

# **Perceptions of parents concerning school violence in a secondary school in Alexandra**

**Maurious S. Mthimkhulu**

**Supervisor: Associate Professor Joseph Seabi**

**A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Educational Psychology in the faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg**

**University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2015**

**November 2015**

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this research report entitled “Perceptions of parents concerning school violence in a secondary school in Alexandra” is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education (Educational Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Maurious Mthimkhulu

## **DEDICATION**

For my grandmother, Thoko Selinah Skhosana, who is my primary caregiver and someone who immensely believed in and supported me in my academic journey that started in grade 1 and continues today. I thank God for your life, Gogo!

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge the great support that I was provided with while finishing this research report:

I am so grateful to Getti Mercurio, who is a father figure in my life and has always believed in my ability. He taught me that to believe in someone is to give that person an opportunity to believe in him or herself.

I would like to thank my mother, Martha Mtsweni, who was always there and would make sure that I got what I needed to complete my master's course.

I thank my supervisor, Prof Joseph Seabi, who was an inspiration and supported me. His constructive criticisms were helpful in bringing out the best in me.

I would like to thank the ten research participants who provided me with their time so that I could complete this study.

Lastly, I will always be grateful to God for providing me with the mind, body and spirit that led me to finish this research project. Definitely, in him, there is hope!

## **Abstract**

This research intended to explore the perceptions of parents concerning school violence in a secondary school in Alexandria. It was guided by the following questions, namely: (1) How has school violence affected learners? (2) What factors do parents think contribute to school violence? (3) What interventions do parents think are needed to address violence in schools? Because this was a qualitative study, an interpretive research paradigm was adopted in order to gain an in-depth understanding into the descriptions and information that the participants shared. Purposive sampling was chosen as a method of collecting data from the participants. The sample consisted of ten participants (parents of the learners) whose children were attending a selected high school in Alexandria. Two parents from each grade (grades 8 to 12) were selected. Participants' ages ranged from 30 to 65 years. The results revealed that many factors such as domestic violence in families were pivotal contributors to school violence. Peer pressure, substance abuse and a new generation with a new set of rights were also identified as the causes of school violence. Anger that has developed due to unfavourable home and community conditions was another trigger identified. Effects of school violence on the learners included concentration lapses in the classroom, bunking classes, academic decline and the internalisation of violent behaviour. Educators were also been identified to be affected by the school violence, this presented as loss of interest in the teaching profession and fearfulness in the teachers as well as behaviours associated with this fearfulness such as being cautious of their behaviour around learners. It is imperative that all stakeholders collaborate in addressing the problem of school violence. More research needs to be done so that society may understand the ways in which this violence can be avoided. Participants expressed that parents are willing to take part and be involved in addressing school violence, even though they think they do not have much to contribute.

### **Keywords**

*School violence, School Governing Body, Corporal punishment, Alexandria, Causes of violence, Township schools, Parent*

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# CHAPTER ONE

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Research gives evidence that school violence is a global phenomenon (Taole, 2013). In the United States of America (USA), it was found that the violence witnessed in the country has now spilled over into public schools. Research in the same country (USA) revealed that between 1992 and 1994, 76 students and 12 educators died from violence in schools (Yell, Drasgow & Rozalski, 1999). Countries such as Holland and Japan have also faced this challenge of school violence and have implemented security measures in an effort to ensure that learners and educators are safe at school (Taole, 2013). These findings have provided justification to research school violence in the South African context in order to understand it better.

South Africa is facing the problem of school violence, where schools are no longer a safe place where learning may be nurtured (Taole, 2013). Violence is not a new problem in South Africa; the apartheid system used young people in order to maintain its political agenda through the practice of directly and indirectly promoting violence in schools. Violence in schools should thus be understood in relation to the political history as well as the conditions of poverty and inequality that are seen today in South Africa (Vally, Dolombisa & Porteus, 1999). It is clear that both perpetrators and victims of school violence are both victims of the structural violence that has been shaped by the politics of the country.

De Wet (2009) argues that many schools have been transformed into a battleground where the safety of learners is no longer guaranteed. Burton (2008) suggests that in order to develop policy decisions and programs that deal with violence in schools, it is important to involve the parents of the learners so that they can contribute their knowledge. Because there is not enough research that has been conducted on this phenomena with parents, specifically in the targeted community (Alexandra), this research has explored the perceptions of parents concerning the violence that takes place in a secondary school in Alexandra. This community was chosen due to a number of psychosocial concerns and because of the prevalence of

violence in the area. The intention of the study was to gain insight regarding the causes and suggested solutions of school violence by its community members.

It is undeniable that violence in the South African schools is prevalent although the government has put in place intervention programmes to address it (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Quality learning cannot take place in an unsafe environment. Therefore school violence affects this process as it carries consequences such as: anxiety, depression, loneliness, social isolation, possible school dropout, withdrawal, and lack of concentration (Burton & Leoschut, 2012, Crawage, 2005, Maree, 2005, Nesor, 2006). In fact, school violence has been found to threaten learners of their constitutional right to education (Burton, 2008). It is clear that this phenomenon requires not only public opinions and media debate but also scientific insight with the hope of influencing the relevant existing structures and policies. It is hoped that this research will have some influence in this regard.

It is crucial to understand school violence from the perspectives of the various key players in the education system (Benbenishty, Astor & Estrada, 2008). Therefore parents are considered one set of role players that participate in the school system through the School Governing Body (SGB) structures (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004). The literature indicates that there is no extensive research that has been done on parents. Therefore this research intends to gain insight into the parents' perspectives with the hope of addressing some of the existing gaps in the literature on school violence.

## **1.2 Rationale**

South Africa has a long history of school violence (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Recently, South African media has highlighted images of violence in schools (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Headlines such as "Schools are war-zones" (Harber, 2001, p.262) and "Three die in school stabbings" (Mapumulo & Kotlolo, 2008, p.4) confirm that school violence is prevalent in South Africa. In a study conducted in 2012, it was reported that 22.2% of high school learners were found to have had been threatened with violence such as sexual assault and robbery (Burton & Leoschut, 2012).

Because parents are concerned about the safety of their children in schools (Furlong & Jimerson, 2006), it is important to explore the perceptions of the parents concerning school violence. Exploring parents' perceptions may help in understanding how school violence affects the learners and what factors contribute to violence in schools. It may also provide

relevant perspectives on how violence in schools can be dealt with based on the suggestions of the parents. This research report may help in raising awareness in the public sphere and ensure that parents' perceptions are taken into account during policy making and when programmes are designed to prevent violence in schools.

### **1.3 Research Aim**

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of parents concerning school violence in a secondary school in Alexandra Township. This study explored the parent's perceptions of how the violence that takes place in schools has affected learners. The focus was specifically on their perceptions of violence between learners in a selected school in Alexandra Township. It was aimed at understanding factors that contribute to school violence, and investigating which interventions would be appropriate for addressing school violence.

