of violence, as well as multiple manifestations of violence. A number of educators defined school violence as being a physical act, whereas others felt that emotional, verbal and psychological harm are subtypes of school violence. In its simplest form, school violence was defined as:

"Physical threats and harm performed by learners or educators" (Anthony)

A number of educators, however, further defined school violence as having elements of both physical and non-physical harm, *i.e.* emotional, verbal and psychological aspects. The majority of educators pointed to the threat of physical violence as part of this definition. It was relayed that harm, intimidation, acts of aggression, humiliation and belittling were common manifestations of school violence.

“I believe school violence is any form of violence, aggression or hostility that a child is exposed to while at school or involved in school activities, at the hands of fellow learners, teachers or outsiders. These actions are intentional, malicious, and can be physical or emotional (psychological)” (Keira).

One educator elaborated on the definition by pointing to the use of weapons in these incidents.

“School violence is when learners cause physical harm on each other or threaten each other with weapons. This violence is also extended to teachers causing physical harm or being harmed physically. Examples include punching, hitting, stabbing *etc.* In my opinion bullying in all forms is not school violence (*i.e.* name calling, isolation, *etc.*), but will include physical bullying [in this definition]” (Olivia).

As indicated, Olivia was the only educator to highlight the use of weapons in these incidents. This contradicts the assumption one might make if the media were used as the primary source of information. The use of weapons in these incidents is often reported upon in such a way that it is presented as commonplace (Mail and Guardian, 2008; Molosankwe *et al.*, 2008, Fredericks, 2009b; Serrao, 2009a). As the role of the media constitutes a theme in its own right, this will be discussed in greater detail below.

Olivia further delineated instances of school violence by precluding verbal and emotional incidents, and damage to property; although her definition does make mention of ‘physical bullying.’ This definition contradicts the arguments made by Stockdale *et al.* (2002) and Gumpel (2008) who include bullying, both in its physical and so-called social form, as subtypes of school violence. It is important to note however that despite making this distinction, Olivia was the only educator to make mention of bullying at all. This point becomes an important one to consider in that raises the question of whether educators differentiate bullying from school violence, or whether these form part of one overarching category, either under the name bullying or school violence. While this does not fall within the scope of this research, it may be necessary to consider in future studies whether this distinction is real or arbitrary; and what the implications of this distinction may be within the school context. How is ‘physical bullying’ different from the causing of physical harm and being physically assaulted? How is ‘social

bullying' different from so-called psychological and emotional harm and humiliation? If a school has high levels of bullying is it automatically a school with high rates of violence? Is bullying viewed as commonplace and a right of passage, and as such not deemed severe enough to be included in a definition of violence? These are questions that remain to be addressed and answered.

From the educators' definitions, three types of school violence were identified: (1) physical attacks, (2) threats of violence, and (3) emotional and psychological harm. This represents a variation of the subtypes identified by the literature. The literature includes bullying, sexual violence and robbery as subtypes of school violence; yet these were not included in the educators' definitions⁴. This would suggest that either these types of violence are not prevalent within the schools where this sample of educators teach or that these educators have no knowledge of such instances should they occur within their school contexts. The majority of the educators however included emotional and psychological harm in their definitions. This may be congruent with social forms of bullying which various authors included in their descriptions of school violence (Stockdale *et al.*, 2002; Gumpel, 2008); however the literature does not explicitly include these emotional and psychological variants in its definitions. The exception to this was the inclusion of verbal and emotional abuse as type of school violence by Benbenishty *et al.* (2008). While the causing of psychological distress, humiliation or degradation was included in the definition posited in chapter 1, this was said to result from destructive physical acts, thus the identification of emotional and psychological types of school violence is not consistent with said definition. This may then require the definition to be reworked to include the causing of psychological distress, humiliation or degradation occurring independently from physical attacks.

All the educators defined learners – either in their own capacity or as a part of a group – as the primary perpetrators, and recipients of school violence. A few educators cast educators, ground and administrative staff in the roles of both perpetrators and victims of school violence.

⁴ With the exception of Olivia's definition which included physical bullying. This is discussed above.

Two educators felt it necessary to state that school violence occurs on school property. While this may seem an obvious deduction to make, its inclusion delineates this type of violence from violence which happens outside of this context. Illustrating this point with an example: when two learners from the same school are involved in an attack outside of school hours and off of school grounds, for example, during the weekend at a party, then this is not school violence but rather a fight; however when this fight re-erupts on Monday morning on school grounds – it is then classified as school violence. While these may appear to be reasonable descriptions of these incidents, it would seem that these incidents are received publicly in very different ways. It becomes important to consider why ‘fights’ in the context of the school raise such concern, whereas reports of such incidents during off-time rarely make media reports and hence seldom receive attention as a matter of public concern. This leads one to presume that despite its non-inclusion as defining term by many educators, it the site of this violence which is in fact the defining characteristic of these incidents. Considering that the school is the site of socialisation whereby learners become ‘good citizens’ and are taught moral values (Hargreaves, 2001; Wilkins, 2005), the incidents of violence may impact on the functioning in such a way that the moral outcomes which are a collective part of the school’s effectiveness is jeopardised (Hargreaves, 2001). The concern may be that schools are no longer able to produce ‘good citizens’ in the way that the public desires. This requires further investigation in future studies. While this *may* be a long-term outcome of school violence, immediate outcomes varied according to the educators – from the infringement of rights, injury, destruction of school property and in extreme cases, death.

“Any action that leads to a learner or staff member feeling unsafe or threatened, or a learner or staff member being injured or killed, or even that may lead to the destruction of school property” (Camilla).

“Where an individual (learner, staff member, admin staff) is subject to any form of abuse that will belittle the individual or harm the individual (emotionally or physically) by: a learner at the school, a teacher, any ground staff or admin staff. In most schools ‘school violence’ is mainly encountered amongst the learners. Other types of violence are very scarce” (Felicity).

The identification of learners as the primary perpetrators of school violence is consistent with the literature, as according to Burton (2008) 83 - 93% of violent incidents in South African schools are perpetrated by learners. Between 5 – 15% of school violence is perpetrated by educators at the high school level (Burton, 2008), which therefore makes the participants' inclusion of educators as perpetrators an accurate reflection of an element of school violence in the South African context.

The complex nature of the definition appears to relate to the heterogeneity and instability of school violence as indicated by Benbenishty *et al.* (2008). School violence varies not only across schools but within them, and this may result in the differing experiences of such incidents.

Common and Severe Incidents

All the educators in the sample have experienced incidents of *learner-on-learner* school violence – this regardless of their years of teaching experience. There was some discrepancy between the educators as to the frequency and severity of these incidents. This discrepancy was noted amongst the educators who taught at the same school, and between the educators from GHS and those reached through the snowball sampling strategy. These discrepancies will be illustrated through excerpts from the educators' responses. Anthony and Gina are both educators at GHS:

“Yes [I have experienced learner-on-learner violence]. These incidents include both sexes but is more frequently experienced amongst boys. The reason for these fights are mostly trivial, *e.g.* gossip via SMS or MXit. Sometimes it involves groups (gangs), malicious rumours are spread to start a fight just for entertainment. These fights don't normally last long and will be over within minutes. In exceptional cases, grudges are kept and will re-erupt in a fight after school involving more friends” (Anthony)

“Since I have been at this school, there has been 1 incident of violence between 2 boys. No one got hurt but the intentions to physically hurt each other severely was definitely present. Fortunately, GHS has very rare occurrences of violence” (Gina).

