

A STUDY OF PREVALENCE, GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION  
AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF OLDER  
ADOLESCENTS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL IN SOUTH  
AFRICA: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

South Africa has made remarkable strides to increase educational access in the past three decades or so. Near-universal enrolments have been achieved in the compulsory phase, and many learners make a transition into the post-compulsory school phase. However, a major concern remains about consistently low matric completion rates, suggesting high levels of dropout in the senior phase. The release of 2016 matric results showed that half of the students who were in the national Grade 10 class three years earlier, did not make it to the matric examination hall on time or had dropped out of the system by the end of 2016. Given the unfavourable labour conditions, particularly excessive youth unemployment for the past decade or so, most youth exiting school prematurely without requisite skills, competencies and work-relevant capacities, are likely to face long-term unemployment among a host of other negative life outcomes.

This study investigates the extent, the spatial distribution and socio-demographic characteristics of older adolescent school dropouts in the country. A broad conceptual framework, that is, the model of high school performance, guided the study. The conceptual framework was constructed to identify factors predicting dropout or high school completion. Its conception of dropout as a function of interaction between individual and institutional factors was useful framework for this study's interest in potential demographic, family, school, and community factors that associate with older adolescent dropouts in the country.

The study employed a pragmatist approach to attempt answer the guiding research question. Mixed methods sequential explanatory procedures were used to analyze the large-scale Census 2011 data and to administer data collection and analysis of the qualitative multiple case study data. The procedures involved the use of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

The results of the study show that, unlike other education outcomes, school participation or dropout is not distributed along the historical apartheid geography lines. This is contrary to the current research that tends to claim all education outcomes in the country do. The study reveals dropout distribution patterns that split the country along the east-west axis, which does not align with the apartheid geography lens. Instead, the results indicate that dropout is a much more localized experience, driven by local-level dynamics rather than macro forces at provincial level. In addition, the results show that dropout is neither urban nor rural phenomenon.

The factors that the quantitative phase of this study and the statistical research in general, single out as predictors of dropout, are important features in the narrative of dropout, but are not necessarily explaining premature exit. The qualitative data and findings show that the commonly cited factors are actually events, and often traumatic, that trigger a series of reactions including withdrawal from school by the affected adolescents. Based on these findings, the study proposes a preliminary model of dropout that considers the trigger factor in combination with debilitating context of the individual to sufficiently account for premature school exit.

### **Keywords**

Early school leaving; Older adolescents; Premature school exit; School dropout; School participation; School withdrawal; South Africa

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of PhD in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and School of Education. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Signed

.....

.....day of..... in the year .....

In memory of my parents, Hunadi le Mpša-ya-go-lahlwa.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
CALS	Centre for Applied Legal Studies
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
ESRI	Environmental Systems Research Institute
FET	Further Education Training
GIS	Geographical Information System
GHS	General Household Survey
HSRC	Human Science Research Council
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NELS	National Education Longitudinal Study
NIDS	National Income Dynamics Survey
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SES	Socio-economic status
SGB	School Governing Body
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
Unesco	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Unicef	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USA	United States of America

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Context and background

The Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga announced improvements in the 2016 National Senior Certificate (NSC) results. However, the celebrations were drowned out by outcries from civic and political formations, who claimed misrepresentation of facts in the announcement. Civic formations lamented that the glossy picture that the Minister presented to the public obscured the grim reality about the shocking NSC (or matric) achievement rates the country has been experiencing in recent years. The Minister was proudly proclaiming about an education system that is stabilising, improving and maturing, evidenced by rise in 2016 matric achievement rates. Conversely, a contrasting picture of a failing if not a regressing system was presented, through various media, with the 2016 matric pass rate estimated well below 50%. The unofficial position on the matric pass rate was that the formula to compute the rate was discounting critical information and therefore deceptive and misleading.

The reality is that matric is one the most significant features of the South African education system and not obtaining one's matric is often associated with failure in general sense (Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2013). The importance of the debate sparked by the 2016 matric results, particularly in the context of this study, is that for the first time, or at least at this level of intensity, people appear to realise that matric results are the primary function of who writes, not only how well they have done. What the two positions bring to the fore, and central to this study, is that in as much as we should celebrate those who performed well in the examinations, we should also lament for those who did not write when they were expected to. The official results pronounced an improvement in the 2016 matric pass rates and pegged the Free State as the best performing Province, with 88% pass rate, while the results adjudged the Eastern Cape as the worst performing Province, with 59% pass rate (Department of Basic Education, 2017). The unofficial position, which argues for revision of the pass rate, posits that the official construction of the pass rate is flawed, as it only considers a proportion of successful students, out of the number who wrote the examination. They argue that the official formula for computing the pass rate fails to account for students

who are retained or have dropped out of school before matric, and therefore ignoring the shortcomings in the education system.

To illustrate, the Free State Province which had the highest proportion of successful students (23 629 passed out of 26 786 who wrote), also had one of the lowest proportions of students sitting for the matric examinations in 2016 for this cohort. On the contrary, it was one of the worst performing Provinces, in terms of cohort transition, as claimed by civil formations such as Equal Education (2017). The Free State matric class of 2016 was the grade 10 class of 2014, and in that year there were 55 293 students enrolled, but only 26 786 wrote matric in 2016, indicating that three years later, over a half of the students from the 2014 cohort class did not write the matric examinations. So, if only 23 629 students passed matric in 2016 from the 2014 cohort, that translates to only 43 percent pass rate in the Free State, less than half the pass rate of 88% officially announced. A staggering 52% (28 507 out of 55 293) from the 2014 grade 10 Free State cohort has, in all likelihood, dropped out of the education system by 2016, a disturbing statistic by any nation's measurement.

Nationally, 400 000 students or about 38% of the 2006 Grade 2 cohort, which was expected to sit for 2016 matric examinations 11 years later, have been retained or dropped out of school (Department of Education, 2008a). However, more shockingly, the 2014 grade 10 national senior secondary school cohort experienced an alarmingly higher dropout rate than the 11-year Grade 2 cohort did. The 2014 national grade 10 cohort class, which was expected to sit for matric three years later, shows a dropout rate of 45% (490 699 out of 1 100 877 million) (Department of Basic Education, 2014, 2016). This shows that about half a million older adolescents have been retained or dropped out of school in only three years. Gustafsson (2011) and Spaul (2013) show that although above average number of South African youth enter the senior secondary school phase, a much lower proportion of them proceed to complete Grade 12 successfully, owing to poor quality at the primary and lower secondary level. The proportion of those who do well in matric exams, like the success of the class of 2016, should also be seen in the context of those who, for various reasons, did not get to matric on time and write the senior certificate examinations as expected, if they ever get there (Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2013).

Surely, the nation should be concerned about the economic implications of losing such large numbers of students to retention or dropout. The students who are dropping out are missing

out on acquiring critical foundational knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will enable them to decide on meaningful career, enhance their employment opportunities, meaningfully participate in society, and make healthy life choices (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco, 2015). Studies elsewhere have also shown that dropping out before completing secondary school is related to a host of negative outcomes. The negative outcomes for school dropouts include lower absorption rates into the labour market compared to those with a high school credential; had higher reliance on state medical care and welfare; higher percentage of dropouts unemployed than those with a high school credential; received lower wages; and disproportionately higher percentages of dropouts in institutions such as correctional, penal centres and mental facilities in the United States of America (USA) (Levin & Belfield, 2007; Stark & Noel, 2015).

In South Africa, recent studies and official reports have also shown that the youth dropping out of secondary school are not in employment either, exacerbating the problem of NEET (not in employment, education or training) already afflicting the country. Branson and colleagues (2014) report that the South African youth dropping out of secondary school generally still idle two years later. Graham and Mlatsheni (2015) also assert that South African youth dropping out of school become a marginalised and vulnerable group. Moreover, they are likely to face long-term unemployment, make poor health choices, and experience loss of self-esteem, experience depression and desolation, which in turn decrease their employability chances. The high incidence of untimely withdrawal from school before writing matric examinations occurs against the background of no-fee policy that has been in place, progressively for the past decade (Monyela, 2011; Gustafsson, 2011; Department of Basic Education, 2011; 2014). The policy prevents schools to exclude poor children based on school fees non-payment (Department of Education, 2006, Department of Basic Education, 2014). In addition, because this group is neither improving their future employability through investment in skills nor gaining experience through work, the group is particularly at risk of both labour market and social exclusion (Spaull, 2013; International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2014). Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) adds that this group of youth is not only facing potential long-term economic marginalization and social exclusion, but also poses a threat to social cohesion in the country.

The high proportions of cohort classes that do not sit for matric examinations in the year expected, correspond with reports of the number of NEETs that are increasing year on year

between 2008 and 2016 (Statistics South Africa (2015; 2016; 2017)). This suggests that the students who leave school prematurely join the back of the ever-lengthening job-seeker queue as the most recent NEETs. The labour force survey of 2017 estimates the South African NEET (15-24 years) population at about 3 100 000 million (41%) of the 7 496 000 million unemployed youth (15-34 years) population (Statistics South Africa, 2017). The country's labour market trends for the past decade show unemployment rates among youth (15 -34 years) consistently between 30 and 40%, more than twice that of adults of 35 years and older (Statistics South Africa, 2015). The latest figures show between 30 and 50% unemployment rate among youth (15-34 years) in the fourth quarter of 2016, and a staggering 64% unemployment rate among NEETs of ages 15 and 24 (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Cloete and Butler-Adam (2012) assert that even if the economy has not been creating enough jobs since the dawn of democracy, the severity of South Africa's youth unemployment is largely the result of a pervasive lack of appropriate skills, competencies and work-relevant capacities among young labour market entrants. It is in this context that students should be encouraged to persist through secondary school, as that does not only reduce youth unemployment, but also sets them up to exploit post-secondary education opportunities (Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2013). As illustrated, for the past decade or so, older adolescents consistently drop out of senior high school in disturbing numbers, just to join the back of the ever-lengthening queue as new NEETs. As it stands, the economic and social prospects are daunting for about three million NEETs (Statistics South Africa, 2017) who are out of school. This group of youth are, among a host of other negative outcomes, facing long-term unemployment or lower wages if they are lucky to get employed; poor health conditions; depend on state for welfare; and more than their matriculated counterparts, likely to engage in criminal activity and consequent imprisonment.

So, if students face such a bleak future by dropping out of school, why do they do it? Who are these youth dropping out of school for no better alternative? This is a troubling situation indeed.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Why students drop out of school has been a focus of several researchers in the country. Many of these studies have been done to understand the factors or reasons associated with dropping out of school in the compulsory schooling phase (Social Surveys Africa & Centre for Applied

Legal Studies (CALS), 2009; Fleisch et al., 2012). Some studies focusing on education outcomes and transitions through school cite system-wide quality deficiencies, and attendant inadequate student achievement as reasons for dropping out (Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2013; Dube, 2011; Branson et al., 2014). While there is good amount of research focusing on school dropout in the compulsory schooling phase (7 -15 years), there is less research focusing on post-compulsory school dropout (16-18 years), using a research approach and design procedures adopted in this study. Those studies that looked at dropout in the post-compulsory schooling phase either were constrained by sample size, or were either quantitative or qualitative in approach. In addition to the amplex and robustness use of the dataset, this study uses a mixed methods design to understanding the research problem, something lacking in the existing studies.

Given the staggering and still increasing number of NEETs in the country, it is important to determine the extent the older adolescents (16-18 years) who are dropping out of school contribute to the NEET problem. Equally, it is important to understand the reasons why these students drop out. Understanding why they drop out at this stage of their schooling career will help the policy-makers and administrators better anticipate and deal with the associated risks and help them persist in school long enough to acquire the requisite knowledge and competencies. This is especially important today when the government is confronted with fiscal pressures to provide adequate early child development resources, school reception year and general school infrastructure backlogs. This is in addition to dealing with general poor quality outcomes that do not complement learner per-capita expenditure. Funding of grade-repeaters, school dropouts or welfare for the NEETs is unaffordable (National Treasury, 2014). This study adds to the research concerned with student progress through school and into work, particularly shed more insight into why they drop out at a critical moment in their lives, that is, the senior secondary school phase. This study contributes to the research by investigating, through a mixed methods approach, the extent of school dropout, the geographical distribution, and the socio-demographic characteristics associated with these youth. The study uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with the large-scale, nationwide quantitative data and results providing a general picture of the research problem, while the qualitative data and findings were used to explore and explain the apparent causal relationships between school dropout and a variety of factors (Creswell, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

### **1.3 The purpose of the study**

The purpose of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study was to investigate the extent, geographical distribution and socio-demographic profile of older adolescent (16-18 years) school dropouts in the country. This was achieved by obtaining statistical and quantitative results from analysing nationwide census data, and then following-up with a multiple case study to explore and explain the quantitative results. In the first quantitative phase of the study, the research questions addressed the prevalence of school dropout in the country among older adolescents, their spatial distribution patterns and determined the socio-demographic factors associated with of the school dropouts. In the qualitative phase that followed, semi-structured interviews in a multiple case study design were used to explore and to help explain the results from the quantitative phase.

### **1.4 Research questions**

The study's overall guiding research question was: What is the prevalence, geographic distribution and socio-demographic profile of older adolescents dropping out of school in South Africa?

For the first quantitative phase of the study, the sub-questions were:

- What is the extent of school dropout among older adolescents?
- What are the spatial distribution patterns of school dropout among older adolescents?
- What are the socio-demographic characteristics associated with older adolescent school dropouts?

For the second, qualitative phase of the study, the sub-questions were:

- In what ways do the qualitative data help explain the quantitative results on school dropout among older adolescents?

## 1.5 Significance of the study

This study is a useful contribution to the growing area of research on youth in-school, school-work and school-tertiary transitions (Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2013; Branson et al., 2014). The main significance of this dissertation research lies in the fact that no existing studies have explored the scope, spatial distribution and profile of older adolescent school dropouts at a scale undertaken here, using recent, robust, and large-scale dataset as Census 2011 dataset. Most studies use older or different datasets, and are not necessarily focused on the age band targeted by this study. This may provide new or additional insight into the extent of school dropout, but more importantly, insight into who actually are these dropouts. The need for a research to determine scale and patterns of dropout in the post-compulsory phase has been articulated in literature (Motala et al., 2007, Fleisch et al., 2012). This study is doing exactly that – with specific focus on post-compulsory phase and employing a distinct mixed methods approach.

From the policy perspective, the study may prove a useful contribution to the emerging policy framework and initiatives aimed keeping students in school long enough to complete secondary school. It is significant to policy-makers and administrators charged with crafting dropout prevention initiatives, in that it does not only provide a general picture of factors associated with dropout, but it also provides much more locally-relevant information, important for fashioning targeted locale-specific prevention programmes. This study is also significant as a resource to the efforts trying to minimize the high cohort dropout rates, and therefore improves the in-school and school-to-work transitions.

Furthermore, the study also has both methodological and theoretical significance. The study adds to mixed methods research by presenting specific and practical design procedures used for connecting and integrating quantitative and qualitative results of the sequential explanatory study. None of the studies reviewed adopt the particular mixed methods design as specified in Chapter Four. Moreover, the importance of this study lies in the fact that it draws from the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative designs, in its sequential explanatory approach to investigating the factors associated with dropout. Theoretically, the integration of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches in an explanatory design provided meaning to school dropout in the South African context in a manner that is not reflected in the general theoretical literature.

## **1.6 Thesis chapter outline**

Chapter one of the thesis provides the context of the study by outlining the background, the purpose and frames the research questions guiding the study.

The second chapter locates the debate in the empirical literature and essentially explores what are the gaps and the missing pieces in the literature, primarily in the South African context, a developing country.

In Chapter Three, I review a theoretical literature and try to develop a schema that helps frame the way I think about the data and draw predominantly on North American theory to develop the conceptual framework. However, the theoretical framework is mostly modified and adapted based on the nature of the data that I work with.

The fourth chapter deals with the study design, and I use mixed methods sequential explanatory design. I also describe the nature and procedures followed in the quantitative phase of the study, and then, describe how I went about administering the qualitative procedures of the design. I then describe how the quantitative and the qualitative strands were integrated to answer the research question.

However, the focus of the thesis appears in the next three chapters, which includes two different quantitative chapters and one qualitative chapter. Chapter Five examines the spatial distribution of the dropout phenomenon, while Chapter Six looks at the socio-demographic factors associated with school dropout. Chapter Seven, a multiple case study chapter, qualitatively explore school dropout factors, and particularly seeks to clarify the factors that were identified in the quantitative phase.

Chapter Eight discusses and synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative findings to determine how the qualitative data explain the quantitative results, if at all. Moreover, the thesis concludes with a summary of the findings and contribution that the study makes to the field - Chapter Nine.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

A search for the term *school dropout* immediately reveals that the concept carries different meanings and serves varied purposes across contexts. While school dropout has been empirically measured across countries and disciplines, its definitions are still context-specific and not necessarily readily universally usable. The multiplicity of definitions of the phenomenon or use of various methods to calculate dropout rates manifests in debates such as those sparked by the South African 2016 matric results. Depending on the intentions, different stakeholders calculate the matric pass rate using the methods that are suited and amplified by their agendas. It is therefore, necessary that the concept of dropout be defined in the context of this study, before determining the extent, spatial distribution and the associated characteristics.

This review of selected studies highlights some of the important empirical and theoretical contributions to the field, and by so doing locate this study within context. The review synthesizes literature on the magnitude of dropout locally and globally, as well as examining factors associated with school dropout among older adolescents. The chapter starts by defining the concept of school dropout, presents latest reports delineating the problem, before synthesizing the literature on the associated factors.

### 2.2 Defining school dropout

“School dropout” is a concept that has so many applications, carrying context-specific meanings. Therefore, trying to lobby for a universal definition may not be necessary or useful. To illustrate the extent of variety in the use of the concept, Motala et al (2009) in their review of extent of access to education in South Africa, argue that gaining physical access or attending school regularly does not necessarily translate into meaningful access. They say that the student can be physically at school, but for various reasons, not make any academic progress through grades and not acquire the necessary foundational knowledge for further academic development. Such children, they argue, are epistemically absent or could be considered as dropouts.

Furthermore, the review of school dropout in the OECD countries by Lamb and Markussen (2011) reveals that within this organisation there are striking differences in how each country defines school dropout. For an example, in Iceland, one is considered a school dropout if s\he has not completed an upper secondary qualification by the age of 24. In England, however, one can be considered a school dropout only if s\he does not hold an upper secondary qualification and is no longer in education, employment or training. Whereas in the USA, anyone who does not complete a high school diploma or equivalent credential is considered a school dropout, regardless of their employment status. The South African Department of Education (2008), based on a report from a commission tasked to determine the extent of dropout in the country, acknowledged and urged the education community to address and reach consensus in terminology and measurements of school dropout.

Even where the differences in school dropout definition are subtle, such small differences become magnified with the gathering of incomparable data and formulae for computing dropout rates. Measuring dropout rates and classifying dropouts is further complicated by the fact that students can drop out of school repeatedly and from different school systems, unlike determining those who complete high school as they can graduate only once (Hauser & Koenig, 2011). Globally, scholars and practitioners suggest three broad methods of classifying and computing dropout rates – the *event dropout rate*, *status dropout rate* and the *cohort dropout rate* (Lehr et al., 2004; Dalton et al., 2009; Chapman et al., 2011; Stark & Noel, 2015). The event dropout rate estimates the percentage of high school students who left high school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next year without earning a high school certificate or an alternative credential. The purpose of event dropout rate is mainly used to determine dropout behaviour in a given school year. The status dropout rate, on the other hand, reports the percentage of individuals in a given age range who are not in school and have not earned a high school certificate or an alternative credential. These two approaches to school dropout serve distinct purposes. The event dropout rate can be used to track annual changes in the dropout behaviour of students in the school system, while the status dropout rate is used to determine the magnitude of school dropout among a select age group at any given point. I therefore disagree with some readers' view that census data (such as Statistics South Africa, Census 2011) can be used to examine event dropout. The third formula of computing dropout rates is the cohort or longitudinal dropout rate. The purpose of this method of computing dropout rate is to trace a class cohort over a longer period. The cohort method typically yields higher dropout rates than the event

and status methods of dropout computation (Lehr et al., 2004; Stark & Noel, 2015). These definitions of dropout and the manner in which they are calculated invariably yield inconsistent and incomparable results from the same datasets, and any attempt for comparison brings about faulty interpretations.

In line with the central question, which was to determine the prevalence, distribution and profile of older adolescent school dropouts, the current study adopted the status dropout definition and computing formula for estimating dropout rates. The researcher was interested in a particular age group (16-18 years) who were not in the education system at a specific point in time and the status dropout definition and calculating method was the most appropriate method to determining the dropout prevalence among older adolescents, and the associated factors.

The conceptual model used by Rumberger and Lim (2008) to analyse why students drop out of school served as a basis for the selection of studies to review. Their conceptual framework considers dropping out of school as a culmination of a process of interaction of between individual or student-level factors and institutional-level (family, school, community) factors (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Finn, 1989). While these factors are discussed separately below, the researcher here acknowledges that the effects of individual and institution-level factors on dropout are difficult to isolate, if at all, given their cumulative nature. The review captures the general, as well as the local literature on individual and institutional factors associated with dropout. The chapter looks at estimations of the dropout problem in the country, within the global context, before the review of the associated factors.

### **2.3 The extent of school dropout among South African older adolescents in global context**

It is estimated that about 63 million adolescents of lower secondary school were not in school in 2012. In addition, about one third (21 million) of them lived in sub-Saharan Africa and about 40% of them lived in South Asia (Unesco Institute for Statistics & United Nations Children Fund (Unicef), 2015). While one for every 11 children of primary school age was out of school at the time, one in five of lower secondary school adolescents were not, showing a sharp increase in dropout risk, as the children get older. The secondary school age adolescents were more than twice likely to drop out compared to their younger counterparts.

In South Africa, Monyela (2011) estimated about half a million (490 341) or 17% of the older adolescents that were out of school and had not completed Grade 12, in 2007. More research has shown that there is very little dropout from school over the first 10 grades in the South African school system since 1994. However, the enrolment rates dramatically drop in the Grades 10 to 12 (Spaull, 2013). This trend is supported by an official report that estimated that only about one percent of children between ages seven and 15 were out of school in 2013, contrasted with about 16% (430 588 ) of 16 to 18 year in the same year (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

## **2.4 Factors associated with school dropout among older adolescents**

### **2.4.1 Individual-level factors associated with school dropout among older adolescents**

Countless and varied reasons for dropping out of high school are often reported by caregivers and adolescents themselves. The individual factors predicting school dropout among older adolescents are those attributes related to their educational performance, behaviours, attitudes, as well as demographic backgrounds. There is vast amount empirical literature that links poor performance in school with dropout. Vast research has reported on lack of achievement and attainment, as manifesting in low test scores and grade retention, increasing the risk of dropping out (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Lamb & Rumberger, 1998; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Herbert & Reis, 1999; Ball & Lamb, 2001; Allensworth, 2004, 2005; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Christle et al., 2007; Suh et al., 2007; Dalton et al., 2009; Lessard & Fortin, 2010; Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011; Fall & Roberts, 2012; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012; Freeney & O'Connell, 2012). Using the data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, Fall and Roberts (2012) found academic engagement and achievement to predict dropout in high school among United States adolescents. In addition, a review of conceptual models applied in selected empirical research by Rumberger and Rotermund (2012) established that students' academic performance influenced their decision to stay or quit school. Lamb's (2013) study of a number of OECD countries also reported grade repetition and low academic achievement to influence early school exit.

### *Grade repetition*

The influence of grade repetition, irregular grade transitions and the resultant grade over-agedness is also reflected in the local literature. A limited survey of 60 youths (16-18 years) who were dropouts at the time of the study showed that multiple grade failure and over-age together accounted for 10% of reasons for dropping out of school (Social Surveys Africa-Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS),2009). Based on the same sample, several studies (Strassburg et al., 2010; Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2010, 2012; Dube, 2011) confirm that self-reports from the older adolescents reveal that they left school after multiple grade repeats, and being older than their classmates. The grade repeaters reported that both the younger classmates and teachers often teased or humiliated them and it was embarrassing. Motala et al. (2007) confirm this in their review of patterns of access to education in the country, with grade repetition or lack of academic progress as a precursor to dropout. Results from analysis of two different datasets, wave one of the South African National Income Dynamics Survey (NIDS) 2008, and General Household datasets 2008, corroborate the findings of high levels of grade repetition in Grade 10 and 11 and that it discourages learners with low scores to continue with their schooling (Gustafsson, 2011). Spaul's (2013) analysis of two different cross-sectional datasets also show that the smooth grade progression in the first 10 grades of school, with very little dropout observed, appear to abruptly end in Grade 10. From this grade onwards, children appear to stall, with high percentage of them repeating the grade or dropping out of school. This trend continues into grade 11, with disproportionate high level of dropout often after two or more grade repetitions. Using two waves of the NIDS 2008, Branson et al., (2014) confirm the association of dropout in senior high school phase with high levels of high repetition in Grade 10 and 11, even after controlling for school and family level factors. They found that grade repetition was particularly common in the secondary grades. For instance, among males, they observed only about 30% progression rate between Grade 9 and 11, in the corresponding years 2008 – 2010.

### *Active engagement*

The literature also links a wide range of factors, grouped as student behaviours, to dropout from high school or graduation. Behaviours such as active and regular engagement in academic and school social activities have been linked with persistence in school. Active academic engagement relates to aspects such as regular attendance and doing homework,

while positive social behaviour involves participation in school extracurricular activities or sports (Finn, 1989; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Fall & Roberts, 2012; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012; Schoeneberger, 2012). Several longitudinal studies traced the behaviour that predicts dropout in high school as far back as the elementary level. Alexander et al. (1997) found that students who averaged high in absenteeism in elementary school were linked to higher dropout rates in high school, while decreased academic engagement also saw increase in the odds of dropout high school. Grant and Hallman (2008), in a localized study in part of KwaZulu-Natal Province, found that irregular or interrupted school attendance in earlier grades predicted dropout among female students after pregnancy. In their trace study of seventh graders, Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found that participation in school extracurricular activities reduced the risk of dropping in high school, particularly for those students who were not high academic achievers.

### *Deviant behaviour*

Deviant behaviour has also been widely found to predict withdrawal from school. Types of deviant behaviours that have been found to increase the risk of dropping out of school include misbehaving in school, outside school delinquency, drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, and pregnancy or childbearing (Rumberger, 1995; Barnes, 1992; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Monk-Turner, 1989, Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Suh et al., 2007; Roebuck et al., 2004). Students with disciplinary problems have been found to be far more likely to drop out of school than those without. In a study of high dropout among African-American Barnes (1992) found that about 80% of those who had dropped out had been suspended from school. Monk-Turner (1989), focusing on White males also found that high school delinquency depresses educational attainment. Suh et al. (2007), using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997) and the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (2002) found that the odds of dropout increased among those students who had been suspended at least once compared to students who participated uninterrupted.

Several studies have also found that alcohol and drug use increase the risk of dropping out (Flisher & Chalton, 1995; Social Surveys-CALS, 2009); Strasburg et al., 2010; Bray et al., 2000; Battin-Pearson, 2000; Flisher et al., 2010). Using longitudinal study and multiple data sources, in the south-eastern US public school system, Bray et al. (2000) found that drug use of various types positively related to dropping out of high school among 16-18 year olds

compared to non-users. In addition, in a birth-to-25 cohort study, Fergusson et al. (2003) observed increased risk of dropping out of school where substance (cannabis) use was reported in New Zealand. Social Surveys-CALS (2009) in the nationally representative study reported alcohol and drug use as a factor in the decision to dropping out of school among adolescents in South Africa. However, in a localized study, Flisher et al. (2010) found that alcohol and long-term illicit drug use did not predict dropout among eighth-graders in Cape Town. Townsend et al. (2007) reviewed about 50 studies about the relationship between substance abuse and school dropout and cautioned about the consistent findings of positive relationship across these studies, as the studies cannot adequately deal with the confounding and mediating factors. In addition, the studies tend to over-represent socially disadvantaged and poor persons, drug users and dropouts, usually owing to sample attrition in longitudinal studies.

#### *Pregnancy or teenage childbearing*

Pregnancy or teenage childbearing during high school is also widely documented as a type of deviant behaviour associated with increased rates of dropout among female students (Rumberger, 1983; Grogger & Bronars, 1993; Ahn, 1994; Dalton et al., 2009; Basch, 2011; Crouch, 2005; HSRC, 2005; Dunne & Leach, 2005; Grant & Hallman, 2006/2008; Marteleto et al., 2008; Lloyd & Mensch, 2008; Social Surveys-CALS, 2009; Timæus & Moultrie, 2015, Rosenberg et al., 2015). Using the US census data, Grogger and Bronars (1993) analysed for the effects of unplanned pregnancy among 18 year olds on school completion. They found statistically significant relationship between teen pregnancy and non-completion of high school. The negative effect of unplanned pregnancy on high school completion was also observed in the study by Ahn (1994), using data from the US National Longitudinal Survey of 1979-1987. This study reported that merely having a teenage birth led to a 50% reduction in the likelihood of high school completion. Using data from three US longitudinal studies (High School and Beyond Survey of 1980/92; National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and 2002), Dalton et al. (2009) reported that about 28% of the females cited pregnancy as the reason they left school. Basch (2011) ranks teenage pregnancy among the seven most important health problems accounting for students' lower educational achievement in the US, particularly among the minority youth. However, using data from the US longitudinal High School and Beyond Survey, McElroy (1996) found that childbirth among 1980 second year

high school students did not have negative and significant impact on completing a regular high school diploma for both black and white females.

In the review of literature on school dropout in the developing world, Hunt (2008) reports on studies concluding that pregnancy is a significant cause of dropout among teenage girls. In a multiple case study design focussed on gendered school experiences in Botswana and Ghana secondary schools, Dunne and Leach (2005) cite pregnancy as the predominant reason for female dropout, reported by the girls themselves as well by their teachers. Furthermore, Crouch's (2005) analysis of the South African General Household Survey (GHS) of 2003 noted teenage pregnancy as the second-most popular (13%) self-reported reason for dropping out among 16-18 year old females, after school fees (41%). In addition, Grant and Hallman (2008) observed that teenage pregnancy was a determinant for school dropout among females in two districts of the KwaZulu-Natal Province. However, they noted that the failure to return to school after childbirth was common among females who had prior low academic achievements due to irregular attendance. Irregular attendance among females was found to be related to lack of sanitary towels across sub-Saharan Africa (Buckler, 2011). Social Surveys-CALS (2009) observed that pregnancy and teenage motherhood accounted for about 40% of the self-reported reasons for being out of school. Forty-two percent of females from the NIDS 2008 data cited birth or pregnancy as a reason dropping out of school (Gustafsson, 2011). However, Lloyd and Mensch's (2008) analysis of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data across 20 southern African countries, found that teenage pregnancy accounted for only between five and 10% of female departures from school.

### *Employment*

Employment during high school and its relation to dropout is another type of behaviour widely documented in literature. There are mixed findings on whether working during high school increases the risk of dropout. Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) conducted a mixed methods study of 15-17 year old students in southern California (US) in their first part-time job. They asserted that regardless of perceived benefits of part-time work to adolescent development, work participation could interfere with academic engagement, manifesting particularly in shabby or no homework done. This is more so for those who work longer hours (Perreira et al., 2006; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). They argued that instead of part-time work promoting healthy adolescent development, it encouraged delinquent

behaviour such as alcohol or drug abuse and irregular school attendance, as the student worked to maintain luxury lifestyles than cover necessities. Using baseline and first follow-up data of the High School and Beyond Survey of 1980 to examine the effects of adolescent employment on dropping out, McNeal (1997b) found that some jobs are beneficial, some are detrimental, while some have no significant relationship on dropping out of school. High intensity jobs were found to be detrimental to school participation. McNeal (1997b) also observed that high school employment had more adverse effect on test performance for females compared to males. Marsh and Kleitman (2005) found general negative effects on school achievement and educational aspirations among employed US students based on the 1988 national longitudinal study, regardless of background or parallel variables. However, based on the same dataset, Lee and Staff (2007), employing propensity-score matching techniques, showed that long hours on the job do not encourage high school dropout among all students. Based on the United Kingdom National Child Development Longitudinal Study – waves three and four, Dustmann and van Soest (2008) observed negative effect among employed males, but not females. A couple of studies have however suggested that high school employment can be a symptom of poor school engagement and achievement, rather than the cause (Shanahan & Flaherty, 2001; Warren, 2002). That is, the students who are already unhappy and less dedicated to school seek out employment as an activity that, at least in their view, carries greater rewards. Therefore, working during high school, and the eventual dropout is a symptom of a school career plagued by troubles such as poor engagement and achievement. Dalton (2009) reported that 35% of dropouts in the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 in the US, cited employment-related reasons, including getting a job and inability to juggle school and work.

A study by Inoue et al. (2015) across 25 sub-Saharan Africa countries report as many as 38% of children of ages seven to 14 economically active, salaries or not. Fifteen percent of these were in ‘full time’ employment and not attending school. The study goes further to note that about half of youth in the ages 15 to 24 work and attend school at the same time. Unlike the youth working to maintain luxury lifestyles (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986), the sub-Saharan youth typically worked to subsidize household income (Ananga, 2011; Inoue et al., 2015). This economic activity among high school youth was found to be negatively associated with school attendance, with youth often forced out of school to work full time to help the family.

Examination of the South African literature fails to locate any studies that correlate employment during high school and dropping out of school. This comes as no surprise given the limited paying employment opportunities for youth in the country in general, let alone high school students (Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2013; Branson et al., 2014). There are a number of studies that report on the influence of over-bearing house and family agricultural chores on school attendance for children as young as those in early primary school phase (HSRC et al., 2005). Under-age employment in the formal agricultural sector, with little or no schooling for the children has also been reported in the country. By the time these children are of high school age, not of their own choice, they have been long in employment without any or proper primary schooling, and unlikely to enrol for school in their lifetime (Ewert & Hamman, 1996; Gardiner, 2008). This recruitment of children and their subsequent life-time participation in agrarian labour does not fit the conception of deviant behaviour that is linked to premature school exit in the primarily North American empirical literature cited in this discussion. From birth, the children are predisposed to a labouring life of farm work alongside their parents, with disregard for their development in other aspects of life including receiving basic education.

### *Background characteristics*

In addition to behaviour, individual's background characteristics have been widely found to predict whether students complete or drop out of high school. These are demographic attributes such as age, gender, race, disability, and health status. Using the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, Dalton et al. (2009) found that the ninth-graders who were the youngest of the cohort at the beginning of the survey had the lowest dropout rates two years later. Those who were 15 years or younger in their second year of high school had lower dropout rates than the 16 year olds, and in turn, the 16 year olds had lower dropout rates than those 17 years or older. Noticeably, those students aged 17 or older had dropout rate of about 30 percentage points higher than that of the 16-year-old ninth-graders in the US. This pattern is confirmed by Chapman et al. (2011) and Stark and Noel (2015), using the US Current Population Survey of 2009 and 2012, respectively. They reported an increase in dropout rates from age 16 towards 18 – with 18 year olds about three times more likely to have dropped out than the 16 year olds, in both studies. De Hoyos et al. (2016) also confirm this in their focus on dropout across Latin America, where the dropout rates among 15 year olds increase twofold by the time they turn 18.

Age-related increase in dropout rates amongst the South African older adolescents were noted in several studies (Crouch, 2005; Motala, 2007; Social Surveys Africa-CALS, 2009; Gustafsson, 2011; Fleisch, 2012; Hall, 2013; Spaul, 2013; Branson et al., 2014). Using data from the South African GHS of 2003, Crouch (2005) showed that the older the adolescents got, the higher the risk of dropping out of school. Hall (2013) notes that the overall high rates of school participation, owing to the near-universal rates in the compulsory phase, masks the significant drop in attendance amongst children aged between 16 and 18. A number of other studies observed that the age-related dropout is likely to be interacting with other factors such as being older than the age-grade norm, which in turn could be related to other factors like late enrolments or multiple grade repetition (Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2012; Inoue et al., 2015). Furthermore, Inoue et al. (2015) found that in most of the 20 sub-Saharan countries studied, dropout rates increase in the last year of each school cycle. They found that across the countries, dropout rates in the last year of secondary cycle were almost twice the average dropout rate earlier in the secondary cycle. Meny-Gibert and Russell (2012) found that 18 year olds were more than twice likely to have dropped out compared to the 15 and 16 year olds. The 17 year olds also had higher rates of dropout than the 16 year olds did, but lower rates compared the 18 year olds. Using the South African General Household Surveys 2002-2012 and Education Statistics 2013, the Department of Basic Education (2014) confirms these age-specific dropout patterns among older adolescents.

High school dropout rates have also been widely reported to vary by gender. Dalton et al. (2009), Chapman et al. (2011) and Stark and Noel (2015), all using nationally representative samples, reported male adolescents to have higher dropout rates than their female counterparts in the US. In addition, Borgna and Struffolino (2016), using two nationally representative datasets, made similar finding, where males were found to have higher dropout rates than females in Italy, after controlling for academic performance. However, Goldschmidt and Wang (1999), using National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988-1992, reported significantly higher dropout rates among females than males in the US. Also, in his study of dropout patterns among senior secondary schools in Delta State Nigeria, Patrick (2012) found higher dropout rates among females compared to males, after controlling for relevant factors. There was no statistically significant difference in dropout rates between US males and females in Rosen et al.'s (2015) examination of data from the nationally representative High School Longitudinal Study of 2009. Likewise, Freeney and O'Connell

(2012) also did not find gender to predict dropout in a sample of second-year Irish high school students.

A number of studies focusing on compulsory school phase in sub-Saharan Africa reported on gender-patterned school dropout. Inoue et al. (2015) conducted an analysis of Demographic and Health Surveys data, or Living Standards Measurement Survey data from 30 sub-Saharan African countries. They reported that a larger proportion of young women (15-18 years) had dropped out compared to their male counterparts. An earlier associated study by Feda and Sakellariou (2013) concluded that early marriage explained this female schooling detriment. Males were found to be five times more likely to stay and complete school than married females across these countries. However, Motala et al.'s (2009) study of two school districts (urban and rural) in South Africa found male dropout rates to be higher, compared to females in grades between one and nine. The Social Surveys-CALS (2009) found no difference in dropout rates among males and females in the compulsory phase (7 – 15 years) they noted significantly higher male dropout rates in the ages 16 to 18, compared to females. Using Community Survey of 2007, Fleisch et al. (2012) reported patterns of higher dropout rates among males of ages 7 to 15 in the southern parts of the Western Cape Province, among the Coloured sub-population group. In addition, based on the Social Surveys-CALS data of 2007, this pattern is supported by Meny-Gibert and Russell (2012) and Branson et al. (2014), with Coloured males (16-18 years) about 10 percentage points are more likely to drop out than their female counterparts.

Population sub-group or race membership has been widely reported to predict school completion or dropout. Some studies found race to be a predictor of school dropout among high school students, while others found no significant relationship. Studies that found no significant relationship suggested that such a relationship was commonly explained by other factors such as school performance and family background (Rumberger, 1983; 1995). Using national sample data of youth aged between 14 and 21 in 1979, Rumberger found that the differences in dropout rates among race groups in the US were explained largely by differences in family background. Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) also observed from the 1988-1992 Educational Longitudinal Study of US older adolescents that while race appeared to be a predictor of dropout in high school, its significance dissipates when controlling for associated family background factors such as high socio economic status. Dalton et al. (2009), Chapman et al. (2011) and Stark and Noel (2015) found that in 2004, 2009 and 2012,

respectively, the differences in dropout rates between races in the US were statistically significant, using datasets cited here earlier.

In South Africa, the Social Survey Africa and CALS (2009) analysis of a limited sample of 16-18 year olds found that youths from the Coloured households were far more likely to have dropped out of school compared to other race groups. It is important to note that the dropout pattern among older Coloured youth was not observed for the younger cohort (7-15) in the same study. Analysis of the Community Survey of 2007 by Monyela (2011) also found noticeably higher dropout rates among Coloured youth compared to the other population sub-groups. Fleisch et al. (2012) found statistically significant differential patterns of dropout between Coloured males and their counterparts from other race groups in the 7-15 age cohorts in 2007.

Another demographic characteristic that has been widely researched in relation to school participation is disability. High school students with disabilities have been reported to have lower school participation rates and higher dropout rates (Wagner et al., 1993; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Rossi et al., 1997; Scanlon & Mellard, 2002; HSRC et al, 2005; Hunt, 2008; Dalton et al., 2009; Chapman et al., 2011; Stark & Noel, 2015; De Witte et al., 2013; Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Social Surveys Africa & CALS, 2009; Fleisch et al., 2012; Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2012; Monyela, 2011). In their analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students of 1987, secondary school youth aged 13 to 21, Wagner et al. (1993) and Blackorby and Wagner (1996) observed a disproportionate share of students with disabilities dropping out of school in in the US. Both studies observed that the dropout rate for students with disabilities was approximately twice that of general education students in the study. This was confirmed by Rossi et al. (1997) from their analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, with students that were identified as disabled by teachers and parents earning lower high school grades and more likely to drop out of school than their non-disabled counterparts. Furthermore, nationally representative studies by Chapman et al. (2011), Stark, and Noel (2015) also observed that dropout rates for students with disabilities (ages 16-24) were about twice as large as the rate for their peers without disabilities – from the 2009 and 2012 US Current Population Survey, respectively.

Analysis of the South African Community Survey of 2007 by Fleisch et al (2012) indicates that children with disabilities were five times more likely to be out of school than those without disabilities in the compulsory school phase. The Barriers to Education Survey by Social Survey Africa and CALS (2009), Meny-Gibert and Russell (2012) also found that children of ages seven to 18 were more vulnerable to being out of school than those without any form of disability.

The relationship between individual health status and school participation has also been widely examined. Analysis of the US Current Population Survey of 2005 shows that that poor health contributed to dropping out of high school among youth who were 20 years at the time of the survey (Laird et al., 2007). And those who had completed high school had better health than those who had dropped out (Hagan & Foster, 2001; Roebuck, French & Dennis, 2004; Daniel et al., 2006, Belfield & Levin, 2007; Lleras-Muney, 2005, Basch, 2011). In the analysis of data on about 10 000 adolescents from a national health panel study of 1995-1996, Hagan and Foster (2001) found that adolescents who reported symptoms of depression were more likely to drop out of school. Roebuck et al. (2004), from analysis of the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse waves of 1997/98, found that the adolescents (ages 12 to 18) who responded to be in excellent or very good health had a higher probability of still being in school than the adolescents who responded to be in good, fair or poorer health. From a review of health problems affecting minority urban youth, Basch (2011) concludes that disparities in students' academic achievement and attainment were largely indirectly and directly explained by health disparities between these two groups. Illness was self-reported as the reason for leaving school by youth (16-18 year olds) surveyed in the Barriers to Education Survey of 2007, with one in every seven having left school (Social Surveys Africa-CALS, 2009).

While individual background, behaviour, and aspects of educational performance influence dropping out and completion of high school, these student-level attributes cannot be seen apart from society at large (Reich, 1975). The individual attributes related to school dropout are in turn shaped by the institutional settings or contexts in which they live. These institutions are families that they come from, schools they attend, and the broader community (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; De Witte et al., 2013). Empirical research on dropout has identified a number of factors within students' families, schools and communities or locations that predict dropping out or completing high school.

#### 2.4.2 Institutional-level factors associated with school dropout among older adolescents

Family background has been widely acknowledged as critical to school success or failure (Jencks et al., 1972; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Pomerantz et al., 2007; Motala et al., 2007; Social Survey Africa & CALS, 2009; Strassburg et al., 2010; Dalton et al., 2009). Furthermore, research has attempted to identify what aspects of family background matter and how they influence school achievement (Pomerantz et al., 2007; Fleisch et al., 2012; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Strassburg et al., 2010; Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2012, 2013; Heaton et al., 2014; Inoue et al., 2015). Aspects of family background such as family structure, family resources, and family practices and their influence on school participation among children have been widely studied (Dalton et al., 2009; Fleisch et al., 2012; Strassburg et al., 2010; Inoue et al., 2015).

Family structure refers to the number and types of individuals in a child's household. The structure has been found to affect the physical, social and cognitive development of children through its relationship with other family features (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). A number of empirical studies reported higher dropout rates where the household was not headed by a biological two-parents (Rumberger, 1983; Olsen & Farkas, 1989; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Rumberger, 1995; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003; Plank et al., 2005; Bridgeland, 2006; Perreira et al., 2006; Dalton et al., 2009). Using data from the High School and Beyond Study waves 1982 to 1986, Astone and McLanahan (1991) found that children from single-parent, step-parent and other family arrangements other than biological two-parent families were at higher risk of dropping out of school. This is confirmed by Dalton et al.'s (2009) study that found that high school youth from the US Education Longitudinal Study of 2002-2006, who lived with both parents were twice likely to be in school until completion, compared to those who lived with single parents or any other family composition.

Fleisch et al. (2012), using data from the South African Community Survey of 2007, found lowest dropout rates among South African children of compulsory school phase (7-15 years) who lived with grandparents, particularly grandmothers. Also, using seven waves of the GHS between 2002 and 2011, Heaton et al. (2014) note the positive effects of female-led households on schooling participation. They argue that the latter could be explained by the fact that female-led families were the common form of family structures during the country's apartheid-induced migrant labour practice that systematically separated men from their

families for extended periods. Such families, they argue, are not significantly different from two-parent families in that it appears that social support structures and other measures may be in place to address the deficits inherent in female-led family types. Based on a limited sample of 16 to 18 year olds, Meny-Gibert and Russell (2012) found lower dropout rates among youth who were considered child of the household head, regardless of whether they were biological, foster, step or grandchild. On the contrary, higher dropout rates were observed among children who were not considered as such. In households headed by “uncles”, or other non-related persons, dropout rates were found to be particularly high. Anderson (2000) observed the relationship of higher dropout rates where family heads were unrelated to children among Black South African children from households that were led by non-genetic head. Other family structures including those sibling-headed were also found to associate with noticeably higher dropout rates compared to sons or daughters to the household head. In the South African literature, grandparents appear to be important to school persistence among children. These grandparents are an aspect of family composition that is not reflected on in general literature.

Another important aspect of family structure is its size, which is measured by a number of siblings or the total number of family members in the household (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The theory of resource dilution posits that the bigger the size of the family, the less the resources to go around (Blake, 1989). Empirical studies have found that the more the number of siblings and the little the space between them, the lower the chances of attainment and the higher the risks of dropping out of school (Rumberger, 1983; Blake, 1986; Powell & Steelman, 1993; Powell & Parcel, 1999). In their review of over 100 empirical studies, Rumberger and Lim (2008) reported that 60% of these studies found the odds of dropping out were higher in larger families compared to smaller ones. Powell and Parcel (1999) analysed the relationship between the number of siblings and educational attainment across the US and Great Britain. They found a robust inverse relationship between the two variables in both areas. However, Marks’ (2006) analysis of data from 30 countries posits that the effect of family size on educational outcomes is simply owing to the correspondence of larger families and lower socio-economic status and not necessarily the dilution of material and social resources in larger families, unlike as Blake (1989) hypothesized.

While largely the hypothesis of inverse relationship between education outcomes and family size still holds, a number of empirical results from developing countries indicate that the

negative impact of large family size on education outcomes is not universal. Sibanda's (2004) analysis of South African 1996 Census data found that large family size had a negative effect on Whites, Indians and Coloured race groups. On the contrary, the larger households appeared to decrease the likelihood of dropping out of school among Black South Africans. Sudha (1997) concludes that the effect of family size on school participation was conditioned by specific cultural, political and socio-economic settings in Malaysia, based on 1988 wave of the National Family Surveys. Moreover, the likelihood of persisting in school increased for a child from a larger Ethiopian family because household chores were spread over a large number of members (Rose & Al-Samarrai, 2001). Urban-rural contrast on the effect of family size was reported on some studies. Larger family size was found to have a negative effect on school participation in urban Cote d'Ivoire, while a positive effect was observed in the rural settings (Montgomery & Kouame, 1993; Eloundou-Enyegue et al., 2006). Eloundou-Enyegue and colleagues note that inconsistencies in sampling, measurement and extended family buffering account for the varying results on the direction and magnitude of the relationship between large family size and school attendance. However, they argue that differences in socio-economic contexts (historical, spatial, educational, and economic context) of the families explain the mixed association between schooling and family size. This conception of association between family size and schooling seems to go beyond Marks' (2006) and Blake's (1989) models referred to above.

Also important, and impossible to separate from family size when trying to determine the influence of family size on dropout is aspect of family resources. Family resources are crucial in promotion of emotional, social, and cognitive development of children and these include financial, human, social resources (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The commonly used index for measuring family resources is the socio-economic status (SES), which in turn is based on several measures such as family income, parents' (or guardians') occupational status and parents' education level. Most studies that were reviewed, using nationally representative samples, found that higher SES decreased the likelihood of school dropout (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; De Witte et al., 2013). Dalton et al. (2009) observed three years into high school that students who were in the lowest SES quarter had higher dropout rates, compared to those in the successive SES quarters above in the US. They were twice likely to have dropped out than those of the SES quarter immediately above them, and six times more likely to have dropped out than those in second highest SES quarter. Numerous studies reported a negative correlation between SES and dropout – where dropout rates increase when the SES is lower

(Ekstrom et al., 1986; Rumberger, 1995; Lamb, 1998; Teese & Walstab, 2002; Entwisle et al., 2005; Marks & Flemming, 1999; Dorn, 1996; Blue & Cook, 2004; Ishitani & Snider, 2006; Ou & Reynolds, 2006; Cataldi et al., 2009; Frank, 1990; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003; Duchesne et al., 2005; Dustmann & van Soest, 2008; Plank et al., 2005; Velez, 1989). Some studies found no independent effect of lower SES on dropout when controlling for a variety of other factors (Rumberger, 1983; 2001; Orthner et al., 2002; Frank, 1990; Duchesne et al., 2005; Plank et al., 2005; Inoue et al., 2015; Huebler, 2008).

Inoue et al. (2015) report that household income was the most important determinant of schooling outcomes across 25 sub-Saharan countries, regardless of methodology. Children (12-14 years) from poorest households were three times less likely to be in school compared to their richest counterparts. In their study of the relationship between school progress and poverty in South Africa, Timaeus et al. (2013) argue that household poverty, more than school factors, accounted for educational disadvantages among poor children. Based on 2008 baseline data of the NIDS, they argue that cost of school fees is not necessarily a factor in the dropout, given the no-fee dispensation for needy children. On the contrary, they posit that it is the lower SES that is indicative of poor family background, which is a factor for children staying out of school, regardless of race of the older adolescent. For example, limited maternal education, as a measure in the SES index, was found to correlate with children staying out of school even with free school access is granted to such families. Heaton et al. (2014) confirmed this observation in their analysis of the GHS (waves 2002 - 2011) in that family background was central to school enrolment and persistence, with school characteristics having little effect. Analysis of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), Demographic, and Health Surveys (DHS) across 20 African countries by Huebler (2008) found that children whose parents have completed secondary schooling were 20 percentage points more likely to be in school. Based on the Social Surveys-CALS dataset of 2007, Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert (2012) argue that in South Africa it was not necessarily absolute poverty that accounted for withdrawal from school, but instead, being acutely conscious of their poverty in relation to their peers influenced their decision to withdrawal from school. When older adolescents want to but cannot conform to their peers, they become stressed and anxious, resulting in irregular attendance, long-term or permanent withdrawal from school. Their analysis cites examples of teenagers who left school because they did not have clothes ('civvies') to wear to school on casual days; they were ashamed of the type of basic lunch they brought to school; or could not afford school excursions, unlike their classmates.

However, among pupils of the compulsory-phase (7- 15 year olds), Fleisch et al. (2012) using nationally representative data from the South African Statistics Community Survey of 2007 found that lower SES appeared not to be a major factor in dropout. They observed near-universal school participation among this age group regardless of their poverty. In a limited sample of out-of-school children ages seven to 18, Surveys Surveys-CALS (2009) reported almost 40% of caregivers who cited lack of income or high cost of education as a reason for their children leaving school. In a sub-sample of the same study, about 13% of the youth aged 16 to 18 cited cost of education as a reason for their withdrawal from school. The cost of education was broader than affording to pay school fees, but a variety of restrictions that poverty placed on households to cope with different other traumas that result in children's withdrawal from school. For example, they explain that a family member falling ill might mean the child withdrawing from school to look after them.

Branson et al. (2014) argue that household income as a measure of SES was significantly related to dropout for children between seven and 18 years. For instance, they noted a 12 percentage point decrease in dropout for every 10% increase in household income. Their analysis showed a positive but statistically not significant relationship between school fees and dropout, agreeing with the previous studies that in the South African context, cost of school fees is not directly related to higher dropout rates, but a combination of pressures emanating from low or no household income. They further argue that older adolescent males are more sensitive to family resource constraints than their female counterparts, with males likely to start looking for work as soon as these pressures present themselves.

As institutions, schools are also widely acknowledged to have influence on dropout even after accounting for individual and family-level factors. School attributes such as the school composition, structure, resources, policies, and practices (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Rumberger, 2011). School composition is about the characteristics of the student body – such racial or lingual groupings and average social economic status. Numerous studies have linked school composition with dropout in instances where minority students felt they did not fit in with the majority (Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Smith & Naylor, 2005; McNeal, 1997; Rumberger, 1995; Okpala et al., 2001; Sander, 2001; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Balfanz & Legters; 2005; Dustmann & van Soest, 2008; Dalton et al., 2009). One manifestation of the effect of school's social composition is peer pressure, although several studies show that the effects of social composition on dropout are generally mediated by other characteristics of the school (Lee & Burkam, 2003).

Another important school-level predictor of dropout is school practices and policies. School practices and policies set both the academic and social climate that influence student engagement. Challenging, inclusive, cohesive, and problem-free conditions have shown to lower the risk of dropout among high school students (Fine, 1986 & 1991; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Bowditch, 1993; Finn, 1989; Pittman, 1993; Herbert & Reis, 1999; Blue & Cook, 2004; Ou & Reynolds, 2006; Vizcain, 2005; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Dalton et al., 2009; Rumberger, 2011). Schools can directly or indirectly influence dropout through zero-tolerance policies and actions that deal with student misbehaviour and under-performance leading to expulsions or forced-transfers. Alternatively, schools can influence students to voluntarily drop out by creating unchallenging, uninspiring and poor quality conditions. Uninspired and disengaged students tend to have low achievement, irregular attendance and eventually drop out (Finn; 1989; Ou & Reynolds, 2006; Vizcain, 2005; Adams and Becker, 1990; Inoue et al., 2015).

In sub-Saharan Africa, access to school infrastructure was reported to be a determinant of dropout. Studies found that distance to the nearest secondary school influenced dropout in the latter part of primary school. Parents tended to withdraw their children even before completing the primary phase where schools were in short supply (Inoue et al., 2015). School practices and resources manifesting in poor teaching and learning climate were also found to increase the risk of dropout in most countries, and more acutely among older adolescents (Hunt, 2008; Inoue et al., 2015). In his review of the quality of education in South Africa from 1994-2011, Spaul (2013) found that teacher quality and teaching, accounted for the sub-standard student achievement and quality of education in about three quarters of the country's schools, manifesting in high levels of grade repetition and dropouts in the senior phase of secondary school. Motala et al. (2007) echo the influence of teacher quality on general education quality, including increased risk of dropout. They assert that, while students were physically at school in comparatively satisfying rates, they were still not getting meaningful epistemic access, given the poor quality of instruction.

Other than the physical infrastructure and education quality barriers to schooling in the country, several studies reported school practices that excluded students on the basis of fee non-payment, over-agedness, repetition, 'weeding', misconduct, and pregnancy. Strassburg et al. (2010), using the Social Surveys Africa -CALs data, noted that many cases of punishment including withholding of students' report cards, students not issued textbooks,

preventing students from writing exams, and students having to stand in class during lessons for children who did not pay school fees. Furthermore, they noted that while not widespread, schools refused entry or expelled about one percent of students owing to fee non-payment. This in turn puts strain on caregivers who would likely hold children back every time they cannot meet the school financial demands, increasing the likelihood of dropout. Youth in the sub-sample of out-of-school 16 to 18 year olds, reported leaving school because they could not afford school fees (Strassburg et al., 2010). Weeks (2005) reports of schools that expel girl learners because they were pregnant or refuse readmission of students back into school because they were too old for the conventional classroom.

Some school practices, commonly known as weeding or gate-keeping have found to associate with high of dropout (Branson et al., 2014; Spaul, 2013). Owing to the poor education quality in the compulsory phase, children are promoted through the system without acquiring grade-appropriate competencies. However, as they enter senior secondary, and national senior certificate examinations only three years away, schools are encouraged to hold back weaker students in Grade 10 and 11. The practice of ‘weeding’ or ‘holding back’ is associated with high rates of dropout in this phase. Some students in Grade 12 are discouraged to continue as their prospects of success in matric examinations are minimal (Crouch & Vinjevd, 2006). This is commonly done to meet matric pass rates targets set by the schools, districts or even provincial departments. To illustrate this, analysis of NIDS (2008) shows that close to 40% of students who were in Grade 11 in 2008 had dropped out of the schooling system without completing matric by 2010 (Branson et al., 2014).

Further than the influence of institutions of family and school in predicting dropout, the community or locality is broadly considered as crucial space or settings to the development of the older adolescent (Reich & Young, 1975; Jessor, 1993). These settings or locales assume spatial characters that shape or are shaped by human agency. Different settings create and reproduce social hierarchies and inequalities, reinforce or undermine ideologies, and enable and promote some practices over others (Tickamyer, 2000). There are key community characteristics that define and influence collective sentiment and levels of engagement on issues - historical, cultural, rural or urban and socio-economic factors (Thompson & Schoonmaker, 1997; Schafer & Hori, 2006; Crowder & South, 2003, 2011; Inoue et al., 2015; Ananga, 2011; Levine & Painter, 1999; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Swanson & Schneider, 1999; de Hoyos et al., 2016; Unesco, 2015a, 2014). Thompson and

Schoonmaker (1997) posit that it is the community's historical background, current social structure, economic status and interests, cultural attitudes, and values can influence their demand for some services not others, or promotion of some practices over others. Such profound inclinations could explain why the uptake of social services such as secondary education is differentially embraced across communities. In other words, taking up full time employment after compulsory education phase could be promoted over completing high school in some communities, while completing high school is promoted as a prerequisite before joining the labour market in others. Conducting their study in rural Louisiana in the US, Schafer and Hori (2006), using state administrative data, found that high school dropout rates exhibited spatial clustering, with schools in near proximity displaying similar rates, even after controlling for school-level factors. They speculated that broader environmental mechanisms such as rural market labour structures and other norms and cultural representations drove the clumping of high levels of dropout in the communities. Ananga (2011) and Inoue et al (2015) confirm this, where they observed employment opportunities in poor rural sub-Saharan Africa communities enticing young children away from school to subsidize family income. Unesco (2015) reports of a general pattern of exclusion from education among adolescents of secondary school age in rural areas of Asia and Pacific, and southern and eastern Africa regions. De Hoyos et al. (2016) confirm the pattern when they report that out-of-school adolescents were found to be more prevalent in rural Latin America. However, numerous other studies found no obvious influence of the urban versus rural context to the odds of dropping out (Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Pong & Ju, 2000).

Ballas et al. (2012), on mapping educational inequality across European Union member states posited that geographical or local area differences in income, wealth, power, and recognition, and the attendant economic and cultural capitals govern access to educational provisions and help exploit these provisions. Wilkinson et al. (2009) emphasize that wealthier and more powerful geographies, regions or communities have been shown to attain better education outcomes than their poorer counterparts. Numerous studies have reported about negative education outcomes associated with impoverished geographies or communities (Christie, 2013; Pienaar & Morton-Mckay, 2014; Ballas et al., 2012; Wilkinson et al., 2009; van der Berg, 2007).

In her work on social justice in education in South Africa, Christie (2013) underscores the need for a geographical lens to the understanding of educational inequalities, in addition to the racial and gender lenses conventionally used in framing the inequalities. Furthermore, Christie (2013) argues that historical geography is vital to the understanding of inequalities in quality of educational outcomes. She contends that negative education outcomes still persist in the country's historically and currently impoverished geographies, regardless of current massive shift of fiscal resources to schools in those communities. Similar studies postulate that the weight exerted by area context could explain striking spatial disparities in educational outcomes, including differences in school participation patterns (Ballas et al., 2012; Christie, 2013; Pienaar & Morton-Mckay, 2014; van der Berg, 2007; Schafer & Hori, 2006).

Further, Ballas et al. (2012) assert that area context to understanding educational opportunity and attainment goes beneath the regional layer, but at the local or even small area level. They posit that it is at this local layer that inequalities are more visible. Some neighbourhoods noticeably exploit the education provisions, while others might see sustained education as not for them but for the politically and socio-economically powerful. The perceived or real lack of economic returns for investing in education among the poor communities could explain higher dropout rates after the compulsory school phase. However, Rumberger (2011) asserts that while differences in neighbourhood characteristics help explain the disparities in dropout rates among communities, similar settings also affect individuals differently. Besides the ascription differences between individuals, subjective interpretation of one's conditions could explain why some students persist in school while living in poor families and crime-ridden communities. He posits that understanding how poor quality neighbourhoods influence school dropout must also be an analysis of views and interpretations of those conditions and behaviours by dropouts themselves.

Several studies have reported a correlation between distressing neighbourhood characteristics and school dropout (Crane, 1991; Clark, 1992; Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Rumberger, 1983, 2001, 2004; Blue & Cook, 2004; Crowder & South, 2003, 2011). Using data from longitudinal National Survey of Children, Crowder and South (2003) measured the effect of neighbourhood effects on dropout decision to be stronger than effects of a variety of individual, family and school factors. Numerous other studies observed that low quality neighbourhoods, characterized by extreme levels of poverty, increased the odds of dropout (Crane, 1991; Clark, 1992;

Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993). From his analysis of ghetto neighbourhoods in two large American cities, Crane (1991) supported the assumptions of the epidemic theory that implied that there should be a sharp increase in social problems as the neighbourhood quality decreases. He found that the odds of school dropout among adolescents aged between 16 and 19 rose sharply among all race groups when the neighbourhood quality falls below a particular critical point. Using similar but more recent data, Clark (1992) also found that bad as well as good neighbourhood dimensions appear to influence dropout among American teenage boys in large cities, but without a tipping point. This refutes Crane's (1991) suggestion. Analysis of the American Current Population Survey of 2000, Blue and Cook (2004) found that youth in low socio-economic neighbourhoods were more likely to drop out of school than their counterparts from more affluent neighbourhoods. Amongst other things, poor communities can affect adolescent development through the lack of support and recreational amenities such as playgrounds and parks, after-school programmes (Woolley et al., 2008; Hallinan & Williams, 1990; Wilson, 1987).

Another important element in neighbourhood quality is the friendship network of the older adolescent. South et al. (2003) found that educational performance of peers was the key mechanism linking neighbourhood socio-economic disadvantage to youth educational attainment. That is, the older adolescent with network of peers that lacks aspiration or has negative attitudes towards school and achieves poorly and are deviant, is at risk of not completing high school (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Ream, 2005). Alternatively, having school friends in the community who are already dropouts has also been found to increase the likelihood of dropping out among youth (Rumberger, 1983; Carbonaro, 1998; Herbert & Reis, 1999).

Communities also provide employment for older adolescents and numerous studies have reported this to increase the odds of dropout. That is, high employment rate among school dropouts in the community is likely to pull them out of school, while high economic returns, evidenced in higher salaries for school graduates encourage youth to persist in school (Rumberger, 1983, 2001, 2010, 2011; Schafer & Hori, 2006; Bickel & Papagiannis, 1988; Clark, 1992; Marks, 1999). Ewert and Hamman's (1996) revealed labour market structures and practices in the Western Cape agricultural industry that involved employment of 'family units', including underage children that could have a detrimental effect on their schooling.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The review allowed for the delineation of the concept of dropout and the various meanings each definition carries, and the various purposes the associated formulae serve. The review also provided some indication of the magnitude and prevalence of school dropout among older adolescents (16-18 year olds), and the factors that are associated with the phenomenon. While the school dropout rates among South African older adolescents appear comparable with other developing countries, in the context of persistently gloomy labour market for youth in particular, the numbers of these youth who leave school only to idle is a major concern.