### **1.4 Research questions**

The following questions guided this study:

1. How has school violence affected learners?
2. What factors do parents think contribute to school violence?
3. What interventions do parents think are needed to address violence in schools?

### **1.5 Outline of the report**

This research report consists of five chapters, including an introductory chapter: a literature review, a chapter addressing research methods, a concurrent presentation of the results along with a discussion of the findings and a concluding chapter. The structure of the report is presented below.

**Chapter one:** provides a description of the aim, rationale and research question of this study. It further provides a description of the methods used as well as a summary of the study outcome.

**Chapter two:** explores the relevant literature with regard to the perceptions of parents about school violence. This chapter begins by providing a debate about the existing definitions of school violence. The levels of school violence globally and in the South African context are

illustrated. It then provides an understanding of violence in township schools. Learner-on-learner violence in schools is discussed, since it is a focus of this research, as are the effects of school violence on the victim learners and on the educators. The role of the parents in school safety is investigated. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, which is used to guide this study, is presented.

**Chapter three:** discusses in detail the research methods that are used to carry out this study. The context of the study, research design, sample and the data collection and data analysis procedures that are applied in this study are explained. Lastly, ethical considerations as well as reflexivity are included.

**Chapter four:** includes results and discussions of the themes that emerge from the ten participants, generated according to the thematic content analysis method.

**Chapter five:** evaluates the strengths and limitations of this study and presents the conclusions. Lastly, recommendations are given.

# CHAPTER TWO

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

Firstly, a number of definitions of school violence will be considered. Next, school violence as a phenomenon that occurs both globally and locally is explored. Thirdly, school violence specifically in the township locations is discussed. Fourthly, learner-on-learner violence at school is given attention. The effects of school violence on the educators and the learners are then examined in order to understand its level of severity. Parents' roles and that of educators in the school context are also examined. Lastly, the eco-systemic perspective is applied in order to holistically understand the school violence phenomenon.

### 2.2 School violence: What is it?

According to Nesor (2005), researchers and schools have in the past used a narrow definition of violence and this informed the way the public understood school violence. Such a narrow definition was used even though the phenomenon carried a number of elements and complexities when studied from numerous perspectives. A narrow definition excludes some of the aspects which are necessary to be part of the definition. Furlong and Morrison (2000) argue that there is no single definition that is inclusive enough, since the phenomenon of school violence has a number of facets. As school violence is a multifaceted phenomenon, researchers have come up with a number of definitions. Clark (2002), for example, has suggested that emerging definitions of school violence should be used as a way of investigating the phenomenon rather than as providing a description of emotional and physical behaviour.

Clark (2002, p.2) defines violence as “a movement that carries extreme force against somebody.”

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (WHO, 2002, p.5). This definition is widely used and is applicable and relevant to school violence, as violence also takes place in schools and among school stakeholders, such as learner-on-learner violence, teacher-on-learner violence, or learner-on-teacher violence. Jacobs (2014) argues that the abovementioned definition incorporates any use of psychological power or physical force with an intention of harming another individual either emotionally or physically. This definition also includes aspects such as manipulation as well as rejection, actions which, along with physical violence, can be seen during school times.

Owing to the complexity of this phenomenon, other researchers have understood it in various forms. Some of the forms are: sexual violence in schools, name-calling and sexual harassment (such as touching of private body parts, grabbing as well as pinching in a way that is sexual) (Jacobs, 2014). Weaver, Borkowski and Whitman (2008) argue that some forms of violence include the hitting, attacking, punching, and shooting of other learners.

However, for the purpose of this study, school violence is defined as “any type of violence, abuse, destructive behaviour, criminal behaviour, and any intentional verbal or physical act producing pain to the recipient of that act while the recipient is under the supervision of the school” ( De Wet, 2009, p.61).

## **2.3 School violence globally and in South Africa**

### **2.3.1 School violence globally**

School violence has globally been identified as a security problem (Van Jaarsveld, 2008). In 1978, the United States of America (USA) Congress released a school study report, which was its first statistical report on school violence. This official report indicated that approximately 282 000 learners are physically assaulted in secondary schools in the USA every month (Elliot, Hamburg & Williams, 1998). Scherz (2005) reports that school violence and its threats are among the significant contributing risk factors to public education in the USA. There also have been a number of mass school shootings in the USA. In one of these tragedies, 15 individuals died, including 12 students and one teacher, the two perpetrators

then committed suicide (Fegan, Wallace & Van Derbekeng, 1999). Nine mass shootings have taken place between 1996 and 1999 in the USA in its school yards, leading to the killing of 35 individuals, with a further 76 wounded (Fegan et al., 1999). The Centre for the Study and Prevention of School Violence in the USA reported that 16 000 violent crimes occur on a daily basis in school yards, resulting in one crime incident every six seconds (Fisher & Kettle, 2003). Between 1996 and 1998, the National Crime Victimization survey in the USA found that 1.3 million violent crimes were committed in schools and surrounding areas (Fischer & Kettle, 2003). In Switzerland, research indicates that one in ten boys are physically violent and are victims of physical violence, while a third of adolescent girls are perpetrators and victims of non-physical violence (Kuntche & Klingerman, 2004).

Unlike the USA, most countries do not collect national statistics on school violence. However, it is acknowledged that even though learners and schools are generally reluctant to report school violence, it remains prevalent. Shaw (2001, p.4) highlighted that learner and educator surveys and police reports showed “patterns of increases in school incidents and levels of insecurity over the past 10 years in countries like Canada, Australia, France, UK and South Africa”.

Research that was conducted (Gardner, Powell, Thomas & Millard, 2003, p.10) in Jamaica shows that “50% of the learners have been threatened with physical violence, while 22% have been victims of violence either once or several times, and 11% were victims of violence.” Violence in secondary schools in South Africa tends to be experienced by 43 learners in every 1000, as compared to five in every 1000 in the USA (Burton, 2008a). This statistic reflects a serious need for relevant interventions regarding school violence globally, but especially in South Africa.

### **2.3.2 School violence in South Africa**

There was a random killing of a 16 year old Jacques Pretorius by Morne Harmse with an Ornamental Samurai sword at the Technical High School Nic Diediricks on the West Rand in Gauteng in 2008 (Bailey, 2008).

The above quotation is a recorded example of one of the many incidents of violence in South African schools. Schools are situated in communities and their role is to ensure that effective learning takes place and that learners are socially and intellectually prepared and developed to be responsible community members in the future. They should also be in a position to develop their communities and the economy of the country. It is generally believed that schools are expected to be safe sites in which learners should be free from harm. Parents expect schools to be safe and peaceful environments for learning (Zulu, Urbani, Van der Walt & Van der Walt, 2004). The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) (1999, p.4) stipulates that a school is a safe place when learners can learn, develop and enjoy themselves and where educators can teach free from threats of violence and crime; human rights are respected and a culture of teaching and learning is developed. It also states that parents are welcomed for an exchange of ideas about learning and development; and the community can be involved and take joint responsibility for the learners through interactions with educators and parents via school governing body structures.