Nicole and Olivia are two educators who are not affiliated to GHS at all. Their experiences present a different picture of violence within the school setting.

“I have only been teaching for a year and have encountered many instances of violence at my current school.... The girls tend to have arguments and verbal fights with occasional pushing and slapping, whereas the boys engage in more violent physical fights. The most recent fight was between two boys.... They were fighting over alcohol that was brought to school... and a violent fight resulting in a badly beaten up boy ensued” (Nicole)

“There was a number of fights in the school.... I had a Grade 10 register class and my neighbour teacher had a Grade 8 class. Over the weekend an incident occurred at one girls house and the boyfriend in my Grade 10 class wanted to fight with the boy in my neighbours register class. Unbeknown to me I let out my class after registration and was prepping for my next class, I heard screaming and shouting which is fairly normal. Until the other teacher shouted my name, screaming for help. I rushed outside to find her holding back the Grade 10 boy and telling me to get the other boy away. As I went to touch the other boy, a bystander screamed “ma’am he had a knife”.... The Grade 8 boy had a huge kitchen knife (chefs knife) with him. I was petrified” (Olivia)

Educators have less frequently experienced incidents of *learner-on-educator* violence. The majority of educators in this sample have never experienced such incidents. Where educators have had these experiences, they were verbal in nature.

“I have encountered verbal violence from learners to teachers but have not, as yet, encountered physical violence. Learners use teachers as their spring boards. They say things to their teachers they would not imagine saying to their parents. Often one has to remind the learners that their teachers are not their friends, so as to ensure you gain some respect from them when they engage in conversation with you” (Nicole)

These educators’ experiences appear to be less frequent and severe as those found by Burton (2008). It is note-worthy that the figures in Burton’s study with regards to learner-on-educator violence were ascertained through contact with the school principals, and thus may not fully represent the experiences of educators. Further it is important to note that Burton (2008) found that learner-on-educator violence was prevalent in 1 in 4 schools. It is possible, therefore, that these educators are located in the 75% of schools where such incidents are

uncommon. One participant pointed to the fact that while she has not experienced learner-on-educator, she has encountered

“incidents of educator-on-learner violence and bullying. I have heard accounts of educators who have thrown things at learners (pens, blackboard dusters, chalk, even a pair of scissors), who have hit children at the back of the head, or grabbed them. And I certainly have heard and seen incidents of educators humiliating, taunting and intimidating learners” (Keira).

From these accounts school violence is presented as existing on continuum of severity and frequency. A number of critical issues regarding these incidents emerge from these excerpts (as well as the responses of the other educators in the sample): the timing of these incidents, the gendered nature of these incidents, the multiplicity of perceived causes⁵, the importance of intervention³, the intensity of incidents, the role of racism³, the role of parents³, the use of weapons, the role of the female educator³ and the ‘victim.’

Incidents of school violence

According to the educators, incidents of school violence vary from social exclusion to the use of weapons. Educators identified emotional and psychological taunting, provocation and physical attacks as common incidents of school violence. Learners would often exchange insults and make derogatory statements towards each other, and in many instances this provocation would lead to violence whereby the ‘victim’ of the taunting becomes the ‘perpetrator’ of the violence. Intimidation and harassment were also identified as specific instances of school violence. Physical attacks that the educators have experienced ranged from throwing objects (acorns, pens *etc.*), tripping, pushing (at times against walls, or poles) to severe assaults. Girls were noted for pulling hair and scratching. The weapons utilised appeared to vary as well – knives, guns the use of safety pins as reported by one educator:

“Learners would wait for break time and plan physical attacks on individuals. Use of ‘opened-baby safety pins’ as a spear – would stab anyone they passed – weapon was small enough to fold up and hide” (Donna)

⁵ These constitute sub-themes or themes in their own right and will be discussed in subsequent sessions.

Educators' experiences of these incidents have therefore varied significantly, although all the participants had witnessed, intervened in or received reports of school violence. This may suggest that while 15.3% of learners have experienced incidents of school violence directly (Burton, 2008), educators have observed and experienced these incidents with a much higher frequency. This should be explored in future, large-scale quantitative research.

These incidents appear to be generally consistent with the definitions that the educators provided for school violence, and reflect the literature which identified physical attacks – including slapping, punching and hitting, emotional and verbal abuse as common manifestations of school violence (Benbenishty *et al.*, 2008; Weaver *et al.*, 2008). These types of incidents are similar to those reported in the media, a range of which were described in chapter two.

Timing and potential spread of incidents of violence

Educators identified particular periods of time during which incidents of school violence were more frequent, and more likely to occur. Break, when learners are changing classes and after-school are the times when school violence is most likely to occur. These appear to be ungoverned and unsupervised spaces where learners are able engage in violent activities without much disruption. Some incidents do occur, however, during class.

“Grade 11s were doing orals and the learner who was speaking was quite rude, when she sat down another learner made a comment about her speech and she (the 1st learner) jumped up and slapped her. The fight quickly escalated in hair pulling, scratching etc”
(Heather)

In relation to the school calendar, violence is most likely to occur close to exams, or the end of the year, especially on the last day of classes. August was identified by one educator as a month where school violence appears to peak. These times were explained by one educator as a time where “learners are more heat[ed] up, excited about the up coming holidays as the holiday mode sets in” (Nicole).

The spread of these incidents was aligned according to two trends, either as sporadic and random, or as “spreading like a disease” (Gina). According to the first trend, these incidents are independent from other instances; occurring rarely in the context of the schools where these educators are employed. These events are described as “isolated” (Bailey), and as “incidents that balloon out of control” (Evelyn). On the other hand, violence was also described as having the potential to spread, whereby, for example “a fighting trend would last for a week or two where there were lots of fights” (Olivia). Reasons for these variations are unclear, and thus could be explored in future research.

Victims

The learners who are victimised are described as those who are “perceived to be weak or different” (Keira), or those who are looking to fit in. It was also noted that learners who are perceived to be ‘better’ are also often targeted. This was explained by an educator who deemed this to be “a kind of power-play, children looking to get in, carve a niche for themselves, or who themselves were struggling with a low self-esteem” (Keira). Learners who provoke others were also identified as recipients of school violence:

“a learner provoked another learner by taking his bag and putting it in the dustbin.
The learner whose bag it was hit the boy” (Micaela)

Instances where ‘victims’ becomes ‘perpetrators’ are commonly reported in the media, reference is made to the case of Phumba and Zulu as described in chapter two of this report (Serrao, 2008). The recipient of violence may also be selected by virtue of his or her grade.

“...I also experienced ‘grade gang’ incidents where two grades were in conflict and hostile to each other and this escalated to a situation where guns were brought to a school function (Grade 8 plays) and fighting ensued” (Keira).

Therefore, the choice of victim of school violence is not an obvious one. There appear to be a complexity of factors which lead to this targeting of a particular learner.