The review identifies two broad categories of factors associated with these dropouts – individual and institution-level factors. While there is ample global, particularly North American research on dropout in high school, the South African literature is limited. Most of this literature is on dropout in the compulsory school phase (or seven to 15 years), with inadequate focus on the senior phase (grades 10 to 12) - ages 16 to 18. Even though the focus of HSRC (2005) study was specifically rural former Bantustan spaces, useful contextual attributes of dropout were uncovered. Motala et al. (2007) also conducted analysis of three different datasets and identified patterns and a range of indicators to school exclusion transition into and through the compulsory phase. The Access to Education study by Social Surveys Africa and CALS (2009) was a major effort that dealt with barriers experienced by children aged between seven and 18. The study, a nationally representative household survey, with supplementary qualitative data, identified a wide range of factors related with dropping out of school throughout basic schooling. While a subsample of youth (16-18 years) was drawn and age-specific characteristics of dropout were identified, the limitations of the subsample and related findings were acknowledged.

Branson et al. (2014), using a first two waves (2008 to 2011) of the NIDS 2008, generating ample socio-economic controls, provide compelling insights into the nature of dropout among older adolescents. Mapping school transitions of a panel of older adolescents, they determined, over period of time, important socio-demographic aspects related to school dropout. Similarly, Gustafsson (2011), using the NIDS 2008 baseline data and GHS 2008 reported on a variety of factors determining dropout. In addition, Lam et al.'s (2011) analysis of the Cape Area Panels Study is another important effort in trying to understand the

correlates of dropout, over time, although the applicability of the results is geographically bounded. In his examination of in and out of school transitions, Spaul (2013) also reports on important predictors of dropout, including poor quality instruction and grade repetition. Fleisch et al. (2012) use data from a much more large-scale 2007 Community Survey, and are able to provide a comprehensive picture of dropout patterns in the compulsory school phase.

However, none of these studies has explored mechanisms of school dropout among South African older adolescents in the manner that the study undertaken here has gone about it. All these key studies are generally sample surveys exclusively implementing quantitative design procedures to draw inferences to the wider population. The HSRC (2005) study combined both quantitative and qualitative procedures to study of school dropout, but the focus was on rural, historically impoverished areas in only three Provinces, and there was no specific focus on 16-18 year old adolescents. Motala et al. (2007) also conducted a quantitative analysis of Census 2001, General Household Surveys 2004, and Labour Force to map patterns of compulsory school exclusion. The Social Surveys Africa and CALS study (2009) also adopted a combined approach, with the qualitative element which was initially meant to inform the survey instrument design, proving to be useful later in the interpretation of the quantitative results. Their subsample of older adolescents (16-18 year olds) was too restricted to extrapolate to the wider older adolescent population. While these studies provided insights into characteristics of school dropout, none was a mixed methods design, specifically trained on older adolescents in the manner followed in this study. More importantly, this study contributes a unique mixed methods design to the study of school dropout among older adolescents to add to the current research that is mainly quantitative or qualitative.

Secondly, none of these studies using dataset at the scale of the Statistics South Africa 2011 Census that the current study makes use of for the quantitative strand of the investigation. Motala et al. (2007) and Fleisch et al. (2012) use similar size, but older data, with their focus on the seven to 15 year age group. The study undertaken here makes use of the affordances of the latest census data not only to specifically profile the out of school older adolescents, but also to determine the prevalence of the phenomenon, and its geographical distribution. Also while some of the existing research (Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2013; Branson et al., 2014) provides indications about the incidence and cohort rates of dropout, given the longitudinal nature of the data used, this study offers much more reliable estimate of the prevalence of dropout among the age group, given the size of the Census 2011 dataset. Again, none of the

studies sought to or attempted to determine the spatial distribution patterns of dropout among adolescents beyond the provincial scale. The current study contributes to the broader research on youth school-work-tertiary transitions by spatially plotting the distribution patterns of dropout among adolescents at local level. After determining the prevalence and the spatial patterns of dropout, the current study analyses the census data to identify socio-demographic factors associated with older adolescents dropouts. This is followed by a second phase of qualitative fieldwork, results which are used to explain the quantitative results that appear to associate with adolescent school dropouts.

This study was aimed to partially fill the gap in understanding the profile and distribution of older adolescent dropouts, by employing a distinct mixed methods design to take advantage of the large scale census data to obtain the general picture of who the older adolescents dropping out of school were, and where? Nevertheless, the study simultaneously exploit the affordances of the in-depth qualitative data to explain the identified in quantitative relationships between school dropout and the identified factors - such as pregnancy, employment and socio-economic status.

The next chapter examines a select theoretical literature on school dropout and by so doing provide a framework for this study.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 Introduction

Earlier models of school dropout generally focused on why students drop out of school in the light of changing labour markets at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. Economic structural changes in labour markets post the Second World War orchestrated mainly by industrial automation through accelerated technological innovation, saw reduction in job opportunities for school dropouts, or even being pushed out of work owing to skill incompatibility (Bienstock, 1967; Dorn, 1996). The models sought to understand, primarily, the psychology of the youth who left school when faced with little or no prospects of success in the labour market at the time. Later theories of school dropout have been developed from standpoints such as sociology, anthropology and economics (Slusasick, 1992; Levin, 1995; Alexander et al, 2001; Reynolds et al., 2004; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Analyses of these theories point to dropping out of school as function of either psychological or social factors working either as adolescents pull or push mechanisms out of school. The difference between these models is that some have focused largely on individual factors, while others have focused on the contribution of institutions (families, schools, communities) to school dropout. That is, these theoretical frameworks and the associated conceptual models have, in the main, represented either an individual or institutional perspective to dropping out of school (Rumberger, 2001). Rumberger and Lim (2008), drawing from the two seemingly dichotomous perspectives on dropout – individual and institutional perspectives, constructed an integrated conceptual framework of high school dropout and graduation – *the conceptual model of high school performance*.

In this chapter, I review the main theoretical developments in the field. I start with once the predominant narrative that school dropout among older adolescents was the result of some kind of incongruity between the individual's psychological dispositions and the school. That is, these models focus primarily on personality factors that associate school dropout among adolescents. I review a select of 1) school membership and educational engagement models, 2) the frustration-self-esteem and participation-identification models, 3) the developmental behavioural science perspective that recognize the importance of context in understanding adolescent development, and 4) models of deviance. Then, the chapter reviews models that

emphasize that school dropout is a function of socio-economic contexts or settings, such as the life course perspective to high school dropout. Lastly, I appraise the model fashioned by Rumberger and Lim (2008) that merges the two perspectives – psychological and social models of dropout, into one comprehensive framework. Their model, *conceptual model of high school performance*, served as a theoretical foundation for this study.

### **3.2 Theoretical perspectives on adolescent school dropout**

Much of the earlier work on why students drop out of school was psychological in orientation. This is particularly in the way that dropout was theorised as a function of the mismatch between adolescent's personality and the institution of school.

#### **3.2.1 Models school membership and educational engagement**

Derived from their 1986 study of 14 schools, Wehlage et al (1989) advanced a model that explained dropping out as a function of *school membership* and *educational engagement*. Their focus was to determine factors that were associated with successful dropout prevention programmes, that is, the basis on which the participating schools were selected. They analysed the characteristics of students at risk of dropping out and developed a theory regarding education of at-risk youth. At the core of their theory was that the stronger the social ties between the student and school (school membership), the stronger the likelihood the student will persist in school, other things equal. The stronger bond with the school is likely to manifest in active academic engagement. Where there is a high degree of educational engagement, the risk of withdrawing from school is likely to decrease. School membership is about social dimension of schooling that is influenced by such things as social ties to others, beliefs in the value and legitimacy of the school and involvement in school extracurricular activities. Stronger membership tends to engender individual's commitment to the institution long enough to see them graduate. Moreover, academic engagement has to do with the individual's attitude and behaviour with respect to formal aspects of school such classroom and school activities. This dimension suggests that dropping out of school would be related to inadequate attention or involvement in academic work by the student, reflected in poor grades and lack of achievement. Inadequate achievement often results to grade

retention, which is widely associated with ultimate school dropout (Balfanz, Hertzog & Mac Iver, 2007; Reyes 1993).

Newmann et al. (1992) and later on Fredricks et al. (2004) expanded and elaborated on the notions of educational engagement, participation and membership. They propose detailed models of student academic engagement to explain the mechanisms of dropping out of school. Newmann and colleagues define engagement in academic work as the student's psychological investment in, as well as effort directed toward their learning and mastery of knowledge or skills. They see engagement as an inner quality of concentration and effort that is not readily observed. It can only be inferred from indirect indicators such the amount of participation in academic work, manifesting in actions like class attendance and time spent on school work. Other signals of psychological investment could be inferred from the students' level of interest and enthusiasm in academic work and school in general. They posit that the students' level of engagement is determined by their underlying need for competence, the extent to which the student experiences belongingness to the school, and the authenticity of the work they are asked to complete, similar to the discussion by Wehlage et al. (1989) and to some extent by Finn (1989).

Fredricks et al. (2004), deriving their concepts from an extensive review of research literature, define engagement in three ways – behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement. Behavioural engagement draws on the idea of participation that includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities. This is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out. Behavioural engagement can range from the student simply doing the work and following the rules, to showing interest on the governance of the institution such as participating in the student council. That is, students who go beyond simply complying with the bare minimum are more likely to persist in school than those who seek just to conform. In contrast, emotional engagement refers to the students' affective reactions to teachers, peers, academics, and the school. In addition, Fredricks and colleagues say this can range from simple liking to deep valuing, or identification with the institution. The model presumes that deeper valuing of the institution or the deeper social ties influence willingness to do work and increasing the likelihood to persist high school. On the contrary, the third dimension, cognitive engagement, incorporates willingness to exert necessary effort to comprehend ideas and master difficult skills. As they explain, this element of engagement can range from simple memorization of learning texts to

the use of self-regulated learning strategies that promote deep understanding and expertise. The student who goes beyond and explores class texts and concepts to enhance mastery is deemed to be making adequate investment in school and unlikely to drop out, other factors equal. These three components are seen as interrelated and interactive. Therefore, the concept of educational engagement is regarded as a multidimensional interaction of the student with the school environment. Moreover, once the engagement takes hold, they argue, it has the potential to evolve and grow in intensity, and if it lasts long enough, the chances of persistence in school increase, lessening dropping out chances.

Some conceptions of educational engagement and its influence on school success is primarily understood as the student's psychic (mis)alignment with the values and demands of the school, such as advanced by Fredricks et al (2004). However, there are other views that see academic engagement (or lack of it) as the role of the school. National Research Council (2004) sees academic engagement as the result of the students' experiences after they arrive at school. The National Research Council, concerned with reducing dropout rates in the US schools, conceptualized lack of academic engagement as a failure on the part of the schools to fascinate the student to engage academically and socially. Their theory posits that positive students' experiences that engender motivation to learn after they have arrived are the role of the school. Academic engagement, manifesting in behaviour and emotion towards academic work, was seen as possible, among other things, through strategies such as revisiting of courses offered and adoption of adolescent-friendly instructional methods; professional development of teachers in discipline knowledge; and increased support and resources to help every student meet challenging standards. Such interventions, it was believed, would influence students' beliefs in their competence and influence their values towards academic work and motivate them to set higher goals. Moreover, such interventions give them a sense of belonging to the institution, regardless of attitudes they arrived with. The increased and sustained engagement, it was conceived, would result in increased graduation rates.

### 3.2.2 Frustration-self-esteem and participation-identification models

Finn (1989) advances two models to dropping out of school - *frustration-self-esteem* and *participation-identification models*. The two models see dropping out as a developmental process that may begin in the earliest grades. The first, frustration-self-esteem model, which

was reformulated from juvenile delinquency literature, argues that the first precursor of school withdrawal is school failure. The juvenile delinquency literature talks about interdependency of problem behaviours such as absenteeism, truancy and disruptive behaviour in class that disrupts or impairs the school routine, and may be seen as earlier patterns of withdrawal from school. These problem behaviours erode school performance, and subsequently, self-esteem and further problem behaviours. Therefore, frustration-self-esteem model identifies school failure as the starting point of problem behaviours in a cycle that may culminate in the students rejecting, or being rejected by the school.

The second model that Finn (1989) advances is the participation-identification model. The model is closely related to Wehlage et al. (1989) school membership and educational engagement model. The model focuses on students' involvement in schooling, with both behavioural and emotional components. Participation includes completing requisite classroom activities as well as completion of homework and other learning activities. It also involves participation in non-academic school activities and interest in school governance. According to this formulation, the likelihood that the student will successfully complete high school is maximized if he or she maintains multiple and expanding forms of participation in school-relevant activities. The model draws from Berrueta-Clement et al.'s (1984) 19-year longitudinal study, which concluded that strong social bonds to conventional settings such as school reduced problem behaviours, and vice versa. Finn's model postulates that the failure of a youngster to participate in school and class activities, or to develop a sense of affiliation, attachment, involvement, bonding and commitment to the school, may have significant negative consequences. These negative outcomes include feelings of alienation and withdrawal. This concept of alienation draws from that of Seeman (1975) which includes emotions such as powerlessness, normlessness, self-estrangement, social isolation, and cultural estrangement. Therefore, the ability to manipulate modes of participation poses promising avenues for dropout intervention efforts (Finn, 1989). However, the National Research Council (2004) would disagree with Finn here and argue that the onus is not necessarily on the student, but on the school to interest the student, after arriving, to take up varying modes of sustained participation while in school.

### 3.2.3 Models of deviance to school dropout

Some models of school dropout are based on out-of-school factors such as adolescent deviant behaviour. A number of criminological theories have suggested a link between juvenile delinquency and educational outcomes, such as dropping out. Labelling theory, as an example, focuses on the negative consequences of labelling an individual's initially and probably harmless acts of mischief as deviant, evil, delinquent, law violation by parents, teachers, peers, the larger community and the juvenile justice system (Matsueda, 1992). The theory argues that the label of being bad or evil in turn influences the self-image of the youth, who come to view themselves as bad or delinquent, which in turn fuels the likelihood of future deviance. Matsueda (1992) explains that eventually the spiralling labelling process can leave the youth stigmatized by parents and teachers, as often the label is likely to reduce opportunities or resources for 'labelled' youth (Matsueda, 1992). Sweeten (2006) observed that skipping school even for the first court appearance feeds the labelling process worse than having been arrested without having to appear in court. That is, chances of dropping out of school increase with the spiralling labelling and stigmatization of youth. This also induces deviant self-image in youth, which is not in harmony with the school or academic decorum and could foster a process of withdrawal from school.

These models focus on individual attitudes, behaviours and aspects of educational performance influencing dropping out. However, scholars in general have come to acknowledge the importance of context or settings in influencing or shaping these individuals. The following models conceptualize the institutions of family, school, and broader communities as important determinants of adolescent behaviour and development, and may determine whether he or she will complete high school or not.

### 3.2.4 The developmental behavioural science perspective

This theoretical framework to school dropout comes from the field of developmental psychology. Breaking from the traditions of adolescent developmental psychology, Jessor (1993), advocated for an interdisciplinary developmental behavioural perspective to understanding adolescent development. He argued that adolescent development cannot fully be comprehended without considering the settings within which they lived. The act of

withdrawing from school cannot be reduced to a psychological function. Context was important. He proposed a *context and development over time model*, where the settings within which the adolescent lived over time are factored in when trying to understand their development outcomes. Furthermore, the model postulates that the broader social-structural, political, economic, and cultural environment, which in turn influences the family, school, neighbourhood environments, have a bearing on the developmental path of the individual, from pre-adolescence to young adulthood. This paradigm recognizes that the various settings of contexts in which the children live all shape their attitudes, behaviours and experiences (Rumberger, 2011). Similarly, the US National Research Council Panel on High Risk Youth (1993) concluded that emphasis should also be placed on high-risk settings in which the youth live and go to school when trying to find solutions to why children prematurely leave school.

Closely related to Jessor's developmental behavioural science theory to school dropout is the life course perspective.

### 3.2.5 Life course perspective of high school dropout

Unlike the developmental behavioural science theory, the life course perspective gives increased importance to social structure. The life course perspective as modelled by Alexander et al. (2001), considers school dropout as a culmination of a lifetime process of disengagement from school. The life course theory is about analysing people's life outcomes within the historical, socio-economic and structural contexts. Alexander et al. (2001) derived their model from a long-term panel study, tracing a sample of children from first grade through to high school. The model identifies socio-economic elements at various schooling stages, and conclude that those factors measured early in children's a schooling career, can forecast dropping out in high school. This model resonates with that of Ensminger and Slusasick (1992) - *pathways to high school dropout*. Ensminger and Slusasick posit that dropping out of high school is a process that could be predicted as early first grade, based on a 12-year longitudinal study of children and their educational outcomes. In addition, Reynolds et al. (2004) propose a model that identifies several pathways to high school graduation, beginning with participation in preschool, and mediated by different factors along the way - *conceptual framework of mediation model*. This model was also derived from a

longitudinal empirical study that examined the children's participation in a preschool programme and their probability of graduation from high school 12 or so years later, all things equal.

### 3.2.6 Socio-economic perspective of school dropout

Studies such as those by Evans (2004) on childhood poverty identify a variety of family, school and community environmental factors that negatively influence the development of poor children. These studies emphasize that the institutional factors weigh on the individual in one way or another to explain eventual dropout from school. As illustrated by Evans (2004), poverty is harmful to the physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive well-being of youths and their families. The family settings where parents were able to be appropriately involved in children's academic lives were found to be beneficial to student achievement (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Moreover, these were families where parents had higher levels of education and typically not poor. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) examining the effects of neighbourhood residence on adolescent outcomes concluded that neighbourhoods with higher economic status (SES) were important determinants of achievement among adolescents while low SES and residential instability negatively affected behavioural and emotional outcomes of youth. In addition, lack of behavioural and emotional engagement is likely to affect cognitive engagement, which tends to increase the likelihood of dropout, as posited in Fredricks et al.'s (2004) model of school engagement. Therefore, the socio-economic context sets off the process of school withdrawal.

The models of school dropout so far identify a range of psychological as well as contextual or institutional (family, schools, and community) factors that influence the process of dropping out from school. The two categories of models differ in the unit of focal concern, with the models focusing on either the psychological or the social context to explain the dropout process.

Instead, Rumberger and Lim (2008) construct a model of school dropout among adolescents by drawing together, the two seemingly exclusive perspectives into an integrated framework - *the conceptual model of high school performance*.

### 3.2.7 The conceptual model of high school performance

The conceptual framework of high school performance (figure 3.1 below) considers the apparently separate psychological, social and economic perspectives of school dropout as potential predictors. The psychological background and the contextual dimensions are equally visible in the model and there is no emphasis of one dimension over another. The model views dropout from high school as a function of factors from any of these aspects. More importantly, the model identifies a dual-level group of factors that influence performance in high school – individual and institutional-level factors. The individual-level group includes mainly psychological and background factors that predict whether the student will dropout or graduate. The institutional-level group factors refer to the settings of the students. That is, the families in which they live, the schools they attend, and the social, cultural, geographic and economic profiles of the communities in which they live.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the model, grouping individual-level factors into four main domains: educational performance, behaviours, attitudes, and student's background. These domains interact in complex ways, and sometimes over long periods, to effect school dropout (Smeyers, 2006; De Witte et al, 2013). The circular multi-directional arrows between the various factors, domains and layers in figure 3.1 is an attempt to capture the complexity of the dropout process leading up to act of withdrawal from school.

The educational performance group is further divided by three inter-related factors, namely, academic achievement, educational persistence, and educational attainment. Educational achievement manifests in grades and test scores; persistence is reflected in school stability versus frequent transfers; and attainment is reflected by grade progress from earning requisite credits. This framework dimension suggests that dropping out of high school is much more likely if the student lacks achievement and tends to change schools often.

The behavioural domain consists of a range of behaviours related to educational performance. The likelihood of dropping out of school increases where students display behaviours not promoting positive educational performance. Some examples of these behaviours are discussed in the psychological perspective of dropout earlier, and include high school employment and deviance.

As elaborated on in the psychological perspective of dropout, the third domain involves individual attitude, which refers to a wide range of psychological factors. These include personal expectations of school, goal setting, and self-perceptions. That is, where the student has lower or divergent expectations, poor self-image, or feels does not belong, he or she is unlikely to adequately engage academically, achieve poorly, transfer schools more and likely drop out permanently.

Student's background is the fourth domain. It includes demographic characteristics such as the individual's health status, prior school performances, and past experiences such as participation in preschool, or after-school activities (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). A vast amount of literature has linked particular demographic sub-groups, poor health and non-participation in preschool with increased likelihood of dropping out of high school (Ensminger & Slusasick, 1992; Reynolds, et al., 2004).

The model postulates that these individual-level factors interact, in an intricate way, with institution-level factors. These institutions or contexts are families in which the students live, schools they attend and the broader communities in which they live. Family background, as reflected by the family's resources or socio-economic status (SES), is viewed as critical to the child's school success. Family's SES is typically measured by family income and parental education. The framework sees family income as resources available to support their children's education for example by enrolling them in quality schools, after-school programmes and stimulating home environment for learning. Appropriate parenting styles and other practices that provide emotional support regulate student activities, encourages independent decision-making, are viewed by the framework as facilitating academic engagement, improving school achievement and likely to reduce dropout. Structure and composition of the families are also seen as important ingredients that influence student's school participation habits, with weaker structures associated with higher dropout rates (Rumberger, 2011).

The school context factors that interact with other salient factors in the high school dropout process range from the school's social composition, its structural characteristics, resources, policies, and practices. On the contrary, social composition refers to the characteristics of students attending the school, particularly the socio-economic composition of the student body. The schools with higher SES are likely to have better teachers, academically engaged

and motivated students, and higher rate of achievement. Conversely, the structural context includes factors such as size and location of the school. Rural and inner city schools have been associated with higher rates of dropout, compared to those located in suburban areas. In addition, large schools and high student-teacher ratios are often viewed as less resourced and poorly equipped to pay appropriate attention to every student. Even for smaller schools, lack of resources, reflected in fewer and less-qualified teachers is considered important contributors to student dropout. Certain school policies and practices tend to create particular academic and social climates that in turn encourage student engagement and prevent dropout. On the other hand, policies and practices of suspensions or expulsions often applied to students with poor grades, poor attendance, misdemeanours, grade repeaters or those over-age, can facilitate permanent dropout from school by the school.

In addition to families and schools, the framework asserts that certain community characteristics can influence withdrawal from or encourage persistence in school. For example, disadvantaged communities with no recreational resources, low quality neighbourhood typified by widespread high levels of poverty, can negatively affect adolescent development (Crane, 1991; Clark, 1992; Brooks-Gunn et al, 1993; Jessor, 1993). In addition, communities experiencing high employment rates and favourable wages for high school dropouts, or low employment rates or low economic returns for graduates can influence dropout rates. Therefore, negative peer influences in the community, for example, where students have dropouts as friends are likely to dropout themselves (Rumberger, 2011).

### **3.3 A brief evaluation of the theoretical models in the context of this study**

The review of the theoretical frameworks above indicates that large part of the debate, the earlier perspectives on why and how students dropped out of school, was essentially informed by a particular kind of psychological rationale.

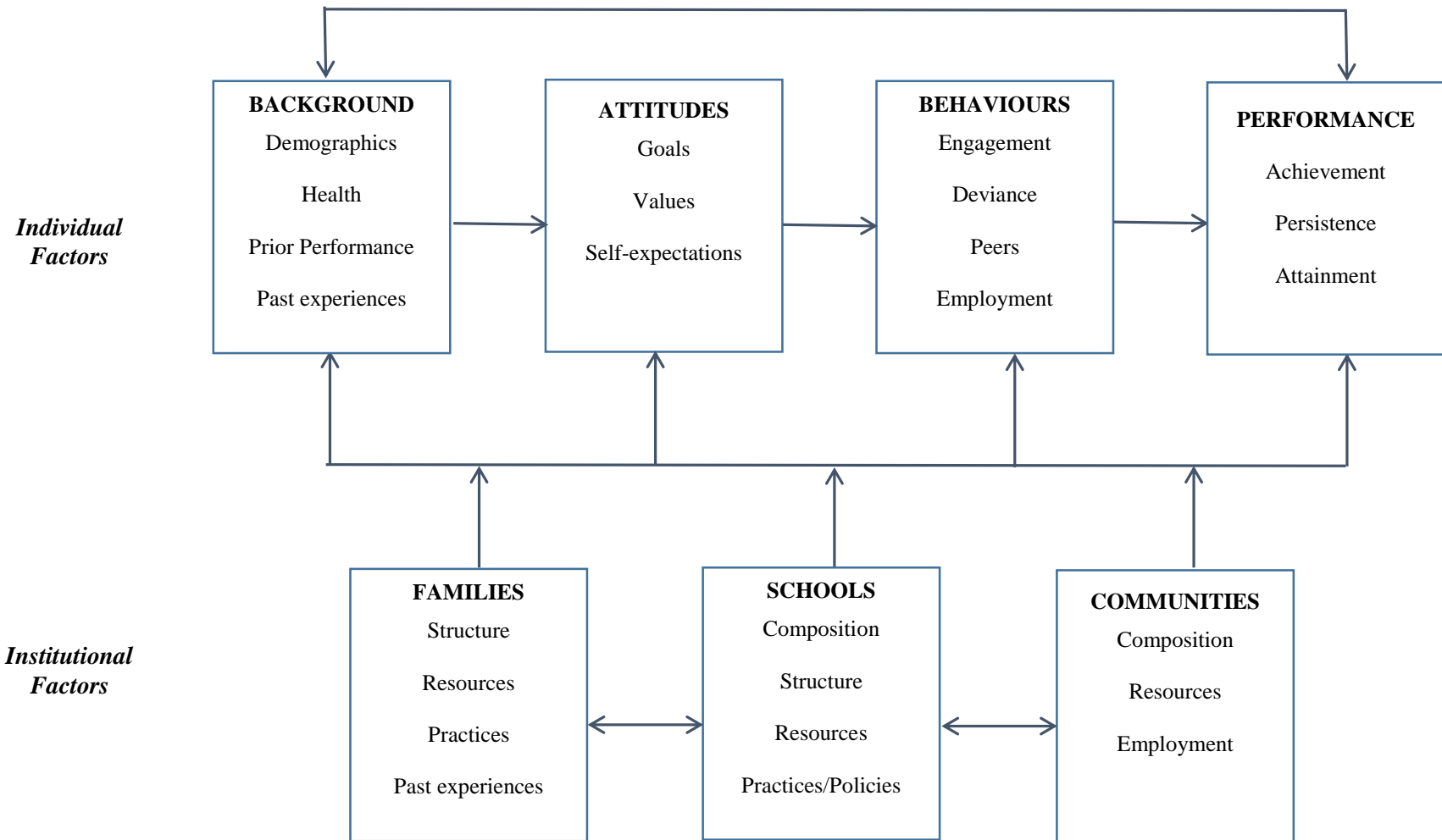
As illustrated by the school membership and academic engagement models, frustration-self esteem, participation-identification, and the deviance models, school dropout is a function of intra-self incongruence or conflict or between self and the school. That is, the research typically focused on psychological-level variables that were believed to mediate between the individual and the school, or those variables that predispose individuals for a misfit with the schooling environment, leading to dropout. Discipline bias means that these models do not

venture beyond individual traits in the quest to understand dropout, which is an obvious limitation.

The developmental behavioural science model (Jessor, 1993) begins to acknowledge the influence of social settings in the adolescent's development, including whether he or she completes school, but still emphasizes individual-level aspects to explain dropout. On the contrary, the life course perspective models of dropout tend to emphasize the historical, socio-economic contexts over the psychological aspects. The historical-sociological predisposition of these models in explaining dropout is in a way a limitation, as it means potential individual-level attributes related to dropout are overlooked.

Rumberger and Lim's (2008) model of high school performance, which is a pragmatist approach to understanding why students drop out of high school, is devoid of any disciplinary allegiance, but eclectic in nature. The integrative nature of the framework considers dropping out of high school as a function of intricate interactions of individual and institutional-level factors, over long periods. What appears to be the strength of this model could be argued as its weakness in that it tends to include everything, out there possible – across all disciplines. The theoretical models reviewed are useful and important in identifying and explaining characteristics of school dropout. The psychology-inclined frameworks identify dropout attributes, some of which were evident in the cases that were explored in the current study. The current study's entry point, however, was the Census 2011 data and was interested in the sociological issues and the geographical questions, as covered in the census survey. This study looks at issues related to older adolescent dropouts and their connection to the broader societal context, and how these connections could explain school dropout patterns. In addition, the qualitative data from the multiple case studies are used to further explain the relationships between the issues raised in the census data and school dropout.

**Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model of High School Performance**

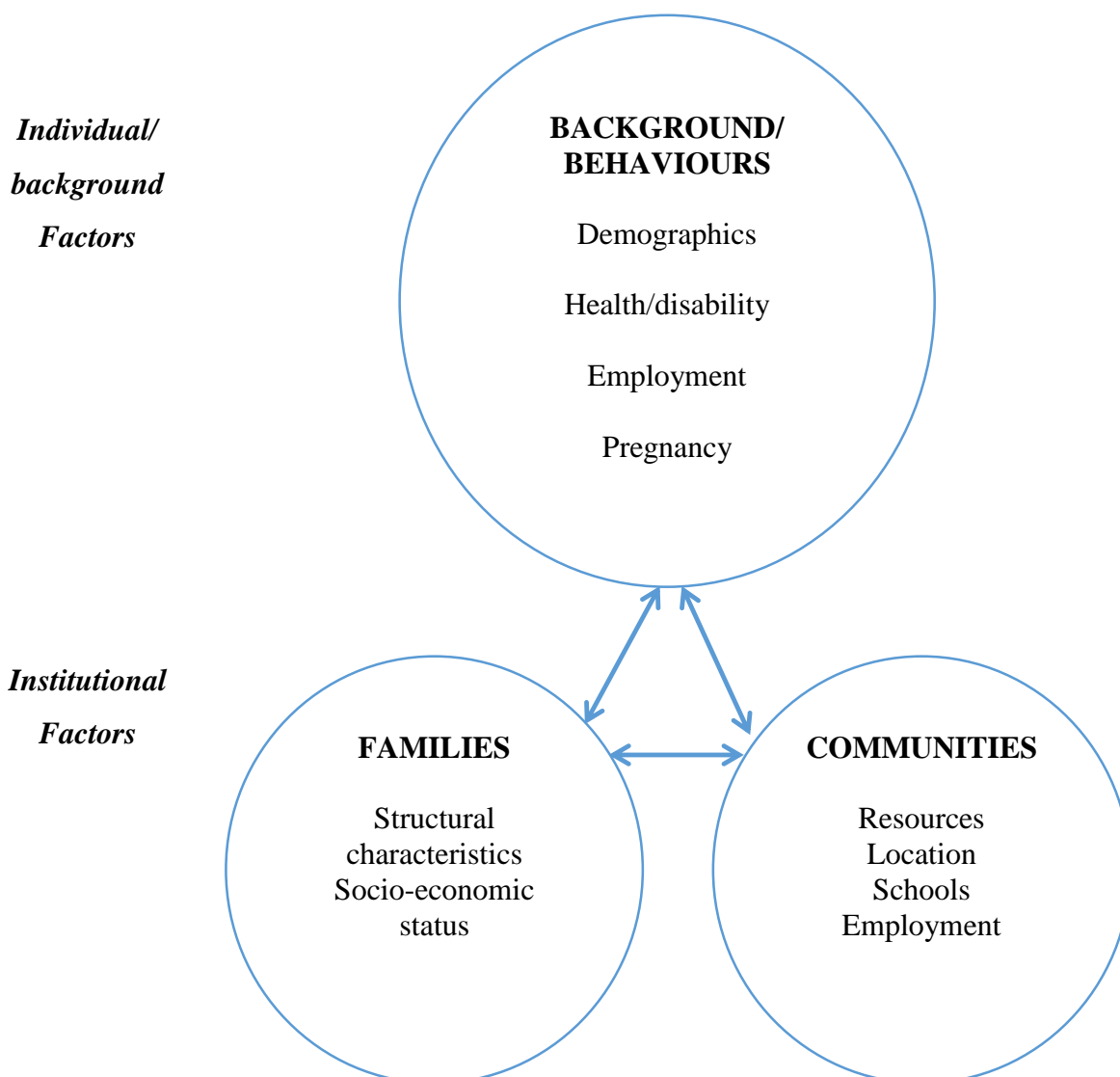


Source: Rumberger, R. W., & Lim, S.A. (2008). Why Students Drop Out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research. California Project Report: University of California

### **3.4 The working model for this study**

The framework adopted here does not intend to cover psychological-level issues and their possible connections to school dropout among older adolescents. It is a socio-demographic lens to school dropout, where individual background, family and community settings are seen to determine dropout. Rumberger and Lim's (2008) framework is comprehensive and identifies extensive range of psychosocial concepts that explain school dropout, and serves as foundation for my study. Nevertheless, I only use some of these concepts as captured in the Census 2011 survey instrument and use the qualitative interviews from the case studies to explain dropout (see figure 3.2 below).

**Figure 3.2: The study working model**



**Adapted from:** Rumberger, R. W., & Lim, S.A. (2008). Why Students Drop Out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research. California Project Report: University of California

The model considers school dropout to be influenced at individual as well as institution (family and community) levels. However, this is not to suggest that the weight of individual-level factors equals that of family and community together. The double-pointed circular arrows between individual, family and community factors suggest that school dropout is a result of complex and intricate interactions between them, often over a long period of time. However, attempting to extricate the effects of the factors by means of ever more sophisticated statistical modelling may prove near-impossible, and perhaps not always worth the effort (Rumberger, 2004; Smeyers, 2006; De Witte et al, 2013).

At the individual level, the model considers demographic or background factors of gender and race to predict school dropout. Having a disability also increases the risk of dropping out. Also at individual level, the model asserts behaviours such as employment during high school and teenage pregnancy influence the decision to leave school. If employment during high school is too intensive and stressful, the risk of dropping out is higher. In addition, if a student gets pregnant during high school, she is much more likely to drop out.

The individual-level attributes related to high rates of dropout should be viewed in the context of families within which they live. As the framework (figure 3.2) illustrates, school dropout can be better understood alongside institution-level factors such as family structure and resources. The model views certain family structural characteristics such as parental survival, relationship to the household head, family size to interact with individual-risk factors to increase the likelihood of dropout, and vice versa. Family resources or standard of living is also theorized to influence school dropout. The resources include employment status of the household head and family income. The model hypothesizes that employed household heads and higher income interact with individual-level factors to reduce the risk of school dropout and vice versa.

In turn, the individual and family characteristics cannot be viewed separate from the broader communities in which they are embedded (Reich & Young, 1975). Poorly resourced, no or low income communities are suggested to interact with family and individual-level characteristics to explain higher dropout rates among older adolescents. In addition, the model views communities which provide employment to adolescents during high school to contribute to their eventual withdrawal from school. The model asserts interactions between individual and institution-level factors, represented by double-pointed arrows between community, family and individual background factors (see figure 3.2) to influence school participation patterns of older adolescents. For example, community job market trends can interact with family's socio-economic status or background and individual's gender to explain the older adolescent's decision to continue school or drop out (Entwisle et al., 2004; Entwisle et al., 2005). In addition, the geographical location of families, interacting with community labour market dynamics can influence school dropout patterns (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Tickamyer, 2000; Schafer & Hori, 2006, Ballas, et al, 2012; Wilkinson et al, 2009).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The chapter has looked at a select theoretical literature on school dropout that was, for some time, predominated by the psychological orientation of the phenomenon. The psychological perspective focused on identifying personal traits and behaviours that were at conflict with or hindering their success at school. While the importance of psychological models of dropout is underscored, this orientation was not adopted in this study. Also reviewed in the chapter were conceptual frameworks that acknowledged the importance of institutions of family, school and broader community in understanding school dropout. Frameworks that not only acknowledge but view socio-economic contexts, especially over the student's life course as primary predictors of dropout from school. A comprehensive conceptual model that framed school dropout as a function of both individual and contextual factors was also evaluated, and was selected as a theoretical underpinning for the current study. The adapted model used here considers school dropout as explained by interactions between background factors, as well as family and community-related factors.

Next, I discuss the methodological approaches and procedures adopted for the current study.

## CHAPTER 4 – THE RESEARCH DESIGN

### 4.1 Introduction

The study was animated by the research question: *What is the prevalence, geographic distribution and socio-demographic profile of older adolescents dropping out of school in South Africa?* In order to answer the research question, I discuss the broad approach to how I conceptualised my research. This leads me to discuss the rationale for using the mixed methods approach adopted in this study. From the broad mixed methods approach, I discuss the particular approach I used and the rationale for doing so. My approach to mixed methods is a unique sequential explanatory design. This chapter outlines the sequential explanatory design procedures followed in conducting the study. The chapter begins by exploring the rationale for the mixed methods approach, and sequential explanatory procedures in particular. The two phases of the mixed methods design, the quantitative and qualitative, are then discussed in detail.

### 4.2 Mixed Methods Design

This study is located within the *pragmatist research paradigm*. The pragmatist view to research is that the researcher could collect every possible data, using whatever approaches or methods at their disposal, if the nature of the research question warrants such (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This study design adopts the view that, qualitative and quantitative methods are not from inherently differing and mutually exclusive research paradigms, and therefore supports the view that the differences between the traditions have been exaggerated, and the overlaps ignored (Ponterotto, et al, .2013; Bryman, 1988). The current study, in pursuit of comprehensiveness in answering the research question, adopted the mixed methods approach, where the quantitative Census 2011 data was analysed and the results from which were complemented by qualitative data and findings from a multiple-case study. The mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods to data collection, analysing and interpretation should be in such a way that it is likely to result in complementary strengths. The latter should offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research and thus resulting in a superior product than the mono-method studies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In other words, the research

question is better answered or the investigation is more complete when methods and or data sources are triangulated, yielding convergent, complementary and corroborating results (Greene et al, 1989; Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

In a mixed methods approach, the researcher builds the knowledge on pragmatic grounds. The researcher takes “what works” and build knowledge in the same study, regardless of whether it is quantitative or qualitative (Howe, 1988). Therefore, the quantitative and qualitative are not treated as mutually exclusive alternatives, to choose from, but seen as compatible and can be jointly used, sequentially or concurrently for a better understanding of a research problem (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The quantitative phase of the study is characterised by typical positivist tendencies, where the researcher, informed by the literature, isolates variables to analyse for potential relationship with dependent variable such school dropout (Ivankova, 2004). The researcher uses numerical data based on clearly predefined categories of independent variables for analysis of their potential influence on school dropout patterns (Wheeldon, 2010). In addition, the researcher also collects qualitative data through procedures such as in-depth interviews and observation, in line with the interpretivist philosophy to research. Qualitative data is generally based on themes that emerge from the open-ended interviews and observations (Creswell, 2005). Furthermore, he maintains that the use of both quantitative and qualitative data, regardless of their seemingly incompatible orientation, is on the pragmatic grounds – a more complete view than would have been achieved with any of one method alone. Given the existing South African literature on school dropout, which is generally either quantitative or qualitative in nature, the internal examiners suggested that I modify my study design to consider both quantitative and qualitative, with the quantitative Census data providing the overview of the school dropout phenomenon, triangulated with qualitative data for corroboration and explanation. More specifically, the mixed methods approach adopted in this study was the explanatory-sequential design, discussed in detail below.

### **4.3 Mixed Methods Sequential Explanatory Design**

The overall purpose of the explanatory-sequential mixed methods design is to use a qualitative phase to explain the initial quantitative results (Creswell et al, 2003). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) indicate that an explanatory-sequential design could be chosen when you want to assess the identified trends and relationships with qualitative data, but also be able to

explain the mechanism or reasons behind the resultant trends (see figure 4.1). There are typical explanatory-sequential design procedures, and they say:

*First, the researcher designs and implements a quantitative phase that includes collecting, analysing quantitative data. Then the researcher connects to a second phase by identifying specific quantitative results that call for additional explanation and using these results to guide development of the qualitative phase. Third, researcher implements the qualitative phase by collecting and analysing qualitative data. And lastly, the researcher interprets to what extent and in what ways the qualitative results explain and add insight into the quantitative results and what overall is learned in response to the study's purpose (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).*

In the current study, the researcher conducted a quantitative analysis of the Census 2011 data, and this analysis threw up a completely new series of issues and questions that I had not necessarily anticipated. The geographic analysis of school dropout, a key aspect of the study, yielded surprising and fascinating spatial distribution patterns of school dropout. Interesting relationships between school dropout and some of the selected socio-demographic variables such as teenage pregnancy were also revealed. On the contrary, the qualitative phase of the study was designed to follow-up on these intriguing results for deeper explanation. The explanatory-sequential design facilitated the study's attempt to answer the central research question in that, not only did the design provide a general sense of the phenomenon, but went further to establish potential reasons behind the identified patterns. In particular, the identified spatial distribution patterns of school dropout informed the selection of the cases sites for the qualitative phase of the study, the multiple case studies that followed. In addition, the quantitative analysis of the selected socio-demographic variables threw up peculiar relationships, which necessitated further interrogation in the case studies to find out what the relationships actually meant. Text-rich data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews to try making sense of the trends and relationships from the statistical results, in the multiple case study design that ensued.

That is, the quantitative methods and techniques were used to determine the prevalence of school dropout in the country (research sub-question 1). Quantitative techniques were further used to map the spatial distribution patterns of school dropout in the country (sub-question 2). Lastly, the quantitative procedures were used to determine relationships between the selected

socio-demographic variables and school (sub-question 3). The follow-up, the multiple case studies, explored the statistical relationships for meaning (research sub-question 3).

One important aspect of the explanatory-sequential design is when and how the quantitative and qualitative phases are integrated (Creswell et al., 2003). The integration between the two phases happened in the discussion section where the outcomes of the two phases were interpreted, with conclusions drawn. Here, the researcher interpreted and drew inferences from the separate quantitative and qualitative phases of the study as well as across the two phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). How the quantitative results and the qualitative findings answered the research question was interpreted here. However, important from these discussions is, “In what ways do the qualitative findings help explain the quantitative results”? That is, how do the qualitative findings help us make sense of the statistical relationships revealed in the quantitative phase, and if the findings provide a better understanding of school dropout among older adolescents in the country, that would the quantitative results have done on their own. Used together, the qualitative and quantitative procedures complement each other to provide a more textured picture of the school dropout problem, and practical, meaningful application of the results (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Creswell and colleagues (2003) also confirm that mixed method studies by design are triangulated and therefore, can partially overcome deficiencies that flow from using one method (see figure 4.1).

As figure 4.1 illustrates the quantitative phase of the study primarily reveals the spatial distribution patterns of school dropout, as well as the associated socio-demographic factors, based on the Census 2011 dataset. The data analysis in this phase employed basic descriptive statistical techniques. The results of the statistical analysis then informed the purposeful selection of case study sites to follow-up on results of interest. Therefore, the qualitative phase was only implemented after the quantitative results were established, represented by one-directional arrows from the quantitative phase of the qualitative phase. Interview protocol was developed and qualitative data was collected. This was followed by qualitative data analysis. The outcomes of the two phases were discussed together and connected results interpreted (see figure 4.1).

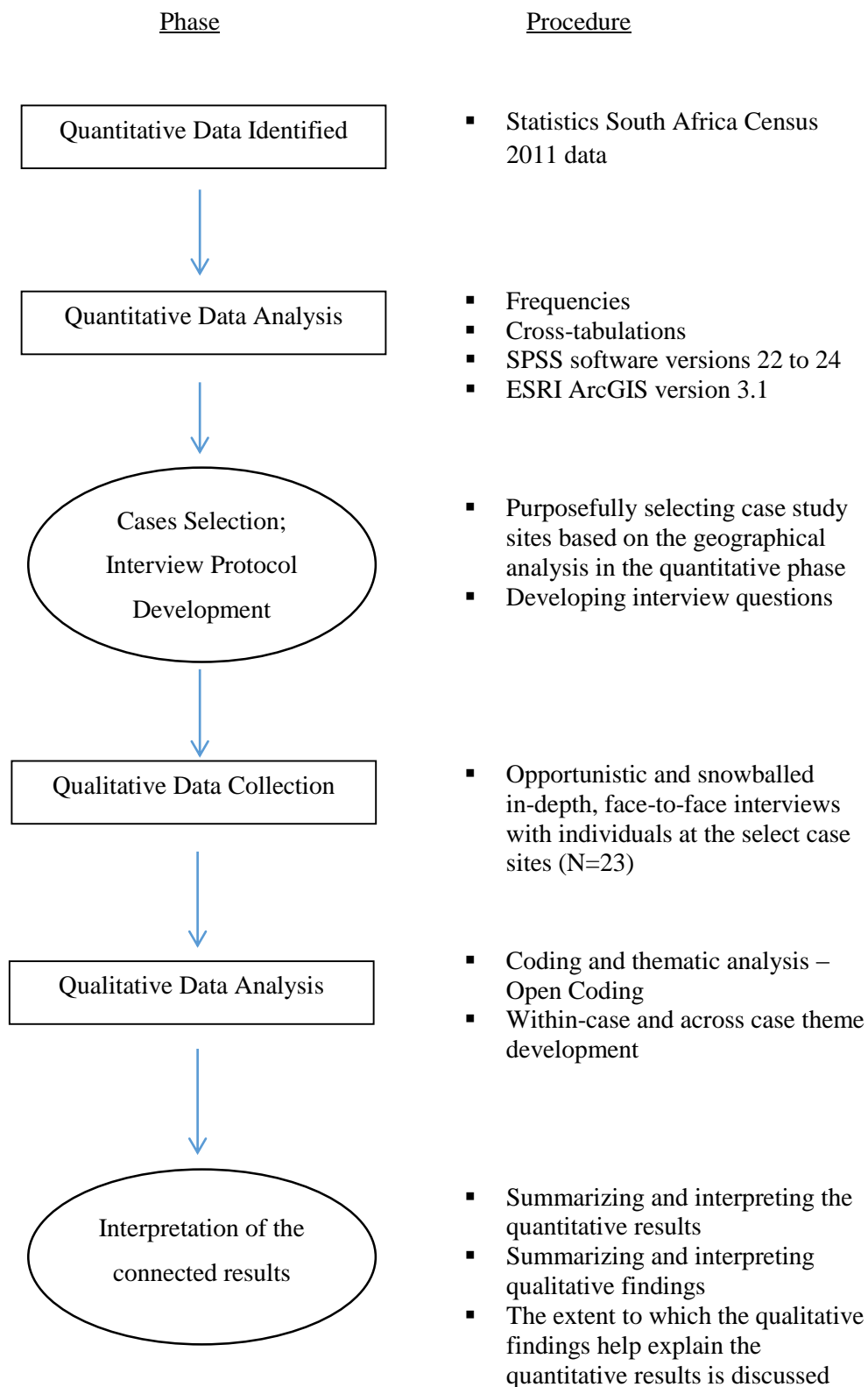
Like most variants of mixed methods, this study designs could be critiqued as lacking ideological or advocacy position. The study’s sequential-explanatory design nature has at its

centre the need for deeper and more complete understanding of the school dropout phenomenon, and not necessarily agitated by a transformative agenda (Hanson et al, 2005).

However, one major drawback of the two-phased explanatory sequential design employed here was that it took long and was costly to implement. The qualitative data collection required extended travelling, incurring car rental, flight, and lodging costs in the process (Green & Caracelli, 1997; Creswell, 2011).

The two phases of the Mixed Methods Sequential Explanatory Design are discussed in detail below.

**Figure 4.1: Visual representation of the Mixed Methods Sequential Explanatory**



Source: Adapted from Clark, V. P., & Creswell, J. W. 2011

## 4.4 The quantitative phase of the study

### 4.4.1 Secondary data analysis

In the first quantitative phase, the researcher conducted an analysis of the Statistics South Africa Census 2011 data to, firstly, ascertain the extent or prevalence of school dropout in the country among the older adolescents (16-18 year olds), at the time of the survey (research sub-question 1). Secondly, the analysis sought to map the geographical distribution patterns of school dropout among the older adolescents (research sub-question 2). Lastly, the analysis intended to identify socio-demographic characteristics of youth dropping out of school before completing grade twelve (research sub-question 3).

Secondary data analysis procedures to research are defined as analysing data that have been collected by some other organization, group, or individual at some prior time (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The approach involves analysing existing data to answer a new research question with a different purpose. In this case, the researcher explored a new research question with a different focus to those of the Census 2011. The census data covered sociological issues and geographical questions of interest to the current study. The data allowed the interrogation of issues pertinent to this study and provided opportunities to answer the central research question.

Given that the researcher was interested in the spatial mapping and profiling of school dropout across the country, the investigation was only possible using comprehensive data such as the census. Otherwise, the researcher would not have afforded the time, costs and expertise for undertaking data collection of census magnitude (Boslough, 2007; Smith, 2008). While the census data allowed for determination of the general picture of school dropout among older adolescents, it was also exhaustive enough to conduct analysis for localised patterns of the phenomenon. The scale of the data brought about greater flexibility in examining identified subgroups, improved reliability and generally, credible results” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In line with the pursuit of answers to the research sub-question two, the nature and size of the census data allowed the researcher to drill down to the local level to map patterns of school dropout. The census data also provided information on small areas and population groups with minimum sampling errors, which is important for example, in the planning the location of a school (Statistics South Africa,

2012). The availability of local-level enabled the researcher to analyse and determine spatial distribution patterns of school dropout at local level, yielding information potentially useful for consideration in policy refinements and/ or for programmatic inputs. The expertise that is usually involved in the generation of census data is associated with higher degree of quality, and subsequently, the findings that result from secondary analyses may well have a higher degree of validity and reliability (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The secondary analysis enabled the researcher to determine the age specific and spatial distribution patterns of school dropout among older adolescents, as well identifying characteristics associated with them, which is the key focus of this study.

#### 4.4.2 Census 2011 Dataset

Census 2011 survey was carried out in South Africa between 10 and 31 October 2011. The 2011 Census, in line with the United Nations definition, is “the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analysing and publishing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, at a specified time, to all persons in a country or a well-defined part of the country” (Statistics South Africa, 2012). The purpose of the 2011 population Census exercise was essentially to aid in public administration, and to ensure equitable distribution of government services. The dataset is comprehensive for purposes of this study as it is national in nature and yet provides disaggregated data on all possible parameters about the older adolescents (16 to 18 year olds), that is, the study’s target group of interest. This allowed for analysis of the quantum of school dropout among this age cohort, the spatial distribution patterns of the phenomenon, and the identifiable factors associated with the dropouts. The socio-demographic data from Statistics South Africa was freely available for public use and the associated shape files were used for the spatial analysis purposes of this study.

#### 4.4.3 The technical aspects of the census design

The census was designed to count everyone in the country at the specific time of the survey. The critical success factors of the census in relation to results quality was demarcation of the country into enumeration areas. This was done by creating a spatial register from the listing of households, residential and non-residential structures. The current demarcations and

enumerator areas were validated and concerted investigation into quality of existing maps and listing methodologies was conducted (Statistics South Africa, 2012). The other critical success factor for quality data was the proper construction of the data collection instruments. The Census 2011 questionnaire was redesigned based on the revision of the previous censuses in 1996, 2001 and Community Survey 2007, coupled with review of best international practices in census questionnaire design. After conducting rigour tests for bias, confounding and statistical precision on statistically selected sample, the questionnaire was finalised (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

Data processing tools were firstly piloted and calibrated for accurate capturing and processing of information contained in the census questionnaires. Calibration for optimum quality was done at receipt of questionnaires, at the scanning and by use of visual character recognition techniques (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

#### 4.4.4 Survey Instrument and the Variables

The census was collected through a questionnaire, which was mainly administered by the field workers. In contrast, provision was made for individuals to complete the questionnaire on their own should they so wish. The use of trained fieldworkers in administering the questionnaire was specifically to relieve the cognitive burden self-administered questionnaires could place on respondents (Bowling, 2005).

Furthermore, Bowling (2005) posits that least burdensome method of questionnaire administration is the personal, face-to-face interview as this only requires the respondent to speak the same language in which the questions are asked, and to have basic verbal and listening skills. Moreover, with the cognitive burden lifted from the respondent, this mode of questionnaire administration should have positive effects on data quality, particularly in terms of population coverage and response rate, she argues.

The census questionnaire was a result of a concerted effort to design and produce, among other things, a relevant and unambiguous data gathering instrument. The questionnaire design was preceded by dedicated research in instrument design, and subsequently, testing the design layout and format through sample-based statistical research (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Steps were taken to determine and ensure optimum calibration of quality controls in the

printing of the questionnaires. Lastly, piloting the questionnaire which included qualitative follow-up surveys to assess the overall acceptability of individual questions were tested (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

The survey questionnaire provides data on the outcome variable of school dropout among the youth between 16-18 years (older adolescents) in the country. The dependent variable is derived from a number of variables. Together, they (variables) ascertained that the individual highest level of education was below Grade 12 and that he or she was not attending school at the time of the survey. The survey covered a wide range of socio-demographic (individual, family and the broader community) attributes that could be investigated for their potential relationship with of school dropout among older adolescents.

#### 4.4.5 The dependent variable: School dropout

It was of interest to this study to determine whether the youth in the 16-18 age group were school dropouts or not. Although it was not a legal requirement for this age group to be attending school, a myriad of studies have documented the negative outcomes associated with dropping out before completing high school (Stark & Noel, 2015; Hall & De Lannoy, 2013; Eurofound, 2012). School dropout is a composite categorical outcome variable, constructed from a number of variables in section E of the Census 2011 data collection instrument (see figure 4.2 below). Firstly, question P17 of the survey instrument, which sets out to determine whether the person was currently *attending an educational institution or not* was the first constituent variable in the building of the study's dependent variable. Secondly, question P20 which sought to determine the highest level of education that the person has completed was added as a condition. School dropouts were those who had an education level below Grade 12 (question P20), and were not attending an educational institution (question P17). So, school dropout (the dependent variable), was constructed as non-attendance of any educational institution by all 16-18 year olds and had not completed Grade 12 (or matric) or the derived education level of below 5, at the time of the census (Statistics South Africa, 2012a).

**Figure 4.2: Dependent variable as a composite index based on questions P17 and P20 of the Census 2011 instrument**

**SECTION E: EDUCATION • ASK OF ALL PERSONS AGED 5 YEARS AND OLDER LISTED ON THE FLAP**

**P-17 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

Does (*name*) presently attend an educational institution?

1=Yes

2=No

3= Do not know

*Attendance includes all part-time and full- time studies, whether in person or as a distance learner. If 2-3, Go to P-20*

**P-20 LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

What is the highest level of education that (*name*) has completed?

98 =No schooling

00=Grade 0

01 =Grade 1/Sub A

02 =Grade 2/Sub B

03 =Grade 3/Std 1/ABET 1

(Kha Ri Gude,SANLI)

04 =Grade 4/Std 2

05 =Grade 5/Std 3/ABET 2

06 =Grade 6/Std 4

07 =Grade 7/Std 5/ ABET 3

*If 98 or 00 Go to P-22*

08 =Grade 8/Std 6/ Form 1

09 = Grade 9/Std 7/Form/ABET 4

10= Grade 10/Std 8/Form 3

11 =Grade 11/Std 9/Form 4

12 = Grade 12/Std 10 /Form 5

13 =NTC I/N1/ NIC/(V) Level2

14 =NTCIIIN2/ NIC/(V) Level3

15 =NTCIIIIN3/NIC/(V) Level4

16 =N4/NTC 4

17=NSINTC5

18= N6INTC6

19 =Certificate with

less than Grade

12/Std10

20 =Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10

21 = Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10

22 =Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10

23 = Higher Diploma

24 = Post Higher Diploma (Masters,

DoctoralDiploma)

25 = Bachelors degree

26 = Bachelors degree and Post graduate

diploma

27 = Honours degree

28 = Higher degree (Masters/PhD)

29 =Other

#### 4.4.6 The independent variables

Informed by theoretical and empirical literature as discussed in Chapter 2, geographic or spatial layers and a range of socio-demographic variables were selected for examination for their potential relationship with school dropout. Census 2011 spatial layers of Province, district and local municipalities were analysed for patterns and trends in the distribution of school dropout among older adolescents.

Individual characteristics of age, gender, and teenage pregnancy, employment during high school, disability status, and race membership were analysed for association with school dropout.

Census 2011 also covers host of different institutional or contextual variables related to family and the broader community. Many of these relate to material conditions or family resources, which are widely indicated as socio-economic status (SES). SES is typically constructed as a composite index based on several measures including occupational status of parents and family income (Rumberger, 2011). Out of tens of different measures, I select employment status of the household head and family income as measures of the family's SES. Thereafter, I assess their potential association with on school dropout (see figure 4.3). Family structure, as defined in Chapter 2, is also a composite index that was analysed for its potential relationship with school dropout. Family structural characteristics including parental survival, relationship with the household head, gender of the household head, age of the household head and household membership size are assessed for connection with older adolescent school dropout.

At the broader macro level, community living standards represented by access to piped water, access to sanitation services (Statistics South Africa, 2014b) and local job market trends and employment rates were appraised for influence school dropout patterns.

**Figure 4.3: Family socio-economic status as a composite index based on employment status of household head and level of income**

SECTION F:EMPLOYMENT -ASK OF ALL PERSONS AGED 15 YEARS AND OLDER LISTED ON THE FLAP

P-23 EMPLOYMENT STATUS

*(Answer all three questions and then follow the skip instruction below)*

In the SEVEN DAYS before 10 October ... P-23a	In the SEVEN DAYS before 10 October ... P-23b	In the SEVEN DAYS before 10 October ... P-23c
Did (name) work for a wage, salary, commission or any payment in kind (Including paid domestic work), even if it was for only one hour?	Did (name) run or do any kind of business, big or small, for herself/himself or with one or more partners, even if it was for only one hour?	Did (name) help without being paid in any kind of business run by her/his household, even if it was for only one hour?
1 =Yes 2=No 3 = Do not know	1 =Yes 2=No 3 = Do not know	1 =Yes 2=NO 3 = Do not know
Mark the appropriate circle with an X	Mark the appropriate circle with an X	Mark the appropriate circle with an X

*If 1 (Yes) to any of P-23a, P-23b or P-23c, Go to P-29a*

P-161INCOME CATEGORY

What is the income category that best describes the gross monthly or annual income of (name) before deductions and including all sources of income?

Monthly	Annual
01 = No income	No income
02 = R1 - R400	R 1R4800
03 = R401 - R800	R4 801 - R9 600
04 = R801 - R1 600	R9 601 - R19 200
05 = R1 601 - R3 200	R19 201 - R38 400
06 = R3 201 - R6 400	R38 401 - R76 800
07 = R6 401 - R12 800	R76 801 - R153 600
08 = R12 801 - R25 600	R153 601 - R307 200
09 = R25 601 - R51 200	R307 201 - R614 400
10 = R51 201 - R102 400	R614 401 - R1 228 800
11 = R102 401 - R204 800	R1228 801 - R2 457 600
12 = R204 801 or more	R2 457 601 or more

*Gross income should include s/1 sources of Income e.g. Social grants, UIF, remittances, rentals, investments, sales or products, services, etc.*

Source: Statistics South Africa, 2012, Census 2011 survey instrument

#### 4.4.7 Data Analyses

The researcher used SPSS software and ESRI GIS software to conduct the descriptive and spatial analyses in the study. First, I conducted a frequencies analysis to determine the prevalence of school dropout among the target group. The national prevalence of school dropout was determined as the proportion of older adolescent (16 to 18 year olds) population not attending school and not having completed Grade 12 at the time of the survey. The dependent variable was then cross-tabulated by the country's Provinces, district, local municipalities to determine the rates (percentages) and patterns of school dropout. The frequencies and cross-tabulation results were then fed into GIS for spatial analysis. The GIS used mainly the *symbolology* tool to find and visualize distribution patterns of school dropout at different spatial layers. Furthermore, the dependent variable was cross-tabulated with a range of selected socio-demographic variables to identify their association with school dropout. The relationships between school dropout and the various socio-demographic variables were then described to identify associations.

#### 4.4.8 Limitations, Validity and Reliability Issues with Census 2011 data

Sample-based statistical research techniques were used to test the census instrument for reliability, and the instrument was further piloted to ensure internal consistency (Statistics South Africa (2012)).

An undercount of 14.6% was reported. It was about five percentage points higher than expected. However, the data were adjusted to compensate for the undercount through the post-enumeration survey (Statistics South Africa, 2012). The Statistics Quality Council concurred that the dataset was fit for use at policy level, but advised to exercise caution at small area level. However, respected demographers, Moultrie and Dorrington (2012), warned that the sample for the post-enumeration survey was too small, raising questions about the data adjustment process, and therefore the credibility of the Census 2011 data itself. They argued that the inconsistencies and anomalies in both individual and households counts between the census data and the mid-year population estimates (July, 2011 and July, 2013) prior and after the census, pointed to poor data adjustment process and techniques, owing to the relatively small post-enumeration sample. They argued that the uncertainties are much

greater at provincial level than officially presented, but even more so at sub-area and subgroup levels. Some Provinces, they argue, have seen improbable rises in population share. Provinces such as the Western Cape and Gauteng saw sharp increases in population share while the Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal experienced questionable decline in their shares. There were also specific concerns around possible over-counting in the 0-4 age cohort which was improbably bigger than the cohort just above, a notable deviation from the previous estimates. The over-estimation of under-fives population segment could be attributed to errors or false responses around the question of country of birth for foreigners, with parents or guardians falsely reporting their children as having been born in the country (Moultrie & Dorrington, 2012). The critiques argue that the discrepancies point to possible inaccuracies, which in turn have serious implications to the division of the national revenue and spending on public obligations such as education.

Any inaccuracies in the estimation of the 16-18 year population segment would affect the accuracy of estimations of school dropout, an important aspect of this study. In addition, if there were inaccurate estimations of provincial population shares, like it has been claimed, the study's determination of spatial distribution patterns of school dropout would also be affected accordingly.

The Census 2011 may be flawed and has been sensibly criticized from a number of quarters. Nonetheless, it still provides the most comprehensive opportunity to answer the central question, certainly much more comprehensive than representative community or general household surveys. The slight shifts in estimates would have little bearing for this study's quest to determine the size, distribution as well as identify the characteristics of older adolescent dropouts, given the ample size of the study population. Nonetheless, caution has to be exercised when interpreting the extent and geographic distribution of dropout. Confident conclusions on the extent, geographic distribution and characteristics of older adolescent school dropouts in the country can be drawn.

## **4.5 The qualitative phase of the study**

This study is a mixed methods design. Unlike many other mixed methods designs that were either parallel or strictly sequential explanatory, there was a particular way that this qualitative phase of the study was conducted. Typical sequential explanatory approaches are designed to follow-up with a smaller and often qualitative sample of the same individuals from the quantitative phase to explain the results. In this study, which was initially designed to be only quantitative, the qualitative phase was only invoked and designed after startling results were revealed by the spatial and socio-demographic analysis, that is, a unique approach to the Mixed Methods Sequential Explanatory Design. From purposefully selected case study sites, informed by the spatial distribution patterns of school dropout, in-depth interviews were conducted with opportunistically sampled individuals. In this section, I explain the procedures followed to implement the multiple case studies.

### **4.5.1 A multiple-case study design**

A multiple-case study design was employed for collecting, analysing and interpreting data, which hopefully would help explain the quantitative results. The multiple-case study design provided an opportunity to examine, in-depth, the nature of the astounding associations revealed in the quantitative analysis. More importantly, the case studies were intended to generate detailed data on the identified factors that peculiarly associated with school dropout, from the purposefully selected study sites. The use of case study research is suitable when investigators hope to uncover contextual or complex conditions and rely on multiple sources of evidence, not only singular sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). The multiple-case study design provided for more insights into the school dropout phenomenon than a single case would have, making the findings and interpretations more compelling (Merriam, 1998). The use of multiple cases in this study could potentially shed deeper insights and textured understanding of the general patterns of the school dropout phenomenon identified in the statistical analysis (Stake, 1998).

This multiple-case study was comprised of 23 cases located in contexts characterized by high prevalence of school dropout as identified earlier. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews as well through observations by the researcher. Each case, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) should be characterized by boundedness.

That is, the case is bounded by place, time and participant characteristics. Each case was studied and described separately, in-depth, before cross-case thematic comparisons were drawn (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; de Vaus, 2006).