Based on the outlines above, a number of South African schools have not met these expectations, leading to a high level of uncertainty among community members about their learners' safety in school yards (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Violence stands in the way of effective learning and threatens to deny learners their constitutional right to education (Burton, 2008). Moreover, violence has become an everyday occurrence in South African schools (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012). Research shows that school violence is increasing, even though there are measures put in place to deal with the problem by the Department of Education (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). In addition, research shows that children who experience violence tend to resort to violence themselves (Frankel, 1993).

Hence, school violence continues to be on the rise. Violence that is seen among the learners in schools could thus be a result of continued exposure to violent members of the community during political conflict, harsh discipline at home and the acceptance of violence as a means of resolving conflict (Ward, 2007). One of the consequences of this phenomenon is that learners cannot study and realise their abilities in an environment that feels unsafe and no quality learning can take place in such an environment (Harber, 2001). Blaser (2008a) argues that unsafe feelings among learners create little success in learning, and this can result in difficulties in realising their full potential. The South African Human Rights Commission (2008, p.1) found that:

The environment and climate necessary for effective teaching and learning is increasingly undermined by a culture of school based violence and this is a matter of a national concern.

Television and newspaper reports highlight the increase of school violence, including incidents where learners assault and stab other learners (Ncontsa et al., 2013). The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) has found that South African schools are considered some of the most dangerous in the world (Baser, 2008). Burton (2008) found that 15.3% of school learners reported experiencing at least one violent incident in 2008. It was thus important to conduct this research in order to find ways of addressing this prevalent phenomenon in South Africa.

The CSVR (2013) reported that, owing to increasing public awareness and anxiety because of school violence, the Department of Education launched The Hlayiseka (Be Safe) project in 1997 and, more recently, the “Torch of Peace” project, which calls for learners, parents, community leaders, educators and police to play a role in and take responsibility for making schools a safe environment. Unfortunately, the majority of the victim learners do not necessarily report the incidents because they do not have faith in the police and feel that there is a lack of interest from authority figures. They are also sometimes scared of being hurt for reporting the violent incident (Burton, 2008).

On one hand, violence in schools is also perpetuated by educators who are unable to ensure effective discipline. Blaser (2008a) argued that an educator plays a role in maintaining the culture of violence in schools through corporal punishment even though this kind of discipline has been outlawed. Burton’s (2008a) research findings show that learners were physically beaten by the educators. On the other hand, educators experience violence from the learners. According to research that was conducted by Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2009) in the Pretoria region, educators who feel threatened stay away from or leave their schools and move to the schools they find safe. Mdhluli and Zwane (1995) listed a number of violent incidents experienced by educators that were perpetrated by the learners between January and July 1999, including: murder, armed robbery, stone throwing, name calling and beating. These findings clearly show that school violence affects both learners and the educators in the school environment and education system.

## **2.4 School violence in disadvantaged, township schools**

Alexandra has a vast number of characteristics that fall under those of a disadvantaged community. There is a high population density, poor infrastructure and many socioeconomic problems (Baskin, 2007). The infrastructure of Alexandra has been designed to carry 70 000 people; however, it has been estimated to carry 500 000 people, including those living in flats, hostels, houses and informally constructed shacks (Baskin, 2007).

In applying the ecological model, characteristics or situations in communities can be considered to have an effect on the people who live in those communities. This model indicates that violence that is witnessed in communities tends to perpetuate violence in schools. A community that possesses characteristics such as high levels of social disorganisation, violence and access to illegal firearms and substances increases the risk of learners being vulnerable to violence within their schools (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). According to Mncube and Harber (2012), communities that are disorganised are more susceptible to gang violence, thus drugs and weapons can be obtained in schools. Some learners may be part of the gangs in their communities and the drug dealers can often use them as a bridge to distribute drugs in schools (Mncube & Harber 2012). Based on this information, it is important to acknowledge that there are certain relevant factors in communities that have an effect on the emergence and sustenance of school violence.

South African township schools are dysfunctional because they are facing a number of challenges. Some of these challenges are poor quality teaching and learning, bureaucratic and ineffective leadership and management, poor state infrastructure and limited resources, low levels of parental participation, violence and negative social attitudes (Mafora, 2013, Mangena, 2012, Mokonyane, 2011, Pandor, 2006, Williams, 2011). Concerning violence in schools, it has been found that township secondary schools are especially vulnerable to violence (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012). Research that was conducted at the Western Cape township school found that violence in schools is gaining momentum (Ngqela et al., 2012).

The violence that is perpetuated in township schools evokes fear in the learners, which eventually prevents them from realising their utmost potential (Ngqela et al., 2012). Masitsa (2011) believes that South African townships schools are susceptible to violence. Finally, according to Shivakumar (1999), three educators were found dead in the South African township of Soweto. Based on the abovementioned township characteristics, the schools of

Alexandra are susceptible to school violence because they possess these characteristics that make their schools vulnerable to school violence.

## **2.5 Learner-on-learner violence at school**

In November 2012, an East Rand Grade 11 learner shot and killed a fellow learner whom he accused of bullying him (Servamus, 2013, p.1).

Learner-on-learner violence does take place in schools. Burton (2008) argues that violence among school learners is prevalent. A national study of school violence found that in nine out of ten cases of school violence, the perpetrator is a fellow student (De Wet, 2009). According to the research conducted by De Wet (2009), educators mostly witnessed learners being assaulted and threatened by their fellow students at their schools. Violence-related behaviour such as the carrying of weapons in order to harm others seems to be common among students, 11.97% of educators indicated that learners came to school armed (De Wet, 2009). In their research carried out in 2011, Burton and Leoschut (2012) found that violence between learners consists of 78.5% verbal abuse and 74.4% physical violence. They also found that 44.21% of learners reported the availability of weapons in schools. These research findings clearly show that violence is prevalent among learners.

## **2.6 The impact of school violence on learners and educators**

### **2.6.1 The impact of school violence on learners**

The impact of violence on learners is well documented. Burton and Leoschut (2010) concurred that learners who are victims of school violence are likely to experience anxiety, depression, loneliness and social isolation. Furthermore, the research found that such learners tended to experience a decline in their academic performance, a lack of concentration, a lack of interest in education and that they were at higher risk of dropping out of school. These effects show that learners' futures are affected by violence in schools. If youth continue to experience and are exposed to violence, it can lead to their perception of violence as an acceptable behaviour (Harber, 2001).

Burton (2008) states that some of the effects of violence on adolescents occur in their cognitive development, this manifests as negative effects on their intellectual development of. Allen (2005) believes that some of the effects experienced by victims of violence are low self-esteem and peer relationship difficulties. Other effects of school violence include feelings of withdrawal from others, anger, frustration and aggression, the long term effects of which feed into the cycle of violence (Burton, 2008, Crawage, 2005, Maree, 2005, Nesor, 2006). Finally, Nesor (2005) states that victims of violence tend to experience the school environment as unsafe, which could mean that such learners may attempt to either avoid or drop out of school in order to regain their sense of safety.