Gendered nature of school violence

While educators did not define school violence along gendered lines, their experiences of such instances were gendered. One educator relayed that in her experience “girls have argued and had physical fights over boys” (Felicity), however these incidents were rare. Physical violence amongst girls is, according to these educators, uncommon. Girls generally engaged in verbal fights, *i.e.* arguments and taunting, and with some physical elements, *i.e.* pushing and slapping. This appears consistent with Ward (2007) which deems females to be at a lesser risk of incidents of severe violence. It is important to note however that patterns of female violence are shifting globally, and thus girls may increasingly become involved in such incidents. Boys however were implicated in more severe forms physical violence. These incidents included beatings, and the use of weapons. This is consistent with several references which deemed being male as a risk factor. Ward (2007) determines that many boys are socialised into believing that violence is part of being a male, and thus this behaviour is socially and culturally constructed. Maree (2003) argued males are at a biological risk for violence, due to high levels testosterone which diminishes frustration tolerance, and increases the likelihood for “antisocial behaviour”.

It also appears that where violence is learner-on-educator male learners are the perpetrators and female educators the victims. These incidences also appear to be racialised, with Black male learners inflicting violence on White female educators.

“Yes [I have known of incidents of learner-on-educator on school violence], only twice in 25 years. In both cases... it involved Black boys disrespecting White female educators. The violence involved pushing these educators violently and verbally abusing them” (Anthony)

This particular finding speaks of prejudicial behaviour occurring along two tiers – gender and race. Considering the definition of racism postulated by Miles (1989) which viewed racism as the prediction of action with the intention of subordinating and exercising control over other racial groups, one could surmise that these incidents can be predicted and occur with the purpose of learners’ exerting some control over these educators. Thus from this position, these

incidents could be predicted to occur especially when the learners are attempting to exercise control and position themselves as dominant. Why this is manifested as Black male learner on White female educator is unclear from this definition. When the definition of racism as a “system of advantage based on race” (Tatum, 1997, p. 7) is contemplated, a conflict is created. The White female educators would be generally considered to be those in an advantageous position, in their authoritarian role, age, and race; and thus where the racism is carried out by young Black learners this question of advantage is tested. The source of the advantage for these Black male learners is uncertain; although it could be hypothesised that exerting power over a White female educator – one who is deemed to be in a stronger position – may increase the learners’ social standing within the school. While this finding should be investigated on a larger scale, it is important to note that these educators reported that incidents of learner-on-educator violence rarely occurred and thus the frequency of these ‘Black male learner on White female educator’ incidents is not certain, but presumed to be infrequent within the context of these particular schools.

Therefore, in summary, the educators have all experienced incidents of school violence regardless of their years of teaching experience. This is notable as three educators have had a year of teaching experience – this then leads one to acknowledge that school violence is a continuous and pervasive feature of school life in South Africa. A number of educators, despite providing elaborate definitions of school violence mentioning both physical and emotional harm, failed to consider emotional incidents as school violence, and thus these were under-represented in their responses. The reasons for this are unclear. In addition, great variation in these incidents was found, however common times for the occurrence of school violence were noted. Violence perpetrated by female learners was described as verbal in nature; whereas male learners appeared to manifest greater levels of physical violence. Further, a number of factors seem to be involved in the choice of the victim of school violence, with learners who are perceived as different often being targets.

Multiplicity of Perceived Causes

The third major theme that was identified from the corpus was the multiplicity of perceived causes that the educators have suggested for school violence. Causes are the fundamental, underlying factors that lead to school violence. These factors can be organised according to individual, interpersonal, home, community and social factors. These factors can be discussed following the Ecological model as posited by Bronfenbrenner, and as discussed in the second chapter of this report.

The individual

A number of perceived causes were identified at the individual level. These factors could be classified as biological/physical or psychological factors. Physically, chemical or hormonal imbalances and intoxication were implicated.

“Chemical and emotional imbalances.... hormones... adrenaline” (Michaela)

“Drug abuse which makes learners aggressive and act abnormally” (Anthony)

Maree (2003) posits that chemical and hormonal factors are involved in antisocial behaviours by learners; these include increased testosterone and lower serotonin levels. Psychologically, poor self esteem, the need to belong and sense of inferiority were believed to contribute to school violence.

“Self-esteem – children pick on other smaller and weaker children in order to show the others that they are tough” (Gina)

“Inferiority complex... Need to belong in a group” (Bailey)

In addition to these, educators felt that feelings of insecurity, sexual frustration, anger and boredom often underlie acts of school violence. Mental illness, namely depression, anxiety and trauma, were also identified as fundamental causes of school violence. The personality of the learner was a further factor that educators believed to underpin these incidents. The use of

substances, the witnessing and/or experience of violence and defiance were thought to cause school violence.

“Experiencing a trauma or traumatic event (like a loss, a divorce *etc*) can leave the child feeling unsafe and scared and cause them to lash out. Sometimes, children are brought up believing that violence is the way to deal with problems and they act out what they have seen” (Keira)

Poor judgement and the inability to foresee the consequences of behaviour were also implicated in these incidents. Finally, violence may be underpinned by a need to control the environment. All these factors were included by Maree (2003) as causal factors for deviant behaviours in the youth. In addition to these factors, Maree (2003) described hopelessness and alienation as possible causes for such behaviour.

Micro-system

The educators all indicated that ‘dysfunction’ within the home and other immediate environments, *e.g.* peer groups, could result in school violence. Interpersonal factors such as poor communication and conflict management, misperceptions and stereotyping, and peer pressure were attributed as perceived causes by the majority of the educators. These factors when added to violence in the home and community would spill the violence over in the school context.

“Learners do not manage conflict well. In many cases, violence is used to deal with disagreements in their homes and environment. They do not know other methods to deal with conflict. We live in a violent society” (Anthony)

“Learners do not have the necessary skills to handle conflict; learners feel unsafe and react violently; we are living in a society where it seems that all problems is solved with violence, and the learners follow the example” (Camilla)

The educators all point to the use of violence as a means of resolving any differences between learners. It was thought by the educator that this is rooted in their home experiences. Educators unanimously identify the home as the site of genesis for violent behaviour, absolving

the school and community of any responsibility as such sites. Educators have experienced that learners from so-called 'broken' and abusive homes have not been taught appropriate ways of releasing their frustrations, and thus they resort to violence. Further, it has been experienced that parents are increasingly uninvolved in their children's lives, with especially poor early childhood rearing practices. It has been experienced that these children have not been taught morals, values – including respect, discipline and tolerance, and emotional expression. Lack of nurturance and 'love' coupled with the needs for food, money and luxury (which are not being met at home) often result in the releasing of frustration through violence.

"I believe that lack of parental control and/or involvement in their children's lives is one of the main causes of this violence. Fewer parents are instilling in their children the values of discipline and respect, both for oneself and for others. Increasingly more children comes from broken or abusive homes so do not learn correct methods of venting their frustrations and getting attention. Hence they resort to that which is familiar and easiest – violence"
(Leanne)

Therefore, at the micro-level ineffective and uninvolved parenting styles, as well as peer pressure and ineffective learnt coping strategies, are believed to cause school violence. The literature provides confirmation for these propositions. Various factors within the family context are linked to school violence – these include changes in family structure, parental discipline styles, parental use of aggression, experience of violence in the home, and low economic status in so far as this economic deprivation may contribute to feelings of shame and inferiority (Aitken, 2001; WHO, 2002; Maree, 2003). Learners from so-called 'broken' or "incomplete family [which] refers to the absence of the father or mother" (Maree, 2003, p. 59) are at a greater risk of becoming involved in antisocial acts, such as violence (WHO, 2002; Maree, 2003). This can be linked to early psychological processes of attachment and frustration tolerance, exacerbated by situations where the single parental figure works long days, often spending time away from their children (WHO, 2002; Maree, 2003; Ward, 2007). In these cases, whilst basic physical needs may be met, these children can often lack parental care and affection (Maree, 2003). Further, whether from a so-called 'broken family' or from a home with

both parents, lack of supervision can allow for the development of antisocial behaviour (Maree, 2003).