#### 4.5.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for the case study was young adults who, at and around the time of the Census 2011 survey were not attending any educational institution and had not completed his or her secondary school (school dropouts). A number of these young adults were analysed within their family and community contexts. Furthermore, family and community contexts were analysed for a more complete understanding of the individual's school dropout circumstances. De Vaus (2006) posits that the full picture in all its complexity would be obtained if we collect information from a wide range of associated elements.

The information was obtained from the school dropouts themselves, as well as information from or about the family, where possible. General community characteristics such as access to basic infrastructure and services, as well as labour market dynamics were also collected. Key informants such as development workers, politicians and residents were interviewed to gather community-level aspects that could associate with school dropout among the youth. The triangulated approach allowed for collecting comprehensive data on the nature and processes of school dropout by each individual case. At the end of his project to understand perceptions about an AIDS Treatment Programme in the Eastern Cape Province, Steinberg (2008) concluded that he better understood when all the doctors, the community workers, the target patients, the actual patients and the traditional healers told the story.

The supplementary interviews with family and different community stakeholders provided a window of understanding into the socio-cultural mosaic within which school dropout takes place. This helped to make better sense of the quantitative results of the study.

#### 4.5.3 Case selection

The rationale and purpose for studying a case has profound bearing on the final selection of a case. The purpose for studying a case could be intrinsic, instrumental or collective (Stake,

1998). Some researchers, he says, study cases because they want better understanding of that particular case, not because the case represents other cases. In contrast, others studied a case to provide insight into typical cases elsewhere – the purpose is instrumental. Closely related to instrumental case studies is the collective study or the study of multiple cases in order to inquire about the population or general condition. Manifested in the research question, which was to understand the profile of school dropout among youths, the use of multiple cases to explore the identified relationships could enrich the process better than using a single case only.

Cases can be selected to represent some population of cases with the phenomenon of interest observable in the selected cases representing the phenomenon generally (Stake, 1998). The study of multiple cases in this section was intended to make sense of the identified statistical associations between school dropout and a variety of factors in contexts presenting high rates of the school dropout phenomenon. The 23 cases sampled in this phase could be instrumental in understanding the mechanism of the relationships. While representativeness is often used as a guiding principle to case selection, it is not always necessary or useful for purposes of all case studies (Stake (1998). The researcher selects a case for various reasons, but leans toward those cases that offer opportunity to learn the most. Potential for learning is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness (Stake, 1998). In addition, George (1979) and Pettigrew (1990) make important recommendations to criteria of selecting cases. They both agree that foremost, the choice of a case should be informed by the research objective, research questions posed and an appropriate research strategy. With the research question well-defined, one purposefully selects a case for study because it is an extreme situation, a critical incident or a social drama; the case is polar type or maximum variation case; or the case presents high experience levels of the phenomenon under study (Pettigrew, 1990; Patton, 2002). Coyne (1997) warns that while a particular criterion for informant selection lends itself the best given the study focus, it might not be the most viable.

Another important aspect to consider in case selection is determining the number of cases to study. Pettigrew (1990) points out that it is difficult to decide on the number of cases for adequacy. The number of cases can be decided by the nature of treatment of the case material, uniqueness, standards or quality of input and output. Therefore, the number of cases to study depends on a variety of other factors. Silverman (2013) agrees that the number of cases to do depends upon the research problem and purposive sampling may be appropriate.

It was difficult in this study to decide even on the number of study sites, let alone deciding on the number of individual cases from those sites. Many more sites presented extreme rates of school dropout that could still be selected. Once the study sites have been identified, it was even more difficult to decide on the number of individual cases. Given the purpose of the qualitative phase of the study, the 23 cases studied were deemed adequate to provide a window into the meaning behind the quantitative results. However, the sampling technique still limits the researcher to conclude with confidence (Creswell, 2002).

Guided by the research sub-question, which sought to establish the characteristics of school dropout, and informed its spatial distribution patterns, in this phase of the study, 10 sites were purposefully selected based on their association with unusually high levels of school dropout. Since this phase of study intended to investigate potential meaning and reasons behind the statistical relationships, the selected sites were those which presented above norm rates of school dropout. The local municipalities in the West Coast district presented the highest rates of school dropout in the country, about 20 percentage points more than the national average. The case studies were located in seven sites in these municipalities. The three other study sites were located in the Waterberg in the Limpopo Province, selected on the basis the sharply contrasting patterns of school dropout in the district, compared to its sister districts in the Province. While school participation in the Waterberg district is slightly better than the national average, the dropout rates in most of its local municipalities contrasted sharply with the rest of the municipalities in the Province. The unusually high levels of school dropout concentrated in three Waterberg local municipalities provided the best opportunity to learn about the nature of dropout. Three of the study's 10 sites are located in these municipalities. The school dropout levels in these localities were three times higher than the provincial rate, and between six and 16 percentage points higher than the national average. The sharp contrast in school participation patterns within one district was fascinating to observe. This had the potential to open new insight in the spatial distribution of dropout. These sites, like the other seven sites in the West Coast district, presented an opportunity to understand the nature of the relationships that were observed earlier.

In each study site, mainly in public spaces, the researcher located young adults who had dropped out of school in their middle to late teens - typically in the post-compulsory school phase. This group of youth dropped out of school in their latter teens between years 2008 and 2015. This was in line with the study focus and objective, which is to profile youth of

between 16 to 18 year olds who had dropped out of school without completing the secondary school careers. The study focus was also to determine the essence of and circumstances attributable to school dropout. It was key to solicit personal accounts and experiences of the school dropouts. Moreover, this would come from the school dropouts themselves, making meaning of their paths that culminated in school dropout (Seidman, 2013).

The selection of the individual cases was both opportunistic and snowballed. Most of the potential cases were located on first contact by prospecting the streets, front yards, backyards, and public spaces. Anyone was recruited as a potential informant, and selected or rejected after the initial screening. The screening entailed establishing their school attendance status, whether they had completed Grade 12, and if they were willing to settle down for in-depth interview. The researcher then asked from the initial cases for referrals to others who fitted the target group profile, in a snowballing fashion (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Snowballing is an “approach for locating information-rich informants or critical cases” (Patton, 2002:237). Based on their ability to inform the study, snowball samples are also used as access strategies in contexts of difficult-to-reach populations (Laher & Botha, 2012). In this study, time was spent locating first respondents who fitted the profile.

It was important that the participants agreed to an extended session as these interviews should provide sufficient depth. More importantly, sufficient depth that those who read the study can connect to that experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding of the issues it reflects (Seidman, 2013). The depth of these interviews should be such that compelling evocation of individual’s experience help the researcher find connections among the experiences of the individuals interviewed (Seidman, 2013). Where available and willing family members were invited to talk about the circumstances related to the premature exit from school. In addition, where possible, community workers were recruited to provide contextual information around to school dropout in the community in general. And by getting family and community perspectives, the approach allowed for comprehensive and triangulated gathering of information that helped build picture that is much more complete (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005; de Vaus, 2006).

#### 4.5.4 Data collection method

##### *Observation*

Each case in the study, the individual who exited school prematurely, was nested within a community. The researcher observed different characteristics about the case such as the geographic location, and availability of general amenities, community economic activity, and the general quality of the community. “Neighbourhood characteristics can help explain difference in [school] dropout rates among communities, apart from the influence of families. Some studies suggest that there is a threshold or tipping point on the quality of neighbourhoods that result in particularly high dropout rates in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Poor communities may influence the child and adolescent development through the lack of resources (playgrounds and parks, after-school programmes) or negative peer influences (Clark, 1992; Crane, 1991; Williams & Hallinan, 1990). Another way that communities can influence dropout rates is by providing employment opportunities both during and after school. Relatively favourable employment opportunities for high school dropouts appear to increase the likelihood that students will drop out (Rumberger, 2011; Bickel & Papagiannis, 1988). In this study, in addition to doing background reviews, the researcher conducted on-site observations in each study site for any characteristics and artefacts that could shed light on its influence on school participation patterns. “Observation is a way for the researcher to see and hear what is occurring naturally in the research site. Observation facilitates a deep understanding of the context and the participant’s behaviour (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:350)”. To this end, an unobtrusive observation protocol was devised to collect data on the general characteristics of the community. This was a one-time observation, sketching the community’s general characteristics over a day or a few hours.

Yin (2003) would argue against the use of observation as a data collection mode over a short time as that would not permit proper observation of key events. He contends that a proper on-site observation is only possible over extended period, a year or more. However, the use of observation in this case was more about getting ‘sense’ of the context, while in-depth interviews were the primary mode of data collection from various sources, particularly the youth who had dropped out of school. In-depth interviews, Yin (2003) recommends, are more appropriate modes of data collection in a case design, over a small number of days.

## *Interviews*

In-depth semi-structured interview was the primary data gathering tool for the case study. As Seidman (2013:7) says,

“I interview because I am interested in other people’s stories. Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. In order to give the details of their experience, a beginning, middle, and end, people must reflect on their experience. It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience”.

This study chose to use in-depth interview because it was interested in the detailed personal accounts of premature school exit. The study was interested in the details about older adolescents leaving school prematurely. The stories were told by the school dropout himself or herself. I conducted in-depth interviews with the 23 youths who had not completed Grade 12. Supplementary views on school dropout were obtained from or about the family, as well as community residents. Interviews with community residents were conducted for possible neighbourhood factors that could be associated with school participation.

At the root of in-depth interviewing is the quest to understand lived experiences of the phenomenon and the meaning people make of those experiences (Seidman, 2013: 9). The in-depth interview schedule was carried out through open-ended questions and explorers intended at understanding why older adolescents dropped out of school. The informal and open-endedness of the questions allow the respondent to narrate individual’s experiences and knowledge in detail; his/her opinions, beliefs, and feelings; and demographic data (Best & Kahn, 1998: 255). The explorers became useful as they enabled the researcher to spur on the respondent for more where one feels the respondent is short on detail in his or her responses, or to provide what Seidman (2013) refers to as a ‘navigational nudge’, when necessary. Also of importance, the use of in-depth interview allowed the researcher to determine current, past as well as future information (Seidman, 2013) that might be useful to understanding the reasons and processes that explain why the individual dropped out of school.

The key to asking questions during in-depth interviewing is to let [the interviewer] follow, as much as possible, from what the participant is saying. Although the interviewer comes to

each interview with a basic question that establishes the purpose and focus of the interview, it is in response to what the participant says that the interviewer follows-up, asks for clarification, seeks concrete details, and requests stories (Seidman, 2013:84). In this study, the researcher started the interviews with a broad question, aimed at inducing a narrative around school dropout. The researcher used the *single question aimed at inducing narrative* technique (SQUIN). The SQUIN approach to interview design allows for elicitation and provocation of story-telling (Wengraf, 2001). The idea was to induce personal narratives from the school dropout around and leading to their premature exit from school. The SQUIN was phrased as follows: *Can you tell me about yourself, your family, your time at school, the teachers, the classes, your school friends and how it happened that you stopped going to school.* The SQUIN question can be conceptually focused on a phase of life or a specific biographical phase (Wengraf, 2001). In this study, the interview question was interested in the biographic narrative of the youth leading to dropping out of school. The participant's responses were followed with explorers to expand, clarify and concretize on the experiences (Seidman, 2013). More importantly, Bailey (1987:187) suggests that probes be used whenever the respondent hesitates in answering or gives an unclear or incomplete answer. This allows for a deep understanding of their experiences leading to their drop out from school. The SQUIN technique was also used for family member interviews to illuminate circumstances around the youth dropping out of school. For community members, the question aimed at inducing narratives about the community in recent years, availability of schools, recreational facilities, economic activities, sanitation, water infrastructure and any social ills afflicting the community and actual school attendance patterns by the youth. The in-depth interview protocol design maximized biographic and community narratives that provided richer information to better understand school dropout among older adolescents, and in so doing help make sense of the results in the quantitative phase.

#### 4.5.5 Data Recording

Bernard (2013) advises against relying on our memory to capture detailed life accounts during interviewing. If the intent is to listen to stories of the informants to understand their experiences as told in their own words relying on memory or field notes, there is a risk of losing meaning captured in verbatim accounts to the researcher's interpretation and deciphering. Tape or digital recording the interview ensures completeness of the verbal interaction and provides material for reliability checks (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). As

Vygotsky (1987) puts it, the participants' thoughts become embodied in their words and each word a participant speaks reflects his or her consciousness. To substitute the researcher's paraphrasing or summaries of what the participants say for their actual words is to substitute the researcher's consciousness for that of the participant (Seidman, 2013). The study used a digital voice-capturing device to record the verbal interactions between the researcher and the interviewee, the use of which was negotiated upfront. In all the cases, participants agreed to be audio recorded. During the interviews, I also created notes to record behaviours and non-verbal moments that I believed were conveying the participant's story. I wrote out the short notes at the end of each interview, and later integrated in relevant segments of the interview transcription. It is advised that if one makes manual notations during the interview, it is important that immediately following the interview, the notations are expanded upon while the information is still fresh in the interviewer's mind (Best & Kahn, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

#### 4.5.6 Data Analysis

A properly conducted in-depth interview produces vast amount of texts that the researcher needs to make sense of at the end of the day. The vast array of words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages have to be reduced to what is of most significance and interest (Seidman, 2013; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Wolcott, 1990). It is this process of reducing the text to what is of most significant that no formula or recipe exists (Patton, 2002). The final destination in the data transformation remains unique for each enquirer; known only when-and if- arrived at (Patton, 2002). Of interest to the researcher in this study were whole stories around early school departure by older adolescents that would help explain the results in the quantitative phase.

Each qualitative study is likely to be unique in nature and purpose. According to Patton (2002), the purpose is the controlling force that should guide the analysis trajectory. The decision about design, measurement, analysis, and reporting, all flow from the purpose of the study. This phase of the study was intended to illuminate the nature of associations between different factors and school dropout that were revealed earlier. Accordingly, analysis of personal narratives looked for messages that seemed to clarify reasons behind school dropout.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim in Ms Word for processing. The transcriptions were checked for accuracy, listening to the audio after the initial transcription. The interview text was manually, sentence-by-sentence, open-coded and then analysed. The data were explored through reading of transcripts and field notes. In addition, the data were segmented and labelled, and similar segments or codes were aggregated into themes or categories. Concepts were abstracted and individual case study narratives were composed from the emergent categories themes. Lastly, cross-case thematic analysis was conducted and cross-cutting concepts or categories isolated. A major benefit of open-coding is that concepts emerge from the raw data and later grouped into conceptual categories. Open-coding, manual or computer-assisted, is a process in qualitative data analysis that involves going through text data, breaking it down into pieces to examine closely, compare relations, similarities, and dissimilarities. A thorough process of making meaning of the raw data was a time-consuming exercise; even more so for a one-person coding team (Creswell, 1998, 2000; Khandhar, 2009).

#### 4.5.7 Trustworthiness

The researcher used a number of procedures to determine the credibility and trustworthiness of the information gathered from the multiple cases (Merriam, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Verifying trustworthiness, plausibility and authenticity of information in qualitative research is important and helps maximize the validity of the findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Silverman, 2013). In essence, the self-reported nature of qualitative data means it is always reconstructed to leave out all problematic parts. The stories they are telling during the interview are clearly the way in which individuals are casting the problem, and often more stuff is unspoken.

To strive for factual accuracy or descriptive validity of the accounts as reported by the researcher, this study used investigator triangulation, where a second, experienced fieldworker (Lebohng Molungoa, who previously managed several wide-ranging qualitative studies with CIET Africa, a reputable international social research organisation) also conducted separate interviews in the same study sites. Cross-checking of field notes and interview recordings were used to determine agreement about what took place. There were general corroborations of accounts between the two of investigators.

The credibility of the accounts by the participants in this study was also verified through the interviews with family members, community residents and development workers (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Silverman, 2013). The information gathered from the community stakeholders provided context for the individual accounts.

#### 4.5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter the rationale for the mixed methods design that was adopted was discussed. The chapter make a case for the adoption of the sequential-explanatory design in particular. The quantitative and qualitative phases of the design, and their specific procedures, were explained. The chapter discussed the procedures followed to establish trustworthiness.

In the next three chapters, I present findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study, in line with the research sub-questions.

## CHAPTER 5: SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

### 5.1 Introduction

Years after dismantling all the statutes that legalized discriminatory education provisioning and resource allocation in general, sharp inequalities still characterize the South African education landscape. Particular spaces still experience disproportionate levels of school dropout among older adolescents. These school dropouts leave school without requisite skills necessary for adult life, exemplifying some of the inequities that still exist in society. More than two decades on, these disparities persist despite concerted efforts presumably aimed at equity and redress. Alarming, analysis of the Census 2011 data in this study shows that there are about 400 000 older adolescents who dropped out of school before completing matric.

For half a century, attempts to understand the patterns of social disparities were predominantly through the lenses of race, class and gender (Grant & Sleeter, 1986; Shilling, 1991). Sociologists and human geographers have since introduced the notion of space to understanding the problem of educational inequalities (Shilling, 1991; Beggs et al, 1997; Tickamayer, 2000; Fataar, 2007; Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Spreen & Vally, 2006; van der Berg 2007 & 2008; Chisholm, 2012; Ballas et al, 2012; Spaul 2013; Heaton et al, 2014). More recently, Christie (2013) and Pienaar and Morton-Mckay (2014) have framed the study of the current education disparities along the historical spatial patterns of discrimination in South Africa. This discriminatory historical spatial zoning related to skewed resource allocation disadvantaged Blacks the most compared to other social groupings. As part of the broader and concerted effort to understanding school to work transitions of students, this section of the study sought to understand the spatial distribution features of school dropout among older adolescents.

The purpose of this chapter was to establish spatial distribution patterns of the older adolescent dropouts. In addition, what is it about their dispersion patterns that can give us new insights about premature school exit in the country? The research sub-question: “*What are the spatial distribution patterns of older adolescents who have dropped out of school?*” guided the analyses. The chapter analyses the country’s various spatial layers for patterns of

school dropout, including the Province, district, local municipalities, as well the metropolitan municipalities. The chapter starts by determining the extent of school dropout among the population of interest.

## 5.2 Prevalence of older adolescents school dropouts.

According to Statistics South Africa Census 2011, there were 2 928 258 million youth of between the ages of 16 to 18 in the country (see table 5.1 below) on the day of the survey – referred to here as older adolescents. The analysis revealed that 10% of the older adolescent population had completed Grade 12 or higher and 90% of the population were expected to still be in school or equivalent educational institution. As expected, the analysis showed that the majority (76.8%) of the population had some kind of secondary education, as either still attending school or having dropped out, after initial transition into secondary school. About 12% of population that was expected to still be in school, reported to have completed primary school or have some kind of primary education, but did transition into secondary school. One percent was reported to have never attended school or did not have any kind of schooling at all (see table 5.1 below).

**Table 5.1: Education level of the older adolescent population, number and percentages**

<b>Education level</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No schooling	25,483	.9%
Some primary	177,563	6.1%
Completed primary	184,861	6.3%
Some secondary	2,247,832	76.8%
Completed grade 12	271,075	9.3%
Higher than grade 12	20,177	.7%
Other	1,266	.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,928,258</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

Of the 90% (2 635 739) who have not completed Grade 12, 83% were still attending school, 15% (395 620) were not attending school at the time, while participation status of two percent (52 797) of this population, was unspecified or unknown (see table 5.2 below).

**Table 5.2: School attendance status of older adolescents, number and percentages**

<b>Attendance status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Attending	2,187,321	83.0%
Dropped out	395,620	15.0%
Do not know	921	.0%
Unspecified	51,876	2.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,635,739</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

This analysis focuses on the older adolescents whose school attendance status was specified as either still attending or not attending an educational institution. This brings the population of interest to a total of 2 582 941. That is, for the purpose of this analysis, I am going to leave out about 53 000 whose school attendance status was not specified or was unknown, a potential limitation of the data. It is likely that those adolescents whose school attendance status was unspecified or unknown were school dropouts, and did not want their dropout status used against them. So, while the number of school dropouts for this analysis is 395 620, the number is probably about 450 000. This is an increase in national dropout rate of about two percentage points, if the formula included them as school dropouts, those whose attendance status was unspecified or unknown. For the purposes of this analysis however, the national dropout out rate is calculated as a percentage of the older adolescent population, whose school attendance status was established during the Census 2011 survey as either attending education institution, or not (see table 5.3 below). Therefore, the national status dropout rate at the time of Census 2011 was 15.3%.

**Table 5.3: Number and percentage of older adolescents in and out of school**

<b>Attendance status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Attending	2,187,321	84.7%
Dropped out	395,620	15.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,582,941</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

With the prevalence of the school dropout among older adolescents determined, the key focus of this section was how were they spatially distributed across the country? Where are these 395 620 youth found in the country, and what is it about their location that can shed new insights about school dropout?

### **5.3 Provincial distribution patterns of school dropout among older adolescents**

This section provides the results of a spatial analysis of dropout distribution patterns at provincial level. The information is presented in table 5.4 and figure 5.1 below.

The country's Provinces show a notable variation in school dropout patterns among older adolescents (see figure 5.1 and table 5.4 below). The dropout distribution patterns reveal the Limpopo Province as having the lowest dropout rate, and the Western Cape having the highest dropout rate among the older adolescents in the country. There was over 16 percentage point difference in school dropout rates between the two Provinces. School dropout rate in the Western Cape Province was also 10 percentage points higher than the national rate of 15.3 percent. In addition, the Northern Cape Province's school dropout rate was also 16 percentage points higher than that of Limpopo. Also presenting higher than the national dropout average were the Provinces of North West and the Eastern Cape, albeit not substantial, four and two percentage points higher, respectively. While dropout rates in the North West and the Eastern Cape Provinces were still 10 percentage points higher than in the Limpopo Province, they were still seven percentage points lower than the Western and the Northern Cape Provinces. In the remaining Provinces (Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Free State), making up the eastern half of the country (see figure 5.1 below), school dropout rates were at or lower than the national rate. Mpumalanga Province had the second lowest dropout rate among older adolescents in the country, although still about three percentage points higher than Limpopo Province.

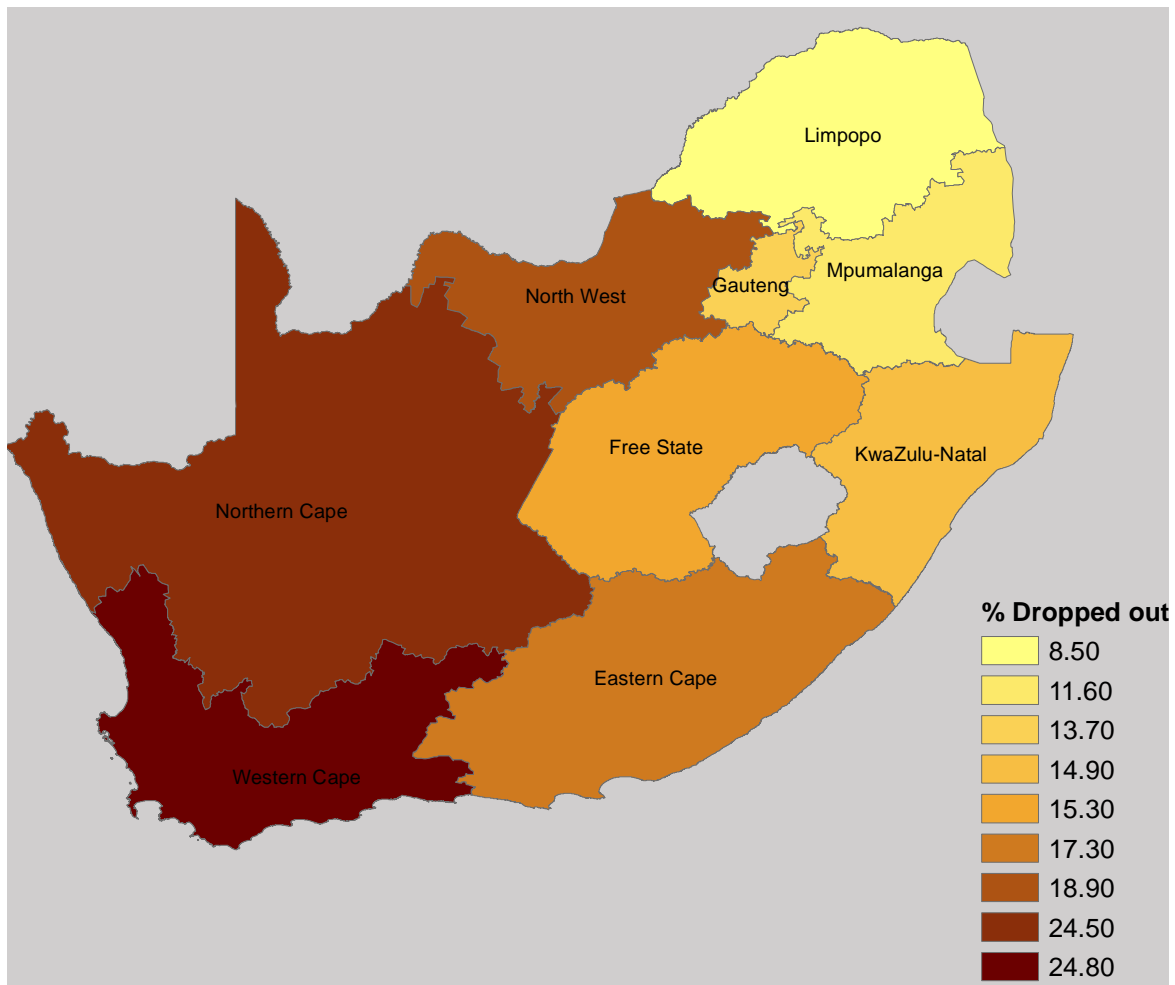
**Table 5.4: School dropout distribution by Province, 2011**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Western Cape	176,247	58,258	234,505	24.8%
Eastern Cape	334,175	69,723	403,898	17.3%
Northern Cape	43,510	14,122	57,632	24.5%
Free State	115,184	20,780	135,964	15.3%
KwaZulu-Natal	482,276	84,439	566,715	14.9%
North West	137,110	31,859	168,969	18.9%
Gauteng	376,503	59,989	436,492	13.7%
Mpumalanga	201,747	26,528	228,275	11.6%
Limpopo	320,571	29,922	350,493	8.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,187,323</b>	<b>395,620</b>	<b>2,582,943</b>	<b>15.3%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

This analysis shows one in four older adolescents in the Western Cape and the Northern Cape Provinces reported to have dropped out of school at the time of the Census 2011, compared to only one in twelve in the Limpopo Province. Put differently, at the time of Census 2011, the older adolescent in the Northern and Western Cape Provinces was three times less likely to be in school compared to his or her Limpopo counterpart. The older adolescent in Limpopo Province is about twice less likely to be in school than the youth in Mpumalanga and Gauteng Provinces, and noticeably much less likely to be in school than counterparts in the Free State and Kwa-Zulu Natal Provinces.

**Figure 5.1: School dropout distribution of older adolescents (16-18 years) by Province, 2011**



Source: Generated by the researcher's analysis of Statistics South Africa Census provincial shape files using ESRI Geographic Information Systems software - ArcGIS version 3.1

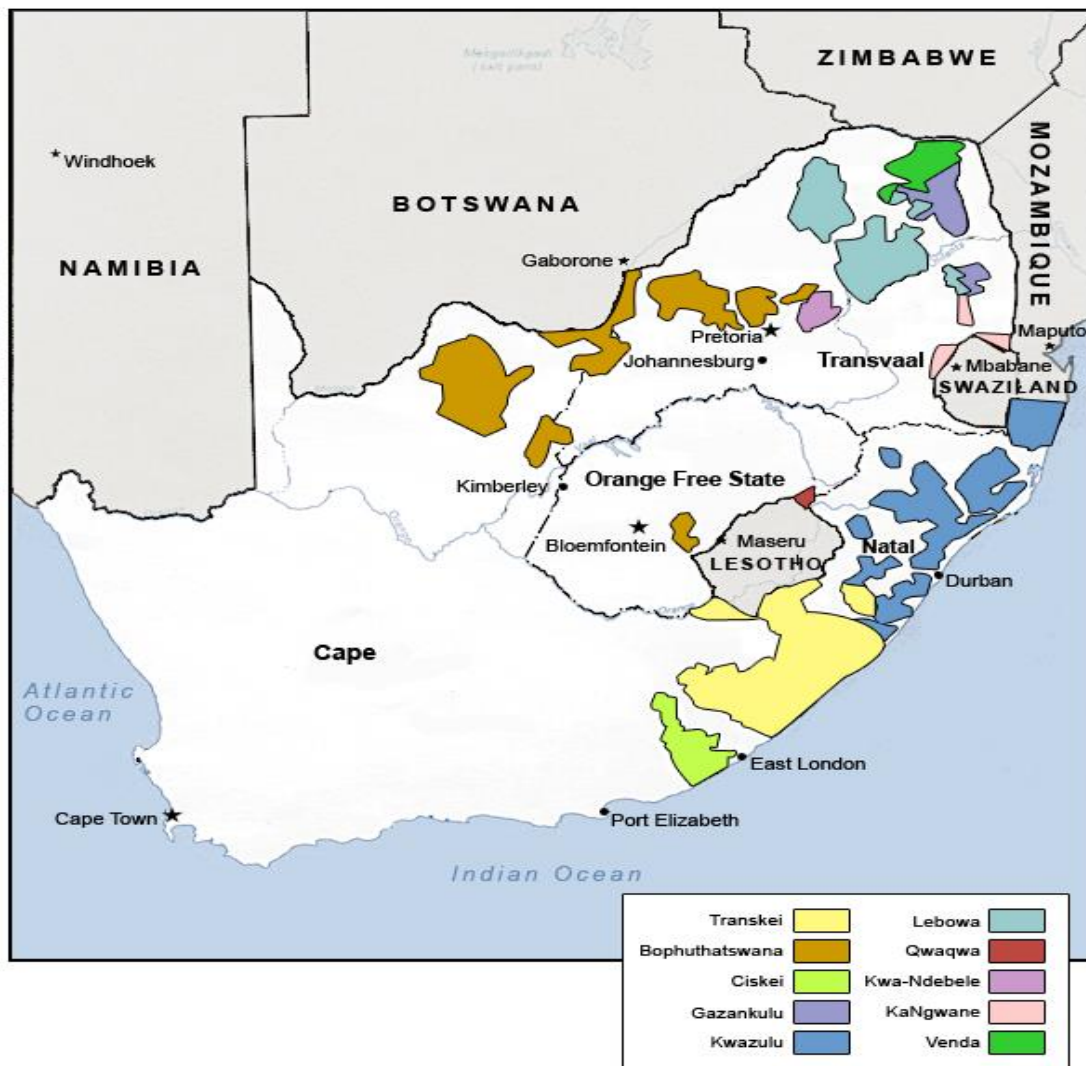
This finding of low rate of school dropout among older adolescents in the Limpopo Province goes against the general expectation that associates negative schooling outcomes with disadvantaged and poor spaces, and vice versa. According to Statistics South Africa (2014a), Limpopo Province was the country's poorest Province at the time of the Census 2011, and it has been the case since the early days of apartheid. The Province came about as a result of merging at least three historically deprived spaces called Bantustans - Lebowa, Venda and Gazankulu (see figure 5.2 below). These spaces, even when disaggregated, had the highest school participation rates in the country, from analysis of the Census 2011 data. Ironically, the Western Cape Province, a historically and currently better resourced space, had the lowest rate of school participation among older adolescents. The Province came about because of dividing the former Cape Province (see figure 5.2 below) into smaller Provinces (including

the current Western and Northern Cape Provinces) and are historically and currently of well-resourced. Nonetheless, this analysis shows that these better-resourced spaces presented the highest rates of school dropout. Also, despite their historical current and historical deprivation, the former Bantustans of Transkei and Ciskei are contained within the present Eastern Cape Province, presented better school participation rates (albeit lower than the national average) than the Western and Northern Cape Provinces. In line with the financing and resourcing policy of the time, the former Cape Province's education system was adequately resourced (Motala, 2006). This historical geography and its related political economy are still associated with positive learning outcomes, manifesting in consistent above average grade twelve results (Christie, 2013; Pienaar & Morton-Mckay, 2014; Spaul, 2013; van der Berg, 2007).

Christie (2013) in particular makes a significant contribution to the study of education inequalities in the country by introducing the notion of space to our understanding of the problem, in addition to the conventional frameworks of race, class and gender. Christie's proposal of the use of a sociological-historical geographical lens – *rhythmanalysis* – is important to understanding why patterns of poor education quality outcomes linger on in the historically deprived geographies, and vice versa. *Rhythmanalysis* is a perspective owing its origins to Lefebvre (1991), the sociologist who used the notion of space and its reproduction of inequalities in society. Using this perspective, Christie (2013) posits that the spatial routines steeped in history ensure production and reproduction of rhythms that in turn reinforce practices and in so doing ensure continuity. So, Christie (2013) compellingly argues that even after the current standardisation and fiscal redress in public education provisioning, the formerly well-resourced spaces continue to be advantaged and associated with better resources and positive learning outcomes, while the historically deprived spaces still reproduce poor learning outcomes, evident in comparatively poor grade scores. She argues that education inequality is not only distributed unevenly, but spatially across the historical geographic lines. That is, historical inequalities in education resources and outcomes have been preserved. Patterns of inequality in resources and quality of outcomes characteristic of the education geography 30 years earlier, still very much in place today. For an example, children in the former Bantustans of Transkei, Ciskei, Lebowa, and Gazankulu are still exposed to weak resources and poor results now just as they did in the 1980s.

Clearly, the use of space to frame educational inequalities in the South African context expands our understanding into the persistent inequalities in learning outcomes such as the disparities in matric results between different spaces. However, when I use school participation as an indicator, it does not map on the historical spatial distribution argument. Quite to the contrary, the examination of the Census 2011 data shows lower school participation levels in the historically and currently well-resourced Provinces, compared to very high participation patterns in the historically deprived spaces. Limpopo Province, made up of three historically impoverished Bantustans presented particularly higher participation rates than the Western Cape Province, which has a contrasting resource history, and is still better resourced.

**Figure 5.2: Former Provinces and Bantustans of South Africa**



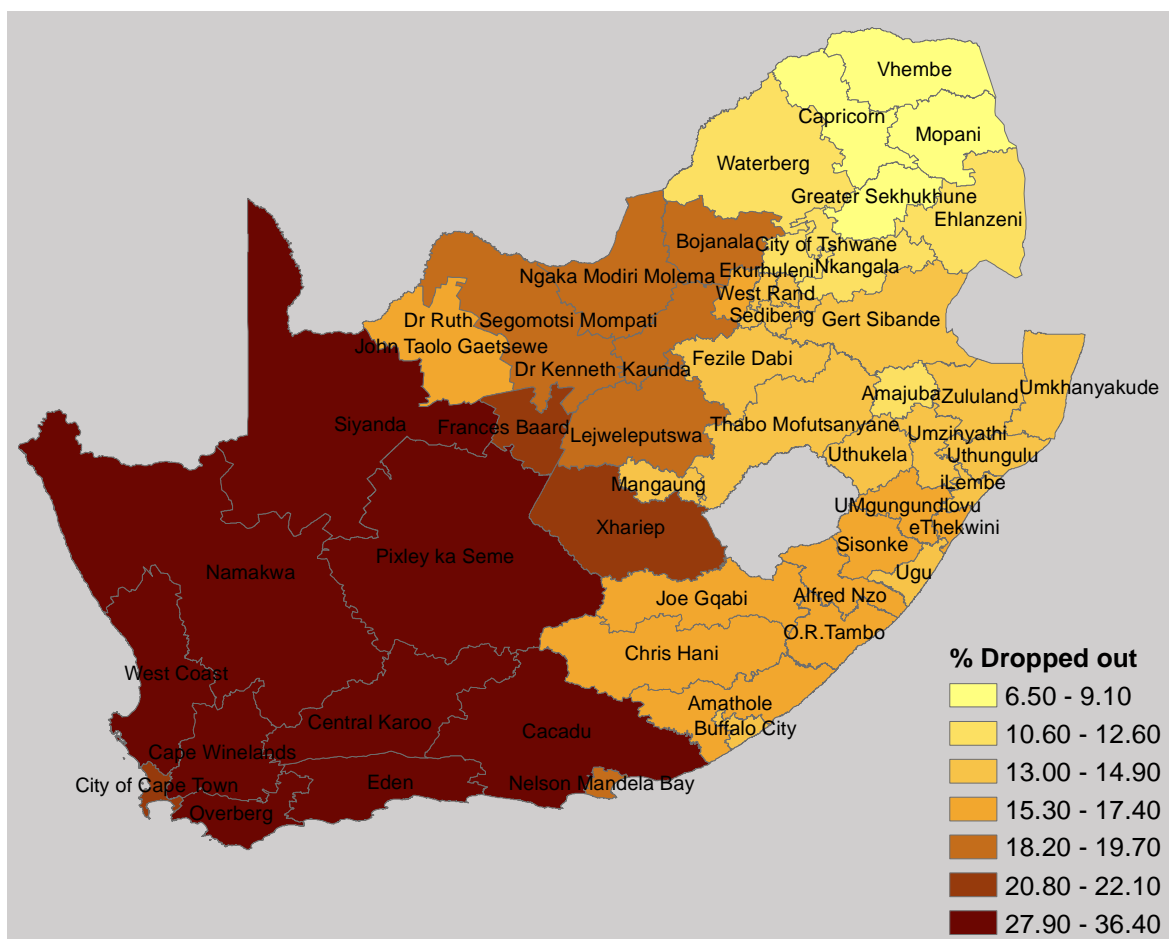
Source: [http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/101/596/65-254-FF-168-overcoming\\_apartheid-a0a8a0-a\\_3272.jpg](http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/101/596/65-254-FF-168-overcoming_apartheid-a0a8a0-a_3272.jpg)

The incongruity between place resources and school participation appears counterintuitive and merits a much more fine-grained analysis. What more can the district-level analysis tell us about the distribution patterns of school dropout among older adolescents in the country?

#### 5.4 School dropout distribution patterns at district municipality level

This section presents results of a spatial analysis of school dropout across the country's 45 district municipalities. The district municipality is the next spatial layer below the Province. The results are presented in figure 5.3.

**Figure 5.3: School dropout distribution of older adolescents (16-18 years) by district municipality, 2011**



Source: Generated by the researcher's analysis of Statistics South Africa Census district municipality shape files using ESRI Geographic Information Systems software - ArcGIS version 3.1

A disaggregation of the country into its municipal districts reveals interesting patterns of school participation among older adolescents (see figure 5.3). The district analysis reveals sharply contrasting patterns of school dropout that cuts the country along an east-west axis. Figure 5.3 reveals that higher school participation patterns in the eastern half of the country, sharply contrasting with the lower participation rates experienced in the western half. The western half is made up of all the Western and Northern Cape district municipalities, and pockets of districts in western Eastern Cape and Free State Provinces. The eastern half of the axis is constituted wholly by Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, and most of the Eastern Cape and Free State districts.

Figure 5.3 shows that school dropout rate in the western half of the axis was generally above the national average (15.3%), while districts in the eastern half of the axis presented participation rates higher than the national average. While one in seven older adolescents had dropped out of school nationally, in the western half of the axis, between one in three and one in four had dropped out. There is something happening in the western half of the country associating unusually high rates of school dropout. This is regardless of the better resources that this part of the country enjoys. In all Western Cape district municipalities, one in three adolescents had dropped out of school (see table, 5.5 below). That is, the older adolescent living in any of the Western Cape district municipalities was twice less likely to be in school than the national average adolescent in 2011. The contrast is even starker when compared to participation rates in the Limpopo Province, in the eastern half of the axis, where school participation was near-universal.

**Table 5.5: School dropout distribution by Western Cape district municipalities, 2011**

<b>District Municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
West Coast	10,264	5,866	16,130	36.4%
Cape Winelands	24,506	9,473	33,979	27.9%
Overberg	7,472	3,106	10,578	29.4%
Eden	16,746	6,663	23,409	28.5%
Central Karoo	2,167	1,062	3,229	32.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>61155</b>	<b>26170</b>	<b>87325</b>	<b>30.0%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

Figure 5.3 above also shows noticeably higher dropout patterns among the Northern Cape district municipalities in the western side of the axis. However, participation was slightly

higher than in the Western Cape districts. In the Namakwa, Pixley-ka-Seme and Siyanda districts, like in the Western Cape districts, the older adolescent was twice less likely to be in school compared to the national adolescent. However, in the remaining two districts (Frances Baard and John Taolo Gaetsewe), despite still much lower than the national rate, school participation appears to improve, with one in five and one in six older adolescents having dropped out of school, respectively. It is also important to note that the Northern Cape district municipalities are generally sparsely populated and therefore the real numbers are much smaller, despite the higher rates of dropout (see tables 5.5 and 5.6 for comparison). For example, the 33% dropout rate in the Namakwa district translates into 1 800 older adolescents, while the similar rate of dropout represents more than 9 000 older adolescents in the Cape Winelands district in the Western Cape (see table 5.5 above). While sometimes the percentages represent considerably varying real numbers, the similarity in rates in this half of the axis suggests regional influences driving school participation patterns, and not necessarily administrative thrusts at province level. In addition, the presence of regional drivers of school participation across administrative lines is further illustrated by the case of the Cacadu district, in the western part of the Eastern Cape Province (figure 5.3). School dropout (31.6%) patterns in the Cacadu district mirrored that of the bordering districts of Eden (28.5%) and Central Karoo to its west, in the Western Cape Province, and Pixley-ka-Seme (30.6%) to the north in the Northern Cape Province (figure 5.3 above). In turn, to the east, in the Free State Province, Pixley-ka-Seme borders the Xhariep district, which also presented noticeably higher rate of school dropout. These higher rates of dropout or patterns of low school participation fall to the left of this east-west divide as illustrated by figure 5.3.

**Table 5.6: School dropout distribution by Northern Cape district municipalities, 2011**

<b>District Municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Namakwa	3,576	1,805	5,381	33.5%
Pixley-ka-Seme	6,396	2,823	9,219	30.6%
Siyanda	8,515	3,444	11,959	28.8%
Frances Baard	14,864	3,908	18,772	20.8%
John Taolo Gaetsewe	10,159	2,141	12,300	17.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,510</b>	<b>14,121</b>	<b>57,631</b>	<b>24.5%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

In contrast, to the right side of the divide, district municipalities are generally presenting higher school participation rates. District municipalities of Vhembe, Capricorn, Mopani,

Greater Sekhukhune and Waterberg, forming north-east section of figure 5.3, presented near universal school participation rates among older adolescents. The districts constitute the Limpopo Province, which has the lowest school dropout rates in the country, a glaring contrast in participation patterns compared to the districts in the western side of the divide. While only one in every 15 older adolescents had dropped out of school in the Capricorn district in the Limpopo Province, one in three had dropped out in the West Coast district in the Western Cape Province (see table 5.7 below). That is, the older adolescent in the West Coast district in the Western Cape is five times less likely to be in school compared to her or his counterpart in the Capricorn district in Limpopo.

**Table 5.7: School dropout distribution by Limpopo district municipalities, 2011**

<b>District Municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Mopani	66,479	6,624	73,103	9.1%
Vhembe	82,315	7,981	90,296	8.8%
Capricorn	75,668	5,232	80,900	6.5%
Waterberg	31,706	4,557	36,263	12.6%
Greater Sekhukhune	64,404	5,528	69,932	7.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>320,572</b>	<b>29,922</b>	<b>350,494</b>	<b>8.5%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

Bordering Limpopo district on the east side of the axis are Mpumalanga district municipalities of Gert Sibande, Nkangala and Ehlanzeni, which also present school participation rates considerably higher than any district in the left of the east-west axis (see table 5.8 below). In these two districts (Nkangala and Ehlanzeni), one in nine adolescents had dropped out of school, and one in seven had dropped out in the remaining district, compared to one in three having dropped out for most districts in the left side of this divide. This pattern of higher rate of school participation the right half of the east-west axis, albeit in varying degrees, continues in most municipal districts in Gauteng, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal (figure 5.3, above).

**Table 5.8: School dropout distribution by Mpumalanga district municipalities, 2011**

<b>District Municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Gert Sibande	50389	8336	58725	14.2%
Nkangala	59419	7053	66472	10.6%
Ehlanzeni	91938	11138	103076	10.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>201746</b>	<b>26527</b>	<b>228273</b>	<b>11.6%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

A disaggregation of the country into its local municipalities further shed new insights and angles to understanding school dropout among older adolescents in the country.

### **5.5 School dropout distribution patterns at local municipal level and the Karoo region**

The district level analysis revealed a general east-west distribution of school dropout in the country. However, this analysis, much more localised, does not only confirm the district-level patterns of dropout, but also help uncover a disproportionate concentration of higher dropout rates in the Karoo region (see figure 5.4 below). The analysis at local level confirms the unusual high rates of school dropout in the western half of the country, in line with the district-level analysis. In addition, the much more fine-grained local-level analysis reveals disturbingly high rates of school dropout concentrated in the Karoo region of the country. Figure 5.4 (and table 5.9) maps tens of local municipalities, contiguously spread across numerous districts and four provinces, and all plotting onto the unique geographical region of the Karoo. These local municipalities straddle provincial and district lines in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Northern Cape and Western Cape Provinces, but within the Karoo. Evidently, the pattern of excessive school dropout is noticeably different from school participation patterns beyond the Karoo region (see figure 5.4 and table 5.9 below). The local municipalities within the Karoo region present dropout rates of between 25 and 58%, in contrast to those outside the Karoo region. The local municipalities outside the Karoo region, particularly those in the north-eastern part of the country show near-universal school attendance among older adolescents. For an example, in Thulamela (7.4%) and Polokwane (7.0%) localities in the north east, only one in 14 older adolescents had dropped out of school, while the adolescent in Matzikama and Cederberg in the Karoo is six times less likely to be in school (see figure 5.4 and table 5.9 below).

**Figure 5.4: School dropout distribution across local municipalities, showing a concentration of excessive rates in the Karoo region**



Source: Generated by the researcher’s analysis of Statistics South Africa Census district municipality shape files using ESRI Geographic Information Systems software - ArcGIS version 3.1

A closer look at the local municipalities in the Karoo shows that, compared to municipalities elsewhere, those in the Karoo generally have lower older adolescent population density. For example, table 5.9 below shows that the local municipality of Matzikama with the population of 3341 has a school dropout rate of 39.7%. Cederberg (2000 versus 39.4 %), Bergrivier (2505 versus 34.9%), Swartland (4486 versus 38.0%), Saldanah Bay (3796 versus 30.8%), Kannaland (1066 versus 53.3%), Hessequa (2312 versus 35.3%), Baviaans (646 versus 43.7%), Prince Albert (725 versus 46.9%), and Laingsburg (292 versus 56.2%) are among the least populated and having the highest school dropout rate among older adolescents in the country. In contrast, some of the local municipalities elsewhere outside the Karoo, which present near universal school participation rates, have some of the highest population densities (see table 5.9 below). For example, table 5.9 below shows that the population of Polokwane (35193 versus 7.0% dropout rate), Makhado (35289 versus 8.0%), Bushbuckridge (37362 versus 8.4%) and Mbombela (31766 versus 10.1%) local municipalities is about 10 times more than that of Matzikama, Hessequa, Swartland and Cederberg municipalities, to cite just a few (see table 5.9). The older adolescent in the more densely populated localities is

about six times more likely to be in school compared to his or her Karoo counterpart. How could low population density in the Karoo municipalities explain the excessive dropout rates?

**Table 5.9: Contrasting patterns of school dropout between the Karoo region and the rest of the country, 2011**

THE KAROO REGION					THE REST OF THE COUNTRY				
Local Municipality	Attending	Dropped Out	Total	% dropped out	Local Municipality	Attending	Dropped out	Total	% dropped out
Matzikama	2015	1326	3341	39.7%	Thulamela	41447	3329	44776	7.4%
Cederberg	1212	788	2000	39.4%	Makhado	32480	2809	35289	8.0%
Bergrivier	1631	874	2505	34.9%	Polokwane	32738	2455	35193	7.0%
Saldanha Bay	2625	1171	3796	30.8%	Greater Giyani	17195	1447	18642	7.8%
Swartland	2780	1706	4486	38.0%	Greater Letaba	14236	1470	15706	9.4%
Witzenberg	3376	1860	5236	35.5%	Greater Tzaneen	21756	2393	24149	9.9%
Kareeberg	219	302	521	58.0%	Lepele-Nkumpi	14768	840	15608	5.4%
Thembelihle	446	287	733	39.2%	Mogalakwena	19457	1625	21082	7.7%
Siyathemba	735	433	1168	37.1%	Elias Mostwaledi	15351	1314	16665	7.9%
Langeberg	2913	1738	4651	37.4%	Makhuduthamaga	17454	1127	18581	6.1%
Swellendam	1064	557	1621	34.4%	Greater Tubatse	19054	1749	20803	8.4%
Theewaterskloof	3145	1242	4387	28.3%	Mbombela	28559	3207	31766	10.1%
Cape Agulhas	984	640	1624	39.4%	Bushbuckridge	34240	3122	37362	8.4%
Laingsburg	128	164	292	56.2%	Nkomazi	23000	3660	26660	13.7%
Prince Albert	385	340	725	46.9%	Thembsile	18104	1344	19448	6.9%
Baviaans	364	282	646	43.7%	Dr JS Moroka	14366	1335	15701	8.5%
Kannaland	498	568	1066	53.3%	Emalahleni-MP	14273	2155	16428	13.1%
Hessequa	1497	815	2312	35.3%	Newcastle	19227	2295	21522	10.7%
George	5803	2147	7950	27.0%	The Msunduzi	25104	4324	29428	14.7%
Outdshoorn	3343	1464	4807	30.5%	Maluti-a-Phofung	17608	2481	20089	12.4%
Letsemeng	1534	621	2155	28.8%	Matjhabeng	16490	2867	19357	14.8%
Tokologo	979	442	1421	31.1%	King Sabata Dalindyebo	28323	5057	33380	15.1%

The Karoo is a semi-arid landscape situated mainly in the central and western interior of South Africa, approximately 400 000 km<sup>2</sup> in size (a third of the size of South Africa), and considered to be a single eco-system. Extensive sheep farming has, over the past century, become part of this ecosystem owing to the region's peculiar drought-resistant plant species that are suitable for sheep feed (Nel & Hill, 2008). In addition, two rivers (Orange and Olifants) that generally cut through the region are also a source of the thriving vine farming along their long banks. Could it be that these socio-economic activities are attributable to the high prevalence of school dropout in the area? Alternatively, what else about this area can add to our understanding of school dropout among older adolescents? Could it be that the socio-economic dynamics of the place discourage a disproportionate number of the youth to attend school beyond Grade 12? In their study of space and school dropout, Schafer and Hori (2006) concluded that area labour market, norms and cultural representations might determine whether or not a high school credential is perceived a necessity for young adults to maintain productive livelihoods. It appears that the Karoo with its peculiar socio-cultural, economic and political characteristics not shared by other localities elsewhere, could possibly be linked to higher dropout rates among its older adolescent population.

There is clear disparity in school participation patterns between the Karoo region and the rest of the country as illustrated by the local level analysis earlier. However, figure 5.4 further suggests some local variability in school participation between constituent local municipalities in the eastern part of the country. These local municipalities present glaringly different school participation patterns compared to their counterparts in the same district or Province, suggesting localised drivers shaping school participation patterns.

What new insights can we gather from these localities with divergent school participation patterns?

## **5.6 Inconsistencies in school dropout patterns at local municipality level**

The district level analysis revealed a general east-west distribution pattern of school dropout in the country, and generally confirmed by figure 5.4 above. Nevertheless, this (figure 5.4) localised analysis further reveals that school dropout cannot be completely understood as a district-level experience. Figure 5.4 above shows patches of unusually high dropout rates dotting the eastern half of the country, pointing to disparities in school participation patterns

at local level, amid high rates in school participation. As figure 5.4 illustrates, school participation patterns in the localities of Thabazimbi, Mokgopong and Musina deviate acutely from the otherwise near-universal school participation patterns of the Limpopo Province local municipalities. Also in the North West and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces, a number of localities show uncharacteristically high rates of school dropout, contrasting with the area general pattern. Uncharacteristically, figure 5.4 illustrates that there are low school participation patterns in some local municipalities similar to the rates in the Karoo region. How could it be that localities in the region generally experiencing high rates of school participation diverge so sharply from the norm?

The macro level analysis of the Limpopo Province reflects near universal school participation (91.5%) among older adolescents. However, this aggregate representation appears to obscure local school attendance dynamics. For example, in the Vhembe district, the Musina Local Municipality shows an unusually high dropout rate, one of the highest in the country, compared to the fellow municipalities in the district (see table 5.10 below). Figure 5.4 indicates that the older adolescent in the Musina locality was between four and five times less likely to be in school than his or her counterpart in the neighbouring localities of Mutale, Thulamela, and Makhado, a short distance away. While the older adolescent in the Mutale, Thulamela and Makhado localities were about twice more likely to be in school than the national average adolescent, the adolescent in the neighbouring Musina locality was instead twice less likely to be in school than the national counterpart. What is it about living in the Musina area that drives the older adolescent out of school, unlike in the fellow localities a short distance away? There appears to be distinct dynamics in the Musina locality associated with higher dropout rates, not shared by the other municipalities in the Vhembe district. Could it be local labour market dynamics in the Musina Municipality, where the unemployment rate is peculiarly lower, compared to its counterparts in the districts (Statistics South Africa, 2012)? Do older adolescents, probably dropouts, come from other parts of the district into the Musina Municipality look for work? Alternatively, could it be a problem of schools supply given its relatively lower population density, compared to the rest of the localities in the district (see table 5.10 below)?

**Table 5.10: Variation in school dropout patterns between Vhembe local municipalities, Limpopo**

<b>Local municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Mutale	6507	678	7185	9.4%
Thulamela	41447	3329	44776	7.4%
Musina	1881	1165	3046	38.2%
Makhado	32480	2809	35289	8.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82315</b>	<b>7981</b>	<b>90296</b>	<b>8.8%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

Also in the Limpopo district of Waterberg, school participation rate that was above the national average obscured the striking inconsistencies in participation patterns between the constituent local municipalities (see table 5.11 below). The analysis reveals that while the district's school participation rate was above the national average, over half of the district's local municipalities participated in school at a much lower rate than the national average. School dropout rates in over half the local municipalities were between six and 16 percentage points higher than the national average (of 15.3%). This was in striking contrast with school participation in the fellow Mogalakwena locality, where the participation rate was eight percentage points above the national rate, and about 24 percentage points above the Mookgopong Municipality on its southern border. Respectively, one in three and one in four older adolescents had dropped out of school in Mookgopong and Thabazimbi municipalities, compared to only one in 13 adolescents that had dropped out in the Mogalakwena, which is a staggering contrast. How is it that the older adolescent in the Mogalakwena locality is four times more likely to be in school compared to his or her counterpart in the adjacent Mookgopong and Thabazimbi localities (see table 5.11 below)? What forces drive these localised disparities in school participation patterns?

The importance of the local-level analysis is demonstrated in the Waterberg district. Aggregating school participation rates at district level conceals the fact that the Mogalakwena Municipality makes up about 60% of the district population, with the remaining five municipalities sharing the difference. And therefore, the near-universal school participation rate in the populous Mogalakwena veils the fact that school dropout rate in the other five municipalities averaged about 20%, more than 12 percentage points higher than that of Mogalakwena (table 5.11, below). Although school dropout rates were higher than the national average in half of the local municipalities, this involved smaller numbers per

locality. These striking dissimilarities in school participation patterns between fellow localities suggest that dropout among older adolescents cannot be fully understood as a provincial or district-level experience. Peculiar, and much more localised forces appear to shape school participation patterns among older adolescents.

Recent reviews of Thabazimbi socio-economic and labour patterns revealed that the mining town and its relatively higher employment opportunities accounts for a large percentage of in-migration (Thabazimbi Local Municipality, 2007; 2013; 2015; Shangoni Management Services, 2010). The Waterberg district and Thabazimbi in particular, have some of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, primarily owing to the mining and secondary economies. Interestingly, the mining company’s labour demographics show that the company has been drawing a large number of its contingent from the parts of the Limpopo Province where school participation is the highest in the country, the Capricorn and the Vhembe districts (see table 5.10, above).

**Table 5.11: Variation in school dropout patterns between Waterberg local municipalities, Limpopo**

<b>Local municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Thabazimbi	1609	612	2221	27.6%
Lephalale	4626	749	5375	13.9%
Mookgopong	808	372	1180	31.5%
Modimolle	2585	702	3285	21.4%
Bela-Bela	2623	496	3119	15.9%
Mogalakwena	19457	1625	21082	7.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31706</b>	<b>4556</b>	<b>36262</b>	<b>12.6%</b>

Source: Researcher’s calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

This localised experience of school dropout is further illustrated in Sisonke district, in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. Table 5.12 below shows sharp variations in school participation at local level between local municipalities. While the rest of the localities presented school participation rate at or slightly below the national average, the Kwa Sani Local Municipality presented an uncharacteristically high rate of school dropout. For example, the older adolescent in the Kwa Sani locality was between three and two times less likely to be in school compared to his or her counterpart in the neighbouring Ubuhlebezwe and Greater Kokstad localities. It is interesting that the Kwa Sani locality does not only present similar

rates of dropout with the municipalities in the Karoo, but it is also sparsely populated, compared to its fellow municipalities (see table 5.12 below).

**Table 5.12: Variation in school dropout patterns between Sisonke local municipalities, KwaZulu-Natal**

<b>Local municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Ingwe	5604	1218	6822	17.9%
Kwa Sani	398	210	608	34.5%
Greater Kokstad	2907	531	3438	15.4%
Ubuhlebezwe	6036	817	6853	11.9%
Unzikhulu	11394	2100	13494	15.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26339</b>	<b>4876</b>	<b>31215</b>	<b>15.6%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

The foregoing analyses have shown that school dropout rates among adolescents in the country vary widely across Provinces, districts and importantly, that dropout patterns were still distinctly variable at local level. The district-level analysis (figure 5.3 above), other than revealing the east-west divide patterns in school dropout, also points to possible different dynamics at play shaping school distribution patterns in the country's metropolitan municipalities that warrant a closer look.

### **5.7 School dropout distribution in the country's metropolitan municipalities, 2011**

The district-level analysis (figure 5.3) also revealed disparities in school participation among the country's metropolitan municipalities, with dropout rates distinctly high in the City of Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Bay and eThekweni when compared to the other five metropolitan municipalities. This section examined the distribution of school dropout patterns across the metropolitan municipalities, at the same time comparing the distribution with the general, largely rural district municipalities. Human Rights Watch (2004) noted generally high school dropout rates in rural areas compared to the metropolitan areas.

Table 5.13 (below) shows that about one-third (778 998) of the total older adolescent population (2 582 943, see table 5.4 earlier) resided in the country's eight metropolitan municipalities, with the remainder, residing in the 44 district municipalities. The ever-increasing urban population makes the metropolitan municipalities important spaces

when trying to understand in-school and school-work transitions for older adolescents. The number of the urban older adolescents (125 267) that had dropped out of school at the time of the 2011 Census made up 32% of the country’s total dropout population of 395 620 (see table 5.4). The proportion of older adolescent dropouts in the eight metropolitan municipalities was higher than the national average (16.0% compared to 15.3%).

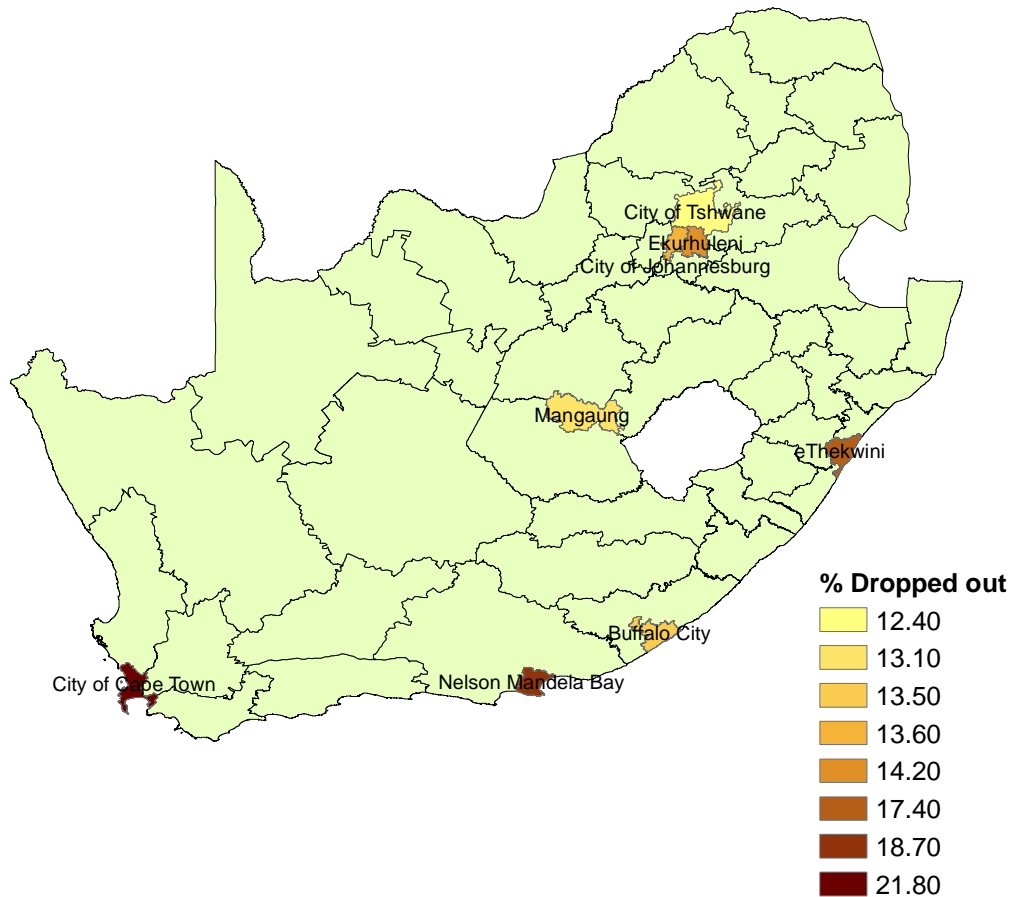
**Table 5.13: School dropout numbers and percentages in the metropolitan municipalities**

<b>Metro municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
City of Cape Town	115093	32089	147182	21.8%
Buffalo City	30075	4702	34777	13.5%
Nelson Mandela Bay	41751	9575	51326	18.7%
Mangaung	30589	4630	35219	13.1%
eThekwini	119987	25215	145202	17.4%
Ekurhuleni	100499	16577	117076	14.2%
Johannesburg	124008	19529	143537	13.6%
Tshwane	91729	12950	104679	12.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>653731</b>	<b>125267</b>	<b>778998</b>	<b>16.0%</b>

Source: Researcher’s calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

Also, as table 5.13 (above) and figure 5.5 (below) show, there are noticeable disparities in school participation across the metropolitan municipalities, with the proportion of older adolescent dropouts in Cape Town (21.8%), Nelson Mandela Bay (18.7%) and eThekwini (17.4%) higher than the national average (15.3%). One in five adolescents had dropped out in Cape Town and Nelson Mandela Bay, compared to one in seven nationally. The proportion of older adolescent dropouts in the remaining metropolitan municipalities was lower than the national average, with Tshwane, Mangaung, Buffalo City, Johannesburg, and Ekurhuleni showing dropout rates of between one and two percentage points lower than the national average.