## **2.6.2 Impact of school violence on the educators**

Educators play a crucial role in the development of the learner's future as they spend much of their time teaching. Unfortunately, school-based violence has been found to threaten effective teaching because educators spend a large amount of time trying to resolve violence among the learners. Burton (2008) has found that educators feel unsafe in the schools because of this violence. Burton (2008) gathered data on the principals' and educators' views on school violence and found that verbal abuse in secondary schools amounted to as much as 59.7% and that 25% of secondary schools had educators that experienced physical abuse. Tait (2004) stated that violence against the educators was prevalent. Trakman (2010) confirmed that learner-on-educator violence was prevalent in his study. Burton (2008) agreed, indicating that learner-on-educator violence was found to be high in South African secondary schools. Educators are not dealing with minor transgressions of the learners but with criminal and violent acts (Masitsa, 2008). Some of the effects of this violence on educators includes post-traumatic stress disorder, bunking school and teaching and mood disturbances (SAHRC, 2008).

Educators can feel powerless and fearful, which can lead to aggression towards the learners (Crawage, 2005), which could further lead to educators' feelings of dissatisfaction in their work and emerging personal issues such as substance use (SAHRC, 2008). However, there is reluctance among educators to report it because they feel their lives might be in danger, owing to continuous threats that they receive. More concerning is that when they do report the incidents, often nothing is done to address the issues. Often, when they report these

violent incidences, they are indirectly made to feel as if they are incapable of resolving such issues and that they are to be blamed (SAHRC, 2008).

## **2.7 The role of stakeholders in preventing school violence**

A safe school can be defined as “a place where learners can learn and educators can teach in a warm and welcoming environment, free from intimidation and fear of violence” (Du Plessis, 2010, p.110). Stability and safety in schools have been identified as a collective responsibility that requires the participation of the parents, the school (including principals and educators), learners and members of the community (Perteson & Skiba, 2001). It is essential that school violence should be addressed so that learning can take place in a safe environment. The following stakeholders are identified as significant in addressing the school violence phenomenon.

### **2.7.1 The role of the parents in schools**

Children are born into a home where they receive their first education (i.e. the parents are the first educators). Formal schooling takes over the education from the home, where parents or guardians have laid down the foundation for their children’s development. In formal education, however, the parents arguably have a less direct role to play in their children’s education. Yet, because of the complex demands of modern society, it is important that parents support the formal education system, which would benefit the child and help them to meet societal demands. It is acknowledged by a number of researchers that formal schooling alone cannot address the difficulties of learning that the schools and the learners are experiencing (Quan-Baffour, 2006). Wolfendale (2000) argues that parental involvement in the education system comes with a variety of benefits, such as sustenance of learners’ school routines, provision of opportunities and involvement in school life. There is a lack of uniform definition of parental involvement. However it is understood as a combination of supporting student academic achievement and participating in school-initiated functions (Okeke, 2014, p. 1). The involvement of parents in the education system tends to promote a learning context that is conducive to the learners (Peterson and Skiba, 2001). This involvement can lead to learners’ academic success, low levels of suspension as well as educators’ and parents’ satisfaction (Perteson et al., 2001).

Positive working relationships between educators (including the principal) and parents can influence positive behaviour among the learners. The Noordegesig Primary School deputy principal stated that educators were faced with various challenges, which impacted on the quality of teaching. Therefore this issue requires parental involvement at school (Sowetan, 2015). Good policies can be implemented by the government to address school violence, alcohol and other behavioural problems. However, these policies can only be successful if the education system involves the parents in addressing these issues (Wolfedale, 2000).

Owing to the awareness of the role that can be played by the parents in the school system, the South African Government has introduced the school governing body (SGB) to help support the formal education system. The SGB is the legal body that is responsible for the improvement of the overall policies, intentions and the vision of the school (DoE, 1997). Under the apartheid system, the school governing body was made up of a few parents and the principal (Nyambi, 2005). In the new democratic society, the SGB consists of learners (from grade 8 upwards), educators, non-educator staff, the school manager, as well as the majority of the parents in the school (Nyambi, 2005). According to Lemmer and van Wyk (2004), the parents' role in the school was seen as paying school fees, fundraising as well as attendance of school events, but they had little to say in the operation of school and its management. In the democratic era through the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA), one of the functions of the SGB is to promote non-violence in schools (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The SGB structure provides an opportunity to the learners, the parents, those from the community, educators and the principal to bring their ideas together with the purpose of preventing violence in the school.

### **2.7.2 The role of educators in schools**

Educators are as significant as the learners in a school environment. The school system cannot exist without the learners, neither can it exist without the educators (Akinsola, 2010). Hence educators play a significant role in the lives of the learners as they spend most of the time with them. Educators are given the responsibility of providing a conducive context and safe environment that fosters a good quality of education (Akinsola, 2010). Educators are liable for the care and supervision of learners during school hours (Du Plesis, 2010). Even though educators have to shoulder this responsibility, fear of their learners can compromise this process, and this needs attention (Bender & Emslie, 2010). Some of the educators' roles

involve establishing a parents-educators association, maintaining school policies and encouraging learners to involve themselves in sports activities.

Educators must behave appropriately (Akinsola, 2010). The literature has found that as much as some educators are perpetrators of violence, some are victims of abuse from the learners. This issue needs to be addressed so that a new and positive experience can emerge for the purpose of positive collaboration (Wilson, 2013).

## **2.8 Theoretical Framework: Eco-systemic perspective**

### ***Ecological theory***

Ecological theory was developed by Bronfenbrenner in order to understand the interactional patterns that influence the behaviour of the individual (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). According to this theory, different organisms and levels of social environments influence the development of the individual (Donald et al., 2010). This theory was appropriate for this study as it has helped the researcher to understand the various social structures inside and outside of communities that can influence the development and sustenance of violence in schools. Taking into account the history of violence in the country, South Africa has been exposed to a variety of factors that may have contributed to school violence (Pahad, 2009). Astor, Pitner and Duncan (1996) state that ecological concerns form a large part of the reasons for violence, especially in disadvantaged urban communities. According to this theory, there is no single factor that influences an individual to become violent. Hence, the cause(s) of school violence is/are the interaction of the unique individual with biological factors, the family, the school and the community (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002). These interactions influence all the different parts of each system. Since this study was conducted in the multifaceted community of Alexandra, this approach was well suited for understanding how a variety of factors might have contributed to school violence among the learners.