“Lack of secure upbringing and teaching of accepted values and morals from early childhood. Lack of parental involvement in the lives of today’s children. Children are left to their own devices and so resort to violence as a way of controlling or exercising some form of control over their environment” (Donna)

Many educators refer to this lack of supervision as a perceived cause of school violence; their position appears to be confirmed in that lack of supervision is linked to “a condition of freedom... which they (the youth) will take advantage of... [or it] interferes with the establishment of the positive bond so important for internalising positive norms” (Maree, 2003, p. 60). It is important to consider whether the educators’ construction of effective parenting is culturally normative. This consideration is significant in light of the view that strict adherence to one’s own cultural values and norms, and criticism of the values of others, can act as a mask for racism. This is not to say that because the educators are concerned about these practices then they are necessarily racist; but rather that the cultural location of these remarks must be borne in mind, and that the possibility of culture acting a guise for racism exists.

Meso-system

As indicated in chapter 2, this system involves the linkages between micro systems (Visser, 2007). The principle of Interdependence posits that risk in one micro system necessarily implies risk in another (Visser, 2007). Applying this principle, therefore, it is suggested that when a learner experiences the great number of risk factors in the home environment so then the risk for violence in the school setting is increased.

Exo-system

The educators have experienced that where materialism, criminality and gangsterism are rife, then violence in the school setting results.

“... Today’s teenagers are very materialistic. Your worth is seen in what you own (brand names etc. and not who you are. Seeking popularity amongst their peers. Criminality, using violence to take others’ possessions and then intimidation to protect themselves” (Anthony)

Gangsterism is an important way for learners to gain status and power, especially where learners feel insecure in their environments. Gangs can be defined as “a group of young people who form an allegiance for a common purpose” (Maree, 2003, p. 66).

“Children in the school environment fight with one another to obtain a higher social status within the school. They form intimidating gangs so as to build up their own power and have some influence over other learners” (Nicole)

Gang membership and its related criminality place a young person at risk for engaging in anti-social activities (WHO, 2002; Maree, 2003). Gang violence can either be imported into the school from the outside environment, or exported from the school context into the community at large; suggesting that violence in the school can either be initiated by or spark inter-gang violence. Where “gang membership, especially at an early age, is strongly associated with future criminal activity” (Maree, 2003, p. 67) this becomes an important causative factor to consider, within the school context and beyond.

These factors that the educators identified could be considered in the light of the social identity theory in terms of which individuals have a preference for association with superior groups (Nesdale, 2001). Through these associations individuals become able to boost their self-esteem (Nesdale, 2001). Gang membership and acts to show “who is more superior than the other” (Ivan) can be understood in terms of this theory.

Macro-system

According to the educators various structural factors cause school violence. Violence in the South African context in general, as well as lack of environmental security, contributes to causing violence in the school setting. Maree (2003) posits that when children grow up in such

environments “and in a culture of survival. For some children, vandalism, stealing and violence have become internalised and part of everyday living, almost normal and acceptable” (p. 58). Social frustration, poverty, hunger, drive for money and race were all implicated as perceived ideological factors which cause school violence.

“Some of our learners come from ‘poor’ families. This means that sometimes they may be hungry and frustrated and they manifest these frustrations by being violent.” (Felicity)

From the factors identified by the educators, it is unlikely that each factor on its own would cause school violence, *i.e.* the witnessing of violence or poor early childhood rearing on its own would not necessarily cause school violence. It is more plausible that a matrix of factors contribute to the ultimate outcome - which in this context is incidents of school violence. These causes coupled with the triggers – which will be discussed below – will result in school violence.

Range of Perceived Triggers

Triggers, unlike causes, are the immediate precipitants of the violence. Educators identified a range of factors that the educators perceive as triggering these incidents. The factors that educators identified are either personal in nature or inter-relational. These trigger factors are identified and discussed in this section.

Personal factors

A number of personal factors are implicated as perceived triggers for school violence. These personal factors can be perceptions of a situation, or emotional experiences which spark the violence. Jealousy and anger appear to be the emotions that most consistently result in the triggering of violence at school. Defiance can also initiate violence. Fear and the feelings of being threatened, intimidated or disrespected can initiate violent incidents.

“...When a child (bully) feels threatened, like their insecurities are being shown up, or like the mask of strength and bravado is being stripped away, s/he will defend him/herself by

diverting unwanted attention onto another child (victim) by inflicting the pain and humiliation the bully is trying to avoid feeling” (Leanne).

Access to substances and substance use also trigger these incidents according to some of the educators. Finally, a personal need for the learner to access food and money was found to be a trigger of incidents of school violence.

Inter-relational factors

An overwhelming majority of the educators identified inter-relational factors as triggering these incidents. In cases of violence, learners have often been found to be seeking attention, popularity and status. For other learners, peer pressure (*i.e.* the pressure to fight) resulted in the initiation of violent incidents. Taunting and provocation often triggers school violence – this can be in the form of teasing, insults, rumours and gossips, derogatory statements and humiliation. The content of these taunts can range from the “family’s economic standing, location where they live” (Felicity), to “when children refer to ‘your mother is...’” (Olivia). Differences in language, culture and beliefs, as well as racist slurs can also lead to the outbreak of violence. Relationship issues – especially fighting over the affections of girl/boy and cheating – are common triggers of school violence. The exclusion and unfair treatment of a learner can trigger a violent response in the said learner. Self-defence therefore is also a common trigger for violence.

Educators’ general sentiments were that “mild arguments can spark into violence” (Heather). These triggers may even appear “silly – for adults” (Evelyn). The literature supports this position by describing how simple arguments can escalate to critical and severe arguments (Fraser, 1996; Leung & Ferris, 2008; Rudatsikira *et al.*, 2008). This relates to the causes discussed above, particularly with regards to the learners’ poor communication and conflict management skills. These incidents are compounded by the emotions experienced “in the heat of the moment” (Micaela), as well by the rush of “adrenaline” (Micaela). These incidents become a form of “entertainment” (Anthony), with “the spectator value of these incidences was sometimes bigger than the fight itself” (Olivia).

Ambivalence on the Role of Racism

The overwhelming majority of educators recognised that racism occupies a large role in relation to school conflict and violence in general. The educators were divided, however, with regards to the role of racism in incidents of school violence at their schools – one educator was unsure as to the role of racism within the social, with the rest of the educators being evenly split between two positions – one which views racism as a factor in school violence, and the other which views racism as a scapegoat. These positions will be discussed within this section.

Racism as a factor in school violence

Almost half the educators believe that racism has a role to play in violence at their schools, although amongst these educators there was some variation as to the extent of the role racism plays in these violent incidents. Some educators report that racism has a minimal role, whilst others indicated that it has a large role to play in these incidents. Racism appears to be more prevalent amongst boys. Parental racism was felt to be a determining factor of racism amongst learners. This is consistent with the theory of social reflection which was described above, which briefly suggests that the prejudices that children hold are a reflection of the beliefs of their significant adults and community (Nesdale, 2001).

“Racism still has an influence in school violence. There are still children who come from racist backgrounds in which they are influenced to believe the ‘other’ race is inferior. Children being naïve allow this to dominate their actions” (Gina).