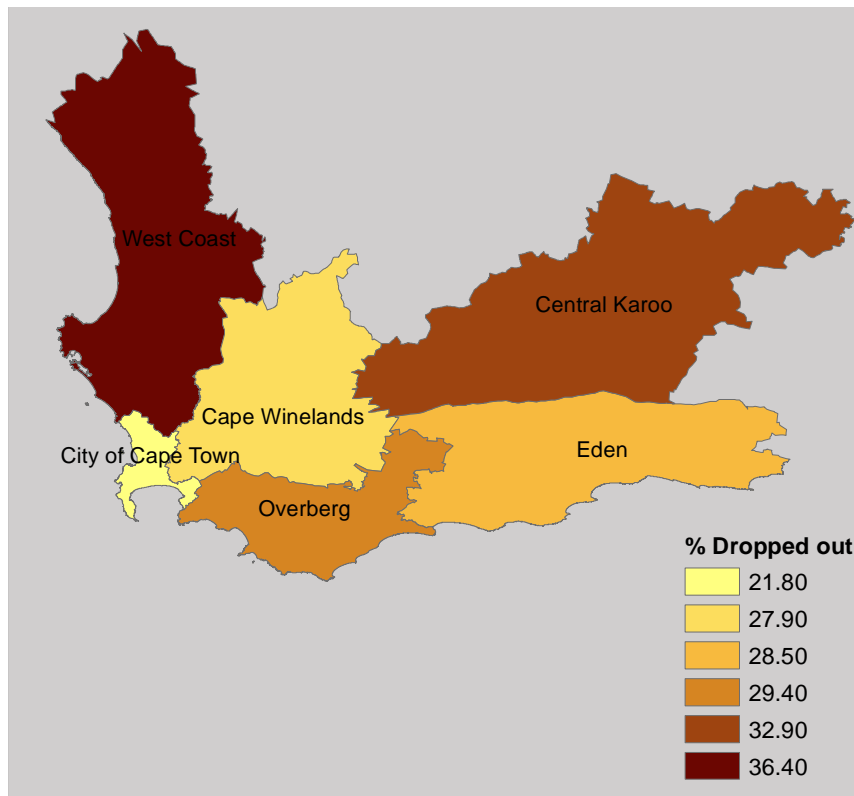
**Figure 5.5: School dropout distribution across the metropolitan municipalities the, (age 16-18), 2011**



Source: Generated by the researcher’s analysis of Statistics South Africa Census district municipality shape files using ESRI Geographic Information Systems software - ArcGIS version 3.1

The City of Cape Town (21.8%) presented the highest dropout rate of the eight metropolitan municipalities, noticeably higher than the national average (15.3%), but lower than the Province’s average of (24.8%). School dropout rates in all the rural district municipalities in the Province were also higher than the metropolitan rate, suggesting that the excessive provincial aggregate rate was spurred by factors at play in the rural localities. Between one in four and one in three older adolescents had dropped out of school in the rural districts compared to one in five in the metro (see figure 5.6 below). While the older adolescent in the metro was less likely to attend school than the average national counterpart, the adolescent here is more likely to be in school than in the more rural districts of the Western Cape Province.

**Figure 5.6: School dropout distribution in the City of Cape Town versus the district municipalities in the Western Cape Province, (age 16 -18), 2011**

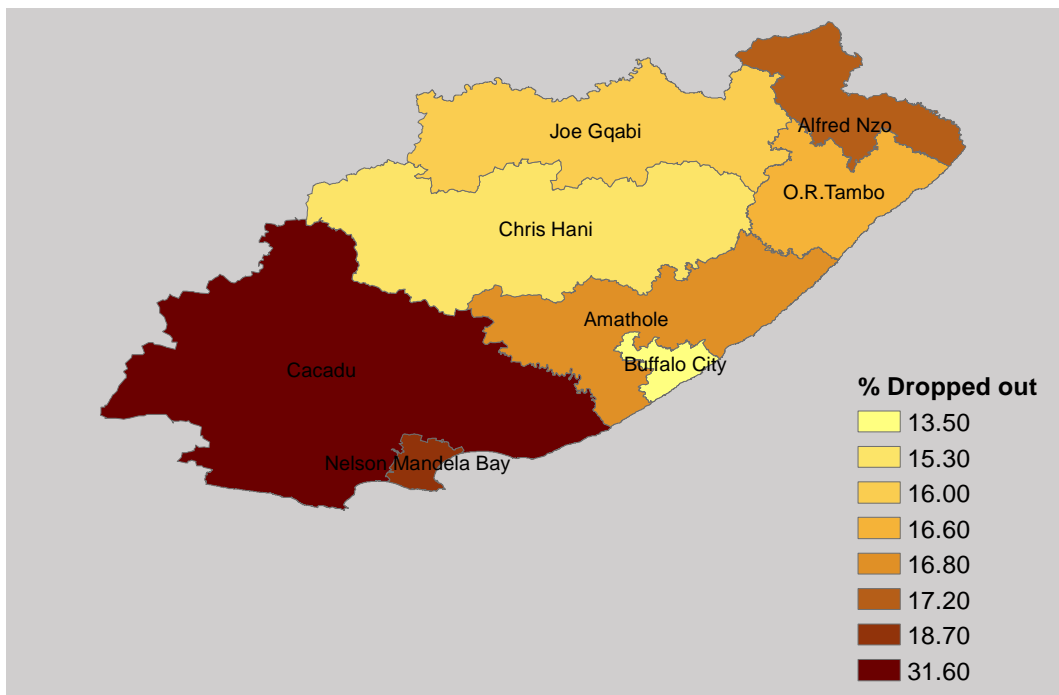


Source: Generated by the researcher’s analysis of Statistics South Africa Census district municipality shape files using ESRI Geographic Information Systems software - ArcGIS version 3.1

The Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality presented higher proportion (18.7%) of school dropouts than the national (15.3%) and provincial (17.3%) averages. The proportion of dropouts in the metro is also higher than for most rural districts, with the Cacadu the only district having lower school participation rate than the metro (see figure 5.7 below).

However, Buffalo City, the sister municipality also in the Eastern Cape Province had the third lowest dropout rate, (13.5%) of the eight metros, and also among the highest school participation in the country. Buffalo City had a notably lower proportion of adolescent school dropouts than both its neighbouring Nelson Mandela Bay metro and all the rural district municipalities in the Eastern Cape Province (see figure 5.7 below). This is also about two percentage points being lower than the national school dropout average.

**Figure 5.7: Comparing school dropout rates between the Nelson Mandela Bay, Buffalo City metropolitan municipalities and the district municipalities in the Eastern Cape Province, (age 16 -18), 2011**



Source: Generated by the researcher’s analysis of Statistics South Africa Census district municipality shape files using ESRI Geographic Information Systems software - ArcGIS version 3.1

The proportion (17.4%) of older adolescent dropouts in the eThekweni metro is not only higher than the district average (14.0%), but also higher than the dropout proportion of every district in the KwaZulu-Natal Province (see table 5.14 below). The older adolescent living in the eThekweni metropolitan area is less likely to attend school than her or his counterpart in the district municipalities, by more than three percentage points. The analysis shows that about one quarter (145 202) of the Province’s (566 713) older adolescent population resided in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, but the city accounted for about a third (25 215) of the school dropout population (84 438) in the Province (see table 5.14 below). That is, while the proportion of adolescent dropouts in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality is only three percentage points higher than that of the rural districts, this represented a relatively large number of older adolescent not participating in school as expected.

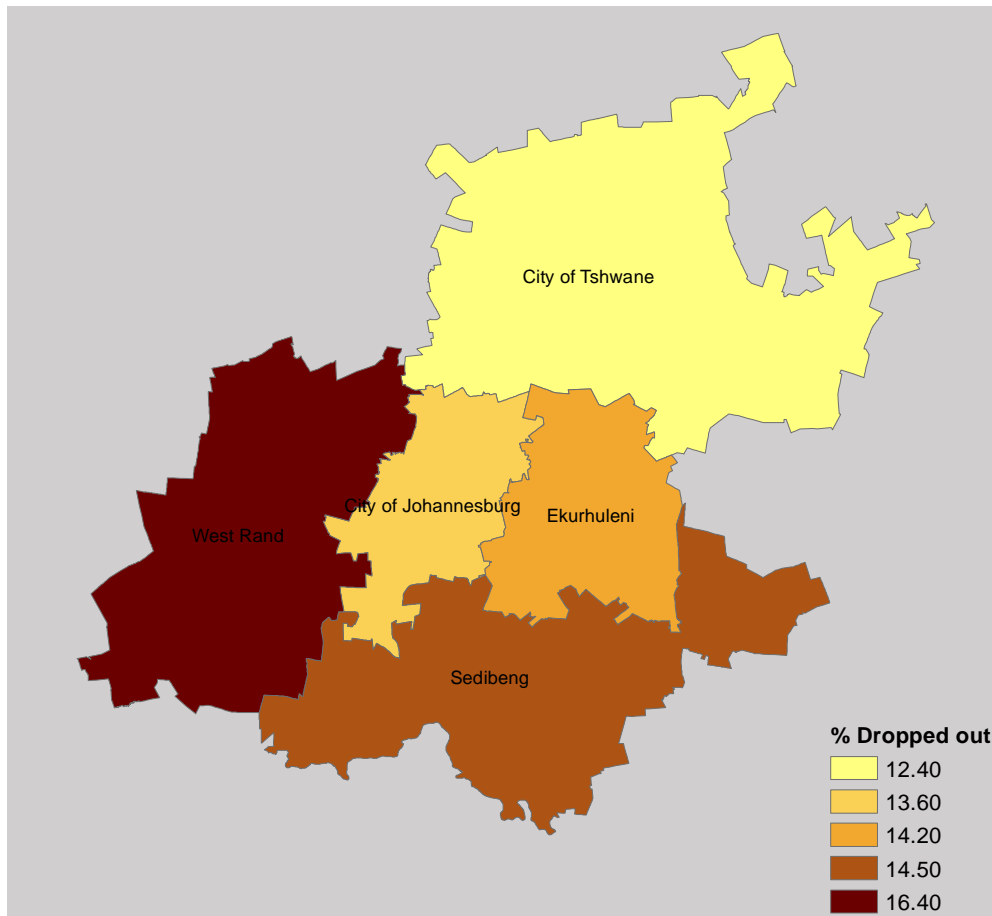
**Table 5.14: Comparing school dropout rates between the eThekweni metropolitan municipality and the district municipalities in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, (age 16 - 18), 2011**

<b>District municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Amajuba	27113	3492	30605	11.4%
uMkhanyakude	38040	5660	43700	13.0%
Zululand	46296	6991	53287	13.1%
uThukela	35710	5604	41314	13.6%
uThungulu	47700	7638	55338	13.8%
uMzinyati	30549	4990	35539	14.0%
Ugu	37843	6282	44125	14.2%
iLembe	30040	5270	35310	14.9%
Sisonke	26339	4876	31494	15.6%
uMgugundlovu	42658	8420	51078	16.5%
District Total/Ave	362288	59223	421511	14.0%
<b>eThekweni Metro</b>	<b>119987</b>	<b>25215</b>	<b>145202</b>	<b>17.4%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

The three metropolitan municipalities in the Gauteng Province, Tshwane (12.4%), Johannesburg (13.6%), and Ekurhuleni (14.2%) did not only show lower proportions of school dropout than the national average (15.3%). They also showed lower proportions than in the two only district municipalities in the Province - Sedibeng (14.5%) and West Rand (16.5%) (See figure 5.8 below). Socio-economic dynamics in the three metropolitan municipalities appear to encourage persistence than in the district municipalities, with Tshwane notably presenting the lowest proportion of dropouts in the Province. Manufacturing and tertiary economic activities predominate in the three metropolitan municipalities, compared to mining and agricultural activities that characterised the district municipalities. While school participation rate in the Sedibeng district was higher than the national average, it was still lower than the provincial average. This suggests that its agrarian character could have been a factor in the district's school participations patterns. The West Rand district predominated by mining had the highest proportion of school dropouts in the Province, which was also higher than the national average. This suggests that the labour market dynamics related to mining drive schooling patterns there. It is also important to note that the three metropolitan municipalities between them account for 84% (365 292) of the Province's older adolescent population (436 492). The district municipalities are noticeably less populated in relation to the three metropolitan municipalities.

**Figure 5.8: School dropout distribution of older adolescents across Gauteng metropolitan and district municipalities (age 16-18), 2011**



Source: Generated by the researcher's analysis of Statistics South Africa Census district municipality shape files using ESRI Geographic Information Systems software - ArcGIS version 3.1

The Mangaung (13.1%) Metropolitan Municipality had a lower proportion of older adolescent dropouts than all the district municipalities in Free State Province (15.3%). The proportion of adolescent school dropout in the Mangaung metro was also lower than country's dropout rate (15.3%) (See table 5.4), and also the second lowest proportion of school dropouts among the eight metropolitan municipalities (see table 5.13). The analysis (table 5.15 below) shows increased likelihood of school attendance by the older adolescent living in the Mangaung metropolitan area than in any of the rural districts in the Free State Province.

**Table 5.15: School dropout distribution of older adolescents between Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality and the district municipalities in the Free State Province (age 16-18), 2011**

<b>District municipality</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Xhariep	5859	1666	7525	22.1%
Lejweleputswa	24953	5563	30516	18.2%
Thabo Mofutsanyane	34805	5811	40616	14.3%
Fezile Dabi	18978	3112	22090	14.1%
District Total/Ave	84595	16152	100747	16.0%
<b>Mangaung Metro</b>	<b>30589</b>	<b>4630</b>	<b>35219</b>	<b>13.1%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

The examination of the major urban centres indicates that school dropout rates among older adolescents vary widely across the eight metropolitan municipalities. The older adolescent living in the metropolitan municipalities of Tshwane, Mangaung, Buffalo City, Johannesburg, and Ekurhuleni is more likely to attend school than the average national (15.3%) adolescent and even much more likely to attend school than the older adolescent living in the major urban centres of Cape Town (24.8%), Nelson Mandela Bay (18.7%) and eThekweni (17.4%). The analysis further reveals that school dropout among adolescent is not necessarily a rural-urban experience, where rurality is associated with higher proportions of dropout as some studies suggest. The analysis reveals that although still presenting higher than national dropout average, compared to its rural surrounding municipalities, the City of Cape Town still holds a better prospect for the older adolescent completing school. On the other hand, it appears that living in Nelson Mandela Bay and eThekweni metropolitan municipalities reduced the likelihood of completing school for the older adolescent, compared to the rural parts of the host Provinces. In addition, living in the Tshwane, Mangaung, Buffalo City, Johannesburg, and Ekurhuleni metropolitan municipalities appears to improve chances of staying in school for the older adolescents than in the rural parts of the host Provinces.

## 5.8 Conclusion

The Census 2011 provides the most recent data on education across all spatial strata. The comprehensive nature of the data makes it possible to study geographical patterns of school dropout at a much smaller level, beyond the provincial spatial unit. Data on school attendance

was collected at provincial, district and local levels, and the potential presented by the data was only possible with the last census survey, a decade or so ago.

Educational achievement and attainment have widely been acknowledged as one of key potential drivers of social justice. Ensuring smooth school transitions and pathways from school to work and/or post-school education for majority of students is a vital step towards social redress. Poor in-school and school-work transitions, including school dropout have been widely identified as critical barriers to achieving educational equality and potentially social justice (van der Berg, 2007, 2008; Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2013; Branson et al., 2014; Christie, 2014). The findings on the spatial patterns of school dropout add to the discussion of school inequality in the country.

The chapter starts with an illustration of school dropout patterns across Provinces, showing widely varying patterns. A disaggregated analysis at district level unmask a pattern of school dropout that divides the country along the east-west axis. A much more refined analysis has shown that school dropout is a much more localised phenomenon than previously thought. Plotting school dropout across the country's populous metropolitan centres showed uneven distribution patterns between them, as well as inconsistent patterns between the urban and rural localities.

The findings show that contrary to the tendency to associate negative schooling outcomes with impoverished spaces, Provinces that were historically and currently poor had higher rates of school participation compared to those wealthier. This counterintuitive finding is illustrated by the near-universal school participation rates in Limpopo, the poorest Province in the country in 2011. While on the other hand, the Western Cape, which was and still one of the wealthiest Provinces, experienced the highest proportion of school dropouts in the country, in 2011. This analysis shows that while a range of quality education outcomes have been found to associate with wealthier spaces, using school dropout as an indicator, poorer Provinces show higher levels of school participation compared to their wealthier counterparts. Are the youth from the poorer Provinces drawn into school and persist longer because there are no other competing alternatives such as work for school dropouts? Do wealthier Provinces offer other alternatives to school dropouts, even for those who move in from poorer Provinces after dropping out?

Disaggregating the Provinces into their constituent districts, the analysis reveals school participation patterns that were not clear at provincial level. The district-level analysis reveals dropout distribution patterns that divide the country along an east-west axis, where the western half of the country was experiencing higher proportion of school dropout than the east. The visual analysis shows that extreme ends of this divide presented juxtaposing patterns of school participation. The far-west of the divide have the highest proportions of school dropout and the far-east of the divide experiences the lowest rates of school dropout. Illustrating the sharp east-west divide in school dropout distribution is the case of the historically and currently poverty-stricken Capricorn district in the far east of the country, which presented the highest school participation rate in the country, strikingly contrasted with the West Coast district in the far west, as the area with the lowest participating rates in the country. Surprisingly, these findings do not align with the general expectation to find in negative education outcomes in impoverished geographies. While quality education outcomes map along the historically well-resourced spaces (Christie, 2013), the same cannot be said about school participation. School participation patterns among older adolescents cannot be adequately understood through the historical apartheid geography.

The local-level analysis revealed important insights into dropout distribution, which are masked by provincially aggregated scores. The concentration of excessive dropout rates in the Karoo, and the contrasting patterns of school participation between the Waterberg localities have shown that the dropout phenomenon cannot be adequately understood as a provincial experience. It is a local experience, and different localities have varying experiences.

The findings further show that country's metropolitan spaces do not share the same urban dynamics, evidenced by the widely varied patterns of dropout between them. In addition, the findings show that school dropout is not necessarily a rural-urban experience, but should be better understood as a peculiar local experience. The localised nature of school dropout patterns has further shown that the provincial aggregation of the phenomenon obscures vital dynamics specific to the local.

The next chapter presents findings of the socio-demographic analysis.

## CHAPTER 6: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter is guided by the research question ‘What are the socio-demographic characteristics associated with older adolescent school dropouts? Guided by the theoretical literature as described and discussed in Chapter 3, the analysis selects a number of demographic and social variables from the Census 2011 dataset and assesses their possible relationship with *school dropout* - the dependent variable. The chapter employs frequency and cross-tabulation analyses in SPSS to determine which of the selected predictor variables associate with school dropout. Extensive cross-tables and figures are used to present and illustrate the relationships between school dropout and the select predictor variables.

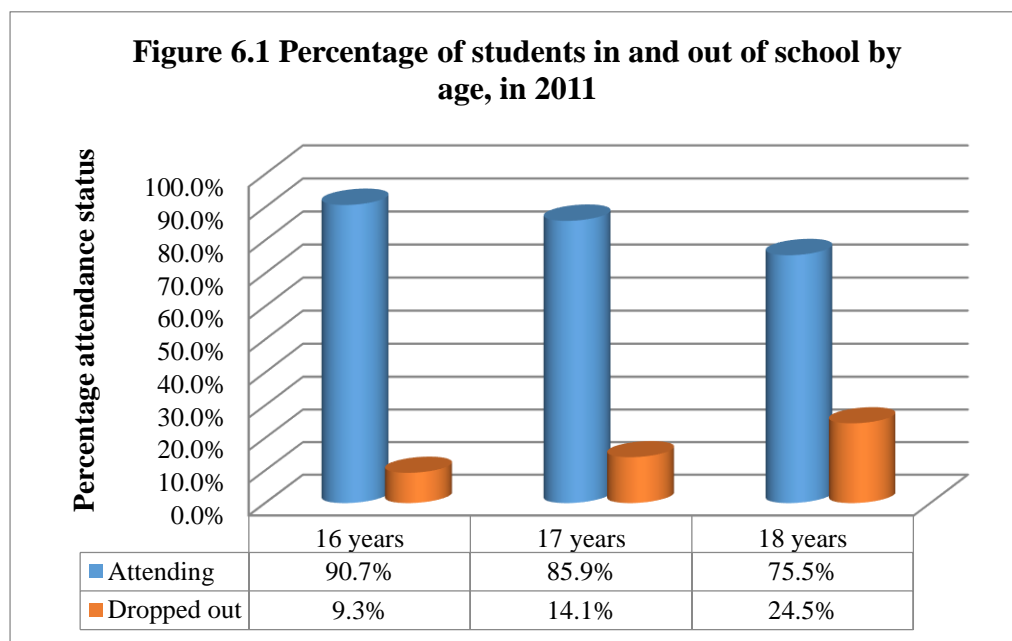
The chapter begins with the analysis of demographic characteristics of age, gender, teenage pregnancy, race group, disability status and employment status for potential association with school dropout among older adolescents. The existing research has found these background factors to influence completion or dropout from school. Then at family level, the chapter examines family structure and socio-economic status for potential influence on the older adolescent’s school participation patterns. Specifically, analysis of the family structure includes birth-parent survival, relationship of the older adolescent with the household head, the size of the household, the gender and age of the household head. In contrast, analysis of the family’s socio-economic status selects and assesses potential influence of the employment status and income level of the household head on school dropout. The chapter concludes by the analysing for relationships between school dropout and access to communal services of piped water and sanitation.

### 6.2 Demographic factors associated with school dropout among older adolescents

The Census 2011 indicates that there were 395 620 (15.3%) older adolescents (16 to 18 year olds) who had dropped out of school, out of a total of 2 582 942, who were expected to still be in school as they had not completed matric. A total of 2 187 322 (84.7%) were found to be still attending school. Possible reasons why the 395 620 older adolescents had dropped out of school are presented below.

### 6.2.1 Age

The analysis shows that 16 year olds presented the lowest school dropout rates (9.3%), while the 18 year olds presented the highest dropout rates (24.5%) (See figure 6.1 below). One in 11 of the 16 year olds had dropped out of school compared to one in four 18 year olds. That is, at the age of 18 the older adolescent was almost three times less likely to be attending school compared to the 16-year-old counterpart. At 17, the older adolescent was likely to be at school just like the national average adolescent, one in seven (see figure 6.1 and table 6.1 below). The story is that at 16 years, the older adolescents are in school at near-universal rate but something appears to happen by the time they turn 18 that one in four drops out of school. The 18 year old school dropouts make up almost half (180 241) of the total (395 620) older adolescent school dropout population (see table 6.1 below).



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.1: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by age**

Age	Attending	Dropped out	Total	% dropped out
16 years	853,825	87,196	941,021	9.3%
17 years	778,119	128,183	906,302	14.1%
18 years	555,378	180,241	735,619	24.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,187,322</b>	<b>395,620</b>	<b>2,582,942</b>	<b>15.3%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

## 6.2.2 Gender

There were slightly more males (51%) among the older adolescents of interest than females (49%) at the time of the survey. The total dropouts were almost equally shared between males (48.1%) and females (51.9%), with females having dropped out at a slightly higher rate than males, with a two percentage point difference (see table 6.2 below). One in seven males had dropped out of school compared to one in six for females.

**Table 6.2: Number and percentage of student in and out of school by sex**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Male	1,126,776	190,452	1,317,228	14.5%
Female	1,060,545	205,168	1,265,713	16.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,187,321</b>	<b>395,620</b>	<b>2,582,941</b>	<b>15.3%</b>

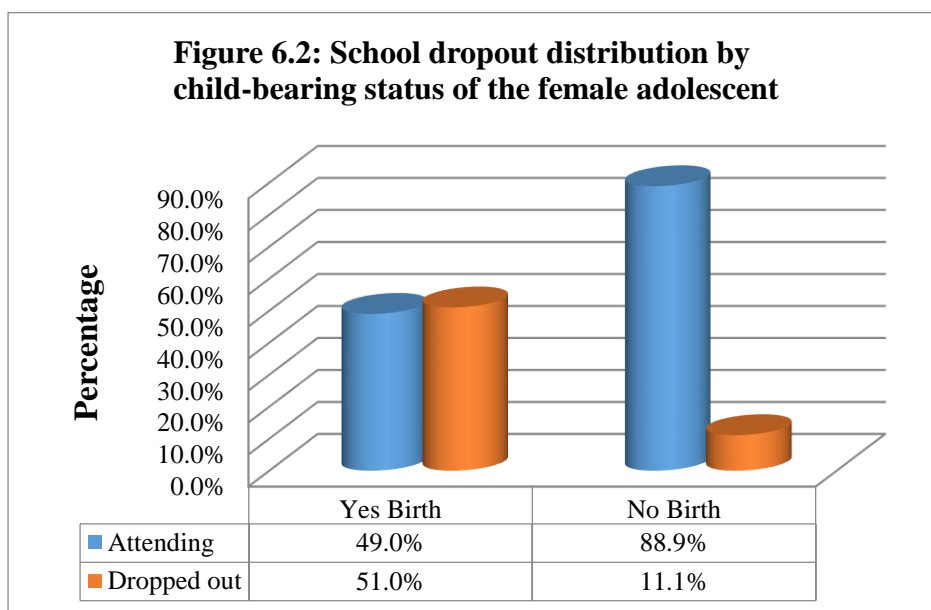
Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

A closer look at the female dropouts reveals an interesting pattern school dropout. Of the total (160 374) female older adolescents who reported to have given birth at one point before the survey, more than half (81 745 or 51 %) of them were out of school (see table 6.3 and figure 6.2 below). This meant that about 20% of the total dropout population were females who have had a pregnancy at one point during their schooling period. That is, one in every five school dropouts was a female who had given birth. It appears that nearly a quarter of all dropouts may initially have been owing to pregnancy and childbirth. On the other hand, those females who had not given birth at the time of the survey were almost five times more likely to be attending schooling than their teenage mother counterparts (see table 6.3 and figure 6.2 below). Females who had not reported a birth of a child were participating in school (88.9%) slightly better than the national average (84.7%), with a four percentage point difference.

**Table 6.3: School dropout distribution by child-bearing status of the female adolescent**

Child ever born	Attending	Dropped out	Total	% dropped out
Yes	78,629	81,745	160,374	51.0%
No	721,902	90,037	811,939	11.1%

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

### 6.2.3 Employment

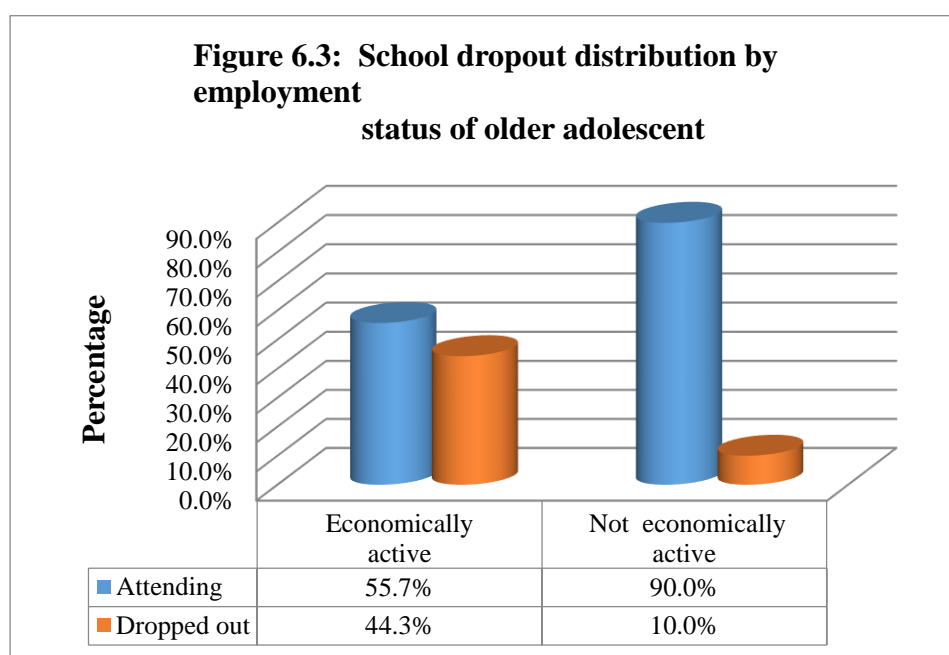
While only four percent (106,845) of the total older adolescent population (2,582,941) was working in one form or another at the time of the survey, and of those employed, one in two was likely to be out of school. Those who were employed and had dropped out of school made about 13% (53 293) of the total dropout about population (395 620). Also, about nine percent (220 300) of the total older adolescent population were reported as unemployed but actively looking for work. Of this segment, about one in three (87 104) were out of school. More interestingly, at the time of the survey, there was about three percent of the older adolescent population who were reported to be discouraged work-seekers (those who have been looking for work for a long while without success), and about 51% of these had dropped out of school, about 10% (37 763) of the dropout population. In contrast, of those older adolescents who were economically inactive, the bulk of the target population, only 10% of them had dropped out. That is, the economically active segment (employed, unemployed and

the discouraged work-seekers), although relatively smaller than the economically inactive segment, still, constituted almost half of the older dropout population (178 160 of the 395620) (see table 6.4 and figure 6.3 below). The economically active segment was five times less likely to be attending school compared to their economically inactive counterparts, suggesting that, albeit in low numbers, those who happened to work while in school were five times more likely to drop out of school.

**Table 6.4: School dropout distribution by employment status of older adolescent**

Employment Status	Attending	Dropped out	Total	% dropped out
Employed	53,552	53,293	106,845	49.9%
Unemployed	133,196	87,104	220,300	39.5%
Discouraged work-seeker	36,871	37,763	74,634	50.6%
Not economically active	1,963,702	217,460	2,181,162	10.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,187,321</b>	<b>395,620</b>	<b>2,582,941</b>	<b>15.3%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

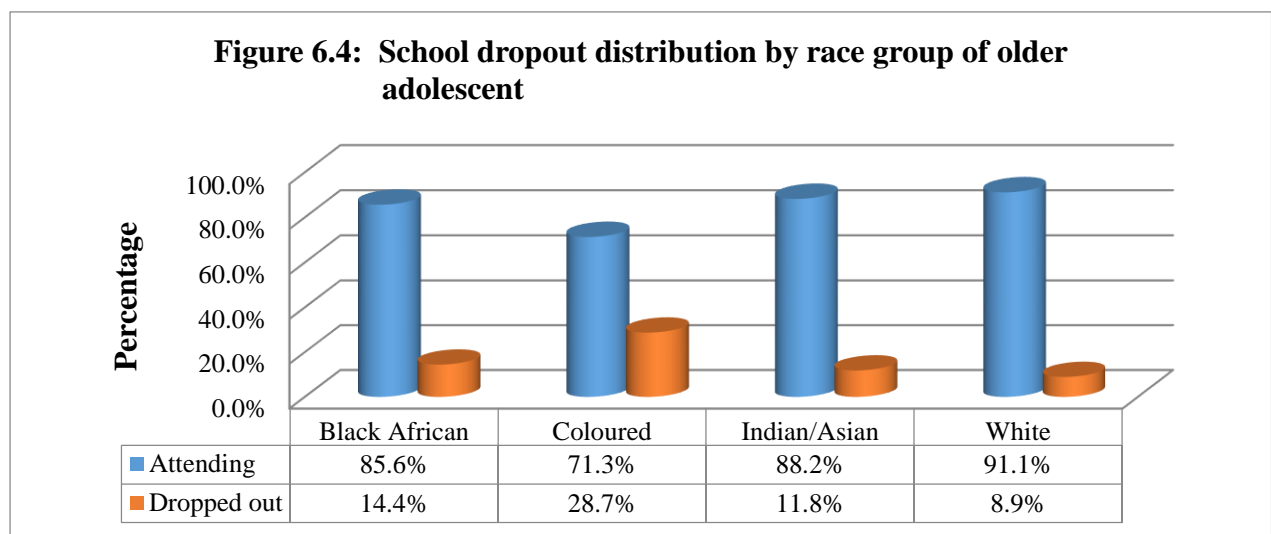


Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

#### 6.2.4 Race group

Census 2011 survey identified four main race groups. Black Africans making up the most of this population (84.7%), the Coloured (8.4%), the White (5.0%) and the Indian or Asian (1.6%) the smallest race group (see table 6.5 and figure 6.4 below). In line with this distribution, Black Africans make the largest portion of the dropout population, and the

Indian/Asian subgroup, the smallest. A closer examination of the race groups reveals that about a third (28.7%) of the Coloured older adolescents had dropped out, the highest dropout rate of the race groups. The lowest dropout rates are observed among the White adolescents, with one in 11 older adolescents having dropped out of school. One in seven had dropped out for the Black Africans, while one in eight had dropped out for the Indian/Asian group. The coloured adolescent was the only one participating worse than the average national adolescent, three times less likely to be attending school than her/his White counterpart, twice less likely than her/his Black African and Indian Asian counterparts (see figure 6.4 below).



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.5: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by race group**

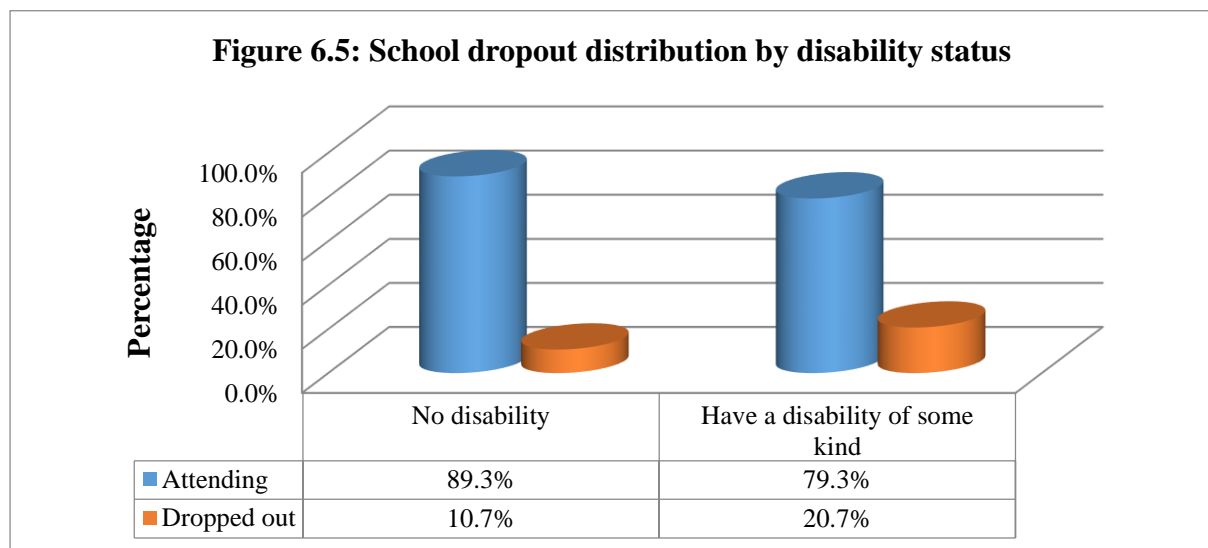
Race group	Attending	Dropped out	Total	% dropped out
Black African	1,873,748	314,503	2,188,251	14.4%
Coloured	153,701	62,005	215,706	28.7%
Indian/Asian	36,609	4,895	41,504	11.8%
White	117,935	11,564	129,499	8.9%
Other	5,329	2,653	7,982	33.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,187,322</b>	<b>395,620</b>	<b>2,582,942</b>	<b>15.3%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

### 6.2.5 Disability

About 95% (2 451 569) of adolescents whose school attendance status was determined as either still attending or had dropped before completing Grade 12 responded to the disability

status question. The question sought to establish if the adolescent had any difficulty in any of the six functional domains, namely, *seeing, hearing, communication, walking, remembering/concentrating, self-care*. About 11% (261 156) of those who responded were reported to have between moderate and total disability in the various functional domains. Of those who reported to live with a disability, about 21% (54 124) of them had dropped out of school. In comparison, among adolescents with no reported disabilities, only about 11% had dropped out. Older adolescents who lived with any type of disability were five percentage points less likely to attend school than the average national older adolescent. Older adolescents with reported disabilities made about 14% (13.6%) of the dropout population. That is, one in seven older adolescents is out of school probably owing to a disability (see figure 6.5 below).

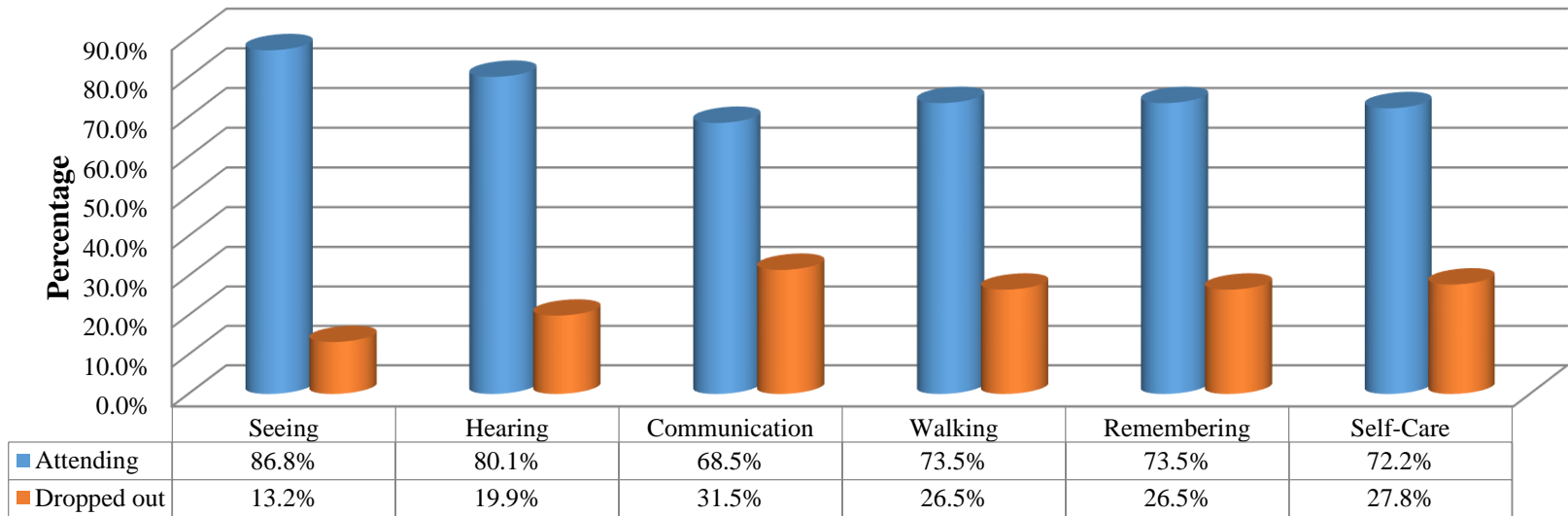


Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

Analysis by type of disability shows high variation in prevalence between the visually impaired and the other disability types. Being visually impaired was the most prevalent disability (40%) reported and communication disability the least prevalent (8.4%). Hearing was the second most prevalent (16.2%) disability, then remembering/concentrating (15.5%), self-care (11.0%) and walking (8.8%). In addition, being visually impaired was associated with the lowest dropout rates (13.2%), while communication, the least prevalent disability type was associated with the highest dropout rate (31.5%) among older adolescents. School dropout was also noticeably high among older adolescents who reported to have disability type of self-care (27.1%), remembering (26.7%) and walking (26.7%). While one in every eight older adolescents who are visually impaired had dropped out of school, one in every

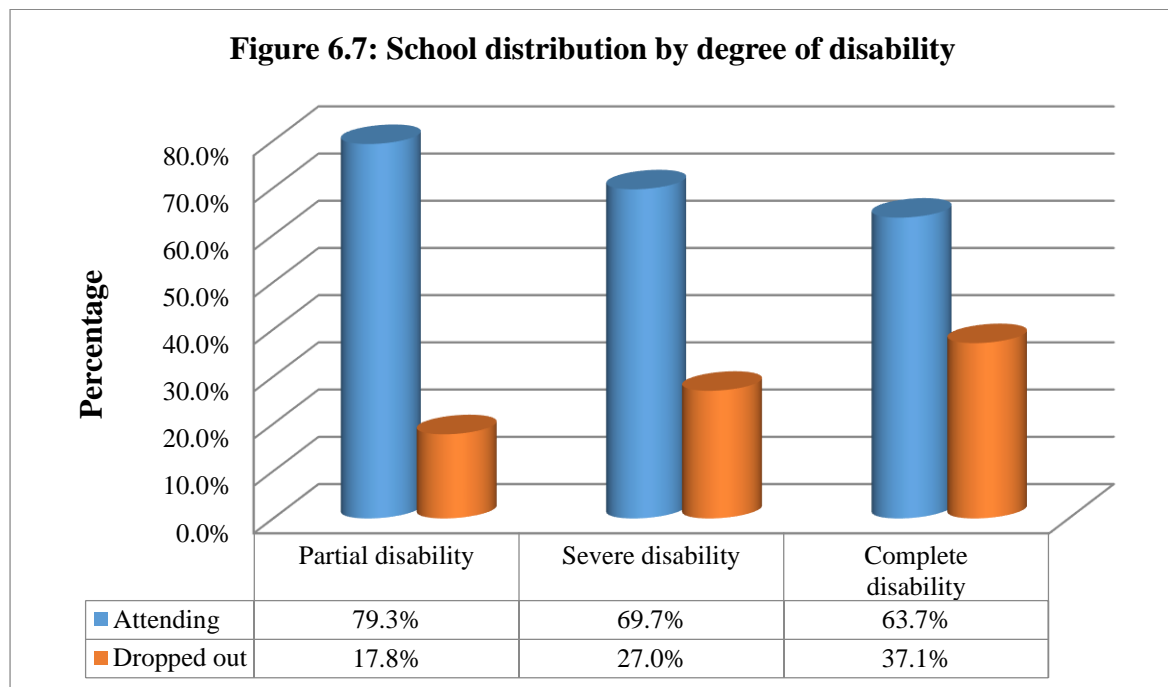
three had dropped out for those with communication difficulties; one in every four had dropped out of school for those who reported walking, remembering and self-care disabilities. That is, the adolescent living with communication disability was more than twice likely to be out of school than her or his counterpart with seeing disability (figure 6.6 below).

**Figure 6.6: School dropout distribution by type of disability**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

Analysis of the extent of disability reveals further decrease in school participation among older adolescents who reported a severe or complete disability. Where severe and complete disability was reported, the highest dropout rates (27.0% and 37.1%, respectively) were observed compared to those who reported a partial disability (17.8%). One in six older adolescents had dropped out of school among those who reported a partial disability, compared to one in three among those who reported severe or complete disability. In summary, while all older adolescents living with disabilities are less likely to attend school than their counterparts with no disabilities, those with complete disabilities are more than twice less likely to attend school than their counterparts with partial disabilities. The results point to increased marginalization of the most vulnerable individuals (figure 6.7 below).



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

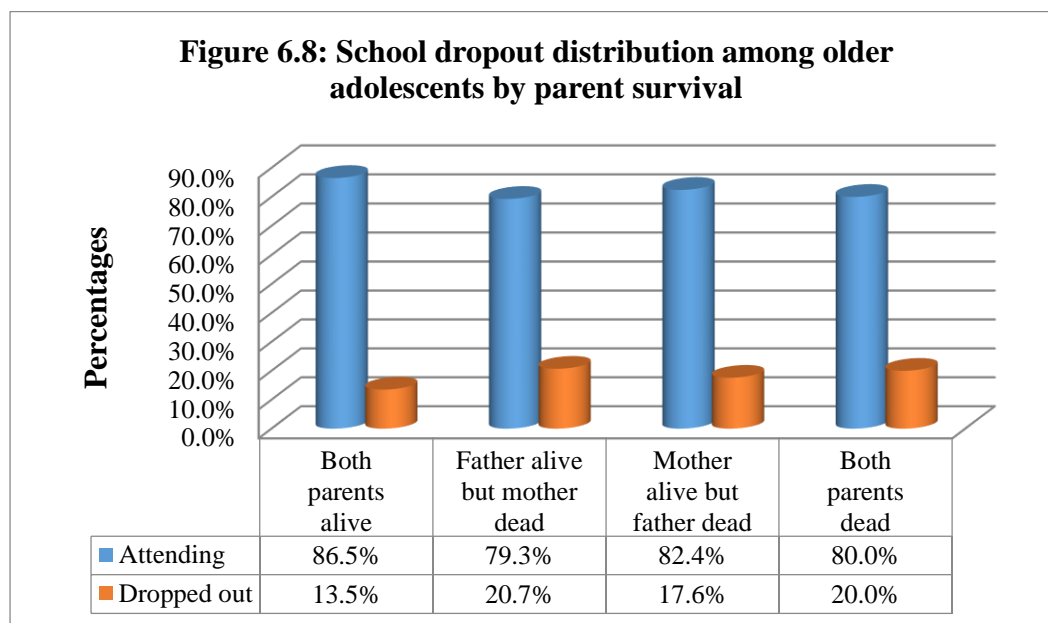
### **6.3 Family and community factors associated with school dropout among older adolescents**

Other than the individual demographic factors, social and broader communal characteristics affecting the lives of the older adolescents were analysed for potential influence on school participation patterns. The results are presented below.

### 6.3.1 Family structure of the older adolescent and school participation

#### *Parent survival*

The analysis focused on the possible influence of parent survival on school participation patterns among older adolescents, and results reveal that where both parents were alive, participation in school was high (86.5%), compared with 80.0% participation, where both parents had died - about seven percentage points decrease in school participation. The likelihood of school dropout also increased with the death of the mother. Interestingly, chances of staying in school appear to slightly improve when both parents were dead compared to when only the father was still alive (80.0% versus 79.3%). With only the mother alive, participation was better than in cases where both parents were dead and a further percentage point better than when only the father was alive (see figure 6.8 below, table 6.6). One in every six had dropped out where only the mother was alive compared to one in every five where only the father was alive (see figure 6.8 below, table 6.6). As expected, having both parents alive in the household enhanced the chances of sustained schooling among adolescents. On the contrary, a mother's death appears to diminish the chances of continued schooling, although only slightly. That is, having only a father did not appear to benefit their schooling career, with the older adolescent's schooling prospects even better with both parents dead than with only the father alive.



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.6: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by parent survival**

Parental survival	Attending	Dropped out	Total	% dropped out
Both parents alive	1,386,670	216,034	1,602,704	13.5%
Father alive but mother dead	112,189	29,256	141,445	20.7%
Mother alive but father dead	417,738	89,306	507,044	17.6%
Both parents dead	177,524	44,431	221,955	20.0%

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

### *Relationship to the household head*

Further analysis of the household structure shows higher participation in school associated with stronger family structures (led by biological parent or grandparent) compared to marginal or weaker structures (see table 6.7 and figure 6.9 below). As expected, most (76.1% of the target population) were in parent and grandparent-led households. These included biological, adopted and stepparent-headed households. Interestingly, school participation was the highest (11.2% dropout rate), where the head of the household was a great/grandparent, followed (12.5% dropout rate) by biological parent-headed household, about one percentage point difference. Moreover, adopted and stepparent families, although participating above national average, experienced slightly higher dropout rates than biological parent families (see table 6.7 and figure 6.9 below). In sharp contrast, marginal family structures, where head of households were not a biological parent or grandparent, school participation was notably lower than the national average. While parent and grandparent families experienced one in every eight adolescent dropout, one in every four had dropped in other forms of family structures. That is, older adolescents from weaker family structures were twice less likely to be attending school than her/his counterpart from parent or grandparent-led families.

Lower school participation rates were observed among older adolescents who were heads of household themselves (30.5% dropout rate), and even worse where the older adolescent was a spouse or partner to the household head (58.3%). One in every three had dropped out of school where the older adolescent was the head of the household, while more than a half had dropped out where the older adolescent was a partner or spouse to the head of the household. Disturbingly low patterns of school participation were also observed among in-law families,

with between 30 and 40% dropout rates. Also noticeably low, was participation levels in sibling-led (20.5% dropout rate), and in households headed by non-related persons (32.5%). The older adolescents in families headed by an in-law, sibling and non-related person were two to three times less likely to be in school than their counterparts in parent/grandparent headed households. In addition, those adolescents who lived in households headed by related persons, were still noticeably less in school (17.8% dropout rate), than those in parent-led households (see figure 6.8 above).

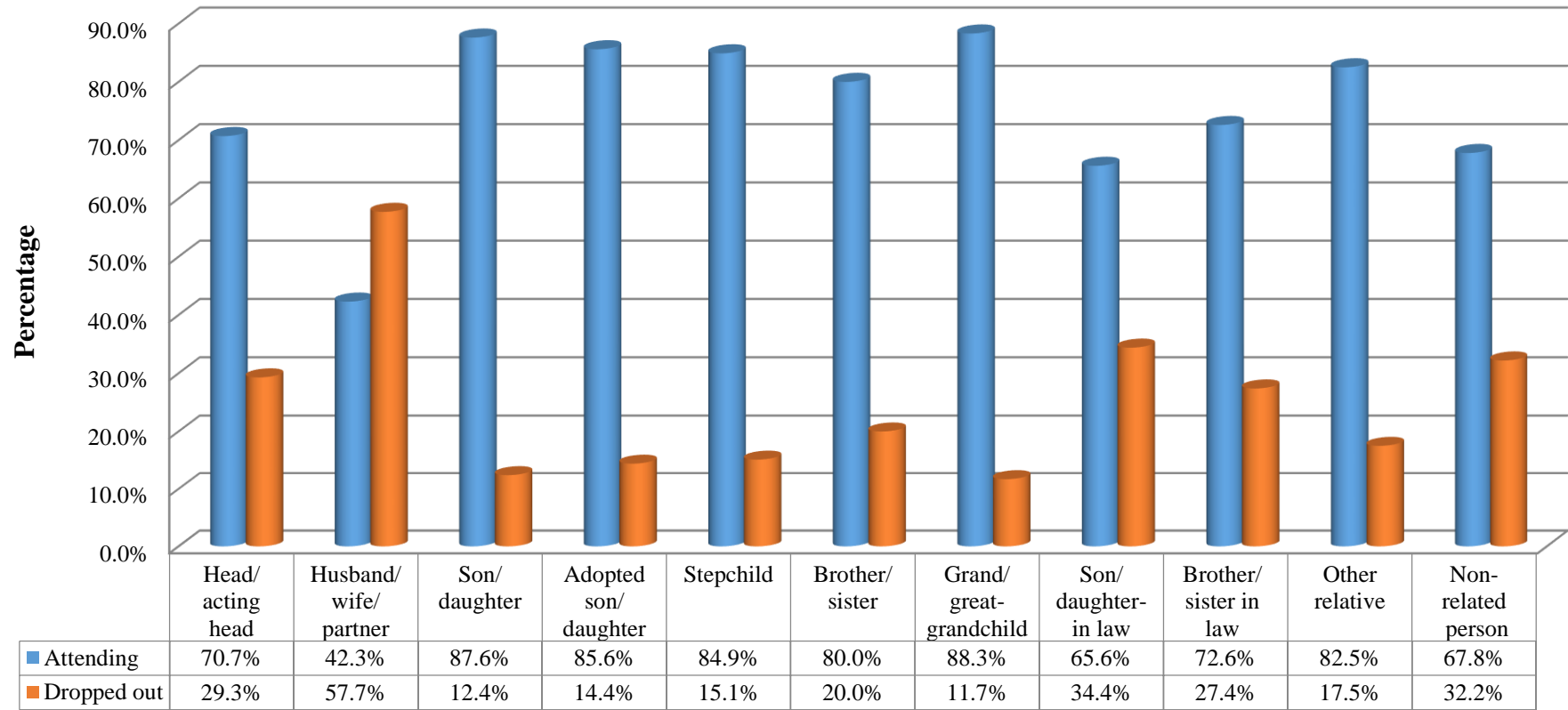
A more fine-grained analysis reveals that custodial grandparenting notably improved school attendance from the national average (15.3%) regardless of the survival status of the parents (see table 6.8). Where grandparents took custody of the older adolescents, with both parents still alive, school participation was at its highest. While living away from the older adolescents, it appears parents appear to still play a complementary role to the grandparents. They enhance adolescent chances of staying and completing school. Surprisingly, custodial grandparenting still improved school attendance chances where both parents had died, compared to when either of the parents had died (see table 6.8). Important to note is that custodial grandparenting was the most beneficial family type, particularly after the death of both or any of the parents, compared to any type of household headship. That is, the absence of grandparent custody after the death of both parents, school dropout rates increased well above the national rate (compare tables 6.6 above and 6.8 farther below).

**Table 6.7: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by their relationship to head of the household**

<b>Relationship to household head</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Head/acting head	54,837	24,011	78,848	30.5%
Husband/wife/partner	17,600	24,646	42,246	58.3%
Son/daughter	1,278,048	182,531	1,460,579	12.5%
Adopted son/daughter	18,167	3,096	21,263	14.6%
Stepchild	27,589	4,929	32,518	15.2%
Brother/sister	111,400	28,676	140,076	20.5%
Grandchild/ great grandchild	397,972	53,227	451,199	11.8%
Son/daughter in-law	14,418	7,721	22,139	34.9%
Brother/sister in-law	11,108	4,288	15,396	27.9%
Other relative	229,677	49,729	279,406	17.8%
Not-related	26,506	12,764	39,270	32.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,187,322</b>	<b>395,620</b>	<b>2,582,942</b>	<b>15.3%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Figure 6.9: Dropout distribution older adolescents by relationship to the head of the household**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.8: Number and percentage of students in and out of school in grandparent-led households, by parent survival**

<b>Parental survival</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Both parents alive	191,288	23,382	214,670	10.9%
Father alive but mother dead	33,326	5,601	38,927	14.4%
Mother alive but father dead	78,452	11,577	90,029	12.9%
Both parents dead	64,298	9,171	73,469	12.5%

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

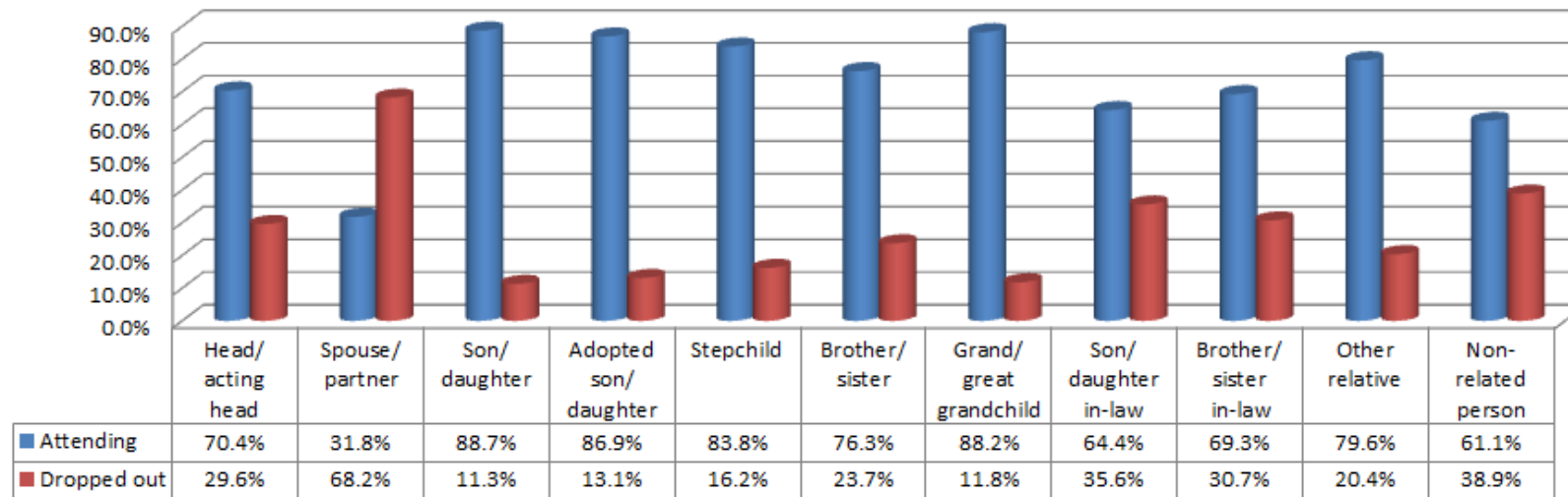
### *Gender of the household head*

The analysis (figures 6.10 and 11 below) further reveals that when controlling for gender of the household head, a percentage point difference (84.0% from 85.7%) between male and female-led households is observed, with male-led households presenting slightly higher dropout rates. That is, the male household headship was associated with school participation rate almost a percentage point lower than the national average, and about two percentage points lower than for the female-led households. However, an examination of the different family types shows that, except for parent and grandparent-led families, all other family types saw a sharp decrease in school participation among all male-headed families. As illustrated (figures 6.10 and 11 below and table 6.14 in Appendix B), there was an acute decrease in school participation where the household was headed by a male spouse/partner (68.2% dropout rate), compared to households headed by female spouse/partner (24.6% dropout rate). That is, the older adolescent was three times less likely not to be in school where the head of the household was a male partner or spouse, and vice versa. About 40 000 or three percent of the total older adolescent population lived in this family type. Similarly, other male-led family types also saw a steep decrease in school participation among older adolescents, with brother-led households experiencing higher dropout rates than the sister-led counterparts (23.7% versus 16.9%). In the same vein, notable decreases in school participation were also observed where the household was headed by the brother-in-law (30.7% versus 23.1% for female headed families), a father-in-law (35.6% versus 33.4%); any other male relative (20.4% versus 15.3%), and a non-related male (38.9% versus 24.7%). One in four had dropped out of school where a brother was heading the household, compared to one in six when a sister was heading the household. One in five had dropped out of school when a male relative was head compared to one in eight when a female relative was head. In

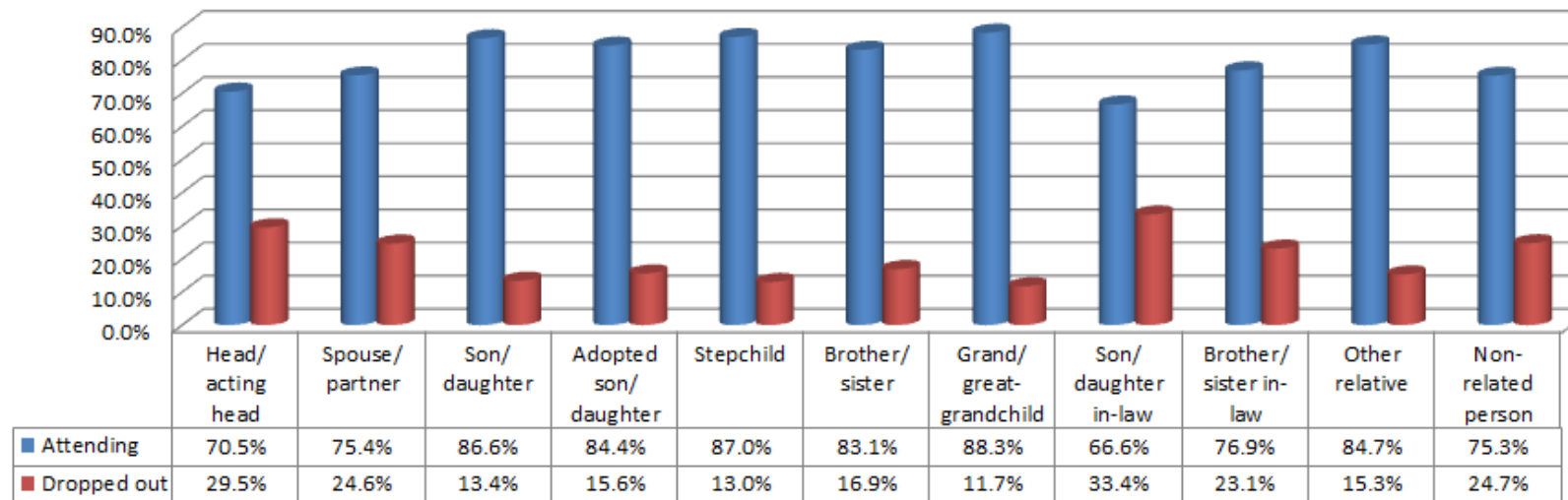
addition, one in three had dropped out when non-related male person was head, compared to one in four where the head is a non-related female. This information is presented in table 6.14 in Appendix B.

In summary, male-led households, including where biological fathers were head (and the mother was dead), had a negative influence on sustained schooling among older adolescents. This alludes to females' central role on children schooling even in the households where the household is male-led. The significance of the female role in continued schooling by children is realised only after the death of the female when children tend drop out of school at a higher rate. The male head's less beneficial role in sustained schooling was also apparent when the adolescent continued schooling even after the death of the father (or the male relative head), and the mother (or female relative) takes sole leadership.

**Figure 6. 10: School dropout distribution by relationship to household head, by male head of household**



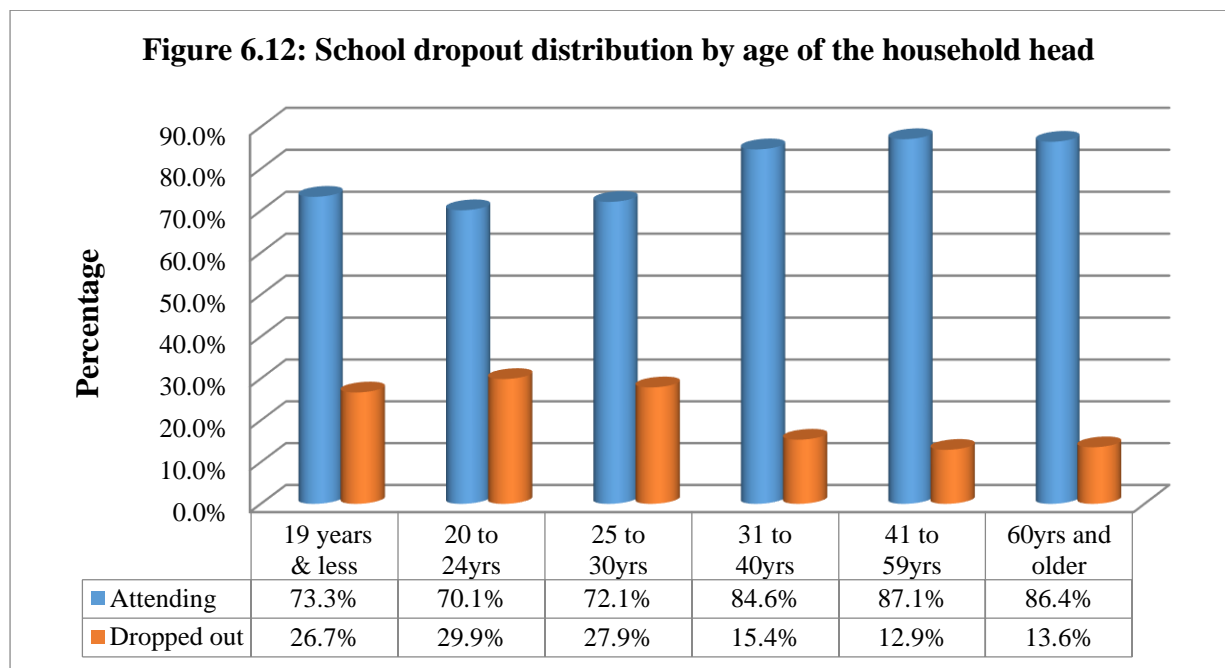
**Figure 6.11: School dropout distribution by relationship to household head, by female head of household**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

### *Age of the household head*

The age of the household head was analysed for possible influence on school dropout among older adolescents, and the results show higher dropout rates (between 26% and 30%) among youth-headed households (30 years and younger). On the contrary, the analysis shows school participation rates exceeding the national average where the household head was 31 years and older (between 12% and 15% dropout rate). One in every four older adolescents had dropped out of school where the household head was 30 years and younger, compared to one in every seven where the head of the household is 31 years and older. The likelihood of dropping out of school doubled where the head of the household was too young to be a parent to the older adolescent (see figure 6.12 below). It appears that even when the head was not a parent, but old enough to be one, it had a positive influence on older adolescent's schooling. It looks like the older the parent or the household head became, the more positive influence they had on older adolescent schooling.