From an eco-systemic perspective, the way adolescent learners behave and develop will firstly be influenced by their interaction with school staff members, peers, family members and community members. Secondly, the internal attributes of a child and the external barriers that are found in the system's environment (such as home or school) continuously develop

and interact with each other, which has an impact on the child's development (Bender & Emslie, 2010).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), there are four levels of systems, which are nested environment systems with bi-directional influence within and between systems (Bender & Emslie, 2010). These interactional patterns that influence the individual's development are the micro-, meso-, exo-, Macro- and chrono-systems.

### **Micro-system**

This system includes the relationships an individual has with his/her immediate surroundings. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, p.22), a micro-system "is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics". This system includes roles and interpersonal relations such as family, friends, schools or social clubs. The following are some of the micro-factors that influence learners to engage in violent behaviour:

- ***Family factors***

The family system has been identified as playing a significant role in making children susceptible to the risks of violence, victimisation and the perpetration of violence (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). The family institution has the ability to teach a child what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, based on the influence it possesses. Furthermore, a child can model behaviour from a significant other in the family. Havelin (2000) agrees that violence is a learned behaviour by the child from the parent as a means to resolve conflict. The family institution has been found to influence the youth toward violent behaviour based on family characteristics such as a low socio-economic status, family social isolation and parental conflict (Gouws, Kruger & Burger, 2000). These factors can lead parents to being preoccupied, which can eventually lead to their children's emotional needs being ignored (Bezuidenhout, 2008). Furthermore, alcoholism and mental issues in the home institution have been found to create aggression in the child (Randall, 2006). Criminal behaviours in the family have been found to make children susceptible to violent behaviour (Almond, 2008).

It has also been found that children who grow up in single-parent homes have an increased risk of being vulnerable to violence compared to children who grow up in a two-parent home (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). According to Roman (2011), single mothers have been perceived

as ineffective parents as they might lack support or may have more responsibilities compared with married couples. However, this is not entirely true. Roman's (2011) research comparing the children's perceptions of maternal parenting in single and married parent-headed families showed no significant difference in either group of children. This finding shows that all family structures can have good or bad parenting.

- ***Peer factors***

Burton and Leoschut (2012) argue that peer pressure is one of the significant risk factors for violence in schools. Prinsloo and Naser (2007) show that peer victimisation is identified as a universal phenomenon. The adolescent is susceptible to being influenced by other adolescents (Burton et al., 2012). This influence can be either a negative or positive influence. Valois, MacDonald, Bretous, Fischer and Drane (2002) stated that adolescents who are exposed to peers who engage in antisocial behaviour also learn to behave antisocially. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2010) stated that an adolescent who is part of a peer group that enforces aggression is more likely to contribute to the violence. Hence, peer influence on adolescent learners is one of the causal factors of violence in schools. Burton et al. (2012) found that peer influence not only teaches adolescents to engage in violent behaviour, but it makes victims of other children if their peers are involved in delinquent behaviour.

- ***School factors***

Ecological theory describes a school as a micro-system in which the adolescent learner spends most of his/her time engaging with the educators and peers in a way that helps construct the system. This means that conditions, norms and social relationships in the school setting can make learners susceptible to school violence. For example, if the school does not have suitable preventive measures of school violence, this can lead to the occurrence of school violence (Moore, Petrie, Braga & Mclaughlin, 2003). Donald et al. (2010) argue that some of the school characteristics that lead to violence in schools are poor achievement both in school and externally (community), bad experiences, a poor sense of belonging in the school context and poor structures and policies that deal with school violence.

According to the research of Burton and Leoschut (2012), corporal punishment in South African schools continues to be used even though it has been abolished as a means of effective discipline and is one of the contributing factors to violence in schools. Maree (2000)

mentions that the term “corporal punishment” emerges from the Latin words *poena* (penalty and loss) and *corpus* (matter, substance and body). According to Van Wyk (2001, p.196), the official prohibition of corporal punishment by the South African government was received with mixed feelings from both educators and parents. It was found that the majority of parents preferred educators to use corporal punishment as a means of discipline when addressing misconduct in the learners (Mabeba & Prinsloo, 2001). In South Africa, the Child Act of 2005 and Section 10 of the South African Schools Act of 1996 was drafted to protect students against mental and physical harm (DoE, 2005). Corporal punishment was seen as acceptable behaviour, especially when directed at younger, weaker children, which eventually increased an overall culture of school violence among learners (Maree, 2009).

### **Meso-system**

The meso-system may be understood as the pattern of interactions and relationships between two or more micro-systems in which the individual participates (Astor, Pitner & Duncan, 1996). Moreover, the meso-system consists of relationships between micro-systems, such as family and school institutions (Taole, 2013). From this, it can be deduced that what takes place in the home institution will affect how the learner responds in the school setting. In terms of school violence, this system postulates that the relationships between family members, friends, intimate partners and colleagues may make an individual vulnerable (Krug et al., 2002). Children who are exposed to a stressful home environment and have no support are usually vulnerable to school violence (Astor et al., 1996). Indeed, lack of parental involvement in the child’s life can exacerbate the risks of school violence, leading to a poor relationship between the school and the perpetrator’s parents (Chisholm & Ward, 2005). Peer influence can promote values that are in contradiction to that of family values. This can eventually lead to gang involvement and violence in schools (Miller & Krauss, 2008).

### **Exo-system**

Exo-systems are clusters and processes of the social environments in which individuals do not directly participate, but are affected by; for example, this system may include people that might have a proximal relationship with the individual such as a friend’s siblings and parents (Taole, 2013). In terms of this research, exo-systems refer to the community characteristics that indirectly influence the learner to be violent.

Community factors have been identified as playing a significant role in influencing individuals of those communities. Burton and Leoschut (2012) state that community factors such as substance abuse, exposure to violent crime and disorganisation are some of the community characteristics that make learners susceptible to violence. Bemak and Keys (2000) stated that other contributing factors are inadequate housing, a high unemployment rate and poor socio-economic status. Other community factors include the high availability of weapons and substance use in the school setting (An Overview of School-based violence in South Africa, 2011). Maree (2003) states that gang violence that emerges in the community is also a contributing factor to violence in schools. Gang violence in South Africa is on the increase, especially in disadvantaged communities, and it has been found to involve youth. Economic issues and identity needs are some of the reasons for the existence of gang violence (Donald et al., 2010).

### **Macro-system**

The macro-system refers to the social structures and beliefs of the above mentioned systems (Pahad & Graham, 2012). Bronfenbrenner (1979, p.26) refers to this system as the “consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, exo-systems) that exist or could exist at the level of subculture as a whole along with only belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies”. This system is premised upon the idea that societal value, economy, the laws, the media and religion are structures that influence the individual. In other words, these structures and cultures in societies that disadvantage a learner may cause him/her to be more susceptible to school violence.

Maree (2008) argues that children that grow up in a culture of survival can lead them to perceive violence as normal and acceptable behaviour. A culture of violence in societies can result in acts of violence among the youth (De Wet, 2007a). Media reports can also be influenced by this culture of violence, which can perpetuate violent behaviour in societies (Bemark & Keys, 2000). Children can model this behaviour that is displayed by significant others. Role models like politicians who engage in violent behaviour can influence individuals to practise such behaviour (Van Jaarsveld, 2008).