The educators reported that many learners continue to organise themselves along racial lines. One educator (Joel) believes that racism is most rife in schools where white learners are in the majority, whilst other educators reflect a different scenario:

“About 10% of fights involves some racism. In our case mostly from black learners on white learners as white are in the minority” (Anthony)

“... [Racism] is unfortunately still one of the causes [of school violence] – not just black/white racism, but kids picking on Asians, for example” (Leanne)

Some educators have had experiences of racialised school violence - incidents which were described in some detail are included below:

“Race does play a role in school violence. A fight ensued at our school between a white boys and a black boy. They pushed and slapped each other and when other black boys saw the commotion, they joined in to help the black boy even though they did not know the story or why the fight was taking place. This caused a fight between 5 black boys and 1 white boy” (Nicole)

“In our school, at this point, there is a problem with a group of black boys who is bullying a group of white boys. In two cases, this has lead to fights between the boys. This is now become a racial issue. The white boys is convinced that its racial, as they say these boys only target them. The other boys of course denies this” (Camilla)

“[I have heard of] one incident where a white boy beat up a coloured boy – but I was not directly involved. I do believe that the white boys’ parents were extremely racists and the boy suffered with problems prior to this incident such as continual theft, violence and other behavioural problems. This was one of many outbursts. He clearly had problems at home and needed help with anger management. He was asked to leave the school.” (Donna)

According to these educators then the problem of racialised school violence is not contained to white-on-black as indicated by Joel – but rather is a problem between members of various race groups: white, black, coloured and so-called Asian learners. Learners from any one race group can be the perpetrator and/or victim of school violence on another learner of a different racial classification. The intensity of these incidents can escalate “to the point where blood is drawn” (Bailey).

Other educators however hold a contrary position, believing that racism is used a scapegoat for violence in the school context. This position will be clarified below.

Racism as a scapegoat

Many educators indicated that while they accept that racism exists in South Africa in general, and while it may have a role to play in other schools, it is not an issue in the schools where they have worked. For many of these educators, racism is a problem that exists at other schools.

“Racism can play a big role in school violence, but in our school this has not really been a big problem. We can pride ourselves on the fact that we have our own culture (as a school). The norms are laid out in our school’s code of conduct” (Felicity).

Some educators attribute their schools’ lack of racism to the school culture and attitudes. Having a school culture that is based “all are equal philosophy” (Donna) and multiculturalism can curb racism in the school context. In addition to this, learners are described as being well integrated and possible racial motivations behind conflicts are denied. From this, it appears that schools are significantly invested in ensuring (a) that they are perceived as non-racist and (b) that the genesis for any racial conflict is not attributed to the school, or the community; but rather confined to the home. This appears contrary to the notion of social reflection which deems prejudices to be learnt from the community at large, and not simply the home environment (Nesdale, 2001). According to this position, prejudices are learnt from direct training or observation of significant adults’ behaviour (Nesdale, 2001). The educators’ reluctance to acknowledge the school and the community as sites of racial socialisation is worth exploring in future research. It is possible that the learners are adopting egalitarian and non-discriminatory behaviour through the direct training and observations of such behaviour by the staff. This process would be easier if such behaviour were reinforced in the home and community. The assertion by educators that “it depends on the general culture or attitudes in the school” (Camilla) appears to be accurate in line with this view. Schools that experience non-racialised hostilities may be a reflection of a social context whereby there is equality amongst the staff component. This however would need to be addressed in a more focussed way in future studies.

It seems that the government’s and South Africa in general’s goal of racial integration and multicultural acceptance (Moodley, 2004; Soudien, 2004) has been achieved to some degree within the schools where these educators have taught according to their responses. Almost half the educators expressed that racism does not play a role in incidents of school violence that they have experienced. Rather these educators believe racism is an excuse or a scapegoat.

“At times it does play a role but I feel that racism is an easy scapegoat, an easy cop-out. In the schools I have taught in, certainly racism was not an issue, at least that I was aware of” (Keira).

The educators who hold this position seem to feel that while some learners may be racist, or while violent incidents may involve learners of different races, the fact that these learners are involved in school violence does not make these incidents racist, *i.e.* “we have had fights which involved different races but the reasons for the fights are seldom race-related” (Anthony). The educators point to other causes and triggers for the violence. This finding raises questions related to the types of racism discussed in chapter two. As indicated in that chapter, present-day racism is not manifested overtly; but rather through subtle behavioural demonstrations and interpersonal experiences. A consideration of aversive racism may be appropriate within this context. This type of racism is characterised by the support for the victims of past social injustice, but individuals continue to hold negative feelings toward racial others (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001). Further individuals who are ‘aversively racist’ would not acknowledge these feelings of hostility; but they too would not necessarily engage in overtly racialised violent behaviour (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001). This may provide an explanation for why inter-racial school violence is described as non-racialised, as those involved do not consciously acknowledge their feelings of hostility as being racist in origin. While this point is highlighted, it is necessary to caution against a blanket presumption that all inter-racial violence must be a racist act.

“Racism does have a role in our school but not always between different races. Culturalism is very prevalent, so is classism. Children mixing in certain groups are usually targeted by other groups. Gangs or as the kids would like to call it crew’s become more evident. Racism as defined by the South African government is not the only root.... Racism seems to have no end but new variations. The only problem is that if children of different races get into a tiff about teenage things, like girlfriends or I didn’t like the way you looked at me etc. It is claimed as racist. The root problem is not necessarily racism but is often blamed” (Olivia)

Educators taking this position differ in their belief in the existence of racism within their school context. Some educators, like Olivia, acknowledge that racism exists generally within the

school; but they do reject its role in school violence. Some educators feel that racism is a scapegoat for other issues within the school context. These issues include criminality, behavioural problems and difficult home situations. It is necessary to make reference to the discussion of masks of racism presented in chapter two when considering the notion of scapegoating. Goldberg (1993) asserted that racism is fluid and that its manifestations will differ through time. It may be significant to question whether these issues of criminality, behavioural difficulties and challenging home situations serve as such a mask under the guise of social norms, and that frustration with the rejection of such norms is in fact a manifestation of racism in its masked form. While this may be worthwhile trajectory to consider; however, it is problematic as one could then argue that any social frustration or interpersonal difficulty that involved different racial groups could be a mask for racism. While stereotypes are necessary for functioning in the world by means of simplifying complexities, racial prejudices are not automatic (Goldberg, 1993).

Therefore, the overwhelming majority of educators expressed that racism continues to exist within the school setting. Almost half these educators consider racism to be a factor in incidents that they have experienced, while the second half of educators believe that racism does not play a role in their own experiences.

Importance of Intervention

All the educators in the sample reported intervening in incidents of school violence. Their interventions would be immediate – upon receiving reports of an impending conflict or seeing a conflict. Their interventions would be enacted with the aim of stopping the violence, not allowing for escalation, changing the outcome and crowd control. The mode of intervention depended on various factors – including, the endangerment that the educators face and the physicality of the incidents. This posed particular challenges for female educators. A number of female educators expressed that in such incidents they would prefer to call a male educator rather than intervening themselves.

“If the fight is not too physical and I, as a female, can stop the commotion I intervene otherwise I inform the nearest male teacher and do crowd control as he stops the fight” (Nicole)

“When as I am able to affect the outcome without endangering myself” (Leanne)

The educators therefore react according to what is within their power and capabilities. Their procedure for intervention appears to be dictated by school policy.