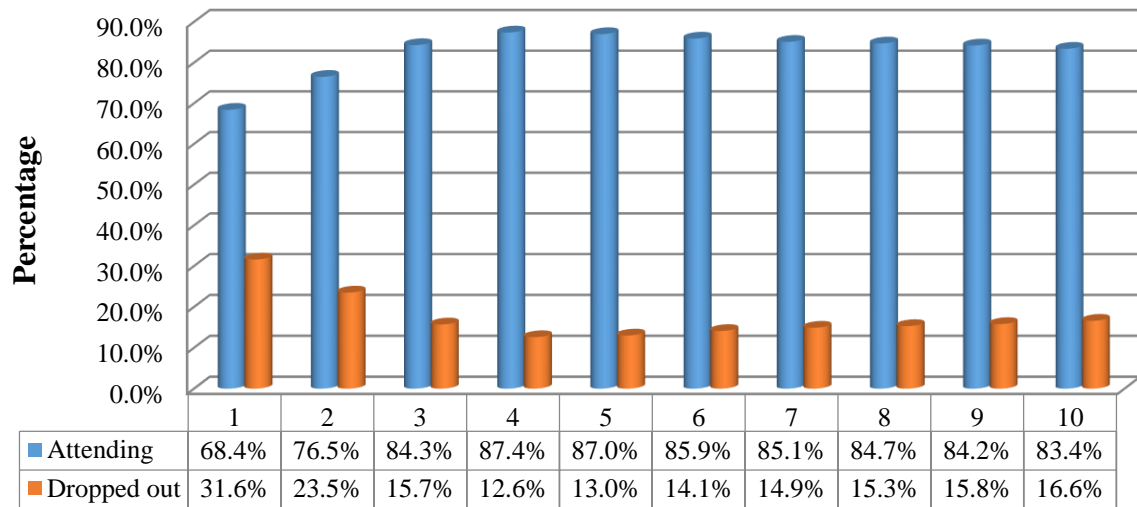


Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

### *Household membership size*

Household membership sizes of between one and 10 make 94% of the total older adolescent population of interest. The analysis for influence of household membership on schooling reveals higher rates of school participation among older adolescents in households with membership sizes of two or more. Single and two-member households were associated with dropout rate more than double that of household membership sizes of three and more. The highest school participation was evidenced among older adolescents from households with between four and five members. For instance, one in every eight (lower than the national dropout rate) older adolescent had dropped out of school in these two household membership sizes, while one in every seven (at national dropout rate) had dropped out of school in household memberships of between six and eight. In addition, one in every three and one in every four older adolescent from household membership sizes of one and two had dropped out of school, respectively. That is, household membership sizes of two and less are more than twice likely to drop out of school than their counterparts from household sizes of between four and five membership. The results then show the likelihood of dropping out of school among older adolescents increasing with the increase in household size from membership of nine upwards. One in every six had dropped out of school among household membership sizes of nine and 10, a dropout rate higher than the national average. Furthermore, school dropout rate was also higher than the national average in household membership size of three (see figure 6.13 and table 6.9 below). Household membership sizes of three and smaller were unlikely to be parent/grand-parent led households, as they are associated with high dropout rates. The households with two or less members appear to be marginal family structures, likely to be headed by the older adolescents themselves, and as discussed in the earlier, youth-headed families were associated with high dropout rates.

**Figure 6.13: School dropout distribution by household membership size**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.9: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by household membership size**

Household membership size	Attending	Dropped out	Total	% dropped out
1	21,521	9,954	3,1475	31.6%
2	111,156	34,133	145,289	23.5%
3	248,031	46,318	294,349	15.7%
4	376,269	54,094	430,363	12.6%
5	373,755	55,646	429,401	13.0%
6	306,846	50,205	357,051	14.1%
7	229,122	40,216	269,338	14.9%
8	162,203	29,299	191,502	15.3%
9	111,213	20,870	132,083	15.8%
10	109,213	21,707	130,920	16.6%

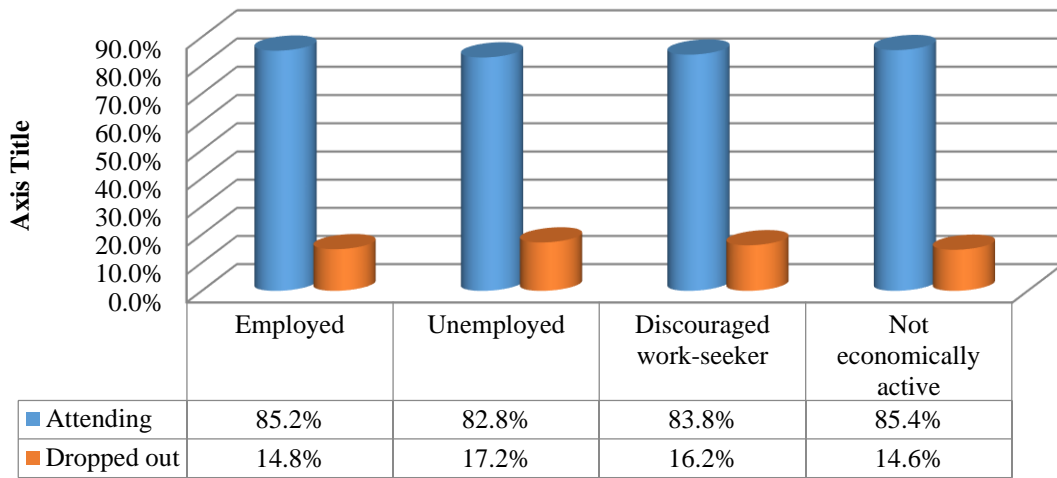
Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

### 6.3.2 Family socio-economic status

#### *Employment status of head of household*

Households led by employed head appear to associate with slightly higher participation rate than the national average. The results show that one in every seven (14.8% dropout) older adolescents had dropped out of school where the household head was employed compared to one in six (17.2%) where the household head was unemployed, or was a discouraged work-seeker. However, it is interesting to note that older adolescents from economically inactive households (40% of the target population) participated in school at a slightly higher rate than those from the economically active households – the employed, unemployed and discouraged work-seeker households. One in every seven (14.6%) older adolescents had dropped out of school in households led by an economically inactive household head compared to one in every six in household led by an unemployed head – about three percentage point improvement (see figure 6.14 below and table 6.19 in Appendix B). The economically inactive are more likely to be custodial grandparents depending on social security grants for household maintenance, including support of older adolescent schooling. These grandparent-headed household, from the analysis earlier, were associated with the highest levels of school participation among adolescents. The unemployed heads of household were likely to be those without any kind of income, probably after losing a job, and therefore unable to maintain the household like they used to, including the adolescent's bare necessities for school, such as costs for uniforms (see figure 6.14 below).

**Figure 6.14: School dropout distribution by employment status of the household head**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

A regional analysis of employment reveals uneven patterns of influence on school participation (see tables 15 to 18 in Appendix B). For instance, in the Western Cape and Gauteng Provinces, higher school participation rates were associated with households headed by employed heads, while lower participation rates were associated with households headed by unemployed individuals (78.3% versus 72.0% in the Western Cape and 88.2% versus 86.0% in Gauteng). However, the pattern reversed, although slightly, in Limpopo and North West Provinces, where lower participation rates among older adolescents were associated with employed household heads compared to higher participation rates associated with unemployed heads of household, albeit slightly (90.1% versus 90.4% in Limpopo and 80.6% versus 82.2% in North West). Further observation was made in Limpopo where highest and second highest participation rates appeared to associate with the economically inactive household heads (92.7%) and the discouraged work-seeking household heads (92.2%). This is between two and three percentage points higher participation than that associated with the employed household heads (90.1%) (See table 17 in Appendix B). This pattern contrasts with that in the Western Cape where lowest participation rates were observed when the household head was economically inactive (70.9% from 75.2% provincial rate) or was a discouraged work-seeker (67.2% from 75.2%) (See table 15 in Appendix B). Interestingly, in Gauteng, the economically inactive household heads were associated with school participation rate at almost the provincial rate (86.0% versus 86.3%), unlike the unemployed (81.8%) and the

discouraged work-seeking (82.8%) household heads, which are associated with school participation much lower than the provincial participation rate (See table 16 in Appendix B).

The clearly distinctly contrasting patterns of school participation among the poor in the Limpopo and Western Cape Provinces might relate to the varied rates of employment between the two provinces. In 2011, Limpopo had the second lowest employment rate among household heads in the country. This was in contrast to the Western Cape's second highest rate of employment in the country. This might have meant fewer poorer households in the Western Cape and possible perception of alienation from the mainstream non-poor. The feeling of marginalization might have resulted in low school participation among the poorer adolescents. In Limpopo, the pervasive unemployment could have meant majority were poor and no same feeling of alienation felt among the poor. In other words, the poorer households were the mainstream. Moreover, without feeling marginalized, older adolescents enrolled and persisted in school long enough.

Other than employment status of the household head, family income was also analysed for potential influence on school participation.

### *Income*

Census 2011 allocated 12 annual household income categories, with categories one and 12 the lowest and the highest, respectively. The analysis of school participation patterns against the various categories shows that higher household income appeared to associate with higher school participation rates, and the opposite generally holds true (93.3% versus 80.4%). That is, the likelihood of dropping out of school decreased with increase in household income, and vice versa. For instance, one in 15 older adolescents had dropped out of school from the highest earning households, compared to one in five where households did not have income. That is, the older adolescent from the household with no income was almost three times less likely to be attending school than her/his counterpart from the highest earning household (see figure, 6.15 and table 6.10 below). Also important to note is the revelation that the households without income had a large number of older adolescents than highest-income category households. In fact, the households in no-income category represented notably more adolescents than the four highest income categories. That is, while higher household income appeared to positively influence school participation, this represented a relatively small

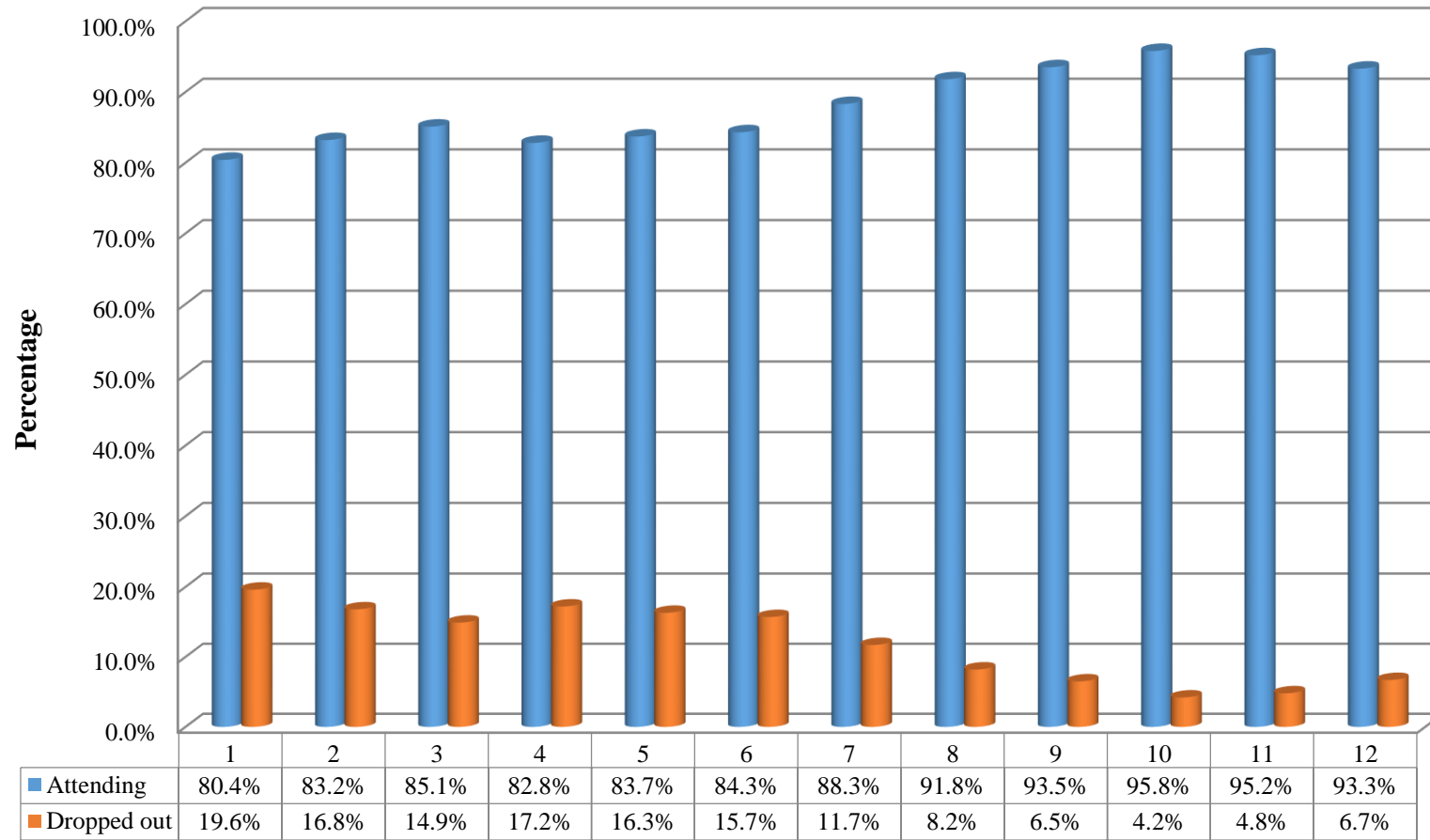
number of older adolescents. Income categories 2 to 8 represented the bulk of the older adolescents, and school participation rate in these categories was about the national rate (84.7%). The no-income and high-income category households were at the extreme ends of the scale (see table 6.10 and figure 6.15 below).

**Table 6.10: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by household income category**

<b>Income category</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
1	194, 490	47,405	241,895	19.6%
2	96,113	19,429	115,542	16.8%
3	216,915	38,053	254,968	14.9%
4	351,852	73,309	425,161	17.2%
5	498,993	97, 011	596,004	16.3%
6	310,861	57,758	368,619	15.7%
7	187,238	24,720	211,958	11.7%
8	138,490	12,289	150,779	8.2%
9	85,818	5,592	91,770	6.5%
10	33,252	1,474	34,726	4.2%
11	10,988	554	11,542	4.8%
12	6,212	448	6,660	6.7%

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Figure 6.15: School dropout distribution by household income category**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

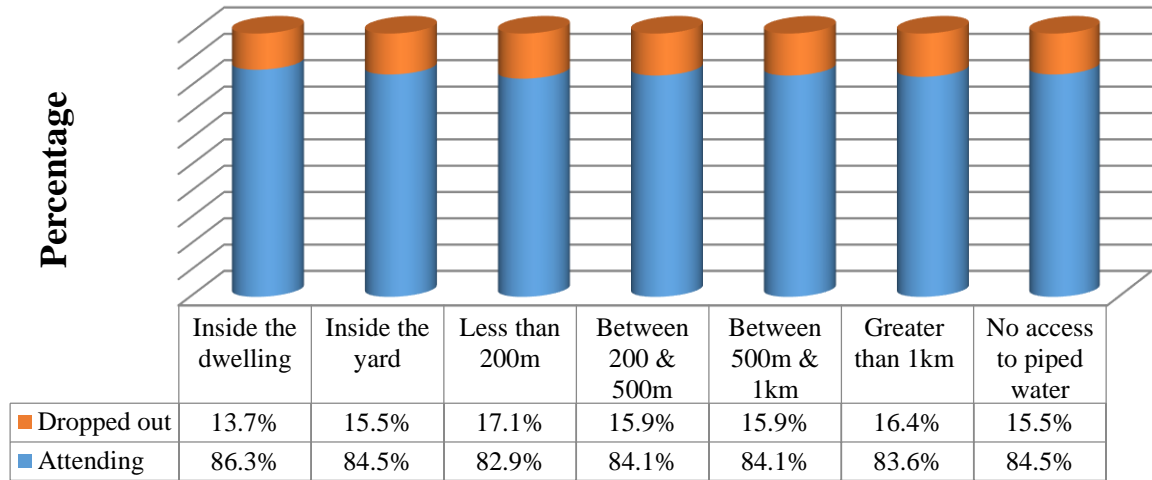
Closely related to family's socio-economic status, and its influence on school participation, the section further analysed the access to basic communal services of piped water and sanitation for potential relationships.

### 6.3.3 Access to communal services and school dropout

#### *Access to piped (tap) water*

Access to piped water ranged from availability inside the dwelling to travelling over a kilometre to access it, or no availability altogether. The analysis reveals that accessing piped water inside the dwelling and inside the yard were the two most widespread points of access (37.7% and 26.8% respectively), making 65% of all access point types. While accessing water inside the dwelling was associated with highest level of school participation (86.3%), about two percentage points better than the national average, accessing piped water from inside the yard was associated with rate of school participation the same as for those accessing water outside the yard at different distances nationally. School participation among households accessing piped water anywhere outside the dwelling were uniformly below (albeit slightly) the national rate. One in every seven older adolescents accessing piped water from inside the dwelling had dropped out of school compared with one in six, where piped water was accessed from any point outside the dwelling. Interesting to note though, is that for those households (about 15 percent of the older adolescent population) without access to piped water, school participation level was similar to their counterparts accessing piped water from different points outside the dwelling - with one in every six having dropped out of school (see figure 6.16 and table 6.11 below).

**Figure 6.16: School dropout distribution by access and to distance to piped water**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.11: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by access and distance to piped water**

Access/distance to piped water	Attending	Dropped out	Total	% dropped out
Inside dwelling	817,352	129,782	947,134	13.7%
Inside yard	567,446	104,074	671,520	15.5%
Less than 200 from dwelling	281,005	57,878	338,883	17.1%
Between 200m and 500m from dwelling	94,855	17,895	112,750	15.9%
Between 500m and 1 km from dwelling	43,017	8,133	51,150	15.9%
Over 1 km from dwelling	25,123	4,946	30,069	16.4%
No access to piped water	302,558	55,704	358,262	15.5%

Source: Calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

However, a finer analysis of the influence of access and distance to piped water reveals uneven school participation patterns across regions, as illustrated below (see figures 6.17 to 6.20). For an example, lack of access or longer distances to the point of piped water appears to have little or no influence on school participation in Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal (figures 17 and 18 below). In Limpopo for example, 15% of the adolescent population live in households without access to piped water and only about nine percent of this segment had dropped out of school, similar (nine percent dropout rate) participation rate to those who accessed water from inside the yard or from between 200 and 500 metres from the dwelling. Similarly, as the analysis demonstrates (see figure 6.18), having no access to piped water in

the KwaZulu-Natal Province does not appear to be an issue in school participation among adolescents, with one in seven having dropped out, equal to those who accessed inside the yard. There was only one percentage point difference in school participation rate between households with no access to piped water and those that accessed water inside the dwelling. On the contrary, school participation appears to highly correlate with access and distance to piped water in some regions such as the Free State and Gauteng (figures 19 and 20 below). For instance, a noticeable decrease in school participation rates was observed in the Free State where households had no access to piped water compared to where water was accessed inside the dwelling or inside the yard. There was about 20 percentage point difference in school participation between households that had no access to piped water and those whose holds that accessed water inside the dwelling or yard. That is, one in three had dropped out of school where piped water was not accessible, compared to one in nine where water was accessed inside the dwelling. Similarly, in Gauteng, where piped water was anywhere outside the dwelling, a sharp decrease in school participation was observed. For example, there was a 21 percentage point difference in school participation between those accessing water inside the house and those accessing it less than 200 metres outside the yard. One in 10 had dropped out of school where water was accessed inside the house compared to one in three when accessed less than 200 meters outside the yard. Older adolescents from households accessing water less than 200 meters outside yard were three times less likely to be in school than their counterparts from households which accessed water inside the dwelling in Gauteng.

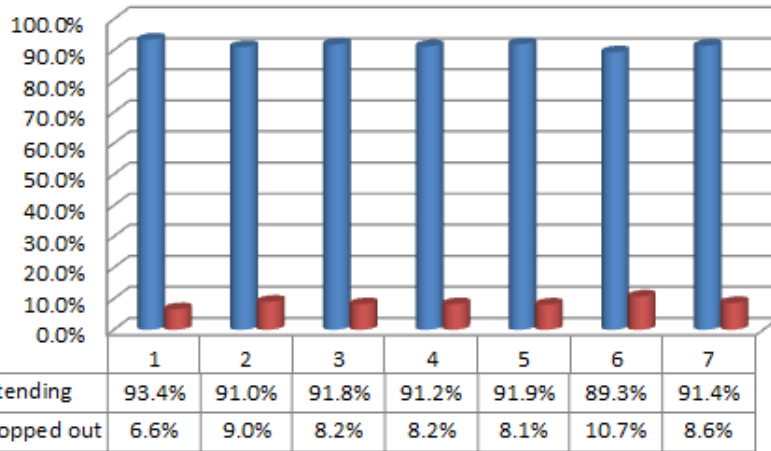
So, access (or lack of) and distance to piped water appears to associate unevenly to school participation across regions. Something else appears to be at play other than water access per se. For instance, a predominantly urban setting of Gauteng, access to piped water is expected to be universal. Those without access to piped water inside the dwelling were likely to be informal settlements and the ultra-poor on the margins of society, among whom higher rates of school dropout were expected. For example, the Census 2011 data show that access to piped water in Gauteng was about 98% and those without access are on the fringes, including problems with access to schools. Like Gauteng, Free State also had 98% access to piped water, which is the third highest in the country. The correlation between lack of access to piped water and higher rates of school dropout seems to suggest that this segment of the population was also the most marginalised in the region. On the other hand, where access to piped water was lower such as in KwaZulu-Natal (78.7%) and Limpopo (84.7%), the second

and the third least prevalent in the country respectively, having no access to piped water appeared to not necessarily mean marginalization in those particular communities. Despite their poor circumstances, including lack of access to piped water, households appeared to be part of regional socio-cultural mainstream, including taking part and staying in school at higher rates. The analysis shows less than a quarter and less than a third of the target population in Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces accessed water from inside the dwelling, with the majority points of water access outside the dwelling. The opposite is true, where fewer households accessed water from outside the dwelling or had no access to piped water, pointed to the most marginalised communities. Moreover, these communities on the fringes participated in school less than their mainstream counterparts, like in the Free State and Gauteng Provinces.

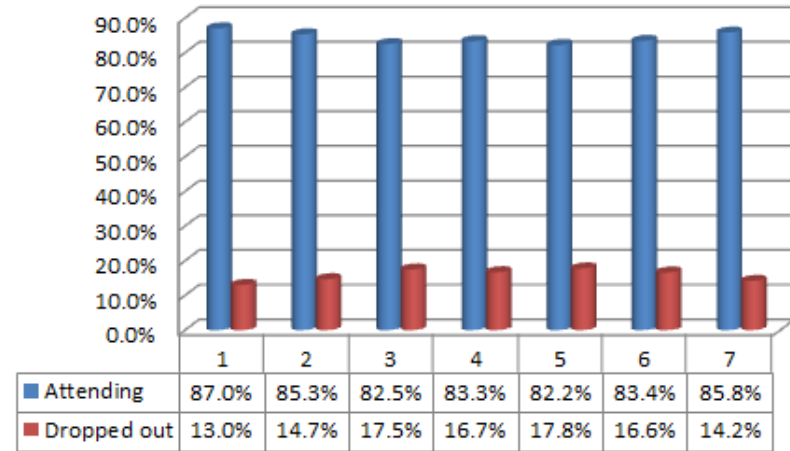
**Notes to figures 6.17 – 20 below: access and distance to piped water**

- 1 = accessed inside dwelling
- 2 = inside the yard
- 3 = less than 200 meters from the dwelling, on community stand
- 4 = between 200 and 500 meters from the dwelling, on community stand
- 5 = 500 meters and 1 kilometre from the dwelling, on community stand
- 6 = over 1 kilometre from the dwelling, on community stand
- 7 = no access to piped water

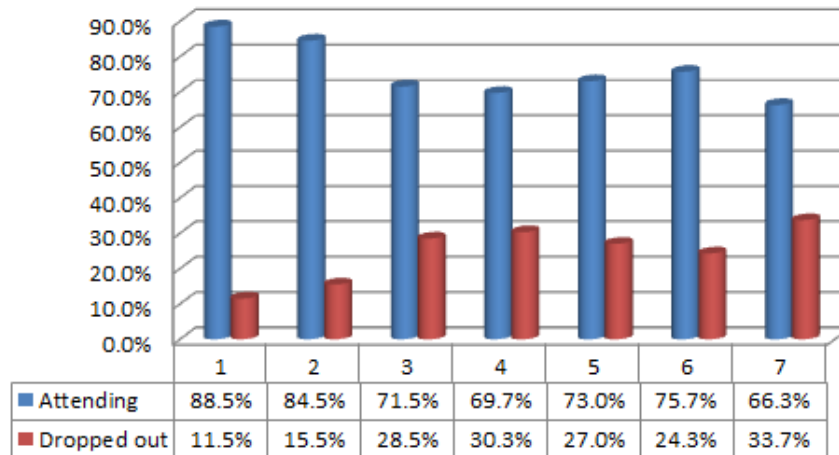
**Figure 6.17: School dropout distribution by access and distance to piped water in Limpopo**



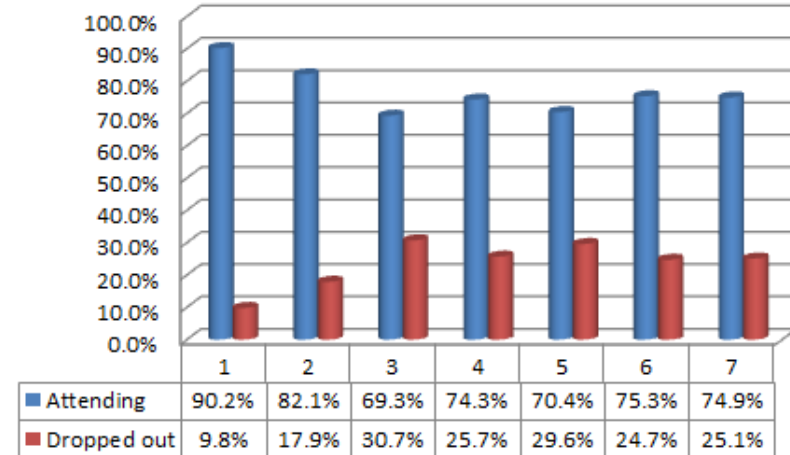
**Figure 6.18 School dropout distribution by access and distance to piped water in KwaZulu-Natal**



**Figure 6.19 School dropout distribution by access and distance to piped water in Free State**



**Figure 6.20: School dropout distribution by access and distance to piped water in Gauteng**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

Access to sanitation services was also analysed for its possible impact on school participation among older adolescents.

*Access to sanitation services – toilets and refuse removal*

The Census 2011 data lists eight types of toilet facilities, including no access to any type toilet facility. The sewage-flush toilet was the most common (44.1%) toilet type and pit toilet without ventilation (26.5%) and pit toilet with ventilation (13.1%) the second and the third most prevalent in the country. The least prevalent (1.7%) toilet type was the bucket toilet system, and it was associated with the lowest school participation rate (25% dropout rate), while the three most prevalent toilet types presented the three highest participation rates. Interestingly, the pit toilet system was associated with the lowest dropout rates, with the pit toilet without ventilation linked to the highest participation rate (86.9%), and the pit toilet with ventilation (86.4%). The most prevalent toilet type, the sewage-flush toilet system that represented almost half the target population, was linked with slightly lower school participation rates (85.3%), about one percentage point less than the pit toilet with or without ventilation system. The three most prevalent toilet types were associated with school participation rates of between one and two percentage points higher than the national average. This sharply contrasted with the use of the bucket toilet where one in four had dropped out of school compared to one in every seven for those who used the three most prevalent toilet types. Noticeably, low school participation was also observed in households which did not have any toilet facilities (22.1% dropout rate ) or used other forms of toilets (20.3%) not specified in the survey (see table 6.12 figure 6.21 below).

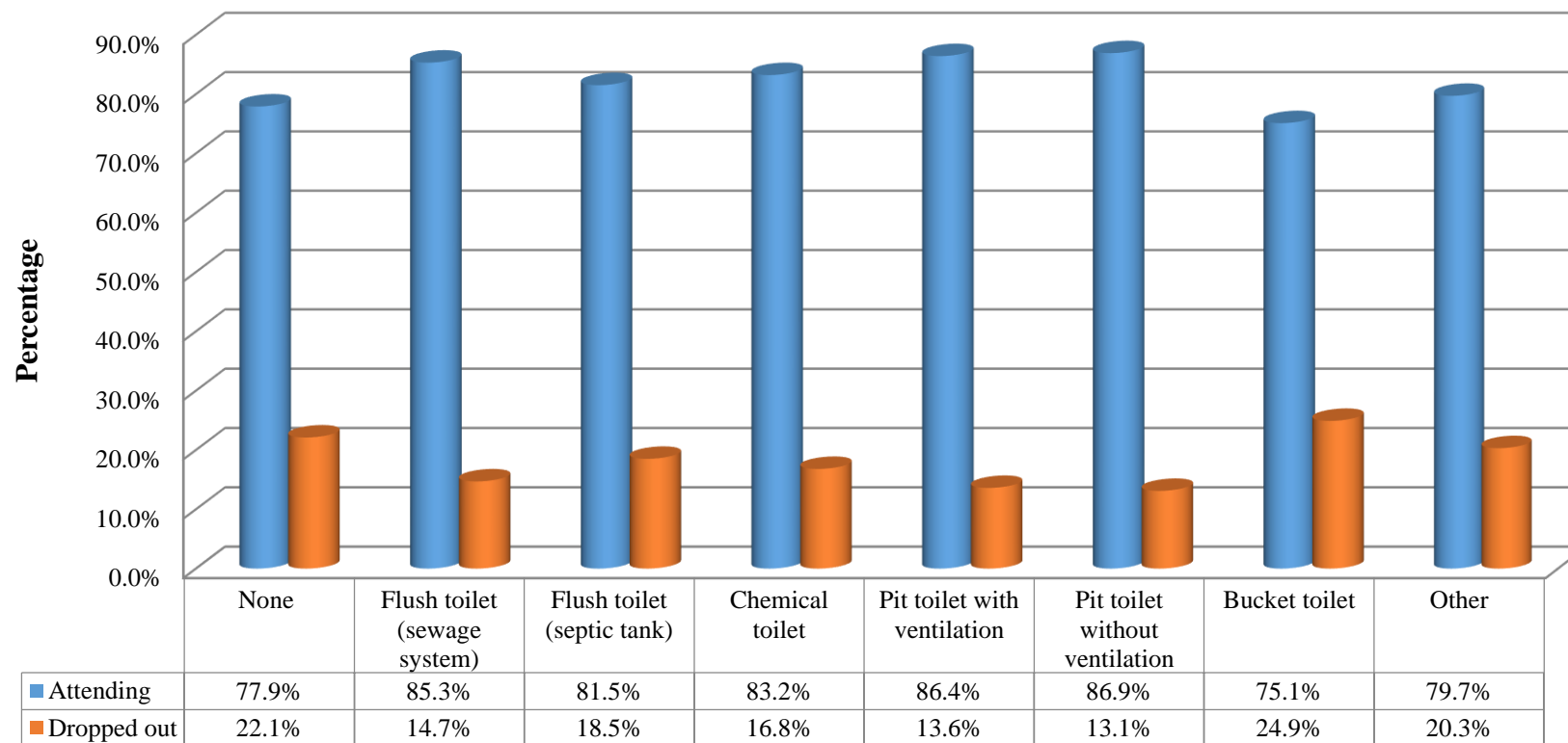
While the use of sewage-flush toilets and pit toilets denote formal settlement mainly in urban and rural regions, the use of bucket toilets is common in informal settlement on the fringes of urban centres. The informal settlers are likely to be from the rural and poorer Provinces, and they find themselves unable to afford conventional accommodation while searching for work in the urban centres, and resort to makeshift housing structures around potential employment sectors. These settlements would typically have no infrastructure such as access to the sewage system, hence the use of bucket toilet systems, and at worst no access to facilities at all. In addition, older adolescents in such marginal communities are the heads of households themselves, having already dropped out of school in their Province of origin, in the city with the sole purpose of searching for employment.

**Table 6.12: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by household toilet type**

<b>Toilet facility</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
None	126,553	35,815	162,368	22.1%
Flush toilet (sewage system)	944,088	162,505	1,106,593	14.7%
Flush toilet (septic tank)	44,928	10,205	55,133	18.5%
Chemical toilet	69,476	14,035	83,511	16.8%
Pit toilet with ventilation	284,621	44,960	329,581	13.6%
Pit toilet without ventilation	578,510	87,231	665,741	13.1%
Bucket toilet	32,393	10,764	43,157	24.9%
Other	50,789	12,898	63,687	20.3%

Source: Calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

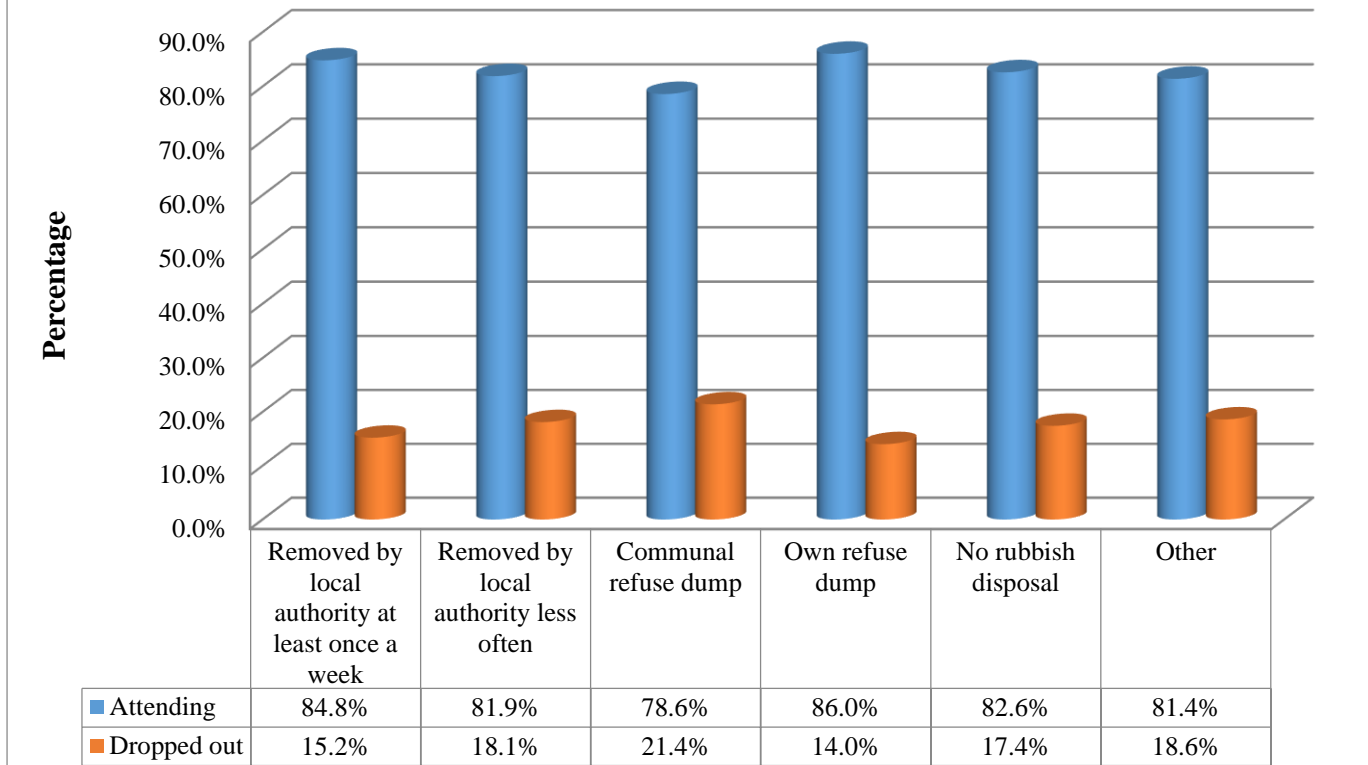
**Figure 6.21: School dropout distribution by type of toilet facility for the household**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

Refuse removal by the municipality at least once a week and own refuse dumps were the most prevalent disposal methods, constituting 90% of all methods. The two refuse disposal methods were associated with school participation rate equal to the national average (85%). In contrast, all the other disposal methods were associated with lower participation rates – all below the two most prevalent refuse disposal methods (see figure 6.22 and table 6.13 below). While one in seven dropped out of school where the local authority removes refuse at least once a week, one in five had dropped out where refuse disposal was at a communal dump or other unspecified methods. The most prevalent refuse disposal methods, where the local authority removes refuse once a week, was typical of conventional urban settlement. More importantly, this was in line with the national trend, that is, school participation was equal to the national average. Using own refuse dump was also typical of formal rural settlement, where each household dedicates a spot for disposing refuse, and these settlements were linked with school participation rates above the national average. On the other hand, communal refuse dumps typified informally settled communities on the fringes of the urban mainstream society, without basic infrastructure as alluded to earlier. These informal settlements typically presented high rates of school dropout.

**Figure 6.22: School dropout distribution by access to refuse disposal facilities**



Source: Derived from Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.13: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by access to refuse disposal facilities**

Refuse disposal facility	Attending	Dropped out	Total	% dropped out
Removed by local Municipality once a week	1,025,509	183,938	1,209,447	15.2%
Removed by local Municipality less often	25,558	5,636	31,194	18.1%
Communal refuse dump	32,218	8,784	41,002	21.4%
Own refuse dump	870,580	142,247	1,012,827	14.0%
No rubbish disposal	156,829	33,084	189,913	17.4%
Other	20,662	4,723	25,385	18.6%

Source: Calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

## 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented results of a socio-demographic analysis of school dropout in the country. The results were organized around the sub-question: “What are socio-demographic characteristics of older adolescents dropping out of school in South Africa?” Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the Census 2011 dataset and extensive cross-tables and visual representations were presented to illustrate the various relationships between school dropout and the select sociodemographic variables.

Alarmingly, there was a group of about 400 000 older adolescents in the country who had dropped out of school at the time of the Census 2011 survey. The analysis has illustrated that pupils transited from the primary school phase at high, near-universal rates, but something dramatic seems to happen around the ages of 17 and 18. It appears that the 16 year olds are still in school and from age of 17 onwards start leaving school in large numbers, and by the age of 18, 25% of them are not in school, almost three times less likely to be in school. The 18-year-old school dropouts made almost half the dropout population.

There was no noticeable difference in school participation between males and females among the females. However, teenage pregnancy and subsequent childbirth appeared to be a critical determinant of school dropout, with half the females who became pregnant dropping out of school. In addition, given harsh the labour market conditions for the past decade, particularly for youth, these female dropouts are likely to remain idle for long periods, if they do not drop back into education. This analysis shows that the economically active older adolescents at the time, whether employed, unemployed or discouraged work-seekers, comprised almost half the dropout population, with half of them not in school. This was in sharp contrast to the older adolescents who were not economically active, who were five times more likely to be in school. Therefore, it appears so far that half of the older adolescents not in school in the country are 17 and 18 year olds, who are economically active and if female, have experienced a pregnancy or childbirth.

The findings also revealed that the proportion of out-of-school Coloured adolescents is double that of Black Africans and three time that of Whites older adolescents. Therefore, the school dropout population is comprised disproportionately of a large number of Coloured older adolescents compared to the other race groups.

The school dropout population is also disproportionately composed of older adolescents living with some kind of disability. The analysis revealed that when living with a disability, the older adolescent was twice less likely to be in school compared to his/her counterpart with no reported disability. Moreover, those living with disabilities other than being visually impaired were over-represented in the dropout population, and were likely to have severe to complete difficulties in any of the functional domains.

These adolescent school dropouts, it appears, were likely to come from families headed by anyone other than biological, adopted or step parents or grandparents. These families where the adolescent school dropouts were likely to come from were headed by the older adolescents themselves or their siblings – basically child-headed families. These child-headed households contributing disproportionately to the adolescent dropout population were typically one to three-member households, with no adult older than 30 years. They were also likely to live in families they had no blood relation to, possibly owing to absence or willing relatives to take them in. Living with relatives was the third most common family type that appeared to provide a buffer, compared to other non-parent family types, although not strong enough a structure, as this family type was still associated with dropout rate higher than the national norm. Therefore, the dropout population appears to likely have come from male-led, non-parent or grandparent families, with female-headed non-parent families appearing to provide slight cushion to displaced adolescents.

What is interesting is that these school dropouts were not necessarily a group of poor youth. The analysis shows that the total older adolescent population was split about equally between employed and economically inactive households and the proportion of school dropouts between the two was the same. While high household income was beneficial and linked to higher rates of school participation, the analysis shows that households with little or no income participated well in school, well above the national average. These low-income households, associated with high participation rates were likely to be those that were economically inactive headed by parents or grandparents who depend on social security grants for maintenance. In addition, lack of access or poor access to basic services such as piped water and sanitation was not necessarily a barrier to school participation among adolescents in general. Instead, the analysis suggests that those adolescents living in informal and often unstable communities on the fringes of urban mainstream communities were less likely to be in school.

In the next chapter, I follow-up and explore more deeply the meaning of the statistical relationships uncovered in the current chapter. The case studies in the next chapter are used to shed more light on what do these relationships actually mean and attempt to explain the nature of the identified relationships in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 7: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter reports on the qualitative phase in the study. It focused on explaining the relationships uncovered in the first quantitative phase. The organizing research sub-question for this phase was: “In what ways do the qualitative data help explain the quantitative results on school dropout among older adolescents?” A multiple case design was used to collect and analyse the qualitative data. In-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection technique used to explore and generate detailed data on contextual conditions and mechanisms that drove premature school exit among the youth. The analysis of the interviews with each participant and data from observations yielded complex narratives and themes related to school dropout. The narratives and themes are presented below.

The chapter starts by presenting each individual case study with its related themes within their community and family contexts. A cross-case analysis of the narratives and themes are then presented in the form a summary at the end of the chapter.

### **7.2 Case study narratives**

Informed by the findings of the spatial analysis of school dropout in Chapter 5, the case study sites were located in 10 communities across two Provinces, two districts, and eight local municipalities (see table 7.1 and figures 7.1&2, below). The study sought to understand school dropout in context, and to this end, the individual was located in his or her community and family. An overview of the case and study sites is provided below (table 7.1.) This is followed by detailed narrative case reports on school dropout circumstances.

**Table: 7.1 Overview of the cases and study sites**

	<b>Case</b>	<b>Study Site</b>	<b>Local Municipality</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Province</b>
1	DIKS	Regorogile	Thabazimbi	Waterberg	Limpopo
2	TEBA				
3	SMALL				
4	LESEGO				
5	THABO	Mookgopong	Mookgopong	Waterberg	Limpopo
6	JERMINAH				
7	ELISA				
8	LESEDI	Phagameng	Modimolle	Waterberg	Limpopo
9	MONICA				
10	JABULANI				
11	ZOLA	Ilingeletu	Swartland	West Coast	Western Cape
12	ANELE				
13	NOZI				
14	LORENZO	Oudekraalfontein	Saldanha Bay	West Coast	Western Cape
15	ANATHI	Vredenburg			
16	JONNIE	Noordhoek	Bergrivier	West Coast	Western Cape
17	SESANA				
18	LEE-ANNE	Piketberg			
19	WESLEY	Citrusdal	Cederberg	West Coast	Western Cape
20	BROMELDA				
21	MILLOW				
22	JEROME	Vredendal-Noord	Matzikama	West Coast	Western Cape
23	AMANDA				

Source: Created by the researcher from the selected cases and study sites

Names of individuals in the cases have been changed to protect the participants.

### 7.3 Case studies in Limpopo Province, Waterberg district - Thabazimbi, Mookgopong and Modimolle local municipalities

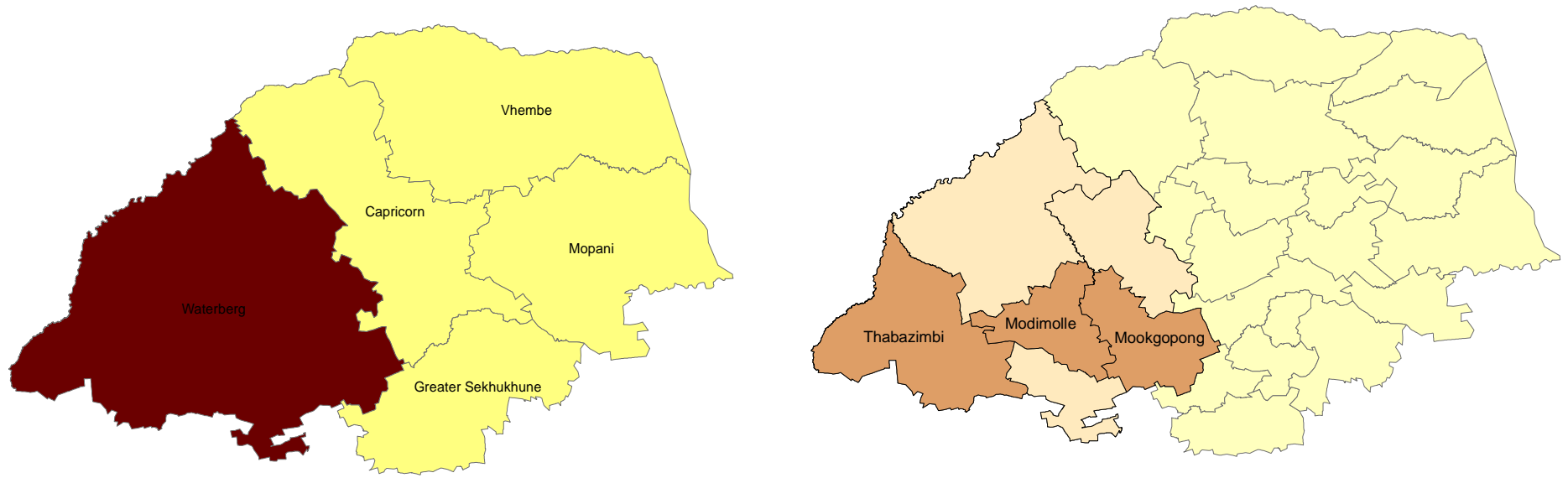


Figure 7.1: Study sites in the Waterberg District, Limpopo Province

## **Study site 1: Regorogile, Thabazimbi Local Municipality, Waterberg District, Limpopo Province**

Regorogile community is the setting for case studies: DIKS, TEBA, and SMALL and LESEGO.

Regorogile is a settlement in Thabazimbi, an iron ore mining town in the Thabazimbi Local Municipality, sitting in the south-west of the Waterberg district, in the south west of Limpopo Province. From the south east of Thabazimbi Town, for about 100 kilometres the bushveld scenery that characterized our trip to the north-west is rudely interrupted by an imposing mountainous topography at the gates of the town, and Regorogile Township. Sections of the Ysterberg Mountain (Iron-producing Mountain) create a natural boundary between the township and any place else by enveloping the township from all sides, barely allowing entrances and exits in the south, north and east.

As I get to the gates of the Iron Mountain, I begin to realise the sheer scale of mining on and around the mountain. Artificially carved contours stagger the mountain side from the base to the top. I learn that this is part of the landscape restoration during and after extraction of the iron ore. The scale of the mining activity is further signified by rusty-looking steel equipment forming part of the extraction network jutting out of the mountain side before it ramifies into a maze around the base of the mountain. I was later told that this is part of an even more complex extraction network located sub-surface. As we arrive in the township, we cross over a railway line with a stationary train on, the head painted colourful red and blue. The hues injected life into the otherwise dull-looking mountain. Once it is ready, the train is cleared to go, hauling thousands tons of ore to destinations hundreds of miles away for further processing into metallic iron and other by-products.

From the south and eastern entrances, the lowest part of the township, the terrain elevates visibly, and gradually as the slope steepens towards the uninhabited lofts of the mountain proper. The north-western end of the township is the highest point, tens of metres higher than the opposite end. Our arrival is greeted by decent houses, further decorated by relatively green vegetation. This section of the township, the closest to the Thabazimbi central business district, in the lower end, historically housed the mine employees holding management or supervisory positions. It was a remarkable improvement compared to the single sex hostels

that housed most employees of the mine on the other side of the town. Employees could now settle with their families here. However, a drive further up along the main road the housing quality is obviously lower, the government-provided houses now dotting the sides of the main road and the smaller streets. The government-provided housing make the most of the township, while to the south-west, shacks are seen crawling up that section of the mountain. The township view from the highest point reveals it as a highly densely populated space, spanning about two and a half square kilometres, a home to almost 18 000 inhabitants – nearly 7 000 people per square kilometre (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

Mabogopedi is the only local high school to the west of the township, and abutting the northern border is a structure still under construction to house the new Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College that opened its doors in January 2016. In the middle of the township lies a sports complex. I closer look reaffirms what I heard from earlier interviews about the state of the complex. The facility is the shadow of its former glorious self, judging from what is left of the physical structures. The site is a desolate sight with what used to be a netball court now littered with shattered beer bottle glass of all colours. The clubhouse is an empty brick and mortar shell with missing door and window frames and where window frames are still in place the panes are missing. The vogue and aesthetic appeal of the brown Kalahari sand coloured bricks still bear testimony of the recentness of the structure. Later in the day, there is some activity at the site – soccer and basketball. The soccer field wears sporadic overgrown patches of indigenous grass, interspersed with red sand patches. Young men are also playing soccer in one of the weed-hedged basketball courts, while more men play basketball in the other dilapidated courts – sans baskets. There is no sign of female participants in any of these activities. I spot no other recreational facilities in the community. However, I later learn of a recreational park next to the main road to south of the township from a participant living right across it, or what used to be a leisure park. I did not see it driving past on a number of occasions, nor told about it in of my earlier interviews. It is now a barren piece of land – red and sandy with no shrubs or grass cover observable. A number of indigenous trees standing at landscaped angles appear to have survived the neglect and destruction of the site. Even when the township is roasting from the sweltering sun of the afternoon, there is no soul spotted at the site. According to a resident living nearby, the site is unknown to most of the youth and it is a distant memory for many adults in the community now.

An interview with MmaMogapi, a community development worker at the community centre along the main road, helps provide a deeper understanding of this community. She also doubles as a member of the SGB at the local high school. More importantly, she paints a picture of a community afflicted on several fronts from which school dropout among youth might stem. She talks of a near-dysfunctional situation at the only local high school. There is almost a collapse in the management of the school and as a result, there is erratic conduct by the teaching staff, with little or no instruction carried out. MmaMogapi claims that the incumbent principal was never a suitable candidate for the job. In addition, she alleges irregular appointment of teachers, some of which are unqualified for subjects they are allocated to and as a result, no quality teaching is taking place at the school, if at all. This is corroborated by a grandmother (sitting on a chair in MmaMogapi's office) who is fearful her grandson is at risk of dropping out partly because of lack of teaching and supervision at school, with teachers bragging they still collect their pay cheque even if children play truant.

*The principal is not suitable. There is no proper planning and staffing. Temporary teachers are hired and given subjects they are unqualified for. No proper teaching is taking place as teachers spent their day in the staff room instead of conducting classes. Learners stay at school the whole day just for fun. Parents just don't care about the situation, just like the teachers (from interview with MmaMogapi).*

It appears the process to appointment the school principal a few years earlier was marred by high political interference and the incumbent was not necessarily the best candidate. This was a political appointment by the teacher labour organisation that wields influence on the administration of schools in the area, including appointments of school managers.

MmaMogapi bemoans the lack of interest by residents in general in the affairs of the school. She thinks if residents were keen on their children's education, they would stand up and act against this to avoid a total collapse of the school.

The diminishing parental control over their children could account for a large number of older adolescents dropping out of school. She opines that poor parenting leaves school attendance at the youth's discretion. Showing frustration at the situation, she laments that:

*Parents have lost control over their children....and teachers do not bother anymore to tell parents when their children have bunked school because parents don't care to*

*follow-up on their children's ill-discipline. [Without parents supervision] youth play truant, take to street corners, and come back home late in the day as if they have been to school (from the interview with, MmaMogapi).*

Around nine o'clock on the morning of arrival in the community, hordes of youth dressed in sky-blue school dresses, white shirts and grey pants, are walking aimlessly about. They are students at the only secondary school in the community, over an hour after the morning bell rang. I later learn that this was typical behaviour, with students coming and going any time they wished.

Talking to a pair of residents later, I find that they agree with MmaMogapi's view that drug abuse and premature alcohol consumption by youth leads to general unruly behaviour among the youth, including dropping out of school. The use of drugs such as *dagga and nyaope* by the youth is not making it easier for parents to enforce discipline. Later that afternoon, I spotted a young man aged between 12 and 15 still in school uniform, sitting under a tree sipping beer from a large quart bottle.

Furthermore, at community level, these residents agree that the easy availability of job opportunities in the area was always pulling adolescents out of school before completing matric. The youth would leave to work in the different economic sectors which sprang up as a result of iron ore mining in the area. Those adolescents who remained in school are under constant peer pressure from those who have dropped out of school and found work, and are now flashing their new-found 'wealth' in the form of clothes, cars and other things. Because of historical easy access to job opportunities in the community, the youth began to believe that it was not necessary to attend school all the way to Grade 12. For the youth who come from households with little or no income, it is even easier to drop out of school, look for a job, and augment the household income. They easily feel poorer amid peers who are either working themselves or their families can afford to provide everything they need or want. One of the residents says:

*Remember our area is surrounded by mines. You (youth) will see your peers working at the mine. They drive Citi Golfs (VW entry model vehicle). So, it's very easy of you to take that chance. It's (to drop out) also made easy by the saying in our township that not everything is about education, you can still be a prominent person without*

*education. It is a common language. Youngsters will feel why should I waste time at school? So and so dropped out in Grade 10, he is working at the mine and is driving, a BMW.*

*I have a younger brother who is 19 years old in matric. He once wanted to drop out of school. The teachers called me to the school. At the meeting, the boy told us that his age group are already working. He told us that he did not see the necessity to sit all day long behind a desk listening to teachers, while there are many options for him, like baking bread at the local Pick 'n Pay retailer or go work at the mines. They take anyone with Standard 7 (Grade 9).*

*Also a factor is household poverty. A youth feels that s/he is not getting everything she wants from parents. S/he feels it is useless to go to school if all his or her needs are not met in the home. S/he feels that with job opportunities plenty in this area, he or she can go to work and spoil him or herself (from the interview with two Regorogile community residents).*

The residents also point out the permeation of politically-motivated fights in every facet of the community life, results in stalling of important programmes or dysfunctional community amenities. They point to the neglected park and the destruction of the sports complex a few 100 metres to the north. The residents held their breaths that the new TVET College that was to open in 2016 runs smoothly and serves the community as intended to, unlike the recreational park and the sports complex that were destroyed owing to politics at the local council.

*Now the FET College is being built; we are hoping things will change. In the past there was no college, those who dropped were lost forever. Quality management is going to be important to the success of the college. Hopefully, not like the sports complex that was wasted through politics and now laying waste and destroyed (from the interview with two Regorogile residents).*

Lastly, the residents say school girls are attracted to the relatively flashy lifestyles by the young males working at the mine and as a result often get pregnant. They agree that teen pregnancy accounts for many girls out of school before completing Grade 12.

## **CASE STUDY 1: DIKS**

Diks is a 17 year old mother to a one year old baby. She looks emaciated, and surely before her bath as she appeared quite untidy and dirty. The baby is pegged with her right arm on her side of the waist and she is chattering away with two more friends, also young mothers. As I was introducing myself to the girls, a young fresh looking man appeared from the house. Upon getting wind of the purpose of my visit, without acknowledging my presence he calls for someone inside the house to talk to me about reasons Diks is not back at school. He is Diks's older brother calling out for her grandmother. Diks lives with her grandmother, the older and a younger brother. Their home is a government provided house (RDP). Like all other RDP houses, it occupies a centre spot of unusually small yards, which in all respects still bear the rocky features of the mountain base. This time the ground has cover but a barren maroon coloured rocky base with loose stones dating back from when the area was prepared for habitation adding to sore sight of the yard surface.

She is the middle one. Her parents died several years ago. Her elder brother has completed matric, while the younger brother still attends school. They mainly depend on the grandmother's social grant. Diks fell pregnant in 2013 but continued with school. However, she started to experience dizzy spells while at school and collapsed on several occasions. She stopped going to school, and planned to return after giving birth.

After the birth of the baby in 2014, she returned to school. However, she was turned away and advised to register for finishing classes elsewhere. Reluctantly, she went to register for finishing classes but could not as she was told she was still under 18 years and therefore did not qualify. She insisted to register with her former school and her grandmother went to enquire about her re-registration, and she was told Diks must bring her identity documents to school. For the second time she was told to go register for finishing classes that take place in the evenings. The grandmother, surprised with the response Diks had from school, went back to establish the facts. Again, she was told that Diks should come at the end of 2015 to check on the school system for a possible place in 2016.

Speaking to Diks' grandmother about the situation, she confirmed that after Diks fell pregnant she could not continue with school as she suffered regular fits. She advised her to

stay home and she (grandmother) would look after her until she gives birth. She confirms the confusing school messages regarding her granddaughter's re-admission.

*I got pregnant in 2013. I was in Grade 9 at Mabogopedi. I was 15 years at the time. Soon I started getting dizzy spells and collapsing while at school. I stopped going to school. I was okay after giving birth and tried to register again this year, 2015 January. The school said I should go register for finishing classes, but I want to finish at the normal school, the school I used to attend. My granny went to enquire about my registration, but was turned away, instead the school asked for my ID. When I took my ID to school, I was told to attend evening school. When my grandmother went back again, they informed her to check again for a possible place at the end of this year, for 2016 registration (from the interview with Diks and her grandmother).*

Almost resigned to school non-attendance status, Diks derides the education offering at the local school as almost equal to staying home. With contempt she goes:

*But all the same because the (teachers) also do not teach as they are supposed to. They stay the whole day in the staff room. We have class timetables, but no teacher comes to class. From January to December we spent the whole day not taught, no homework for the whole year. I want to go back to school but they cannot let me back in after I had this baby (from the interview with Diks).*

This confirms the earlier reports by the community worker about the poor state of administrative and affairs at the local school that compromised regular teaching and learning.

## CASE STUDY 2: TEBA

Teba is busy washing clothes from a steel, crooked tub resting on uneven, sloping ground covered with loose stones of different sizes, making it impossible for the washtub to rest comfortably on its base. Glancing around the yard, one is quickly reminded that this is a mountain slope, worked minimally, enough to set the foundations of the low cost free government-supplied houses. The loose, dark red stones dispelled during house construction still litter the yard, adding a dull and untidy outlook to the space.

Teba's wash station is about three metres from the gate. She raises her head out of the washing tub to meet my greetings, and unenthusiastically allows me to step inside the yard. I introduce myself, and calmly without giving away any emotion, she agrees to talk to me. She is the youngest of several siblings, and currently lives with her mother, her own two children and an older brother. Her father died several years ago and her older sisters have all moved out to set up their own families.

Teba stopped going to school in Grade 11, five years earlier to give birth to her first child, now about five years old. After she had given birth, Teba could not go back to school as she had hoped as there was no one to look after the baby while at school. Her mother had started getting ill and would not be able to look after the baby. Teba's mother needed to be cared for owing to her loss of essential functions. Her (Teba) brother could not nurse his mother. Therefore, Teba had to take care of the mother.

Teba, now 23 years old, has a second child and her responsibilities have grown bigger. She has resigned herself to looking after her little baby and the sick mother. The only way to improve her lot, she believes, is to go look for work. If she finds work, she believes, she can look after her mother, and her two kids better. A caregiver would be employed while she (Teba) is at work during the day.

*After I gave birth, I had to look after the baby. They (children) are now two, and they need to go to crèche. I need to look after them. I need to find a job to feed them and find someone to look after them while I am at work. But there are no jobs these days (from the interview with Teba).*

Teba had no social structural support for her to continue with school after childbirth. At 17, she effectively became the head of the household, with her older sisters having left to start their own families elsewhere. Her young brother, who was still in primary school then, her sick mother and her own child, made up the household at the time.

### **CASES STUDY 3: SMALL**

Small was 23 years old and dropped out school in Grade 11 six years ago. His story begins after completing primary school, and out of concern, his parents wanted him to move away from the township which was deemed not a conducive learning environment at the time. Small's parents were worried about the "pervasive truancy among adolescents in the community". He was sent to a family relative in Mpumalanga Province, where he went to school for one year, before he moved to a school in the North West Province. His mother believed it would benefit him, as he would attend the school where his aunt was a teacher. His aunt happened to be his class teacher and was giving him extra homework, which he found too much. He moved schools two more times until he dropped out before he could write Grade 11 end-of-year examinations. During his nomadic high school life, he twice stayed with relatives whom he says did not get along well. He once stayed alone in a rented accommodation after moving from the first relative. He felt that the parents were not providing enough and had no subsistence money left after paying rent. He again moved place and school to stay with another relative as that would leave him with some subsistence money. At the second relative, he says he would go to school without lunch money, and felt that his parents have abandoned him, and decided to return home where he would be looked after like his younger siblings. He was in Grade 11 in 2010, before the final examinations. He reports that:

*I told my mother that she better move me to Rustenburg (North West Province) and wanted to stay on my own this time. There were other relatives but we did not get along that well. So, I rented a room there. But it was not easy for me out there as a young person having to often choose between food and entertainment with the little money [insufficient] that was sent from home. I was 15/16 at the time (from interview with Small).*

In addition to apparent lack of personal drive or self-motivation from Small, it appears that the parenting style was not helpful in ensuring he stayed in school. The excerpt above reveals how Small passed Grade 8 well with the help of her aunt teacher, but yet he commands his parents to move him elsewhere because the aunt gives him too much work. The parents agree with him and he moves on to a different school, different town to stay alone as a 16 year old. The apparent lack of self-drive and the permissive parenting style appear to have contributed to Small's eventual drop out from school. After fallout with the second aunt, he tells me it was his choice to leave school and no one would tell him otherwise. He tells me:

*My mother agreed to the idea [of moving in with the second aunt] as ... we could save on the rent money. I lived with my aunt while enrolled for Grade 10 and 11. It was around final Grade 11 exams that I picked up a bad vibe from aunty. I would start going to school without lunch money. She would tell me why my mother does not send lunch money. That did not sit well with me and I felt my parents have abandoned me. It was at this point that felt it was better to go back home and live them (parents), and eat what they eat. I could no longer concentrate at school, and left before writing exams ((from interview with Small).*

Small found employment at the local mine as a rock driller shortly after dropping out of school. He worked for less than two years as he found the physical demands of the job unbearable. He is a small man in stature but big ambition, which does not seem to be matched by effort. He intended to enrol for a vocational qualification at the new the TVET College in the community.

#### **CASE STUDY 4: LESEGO**

Small referred me to Lesego who did not live far from him. Lesego left school in Grade 10, which he enrolled at three different schools before eventually exiting in 2011. His high schooling started at the local school, Mabogopedi. School was all well, *“but I was not focused, and things at home were also bad at the time. I was going to school in worn-out uniform. And I stopped going to school”* (from interview with Lesego).

He later went away from Regorogile community to resume his school career in Mogwase, in the North West Province, some 80 kilometres away. He enrolled for Grade 10 and subsequently dropped out before completing the grade. The following year he registered with a private high school college in Pretoria, 200 kilometres to the south-east, where he also dropped out, and has never returned to school to date.

*I went to Mogwase in the first place because I could not stand this place any longer. I didn't feel like attending school here anymore. My father still helped out when I went to school in Mogwase, for things like accommodation. But I stayed with a friend, so I didn't have to pay much for accommodation. After Mogwase, I then went to a college in Pretoria. I always wanted to go to Pretoria. I always heard from friends and many people talking about Pretoria as a fun place. I had saved some money to attend a school in Pretoria. But while I was in Pretoria, there was no financial assistance from home. So, I dropped, in 2011 and came back home. I need financial support to continue studying, but now my father is not working; it is difficult.*

*I liked school but I always felt pressure from friends whose families were better off and were getting most of the things they wanted.*

*I however want to register with the local Further Education Training College (FET), opening in the neighbourhood next year (from interview with Lesego).*

Lesego's high school life before dropping permanently was transient. The idea behind his first transfer from his local neighbourhood was to enhance his chances of school completion (like many other youth from the community opting to go to more rural, "laid-back" environments for school). However, it appears the move had the opposite effect. His father, working at the time, supported his idea, but the family support was not matched with the required diligence from him. Instead of using monies sent from home for his sustenance and school necessities, he saved it towards his ultimate move – going to Pretoria where he hoped to finish school, and have fun in the city, like many of his friends. This time, his family could not afford the city school in addition other expenses related to city life. As he puts it, he always felt pressure from friends, not focusing on the job at hand, affecting his schooling. He sums it up well when he says he lacked focus and driven by peer pressure and in the end

wasted a school career. His family could barely afford his requirements at the local school, let alone going to school away from home, where he had to pay for everything.

## **Study Site 2: Mookgopong settlement, Mookgopong Local Municipality, Waterberg district, Limpopo Province**

Mookgopong settlement is the setting for case studies: JERMINAH, ELISA and THABO.

The settlement is located in the south-east of the Waterberg district in the Mookgopong Local Municipality, Limpopo Province. It is cut into two halves by the north/south National Highway One (N1), 100 kilometres south of Polokwane and about 160 kilometres north of Pretoria. To its west runs the old national road (R101), historical primary connection between Limpopo Province in the north and the rest of the country to the south. On the western side of the national road (R101), is Mookgopong Township's closest neighbour, Mookgopong town, less than a kilometre away. Black Africans exclusively populate the township while Whites inhabit the town (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Like many other settlements in South Africa, the segregationist town planning system ensured artificial symbolic or literal division between black and white settlements, regardless of their interdependencies, which did not warrant any separation.