### **Chrono-system**

The last system is called chrono-system, which deals with alteration and consistency over time in both the individual and the environment in which an individual lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Some of these alterations are unemployment, residences (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) and family institutions, and may include events such as the death of a family member, which can result in violence (Ryan & Paquette, 2001).

Child development in terms of physical, intellectual and community characteristics, which are associated with time alteration, play an influential role (Flores, 2005). The adolescent in particular is vulnerable to violent behaviour (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Younger adolescents are considered less vulnerable compared to the older ones (Maree, 2008).

Time alterations, which continue to influence society, play a role in constructing violent societies. Violence in South Africa is one of the legacies of the apartheid system (Mncube & Harber, 2012). This system constituted systemic violence, which resorted to physical violence in order to perpetuate racial oppression (Van Der Merwe, 2013). Van Der Merwe (2013) argues that violence has thus been used as a political strategy in order to address conflict, which is harmful to all concerned. Although the apartheid era is over, violence is still rife in South Africa (Harber, 2001). This example shows how time-bound national activities continue to influence current societal structures.

A study that was conducted in South Africa in 2007, 36 children were involved, the study aimed to understand the children's perceptions of violence in their neighbourhood. The study found that violence made children feel disempowered and fearful, while perpetrators were viewed as gaining power through their use of violence (Parkes, 2007). Alteration of society has been identified to have an effect on the education system and the learners (Van Jaarsveld, 2008).

## **2.9 Summary of the Literature Review**

The literature review provides significant insight regarding school-based violence. It suggests that this phenomenon is not only prevalent but is on the rise. It thus needs urgent attention so that formal schooling will continue to be effective in enforcing its vision of building society. A number of factors were identified as the contributing factors. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory was used to bring those factors together and give a holistic picture of the causes of

school-based violence. While studies have been conducted on the views of the learners and educators regarding school violence, little is known about the parents' perceptions. The gap in the research will be addressed in chapter four.

# CHAPTER THREE

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## Methods

### 3.1 Context of the study

Alexandra Township is situated 13 kilometres away from the centre of Johannesburg, found in the North-Eastern suburbs. It was established in 1912 (during the apartheid system) as a black settlement in order to serve the white race that was situated around the area (Human Sciences Research Council, 2003). Bonner and Nieftagodien (2008) state that many of the Alexandra residents came from rural places in search of job opportunities. This township has been found to have a high level of crime and has been called a “university of crime” (Langa, 2012, p103). This name comes from the fact that Alexandra is considered a place in which many individuals learn how to commit crime, which, according to residents, is a way of survival in the midst of these difficulties (Langa, 2012).

Alexandra many social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, crime, poor electricity supply, child neglect and women’s abuse (Morris, 2000). Baskin (2007) confirms that Alexandra is a community with a multitude of social problems. As mentioned above, many researchers believe that a disadvantaged community tends to experience violence, which is often reflected in the schools (Eliasov & Frank, 2000). The township of Alexandra and its schools thus are characterised, among other things, by violence. Although other psychosocial problems are prevalent in this community, it was important to explore the problem of school violence from the perceptions of the parents that live in Alexandra Township.

### 3.2 Research design

A research design is defined “as a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research question and the implementation of the research” (Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter, 2008, p.34). A qualitative research approach was used in order to explore and

provide descriptions of the perceptions of parents of the children concerning school violence in the secondary schools in Alexandra. An interpretive research paradigm was adopted in order to gain an in-depth understanding and provide a clear description of what participants shared. The interpretive paradigm is defined as the “understanding of the meanings of human actions and experiences, and generating accounts of their meaning from the viewpoints of those involved” (Fossey, Harvey, McDemont & Davidson, 2002). It is note that the interpretive paradigm takes into account how human beings construct social meaning (Fossey et al., 2002).

### **3.3 Participants**

Sampling may be defined “as a selection of the research participants from the entire population which requires decisions about people, settings, events and behaviour to observe” (Terre Blanche et al., 2008, p.49). This study used non-probability purposive sampling when recruiting participants because this enabled one to explore the quality of the information received from the participants (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). By using purposive sampling, this study has focused on interviewing only the parents of the learners at the secondary school. Approximately ten research participants were required for this study. Only participants who live in Alexandra, have a low socio-economic status and are the parents of the learners were asked to participate. Participants’ ages were approximately between 30 – 65 years, as the researcher was focusing on interviewing parents whose children attended secondary school. The participants mean age was 44.1 years. The research focused on interviewing parents whose children were both perpetrators and victims of school violence. The children of the parents were between 14 – 20 years.

### **3.4 Procedure**

The Gauteng Department of Education was contacted and the researcher requested permission to conduct research in the selected government school, which was granted. A letter was distributed to the principal of the selected school explaining the nature of the study and asking permission to access parents and also to use their premises during interview sessions. After permission was granted, the researcher attended the parents’ committee meeting, explaining the nature of this study to the parents. Interested participants were then given an opportunity to volunteer to participate in the study. The researcher then collected

the contact details from the participants so that he could later call the participants to arrange for an interview to take place on the school premises. Suitable times were arranged with the participants. Before the interview started, informed consent and consent to record the interview was obtained from the participants. These consent forms were translated by the researcher to ensure that the participants understood them.

### **3.5 Semi-structured interviews**

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. One of the reasons this method was chosen was that it provided an opportunity for the participants to openly express their perceptions of school violence. Interviews are conversations that mimic everyday thoughts through a series of questions and answers. As is normal practice, the conversations were arranged by the researcher, as the researcher had clear intentions and wanted to hear and learn about the participants' lived reality and experiences regarding school violence (Greenstein, Roberts & Sitas, 2003). Semi-structured interviews thus involve a particular list of issues or topics to be answered through the use of guided interviews as well as open-ended questions, which motivate the participants to express their subjective views. This type of interview is thus flexible in nature (Bailey, 2007). The construction of the interview was guided by the research questions. These research questions were firstly influenced to answer the aim of the study. The questions used were taken from previous studies on school violence which were carried out in contexts similar to Alexandra.

These interviews were tape-recorded because recording helps preserve accurate information in language (Legord, Keegsn & Ward, 2003). Each interview was conducted for approximately an hour, depending on the interviewee's needs and owing to the fact that the researcher was interested in receiving enough data to answer the research questions. These interviews were conducted in three languages, namely English, isiZulu and Setswana, which are the languages that are mainly used by the community members of Alexandra and are spoken by the researcher.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Mouton (2001, p.108) defines data analysis as the "breaking up of data into smaller manageable themes, patterns, trends, and relationships." Because this study aimed to explore

the themes that emerged from the parents of the learners concerning school violence, the researcher applied thematic content analysis. Thus, once the interviews had been conducted, the researcher transcribed the data into text (Maxwell & Starke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) define thematic content analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.” It is further understood that this type of analysis provides rich detail when interpreting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This kind of analysis helped the researcher to capture descriptions of the parents’ subjective perceptions and meanings of school violence (Ary, & Jacobs, 2008). It is important to acknowledge that this type of analysis was based on flexibility rather than on rigid rules, which are found in quantitative analyses (Ary et al., 2008). Because thematic content analysis is suitable for qualitative data analysis (Braun et al., 2006), it provided rich data when analysing the perceptions of the parents concerning school violence.