Procedure for intervention

The educators from GHS appeared to have a set procedure for addressing these incidents, as the educators from the school presented the same steps for intervention. Educators who were not from the school expressed general considerations for intervention. When questioned whether educators would intervene differently if incidents were racialised, their response was negative.

“The type of intervention will depend on the severity of the of the incident” (Camilla)

The intervention begins with initial separation whereby the learners involved in the violence are physically moved apart. Female educators indicated that if necessary they would call bigger learners, prefects or male educators to effect the physical separation. Educators are not prepared to risk injury or danger in order to intervene in these violent incidents.

“I always intervened by either running for help or getting involved. I preferred to run for help or reprimand the students, then being in the middle of a physical fight and putting my life in danger. I was not prepared to get hurt in the process” (Olivia)

It was indicated that educators need to remain calm and objective during this stage. Following this, statements are collected from the learners involved, as well as any witnesses. The reason for the violence is established. A hierarchy of involvement is then followed. The year head, the head master/mistress and the parents are immediately contacted and become involved in the

management of the incident. If it is deemed necessary, then the police and the departments of health and social welfare are contacted. Management and follow-up plans are established. This can involve “reconciliation [being] enforced” (Anthony), punishment and suspension.

It is interesting to note that consistent amongst all the educators the intervention was limited to the specific learners involved. This demonstrates little systemic understanding of violence, and provides little containment of the violence across the learners’ classes, grades and the school in general.

What should be done to control school violence

The educators highlighted the importance of taking every instance of school violence seriously. This requires a strong team at the school, and effective school management. This further necessitates the striving for the success of the school by all stakeholders, including support from parents, school management, and community structures such as the police, the department of education. Individuals must be accountable for their incompetence in this regard. The educators also felt that schools should be able to expel learners, “kids know their rights and misuse this to their advantage” (Olivia) as they know that they cannot be expelled for such behaviours. Educators further indicated that access to school premises should be restricted, searches conducted on learners and severe punishments given for incidents of violence. Educators felt that according to Department of Education’s policies learners have been given too many chances. The educators expressed the following this regard:

“I personally believe that a ZERO TOLERANCE policy is the only thing that will restore stability in our school; but too often we give one too many chance and only when there is a disaster do we react” (Donna).

“I think that it should be made easier to expel children in government schools, as the learners have to go through a process in the school making it very difficult to expel a child regardless of the acts they have been involved in” (Nicole).

“It is not the only solution but expulsion had its place, kids know their rights and misuse this to their advantage. School has no power anymore and is not supported by the GDE” (Olivia).

To control school violence, educators felt that there needs to be an emphasis on skills development for both the learners and educators. Learners should be empowered with coping, communication and conflict management skills. Educators should be empowered with the skills to address these incidents. Counselling should be available at the schools for the learners, as many learners are struggling with personal stresses. These interventions have all been suggested by the WHO (2002), in addition to incentives to complete schooling, counselling, academic enrichment programmes, rehabilitation and residential programmes.

Educators also expressed a need to develop the right school culture. This culture should involve instilling the values of respect, tolerance, love, acceptance and understanding. Discipline is an important aspect of a good school culture. In addition, monitoring and vigilance is necessary to ensure that incidents are not triggered. The development of a common vision and common goal within the school is also essential. This is consistent with the community-type interventions suggested by the WHO (2002), who further recommend creating safe routes, gang prevention programmes, and community policing.

Impact on School Functioning

The educators all expressed that violence impacts on school functioning. Educators felt that functioning was impacted in the following areas: academics, discipline and reputation, criminality and the changing role of educators.

The educators conveyed that school violence impacts on teaching and learning. It creates a dysfunctional environment, where learners and educators feel unsafe and thus cannot fulfil their roles. It was expressed that calm and safe environment are necessary for learning and academic success. Several educators indicated that they do sometimes feel vulnerable, as “we are teachers but [also] human” (Olivia).

“Sometimes we deal with individual learners who make you aware of your vulnerability and you become nervous. There is always that fear especially when you have to report or deal with an obstinate or defiant learner. Often the learners threaten you once you have taken action – that can quite intimidating” (Donna).

While little literature can be found on the impact of violence on educators within the school context, research on the impact of violence on health care workers has been undertaken. In a study by Marais, van der Spuy and Röstsch (2002) 11% of the health care workers reported that the quality of their service to patients was adversely affected by fear of violence within their workplace. Further these health care workers reported that this fear manifested in high absenteeism (Marais *et al.*, 2002). While rates of absenteeism were not described by the educators, this remains a possibility. An intensive study on the impact of school violence on educators who are employed in schools with significant levels of school violence should be undertaken.

It was experienced by the educators that more time was being devoted to discipline and addressing instances of violence, rather than teaching and educating. Thus, if school violence were addressed and prevented time spent at school could be devoted exclusively to the task of educating and developing the learners. In this environment, learners cannot prosper, nor can they cope academically. This point was discussed in some detail by one educator:

“Children who are scared or tormented do not perform. Teachers who are afraid or are the aggressors do not perform. And children who are the aggressors don’t perform. School connectedness is vital in a child’s emotional well-being and is a protective factor in cases of depression and suicide risk – but if a child is a target of abuse, there is no connection to school and this can be very serious on top of the other factors that go with school violence, like fear, trauma, low self-esteem, depression etc. Aggressors are also dealing, albeit badly, with emotional pain and don’t function well at school as they are often labelled as ‘the bad kid’ or cannot cope academically” (Keira)

Beyond these general impacts, it was relayed that after a specific incident of school violence, the learners are agitated and restless. These learners struggle to focus once again on the academic learning that is necessary. “This affects the school because it is disruptive and time

consuming. It takes time to resolve the issue as well as to settle the other children down” (Gina). In that way, these incidents are also thought to impact on the school’s discipline system. Educators become fearful of instilling discipline and punishing learners for bad behaviour as they feel personally threatened. The lack of discipline makes it difficult to engage the learners in educational outings as the learners cannot be controlled or disciplined within the school setting, and even less so in out-of-school contexts. One educator noted that “the school gets a bad name and then the better calibre learners do not enrol” (Joel), and thus the school gradually performs less successfully.

According to a number of these educators, if incidents of school violence are not controlled, criminality can spill over into the school context according to a few educators. This was since school violence is already “associated with drug abuse, gangsterism, sexual harassment” (Anthony). If school violence goes unmanaged, then “anarchy” (Anthony) will reign within the school context.

For educators, school violence has a particular impact. It is time-consuming and stressful. It requires educators to become extra vigilant, and adopt new roles. A significant role at present for educators is “locus parentis” (Olivia). In this role “instead of spending time teaching, teachers are having to play the role of parent as well in terms of teaching children social codes of acceptable behaviour – the parents’ job!” (Leanne). Educators feel that they now have to teach learners moral and values codes, in addition to the academic lessons that are meant to give. This seems to result in frustration and resentment. While educators have acted as “part-time parent-substitutes” occupying the “locus parentis” which Olivia describes (Wilkins, 2005, p. 27), it appears that the educators are resentful of this role being extended from part-time parent-substitutes but rather primary parental figures, having to instil rather than build moral values and codes. This resentment may be exacerbated by an apparent disconnect between parents and educators. With little contact between these groups, the educators may experience themselves as bearing the burden without being able to share this responsibility

with the parents who are constructed as the natural bearers of such a burden. Further exploration of this topic could be undertaken in future research.