The settlement saw rapid growth in the years following the dawn of democracy. Former farm labour tenants were either displaced by the farms by rogue eviction practices, or preferring urban residence. The latter made easier by the advent emancipatory political dispensation. The repeal of influx control laws in the late 1980s also saw families of factory workers joining the male relatives who were housed in migrant worker hostels on the town outskirts. The Mookgopong Township has since grown exponentially and the housing demand still outstrips supply. The township, for all practical reasons, grew both sides of the N1 highway, not for any social, political, economic, or cultural classification. It was a question of making use of land available, both sides of the highway, to meet the burgeoning housing need at the time. Most of the house types in the township are therefore government provided, with a few self-built by former civil servants. The township is now densely populated, occupying a three square kilometre area, a home to about 6000 households and 25000 residents. Over 60% of

the population here speak Sepedi as their first language, and about 15% speak Xitsonga (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

The former farm labour tenants, who still held onto their jobs commute daily to their employment on the maize, wheat, cotton, tobacco, wildlife, and cattle farms that sprawl the outback. The community is now a typical South African settlement in a rural setting where the economic activity is mainly agrarian, with limited retail and manufacturing. The township has one or two properly paved main streets and the rests of the in-streets are of low design quality with often buried under mud from the unpaved sidewalks, after good rains as they have no drainage systems. A multipurpose stadium is also spotted in the township, with a netball and volleyball court within the precinct. There are a number of poorly designed and maintained recreational parks too unattractive to serve their intended purpose. I later learnt of the serious water shortage in the area that was also threatening the agricultural economy of the municipality. Therefore, watering of recreational parks is out of question at this stage.

The students from the township go to two primary and two secondary no-fee schools within walking distance, with the third optional no-fee primary school about six kilometres away.

I learnt more about this community from Messrs Chauke and Ledimo, senior Mookgopong residents. Mr Chauke, a retired police officer had a clean-shaven head, dressed in a neatly smoothed short-sleeved striped shirt and brown pants. He is sitting on a chair comfortably under a shade of a densely leafed tree, well protected from already searing temperatures, despite that it was still before nine in the morning. A toddler with porridge and candy-sticky hands was cuddled between his legs plucking away at the creases of his expensive looking pants. He did not seem to be bothered by the toddler's messy business. Mr Ledimo was metres away doing welding on some steel frame, commissioned by Mr Chauke.

Mr Chauke having lived and schooled in the in the Limpopo rural hinterland before he settled in the community, slowly explains that there are just too many distractors here in the urban setting than in rural areas. He talks of the prevalent abuse of alcohol and drugs such as *nyaope* and marijuana by the youth. He explains that the youth easily get access to these distractors because they can afford to buy them. They start earning their own money early on by either hustling in the central business district less than five minutes' walk across the R101 road, or do odds jobs on farms where most of their parents lived and worked before they

came to the township. An odd weekend or after school job soon becomes an everyday job and they choose that instead of school.

He emphasizes that parents in the township came from the farms and they are uneducated themselves. Life on the farms was all about work. They do not value education unlike parents in the tribal villages where education was emphasized. In the tribal rural villages, youngsters look after family livestock, do house chores and go to school. They do not do jobs that they get paid for while they are still in school. As a result, they persist in school. Parents in the tribal hinterlands, unschooled as they might be, insist on the youth going to school for betterment of their lives.

Mr Ledimo adds that in this township *“children do not fear of talking-to by parents or teachers. They drink with their parents at shebeens all night. Parents don’t care for kids as they are supposed to; parents are not playing their part”* (from interview with Messrs Chauke and Ledimo).

He continued that the consumption of alcohol by children too early in their lives leads to no respect by children. The situation was made even worse when the parents are also abusing alcohol. In this community, the use of alcohol and drugs was common even on school premises without fear of punishment from the teachers. Among young girls who abuse substances, pregnancy happens as a result, he emphasizes.

Gang activity is also rife in the area. Homes are invaded and houses stripped of metals for sale at scrap yards for a few Rands to buy their next fix – alcohol or hard drugs.

## CASE STUDY 5: JERMINAH

Jerminah enjoyed her time at the local secondary school, Makhutjisha. The school and teachers were good to her and her family. Even after their house burnt down, the school provided her with uniforms and groceries for the family. She did not have to pay school fees and books were also provided for by the school.

However, she started struggling with her grades in senior secondary, repeating Grade 10 and 11 before she got pregnant during her second attempt at Grade 11. Her health started deteriorating during her pregnancy and the baby was lost before full term. The following year after recovering (at least she thought) from the trauma, she went back to school to complete school, through the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programme, in 2009. She was now 22, too old, she thought, to go back to Grade 11 in the conventional classroom. Her health problems continued during her ABET programme and she eventually stopped attending classes. She says:

*In May, the following year I went to register for ABET classes hoping to complete Matric, but I again dropped out in November as my eyes got sore. I stayed home. I always had sight problems but it got worse when I registered for ABET classes, especially during exams. My eyes started just in time for exams. During the year, it was not much of a problem (from interview with Jerminah).*

The problem with her eyes appears only when she does prolonged reading and she vows not to do anything with books anymore. She emphasizes:

*I will not go back to school or read books as I am afraid my eyes will start to hurt again. I always loved school and thus I carried on even after failing Grade 11 and after I got pregnant (from interview with Jerminah).*

It appears that her sight problems were not detected early in her formative schooling years, and as a result, prematurely cut her schooling career. She then had to content with life of unemployment, living in a government-provided house with four other family members. Her father left the family long time ago, and the mother and grandmother are providing for the

family, employed as a domestic worker and old age social grant, respectively. Her one sister has completed Grade 12 but lack finances to pursue higher education, and her youngest sister is still in Grade 9 at Makhutjisha Secondary School. Her two elder brothers have left to set up their own homes and the third brother has died.

Jerminah's mother and grandmother are sitting inside a room which is crudely attached to the main house structure. The unevenly stacked and bare block bricks are inexplicably holding the roof in position. A local or family member who did not have to be paid for the work, likely put up the unskilfully constructed structure. The big family needed the extra space provided by the structure, aesthetics aside.

The two family seniors (mother and grandmother) confirm Jerminah's schooling experiences and have accepted her ill-fated career. They hope that she finds a job and a good-willed citizen to financially assist the younger siblings to pursue their dreams beyond secondary school.

## **CASE STUDY 6: THABO**

Thabo was 15 years when he left school several years earlier. He related to me a life of a truant and graduated to petty crime as he got older. Thabo lived with his mother and stepfather at the time he left school. He started drinking alcohol, stealing and became a member of one of the local gangs. With bravado, he narrated his past experiences as if they were conquests, and no remorse evident. His mother, he said, did everything a mother would do to guide a child, but without success. His mother's efforts to rein him in pushed him further away to street life and gang activity. He was the eldest child, and does not share a biological father with his siblings. Thabo never accepted his stepfather's authority. He was not a father figure to him, he did not approve of him, he despised him, and he could not be part of his life. According to him, "*the stepfather knew his place and would not even speak to him about discipline, young as he was*".

*My mother tried to discipline me but failed. My stepfather could not even try to interfere because he knew I would beat him up. I was stubborn* (from interview with Thabo).

Thabo did not have any problems with his grades in early primary school. However, he had run-ins with school authorities in senior phase regarding gross misbehaviour, including smoking and drinking on school premises. He repeated grades in the latter part of primary school. He was not expelled from school but eventually dropped out in Grade 7, as he was spending more time hustling on the streets than at home. He considers himself very lucky that he never spent any time in jail. Some of his friends were not so lucky.

Now 23 year old, Thabo lives with a girlfriend and a young baby in a rented room. He explains that he now has responsibilities – a baby to look after and a rent to pay. He needs money, to earn it or otherwise. He has no regrets that he left school prematurely.

Thabo's source of hatred for his stepfather is not clear, besides the fact that he is not his biological father. He never got to know his biological father, whether he was still alive or dead. His mother was a teenager in school when she became pregnant with him. It appears that the absence of one biological parent had a negative effect on Thabo, which is widely reported in studies on youth development. Single-parent and stepfamilies have been found to have negative effects on emotional, social, and economic needs of children. Amongst other developmental deficits, in emotional or social needs might impact on the children schooling (Seltzer, 1994; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Perreira et al., 2006).

## **CASE STUDY 7: ELISA**

Elisa explains that the situation in household was so difficult that she was driven into relationships with working males hoping that they supported her with school basics. Unfortunately, she consequently became pregnant while in Grade 11, five years earlier. She is now pregnant with her second child and a mother of a four-year-old toddler, out of school and unemployed.

Elisa is the eldest of eight children who all live with their mother and grandmother. They live in a government-provided house and it is unimaginable how a family of more than ten manage to still present a dignified outlook, at least on the surface, given the conditions under which they live. Elisa, her child and her mother all looked well kept. The family survive only on social grants since the mother has since lost her job as a domestic worker. Elisa's four youngest siblings, who are still in school, receive a social grant each and that keeps the family going. The family appreciates the fact that water is still provided free by the municipality. However, they have to buy electricity.

Elisa talks about good experience during her school days with enjoyable lessons and helpful teachers. However, (*she draws air heavily*) home was too bad.

*We were too many at home at the time, and my mother was the only one working. Living without a father put a strain on my mother. She couldn't afford to maintain all of us, clothes and other things. It was worse especially in winter. She was a domestic worker at the time, now she is not working* (from interview with Elisa).

Elisa would feel pressure from school friends who had money for anything they wanted. They maintained their hair, had shiny shoes and warm jerseys but not her.

*I did not have a simple jersey. It was worse when we had to wear civil clothes (civvies) at school. You couldn't even sit with them at lunch break as they were so dressed up. They would flash their monies. You start looking for boyfriends to support you at school and other things* (from interview with Elisa).

She explained that her three other siblings have dropped out of school for the same reasons. They could not afford the basic school necessities. She said that they did not have to pay school fees but they still looked odd without proper school wares. Elisa also started school late with the family moving into the community from one of the farms in the area where regular school did not take place.

### **Study Site 3: Phagameng settlement, Modimolle Local Municipality, Waterberg district, Limpopo Province.**

Phagameng settlement is the setting for the next three case studies presented below: LESEDI, MONICA and JABULANI

Phagameng is almost exclusively a Black African settlement near the southern edge of the Waterberg district in the Modimolle Local Municipality, Limpopo Province. The settlement is part of the Greater Modimolle town area, but the history of racial segregation kept the two apart. Phagameng was historically meant to be a readily available labour reservoir, and still is, to the White business, minutes from the central business district and a short distance from the surrounding farm lands. Citrus, cattle and wildlife are primary economic activities in the greater Modimolle area.

The settlement nestles between the north-south national artery, the R101 along the western border, and the north-south national railway line along the eastern border. To the north, the settlement abuts farmlands extending into the horizon. Conversely, to the south, it is separated from its historically White neighbour by a narrow stretch of uninhabited savanna bushveld, designed as a buffer zone between the white and black settlements.

The settlement has exponentially grown in the past two decades, owing primarily to movement of former farm tenants into the urban environment. The farm labourers were now commuting daily between work and their new residence in Phagameng. Phagameng is now an area of about six square kilometres and about 30 000 residents. Seventy percent of the people here speak Sepedi as their first language (Statistics South Africa, 2012). The streets are stretches of sandy pathways. The main street, which was paved by tarmac at one point, is in most parts covered by sand or caged mud. Many stands spot both self-built dwellings and a free government house.

Sport and recreational facilities are almost non-existent except for the conspicuous structure of the local stadium used mainly for soccer tournaments, music and cultural activities. There are dedicated spaces for leisure and sport facilities, but are undeveloped.

The settlement is serviced by five primary and two secondary schools – Hector Peterson, Dagbreek, Maokeng, Lekkerbreek, and Modimolle primary schools, as well as Phagameng

and Solomon Mahlangu secondary schools. Most of them are within walking distance of the learners, weather permitting.

I speak to two residents, Jabu and Katz for a deeper understanding of this community. Jabu and Katz run a makeshift car wash business in front of the ruins of an old shop along the main road. At the other end of the building sits a group of men sipping beer in the shade provided by the crumbling structure. There is a hype of activity across the road, men and women moving purposefully in and out of the building, with irregular shouts of cheer and wail blurring out through the door. It is Saturday, 7 November, the country's two biggest soccer teams, Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs, are *clashing*, and the crowd is reacting to their team's performances and near-misses in chorus. Chiefs emerge as winners 30 minutes or so later. The venue is a local tavern where revellers frequent and the private satellite television is an attraction as most soccer matches that are unavailable on public platforms are broadcast live on the private channel.

Jabu and Katz, who have both completed Grade 12 years ago, paint the community plagued by a number of ills that could push or pull youth out of school. Citing themselves as examples, they say many other young people who complete Grade 12 do not proceed to higher education, but end up lazing about the town, as jobs are not readily available for most of them. They argue that attending school until Grade 12 does not inspire many in lower grades as most graduates jostle with them for a seat at local drinking halls. Alternatively, even worse, some end up abusing and peddling hard drugs. The few that manage to pursue post-school careers do not come back to the township to serve as role models. Based on their experiences, they see the township as a place of despair for many youth.

*Loafing around here after completing matric is not motivating for youngsters still in lower grades. With elder brothers and sisters staying home after completing matric does not motivate younger siblings (from interview with Jabu and Katz).*

The absence of higher education or technical institutions in the area compounds the problem. Those who complete Grade 12 have to travel to faraway places to access higher education. They applaud the fact that a new satellite Campus of the Lephalale TVET College has recently opened in town 10 minutes away. However, only four classes can be accommodated, far below the demand for such offerings.

Alcohol abuse is not helping the situation either, with teenagers leaving night clubs well over mid-night before a school day. These teenagers get recruited into bad life of criminal gangs in the taverns. Soon they stop going to school as they can now make a quick buck better than high school graduates who are loafing around.

They also point to shortage of teachers and classrooms at new (Solomon Mahlangu Secondary) school as problematic. The learners there are divided into morning and afternoon platoons and it is not working, they believe.

*They try implementing a platoon system with one group finishing midday and the second group from midday into the evening. The second group is just giving up, and staying home (from interview with Jabu and Katz).*

As the conversation continues, they emphasize that it is easy to start using drugs around here as there were no recreational activities to do for them after a normal school day. The sports facilities are not developed and no leisure parks to speak of. Moreover, there is no library in the community unless you go into town to use one. Even there you have to be out by four o'clock in the afternoon as it closes for the night. They reported that the library is not open over weekends. This situation does not help the course of many learners who still persist in school. During a recent community protest, a month or so before, a list of demands to the local mayor highlighted high unemployment among the youth, non-development of sports and recreational facilities and drug abuse as the biggest concerns.

It is common in the area that the parents work far from home leaving the household headed by a child or a grandparent, and that, they say, often leads to children attending school irregularly.

With resignation, they lament the lack of services in the community for even simple things like organising cleaning campaigns. *“Simple things like cleaning of streets, but yet streets are clogged with dirt and mud. Politicians don’t care as they stay in tidy streets in town”* (from interview with Jabu and Katz).

## **CASE STUDY 8: LESEDI**

Lesedi (25) was born in Phagameng in 1990 and shortly after he was born both his parents died. His father died in 1992 and the mother soon followed in 1995. He lives with his two younger brothers in the family house. His older brother, whom he still refers to as the head of the household even when he lives separately, a few blocks away after he recently was allocated a free government house. Lesedi and his brother are the youngest of five siblings, with two older sisters and a brother before them. After the death of his parents, relatives decided to share the orphaned children among themselves. The eldest brother who was barely into his teens at the time, refused to leave the home with any of the relatives and demanded to remain with his two younger brothers. The sisters were shared among aunts.

The relatives did not take lightly to the older brother's view and resolved to forcefully remove him from the home to any of the willing relative, as he was too young to look after himself, let alone his younger brothers. The eviction of the brothers did not materialise in the end despite waves of harassment from by aunts, and later by the sisters. The intended philanthropic eviction later morphed into a battle for home ownership between nephews, aunts, sisters, and brothers, often physical and involving police. All attempts to remove the brothers failed and the brothers are still occupying the family house, and their older brother has been the head of the household ever since, even though he now has a government-issued house. Most family activities such as preparing meals happen in the oldest brother's house, and their parents' house, serves primarily as sleeping quarters for Lesedi and his other brother. I now understood why Lesedi refers to his oldest brother as head of the household despite that he has his own house somewhere. Therefore, the two stands or houses, separate as they are, are still one household led by the oldest brother.

The battle between the nephews and the aunts had dire consequences for the young Lesedi and brothers as it destroyed the only closest social structure they had after their parents' death. The brothers only had aunts and uncles from both maternal and paternal sides but never had any grandparents from either side. With the only family relations, they know now their enemies, they had no one to turn to for help with their sustenance and care. The relatives regarded Lesedi and his brothers' refusal to go in custody of relatives as disobedient and unruly, and the relatives were not prepared to help the brothers in any way, including helping

them register for social assistance. The siblings could hardly get by, often days going by without a proper meal. Consequently, Lesedi and his brothers had to hustle on the streets for their sustenance. He said that they still had to turn to their aunts when the streets were not good to them, and this would be after a day or two of no proper meal. Their aunts were not ready to forgive.

*They would turn us away when we asked for help and told us never to bother them. Not even a two kilogram maize meal packet to help us. All of them would not help us. We grew up tough. We survived on bread for a week, but you could not see from outside* (from interview with Lesedi).

After Lesedi's brother decided to go look for work after failing Grade 12, Lesedi's school attendance became erratic. Eventually, he himself stopped going to school and started looking for work on a full time basis to help in the household. This is despite that Lesedi liked school and his grades were alright until he dropped out in Grade 11.

Lesedi's older brother, Lerumo, who headed the three-brother household since pubescent, is inconsolable about the role he feels he played in the younger brothers dropping out of school. None of the three brothers completed Grade 12. The tightly-knitted team of three brothers did everything together to stave off starvation and fend hostilities, even if it meant dropping out of school to look for work. Lerumo believes that he did not set a good example for the two younger brothers when he did not go back to repeat Grade 12 after he failed at first attempt.

*My dropping out of school possibly influenced them to do the same. I could not imagine going back to repeat because of the hunger and struggles we were going through as brothers* (from interview with Lerumo, head of the three-brother household).

The boys are now without a job, and now he realises that he should have insisted that they complete Grade 12, and their fortunes might have been different. They want to go back to finish school and he is now encouraging them to do so. However, they would continue looking for a job and attend classes part-time. The three brothers survive on Lerumo's wages from working at a fast-food outlet in town.

## **CASE STUDY 9: MONICA**

Monica is now effectively head of the household after her mother died and her stepfather left the home. She looks after her own child and her 15 and 22-year-old brothers. She is 21 years old.

As one of the two females in the household, Monica had to look after her mother who had become ill while Monica was in secondary school. With her mother still healthy and well, Monica returned to Phagameng Secondary School after she gave birth while in Grade 10. Her mother looked after the baby, as she was not working. While in Grade 11, her mother became ill and she had to look after her and her own child. She later died. She never returned to school after her mother's death and has since become the head of the household. Her younger brother is still attending school while the older brother dropped out of school well before their mother's death. He had started smoking and drinking, bunking school, sleeping away from home and eventually dropped out in Grade 8. Monica has not seen her brother in two days. He comes and goes; nobody knows his whereabouts.

Monica does not have a job but dresses people's hair occasionally. Her child's social grant also helps the household going.

Monica failed Grade 11 for the first time when she returned to school after giving birth. She did well throughout primary school, which started at one of the farm schools in the area, before she moved to the township 10 years earlier to start secondary school. She did well until Grade 11 after she had had a baby.

## **CASE STUDY 10: JABULANI**

Jabulani lives with both his parents and a sister sibling. He went to school at the local Lekkerbreek Primary School, a few minutes from his home. He did in his grades and teachers were supportive. He was clad in good school uniforms and a lunch box to take with regularly. Both his parents were employed. He completed his primary phase without a glitch and proceeded into secondary school.

It was in secondary school that some of his friends dropped out and went to register with what they described to him was a better in school town. Therefore, he also dropped out in grade eight to register at the new school. The new school was a public technical school, also a no-fee school. They had to pay for daily transport in and out of town. He was certified as a plumber from the technical school that year and he is now doing odd jobs for the municipality. He is not happy with the wages he receives for work done and he now wants to upgrade his technical qualifications.

Jabulani's parents did not play an active part in his decision to change schools. However, they had to start allocating money for his daily transport to and from the town school. They were told it was a good school in town, and many children from the township were now enrolling there.

**7.4 Case Studies in Western Cape Province, West Coast district – Swartland, Saldanha Bay, Bergrivier, Cederberg and Matzikama local municipalities**

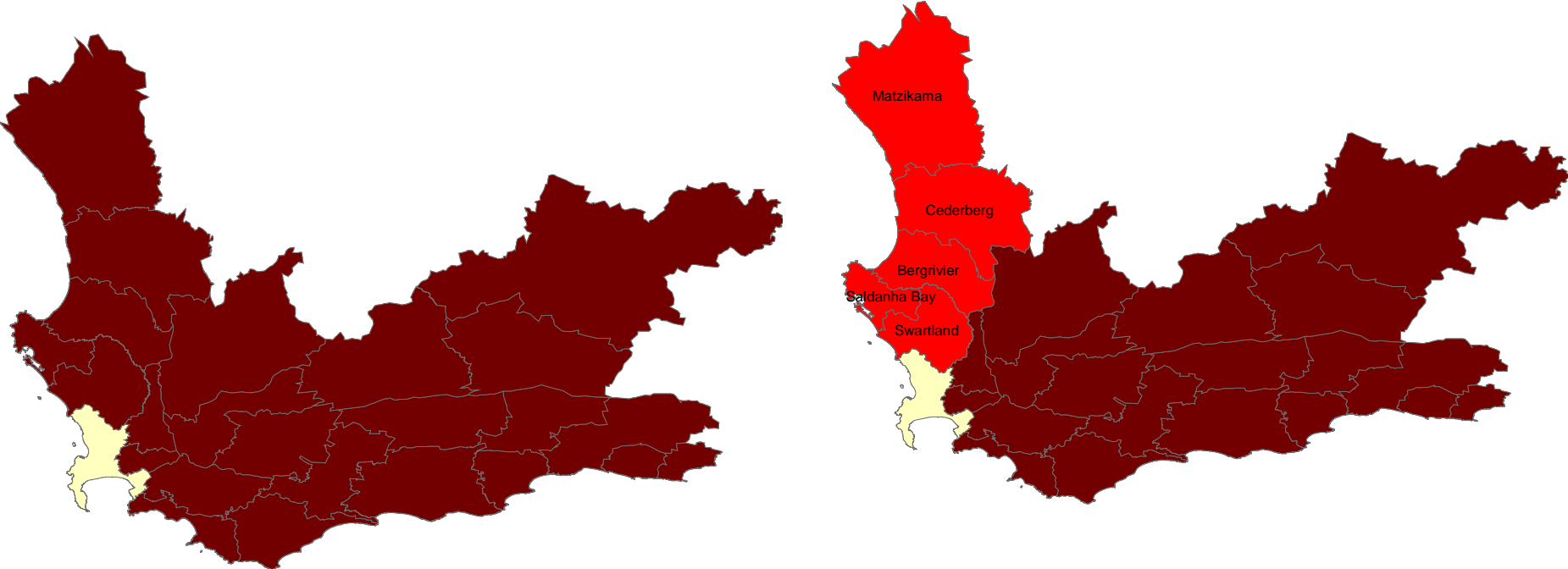


Figure 7.2: Study Sites in the West Coast District, Cape Province

#### **Study Site 4: Ilingeletu settlement, Swartland Local Municipality**

Ilingeletu community is the setting for the next three case studies presented below: ZOLA, ANELE and NOZI

A few years before the influx control laws were repealed in 1986, a group of women and children had camped outside the gates of Malmesbury cannery company compound demanding to join their husbands in the compound. In 1973, about 330 black men, mainly from the Eastern Cape Bantustans of Transkei and Ciskei, who were farm or cannery labourers in Malmesbury were housed in this compound, from which women and children were excluded.

The women and children started living in the surrounding reeds and mud, in rain and in sun, just beyond the signs that prohibited them from entering the fenced compound. The men snuck out food, water, and mattresses to their families. The women periodically tried to come into the compound, and they were arrested. More than 500 women sharing subhuman conditions living outdoors gradually welded themselves in the community in the 1980s and 1990s. Even after the repeal of the influx-laws that prohibited black women to live in the Cape ended in 1986, the company and the municipality still refused to allow the women into the compound: the company remained law unto itself, and the city government regarded black women squatters as outsiders, underserving of the rights of local citizens. The women tried to create homes for themselves and their children in shacks they built outside the gates (Kaplan, 1997).

In 1987, in one of the many skirmishes between the women and the compound guards, the women tore down the gates and began to erect shacks within the compound. Now families inside the compound still lacked toilet facilities, water and electricity hook-ups. The women demanded that the municipality provide these services. Seeing the presence of the women and children as a health hazard, the authorities simply wanted to drive them out and away from the compound surroundings. The year, 1989, witnessed yet another failure by the municipality to evict the women from the compound. The women remained and instead painted over the signs that prohibited them to be there. They laid out their village, and named the streets and gave the shacks numbers. The compound had only a few toilets which were not even sufficient for the men who originally lived there. Women had to carry water great

distances for cleaning and cooking. Once the women established their rights to the land within the compound, they wanted the same social services any other citizen enjoyed. They organized demonstrations and with the support of local civil groups, they marched to the civic centre of Malmesbury and demanded that the town includes them in its benefits. A committee negotiated with the municipal authorities for over a year and finally, in December 1992, won an agreement that the town would supply 550 sites with taps, toilets, and underground electrical connections. The name Ilingeletu (meaning “our own struggle”) was decided upon in 1993 and in 1994 the residents moved into the new area – Ilingeletu (Kaplan, 1997).

The Ilingeletu settlement is now home to over 13 000 people divided almost equally between Black Africans and Coloureds population sub-groups. The settlement is about one square kilometre area in size and growing. It lies less than a kilometre south of the Malmesbury town centre, bordered on its north and south-eastern sides by the long established township of Westbank between the national road N7 and the regional road to Darling (R315). To the south-west lie wheat and grape farms that extend well over the skyline. Electricity, water and sanitation infrastructure is in place, but the streets are still red sand pathways, supposedly precursors to paved streets in the near future. The Ilingeletu settlement has rapidly grown in size from the original 550 stands that it was in 1992 and is still sprawling westerly with new stands being allocated. Free government houses are now a common feature, the legacy of informal housing still lingers on from the beginning of the settlement, compounded by the housing provision that lags behind the population growth in the community. Almost every stand still has a backyard shack that used to be the main dwelling when the stands were first allocated, or recently erected as means of income from renting them it out. A stand with more than one shack is a common sight in the settlement. I learn from later interviews that subletting the shacks is a thriving business in the neighbourhood as accommodation is in high demand. The settlement has recently witnessed violent protests by residents demanding housing from the government. They were mainly sub-tenants renting accommodation in backyard shacks. The Daily Sun newspaper quoted the protesting sub-tenant, Kazibo Fakayi (55), a mother of five children, who said they were fed up with living in backyard shacks and wanted their own house (Daily Sun, June 06, 2014).

A group of young pupils in brown jerseys and gold dresses stream down a broad sandy street, and I am told the big structure peering above the houses, about 200 meters away is the local

primary school - Naphakade Primary. It is a Wednesday morning, a normal school day, and the morning bell is yet to go off. The Ilingeletu Secondary School is also a short distance away from the primary school. A ward committee member later in the day is satisfied about the number of schools in the settlement but warns about potential overcrowding given the settlement's exponential population growth rate.

Maureen, the community development worker, provides more insight into the community and its "collusion in school dropout". Maureen is one of the several community development workers for the Swartland Local Municipality and is responsible for two other settlements, Westbank and Abbotsdale in the Malmesbury Town Council. As she puts it, they are the community's foot soldiers. They go around identifying problems affecting the community. She also sits at a bigger social development forum where they share ills afflicting the general Swartland municipality community. The problem of drug abuse is the biggest in Ilingeletu and her greatest concern is that the drug use starts as early as the age of nine. By the time they come out of primary school (if they do), they have long experimented, and some of them are peddling on school premises for bigger men out there. While the schools are trying everything to stop drugs coming onto school premises, the children still find creative ways to smuggle them in, either for selling or for their own use. She says outside the school premises then it is free for all, with the drug lords pulling the strings all over the place. She reports that drug users resort to crime, predominantly house invasion, where they steal in order to ensure their next fix. The drug users are typically lost from school because of their criminal behaviour which often lands them in jail or juvenile correctional facilities. That morning, she narrates, a primary school child tried to smuggle drugs into the local school (as she shows me the picture of the confiscated drug and the intake accessories on her computer screen). She laments that:

*Alcohol abuse, drug use are the biggest problem in this area. There's a new drug called crocodile, it is more dangerous than Tik (methamphetamine). Suppliers are from Cape Town, they are using young local kids to peddle the drugs on their behalf. A primary school child brought a pipe and dagga to school this morning, and he is 11 years old (from interview with Maureen).*

A ward committee member, MaNtonga, who adds that the drug dealers are so brazen that they even put up signposts to mark their territories, confirms this observation. Interestingly, shoes hanging on electricity poles and lines indicate a drug sales point nearby. She despairs in

the fact that the drug supply and use have taken deep hold on the community and it seems like they are fighting a losing battle. As soon as one established drug dealer is arrested, a new one pops up soon after.

Maureen and MaNtonga agree that substance abuse and particularly alcohol abuse by parents or guardians compounds schooling difficulties of children. Parents abusing alcohol are unable to meet out their supervisory duties. Eventually, children end up staying home with no one nudging them to go to school, and in most cases ending up abusing substance themselves and dropping out of school.

The majority of those who drop out take seasonal jobs on the grape and wheat farms, or work on road construction projects that are going on almost every major road in the West Coast District in the past few years. Some youth commute daily by bus or train to Cape Town for work in other industries. They do not go back to school. Both Maureen and Ma Ntonga agree on the employers of choice for those who drop out of school – grape and wheat farms, and road construction. A stretch of the N7 Highway, Cape Town to Namibia, near Ilingeletu is being upgraded and out-of-school youth are employed there. That is, after dropping out of school, the older adolescents easily find jobs around the municipality or even elsewhere in the Province.

*They drop out of school to work on the grape farms, or they commute to Cape Town by train or bus for work. Most girls work on the grape farms after they had children. Work on the farms is seasonal and after each season, they sit home. You don't see many in the community now they are out to work. Some work on the N7 Highway upgrade project (from interview with Maureen).*

For a number of years, the employment rate in the West Coast, and Swartland in particular has been relatively high. This seems to support Maureen and MaNtonga's observations. For most girls, after childbirth, the young mothers typically take up jobs readily available on the grape farms, a major economic sector in the Swartland Local Municipality.

The movement of migrant labour from the rural Eastern Cape Province to the Western Cape dating back several decades is still continuing. Ilingeletu is still experiencing continuing

multitudes of in-migrants searching for better economic opportunities. In addition, these migrants are getting younger, as the following case studies will show.

### **CASE STUDY 11: ZOLA**

Zola left home at the age of 17 after his schooling has stalled. He is now 19 years. He came to the Western Cape from Xhora, a village in the Eastern Cape Province. He settled in Ilingeletu in the past year or so. He dropped out of school in 2013 in Grade 7. He narrates difficulties of his upbringing back in the Eastern Cape, in a household where all his siblings, his mother and aunt relied on his grandmother's social grant to get by.

Talking about his experiences while at school, he narrates having difficulties with grade work, having to repeat a number of grades several times. That he was 17 years old still in Grade 7 bears testimony to his academic struggles, and yet he persisted. He shares about his love for school and wished he fared better like those he started school with years earlier. Growing up herding livestock, he always loved school to break the herdboys' monotony. He never smoked or drank alcohol during his time in Xhora and he is still not. He received his identity card while in Grade 7 and at the end of that year, he left for Cape Town where he intended to look for work. His schoolmates at the time were just too young and he felt out of place.

*Life was difficult, with no one to help with school wares and other things. I lived with my mother, her sister and grandmother. We depended on grandmother's old pension money. I never had a dad. After I had my ID, I came to Cape Town. I am now doing odd jobs on a farm. I am now off for a few days (from the interview with Zola).*

Out of his love for education, Zola plans to continue studying, preferably vocational courses as he cannot go back to the mainstream classroom. He has time on his hands as he periodically gets time off from his job on the farm.

## **CASE STUDY 12: ANELE**

We met Anele in the street and she agreed to talk to us. She suggests that we go to her house for the chat. The house is metres away and soon she leads us into one of about six backyard shacks that surround a modest government-issued low cost house. A maze of narrow sandy pathways criss-crossed the yard, connecting the shacks together, to the lavatory, and to the lone water tap installed for the backyard tenants. I learnt that the yard is home to about 15 people. As soon as we stepped inside the shack, I realise that she was not home alone. There was someone in the next room, which is separated from the kitchen area by a thin curtain, almost possible to clearly see through. I requested that we sit somewhere outside for the conversation, but she protested, and she suggested that she prepared us some tea in the meantime while her boyfriend was finishing preparing for work. He starts work at nine o'clock, at a nearby vine farm and he should be on his way soon. Anele wanted to see him off to work, hence the invitation to the house after realising our conversation would be a bit long. She is herself employed at a vine farm, but she is off-work for today. Soon she bid her boyfriend goodbye and she is ready to talk to us.

The inside of the shack looked much the opposite of its outside appearance. Well-laid chipboards line the inside of the rusty metal sheets, providing a homely feel. Two modest cupboards decorated the kitchen, with shining pots line in a row on one of the. Anele is also dressed in a good-looking pair of jeans, a complimenting top, and a well-cropped hair look.

She came to the Ilingeletu Township from Mthata area in the Eastern Cape. She was 17 years old when she dropped out in Grade 10 in 2009. She is the second eldest of the five siblings, who lost their father to illness while she was still in secondary school. With their mother unemployed, the family started to struggle to make ends meet. Her mother could not afford the school basics that included school fees at the nearby school. There was no no-fee public school nearby and all her siblings attended the fee-paying school, the only school in the close vicinity. They had to buy their own school uniform and books. The mother could not afford to take them to school anymore.

She was 17 when she came to the Cape Town with a friend looking for work. She soon proceeded to Malmesbury, where she was told there were more job opportunities. She lived

with her boyfriend. She was then working and supporting her mother and other siblings back home as she has no child of her own yet. She would love to go back to school one day, but for now her focus is work and supporting her family.

*We did not have money for school fees, uniforms and other things. We were five at home; I am the second eldest. I have brothers and sisters. I came here to Cape Town with a friend looking for a job (from the interview with Anele).*

### **CASE STUDY 13: NOZI**

Anele led us to Nozi's shack, one of the many in the yard. Nozi met us earlier during the interview with Anele, when she came to say morning greetings to her friend, fellow tenant. She agreed to share her story once we finished talking to Anele.

Nozi's place was much smaller than that of Anele, also made predominantly of metal sheets crudely connected together. The metal sheets were also not insulated on the inside, with the fastening nails showing through the rusty sheets. The place was a bachelor arrangement that combined the sleeping area and kitchen together, almost at arm's reach of each other. The place did not look comfortable for a pregnant woman. Nozi was visibly pregnant, lived with her boyfriend who was out to work. Somehow, we found enough room to sit and talk in the kitchen area on makeshift chairs. She looked unkempt, shy and sleepy, and this prompts me to check if she was willing and able to talk to us, which she clearly positively confirmed.

Nozi, now 26 years old, left school in Grade 10 in 2007. She went to school in East London, Eastern Cape Province and came to the Western Cape with a boyfriend shortly after dropping out of school. Her parents had died a short time apart and she and her three younger siblings were sent to a foster home, as there were no relatives to take them in. She could not settle down with the new family and after the first term of school, she left school. Nozi generally enjoyed school and did well in her grades until her parents died. She was 16 years at the time of their death. She came to Ilingeletu in March this year where she has found a job. She is off-duty for a couple days. She was expecting her first child sometime in 2016, who she

wanted to work for, and where possible, look after her younger siblings back in the Eastern Cape.

### **Study Site 5: Oudekraalfontein, Saldanha Bay Local Municipality**

Oudekraalfontein community is the setting for the case study: LORENZO

Oudekraalfontein is a Coloured (almost exclusively) settlement in the town of Hopefield in the Saldanha Bay local municipal area. The settlement lies side by side with the historically White part of Hopefield, separated by the Sout River, a historical racial divide between the Coloured and White sub-groups. The Voortrekker road bridge connects the two halves of Hopefield by both foot and vehicle. The area is an historical farmer's service centre surrounded by an agricultural hinterland. In its heydays, the town was the only access to the region, with major road going through the town. Re-routing of the regional road (R27) and construction of (R45) which both by-pass the town, its fortunes have tumbled and has been officially classified as one of the towns with the least growth potential within the Saldanha municipal area.

The Oudekraalfontein is the poorer of the two parts of Hopefield, with smaller residential erven, only one school, a primary school and no public secondary school. While the secondary school across the Sout River is only a few minutes' walk, it is a former model C school and fees are prohibitive. The closest ordinary public school is 40 kilometres to the north-west in Vredenburg, the seat of the local municipality. The closest settlement from Oudekraalfontein is the coastal village Laagebaan, 30 kilometres to the west, but does not have an ordinary public school.

While the commercial significance of the area has shrunk over the years, the population of Oudekraalfontein has increased. The settlement now spans about eight square kilometres, a home to about 1500 households and 6000 people. The newest residential section of Oudekraalfontein is clearly visible, constituting over 100 houses painted in fresh snow white paint.

Jahman, a resident complained that "*school is still too far, parents have to pay for transport*". Jahman emphasizes the point about the lack of an accessible secondary school in

Oudekraalfontein. He points to his wife accompanied by his daughter, still in school uniform, just off the school bus, from a 30 kilometres trip to the west in the town of Vredenburg. He explained that his daughter stayed in a hostel during the week and only came home for weekends. He paid the weekly bus trips to and from school, in addition to the mid-week accommodation costs for the daughter. He was grateful that the family could still afford these costs, but many families were not that fortunate. The school across the Sout River in Hopefield Town, a walking distance away served mainly the white wealthy families and those few affording Coloured families with deeper pockets. It is still cheaper to send his daughter 30 kilometres away for school than enrolling her in the school less than a kilometre from his house. It is common therefore, for children after completing primary school in Oudekraalfontein, to sit at home and not go into secondary school. His much younger companion, who shares dagga smoking sessions with, is an example of those who discontinued with school after the primary phase, owing to pressures such as inaccessibility of schools, amongst other things.

#### **CASE STUDY 14: LORENZO**

Lorenzo came to the West Coast from Cape Town several years ago on a road contract work and settled in Oudekraalfontein, where he lives with a girlfriend and their little baby. He was the only one willing to speak to me among a group of about six young men huddling in the patio of a small local shop. As the car approached the shop, the group quickly dispersed, with Lorenzo and another lad keeping their positions. I later learn that our car looked suspicious and out of place with Gauteng Province police detectives often used the registration plate, and they are not friends with police. This suspicion could explain why Jahman's companion refused to speak to me minutes earlier, even after Jahman assured him that I was a student. I can say he never recovered from his suspicions. Lorenzo, who came to the car window after I requested him, did not have the same level of mistrust as his friends. I quickly also realized that he had a good command of English than most people I have spoken to in the area. He indicated to the other lads through gestures that I am harmless, and the group reassembles in front of the shop. Lorenzo agrees to settle down in the car after learning about my interest – and he is willing to share his story.

He came from Cape Town originally. He left school in Grade 11 in 2009 “because of bad influences”. He was 18 years old. He repeated Grade 11 twice, something that has never happened prior to Grade 11. In Cape Town, Lorenzo lived with his paternal grandmother. His father was serving time in jail and his mother had moved to Johannesburg. He has two younger sisters who lived with his maternal grandmother at the time. The two sisters later joined their mother in Johannesburg, and they were still in school when he dropped out.

His mother would send money to his grandmother for his upkeep and school uniforms. He would lie to the grandmother about monies required at school for this and that, meanwhile he bought marijuana and stuff with it.

*I started smoking dagga, experimenting with other drugs, drinking and bunking school. In the end, I lost interest in school (from the interview with Lorenzo).*

After years working for the road construction company, the contract ended recently, and has not found another job since. He says, “*I feel lost*”. He was hoping for a job opportunity when he readily came to speak to us. He feels lost without a job and thinks of going back to Cape Town to start afresh. He regrets that he prematurely left school, now he is a father, with a child to work for. He would visit the girlfriend and the child maybe once a month if he moved back to Cape Town.

Misbehaviour, substance abuse and academic failure in the context of marginal family structure appear to account for Lorenzo’s eventual disengagement from school.

## Study Site 6: Vredenburg, Saldanha Bay local municipality

Vredenburg community is the setting for the case study: ANATHI

Vredenburg is a densely populated settlement of about 14 square kilometres, 20 kilometres from the Saldanha Bay shoreline, and home to about 38 000 inhabitants (Statistics South Africa, 2012). It is a conglomeration of multiple sub-settlements, varying by age and SES status. The youngest part of the settlement, on its eastern border, is characterised by informal dwelling structures made mainly of metal sheets. Black Africans almost exclusively occupy this section of the settlement. The great portion of Vredenburg, the middle, the southern and the northern sections, are occupied predominantly by the Coloureds. The western part of Vredenburg, including the central business district is visibly leafier and wealthier, and the population is about 60% White. The fishing village of Paternoster lies about 15 kilometres to the west, while St Helena Bay and Velddrif settlements are 25 kilometres to the north. Hopefield is its eastern neighbour about 40 minutes away.

Ms Van Ryn, a community development worker, stationed at the municipal offices in the central business district, is a welcoming personality. She passionately narrated the historical and current successes and challenges the municipality faced, particularly Vredenburg. Talking about accessibility of schools in Vredenburg, she confirms what I was told earlier in Oudekraalfontein, and continued to add that:

*Children from all over the Saldanha Local Municipality have to come into Vredenburg to access high school. Children from Oudekraalfontein, Langebaan, St Helena, and Paternoster have to come into Vredenburg to access high school. Schools are a bit overcrowded as a result, with 50-60 kids per class. Amenities such as libraries are available but not adequate for the learner population (from the interview with the community worker - Ms Van Ryn).*

This confirms what Jahman said about his daughter having to travel into Vredenburg for secondary school. Ms Van Ryn did sound alarm bells yet about the capacity of the Vredenburg schools to accommodate all in-coming children, but the estimates per classroom she provides are a cause for concern. She acknowledges that the longer distances to school

for children coming in from outside Vredenburg could play a role in some of them dropping out of school, especially from poorer families who cannot readily afford transport cost.

Ms Van Ryn talks about the positive economic outlook for the municipality, with ambitious industrial plans on the table. She emphasizes that the industrialisation plans will definitely attract more youth before they complete school, especially those from poorer families.

*The envisaged Industrial Development Zone (IDZ) is being rolled out with the Saldanha area going to become the new City of Cape Town in terms of development (from the interview with the community worker - Ms Van Ryn).*

Already youth are attracted to the traditional industries associated with this municipality – fishing and quarrying. The opportunity to earn money, to feed themselves and their families is irresistible, often at the expense of attaining basic education credentials.

*It is crayfish, snoekfish season and youth find lot of employment there. Manufacturing provides odd/temporary jobs for youth. Saldanha Sand (quarrying) is also providing jobs for youth. There are a lot of opportunities in the area, but also lot of youth out of school (from the interview with the community worker - Ms Van Ryn).*

In addition to local youth leaving school for available jobs, there was in-migration of youth from the Northern and Eastern Cape in the area in search of better economic prospects. These youth could be either school dropouts or those with only secondary school education. She points out that most of the informal settlements that I saw on the eastern outskirts of the area are home to mainly economic migrants from outside the Province.

Also, the children from poorer families, where the household heads cannot provide the basics, would feel the poverty, in the light of generally good economic conditions in the municipality.

*There are quite a number of poor families with no food. In such cases, kids would say what the use of going to school is. They want to earn money. Government gives youth stipend to clean the streets. Extended Public Works Programme also employs a number of youth (from the interview with the community worker - Ms Van Ryn).*

She also laments the prevalence of drug abuse among the youth in the area in general, with *tik* (methamphetamine) a drug of choice among the Coloured youth.

She shared shocking statistics of teenage pregnancy in the municipality, with some feeder areas reporting higher than usual rate of pregnancy. The report by the national Department of Basic Education that came out in October 2015 was not a surprise for them as they had already observed high incidence of teenage pregnancy in their municipality from earlier on.

### **CASE STUDY 15: ANATHI**

Anathi came to the Western Cape Province several years ago with her mother and four of her siblings, from the Eastern Cape Province. Anathi's family moved in with her aunt in the Province after her father passed away earlier and her mother could not afford to take care of them. Her mother was hoping to get a job when she moved here.

Anathi was 17 years when she dropped out of school in grade 10 in 2008 after she became pregnant. Her father had already died and her mother could not afford her and the baby. Her two sisters and a brother also did not complete school. Only her youngest sibling completed school.

*In our area, back in the Eastern Cape, we had to cross rivers to get to school. Sometimes we did not go to school when it rained as the river became full and impassable. We had broken shoes, worn out uniform, and it was very difficult for us, especially during the rainy season (from the interview with Anathi).*

She had found work in the area and was able to support her child. Anathi's pregnancy and childbirth into a family that was already struggling with survival since the death of her father further diminished the chances of her returning to school.

## **Study Site 7: Noordhoek, Bergrivier Local Municipality, West Coast district, Western Cape Province.**

Noordhoek community is the setting for the case studies: SESANA and JONNIE

Noordhoek Township is in the Velddrif Town area in the Bergrivier Local Municipality, situated at the Berg River mouth, as it river empties into St. Helena Bay. The Velddrif central business district is a few minutes' drive from the township, while the fishing Laaiplek harbour village with its fish factories and the Atlantic Ocean beachline a walking distance away. Driving into the area from the south, across the Berg River bridge, about three kilometres from Noordhoek, salt pans that stretch a couple kilometres along the river are clearly visible. I later learn that the salt mining industry is the second biggest employer after the fishing industry. Tourism is another big revenue source, although it is not a big employer among the Noordhoek youth.

Noordhoek is the most populated part of the Velddrif area, with over 80% of the residents Coloured and 16% Black African. A typical South African Coloured settlement, separated from the other part of the town council (historically inhabited exclusively by Whites) by a stretch of indigenous *kersbos* (candle bush) vegetation covering the brown to cream-white sandy soil below. The settlement is predominated by very old council housing structures, with newer houses completing the arrangement. Some dwellings closer to the harbour used to be compounds for fishermen from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Accumulation of sand as high as the doorstep shows that the area is continuously flooded after every heavy rain, with little attempt to clear the doorways. Some of the compound blocks appear deserted, most likely because of the flooding problem. An imposing community centre was unmissable further into the settlement, but upon closer inspection, it appeared that no proper maintenance is carried out. Some of the sections are disintegrating. The hot sun further accentuates the pungent urine smell around one corner, which I mistook to be leading to the hall entrance. I learn that the noises coming from inside were of women on some project, and they would not be disturbed. Sports fields are also visible a few hundred yards away.

Driving deeper into the settlement, the tarred streets are invariably clogged with the several layers of ocean-white sand from the raised dirt pavements, either by rain or displaced by

footsteps as people trudge along daily. People are walking about regardless of the hot sun; thanks to the cooling effect from the ocean breeze from the direction of the shoreline.

Noordhoek youth have to travel 30 kilometres to Vredenburg (Saldanha Local Municipality) to the south to access a public secondary school, after completing the primary phase locally. I learnt that plans were afoot to build a secondary school in the northern part of the settlement, not people's preferred location as it would be a longer (walking distance) for most students.

### **CASE STUDY 16: SESANA**

Sesana, 24 years old Black African female, lives in Laaiplek, a fishing port village at the Berg River mouth. She came to Laaiplek in January 2015, from King Williams Town region in the Eastern Cape. She lived with her mother and her two elder sisters, her father died when she was only six years. She was 18 years when she left school in Grade 11.

Sesana did well at school, but left after she became pregnant. Like her older sisters, she had to find a job to support her child. She found a job at the road construction site for some time, but the contract had since expired. She was now looking for work with the fish factories in the village.

Sesana's family struggled to make ends meet since the death of her father. None of her sisters finished school. They are now working or looking for work in different parts in the Western Cape Province.

### **CASE STUDY 17: JONNIE**

Jonnie, a 26 year old Coloured man, lives with his parents in the fishing settlement of Noordhoek, in the town of the Velddrif. He has three other brothers and he is the second oldest. Like him, his two older brothers did not finish school, but he youngest brother, who also temporarily dropped out, went back to school after Jonnie's advice, and is now in matric.

Jonnie attended high school in Vredenburg, 30 kilometres to the south, where Coloured youth from many other settlements went to for secondary school. He talks of run-ins with teachers during his time at school, bad influence on the streets and no-so-good environment at home. His parents were drinking all the time at home and did not care whether they went to school or not. They did not push them to go to school, or check on their homework.

*If you don't have a mother at home to tell you to go to school, you just put on uniform but end up at street corners and doing bad things. You start smoking dagga and doing drugs. And when you are absent from school, you must bring a letter to explain why you were absent. I didn't have a letter all the time I was absent, I stopped going (from interview with Jonnie).*

Jonnie was 18, in Grade 9 when he left school in 2009. By the time dropped out of school, he was several years older than age-grade norm, owing to multiple grade repetition. Deviant behaviour in and outside school was compounded by an uncondusive home environment, with lower educational expectations from parents.

### **Study Site 8: Piketberg, Bergrivier Local Municipality**

Piketberg community is the setting for the case studies: LEE-ANNE

Piketberg, I think for its strategic location, is the seat of the Bergrivier Local Municipality. It sits in the middle of the two other towns in the municipality, Velddrif, about 70 to the west and Porterville, 30 kilometres to the east. It lies strategically along the national road N7, and a junction to access the district's four other local municipalities and towns to the north and the west. A community of about 12 000 people predominantly Coloured, lying at the foothill of the Piketberg mountain. Piketberg is a wheat and grape farming community with cement manufacturing also contributing to the economic activity of the community. Wine warehouses and wheat silos are dotting the opposite site of the national road N7, and further south, down the national road is the sprawling cement plant adding to the dull brown shaded wheat straws covering the now fallow fields since the last harvest.

A drive around the settlement reveals another 'tale of two cities' within one geographic community, sharing municipal services. Piketberg is characterised by contrasting residential

arrangements, with the northern side being visibly poorer, while the south-west is relatively wealthier, generally the Coloured and the White population sub-groups occupying the two areas, respectively. The Coloured population sub-group makes about 75% of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2012). The northern side is growing as evidenced by the newly built free government houses pushing the border of the settlement further north. Lack of vegetation in this section makes walking the streets nearly unbearable under the searing sun. The older section of the northern section is characterised by older, run down houses, broken fences and very few people are seen in the streets. Where residents are home, many houses have their front doors, windows open to maximise ventilation, and residents are lounging under the relative comfort of the house shade, out of the scorching sun, but invitingly close the street passers-by.

Piketberg youth have access two secondary schools within one kilometre from each other. These are Piketberg Combined School a former model C public school charging about R800.00 per month in school fees, and Steynville Secondary School charging R60.00 per month, with those who cannot afford to pay fees exempted.

## **CASE STUDY 18: LEE-ANNE**

Lee-Anne is a 21-year-old Coloured female. She lives with her mother and her older sister in a council provided house, in the northern section of the town.

*I was 15 in Grade 9 when I left school. My friends had finished in matric and I was still in Grade 9. I was tired and lazy (from interview with Lee-Anne).*

A family friend, who was visiting Lee-Anne's home at the time, and in earshot, quickly adds that her daughter also just left school after completing Grade 9 in 2010. She was 15 years old. She emphasizes that she was not sick, not pregnant, but just stopped going to school. I was curious about her reaction to her daughter's decision to stop going to school. The mother says: *"I said nothing; she just stopped"* (from interview with Lee-Anne family friend).

Lee-Anne continues to tell her story:

*I started bunking classes and going into the bushes to smoke all day. I came back home after school. Mom and dad didn't know I was bunking classes. I got homework from classmates. My teachers did not care if I came to class or not, and did not even check with my mother what was wrong. We were too many in class about 40 of us. I eventually dropped out after missing so many school days. But now I cannot find any work with Grade 8 certificate, unless I go to work on the grape or wheat farms (from interview with Lee-Anne).*

### **Study Site 9: Citrusdal Township, Cederberg Local Municipality**

Citrusdal is the setting for case studies: BROMELDA, WESLEY and MILLOW

Citrusdal is located in the Cederberg Local Municipality along the N7 national road. The town is nestled between the Olifants River to the west and the Cederberg mountain range to the north-east. It is known as the start of the Olifants River wine route that meanders along the river in the north-westerly direction for about 120 kilometres. The settlement is predominantly inhabited by the Coloured population subgroup, about 70%, with the Whites and Black African making up the difference, almost equally. The settlement is a service and industrial centre for citrus and grape farmers. The place has recently experienced dramatic increase in population growth, owing to the rise in urbanisation of Coloured labourers on citrus farms, but also in-migration of labourers from the Cape Town metro area or even outside the Province. The settlement, now a five square kilometre area, a mixture of formal and informal residential structures, as well as industrial citrus and vine warehousing and packaging structures, and the central business district. The different functional areas of this community are all huddled together at the foot of the protective Cederberg Mountain on the one side, and the fertile, charitable waters and alluvial soils of the mighty Olifants River, on the other.

Only recently, owing to the increase in numbers of poor and working class population, Cederberg Academy, a public no-fee school, was established in Citrusdal. Until five years earlier, the mostly Coloured students accessed public school in Piketberg, 50 kilometres away to the south, in the Bergrivier Local Municipality. This was despite the availability of Citrusdal High School, former model C school, a walking distance for many learners. Owing to diminishing numbers, the Citrusdal High School, was recently converted into primary

school, but tuition fees are still prohibitive for most Coloured and Black African children, who generally attend the no-fee Citrusdal Première Primary School. The West Coast Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College (Citrusdal Campus) is also a walking distance for many in the area.

Early Friday morning, after a peaceful and restful night sleep at the Citrusdal Country Lodge in the central business district, I make my way around the place. The residential parts of the settlement are visibly divided along SES lines, with higher SES and older residential section much closer to the central business district, to the south. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clearer that Whites predominantly live closer to the town centre than the other race groups, owing to the historical racial designs. To the north, with the industrial zone in between, is the lower SES residential section, all government provided housing post-1994, which happen to be occupied by the Coloured and Black African population sub groups. In fact, the Black Africans are occupying recent-looking informal housing section on the one side of the road. Here the streets are dusty and the building materials to the housing structures are mainly iron sheets and wood, although solid structures are also evident. Water and sanitation infrastructure is in place, and hear plans are underway to put up proper dwelling structures soon. Unlike the south side, the streets here are too narrow and at higher gradient given their location foothill of the Cederberg Mountain. The streets are line up with youngsters getting breakfast essentials in different forms. I later learnt from a 12 year old that schools have completed their curriculum for the year and they are waiting for the end of year report cards, and there is not much they do at school but play. Therefore, he and many others did not go to school that day.

## **CASE STUDY 19: BROMELDA**

I met Bromelda at the gate to her house, a loaf of bread on one hand and I thought a half a dozen eggs on the other. She was willing to hear the rest of my story but first she must attend to her granny's breakfast.

Bromelda lived with her grandmother and her little sister. Her parents are both working but live elsewhere. She is not keen to talk about her parents, where they live, and so on.

Bromelda is not working since she left school. Both the little sister and she survive on their grandmother's social grant. She was 16 years old in grade 9, two years earlier when she decided dropped out of Cederberg Academy. She did not feel like going to school anymore. *"I just did not feel like going to school anymore"* (from interview with Bromelda).

## **CASE STUDY 20: WESLEY**

Wesley lived with his mother and two younger brothers. He was 18 years old when he dropped out of school in Grade 11, in 2009. He attended high school in Piketberg, about 50 kilometres to the south. He stayed in a hostel while at school in Piketberg, and came home fortnightly. His stepfather took care of bi-weekly transport costs to and from school, as well as the hostel fees.

*After my stepfather died, there was no money to continue. We paid for transport, R120.00 every fortnight, and for hostel. My mother was not working at the time* (from interview with Wesley).

He later found employment with a road construction company on the National Road 7, but has been recently retrenched. He was then at home looking for the next employment opportunity. His mother has also found work as a domestic worker in town, a short walking distance from the exclusively Coloured section of the township.

## **CASE STUDY 21: MILLOW**

Millow lives with his mother, and older brother in Citrusdal Township. He started school in Vredenburg, Saldanha Bay, about 150 kilometres to the south-west. He completed Grade 8 in Vredenburg, where he stayed with relatives. He explains that while he enjoyed school, he had to move from Vredenburg because of violent gangster activity. He was not prepared to join any gang while his friends were gang members. He recently learnt of the death of his former friend at the hands of other gangs.

He completed Grade 9 in 2012 in Citrusdal, and was in Grade 10 in 2013 when he dropped out, at the age of 16. His girlfriend had gotten pregnant and he felt he had to go look for work to be able to take care of the baby that was on the way. He found seasonal work with a citrus company in the area where he works in eight months cycles. He is in his eight months off-season and was only going back to work the following year. In the meantime, he was at home, and thinking of visiting his uncle in Cape Town to pass time. His child was then one year and a half.

### **Study Site 10: Vredendal-Noord Township, Matzikama Local Municipality**

Vredendal-Noord is the setting for case studies: JEROME and AMANDA

Located in Matzikama, the northern-most local municipality of the West Coast district, Vredendal-Noord is part of the Greater Vredendal Town, the seat of the Matzikama Local Municipality. The Coloured population subgroup and still the predominant population group historically occupy Vredendal-Noord. The Olifants River separates the settlement from the south half of the town. The south half of town was historically populated exclusively by the White subgroup, and still about 70% still a white settlement. Vredendal-Noord lies about 20 kilometres west of the national road (N7) and accessed mainly through the regional road (362), running parallel the northern banks of the Olifants River. A wine processing industrial zone on the northern bank of the river further solidifies the border between Vredendal-Noord and its southern neighbour. The southern half of the town, from the national road 7 (N7) is separately accessed through regional road (R363) along the opposite bank of the river.

However, Vredendal-Noor is connected to its closest neighbour, 3 kilometres to the south, through the Voortrekker road and bridge on the Olifants River.

Vredendal-Noord is a densely populated settlement of about two square kilometres, and a home to about 15 000 residents, with over 7 000 residents per square kilometre (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Eighty percent of the residents are classified as Coloured and 15% Black African. The neighbourhood is characterised predominantly by low cost housing many of which are government provided or subsidised. The south-east section of the settlement, which is closer to the educational facilities and the affluent White Vredendal, is decorated decent looking bonded or company subsidised houses, albeit fewer in number. This section enjoys a few kilometres of paved roads, unlike the greater part of Vredendal-Noord.

The children in Vredendal-Noord go to a no-fee public primary school in the area, then attend Vredendal Secondary school (also no-fee), about half a kilometre from the primary school. Both schools house over a thousand children each. A few minutes away from the primary school, along the same street with the secondary school, is the Vredendal TVET College.

It was a Thursday afternoon and driving deeper into the settlement with car windows open becomes near impossible. There is a strong wind blowing some kind of a sand storm and we quickly close windows to escape the battering sand particles. Assuming it is a passing dust devil episode, we drive around to wait it out, also an opportunity to get an overview of the place before our first interview. After a good measure of time, criss-crossing the settlement, we realized that it was not a passing devilish duster, as every street we turned into appeared to be the epicentre. Also to our surprise, the stormy streets were full of people, stationary chatting or idly going about their business. It was a typical weather pattern with the easterly winds howling from the Atlantic Ocean a few kilometres to the west, blasting the sandy streets of Vredendal-Noord, which is more exposed to elements by its position away from the peaceful protection of river valley (enjoyed by the southern half of the town), perched on the overlooking hilltop.

We make our first stop at a house with two people chatting across a split-open door, one likely dropping by for a quick neighbourhood update. I make an excuse to use their bathroom after half pulling into their unfenced yard, with my companion slowly following behind. After I was allowed into the house, they expectedly enquire about the reason for my presence

from my companion. With greetings out of the way, they allowed me to speak to us right away, as if they were not busy conversing over something. Thanks to the recording devices that are capable of discerning noise and intensive noting taking, the interview transcription possible and completely audible, despite the groans and howls from the mini sandstorm. One of the residents identifies himself as also serving as the Municipal Business Development Officer for the local municipality.

The business development officer, initially from Cape Town, and has lived in the area for 15 years, goes on to paint the economic landscape and potential of the greater municipality, as well as the educational opportunities available to the Vredendal-Noord residents. I learnt from this interview that the industrial site that greeted us on our way into Vredendal-Noord is mainly a huge wine processing site, although made up of various companies. The grapes that are harvested from the unending rows of vine that decorate both banks of the Olifants River for miles end up at this processing site. Vine farming is the biggest economy in the municipality and Vredendal. Most young people work in the wine industry even before completing school and even after graduation. Many work on the grape farms and some in the wineries. Unfortunately, some farms employed under-age children and exploited them.

*Farms are employing underage kids, drinking from early age. Some are paid with wine. "On one farm I went, where workers stay, I found a lot of young children drunk together with their parents (from interview with Vredendal-Noord residents)*

Young children are still attracted or pushed to work on the farms despite the abundance of schooling opportunities in Vredendal-Noord. They explained that schooling is free at the local primary and secondary schools. Those young people who are old enough can still find work in bigger, formal and proper paying wine companies even without Grade 12. They also found work in the lime sand mining companies, which does not require Grade 12.

Young people having access to money before they have any other responsibility, use their earnings on drugs. They abuse different types of substances and start doing crime when their money runs out. Girls became pregnant at a very young age.

*Tik [methamphetamine] is the common problem, with youth as young as 12 and 13 using it. Pregnancy is also a problem, even among girls as young as 14 years old (from interview with Vredendal-Noord residents).*

The business officer further explained that many families in Vredendal had come from the surrounding farms to inhabit the place, post-1994. On the farms, very little or no schooling happened, and the attitude carries on here. Also, for those families who want to enrol their children in school longer, those parents are still commuting to the farms daily for work, leaving very little or no money for other things.

*Most families here came from the farms. Parents cannot afford normal school wares. Parents are not taking care [do not value education]. Poverty is the main issue (from interview with Vredendal-Noord residents).*

Instead, the young ones are recruited into those farms in which their parents were employed.

## **CASE STUDY 22: JEROME**

Around the corner, I met Jerome. He is wearing a heavy windbreaker with the hood covering both his earlobes from the flying biting sand particles. Waving at him, as I could not compete with the wind noise, he obliges and come to the window. I invited him inside and he obliged. I introduced myself and he was willing to talk about his short-lived schooling career. However, he had to go to the shops first, to buy something *smooth* (a bottle of his and mother's favourite alcoholic drink). We could talk as we drove to the shop or we could wait for him along the street. We gladly drove together to the shop and our conversation as briefly interrupted, while he was in the shop. My brief wait for him outside the liquor store was an interesting one. Five men at different stages of intoxication mob the car, requested (more of a demand) that I either buy them alcohol or give any amount I could or any coins if I did not have enough for full drink. In the middle of my negotiations out of the ransom, Jerome came back and we were on our way back to his house. He has tucked a greenish wine or rum bottle under his coat, and in a connoisseur style, he revealed the container to me.

I must agree he is also too smartly dressed for those weather conditions. He looked slick indeed. We continued our talk in the car on the way to his home, where his mother was present and should not have a problem talking to us. The only problem was that the mother was too unsteady on her feet to even fashion a brief standing position. The house was too small and untidy (at least I thought). Only two steps into the house, the mother wobbled from around one of the inside walls to meet us. She almost walked past us on her way outside. At this point, I turned around and gestured to Jerome that we could talk outside. My earlier interview with two residents was in the howling wind but the audio came out perfectly. Therefore, I was not worried about the quality of the audio conducting the interview outside. As observed earlier, the wind element did not seem to cause any discomfort for a prolonged outside activity.