As particular themes were evident in data once it was put into text, thematic content analysis was utilised so that the important themes were maintained (Maxwell et al., 2006). The themes that were considered crucial based on the subjective perceptions of the parents were grouped together and became part of the research report.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six phases in the step-by-step process of thematic content analysis, which will be explained below. All six phases in this study were used when analysing the data.

#### I. Immerse yourself within the data

This phase was adopted to describe the researcher’s immersion into the data. This immersion was conducted through transcribing, which took many hours, and reading and re-reading the written data many times in order to make sure that the breadth and depth of the content was sufficiently understood. The researcher took notes and identified ideas of code marking in preparation for the following phase (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006).

#### II. Generating initial coding

This phase generated initial coding from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher coded the features of the data based on what was important to answer the research questions. Coding refers to “the creation of categories in relation to data; the grouping together of different instances of datum under an umbrella term that can enable them to be regarded as of the type” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p.159). The researcher coded the data using the inductive

approach in order to identify themes that emerged from the data itself. This coding was conducted manually, with equal attention given to all the transcribed material.

### III. Searching for potential themes

The beginning of phase three is the sorting out and collating of different codes into potential themes (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The potential themes, together with the sub-themes from the coded material, were identified (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The main themes that were identified were the complex definition of school violence, triggers for violent behaviour, effects of school violence, parents' relationship with the school and the proposed interventions in addressing school violence.

### IV. Reviewing themes

This phase involved reviewing the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), including the reviewing and refining of the themes and sub-themes with the purpose of providing a meaningful, coherent pattern (Braun et al., 2006).

### V. Defining and naming themes

This phase involved further refinement and definition of the themes identified at a satisfactory level. The researcher was able to do this with the purpose of capturing the essence of the data it represented (Braun et al., 2006). The names given to the themes and sub-themes were concise, in order to help the reader to immediately make sense of what the themes were about (Braun et al., 2006).

### VI. Report writing

After the themes and sub-themes had been clearly worked through, the researcher did a final analysis and wrote up the report (Braun et al., 2006). The analysis was concise, coherent and logical. Sufficient evidence from the data was provided in justifying the analysis in the report.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

The researcher requested permission from the Gauteng Department of Education and the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC-Non-Medical) at the University of the Witwatersrand, which was granted. This research was conducted in accordance with the protocols and procedures specified by the HREC-Non-Medical and the Department of Education.

In order to maintain ethical practice, the researcher informed the participants that they were not obliged to participate in the study, that at any time they could withdraw their consent, that they have a right to anonymity and that their names would not appear in the final report. The consent form that was signed by the participants informed them that interviews were to be recorded for data collection and would form part of a research report. They were told that confidentiality will be ensured and that they could refuse to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with. Owing to the sensitivity of the research topic, participants were told that they should provide only their views of the violence that takes place in schools. They should not disclose any specific event(s) or name(s) of learners who might be perpetrators or victims of the violence, otherwise the researcher would be obliged to report the incidents. However, this obligation would depend on a variety of factors, including whether or not it would be beneficial and if the participant agreed then it should be reported. It should be mentioned that the purpose of this research was to investigate school violence from the perceptions of the parents, which could eventually influence the policies and prevention programmes of violence in schools. The participants were informed that research findings would be submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand and that they could obtain a copy of the research report from the Wits library. Participants were informed that audiotapes would be transcribed and processed by the researcher. They were also told that all audiotapes, type transcripts and other personal documents will be held in a secure place for five years and thereafter will be destroyed.

Finally, participants were informed that, should any participant(s) suffer psychological distress as a result of the participation of this study, contact details of relevant and free counselling services would be provided. In the event of psychological distress, participants would be given a letter of referral and assistance in contacting these counselling services on request.

### **3.8 ISSUES OF REFLEXIVITY**

Qualitative research embraces the subjectivity of the researcher in analysing data, which is in contrast to quantitative research, which embraces objectivity. In qualitative research, it is important that the researcher is aware of his/her own values, beliefs, experiences and social identity, because they may influence the research and data analysis (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). This awareness, which contributes to the construction of meaning and the whole research process, is called reflexivity (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006).

Eagle, Hayes and Sibande (2006) argue that social researchers' demographic and personal attributes play a role in the research analysis and compilation of the research report. The researcher acknowledges that his age, race, economic class, education level, location, gender and the fact that he is multilingual and can speak a number of languages that are spoken by the participants might have influenced the research and data analysis.

Because the researcher is black, lives in the same area (Alexandra) and shares the low-economic class of the participants, the researcher may not have been totally objective in the data collection and analysis processes. In addition, the participants became too comfortable in disclosing information, as it was easy for them to trust the researcher, to whom they felt they could relate. Even though the researcher was asking the participants questions in English, they were answering in their mother tongue (indigenous languages) because of the assumption that the researcher could understand their languages. However, the researcher was given an advantage in that he was receptive to the participants' thoughts.

The educational level of the researcher might to some extent have influenced the interview, as many of the participants were illiterate and only two had undergraduate degrees. One participant said, "I am not sure if I can provide you with good answers... I am not educated... you are the one who's educated..." There is a possibility that gender differences might have also impacted the interview sessions. Most participants were females, who would bring along either their children or friends to the interview location. This phenomenon could be an indication that there might have been some fear of the researcher due to his gender. The researcher acknowledges how he might have influenced the research process because of his subjectivity; however, the supervisor's thoughts were considered in addressing the issues of concern.