In terms of the *capital theory of school effectiveness and improvement*, discussed in chapter two, the school effectiveness is challenged as a result of incidents such as school violence in the ways that the educators has disclosed (Hargreaves, 2001). The school is unable to meet its outcomes – both morally and intellectually, whereby the school is challenged in its ability to produce ‘good’ citizens, who have used their time at school to acquire skills and knowledge (Hargreaves, 2001). Educators are in a position of high input but low output, thus having a low leverage – which thus requires them to work harder, rather than smarter – this can lead to exhaustion and frustration for the educators (Hargreaves, 2001). Intellectual capital is compromised as educators struggle to transfer their knowledge as their time is occupied with restoring calm as class can become restless and agitated by these incidents, as the educators indicated, and the ‘school’s competitive edge’ becomes blunted (Hargreaves, 2001). Social capital is also compromised as there is little trust and support within the school network (Hargreaves, 2001). This would suggest therefore that the school affected by these incidents are not in fact effective in fulfilling their role and purpose.

Importance versus Misuse of the Media

The educators were divided with regard to the role of the media and the accuracy with which these incidents are reported. A few educators feel that it is good that these incidents are reported as the public needs to be informed of what is occurring within the school setting.

“I do believe that it is a very good thing that that there is now a public awareness that school violence is real and happening everywhere. I do also believe that some situations can be blown way out of proportion, taken entirely out-of-context and exaggerated through media-hype” (Leanne).

The majority of educators expressed that the media sensationalises instances of school violence. In relation to the sensationalism, the educators expressed that only the most severe are reported, and that these instances are always dramatised.

“I think the media sensationalise incidents and are not fully comprehensive in their reporting” (Keira)

The media reports concerning the Columbine massacre and the murder of Jacques Pretorius, as presented in previous chapters, utilised emotive and dramatic language, which could lead to perceptions that the educators hold of sensationalism. The incidents are also not the norm in terms of instances of school violence, however, they received significant media attention (possibly for the exact reason that these incidents are not common).

In addition to this, the educators felt that “we have no real violent situation but according to the media this is a regular occurrence. But perhaps this does happen in other schools” (Heather). These incidents not comprehensively reported according to these educators. It appears according to these educators that the problems are much deeper than the media depicts. Related to this sensationalism, educators expressed that the variation in levels of school violence from school to school is not reflected in the media reports. This variation is due to values, school demographics and management. Educators expressed that these incidents should not be generalised to reflect to school functioning; nor should violence in one school be generalised to reflect violence in other schools.

“School violence differs greatly from school to school (community to community), demographics, values, school management etc has an impact on the levels of school violence. School violence cannot thus be generalised.” (Anthony)

Media reporting was also felt to be one-sided – with the victim often being blamed for the incident, rather than blame being attributed to the aggressor.

Facets of school violence which have been ignored

The educators felt that a number of facets of school violence are ignored by media coverage and discussions of school violence. The general moral decay and criminality in South Africa was felt to have an important role in school violence. A general disregard for rules, values and norms, an ineffective handling of conflict and challenges and the influence of criminality are believed to manifest as violence in the school context. This is further complicated, according to the educators, by hunger, substance use, abuse and poverty.

The difficulty caused by school violence is an issue that educators felt have been under-reported in the media. Educators feel that fellow educators are often held in the wrong for the incidents, and the learners as independent beings have not been attributed sufficient blame.

Educators also expressed that there is insufficient focus on understanding the lead up to the violence, the reasons for the learners' behaviour, as well as prevention strategies. It was felt that the media "labels people very easily" (Keira), and reports are often one-sided. The media was thus experienced as failing in their responsibility to report accurately and objectively in these incidents. It was also felt that the reporting of these incidents causes a 'knock-on effect' where violent incidents spread from one school to another.

Finally, it was felt by a significant proportion of the educators that psychological forms of violence and female victimisation are under-reported. It was felt that more subtle forms of harassment and violence are ignored, within attention being diverted to rarer physically severe incidents. Educators expressed that these experiences can have lasting psychological effects; but that these outcomes are generally ignored by media reports.

Conclusion

Considering all the themes and responses that emerged it is clear that school violence is pervasive and disruptive of the primary task of these institutions, *i.e.* to educate, develop and enhance the learners who attend these schools. Educators are experiencing some strain with

their new roles, as 'parents' - instilling the values that are not being taught in the home and community settings. Racism appears to be a feature of school-life although educators are hesitant to blame racism for incidents of violence; instead a multiplicity of causes and a range of triggers are implicated. This chapter closes with the words of one educator who seemed to encapsulate passionately critical ideas which requires consideration for those focussed on school violence:

"Meeting school violence with force is not effective. We need to look at the underlying causes for concern.... Crimes of violence are intentional acts of bullies who are too often aided and abetted by the inaction and lack of accountability by those in positions of power. Looking and reacting with horror or shock when we see reports of teen violence in schools is just not good enough. Violence and bullying in schools often has a root cause.... Violence is a learned behaviour; if it can be learned it can be changed. Violence can't be stopped with a metal detector - it's like putting paint over a giant crack – it's not going to last." (Keira).

Chapter Five: Limitations, Implications & Conclusions

The school is an important site of socialisation. It is within this context that children acquire knowledge, skills and relational experiences to become 'good' citizens within the state. Violence within this context appears to complicate the school's ability to achieve its goals and enhance its own functioning. School violence affects school management, the learners and the educators. This particular research was necessary in that when discussing school violence, the effects on and experiences of educators tend to be left in the background. This research sought to bring their voices to the foreground and enlightened those with access to this research of the difficulties and challenges of being an educator at a time when violence is rife. "“Why did she not report [the sword Harmse was carrying]? She could have done something about it”. Van der Merwe [the 39-year-old mother] said’ (Molosankwe *et al.*, 2008, p. 1) – it is easier to use educators as scapegoats for these incidents than it is to understand the challenge of their role in a violent time. This research was significant then as it attempted to explore educators' perspectives of school violence in order to understand them and their actions, without blaming them.

In addition to all the above-mentioned potential areas of significance of this study, the exploration of the topic of racism was critical one as it had largely been ignored in previous works on school violence. This is most evident in the researcher's difficulty finding previous studies which explored racism within the context of school violence. With romanticised notions of the *Rainbow Nation* and integration in schools, tackling the issue of racism brings to forefront a significant factor in school violence which has been relegated to the past in the form of South Africa's dark history of Apartheid. This study then forces one to consider the rather real possibility that racism in South Africans school is yet to be eradicated. The research seemed to find that while educators acknowledge the existence of racism within the school context, there is ambivalence within this sample with regards to the role of racism in incidents of violence. The generalisability of the findings of this research should be considered: while this research is significant in and of itself, broad-based and definite conclusions could not be drawn.

Replication using a larger sample, in the broader South African context, would be useful to gain wider perspective of school-based violence in general, and the role of racism in these incidents in particular. It is hoped that such research would confirm the findings of this report.

Methodologically, the study was distinct from the studies cited above (and referenced in the Reference List), since it employs the use of open-ended questionnaires whereas previous studies have relied on interviews, focus groups and quantitative measures. It was hoped that this technique will elicit far more accurate and honest themes, than if face-to-face contact were used. In reality, this did occur with educators providing honest and frank sentiments and experiences regarding school violence. However, despite the relative ease in accessing the sample through GHS, the volunteer nature of the study did result in a low return rate of questionnaires. It was felt nonetheless that the richness of the data was not comprised by this low-return.