Jerome was born in Vredendal-Noord in 1994 but moved to the Northern Cape where his father worked. He completed Grade 7 in 2008 at Kleinsee primary school in the Northern Cape when he was 14 years old. After his father lost his job there, they moved back to Vredendal-Noord, where they had a government provided house.

When they moved here after the academic year had started, there was no place for him at the local school for Grade 8. His parents tried neighbouring places such as Vanrhynsdorp, 25 kilometres to the north for a place but could find any.

*I started looking for a job (at 16). I have done some security courses since I left school. I got a job on the grape farms, working in the lab testing grapes for about 6 weeks. After that, I did security jobs for about 5 to 7 years. I want to work for the police. I want to do Matric. I want to go straight to Matric (from interview with Jerome).*

Jerome was now out of job. Both his mother and father were unemployed. Only his elder sister is working at a fast food outlet, the other side of the Olifants River. His little brother and sister are still in school.

Jerome's mother, first mistaking us or suspecting that were law enforcement officers, sang her boy's praises as far as his behaviour was concerned. With repeated assurances from her

son that we are students and we were interested how her son ended up not going to school altogether, she invariably stumbles, a couple times that:

*He was a lovely boy, my lovely boy! We tried to enrol him when we came to Vredendal but there was no place anywhere for him (from interview with Jerome's mother).*

They had moved here from the Northern Cape only to find no place for him at the local schools, including the school in *Vanrhynsdorp*, a town 25 kilometres to the north. At the age of 15 or so, Jerome was employed at a local wine factory, and has since been in the labour market.

### **CASE STUDY 23: AMANDA**

Amanda then 23, was 18 years old, when she left school after completing Grade 9 several years earlier. She attended school in Saldanha Bay, 260 kilometres to the south, where she stayed with relatives. After completing Grade 9, she came back home to Vredendal-Noord. Her father had left them and started a new life elsewhere. Her mother did not work and could not afford basic school wares.

*When I came here to do Grade 10, mom did not have money for books and other things. My father is not here, living with another woman elsewhere (from interview with Amanda).*

Amanda, her mother and her own baby survived on her grandmother's old age pension. Their home is a free government-provided house that is a common feature in the township. She is actively looking for a job at one of the retailers in town.

*I don't work; mom doesn't work. We survive on granny's old age pension. I am looking for a job at local retailers. I need to work for the baby. I have only one child (from interview with Amanda).*

## 7.5 Cross Case narratives

A cross case analysis revealed the emergence of *death* of one or both parents in the majority of the cases of early school exit. In Diks and Nozi's case, their parents died several years earlier. Lesedi's parents died when he was little and his older brother who was barely into his teens, became the head of the household. Teba's father died a while ago and her mother was bed-ridden, while Wesley had to drop out of school soon after his stepfather's death and could not afford transport and hostel costs anymore. In addition, both Monica and Anele's mothers had died a few years earlier. Anathi, Sesana and Lee-Anne's fathers had also died several years earlier. In the cases of Elisa, Zola, Thabo, Jerminah, Amanda, Bromelda, the father had left the family some time ago or the male parent was never a part of their lives. Lorenzo's father was in prison at the time of his dropout from school. Only in three case studies, Jabulani, Jerome, and Jonnie were living with both parents at the time of their dropout.

That the selection of families of the dropouts was not predetermined, it was astounding that over half of the case studies experienced death of one or both parents. This is a very high death rate for such a small number of cases. This high death rate coincided with the HIV/AIDS epidemic that ravaged the country for the past two decades or so. In their study of the demographic impact of HIV/AIDS in the country, Dorrington et al. (2006) estimated that 30% of all deaths were attributable to the disease by middle of 2006. HIV/AIDS infected about five and a half million (11% of the population) people, 20% of which were among adults between 20 and 64 years. By 2006, the disease would have accounted for over 1.8 million deaths in the country and 1 million orphans in the country. That is, about 75% of children less than 18 years of age were orphaned because of AIDS. It was not in this study's scope to determine causes of parental death, but finds the coincidence with the HIV/AIDS interesting.

The concentration of AIDS-related illnesses and deaths among adults between the ages of 25 and 50 meant a break up of conventional biological parent-led family types. This likely led to the disruption of the normal functioning of households such as providing for the family after the death of one or both breadwinners. The Economic Commission for Africa (2005) noted that with the death of adults in the prime productive lives come changes in household structures, with more female, child and elderly-headed households. In extreme cases, some

households dissolve completely because of death of both parents and economic destitution. They further note that children experience the stresses of parental illness, as they may be withdrawn from school to assist in the care of the sick relative. In all families headed by the single mother, the grandmother or the child herself or himself, the change and weakening of the family structure owing to parental death appears to trigger a number of negative social outcomes. These include dropping out of school. Irregular school attendance and eventual dropout in most case studies was around or after the change in family structure, owing to death.

The Economic Commission for Africa (2005) further reported that the loss of strong family structure, typically led by both birth parents, did not only give rise to economic destitution, but children also become susceptible to sexual abuse, a common factor in teen pregnancy. Pregnancy was clearly a feature in the disruption of female participants' school career, but it was also related to other factors such as the death of parents or loss of a more supportive social structure, access to schools and health-related issues. The number of individual accounts indicates that while pregnancy accounted for interruption of the female adolescent's schooling, a number of other factors appeared to have conspired for the prolonged or permanent exit from school, not pregnancy per se. In the dropout narratives where pregnancy is mentioned, all the females returned or tried to return to school, or became pregnant after dropping out of school. A number of different factors appear to combine to account for permanent premature school exit of the teen mothers, not the pregnancy event per se (see interviews with, Diks, Teba, Jerminah, Monica, Amanda, Sesana, Anathi, Elisa). That is, pregnancy is in itself, like dropping out, is an event or outcome of a set of social and or family conditions that are unsupportive to proper child development. To cite a couple of examples from the narratives to show that pregnancy is not in itself explaining dropout among females students: After she had given birth, Teba could not go back to school as she had planned but had to look after the baby and her mother who had started getting ill and would not be able to look after the baby. In addition to looking after her child, Teba was now also looking after her mother as she has now lost essential functions. Diks unsuccessfully, after numerous attempts, tried to re-enrol after giving birth but was not allowed. This appeared to be owing to misinterpretation of policies to do readmission of teen mothers by poorly trained administrators at the local school, as revealed in the interview with the community development worker (see interview with MmaMogapi).

In several accounts, employment also featured as probable factor pulling the youth away from school (see interviews with Zola, Nozi, Anele, Anathi, Lorenzo, Sesana, Wesley, Millow, Jerome, Small, Thabo, Teba, Amanda, and Lee-Anne). However, unlike widely documented in literature, these youth did not leave school because they have found employment or because of personal or family's socio-economic conditions. Analysis of these accounts revealed that these youth sought employment only after dropping out of school for some other reasons, unlike in other parts of the world such as South East Asia, where poor families cannot afford school fees, pushing older adolescents into work, often prematurely (Unesco, 2014; 2015). In all the case studies, no individual dropped out of school because they found employment, but started looking for employment after the decision to drop out school. To cite a few examples, Zola's stalled academic career, and destitute family illuminate the decision to seek employment after receiving his identity document; double-orphaned Nozi and her negative experience with the foster family tell a better story of dropout than been lured from school by employment prospects. Small and Lesego, both unsettled and dislocated from their families, also showing lack of self-drive, dropped out of school before they started looking for work. Jerome, coming into the new community after school registration for the new school year have closed, only started looking for employment after he could not get admission into any of the surrounding schools. Although not emerging from the individual accounts, interviews with key community informants suggest that owing to easy employment opportunities in these areas, the youth from poorer families tended to seek employment as a way out of poverty rather than persisting in school. The community's relatively higher employment rate might influence the individuals to actively look for work than continue with school, especially if they feel they are not getting the basics from the parents.

In communities where families with historical and current links to farm labour are in majority, any type of crisis that makes schooling uninteresting for the youth makes the easy to access farm work, albeit trivial, an attractive alternative to schooling. Problems and triggers of school dropout such as weakened family structure, poor school quality and failure were observed in study sites of Mookgopong, Phagameng, Ilingeletu, Citrusdal, and Vredendal-Noord, and these sites happen to have relatively higher rates of employment than many parts of the country. The surrounding employer farms provide the youth, who by now have dropped out of school, with easy but insignificant employment opportunities. The key informants in these sites explain that on these farms life is all about work for young and old,

with little or no emphasis on education. Having arrived in the township, the youngsters continued to look out for job opportunities rather than focus on education.

*They start earning money by hustling in town a few walking minutes, or do odd jobs on the farms where their parents lived and worked before they came to the township*  
(from interview with Mookgopong residents)

Gardiner (2008) notes that regardless of progressive policies promoting schooling among children of farm worker families, these policies have not been able to change in any significant way. Moreover, the decades-long poor quality and unavailability of education on farms that has created a legacy of illiteracy among farm workers and their children still persists. The tendency to start work prematurely appears to linger on among former farm-dwelling families where children of farm workers were generally used as labourers, and could be withdrawn from school anytime to do work, with no consequence for the farmer. Several sites in this study also happen to provide higher chances for employment than most of the country, particularly farm work.

The observation by the key informants about youth opting out of school to seek employment appears to relate with poor quality schooling, where they experienced failure or multiple grade repetition. The youth who were not making adequate progress in school ran out other alternatives, primarily trying to find work. In several of the case studies, grade repetition or school failure emerged as a key feature around the dropout narrative. In Zola's case, repeated grade failure saw him in Grade 7 at the age of 17 considerably overage for the grade norm. Regardless of his love school and persistence, acquiring an identity document marked a new chapter in his life, an alternative to his stalled schooling career – schooling did not make sense for him any longer. Coupled with his family's dire economic conditions, seeking employment was the first option available to attempt to improve his circumstances. In Jerminah's case, problems with her sight and lack of appropriate treatment made useful reading almost impossible by the time she was in Grade 11, making it difficult for her to continue schooling. The decision to dropout was preceded by multiple grade repetitions that she was 22 years old and still in Grade 11. Monica, also witnessing her schooling stalling in Grade 11, saw her leave school and never to return (see interviews with Jerminah, Zola, Monica, and Lerumo). It appears, therefore, that dropping out first owing to school failure precedes the decision to seek employment.

Access to schools also commonly emerged as an important issue related to the premature school exit narrative in some communities in the West Coast. This was not to do with shortage or absence of physical school buildings, but rather to do with apartheid patterns of racial segregation that still divide the communities. More than two decades after the end of apartheid, Citrusdal High School, a public but fee-paying former Model C school a walking distance away, was still exclusively enrolling White students, with exorbitant registration, tuition and extramural costs often used to keep the general Coloured population out. Despite the proximity of a public school within a walking distance, Wesley travelled to Piketberg 50 kilometres away, to a 'Coloured' secondary school in the neighbouring municipality. He later dropped out because he could no longer afford transport and hostel fees after his stepfather had died. The inaccessibility of former Model C schools to the general public, regardless of their proximity, appeared to have also have accounted for Anele's premature withdrawal once her father died. Similarly, Jahman, the Oudekraalfontein (Hopefield) resident, explains that high fees at the only public local school, a former Model C school, automatically excluded most of the town's Coloured residents. Instead, the Coloured children had to travel 40 kilometres away for a free public school, incurring hostel and transport costs in the process.

This narrative about supply of schools in relation to dropout does not suggest shortage of physical classroom, but equitable access to the existing public schools. While admission at nearby local schools cannot be legally refused on the basis of affordability, the high fees, extramural costs and other more subtle practices are still a barrier for the majority Coloured and Black African families who seek to gain access to formerly White-only schools. While the supply of physical school classrooms does not appear to be the problem, but rather the deliberately prohibitive costs and a host of exclusionary practices at these former White-only schools were a barrier for Coloured youth in several West Coast communities. In the end, Coloured families had to enrol their children in the far-flung, sparsely distributed, historically Coloured-only schools.

Drug and or alcohol abuse are also a common feature around the school dropout narratives. Common across all communities, is the message from residents and community development workers that pervasive abuse of alcohol and drugs among youth and to some extent by parents explain high rates of school dropout. Residents and community workers from all the study sites lament the high prevalence of Tik or nyaope use (methamphetamine) as a

recreational drug among school-going adolescents, as well as general alcohol abuse. In Mookgopong, the residents exclaim that youngsters “*drink in shebeens all night*”, making it difficult for them to maintain regular school attendance. Also in Ilingeletu, key stakeholders mention drug abuse as the biggest problem and the greatest concern being that the drug use starts as early as early as the age of nine. A recent study by the Department of Basic Education reported on the negative consequences of drug and alcohol abuse among learners, where learners were found to experience stunted academic progress, mental and physical health problems, and show criminal and violent behaviour. The adolescent abusing substance becomes aggressive and uses violence towards family, teachers and other people as a means to resolve differences (Department of Basic Education, 2013b).

Although only four case studies corroborate the key informants’ account on the role of alcohol and drug abuse on school dropout, the problem is probably more prevalent than reported. The problem of drug abuse is related to other factors particularly family structure. For an example, Lorenzo talks about bunking school to enjoy dagga and drinks with friends. However, his family context tells a bigger story than a pot of dagga. He lived with his paternal grandmother, his father in prison and his mother (estranged from his father) living separately with his younger sisters. With his mother contacting him directly on school matters, and his grandmother bypassed, Lorenzo was practically left on his own. Lorenzo regularly solicited monies from his mother for unfounded school necessities, leaving him with extra cash to use as he pleases. Lorenzo started using dagga, drinking alcohol and experimenting with other drugs. With no supportive family structure, Lorenzo became truant and his academic progress stalled. He eventually “*lost interest in school in Grade 11*”. Thabo’s story also refers to abuse of alcohol and gang activity while in school that might explain his short-circuited school career. His in-and-out of school misbehaviour takes place within an unstable family context. He talks of a stepfather whom he never recognized from the moment he became part of the family, and he would not allow the stepfather play any part in his upbringing, including disciplining him. In the end, Thabo did not accept school authorities and eventually stopped attending school. So, while abuse was factor in Thabo’s premature school exit, it is better understood in the context of an unstable stepfamily arrangement that appears uncondusive to his development. Small and Lesego, both dislocated from their families, living on their own or with relatives, they mention use of alcohol as a form of entertainment. It was partly lack of entertainment money while displaced and unsettled Small, living away from his parents that he cites as the reason for dropping out of

school before Grade 11 final examinations. The reality is that many older adolescents do experiment with alcohol and some other soft illicit drugs, but still persist in school. It is likely that only where the family and other social support structures have weakened or absent that the youth graduate into full time drug or alcohol users at the expense of school.

It is clear that there is general abuse of alcohol and drugs among youth, and it appears to be compounded by other factors at individual and family levels to account for the eventual drop out from school.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

It is apparent that these older adolescents were not dropping out of school because they came from poor families. The youth did not leave school because they did not afford it, or because they wanted to supplement family income. Youth from families with little or no income still attended and persist in school. In addition, the general lack of work opportunities for youth in the country means that they are not lured out of school by employment prospects. Only after dropping out of school, they tend to look for work as illustrated by the case studies in the West Coast district and parts of the Waterberg district. The South African youth appear to drop out of school because of unique sets of crises that interlace in a complex fashion. It is reasonable to say that they dropped out of school because of lack of supportive social and family structure because of death of either or both parents. An intersection of traumatic moments such as parental death and other debilitating circumstances better account for early school exit among older adolescents. The weakened family structure, combined with stalled career particularly in the senior phase of secondary school, see the youth exiting school not necessarily into work, but into an intermediate stage of marginalization and unemployment. In the context weakened social support structure, they drop out of school after becoming pregnant and giving birth as there is no one in the family to look after the their newly born child. Alternatively, because they were expelled or encouraged by the school to stay home after they became pregnant, or refused readmission after childbirth as they were now considered too old for the conventional classroom.

They also drop out of school because of failure at school at the ages of 17 or 18 years old, likely in Grade 10 and 11 after repeating a grade. School is not working for them and in some cases, they are deliberately encouraged by schools to pursue other alternatives as they would not succeed even if they were promoted to Grade 12 – schools want their best crop in Grade

12 to protect their image as top performers with high pass rates. Communities like Thabazimbi, a town with a history of vibrant mining activity and relatively higher rates of employment, attracted the youth from as far afield. These youth come to Thabazimbi looking for work after having dropped out of school for reasons such as school failure, or collapsed family support structures.

Sadly, discriminatory school admission practices disadvantaging particularly the Coloured youth in some parts of the West Coast made it easier to leave school in the context of easy employment and general labour market patterns and practices in the area. The historical patterns of racial segregation still define the everyday lives of communities, with the Coloured youth for one reason or another, unable to access the previously White-only public schools usually a walking distance away. In the process, the Coloured families incurred transport and hostel costs to enrol their children in out of town historically Coloured-only schools. Furthermore, the history of farm tenancy and associated labour practices also saw youth find easy access to trivial employment on farms where their parents still worked, even after moving to the urban centres.

The next chapter, the discussion, connects the quantitative results from Chapter 5 and 6, with the qualitative data from the case studies. That is, in what ways do the qualitative data from the case studies explain the results from the statistical chapters, and by so doing, tell the integrated story of school dropout among the South African older adolescents.

## CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

### 8.1 Introduction

The central interest in the current study was to *determine prevalence, the geographical distribution, as well as the socio-demographic profile of older adolescent school dropouts in South Africa*. This section connects the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study, integrates, and interprets both findings to answer the central research question. The large quantitative data allowed the study to provide the big picture, revealing the spatial distribution patterns of school dropout, and the associated socio-demographic characteristics. The qualitative data was used to explain these relationships, sharpening the picture of who are these older adolescents dropping out of school.

The quantitative data helped map the spatial distribution of school dropout and highlighted the socio-demographic factors associated with the school dropout, helping answer the study questions: *What are the spatial distribution patterns of school dropout among older adolescent in South Africa?* In addition, *What are the socio-demographic characteristics of older adolescents dropping out of school in South Africa?* In contrast, the qualitative strand of the study, through multiple case narratives, focused on exploring individual processes to dropping out of school. The personal stories provided context, texture and a much richer picture of the factors of school dropout and therefore answering the qualitative phase sub-question: *In what ways do the qualitative data help explain the relationships between the identified socio-demographic variables and school dropout among older adolescents?*

The study emanated against the backdrop of extreme levels of youth unemployment, potential life-time of social exclusion, marginalization and a host of other negative life outcomes that the high cohort dropout rates, particularly among senior secondary school class cohorts. These factors have sparked heated debates on the nature and profile of the dropout phenomenon. The reality of the loss of huge numbers of students in the latter part of secondary school to retention or dropout was brought to the fore this year by the debates about the actual matric pass rates. This debate arose out of the hype accompanying official announcement of improvement in the 2016 National Senior Certificate pass rate. More importantly, the increase in the proportion of students who passed matric, out of the number

who wrote, does not account for about half a million or 45% of students who were in Grade 10 in 2014, who either did not make it to the matric exam hall on time or have dropped out of the schooling system. While studies have been conducted to understand the nature of the system inefficiencies, the problems with in-school and school-to-work transitions, no study shares the design of the current study – a multimethod sequential explanatory design. The current study with the use of fresh large scale data from the Census 2011, coupled with textured qualitative data, sought to determine the spatial distribution and the socio-demographic profile of older adolescent dropping out of school.

Scholarly and public discourse about indicators and characteristics of secondary school dropouts identify several factors. These include gender, race, disability, grade retention, teenage pregnancy, substance or drug abuse, parental survival, school failure, poverty as some of the factors directly influencing dropout. Firstly, the quantitative findings in the present study provide a spatial distribution picture of school dropout. Secondly, the quantitative findings help to identify factors associated with dropout among older adolescents in the country, as presented in Chapter 6. While identifying important markers of school dropout among older adolescents, the quantitative findings on their own do not tell the complete story. In this chapter, I integrate the quantitative findings with the qualitative narratives from the in-depth interviews. I argue that school dropout among South African older adolescents is not only a localized experience, but a nested, nuanced and elaborate phenomenon than often presented in the national debates.

Next, the section briefly outlines the theoretical framework that guides this discussion section. The section then presents discussion on the distribution of school dropout, and offers an answer to the research sub-question that sought to determine the spatial distribution patterns of school dropout. Then the study discusses socio-demographic characteristics of school dropout, exploring possible explanations. The chapter concludes by offering an answer to the central research question: What is the prevalence, geographic distribution and socio-demographic profile of older adolescents dropping out of school in South Africa?

## 8.2 Understanding school dropout through the “the conceptual model of high school performance” framework

Rumberger and Lim’s (2008) framework provides a useful and research-based lens through which to understand not only the story of those students who drop out of school before completing Grade 12, but also those who graduate. The *conceptual model of high school performance* is a culmination a review of a two-decade theoretical research work on high school dropout, which concluded that various contexts or settings in which students live shape their attitudes, behaviours, and educational performance. These contexts – families, schools and communities - are important in understanding the process of dropping out and graduation, as well as the prominent factors underlying that process. The model identifies broad categories of institutional-level factors as well as individual-level factors. Institutions here refer to families, schools and communities, the three major contexts that influence students’ dropping out or graduation. In addition, the individual level factors refer to those proximal factors to do with the individual’s educational performance, behaviours, attitudes, and background. However, the authors were not suggesting a particular model of the dropout process, but rather a framework to organizing factors associated with the process.

Moreover, if the literature acknowledges that dropping out of school could be a very long process, trying to determine a dropout process model that suggests a causal relationship between a single factor and the final act of quitting school could prove difficult. This is so because in the process of dropping out, some factors that were prominent long ago, which may have contributed to students’ attitudes, behaviours and school performance, are less salient or unnoticeable in the immediacy preceding their decision to leave school. Using the ever more sophisticated statistical modelling means to try isolating the intricately interwoven individual and institutional factors may not only prove a tremendous challenge, and perhaps not even always worth the effort (Rumberger, 2001; Smeyers, 2006; De Witte et al., 2013).

The current study, given the nature of the Census 2011 data and its interest on sociological issues, adapted the Rumberger and Lim’s (2008) framework to organize the selected factors for investigation. The operating model in the current study excludes all the psychological factors in the Rumberger and Lim (2008). Nevertheless, it focuses on the demographic and social status of the older adolescent and possible relationship with their dropout status. Reich

and Young (1975) emphasize the importance of the broader community context when seeking to understand individuals and families.

### 8.3 Spatial distribution of school dropout

The section discusses the findings on the geographic distribution of school dropout guided by the research question: *What are the spatial distribution patterns of school dropout among older adolescent in South Africa?* Using the quantitative data, I first argue that not the province and not even the district, but a much more localized geography may be a more appropriate unit of spatial analysis. I then integrate the qualitative and the quantitative data to argue that there are other alternative geographies and logics that explain spatial distribution of school dropout, not necessarily the historical apartheid geography. I use two empirical scenarios to illustrate that dropout is a much more localised experience, happening in specific contexts closer to where individuals live, with local specific rhythms and patterns that are not necessarily adequately understood through the historical apartheid geography lens. The idea of community or place and its influence on school dropout or attendance patterns, as articulated in the conceptual framework, helps argue the benefit of *localness* in understanding dropout.

The macro spatial analysis of school dropout distribution shows wide disparities in school participation between the country's provinces. Almost half of the country's provinces present dropout rate is above the national average. Against expectation, higher levels of school dropout are among provinces considered relatively wealthier provinces, while historically and currently poor provinces present lower dropout rate patterns. Limpopo Province, arguably the poorest province in the country, had the highest rates of participation in school compared with the Western Cape, the second wealthiest province. The theoretical and empirical literature on the relationship between education outcomes and quality of space or place has associated negative education outcomes with impoverished geographies (Christie, 2013; Pienaar & Morton-Mckay, 2014; Ballas et al., 2012; Wilkinson et al., 2009; van der Berg, 2007). In her work on social justice, Christie (2013) focussing on quality of education outcomes in relation to space, suggests the use of *rhythmanalysis* as a useful theoretical framework to understanding why negative education outcomes persist in historically impoverished geographies, regardless of deliberate fiscal redress to education provision in those spaces. Furthermore, Ballas et al. (2012) posit that geographical manifestations of

deeper divisions in income, wealth, power, and recognition, and the attendant economic and cultural capitals govern access to educational provisions, and help exploit these provisions. Wilkinson et al. (2009) emphasize this observation in that, wealthier and more powerful geographies, regions or communities have been shown to attain better education outcomes than their poorer counterparts. There was a 16 percentage point inequality gap in school attendance rates between the poorest and the wealthiest province, with the richer province presenting the highest dropout rates.

Undoubtedly, Christie (2013) has made a significant contribution in shifting of focus away from strictly racial, class or gender lenses to framing of educational inequality to focus on the spatial dimensions of inequality. Clearly, spatiality, particularly historical geography, provides a valuable perspective to our understanding of education inequalities today. Certainly, she makes a compelling case that in terms of both resources and learning outcomes (possibly matric results), education disparities followed the historical geographic patterns. There is a tendency though to claim that all aspects of education follow the historical spatial patterns.

My work, which is looking at something different, is school participation, shows a slightly different perspective. Using school participation as an indicator, patterns of participation do not map on the historical geography argument. The current study on school participation among adolescents found higher rates of school dropout among historically and currently well-resourced geographies and particularly lower rates of school dropout among historically and still impoverished geographies. Therefore, the finding challenges the tendency to claim that all inequalities in education are best understood through the apartheid geographical lens. The finding extends on the existing literature in the compulsory schooling phase, which observed that the historical legacy of geographical impoverishment did not appear to impact on access to school in that phase (Shindler & Fleisch, 2007; Motala et al., 2007). Shindler and Fleisch (2007) focused on the 7-15-year-old band reported near-universal participation rates even in historically disadvantaged provinces. Moreover, Motala et al. (2007) concur that there was resilience and persistence in school in that phase even in the face of harsh economic conditions. The findings by the current study extend this literature with the observation that even in the post-compulsory school phase, historical geographies of impoverishment do not appear to affect school dropout among older adolescents. The large-scale post-compulsory school data used by the current study shows that the relatively high

levels of participation among older adolescents are not driven by the apartheid geography. The study contributes to the empirical and programmatic debate about the nature of older adolescent school dropout, particularly, the finding on the spatial distribution patterns, which does not support the dominant apartheid logic.

In addition to the determination that the uneven distribution patterns of dropout extends below the provincial layer to the district layer, the district-level analysis, with the aid of the visual spatial analysis tools, reveals an interesting pattern of school dropout. The analysis reveals a picture of a country divided along the east-west axis, with the western half showing higher dropout rates compared to the east. This analysis shows particularly high dropout rates in the far west of the divide and very low dropout rates to the far east of the divide. That is, moving from the far west of the divide, closer to the axis, school participation begins to improve. On the other hand, moving from the far-east, where school participation is near-universal, closer to the axis, dropout rates tend increase. This means that almost all the districts in the former Cape Province and the current Northern, Western, and Eastern Cape Provinces, some parts of the Free State Province are experiencing particularly high levels of dropout. The district-level analysis helped reveal a picture of school dropout distribution that cuts the country into two sharply contrasting halves – very high and noticeably low dropout rates in the west and the east, respectively. Moreover, this pattern of low school participation in the western half of the country cannot be explained along the former apartheid education departments' lines or the current provincial administrative lines. Therefore, this challenges the superficial claim in the current literature that all aspects of education follow the historical spatial patterns. The east-west spatial distribution pattern of dropout among older adolescents is a unique finding by the current study, and an extension to the existing research on school dropout. This extension to the literature shows that school dropout among older adolescents in the country is not necessarily a provincial experience, but a geographical phenomenon. The point below further illuminates the geographic character of the dropout phenomenon.

### 8.3.1 Concentration of high levels of school dropout in the Karoo

The geographic nature of the dropout phenomenon sharply manifests through a fine-grained spatial analysis lens. The much more distilled analysis does not only show unusually high school dropout levels in the west of the country, but also depicts excessive dropout rates

distributed along the geography of the Karoo, straddling numerous jurisdictional spaces of province and district. Using the basic cartographic visualization tools, the study revealed unusually high proportions of school dropout patterning along the contiguous and unique Karoo landscape. School dropout rates within this distinct geography were conspicuously higher, compared to other geographies beyond the Karoo (see figure 5.4).

The Karoo region, a semi-arid landscape that straddles the provinces of Western, Northern, Eastern Cape, and the Free State, is situated mainly in the central and western interior of South Africa. It is considered a single eco-system characterised by pastoral economic history, particularly sheep farming. Viniculture and citrus farming are also important activities in some parts of the region. The Western, Northern, Eastern Cape Provinces and the parts of the Free State Province were part of the former Cape Province and the former Orange Free State Province, respectively (see figure 5.2).

Historically and to a relative extent at present, the Karoo is still wealthier than many other places in the country. However, the region presents the highest proportions of school dropout in the country (see figure 5.4). The quantitative data shows that the average of one in every three older adolescent has dropped out of school in the Karoo, compared to the national average of one in every seven. The point is further illustrated by the finding that while the Karoo presents the highest rate of dropout in the country, the Capricorn region, one of the most impoverished geographies in the country, has a near universal school participation rate. Only one in every 15 has dropped in the Capricorn region compared to the average of one in every three in the Karoo (see figure 5.4 and table 5.9). Analysis of the case studies from the West Coast, the west-most part of the Karoo revealed an interesting pattern of youth exiting school before or just after completing the compulsory school phase, Grade 9. In almost all the cases studies in the Karoo, participants have dropped out of school at or before completing Grade 9.

The Karoo, occupying approximately a third of South Africa's topographical landscape, has been characterised by extensive sheep farming over the past century. The thriving lamb industry owes its origin to the region's peculiar drought-resistant plant species that are suitable for sheep feed (Nel & Hill, 2008). In addition, two rivers (Orange and Olifants) that generally cut through the region are also a source of the thriving vine farming along their long banks. Wheat farming is also widespread in the area. The relatively high rates of

employment in the area (Statistics South Africa, 2011, 2016), could suggest that the sheep farming industry provides longer-term employment opportunities to the youth in the area. On the contrary, the vine and wheat industries provide seasonal job opportunities, once they have dropped out of school (see texts from the Swartland, Bergrivier, Cederberg, Matzikama case study sites). Could it be that the socio-economic dynamics of the place discourage a disproportionate number of the youth to attend school beyond Grade 12 in the Karoo? In their study of space and school dropout, Schafer and Hori (2006) concluded that area labour market, norms and cultural representations might determine whether a high school credential is perceived a necessity, or not, for young adults to maintain productive livelihoods. It appears that the Karoo, with its peculiar socio-cultural and economic characteristics not shared by other localities elsewhere, could possibly be linked to higher dropout rates among its older adolescent population.

The life accounts from the case studies (see interviews with Jerome, Amanda, Bromelda, Wesley, Lee-Anne, Millow, and Jonnie) suggest a culture of little schooling around the Karoo farmlands. Gardiner (2008) observes that although the years of schooling among the former farm tenant-families have increased post-1994 with urbanisation of many farmworkers, the culture of early school leaving is still persistent. He posits that recent the pro-poor policies have not been able to change in any significant way, the decades-long poor quality and unavailability of education on farms that has created a legacy of illiteracy among farm workers and their children. Prior to this policy change, children of farm workers were generally used as labourers, and could be withdrawn from school anytime to do work, with no consequence for the farmer. Even where schooling was regular, the schools offered only primary education, with a handful offering classes beyond Grade 7. Invariably, these children, commonly over-aged for the grade, have started to work full time before or at the time for high school. Ewert and Hamman (1996), studying labour market structures of the Cape and Karoo farmlands, note that the historical and to a degree current labour dynamics and practices most likely shaped the socio-cultural geography of the place, and its influence on attitude, behaviour and expectations on education. Ewert and Hamman (1996) reported on the area historical social and labour relations, which saw farmworkers tenant families effectively providing consistent supply of labour, as a unit - husband and wife, including children who could work. They posit in their observation that the 'family unit' practice was embraced and guarded by employers and the worker families as it meant supplemented income for the family, and reliable labour supply for the farmers. The potential external

labour was that of Black Africans coming from the Eastern Cape “homelands”, which was perceived to be unreliable as it was prone to collective action. Because of these social and labour relations, farm labour in the region has seen employment of more than one generation on a farm, with an average of below seven years of schooling across 42 farms at the time. Over 90% of children of farmworkers, exclusively Coloured, reported to have known nothing, but farm work all their lives and their farming skills were difficult to sell elsewhere (Ewert & Hamman, 1996).

The practice of employing whole family units that expected children, who were barely out of primary school to start work, appears to have shaped norms, identities, aspirations, and values around education that still linger on today. Despite increased settlement in urban townships around the small Karoo towns by historically farm families, the high dropout rates still persist among the Coloured communities in and around these towns. In their study of the effect of space on school dropout, Schafer and Hori (2006) would explain the clustering of high proportions of dropout in the Karoo as the influence of the area’s labour market dynamics, norms and cultural representations. These social norms and values are important drivers of whether or not a high school credential is a necessity for young adults to maintain productive livelihoods. Clearly, the practice of family labour and particular kind of socio-economic relations in the Karoo, for the most part of the area’s history, shaped norms and attitudes of the Coloured population towards schooling. The persistently high dropout rates at the end of the compulsory phase do not align with the historical apartheid geography explanation. Much more local forces are at play.

### 8.3.2 School participation anomalies in the eastern half of the country

The disaggregated analysis clearly revealed the east-west divide to school dropout distribution and the concentration of high dropout rates in the Karoo region. However, the findings further show that even in the east of the country where everybody appears to be in school, there are anomalies and outliers (see figure 5.4). Moreover, in the discussion below, I want to show these anomalies. The discussion tries to find out what is it about these outliers that we can learn from patterns of school dropout. The case in point is in the Limpopo Province in the north-eastern part of the country, where one in 12 older adolescents generally exit school prematurely is, but a number of localities sharply deviate from this general

pattern. Take the case of Thabazimbi and Mogalakwena, two localities in the Waterberg district municipality, where a 20 percentage point disparity gap exists between them (see table 5.11 and figure 5.4). In Thabazimbi Local Municipality, one in every four older adolescents has dropped out of school compared to one in 13 in the neighbouring Mogalakwena local area, in the same district, a short distance away.

Mogalakwena is a locality comprising tens of Black African settlements under different tribal authorities and limited urban settlement, and historically within the under-resourced apartheid 'homeland' of Lebowa. The settlements have largely remained impoverished, bar relative improvements in housing under the free housing programme by the national government. Migrant labour remittance and the social grants are the main source of income for most households, with very limited subsistence farming taking place owing to lengthy lack of useful rainfall. Education provision has also seen an increase in expenditure on infrastructure and tuition resources post 1994, but largely still remains weakened. On the other hand, Thabazimbi Local Municipality is a differently disposed area, owing to the boom of iron ore mining activity dating back to almost a century. As a White area, Black Africans historically settled in Thabazimbi as mine labourers initially confined to hostels, in and around the mine as their place of abode. For the past two decades since the dawn of democracy, the area has experienced dramatic increase in largely Black African formal settlements in and around the town of Thabazimbi, such as the Regorogile Township.

Historically, the mine depended exclusively on migrant labour from all over the country, with the majority of them coming from elsewhere in the province. These workers were permanently housed on the mine to ensure an uninterrupted source of labour for the mine operations, granted only periodic visit to their families in the former Bantustans of Bophuthatswana and Lebowa. The town, since the repeal of influx control laws in the late 1980s, has seen dramatic increase in informal settlement (and subsequently formalised through government-issued housing) by individuals looking for work at the mine and secondary economies. In addition, with enabling laws, the town saw a huge resettlement of employees by the mine into family units in and around the town. Analysis of the Thabazimbi iron ore mining company shows that their labour still largely comes from the broader Limpopo and North West Provinces. For those looking for work, particularly from elsewhere in the province, the belief is that moving into the area improves their chances of employment (Thabazimbi Local Municipality, 2007, 2013, 2015; Shangoni Management Services, 2010).

Census 2011 data shows the Thabazimbi area as one of the lowest youth unemployment rate in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

The findings suggest that while youth in Thabazimbi persist in school until late in secondary school, for some reason, there is a tendency to withdraw from school before completing matric. A number of these youth appear to originate elsewhere in the Limpopo Province, coming to Thabazimbi to look for work, having already dropped out of school. Unlike what the key informants in Thabazimbi tend to believe, it is not necessarily that youth are pulled out of school by availability of work on the mines, but the youth, locals and those from elsewhere, have already dropped out of school when they take up work or start looking for work.

It is therefore plausible that localities like Mogalakwena, formerly and to a large degree still impoverished geographies the youth enrol and stay in school until somewhere in the senior phase, where something dramatic appears to happen that they start to disengage from school. It is after this withdrawal from school that it seems they start to prospect for other life alternatives such as looking for work in neighbouring towns like Thabazimbi where chances of employment are higher. Those who do not move appear to persist in school, illustrated by the high participation rates there. This movement in turn, possibly explains the lower participation rates in Thabazimbi where the older adolescents are either in employment or still looking for work. The wide disparities in school participation patterns between integral localities do not only defy the historical apartheid geography logic offered in the current literature, but it is better explained by the distinct and confined socio-economic and labour market dynamics. These anomalies in school participation in the eastern half of the country further demonstrates that school dropout is a much more local experience than it is often aggregated at provincial level in the existing research. The *localness* of school dropout experience is a vital extension to the existing understanding of the nature of the phenomenon.

Other than revelation of the east-west divide and the localness in the distribution of school dropout, the current study also reveals an uneven distribution pattern among the country's metropolitan centres. In addition, the study reveals no clear pattern between these urban centres and the rural municipalities. For example, the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality presents particularly high school participation rates compared to its rural vicinity, while the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, in the same province, shows lower

participation rates. In the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, school participation is noticeably lower than in the surrounding rural districts, while in Gauteng in all the three metropolitan municipalities' school participation was not only higher than the national average, but also higher than in the only two rural districts of the province.

The findings of inconsistent distribution patterns across the metropolitan municipalities, as well between the urban centres and their rural counterparts, show that there is no single trend of the dropout phenomenon - no clear urban or rural distinction in the distribution patterns of school dropout. These varied and inconsistent patterns show school dropout as a local phenomenon, not provincial, not rural or urban. This is consistent with some parts of the literature where mixed observations in terms of the rural/urban influence on participation have been made (Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Pong & Ju, 2000). However, the finding contradicts the pertinent and most current general literature - Latin American, Asia-Pacific and sub-Saharan African literature which concludes that exclusion from education is a rural phenomenon, where living in rural was found to reduce the odds of attending school by the older adolescent (Inoue et al., 2015); de Hoyos et al., 2016; Unesco, 2014; 2015). The finding, therefore, is an important contribution to the dropout literature most relatable to South Africa. That is, unlike its counterparts in the developing regions, school dropout in South Africa is neither a rural nor an urban phenomenon, but a much more area specific or smaller area experience, not necessarily urban or rural.

What can the integrated findings from the socio-demographic analyses tell us about the 395 620 older adolescents who are out of school? What is it that is happening in their lives that can shed new insights about school dropout?

#### **8.4 Socio-demographic characteristics of school dropouts**

The discussion in this section is shaped by the research sub-question: *What are the individual and institutional characteristics of older adolescents dropping out of school in South Africa?* The quantitative and qualitative data are integrated here in an attempt to obtain a fuller understanding of dropout and its relationship to the selected socio-demographic characteristics.

I used the conceptual *model of high school performance* framework to select a number of individual and institutional-level variables from the census data for examination. Moreover, owing to the nature of the data, psychological-level variables were not covered in the survey and therefore not available for investigation. The selected factors and their potential relationship with school dropout were further explored in the multiple case studies. More importantly, the model was useful helping me interpret and testing both the quantitative and qualitative findings together. The framework essentially demonstrates all the variables potentially associated with early school exit, some more prevalent than others. However, when I look at the qualitative data, some factors critical to the process of dropping out of school among South African older adolescents, are not captured by the model. The following discussion helps illustrate this point.

The study sought to investigate the relationship between school dropout among older adolescents and the following factors: at individual level - age, gender, employment status, race, disability status, pregnancy, grade repetition, deviance, and substance abuse. At institutional level, the study sought to investigate the influence of family, school and the community on school dropout. Family factors included family structure – the relationship to the household head, parental survival, and family size; family socio-economic status – employment status of the household head, and family income. School-level factors looked at the availability of schools, while community level factors focused on access to general amenities, infrastructure, economic and socio-cultural activity of the area.

At individual level, the conceptual framework helped to identify age, gender, pregnancy, employment status, race, disability status, grade repetition, deviance and substance abuse as factors associated with early school exit among older adolescents. The age of the adolescent indicated whether they were likely to remain in school or drop out. In the cohort, the 18 year old adolescent (the oldest of the cohort) was more than twice likely to drop out of school than the 16-year-old adolescent, the youngest of the cohort (figure 6.1). This finding, consistent with a number of studies that noted the highest proportion of school dropout in the country, is at top end of the secondary school phase, where older learners are concentrated (Crouch, 2005; Motala et al., 2007; Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2012).

*Female* adolescents were found to be slightly more likely to drop out of school than their male counterparts. The male adolescent was participating in school one percentage point

better than the national average, while the female adolescent was one percentage point lower (table 6.2). Nevertheless, this is not consistent with research that reported school participation among males to be lower than that of females (Rumberger, 1983, Duchesne et al., 2005, Ou & Reynolds, 2006). Social Surveys Africa & CALS (2009) reported female participation rate to be slightly more than that of males of ages 16 to 18. Motala et al. (2009), focusing on two school districts, found higher proportion of boys between grades one and nine dropping out of school compared to girls. The findings further refute Fleisch and Shindler's (2009) study, who found gender patterned access to school among 3000 urban youth under the age of 16, with girls outpacing the boys in attendance. The study finding appears to agree with Fleisch et al. (2012), using data from Community Survey 2007, that there was no significant difference in attendance patterns between girls and boys in the compulsory education phase.

However, as the qualitative data show, female adolescents who experienced pregnancy and child birth were found to disproportionately drop out of school. Moreover, they were about five times more likely to dropout out of school than the females who never gave birth. More than a half of those who ever gave birth dropped out of school (table 6.3). The finding concurs with Crouch (2005) and HSRC (2005), who found teenage pregnancy to be a factor in the adolescent's disengagement from school. This is also consistent with general research that found correlation between teenage childbearing and negative socio-economic outcomes including low educational attainment (Conley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998; Grogger & Bronars, 1993).

A closer scrutiny of qualitative data helps to clarify this apparent relationship between teenage pregnancy and school dropout. While seven of the nine female participants mentioned becoming pregnant while in high school, it does not emerge from their narratives that the pregnancy itself accounted for their eventual drop out from school. Analysis of the individual accounts reveals that pregnancy accounted for the initial interruption of the female adolescents' schooling. Nevertheless, the pregnancy event itself does not provide an adequate explanation for their prolonged or permanent exit from school. Instead, the pregnancy and subsequent childbirth appears to trigger and compound a combination of other factors to eventually explain permanent dropout from school (see interviews with Diks, Teba, Jerminah, Elisa, Monica in Chapter 7).

To illustrate this point, Diks, a double orphan, became pregnant at the age of 15. She intended to continue with school and did so until she suddenly became ill and started collapsing at school. After a series of collapsing episodes, her grandmother advised her to stay home until after the birth of the baby. Soon after she gave birth, Diks returned to her old school the next academic year to re-enrol for Grade 9, which she left without completing. She was refused readmission by the school but instead she was referred to a finishing school which she says did not accept her because she was not yet 18 years old. Even after intervention by her grandmother, which she confirmed, the school did not readmit her for the 2015 academic year but told her to come back at the beginning of the following academic year to check if there was a place for her. She was hoping that she would be allowed to re-enrol this time round.

In addition, in Teba's case, she could not go back to school after childbirth because no one could help with childcare while she was at school. Her elder sisters had all moved out of the house, her mother had become seriously ill and her father had died several years earlier. She was now looking after her bed-ridden mother in addition to her own child. Monica's return to school after childbirth was short-lived as her mother had taken ill and could no longer help with childcare while she attended school. She was now looking after her sick mother (who subsequently died) and her own child, effectively dropping out of school. In the case of Jerminah, sight problems worsened during pregnancy and after childbirth. She stopped going to school in the first year after returning to complete Grade 12. Her eyes were too sore to do any useful reading.

The qualitative data illustrates that teenage pregnancy does not automatically lead to school dropout as suggested by the quantitative findings in this study. As shown here, a combination of factors, not the pregnancy event per se, seems to account for their eventual premature exit from school. Ill-health of the participant, ill-health or death of either or both parents, especially the mother and misinterpretation of school readmission policy on teenage mothers combined with teenage pregnancy to account for their premature school exit.

In their national study of prevalence, determinants and impact of teenage pregnancy, Panday et al. (2009) reported that, owing to stigmatisation, pregnant teenagers are less likely to receive the prenatal care available and become ill in the process, affecting their academic progress. In her review of schooling experiences among South African teenagers, Willan (2013) reported that teenage mothers who had support of their mothers were most likely to

return and remain in school. Weekes (2005) reports about a case of misinterpretation of the policy on readmission of teenage mothers after childbirth and how this exaggerates school dropout rates among teen mothers, unduly attributing their school non-attendance to the pregnancy event. Negative teacher and administrator attitude is cited among factors that constrain re-entry into the school system after childbirth for teenage mothers (Dube, 2011). The qualitative data clarifies the relationship between pregnancy and school dropout that is not encapsulated in the conceptual framework.

The conceptual model also identifies youth employment as a predictor of school dropout. The quantitative data also confirm employment with higher dropout rates compared to the economically inactive adolescents. The employed adolescent was five times less likely to be in school than the economically inactive counterpart (table 6.4.). This is consistent with general research that associated employed students with propensity to dropout (Dustmann & van Soest, 2008; McNeal, 1997a). They are even more likely to drop out if they worked longer hours (Perreira et al., 2006; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). That is, employment during high school was seen as hindering the student's academic progress, and often resulting in permanent drop out into the labour market before completing school.

However, case study data shows that the relationship between work and education is much more complicated. The qualitative data shows that individuals start seeking employment after effectively dropping out of school. This is illustrated in the personal accounts of Zola, Anele, Nozi, Jerome, Small, and Lorenzo. As soon as Zola received his identity document, he left school in search of work, but the detailed account of his circumstances suggest that a stalled academic career, coupled with hardship at home provide a credible perspective into his eventual decision to seek employment than to remain in school. On the other hand, Jerome ended up working on a vine farm because of his transient family and failure to secure a place at the local secondary school after one of his family's relocation. He never went back to school but took up a job on a vine farm at the age of 16. In addition, after her father's death, Anele's mother struggled to care for the family. After dropping out of school, at 17 years old she went to look for work. Small, unsettled and itinerant, dropped out school and later found employment at the mining company in his hometown of Thabazimbi. In addition, Lerumo, a double-orphaned teenager, heading a household of three brothers, did not continue with his school career. After failing matric, he started looking for work.

The quantitative data corroborates the general research that shows employment powerfully correlated with dropping out of school, what is missing from conceptual framework is that often times the students are doing very poorly at school, in the context of weak family structure and availability of work opportunities in some instances. Through the qualitative data, the study is able to show a more nuanced account of what the relationship between employment and school dropout. None of the participants in the study left school because they got employment or promised one. Instead a combination of factors, prior to getting employment, better explain their premature withdrawal from school. Therefore, contrary to general literature, as depicted by the conceptual model that views employment as strong predictor of school dropout, the current study does not find employment as an explanatory factor for school dropout, but rather the viable pathway for those who have already dropped out of school. In the South African context, with little or no research having focused specifically on the influence of high school employment on dropout, this is a useful contribution to the fledging empirical literature.

The Coloured older adolescent is more likely to drop out of school compared to her/his counterparts from other race groups. The quantitative analysis shows that the Coloured adolescent is twice less likely to be in school than the Black African counterpart, and three times less likely than the White adolescent (table.6.5). This finding of high proportions of school dropout among Coloured adolescents is consistent with Fleisch et al. (2012) observation of 7-15 year old Coloured children attending school proportionally less than their counterparts from the other race groups. Rumberger and Lim (2008) report indifferent relationship between high school dropout and race or ethnicity membership, where they found varying results across contexts.

The quantitative data concurs with general research on the relationship between living with disability and higher levels of school dropout (Sibanda, 1996; Crouch, 2005; Fleisch & Shindler, 2009, Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2012). In some instances, the type and degree of disability increased the odds of dropout two times among affected students, compared to students without any disability (HSRC, 2005; Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Hunt, 2008; Chapman et al., 2011; Fleisch et al., 2012).

The qualitative data suggests that, it is not necessarily complete disability and the absence of special schooling facilities that explained the high dropout rates. It appears lack of 'routine'

healthcare intervention for moderate difficulties affected their schooling, including dropping out of school. For instance, Diks, double orphaned and pregnant, was still attending school regularly when she started to experience convulsions. No appropriate health care intervention was sought, but she was advised to sit it out at home until childbirth. It was probably considered as just another pregnancy side effect. She has since struggled to get readmitted to the school and was still out of school two years later. Jerminah experienced eye-sight problems after becoming pregnant. Her condition did not improve even after childbirth that she was having difficulty doing productive reading, and dropped out of school as a result. While it probably would have taken a standard eye examination and treatment to restore Jerminah's sight for sustained reading, the reality is that she did not have access to such treatment. The qualitative finding corroborates the quantitative data and confirms the general literature, but further suggests that not only the technically disabled individuals struggle to get proper health care and access to schools, but the general lack of access to otherwise routine health care and assistive devices that also account for higher rates of dropout. The lack of access to proper health care happens in the context of extreme poverty and other hurdles, to explain the high association between disability and dropout, identified by the quantitative data. This is in addition to lack of school infrastructure for those living with complete disability. This is an important contribution to the programmatic debates on school dropout among the youth living with disabilities in the country.

Alcohol and drug abuse is generally associated with higher dropout rates by the current research (Flisher & Chalton, 1995; Madu & Matla, 2003; Strassburg et al., 2010; Bray et al., 2000; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Qualitative interviews with key informants suggest a relationship between school dropout and alcohol or drug abuse (see interviews with residents or community workers from Ilingeletu, Oudekraalfontein, Vredendal-Noord, Regorogile, Mookgopong and Phagameng study sites). However, only four of the individual accounts mention use of alcohol or drugs while in school. Still, it does not come out of their stories as the reason for them leaving school, often found in self-reported accounts. However, taking life narratives in totality, a bigger story emerges (see interviews with Lorenzo, Thabo, Small, Lee-Anne, and Lesego in Chapter 7). While the qualitative data shows that there is prevalent use of alcohol and drugs during high school, this does not explain why the youth drop out of school. Rather, a combination of both individual and family-level factors, explain the untimely withdrawal from school better. The story of Lorenzo helps illustrate this point where a child separated from his mother and siblings, father in jail, left on his own devices.

While playing a role, surely his use of drugs does not sufficiently explain his premature departure from school. If anything, the drug use, just like dropping out of school appear more of symptoms of failure elsewhere in the system, and in this case, the collapse of the family and other social support structures. This is a vital contribution to the literature on mechanisms of the relationship between dropout and drug, as well as a useful insight to the programmatic debates on how to curb school dropouts.

Lack of academic progress or grade repetition is another individual level factor highly correlated to higher dropout rates in the general literature (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Herbert & Reis, 1999; Lamb & Rumberger, 1998; Ball & Lamb, 2001; Dalton et al., 2009; Allensworth, 2004, 2005; Motala, et al., 2007, 2009; Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2010; Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2012; Spaul, 2013; Gustafsson, 2011). Several South African studies have shown that children transit into secondary school at very high rates. The general research invariably note that grade repetition in high school associates with higher dropout rates. Owing to limitations, the quantitative data on school performance was not available for examination. However, the qualitative data was able to shed light on the possible mechanisms of the relationship between dropout and grade repetition. Grade repetition appears to nest within a context of poor quality education provision and vulnerable individual and family circumstances (see interviews of Zola, Jerminah, Lesedi, and Monica). While at a glance, grade repetition appears to account for youth dropping out of school, the current study findings illustrated that it appears to be more of a trigger of school dropout in a context already breaking at the seams. Jerminah's case as narrated earlier, illustrates that she did not leave school because she failed a grade. Her sight problems after becoming pregnant and lack of access to health care combined to account her leaving school, and surely failing Grade 11 could have made the decision to leave school even easier. Lerumo's decision to leave school after failing Grade 12 was also in the context where he was head of the household which basically depended on erratic hand-outs for survival. In addition, with his academic career apparently stalling, going to look for work was the best viable alternative. This qualitative data makes sense of how grade repetition, particularly in senior secondary of school, is related to dropping out, something that is missing from the general research.

According to the *conceptual model of high school performance*, family as an institution is viewed as the most important contributor to success (or failure) in school. In addition, research has attempted to identify what aspects of the family background matter, and how

they influence school achievement (Jencks, 1972; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Pomerantz et al., 2007; Motala et al., 2007; Strassburg et al., 2010). Family structure, family resources and family practices have been identified as most important aspects in predicting whether children drop out or graduate (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

The finding by this study of marginal family structure that is linked to higher dropout rates is consistent with research. The existing literature finds households that are led by non-biological parents influencing dropout negatively (Social Surveys Africa & CALS' 2009; Fleisch et al., 2012; Rumberger, 1983, Plank et al., 2005, Dustmann & van Soest, 2008). The current study revealed that where both parents were still alive, one in every seven older adolescents has dropped out of school compared to one in four where both parents were dead (see table 6.6). The study extends on the research that found that households headed by biological parents or grandparents were linked to high participation levels among compulsory phase children (Fleisch et al., 2012). This finding challenges the general literature that report on increased dropout rates for any family structure other than parent-led.

Child-headed households and households headed by non-related persons were the most vulnerable forms of family structure, experiencing high proportions of dropout among their older adolescent members (table 6.7 and figure 6.9). The findings show that the younger the age of the household head, the higher the odds of school dropout among family members. Child-headed households made up 11% of the total older adolescent population, and 20% of the dropout population, or one in five adolescents from child-headed household is a dropout, compared to the national average of one to seven. The qualitative data, particularly from the Limpopo study sites show that child-headed households are a feature in premature exit from school (see interviews with Teba, Lesedi and Monica). The children get to head these households after the death of both parents and grandparents. Also, although involving small numbers (about 3 percent of the dropout group), adolescents in non-related families appear displaced and twice likely to be out of school than their counterparts in parent-led families. Moreover, the male headship, making up a third of the already non-parent vulnerable structures, further increased the odds of dropout (figures 6.10, 6.11, table 6.14). These findings concur with the existing literature on the influence of family structure on school attendance, with non-parent or grandparent and male-led structures generally associated with higher rates of dropout (Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2012; Fleisch et al., 2012; Heaton et al., 2014; Anderson, 2000).

Family size, measured by a number of siblings or the total number of members, is another structural feature considered an important contributor to dropout or graduation. The odds of dropping out were higher in larger families compared to smaller families (Rumberger, 1983; Powell & Steelman, 1993; Dustmann & van Soest, 2008; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003). The common explanation is that larger families may have fewer resources per family member to support education (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Sibanda (2004), using the South African 1996 Census data, found that the effects of larger family size (six or more) did not have impact on school participation among Black African families. He argues that was possibly explained by the social support provided by the extended family - buffering effect of extended social support. The finding from the current study is not consistent with the dominant literature that correlates larger family size with higher dropout rates. The findings indicate that larger family size correlated with higher participation rates in school, while the family size of smaller than three was linked to higher dropout rates (see figure, 6.13). These smaller families with two or less members, contributing about 45 000 (11 %) adolescents to the dropout group, appear to be those headed by double-orphaned children themselves, alluded to earlier in the discussion.

The qualitative data helps to illuminate the relationship between dropout and family size. The smaller families were vulnerable family structures typically headed by a child after death of both parents or by single mothers or grandmothers. The smaller size families experienced death of the father or both parents (see interviews with Nozi, Lesedi, Teba, Anele, and Monica). Teba was effectively the head of the household, with her mother bed-ridden and without a father. So was Monica, with her mother dead and step-father having left them shortly afterwards. Anele's father had died and her mother unable to keep them in the only fee-paying school. These clearly vulnerable families have lost one or more members and not coping either economically, socially or both. From the number of the cases sampled, the unusually high prevalence of parental death, most probably linked to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, accounting to the changes in the family structure that left them vulnerable to other stressors, making it difficult for sustained schooling. It is plausible, therefore, that the bigger family size (between four and eight members) points to a family that is still relatively intact and able to support the children's schooling, at least socially. This is an important contribution to the general literature as it calls for consideration of context, particularly the South African context, to the understanding the influence of family size to school participation.

Socio-economic status (SES) is another family aspect that is widely reported as an important predictor of school dropout. The SES is widely used as an indicator of family resources, and is typically constructed as a composite index based on several measures including financial (employment and income) and human resources (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). General literature reports a correlation between employment status of the household head and family income. Children were found less likely to be in school where the household head was unemployed and vice, versa. Similarly, the odds of dropout decrease as the household income increases (Marks & Flemming, 1999; Dorn, 1996; Blue & Cook, 2004; Ishitani & Snider, 2006; Ou & Reynolds, 2006; Cataldi et al., 2009).

In the current study, the SES composite index had employment status of the household head, income, and standard of living as proxies. The standard of living as defined in the South African multi-dimensional poverty index (SAMPI), consisted of access to piped water, type of sanitation type and fuel types for heating, cooking, and lighting (Statistics South Africa, 2014b). This study used access to piped water and sanitation as proxies for standard of living for the household. The quantitative data reflected a negative relationship between dropout and employment of the household head. However, disaggregated data revealed that in some areas, school participation appeared impervious to economic inactivity the household head, with members from these unemployed households equally participating in school.

Challenging the general literature is the finding in the current study that in some areas, for example, Limpopo and North West Provinces, school participation rates are higher or the same among unemployed households compared to the employed (see tables 6.15-18). In addition, low or lack of income does not appear to deter school participation, with high rates of participation still observed among low or no-income in the households. However, in line with the general literature, this pattern is reversed, in Gauteng, Western Cape and other Provinces. Moreover, this pattern could be explained by the fact that while poverty does not seem to be a barrier to school attendance generally. In the relatively wealthier Provinces, there may be hidden opportunity costs. The opportunity costs deter youth from attending school. Or direct costs impeding regular school attendance, compared to the areas like Limpopo where school is still the best alternative in the context of high unemployment rates particularly among the youth.

The qualitative data validate that the low SES as represented by economic inactivity, low or no income and poor living standards, was not necessarily a factor in the decision to leave

school prematurely. What emerges from the multiple case analyses is that individuals attended until the latter phase of school, regardless of the depressing socio-economic circumstances. It appears however, that a shock event or crisis in the individual's life that undermines whatever the buffering that existed hitherto, triggers the process of dropping out. The case studies in the Limpopo Province are a microcosm of extreme poverty. Most of the families got by on the social grants, with household heads, where present, not employed. Surprisingly, none of the narratives point to the economic hardship in their trajectories to dropping out, at least directly. Crisis events such as pregnancy, ill-health of both the adolescents and household head/s and of death of household heads are examples of circumstances that when combined with poverty, accounted for school dropout (see interviews with Teba, Monica, Lesedi, Diks, Anele, Nozi, and Jerminah).

Lack of school supply, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, is also identified in general literature as a strong predictor of dropout (Inoue et al., 2015). Furthermore, long distances to the nearest school are associated with higher rates of dropout. The qualitative data in the current study also points to supply of school as a feature in the dropout narratives, but of a special kind. The qualitative data show that, in the West Coast in particular, the issue of school accessibility is not necessarily of infrastructure in nature. While there was ample public school infrastructure in the communities studied, the schools were not necessarily accessible to everyone. For instance, at the study sites of Oudekraalfontein, Noordhoek and Citrusdal, public secondary schools were within walking distance, but most Coloured youth from these communities had to travel away to a Coloured school, incurring transport and hostel fees in the process. The public schools within walking distance are historically White, and for one reason or another, two decades into the new dispensation, still excluded Coloured students. Sadly, the historical patterns of racial segregation still define the everyday lives of communities, with the Coloured youth unable to access the previously White-only public schools.

It was not necessarily shortage of physical classroom in these area, but arbitrary denial of access to existing public schools. Jahman explains that the enrolment and tuition fees at a nearby former Model C public school are prohibitive, and most Coloured residents of Oudekraalfontein, a largely working class community that he lives in, cannot afford to raise the enrolment fees, let alone the tuition fees. He explains further that the school is mainly for White people, and a few Coloured children who can afford. Instead, they send their children

50 kilometres away to a free public high school, although incurring transport and hostel costs in the process.

This pattern of exclusion through prohibitive school fees from local former White-only schools was also observed in Citrusdal, where until three years ago the Coloured families felt the fees and culture at local Citrusdal high school prevented them from enrolling there. Instead, as Wesley's case illustrated, they had to pay transport and hostel costs to access a school, 50 kilometres away in Piketberg. Wesley dropped out of school after his stepfather died and his unemployed mother could not afford the costs. Although by law the Model C schools cannot refuse access or expel anyone eligible for high school based on affordability, they still charged fees, often exorbitant, claiming it as a necessity to maintain high teaching and learning standards. While there are public schools in proximity of the demanding individuals, there were still financially inaccessible to families – lack of school supply of a special kind. The kind of shortage of school supply experienced in these communities is not the same notion of school supply as covered in the general literature, especially as advanced by Inoue et al. (2015) in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, this is an important extension to the existing literature on the relationship of school supply and school dropout. School practices and processes were also found to have a bearing on student persistence, achievement or dropout. School policies on suspensions, expulsions or forced transfer of students because of factors such as poor attendance, being over age, misbehaviour or low grades, have been reported to cause involuntary withdrawal from school (Bowditch, 1993; Fine, 1986; 1991). In line with this research, the current study found that misinterpretation or arbitrary application of rules on high school age appropriateness drove involuntary withdrawals from school.

The study found that the high school age norm was arbitrarily applied to returning teenage mothers who are well within the cut-off age of 18, advising them to transfer to 'adult learning centres', even where there is none (see interview with Diks). Diks had missed a school year after she was refused re-enrolment in addition to the abeyance period before and following childbirth. This is consistent with some studies which found general stigmatisation and negative attitude towards pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers by teachers and pre-natal health workers who regard them as bad influence to other children (Weeks, 2005). Pregnant teenagers avoiding pre-natal care, with dire consequences, have been reported (Panday et al., 2009). It is therefore plausible that school administrative staff arbitrarily refer returning

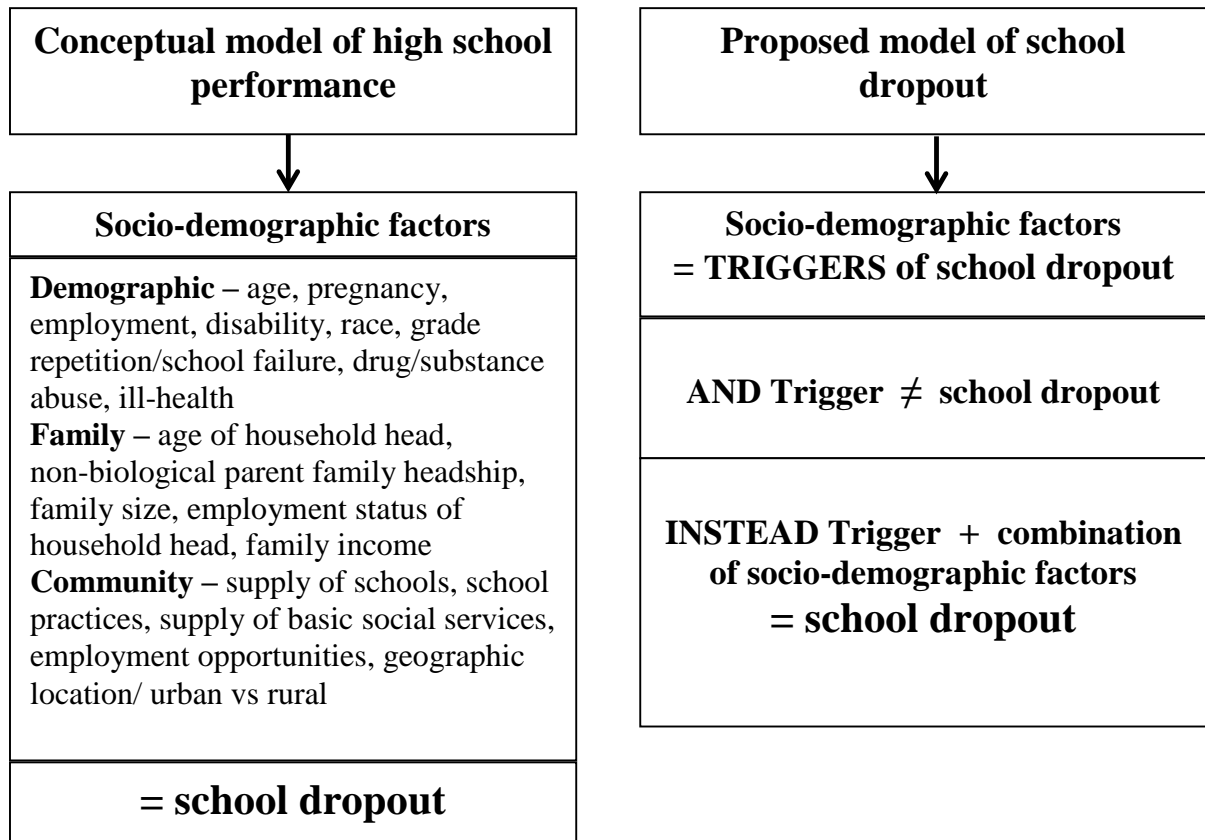
mothers to 'adult schools' instead of enrolling them as guided by the law. The unlawful discriminatory practice in readmission of teenage mothers provides some perspective to the disproportionate number of females out of school after childbirth. Unlike the unfavourable policies cited by the general literature (Bowditch, 1993; Fine, 1991) such as those expelling pregnant students, poor performers or over-aged students, this finding confirms the illegal practice by schools that effectively discourage pregnant students from attending school, and also, contrary to law, not to readily readmit them on their return after childbirth (Weeks, 2005).