The research set out to answer a number of research questions. It appears to have achieved this. The educators identified a wide range of causal factors, and triggers – many of which were supported by the literature. The discussion of the role of racism was an interesting one in that the educators appeared to recognise racism as a real issue within school context; but wanted to distance their schools and the incidents from racism. Whether these inter-racial incidents are a function of other causes or racist in nature requires further investigation in future studies. Educators provided complex definitions of school violence, although these were not always directly reflected in the incidents that they reported to have experienced. All the educators experienced learner-on-learner school violence, with learner-on-educator school violence being commonly experienced. Fear is a factor which features in interventions in these incidents. Educators did not want to endanger themselves when attempting to curb these incidents. Educators intervene in all incidents of school violence, one way or another, regardless of whether these are believed to be racial in origin.

These results hold a number of implications. The first pertains to future research. As indicated above the role of racism needs to be addressed and explored further. Due to the paucity of research in this regard, studies should be extended to both learners and educators within the school setting. These studies could be conducted in both primary and high schools. The impact of school violence on female educators could be explored in greater depth in future studies. Finally, special attention could be placed on the role of the media in these incidents. A second implication relates to the suggestions that the educators made in order to control school violence. Skills development for both learners and educators should be emphasised. Policy related to how these incidents are addressed should be explored and adapted to the needs of the school in order to optimise its functioning. Possible research trajectories were identified throughout chapter five of this report. This research may be useful in contributing towards the design of school-based violence prevention programmes, by pointing towards skills development, anger management, and cultural tolerance as important components of any such programme.

While this research found that incidents of school violence are prevalent – on a continuum of frequency and severity (highly dependent on the school which one is considering); there is some hope that with successful management strategies and community involvement, these incidents can be curbed. Despite its challenges, the school continues to be an important site of socialisation and the experience of positive interpersonal relationships. These educators, despite their burdens and challenges, all demonstrated a passion and commitment to their learners. The school system is a complex one with significant diversity. The adoption of a multicultural staff and management components can prove to be significant opportunities for the observation and embracing of non-racialised attitudes and behaviour by its learners. The prospect of non-racialised, safe schools exists; but according to these educators requires effective management, committed staff, interested parents and nurtured learners. Social sciences serve an important function in carrying out the necessary research to ensure that such strategies can be developed. This research hoped to form part of such an effort.

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Appendix 1 – Permission From Department of Education



UMnyango WezeMfundo
Department of Education

Lefapha la Thuto
Departement van Onderwys

Thursday, July 09, 2009

Ms De Gouveia Carla Samantha Garrido

Dear Ms De Gouveia Carla Samantha Garrido

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: PROJECT

The Gauteng Department of Education hereby grants permission to conduct research in its institutions as per application.

Topic of research : "Educators' Experiences and Perceptions of School Violence: An Analysis of the Causes, Triggers and the Role of Racism."
Nature of research : MA [Community-Based Counselling Psychology]
Name of institution : University of the Witwatersrand
Supervisor/Promoter : Dr Brett Bowman

Upon completion of the research project the researcher is obliged to furnish the Department with copy of the research report (electronic or hard copy).

The Department wishes you success in your academic pursuit.

Yours in Tirisano,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shadrack Phele".

p.p. Shadrack Phele [MIRMSA]

Ms Mmapula Kekana

Chief Director: Information Systems and Knowledge Management



OFFICE OF THE CHIEF DIRECTOR
INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire

SCHOOL VIOLENCE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions

Please ensure that you answer each question, as honestly as possible, in the book provided. For analytical purposes, please do not use point form but rather complete sentences.

Thank you for your time and participation.

A. In your own words, please define school violence.

¹Please consult the end of this questionnaire before proceeding in answering the questions below.

B. What do you believe are the fundamental causes of school violence?

C. What do you believe are the specific triggers for instances for school violence?

D. In your professional capacity – both at this school and previously – have you experienced incidents of *learner-on-learner* school violence? If possible, please elaborate on such experiences by including information on frequency and intensity of such incidences.

E. 1) In general, what role do you believe racism plays in incidents of school violence?

2) At your school, do you believe racism is instrumental in causing school violence?

F. In your own experience – both at this school and previously – have you encountered racist incidents of *learner-on-learner* school violence? If possible, please elaborate on such incidents by including information on frequency and intensity of such incidences.

G. In your own experience – both at this school and previously – have you encountered incidents of *learner-on-educator* school violence? If possible, please elaborate on such incidents by including information on frequency and intensity of such incidences.

H. 1) When do you intervene in incidents of school violence?

2) How do you intervene in these incidents?

3) Would your answer to (1) and (2) differ if the incident were racist in nature?

I. Do you believe that media representations of school violence are accurate reflections of the current situation?

- J. Do you believe that there are issues that are under-represented/reported in school violence? If so, what are they?
- K. Do you believe that school violence influences the functioning of the school? Please elaborate.
- L. Do you feel safe, from the learners, while at school?
- M. What do you believe should be done in order to control school violence?
- N. Please share any other thoughts or experiences on school violence.

¹Please consider the following definition of school violence when answering the questions B through N.

School violence can be defined as *“destructive physical acts performed by learners with the purpose of inflicting physical harm or injury; or causing humiliation, degradation or psychological distress on another learner or educator.”*

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 3: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Information

Please answer the question below and where possible place a cross on the most suitable option.

Age: _____

Sex: Male ☐ Female ☐

Race: Black ☐ Coloured ☐ Indian ☐ White ☐ Other ☐

If other, please specify _____

Years of teaching experience: _____

These categories are used only for research purposes and are not meant to be offensive.

Appendix 4: Information/Cover Sheet



Psychology

School of Human and Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Carla de Gouveia. I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining Masters of Arts (Community-Based Counselling Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is school violence and how it is experienced by educators. The research also seeks to explore educators' perceptions of the causes, risk factors and the role, if any, of racism in these incidents.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Participation in this research will entail completing the attached questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 - 45 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary, and refusal to participate will bear no consequence: benefit or loss. There are no immediate risks or no benefits for you. No identifying information, such as your name or the grade/subject that you teach, is asked for, and as such, you will remain anonymous. Your completed questionnaire will only be processed by me, and possibly my research supervisor. Should direct quotations be included in the research report, all identifying markers will be removed and a false name will be used.

If you choose to participate in the study, please detach this information sheet, for your own record, and complete the attached questionnaire as carefully and honestly as possible in the book provided. Once you have answered the questions, place the book in the sealed box provided in the staff-room. The box of completed questionnaires (*i.e.* books) will be collected in two weeks. If you do return your questionnaire answer book, this will be considered consent to participate in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, until you hand in the questionnaire, since from that time it cannot be traced.

The questionnaires have been formulated with care to ensure that no sensitive information is asked. However, should you experience any anxiety arising from the content, please feel free to contact the South African Depression and Anxiety Group on 011 262 6396 or Lifeline on 011 728 1347 for free counselling.

This research will contribute to a growing body of knowledge on South African school violence, which is greatly required in the South African context. Please feel free to contact me should you have any further questions. A summary of research findings will be made available on request.

Kind Regards

Carla de Gouveia

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- - - - -@students.wits.ac.za