The conceptual framework views the wider community, within which individuals, families and schools interact to play a crucial role in the development of the adolescent (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Several studies have reported distressing neighbourhood characteristics to be negatively correlated with dropout (Crane, 1991; Clark, 1992; Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Rumberger, 2004; Blue & Cook, 2004; Woolley et al., 2008). Low quality neighbourhoods, characterized by extreme levels of poverty, were found to increase the odds of dropout (Crane, 1991; Clark, 1992). Lack of amenities such as playgrounds, parks and after-school programmes were also linked to higher dropout rates (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993). Community employment conditions, such as easy job opportunities for school dropouts were reported to correlate with dropout rates (Bickel & Papagiannis, 1988; Clark, 1992; Pittman, 1993; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Entwisle et al, 2004; Rumberger, 2001, 2010; Dustmann & van Soest, 2008). Paradoxically, the general literature reports that favourable economic returns such as higher salaries for school dropouts tend to drive up the dropout rates. However, Gardiner (2008), Ewert and Hamman (1996) show that in the South African agrarian context, it was not necessarily a matter of youth choosing to take up the readily available job opportunities, but rather coerced by nefarious social and labour practices that introduced them to paid work as children, at least historically. The qualitative findings explain the correlation between higher dropout rates and availability of job opportunities in the context painted by Gardiner (2008), Ewert and Hamman (1996) (see interviews with community development workers or residents in Swartland, Saldanha Bay, Bergrivier, Matzikama, Mookgopong local municipalities). It appears, as observed by Gardiner's (2008), that the legacy of illiteracy among farm worker families, and the inclination for farm children to prematurely do paid work was transferred to their new areas of residence. Ewert and Hamman's (1996) revealed labour market structures and practices in the Western Cape agricultural industry that involved employment of 'family units', including underage children that could have a detrimental

effect on their schooling. Although it appears, at present, that the youth do not necessarily leave school because they have found work, the relatively higher employment rates appear to keep them hopeful. The qualitative findings further show that the youth are not only seeking job opportunities on the farms where their families used to be tenants pre1994, even when they now reside in urban centres. The culture of little or no schooling among these families appears to linger on, such that, where they cannot find jobs on the farms, they start hustling in town for odd jobs after dropping out (see interviews with community development workers or residents in Swartland, Matzikama, Mookgopong, Cederberg, and Bergrivier local municipalities).

What emerges from the preceding discussion, through the integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings, is a clearer picture of what is going on in the lives of the 395 620 older adolescents who are not in school. Clearly, this is not a group of poor youth, from poor families or poor communities per se, but a group of individuals who have experienced traumatic events at the most vulnerable moments of their schooling career. The high rates of school participation among the poorest communities which had no access to the most basic services such as piped water and sanitation indicate that poverty cannot by itself explain why this group dropped out of school. Analysis of the socio-demographic data supports some components of the conceptual *model of high school performance*. The model was essential in identifying a range of issues associated with this group. However, using the qualitative data to explain how the identified factors work, new issues emerge that are not necessarily supported by the model (see figure 8.1).

**Figure 8.1: Proposed model of school dropout among older adolescents**



Operationalising the conceptual model of high school performance for this study (see the left-hand section of figure 8.1 above) was useful in helping to identify a substantial range of socio-demographic factors at individual, family and community levels that correlate with school dropout. For instance, analysis of the quantitative data showed that teenage pregnancy, employment or small family sizes were found to associate with high dropout rates. However, the analysis of the qualitative data shows that the model does not support some elements related to dropout in the South African context. For an example, the conventional model correlates teenage pregnancy, childbearing, and employment with high dropout rates. In the context of the current study, the qualitative data explains this relationship in a manner that is not captured by the conceptual model of high school performance. For instance, analysis of the quantitative data found these variables to correlate with high levels of dropout, the qualitative data showed that it was not necessarily pregnancy that led to dropout. Instead, pregnancy was more of a trigger that, only when taken in the light of the individual's debilitating circumstances, the early exit is better understood (see the right-hand section, figure 8.1 above).

Monica's case illustrates this point. Monica returned to school after childbirth and her mother looked after her child. Soon afterwards, Monica's mother took ill and subsequently died. Also without a father, Monica had to leave school to nurse her sick mother as the only female in the household. Consequently, she was not able to return to school after her mother's death and has since become the head of the household looking after her younger brother and her own child. She is also looking for work. Therefore, the pregnancy in Monica's case cannot adequately explain her premature exit from school, but being a young mother in the context of death of both parents and no other social support structure made it difficult for her to stay or return to school. Rather than accounting for the dropout, it is plausible to say that the pregnancy was just a trigger of dropout in a vulnerable family context. The inferential tests and relationships between dropout and the various variables as suggested by the basic model would not be able to show the connection between pregnancy and dropout where the pregnancy is more of a trigger in the context of trauma that the individuals seem to experience before dropping out (see the right-hand section, figure 8.1 above). Similarly, the relationship between employment and dropout should be understood within this context. While the quantitative data appears to support the basic model, the qualitative data show that the model does not capture intricacies of the relationship. That generally, the youth do not necessarily drop out of school to take up employment, but have

effectively, under a variety of fragile conditions, dropped out of school before they get employed. Therefore, the study proposes a conceptual model that considers school dropout as an experience nested within complex and context-specific conditions, that is not captured by the inferential connections supposed by the general conceptual framework.

## 8.5 Conclusion

This discussion chapter integrates the quantitative and qualitative findings from the three preceding chapters, with each designed to contribute to answering the central research question: *What is the prevalence, geographical distribution and the socio-demographic profile of the South African older adolescent school dropouts?* This discussion, by connecting the quantitative and qualitative findings, from the two phases of the study, offers a compelling answer to the central question, which is outlined below.

There were about 400 000 older adolescent dropouts in the country, in 2011. The different parts of the country contribute unevenly to the size of dropout group. However, evidence suggests that older adolescents living in the western half of the country, particularly in the Karoo region, are more likely to drop out of school than those from the eastern half. The youth in the Karoo appear to disproportionately leave school at the end of the compulsory phase owing to the after-effects of the historical labour market structures of the area, combined with current relative easiness to get employment in the agricultural sector in the area. The eastern half of the country is also not a homogeneous space of high levels of school attendance. In some localities, the youth are noticeably less likely to attend than counterparts in adjacent locales, indicating that dropout is a much more local experience than usually depicted. Specific, much more localised experiences, rather than the historical apartheid geographic logic, sufficiently explain the often acute differences in school participation patterns between integral localities in the eastern half of the country.

The evidence from the quantitative data and the multiple case studies, as presented in the foregoing discussion, suggests that this is not a group of poor youth from families. It is not because their parents or guardians are unemployed or family has no income. Poor socio-economic status does not necessarily keep the youth out of school. In fact, the youth with the highest levels of school attendance live in poorest families with no access to basic

services such as piped water and sanitation inside the dwelling, as evidenced among Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal communities.

About half of the dropout group are 18 year olds, and 21% of the group have had a pregnancy at one point or another. They are unemployed actively searching work or have given up on searching for work after long unsuccessful attempt. The evidence further shows that these out-of-school youth are living in families that are not headed by parents or grandparents. They live in weak family structures where the older adolescents are left to fend for themselves after parents' death. Alternatively, they are living in families led by persons not related to them, particularly men.

The qualitative evidence further clarifies that this out-of-school youth do not drop out of school because they became pregnant, or because they have found work. Instead, pregnancy or looking for employment combined with a number of other socio-demographic factors account to why these youth end up out of school. The teenage mothers struggle to get readmission into school after initial interruption of childbirth. As a result, they have stay home after childbirth because there is no family support to help with the child while they are at school, or they have to leave school to go look after the child because the social structure has in the meantime collapsed, mainly owing to parental death. Or the experience of death one or both parents, coupled with stalled schooling career owing to failure, and economic hardships result in the older adolescent going into the labour market as the best viable alternative. Therefore, pregnancy and employment in this context are triggers of dropout than cause or the reason why they dropped out. The school dropouts who happen to be teenage mothers, or are in the labour market seem to have experienced a life crisis along the way to dropping out, intersecting with extreme poverty. Parental death appears to be the common traumatic thread in the process of dropout. Events such as pregnancy that are singled out do not sufficiently explain the early school exit, but combined with a set of other vulnerable context factors, better explain the premature exit. However, the dominant model does not adequately account for this complexity, hence the proposal for a context-specific model that reflects the intricate reality in the process of dropping out, at least among South African older adolescents.

## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the important conclusions that the study makes. It summarizes the background to this study, the empirical and theoretical literature that framed it, as well as summarizes the main study findings. Lastly, the chapter presents the study's contribution to the existing literature and makes recommendations.

The study emanated out of the public concern and debates over the number of students who take too long to get to matric or drop out of school altogether. Matric is one of the most recognizable features of the South African education system, and successful navigation of the national senior examinations is associated with a sense of potential if not indicator of ability. Moreover, dropping out of basic education is regarded as missing acquiring of critical foundational knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that will enable them to decide on a meaningful career, enhance their employment opportunities, meaningfully participate in society, and make healthy life choices. The public is rightly concerned when only a small proportion of students timeously transition to matric and eventually sit for the final examinations. Grade repetition and school dropout have dire socio-economic consequences for both individual and society. The labour environment that is particularly hostile to youth, let alone school dropouts, further justifies the public concern over cohort retention or dropout.

Official reports show that 45% or half a million of older adolescents who were in Grade 10 three years earlier, and were expected to write national senior certificate examinations in 2016, did not write national senior certificate examinations. They were either retained or had dropped out altogether. A number of studies have suggested that the South African youth dropping out of secondary school generally become idle, in the context of lack of work opportunities for school dropouts. The school dropouts, here and elsewhere, are likely to face long-term marginalization, unemployment, make poor health choices, and engage in risky behaviour in general. This is in addition to the cost the government incurs for their welfare and healthcare, despite contributing little or nothing in taxes, as they are often under- or unemployed.

The labour conditions for the youth have not improved for the past decade or so, with unemployment rates among youth (15 -34 years) consistently between 30 and 40%, more than twice that of adults of 35 years and older. Moreover, the latest figures show increase in youth unemployment rate hovering around 50% (Statistics South Africa, 2015; 2016; 2017). In addition, about 40% of the unemployed youth population were reported to be NEETs in 2016, emphasizing the harsh labour market unable to absorb school dropouts. The youth dropping out of school now are likely to join the back of the job-seeker queue, as the most recent NEETs, with no job prospects in the short term. Evidence suggests while the economy has not been creating enough jobs for some time now, the problem of unemployment is compounded by lack of appropriate skills, competencies and work-relevant capacities among young labour market entrants. School dropouts are unlikely to possess the requisite work-relevant capacities and therefore reducing their employment chances. In the light of no other viable options for the older adolescents, you would expect them to stay in school long enough to acquire requisite social and career competencies, including exploiting tertiary education opportunities. However, a disturbing proportion of students still drop out of school into a void.

How many older adolescents are dropping out of school and why are they dropping out of school at the critical moment of their lives, for no better alternative? In addition, where do we find these school dropouts? This study adds to the research concerned with students' in-school, school-to-work and school-to-tertiary transitions. If interventions are to be successful, we know the size of problem, as well as the parts of the country that are problematic. In addition, we need to determine those factors related to the problem. The existing studies do not sufficiently answer these questions. The study adds to the current research by investigating, through a mixed methods approach, the extent of school dropout, the geographical distribution, and the socio-demographic characteristics associated with these youth. The study was guided by the research question: *What is the prevalence, geographic distribution and socio-demographic profile of older adolescents dropping out of school in South Africa?* More specifically, the study attempted to answer the sub-question: *What are the spatial distribution patterns of school dropout among older adolescents?* And upon determining the geographical distribution, the study answered the sub-question: *What are the socio-demographic characteristics associated with older adolescent school dropouts?* While these questions are not necessarily new, this study adds a fresh dimension to the understanding of the school dropout phenomenon by using a multimethod explanatory

sequential design, with a follow-up phase aimed at explaining the quantitative results. The second, qualitative, phase used multiple case studies to explore and illuminate the mechanisms of the relationships between dropout and factors identified in the first, quantitative phase.

## **9.2 What does the literature say on spatial distribution and socio-demographic characteristics of school dropout?**

The question of school dropout is a major area in international and South African literature, and unlike in any other area of education, there has been considerable growth in quantitative and qualitative literature focusing on the phenomenon. The international literature on why students drop out of school is predominantly quantitative, multivariate in nature and the concepts from which are largely encapsulated in Rumberger and Lim's (2008) *conceptual model of high school performance*. The literature, as modelled in Rumberger and Lim's (2008) framework, considers dropping out and graduation as a function of psychological and social factors. The model identifies a two-tiered group of factors that influence performance – individual and institutional-level factors. The individual-level group includes mainly psychological and background factors that predict whether the student dropout or graduate. The institutional-level group includes factors associated with context in which the students live – family, school, and the broader community.

I used international literature, as encapsulated through the *conceptual model of high school performance*, to examine the South African research in light of the study research question. This study was guided by the research question: *What is the prevalence, geographic distribution and socio-demographic profile of the South African older adolescent school dropouts?* There is sizable local literature covering individual and institutional-level factors predicting school dropout, but not enough focusing on the post-compulsory school phase, or the older adolescents.

Christie (2013), proposing a geographic lens to understanding persistent educational inequalities in South Africa, reported on the influence of the differentiated historical geographies on educational outcomes. She essentially argued that most rural communities in former African-populated Bantustan spaces, where education provisions were the poorest, laid the basis for deep contours of inequality in education that have proven almost impossible

to shift in the post-apartheid period. She argues that production and reproduction of inefficient practices, routines and bureaucracies in the Bantustan spaces, well after the end of apartheid, continue to drive poor education outcomes in those areas. Christie (2013) posits that it is through these apartheid legacies that the disparities in education outcomes today should be understood.

In addition, she contends that the current education provision along provincial configurations masks the negative influence of rurality. Furthermore, bureaucracies still weigh negatively on education mainly among the Black African majority. The latter are still occupying the historically and currently impoverished spaces within the provinces. While Christie (2013) acknowledges the need to rethink the current unitary province approaches to dealing with education inequalities, given the splintered socio-economic and political history of the provinces, she stops short of going below the provincial space to disaggregate these disparities. Ballas et al. (2012) examined the spatial distribution of educational disparities across the European Union. He recommended disaggregation of space to local level as potentially the most useful spatial unit understanding the nature of the disparities.

Another important South African study, although by design is of limited applicability, is the HSRC study conducted in 2005. The study corroborates the finding of negative education outcomes today in former Bantustan geographies as the lingering effect of apartheid. The study, conducted between 2003 and 2004, focused on rural communities' experiences of poverty and the relationship to schooling. The provinces or study sites were primarily former Bantustan spaces. It was primarily a quantitative study focusing on the primary school phase, sampling about 600 households, 150 primary schools and altogether respondents totalled 4500. This was complemented by an in-depth participatory research at nine sites in the three provinces. The study identified a variety of individual and institutional-level factors associated with school dropout in rural South Africa. The study was rural in focus, and specifically, Bantustan rurality. There was no intention to sample other communities that characterise the country as we know it today.

Fleisch et al. (2012), using Community Survey 2007 dataset to profile out of school children in the compulsory phase (7-15 year olds), reported an uneven patterns of non-attendance between provinces. Analysis of a small sample of local municipalities suggested patterns of high non-attendance rates concentrated specific areas within provinces. This was consistent

with earlier findings (Shindler & Fleisch, 2007), which indicated a considerable variation in school access levels between provinces. The latter findings also confirmed an inverse relationship between the level of access to school and the relative wealth of the province. That is, they found that the historical legacy of geographical impoverishment did not appear to impact on access to schooling. However, this was not consistent with findings by Christie (2013) and HSRC (2005), which found that provinces that included former impoverished Bantustan spaces to be associated with negative education outcomes. Shindler and Fleisch (2012) noted some problems with the quality of data they used - Census 2001, Annual School Survey 2001, and SNAP Survey 2001.

Motala et al. (2007) also conducted a quantitative analysis of Census 2001, General Household Surveys 2004, and Labour Force Surveys identified patterns and indicators to school exclusion consistent with some earlier studies. The triangulation of data also confirmed high levels of access in the primary phase and high transition rate into the compulsory secondary school phase - grades eight and nine, across the country. They recommended future work to look at the patterns of school exclusion in the post-compulsory phase.

Social Surveys Africa and CALS (2009) conducted a study that largely outlined the South African landscape on school dropout and the attendant characteristics. Furthermore, the study sought to determine the extent to which children of primary and secondary school age were not accessing school education and to identify different types of barriers to accessing and completing school education. The study sampled about 4500 caregivers in a nationally and provincially representative survey, weighted to the national population. A non-representative sub-sample of youth aged 16 to 18 was also drawn, with no attempt to generalise the findings. The general quantitative study was complemented by focus groups with selected participants and key informants in two provinces. The study identified a range of individual and institutional level barriers to entering and remaining in school for children and youths aged between seven and 18. Their most notable finding, through the qualitative data, was that absolute poverty did not necessarily impact school attendance, but rather the relative deprivation that the children experienced in relation to those around them that accounted for them dropping out. They found that the children were not really complaining that they were poor, but were feeling poor compared to the other relatively 'well-off' children, who

themselves were poor in absolute terms (Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2012). This observation was consistent with Shindler and Fleisch (2007) from their study of 7-15 year olds.

Contributing a new methodological design to date, Branson and colleagues (2014) exploited the advantages offered by the two waves of the longitudinal dataset, that is, NDIS 2008, to examine the reasons for school dropout. Analysis of the robust, nationally representative and longitudinal dataset confirmed a series of determinants mostly covered in the literature. Interested in patterns of progress through school and transitions into work, they observed that, compared to the group that was still enrolled in school three years from the baseline, the dropout group was older than the grade age norm. They also found that they had slower progression rates, were less proficient in reading and writing in the language of instruction, were less likely to live with both parents, parents likely to be deceased, attended poorer schools, and lived in poorer households.

To summarise, Rumberger and Lim's (2008) eclectic conceptual framework largely captures the dominant literature on school dropout. The various theoretical frameworks that Rumberger and Lim (2008) used to construct their model of high school performance were derived from mainly statistical studies on why students drop out of high school. The South African research investigating the characteristics of school dropout is generally either quantitative or qualitative in design, and focused mainly on the compulsory schooling phase. Moreover, where they combine the two approaches, they have other limitations, such as focus on the compulsory school-going age. The quantitative studies are generally analyses of cross-sectional datasets, often dependant on responses from the household respondent not necessarily the school dropout herself or himself, and therefore limiting their applicability (Branson et al., 2014). The qualitative designs are naturally limited in scope and applicability. However, Branson and colleagues' (2014), national longitudinal data analysis introduced a fresh angle to the study of reasons for school dropout, able to track transition patterns over time. The HSRC (2005) conducted a mixed methods study specifically designed to examine experiences and challenges of rural children in accessing education. Then again, the multi-method design by the Social Surveys Africa and CALS (2009), a nationally representative study, had a specific focus on access to primary education. The study's sub-sample of 16-18-year olds was too limited and non-representative. While the recent, nationally representative longitudinal study by Branson and colleagues (2014) provides the most refreshing perspective to study of determinants of school dropout, it would have been

interesting to see the findings they generated had they triangulated this with qualitative text data.

What was needed was to do a nationwide statistical study, complemented by a qualitative study, with a specific focus on older adolescents (16-18-year olds). Accordingly, this is what the current study has done. This study used multimethod procedures in an explanatory approach to determine the prevalence, geographic distribution, and profile of older adolescent school dropout across the country. I conducted a mixed methods explanatory sequential study using a large, current national data and multiple case studies that did not only enable for examination of national and provincial patterns of school dropout, but also allowed for uncovering of localised quantitative patterns of school dropout. This design is not replicated in any of the existing studies. In addition, the large-scale census data were used to identify socio-demographic factors associated with dropout. Text data from the multiple case studies were then used as a follow-up to explore and explain the quantitative results. It was necessary to design a mixed methods study that focused specifically on 16 to 18-year olds as the existing studies mainly focused on the seven to 15-year-olds or the compulsory school phase.

### **9.3 Study findings**

#### **9.3.1 Dropout prevalence among the 16 to 18-year-old cohort**

The study confirms, more or less, the findings from earlier studies that found that the majority of the age cohort is attending school, with the national dropout rate around 15%. There were 395 620 older adolescent school dropouts (16 to 18 years) in the country in 2011, more or less in line with the official reports.

#### **9.3.2 Geographic distribution of school dropout among the 16 to 18-year-old cohort**

One of the crucial advantages of working with the census data was to be able to provide a detailed picture of the spread of school dropout not only at provincial, or district levels, but even disaggregated to local area level. Moreover, one of the aspects of dropout that is often missed with the absence of disaggregated data is the local variation of the phenomenon. The aggregate picture often obscures the considerable variations that exist at the local level.

The Census 2011 may be flawed and has been criticized from a number of quarters. It nonetheless provided the most comprehensive opportunity to establish the geographic distribution patterns and profile of older adolescents that have dropped out of school before completing Grade 12, an advantage over general household surveys that rely on smaller datasets.

First, the current study finds notable disparities in school participation distribution in the country. The finding reveals the country divided along the east-west axis, with sharply contrasting school participation patterns between the two halves. The western half of the axis is presenting noticeably higher rates of dropout compared to the eastern half. That the western half of the axis comprises mainly of spaces that belonged to the historically well-resourced Cape Province further illustrates the flaws in the use of the apartheid geography lens to understand education inequalities in general. Similarly, the finding of particularly higher participation rates or lower dropout rates in the eastern half of the axis, which contains impoverished former Bantustan spaces, further points out the limitations of the historical apartheid lens to understanding geographic distribution patterns of school participation disparities.

Second, the current study finds a disproportionate concentration of excessive dropout rates in the Karoo region. While the purpose of the study was not necessarily to provide an explanation for spatial variations in dropout patterns, a cursory observation of these patterns suggests that localities within or in the proximity of the Karoo geographic area seem the most prominent. This will be a focus for future research to find out exactly why this dropout distribution map in the Karoo is prominent. However, these Karoo localities tend to share experiences such as peculiar socio-economic dynamics and culture that seem to associate with excessive dropout rates. The Karoo region is an expanse of agricultural activity, characterized by extensive sheep, vine and citrus farming - labour-intensive industries, which in turn could have shaped the socio-cultural geography of the place.

Studies around labour organisation in this area suggested that housing and employing the whole family unit, as farmers' strategy to ensure consistent and adequate labour supply, introduced children of farm workers to farm labour early in their lives and most of them have known nothing but farm-work all their lives. With the farm workers housed on the farm, the vicious cycle has been ongoing and lingering to this day. This old age practice, which did not

require schooling beyond primary phase, has unfortunately become the farm family culture, as evidenced in the high dropout rates in the Karoo. As some studies suggest, these ‘farm families’ also protected the practice as it improved the family income. The farm families tended to close ranks and prevent outsiders from coming in, encouraging family members to fill any vacancies that become available. It is likely that youth from the Karoo region, regardless of progressive laws in education, and general improvements in education provisioning, continue to provide labour in the area’s vast agrarian industry at the expense of basic education. Therefore, the legacy of illiteracy and minimum schooling among farm workers and their children still lingers on in the Karoo region.

The map of the Karoo indicates that the region largely nestles in the former Cape Province, a relatively better-resourced and wealthier space than most spaces of the former Bantustans. However, the finding of high levels of school dropout cannot sufficiently be explained by the apartheid geography. This finding does not only affirm the current’s study’s challenge on the dominant apartheid geography explanation to all educational inequalities, but further argues that school dropout is a much more local experience. This *localness* in school dropout distribution is illustrated by the sharply contrasting patterns in school participation between localities within the Waterberg district, in Limpopo Province. The acutely contrasting patterns of school participation between the integral localities of Mogalakwena and Thabazimbi in the district of Waterberg does not map onto the apartheid geography explanation, but rather suggests a different, much more localized logic.

Third, the study found that school dropout is neither a rural nor an urban phenomenon. There was no clear rural versus urban to the pattern of school dropout. This was inconsistent with findings in similar or relevant contexts (Latin America, South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa), where most recent large-scale studies have found that the rural youth were less likely to be in school than their urban counterparts. School dropout is widely varied between the metropolitan municipalities themselves, with school participation in the major coastal centres notably lower than the national average, indicating no clear urban pattern to school dropout. The study further finds that there are varied and inconsistent patterns of school dropout between the metropolitan municipalities and their rural vicinity. In some cases, participation is lower in rural localities compared to their urban counterparts, and vice versa. Participation in the Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, while lower than the national average, is noticeably higher than in the rural districts, and, in contrast, participation in the eThekweni

Metropolitan Municipality is lower than in the surrounding rural municipalities. This indicates clearly that dropout is neither a rural nor an urban occurrence, but a localized phenomenon cutting across contexts. That is, living in rural or urban areas in KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape Provinces does not mean sharing similar experiences for the older adolescent. The rural KwaZulu-Natal appears to serve as labour reservoir for the eThekweni and other urban centres, with the youth staying in school only to leave for urban centres once school is not working for them. On the contrary, the relatively higher school participation levels youth in the Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality suggests that the youth from the rural Western Cape Province or elsewhere, do not necessarily move there to look for work, but also in search of better education prospects. In addition, there appears to be different rural versus urban dynamics at play in Gauteng and the Free State Provinces that are not replicable across the country.

### 9.3.3 Socio-demographic characteristics associated with school dropout

#### *Individual-level characteristics of school dropout*

The quantitative data identified relationships between school dropout and a number of demographic attributes such as age, gender, race, pregnancy (or child-bearing), disability, and employment status of the older adolescent.

The older members of the cohort under study were associated with markedly higher rates of dropout than the younger members. This was evidenced by 18-year olds who were twice less likely to be in school compared the 16 year olds, the youngest age in the cohort. That the odds of dropping out rise so sharply between the two ages, in the context of pervasive youth unemployment, suggests efficiency problems in the latter phase of the schooling system that pushes the 18-year olds out of school.

Membership to the Coloured population subgroup was also linked with increased odds of dropping out. The high dropout rates among the Coloured youth coincide with the generally low school participation rates across the Western Cape localities, particularly in the Karoo, where they predominate. The culture of minimal schooling across the Western Cape

farmlands, owing to historical social and labour relations and practices on these farms seem a plausible explanation for lower levels of school participation among the Coloured youth.

Females were also found to attend school slightly below the national average, about two percentage points worse than their male counterparts, who were linked with dropout rates higher than the national rate. However, confirming similar literature, the quantitative data and associated teen-childbearing increased likelihood of dropping out of school. In addition, the odds of staying in school after childbirth reduced by about half once the female youth experienced childbirth.

While the number of employed older adolescents was very small (about 4%), half of those who were in employment were not attending school. Older adolescents who were in employment were five times less likely to be in school, compared to their economically inactive counterparts. It appears that those who happen to get employment while still in high school opt to leave school and work on a full time basis, if they have not dropped out by the time they get an employment. Furthermore, living with a disability was also found to negatively influence dropout rates, with about 10 percentage point disparity gap in school attendance where a disability was reported.

The qualitative data generally corroborated the quantitative data, and helped explain the mechanisms of the connections between the identified factors and school dropout. The multiple case study data confirm the disproportionate premature of exit of the older section (18-year olds) of the cohort, from the latter part of secondary school, particularly in the Limpopo Province. The youth persist until late in school or at about 18 years, then only to dropout before completing matric. In addition, the question is what is happening in the lives of the older adolescents at this time of their school career? However, it is important to note that the premature exit happens peculiarly earlier, at the end of the compulsory phase or about 16 years, in the West Coast, part of the Karoo region.

The qualitative data also helped to clarify the apparent relationship between school dropout and teenage pregnancy or childbearing. Teenage pregnancy and childbearing are features in the story of older adolescent dropout, as rightly identified from the quantitative data.

However, the case narratives show that it is not necessarily the event of pregnancy that explains the permanent exit from school, but rather, the pregnancy (or childbearing) event

combining with a raft of other debilitating socio-demographic elements, that explain the premature exit from school more sufficiently. The qualitative data illustrated that the young mothers re-enrolled or tried to re-enrol after childbirth, only to confront different barriers that accounted for their eventual school dropout. Pregnancy or teenage motherhood serves as a trigger to premature school exit than the cause. Another feature that strongly connects with teenage pregnancy and dropout is individual ill-health. The qualitative data showed that lack of appropriate healthcare interventions particularly during teenage pregnancy made it difficult for the student to stay in school long into their pregnancy. This subsequently delayed their return to school after childbirth, or short-lived their return to school. Adolescents experiencing poor health during pregnancy in turn experienced poor academic performance, repeated grades and school dropout. Poor health, manifesting in various illnesses during and after pregnancy, left untreated, increased the odds of dropping out school for the pregnant teenager or the young mother.

In addition, the case study's narratives bring into clearer view the connection between employment and excessive dropout rates identified through the quantitative data. The qualitative data confirms the negligible employment proportions among older adolescents. What the case narratives illustrate is that the older adolescents had either temporarily or permanently dropped out of school before they took up employment. The large number of economically active adolescents, who have dropped out school and seeking employment supports this view. It appears, as discussed here earlier, the older section (18-year olds) of the cohort who disproportionately drop out of school, do so not because they have found employment, but for some reasons, pushed out of school before completing matric into a bleak labour market, where only a handful get absorbed. Therefore, it is not entirely correct to think of employment as pulling older adolescents out of school, and therefore explaining dropout.

The qualitative data also clarifies the relationship between alcohol/drug use, and the increased odds of dropout that is widely reported in the general research. Interestingly, the use of drugs or alcohol did not appear as a reason for premature school exit in the individual accounts. While the communities are rightly concerned about the prevalent alcohol abuse among students, this did not appear to account for their withdrawal from school. It is only when the individual's family and broader contexts are revealed in the case narratives that one

understands that teenage drinking or smoking cannot sufficiently explain their premature exit from school.

### *Institutional-level characteristics of school dropout*

The quantitative findings corroborate the general literature which associated vulnerable family structures with higher dropout rates. Child-headed families, the most vulnerable, experienced the highest of dropout rates among older adolescents. Conversely, finding of association of higher dropout rates with small family size challenges the dominant literature. The dominant theoretical literature associates smaller family size with sustained school participation among member children. This is based on the assumption that the fewer the number of family members, the more the resources to go round, including supporting education. However, the current study refutes this assumption in that, family sizes of three members and fewer, were linked with markedly high rates of dropout among the member adolescents. Therefore, this is not consistent with the general research, based on resource dilution models, which postulate that bigger family sizes mean fewer resources per member, and therefore less investment in education per sibling. The qualitative data suggested that the smaller families, three members or less, were likely to be orphaned child-headed families, and these family types invariably have little or no social support, making sustained schooling difficult. This is an important contribution to the theoretical literature on school dropout among older adolescents.

Further, still at family level, socio-economic status, with economic activity of household head and standard of living as proxies, was found to be indifferently associated with school dropout from the census data. In some local areas, poor living standards (access to piped water and sanitation) were associated with lower dropout rates than in areas with relatively higher living standards. And also, inverse relationships between employment status of the household head and dropout rate were observed. Disaggregated data showed instances of lower dropout rates where the heads of household were unemployed, and higher dropout rates associated with employed household heads. This could be explained by relative deprivation or felt poverty, where poverty in absolute terms does not necessarily exclude individuals or households from mainstream social activities including school attendance (Meny-Gibert, 2012; Fleisch et al., 2012). Only when the individuals feel poorer than those around them, they begin withdrawing from social activities, for example, stop going to school because of

worn out shoes or no shoes, compared to the other children. Unlike elsewhere, for example South-East Asia, where low SES is a barrier to education access, in the South African context it does not appear to be structural poverty that necessarily excludes older adolescents from accessing education, but an intersection of individual-level and contextual factors. On the contrary, the locality with the highest school participation rates in the country is arguably the poorest, with the least employed heads of household, among the lowest income, poor water and sanitation access – the Aganang Municipality in the Capricorn district, Limpopo Province (EnviroXcellence Consulting Services, 2009; Statistics South Africa, 2012). Therefore, older adolescents are not out of school because they are poor, but an intersection of conditions that explain why they leave school.

The qualitative data and analysis confirm findings of unusually high prevalence of parental death. This is, most probably linked to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, accounting to the changes in the family structure, mainly reduction of family size. The qualitative data illustrated that, invariably, the older adolescents experienced death of one or both parents which left them much more vulnerable to other stressors, making it difficult for sustained schooling. The death-induced smaller family size suggested increased vulnerability, rather increased resources between fewer surviving members. It appears these poor individuals, who experience family breakdown owing to HIV/AIDS-related death, saw their initial resilience to harsh economic conditions beginning to weaken, illustrated by higher rates of dropout among the orphaned or half-orphaned adolescents living in near-dissolved family structures. This contextual and textured finding from the qualitative interviews challenges some of the assumption we already have about association between family size and school dropout.

The qualitative data confirms the general research that access to and staying in school was made difficult by lack in school supply. Unlike generally reported in the sub-Saharan context, lack of supply of school in the current study was not shortage of school infrastructure. School dropout, particularly in the rural Western Cape, was linked to illegal exclusion, through various means, of Coloured youth from historically White-only public schools. Sadly, historical patterns of racial segregation still defined everyday lives of many communities in the province in that the nearest public schools were not necessarily accessible to local youth. In the process, families incurred transport and hostel costs to send children to historically Coloured-only secondary schools in the next town. This practice, combined with family and broader community factors, were found to facilitate the school withdrawal process for the

older adolescent. Therefore, this special kind of school access appeared to be a barrier, particularly in the rural Western Cape.

Also, the current study challenges the dominant model that considers low quality neighbourhoods as characterized by high levels of unemployment, extreme poverty and general distressing characteristics as strong predictors of dropout. High rates of participation were found in communities with distressing characteristics such as pervasive unemployment and tangible poverty.

The quantitative findings confirm several studies that have reported high levels of school participation among older adolescents, comparable with other developing nations (Gustafsson, 2011; Spuall, 2013; Department of Basic Education, 2014). About 15% of older adolescents had dropped out to school in 2011, showing a progressive decline in participation from the compulsory phase into senior secondary school.

And in the main, with few exceptions, the quantitative strand of the study confirms the literature on the socio-demographic characteristics of school dropouts. And also, the observations made in the compulsory school phase were confirmed among older adolescents as well (Social Surveys Africa & CALS, 2009; Shindler & Fleisch, 2007; Motala et al., 2007, 2009; HSRC et al., 2005; Strassburg et al., 2010; Gustafsson, 2011; Spuall, 2013; Fleisch et al., 2012; Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2012; Branson et al., 2014).

However, when the qualitative findings are integrated, new insights emerge and extend or challenge the existing literature at both empirical and conceptual levels. The qualitative findings challenge some components of the dominant model that singles out some factors as determinants of school dropout. In addition, the conceptual model of high school performance singles out factors such as pregnancy and high school employment as predictors of dropout among female adolescents. The qualitative data showed that the factors that are singled out by the dominant model essentially obscure the extent to which those factors are events or traumatic moments prompting or triggering the decision to drop out, as opposed to the root cause of dropout that often is a long-term accumulation life time events. Invariably, the South African research, owing to design limitations, also often cites these triggers of dropout as the determinants of dropout, unable to adequately untangle the story dropout, particularly late in secondary school. I believe this study has to some extent, succeeded in

unravelling the story of dropout among older adolescents, owing to the strength of the multimethod explanatory sequential approach. The two examples below illustrate the point.

The relationship between teenage pregnancy/childbearing and high levels of dropout, identified from the analysis of the quantitative data and general research does not tell the whole story. The qualitative data also acknowledge that teen pregnancy and subsequent childbirth are strong features in school interruption among girls. Conversely, the qualitative data further showed that the teen mothers do re-enrol or attempt to re-enrol after childbirth. Where the teen mother eventually dropped out after re-entry, the qualitative data showed that a combination of factors, could better explain the premature exit, rather than the pregnancy event itself. Specifically, teen mothers whose return to school did not last beyond Grade 12 cited ill-health, death of parent/s as a reason for their premature exit. Illness that started or became more pronounced during or after pregnancy was also a factor in the story of dropout. Encouraging pregnant students to stay home and refusing them re-entry after childbirth is also a mentioned alongside pregnancy and school dropout. The individual became pregnant while in Grade 11 and continued to attend late into the pregnancy. She returned to school after childbirth, while her mother looked after the baby. However, she left school to care for her child and her mother who had become ill and subsequently died. This clearly demonstrates that while teenage pregnancy and teen motherhood happens all the time, it does not necessarily explain the premature school exit by the individual. It is in combination with traumatic events such as ill-health or death of family member, particularly mothers, that the teenage mothers leave school altogether, not necessarily because of the pregnancy. While the conceptual model also views dropout because of interaction of individual and institutional-level factors, it does not and maybe will not be able to portray the complexity of the story of dropout as emerged from the case study narratives. Teenage pregnancy is rather a traumatic event, a catalyst for school dropout, not a determinant.

In addition, the qualitative insights illuminated the statistical connection between employment and dropout as captured in the conceptual model. While the quantitative data, like similar statistical studies such as Branson et al. (2014) have observed, linked employment among older adolescents with high dropout rates, the qualitative data was able to put the relationship into perspective, showing that economic activity, including getting a job, happens after effectively dropping out of school, for a combination of factors. In the context of general lack of job opportunities for youth in particular, older adolescents do not

necessarily drop out because they have found work, but rather, start looking for work after dropping out.

Similarly, evidence from the in-depth interviews shows that repetition or school failure was understood in the context of factors such as ill-health, breakdown in supportive social structure, with teen mothers affected the most by the death of a mother, often leaving the teenage mother to essentially head the household in addition to motherhood obligations. School work invariably suffers and eventually they drop out in the absence of any social support. So, while grade repetition or academic failure was part of the dropout narrative, it was only after a traumatic event such as family death that their academic work suffers often leading to dropout.

Therefore, the quantitative data alone cannot begin to encapsulate the weave or the interconnectedness of these life events into a coherent sense. The use of the explanatory qualitative data elicited the story of school dropout among older adolescents in the country in a manner the existing research does not reveal. That is, the quantitative data provided a general picture of the characteristics of school dropout, and with the qualitative data, a more textured nature of school dropout was derived. The general conceptual model of high school performance, in its raw form, was unable to reveal the textured context of school dropout as unveiled in this study, suggesting a need for its adaptation.

#### **9.4 What does my study contribute to the literature on school dropout?**

The study contributes to the literature in a number of respects: first, the study challenges the assumptions embedded in the literature that, patterns of inequality and exclusion in education follow more or less along the historical apartheid geography lines. Second, the study makes a methodological contribution, a mixed methods explanatory sequential design, to the study of school dropout among older adolescents. Third, the study makes a theoretical proposition to the study of school dropout among this age cohort.

While my study acknowledges and confirms that there are geographic patterns to social exclusions and education inequalities in particular, the study challenges the assumptions embedded in literature that all aspects of inequality in education are best understood through the historical apartheid geographical lens. That is, the tendency in the literature to apportion

contours of education inequality to apartheid geography is not supported by this study (Christie, 2013; Pienaar & Morton-McKay, 2014; Chisholm, 2012; Spaul, 2013; van der Berg, 2007, 2008; Gustafsson, 2011). The study has shown that the disparities in school participation across the country do not follow the historical apartheid geography lines. The historically and currently poorly-resourced spaces that in the dominant literature are expected to have lower school enrolment and attendance rates, were found to have higher levels of participation in school. The western half of the country, historically a systematically better-resourced part of the country, was found to experience particularly lower school participation rate among older adolescents than the eastern half, which houses the historically, and currently, all the impoverished Bantustan spaces. Therefore, the study refutes the claim in general literature that tends to link lack of access to educational provisions to area income, wealth, power or social hierarchies (Wilkinson et al., Ballas et al., 2012; Tickamyer, 2000; Thompson & Schoonmaker, 1997; Woolley, 2008). The current study posits that there are varying factors in the geography, probably operating at a much more localized basis, not just the historical legacies, that better explain the inequalities in the spatial distribution of school participation. Moreover, two scenarios presented in this study illustrate the argument – the Karoo and Thabazimbi patterns of school participation.

The geographical analysis of school participation revealed a concentration of excessive dropout rates in the Karoo region, which does not map onto the historical apartheid geography explanation. The study has shown that the Karoo region, which spans multiple provinces and districts, is a distinctive geographic landscape with peculiar social, economic and cultural dynamics. The region's distinct dynamics distinguish localities within its boundaries from those outside the region, even though they happen to share juristic boundaries of province or district. For instance, the Cacadu district, which is administratively in the Eastern Cape Province, but falls within the greater Karoo region, experiences high rates of school dropout just like the Central Karoo Municipality in the region, but noticeably different participation pattern from Chris Hani, its integral municipality in the Eastern Cape Province. Clearly, there are geographical patterns to school participation, but these patterns do not fit into the historical apartheid geography lenses. There are other forms of geography that explain the patterns of school participation in the Karoo, and plausibly, an intersection of socio-cultural and economic geographies, as argued in detail in Chapter 8.

Also in Limpopo Province, Thabazimbi is experiencing particularly higher dropout rates compared to most areas within the province. The hugely contrasting patterns of school participation between Thabazimbi and its neighbouring Mogalakwena locality in the same district is a further illustration of the inadequacy of the historical apartheid geography lens to understanding education inequalities in the country. Thabazimbi, a town with a vibrant mining activity for the past century, has been attracting high proportions of the youth from across the country, prospecting for employment on the iron ore mines. In contrast, Mogalakwena locality is a collection of subsistent Black African settlements under different tribal authorities, and historically within the under-resourced Bantustan of Lebowa. Since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mogalakwena effectively served as a labour reservoir for the flourishing mining activity across the country, including the Thabazimbi iron ore mines. Moreover, to a large extent, Mogalakwena still depends on migrant labour remittance as source of income for most households. In Mogalakwena, adolescents appear to stay in school, as the most viable option available to them, in the context of high unemployment particularly among the youth. However, where job opportunities present themselves, the youth start working and especially in the likelihood that they are not going to get anything from staying in school, illustrated by high matric non-completion rate. On the contrary, Thabazimbi, with its relatively lower unemployment rates, and the better odds of getting employment there, appears to attract the youth from areas such as Mogalakwena. The integrated findings from this study show that the current economy in general, including mining, is unable to absorb the economically active youth. It is then plausible that the higher dropout rates in the Thabazimbi area are owing to older adolescents local and outsiders, looking for work after dropping out of school. The older adolescents relocate for Thabazimbi area with the hope of getting work, after dropping out of school. The mining sector does not absorb most of the youth and work opportunities have become scarce. It does not seem to be a cultural practice for Black African youth to drop out of school. In fact, they stay in school, but where job opportunities present themselves, the youth start working and especially in the likelihood that they are not going to get anything from staying in school, illustrated by high matric non-completion rate, even after years of investment and perseverance. This point is illustrated by the contrasting near universal participation in the fellow Mogalakwena locality, a tribal setting where job opportunities are hard to come by and staying and persisting in school is the most viable option. Therefore, the logics that drive these dropout patterns are not the historical apartheid logic, but new or alternative logics to the spatiality of school dropout.

My study, as these two scenarios have clearly demonstrated, challenges the historical apartheid geography lens to understanding all aspects of education inequalities as inadequate. School dropout logics follow different trajectories, and the apartheid geography explanation does not appear to work. There are other alternative logics explaining social life patterns in the country, not necessarily apartheid geography logic. The Thabazimbi-Mogalakwena school participation contrast shows that other forms of geography are at play, and most probably, the gravitation of the Black African youth to the economic vibrancy of Thabazimbi, after stalled or stalling schooling careers, particularly late in secondary school. In addition, there appears to be a cultural pattern to the constellation of excessive dropout rates among the Coloured youth in the Karoo region, in the context of easier employment conditions, not apartheid geography. The Coloured youth tend to drop out of school at the end of compulsory schooling phase (see case studies of Jerome, Amanda, Bromelda, Millow, Lee-Anne, and Jonnie).

Second, the study makes a methodological contribution to the literature – a multimethod explanatory sequential design approach, integrating a quantitative census data with an in-depth qualitative multiple case study. There is a growing recognition of the value of the mixed methods approach to studying patterns of school access and dropout, but very few actually do it. And when they do it, as demonstrated by Social Africa Surveys & CALS (2009) and HSRC et al. (2005) studies, they do not use the explanatory sequential design as used in my study. First, the focus of Social Africa Surveys & CALS (2009) was primarily on the compulsory schooling phase, with limited, unrepresentative sample for the older adolescents (ages 16-18). Even with the compulsory phase as focus, their study is the variant of parallel convergent design, where the idea was to increase the chances of unearthing relevant variables possibly there. Answering the same research question, qualitative strategies were used to complement the quantitative data. Similarly, the HSRC et al. (2005) study was also multimethod in nature, but the procedures were parallel in nature, where the qualitative data was designed to supplement the quantitative data. The study was also focused on the primary school phase and rural in scope with no intention to sample other communities that characterise the country as we know it today. More importantly, my study is not only a mixed methods or multimethod design, but it is intentionally explanatory and sequential, with two distinct phases, with the quantitative phase preceding the qualitative. None of the studies reviewed has attempted to use the design procedures of the explanatory sequential designs, as used by the current study to investigate school dropout among older adolescents. In this

study, in the first phase, the quantitative, the Census 2011 data was subjected to frequencies and cross-tabulation analyses to determine the prevalence, spatial distribution and profile of older adolescents, specifically. In the second phase, the qualitative, multiple case studies are used intentionally to explore and explain the relationships identified in the quantitative results, through a follow-up question which sought to find out: *In what ways do the qualitative data help explain the relationships between the identified socio-demographic variables and school dropout among older adolescents?* Through the in-depth interviews, this study design was able to determine how various factors relate to school dropout. The rationale of this study design, through the quantitative large-scale data and results was to obtain a general picture of the dropout phenomenon. Complementarily, the qualitative data and analysis refined and explained the statistical results, which none of the reviewed studies has done.

The study's methodological contribution to the existing literature, in a manner that other studies do not, is illustrated in the way that it illuminated the relationship between pregnancy and school dropout. While the quantitative data was useful in identifying teenage pregnancy as linked to excessive dropout rates, the qualitative data proved that it was not the complete story. The case studies allowed for further exploration of the apparent relationship, and found the pregnancy was a strong feature in the adolescent dropout's life, and did not account for their premature school exit. The case narratives demonstrated that the pregnancy was probably a traumatic life event, which combined with other precipitating socio-demographic factors, triggered the school dropout process. Invariably, students who became pregnant in high school re-enrolled or tried to re-enrol, but for a variety of reasons, as demonstrated in detail in the case studies, they could not persist beyond matric. In itself, pregnancy did not sufficiently explain why the individual eventually dropped out of school. Similarly, the study's design procedures were able to throw light on the relationship between small family size and higher dropout rates. The in-depth interviews help understand and uncover the context of the small family size, which revealed that the small family size reflected vulnerability resulting from parental and sibling death, most likely to HIV/AIDS, and bigger size suggested intact families or presence of social support necessary for persistent school attendance.

The use of the multimethod design procedures as applied here is a value-add to the older adolescent school dropout literature, in ways that the existing quantitative and qualitative

studies in isolation do not. The study was able to provide an overview of the dropout phenomenon, at the same time illustrated the intricate and multidimensional nature of the relationships between school dropout and the identified variables. The study's ability to illuminate these relationships is particularly useful for policy design and implementation of intervention programmes.

The study also contributes theoretical insights to the existing literature on school dropout. The current study used *conceptual model of high school performance* (Rumberger & Lim, 2008) as the broad framework to investigate school dropout among older adolescents in South Africa. The broad framework covered a wide range of psycho-social factors explaining why students drop out of school. Nevertheless, the interest and nature of data used in the current study, did not find the psychological elements of the model helpful, as the interest was to explore a select of socio-demographic issues covered in the Census 2011 survey. Therefore, the current study adapted the broad theoretical framework to focus primarily on the social issues.

The *conceptual model of high school performance* is a very useful model to help see the essential components relating to school dropout. However, the socio-demographic data for the current study supports some of the components of the model and not the others. Substantially, the model explains the quantitative socio-demographic data, but the qualitative data and findings are not visible in the dominant model. The qualitative analysis demonstrated that, what the existing model singles out as predictors of school dropout, they are just triggers of dropout, not necessarily the predictor variables themselves (see figure 8.1). The trigger worked in combination with other socio-demographic conditions to explain eventual school dropout.

For instance, while the existing model, and supported by the quantitative data for the current study, associates employment during school with the likelihood to drop out, the case studies show that the relationship is much more complicated. What the existing model misses, but becomes clear through the qualitative data, is that oftentimes the older adolescents are performing poorly and their schooling careers have probably stalled, when they start looking for work. It would be difficult, if not impossible even through sophisticated inferential tests, to reveal the manner in which these factors interplay – the combination of availability of work and poor schooling experiences to explain the process of dropping out. Essentially, the

case studies data made it possible in the current study. The existing conceptual model is unable to capture this intricate relationship, where events, often traumatic, such as unplanned pregnancy, over time, interact and interlace with other life events to account for school dropout. It is on this basis that the current study proposes a model (figure 8.1) for investigation of school dropout among adolescents, which considers the singled-out socio-demographic factors as sparks or triggers of dropout, but not predictors, as hypothesized in the existing model.

## **9.5 Study limitations, implications and future research**

### 9.5.1 Study limitations

Limitations of the study included:

1. There were questions raised about the quality of the Census 2011 data, particularly related to the undercount, and this calls for caution when interpreting the estimations of school dropout across spatial units.
2. In addition, about 53 000 older adolescents were not included in the study because their school attendance status was not specified or unknown. It is likely that most of these adolescents are dropouts, hence their reluctance to declare their status. Therefore, the dropout prevalence is likely to be even higher than presented in this study.
3. Also, because purposive sampling was used in the qualitative phase of the study, the researcher cannot say with confidence that the sample was representative of the population (Pettigrew, 1990; Creswell, 2002; Silverman, 2013).
4. The nature of the interpretative nature of qualitative data is such that researcher might have introduced his bias into the analysis and interpretations of the findings.

### 9.5.2 Implications and recommendations

The study provided insight into the prevalence, geographic distribution and profile of older adolescent school dropouts in the country. The study makes a valuable contribution to the empirical and methodological literature to the study of dropout in South Africa. Recognizing that the public in general is duly concerned about the astoundingly high numbers of older adolescents dropping out before completing basic education, and therefore missing on critical foundational knowledges and skills necessary to improve their employability and meaningful citizenship, the findings of this study are aimed at policy makers, local and education administrators, community workers and social programme implementers. Knowing the geographic distribution patterns and characteristics of older adolescents exiting school prematurely may assist the various stakeholders in programme design and development of strategies to enhance school persistence and completion of the National Senior Certificate (matric). Specific implications include:

1. Small-scale programmes are more likely to have the greatest effect than those designed nationally or provincially. School dropout among older adolescents is a much more localised experience. Understanding each community as potentially unique, with peculiar dynamics would improve the programme's relevance and applicability to local school dropouts. And the community is not necessarily defined by its current or the historical administrative apartheid geography, but other forms that define it, including cultural dimensions.
2. Programmes specifically aimed at supporting students who become pregnant in school, ensuring they receive necessary pre/post-natal healthcare to minimize interruptions. The programmes must also facilitate their readmission to school after childbirth, with necessary moral and tuition support. Programmes promoting safer sexual behaviour and healthy choices in general should be ongoing, facilitated at school and in communities.
3. Older adolescents in non-parent or grandparent families require special support, including those that live with relatives. Programmes must include comprehensive support structures for double-orphaned students living on their own. The support

could include trauma counselling to help them deal with loss of parents, in addition to moral support and subsistence.

4. Students living with disabilities would benefit from special support, particularly with medical and assistive devices that would enable them to engage in meaningful learning.
5. Concerted efforts are necessary to improve grade transitions. Older adolescents in the senior phase require supplementary and remedial tutorial support to reduce grade repetition, which is a precursor to dropping out of school.
6. As implied by the proposed framework to understanding school dropout, effective programmes would be inter or multidisciplinary in nature, as it was demonstrated that the factors that are commonly singled out as causes of dropout, are mere triggers, with a host of other conditions interplaying to explain why they eventually drop out of school.

### 9.5.3 Future Research

The quantitative analysis and results of the current study threw up a number of questions that necessitate specific designs for further exploration. These include the following:

1. To design specific study/ies to statistically test the relationship between culture and the tendency to drop out of school at the end of the compulsory phase in the Karoo region of the Western Cape. Such a study would also statistically test the link between availability of employment in the area and higher dropout rates among older adolescents.
2. A specific study to test the Thabazimbi hypothesis, the suggested link between higher dropout rates and the area's vibrant mining activity.
3. Studies focused in areas presenting anomalous high dropout rates that were not included in the current study's qualitative sample, and might shed new insights or provide different explanations to localised patterns of dropout. It would be interesting

to find out why the odds of dropout are disproportionately higher in localities such as in the Musina, Kwa Sani, Kgetlengrivier, Ventersdorp, Ditsobotla, Midvaal, Westonia, Mkhondo, in the midst of high levels of school participation, in the eastern half of the country.

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## APPENDIX A: ETHICS CLEARANCE



### Wits School of Education

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17 September 2014

Student Number: **9010498T**

Protocol Number: **2014ECE016D**

Dear Henry Monyela

### Application for Ethics Clearance: Doctor of Philosophy

Thank you very much for your ethics application. The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

### A study of quantum, distribution and profile of older adolescents not enrolled in school: A mixed method study

The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that **clearance was granted**. However, there were a few small issues which the committee would appreciate you attending to before embarking on your research.

#### The following comments were made:

- The risk involved in this study is more than low and there may be sensitivity around why participants left school, and this needs to be acknowledged and appropriate counselling support needs to be put into place.
- You mentioned that adolescents will be sought for participation in the project but you did not stipulate how many.
- Indicate where the research will take place.
- The information sheet to youth does not indicate that reasons for leaving school will be explored.
- There are a few grammatical and spelling errors on the information sheets that require correcting.
- Your surname needs to be Included in all letters.

Please use the above protocol number in all correspondence to the relevant research parties (schools, parents, learners etc.) and include it in your research report or project on the title page.

**The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education Committee upon submission of your final research report.**

All the best with your research project.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'M Maseko'.

Wits School of Education

Cc Supervisor: Prof B Fleisch

## **APPENDIX B: QUANTITATIVE TABLES**

### **B-1: Quantitative tables 6.14 to 6.19**

**Table 6.14: Number and percentages of students in and out of school by gender of the household head**

<b>MALE HOUSEHOLD HEAD</b>					<b>FEMALE HOUSEHOLD HEAD</b>			
<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Head/Acting head	30,811	12,927	43,738	29.6%	22,045	9,204	31,249	29.5%
Spouse/partner	9,767	20,909	30,676	68.2%	7,329	2,390	9,719	24.6%
Son/daughter	645,415	82,488	727,903	11.3%	605,644	94,025	699,669	13.4%
Adopted son/daughter	8,630	1,296	9,926	13.1%	9,044	1,673	10,717	15.6%
Stepchild	17,474	3,374	20,848	16.2%	9,299	1,387	10,686	13.0%
Brother/sister	47,269	14,648	61,917	23.7%	61,734	12,587	74,321	16.9%
Grand/great-grandchild	111,023	14,794	125,817	11.8%	274,257	36,387	310,644	11.7%
Son/daughter in-law	6,054	3,351	9,405	35.6%	7,896	3,956	11,852	33.4%
Brother/sister in-law	5,836	2,581	8,417	30.7%	4,963	1,491	6,454	23.1%
Other relative	90,608	23,242	113,850	20.4%	131,119	23,767	154,886	15.3%
Non-related person	11,941	7,599	19,540	38.9%	13,199	4,335	17,534	24.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>984,828</b>	<b>187,209</b>	<b>1,172,037</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	<b>1,146,529</b>	<b>191,202</b>	<b>1,337,731</b>	<b>14.3%</b>

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.15: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by employment status of household head in Western Cape Province**

<b>Employment status of household head</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Employed	108,206	30,002	138,208	21.7%
Unemployed	16,566	6,433	22,999	28.0%
Discouraged work-seeker	3,342	1,632	4,974	32.8%
Economically inactive	43,889	17,998	61,887	29.1%

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.16: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by employment status of household head in Gauteng Province**

<b>Employment status of household head</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Employed	216,682	28,872	245,554	11.8%
Unemployed	45,652	10,145	55,797	18.2%
Discouraged work-seeker	9,690	2,012	11,702	17.2%
Economically inactive	93,121	15,190	108,311	14.0%

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.17: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by employment status of household head in Limpopo Province**

<b>Employment status of household head</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Employed	83,785	9,240	93,025	9.9%
Unemployed	44,483	4,697	49,180	9.6%
Discouraged work-seeker	18,823	1,582	20,405	7.8%
Economically inactive	169,844	13,399	183,243	7.3%

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 dataset

**Table 6.18: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by employment status of household head in North West Province**

<b>Employment status of household head</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Employed	51,722	12,437	64,159	19.4%
Unemployed	15,684	3,393	19,077	17.8%
Discouraged work-seeker	5,818	1,469	7,287	20.2%
Economically inactive	61,507	13,420	74,927	17.9%

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 data

**Table 6.19: Number and percentage of students in and out of school by employment status of the household head**

<b>Employment status of household head</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% dropped out</b>
Employed	828,228	143,753	971,981	14.8%
Unemployed	243,075	50,447	293,522	17.2%
Discouraged work-seeker	104,070	20,190	124,260	16.2%
Economically inactive	955,090	163,708	1,118,798	14.6%

Source: Researcher's calculations based on Statistics South Africa Census 2011 data

## **APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS**

**C-1: Interview consent form – the school dropout**

**C-2: Interview consent form – family member**

**C-3: Interview consent form – community member**

## **C-1: Interview consent form – the school dropout**

### **Factors leading to older adolescents dropping out of school before completing grade twelve**

I am a student at Wits University, and I am conducting interviews for my Doctoral research project. I am studying the factors that lead to youth dropping out of school.

During the interview, you will be asked to answer some questions about your schooling and your family. You are free to talk as much as you need during the interview, and if there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so, and we will stop and move to the next question, if you agree. Also, with your permission, I will audiotape the interview, as it will save us time and make sure I don't miss anything you say.

All the information will be kept confidential. I will not use your real name when I record the information. I will keep the data in a secure place. Only the faculty supervisor and I will have access to this information. Upon completion of this project, all data will be destroyed or stored in a secure location.

#### **Participant's Agreement:**

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation. I understand the intent and purpose of this research.

I am aware the data will be used for a Doctoral research project. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the doctoral project submission. The data gathered in this interview are confidential and anonymous with respect to my personal identity unless I specify/indicate otherwise.

I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I agree to participate in today's interview.

---

Participant's signature (or guardian)                      Date

---

Interviewer's signature                                      Date



### **C-3: Interview consent form – community member**

#### **Factors leading to older adolescents dropping out of school before completing grade twelve**

I am a student at Wits University, and I am conducting interviews for my Doctoral research project. I am studying the factors that lead to youth dropping out of school.

During the interview, you will be asked to answer some questions about youth and schooling, as well as other social issues in this community. You are free to talk as much as you need during the interview, and if there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so, and we will stop and move to the next question, if you agree. Also, with your permission, I will audiotape the interview, as it will save us time and make sure I don't miss anything you say.

All the information will be kept confidential. I will not use your real name when I record the information. I will keep the data in a secure place. Only the faculty supervisor and I will have access to this information. Upon completion of this project, all data will be destroyed or stored in a secure location.

#### **Participant's Agreement:**

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation. I understand the intent and purpose of this research.

I am aware the data will be used for a Doctoral research project. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the doctoral project submission. The data gathered in this interview are confidential and anonymous with respect to my personal identity unless I specify/indicate otherwise.

I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I agree to participate in today's interview.

---

Participant's signature

Date

---

Interviewer's signature

Date

## **APPENDIX D: QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOLS**

**D-1: Interview protocol – the school dropout**

**D-2: Observation protocol – community characteristics**

**D-3: Interview protocol – family member**

**D-4: Interview protocol – community member**

## **D-1: Interview protocol – the individual who dropped out of school**

Interview Site:

Interview #:

Interviewee:

Age:

Gender:

Health and disability:

Population Sub-group:

Language:

Date:

Time:

Length of interview:

1. Focus on personal (biographical information),

Can you please tell me about yourself, your schooling days, the teachers, the classes, school friends and how it happened that you stopped going to school.

Start wherever you like. Please take your time. I will listen first, I won't interrupt, and I will just take some notes for after you have finished telling me about yourself.

Focus on family- (if it does not come up in the response to first question)

2. Focus on community - (if it does not come up in the response to first question)

Probes - on topics that emerge from the narrative in 1 to 3.

Questions - based on topics that were not mentioned in narrative 1.

## **D-2: Observation protocol**

**WHAT ARE COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS, FEATURES, ARTEFACTS, ETC.? AND  
WHAT CAN THEY TELL US ABOUT SCHOOL PARTICIPATION IN THE AREA?**

Site #:

Observation Site:

Date:

Time:

1. What is the geographic location of the community?
2. Community settlement type (formal or informal) – urban, rural, traditional?
3. Housing type – shacks, mud, and concrete, etc.?
4. Schools – availability of and distance to schools?
5. Community infrastructure – water, electricity, sanitation, etc.?
6. Community economic activity – factories, mines, trade, etc.?
7. Community recreational facilities and resources – play grounds, parks, libraries, after school projects

### **D-3: Interview protocol – family member of the school dropout**

Interview Site:

Interview #:

Interviewee relationship with the adolescent:

Age:

Gender:

Population Sub-group:

Language:

Date:

Time:

Length of interview:

1. Can you please tell me about .....and how it happened that s/he stopped going to school before completing grade 12.  
Start wherever you like. Please take your time. I will listen first, I won't interrupt, and I will just take some notes for after you have finished telling me about yourself.
2. Probes - (for more details) based on topics that emerge from the narrative in 1.
3. Questions - based on topics that were not mentioned in narrative 1.

#### **D-4: Interview protocol – community member**

Interview Site:

Interview #:

Interviewee position in community:

Date:

Time:

Length of interview:

1. Can you please tell me about this community – access to schools, sport facilities, leisure parks, libraries; employment, social security grants, access to water, toilet facilities, electricity; and any social issues affecting the community?

Start wherever you like. Please take your time. I will listen first, I won't interrupt, and I will just take some notes for after you have finished telling me about yourself.

2. Probes - (for more details) based on topics that emerge from the narrative in 1.
3. Questions - based on topics that were not mentioned in narrative 1.