Finally, Taylor (2001) states that the researcher's identity influences which particular research topic he/she would like to do. The researcher acknowledges that he has chosen this

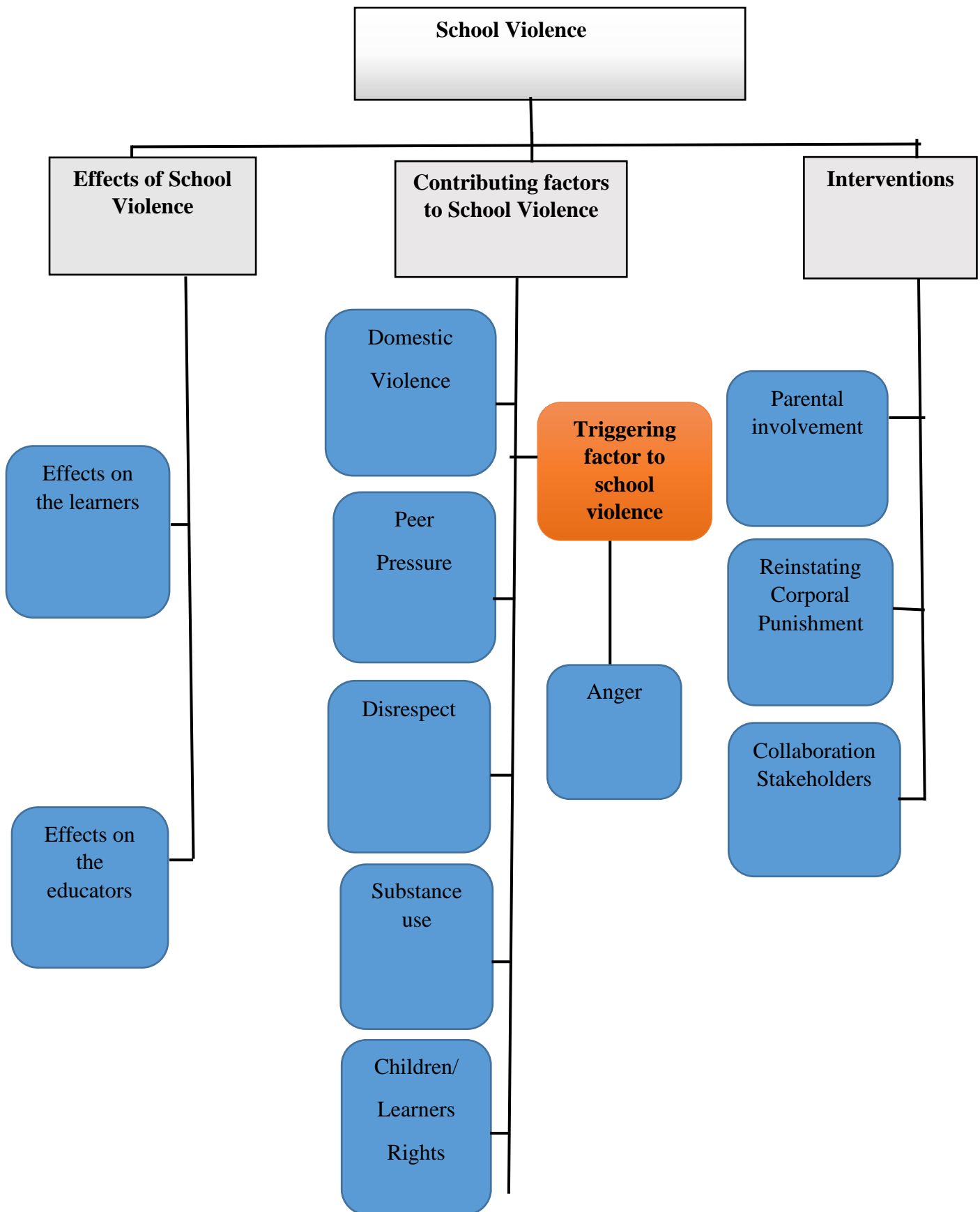
specific topic based on his experiences in the community of Alexandra, as he would read, hear about and witness the prevalence of school violence in the community. Hence, the researcher developed an interest in studying this topic.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### **Results and Discussions**

In this chapter the research findings are presented concurrently with a discussion. Several themes emerged under the research questions: 1) effects of school violence on the learners; 2) contributing factors to school violence; and 3) proposed interventions to address school violence. The themes that emerged were structured according to major and sub-themes. One particular theme, which is not related to the research questions emerged and it was included because of its significance. Verbatim quotations from the interviews are presented. A diagram of the themes that emerged from the results of this study are presented in Figure 1



**Figure 4. 1: Themes that emerged from a study of school violence**

## **4.1 Effects of school violence**

The first question in this study explored the effects of school violence on the learners. The participants identified the effects of school violence on themselves, however they also identified effects on the educators as significant themes.

### **4.1.1 Effects on the learners**

The participants expressed their concerns on the effects of school violence on learners. They expressed that school violence hindered academic development. Half of the participants believed that school violence involved the stabbing and killing of other learners. It results in a decline in academic performance, bunking of school lessons, dropping out of school and the internalisation of violent behaviour, as illustrated by the quotations below:

*“These children can kill themselves” (participant 4)*

*“I heard that a learner killed another learner at the school” (participant 10)*

*“How can our children go to school knowing that they will be stabbed....of course they will lose interest” (participant 1)*

*“I think our children don’t want to go to school because they might be stabbed” (participant 4)*

Consistent with the current findings, Van der Weisthuizen and Maree (2009) found that the stabbing and killing of learners is prevalent in the school environment. Subsequent fears among the learners lead to psychological distress, poor academic performance, bunking classes, feelings of helplessness and feeling unsafe in the school environment (Bulbulia, Masuku, Seedat, Stevens, Van Niekerk, Van Der Walt, & Wynggard, 2000). Based on the current findings it seems that learners who are victims of school violence find themselves in a helpless situation as they may feel that no one can rescue them since educators and parents feel powerless and vulnerable to effectively address school violence themselves (Mncube, Harber & Du Plessis, 2011). Learners may subsequently be absent from school or bunk classes in order to avoid being bullied and feeling unsafe in the school environment. This will have a negative impact on academic results.

Participants 6, 8, 9 and 10 stated that school violence has a negative effect as it makes learners perform poorly at school. Educators and parents easily blame these learners because they are expecting them to perform well so that they can have a better future. Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004) mention that parents' reason to send their children to school is in order to secure a better future. School violence is however hindering academic performance. This is evident in the following extracts:

*“This school violence that we hear in schools make our children not to do well at school...and that is not good” (participant 9)*

*“Our children are failing because of this school violence... we do want our children to have a better future but this thing called violence is making them not to do well in their school work” (participant 7)*

Educators have also been identified as having a negative impact on the learners. This negative impact may lead learners to quit school due to the violence perpetrated on them by the educators. Van der Walt and Maree (2010) confirm that some of the effects of school violence on the learners are high rates of absenteeism and dropping out of school. The following quotes provide evidence:

*“These educators also make these learners to quit because they are violent...am telling you I know of children here in Alexandra who quit school because they are saying educators were punishing them harshly” (participant 10)*

*“I am telling you...our children quit because of other learners and educators who beat them” (participant 8)*

All of the participants suggested that school violence makes children violent as they seem to learn such behaviour in order to address their conflicts. The majority expressed that it's not only violence that leads to such behaviour but also violence that learners witness in their communities and this makes them address violence with violence.

*“I can tell you today that what is happening at school...I am talking about this violence...these children learn it...and we must not be shocked when we see them in the future being violent”*(participant 3)

*“I know that our community is violent...and they teach these kids to be violent as well just like school...mhhh Our children learn violence that is why they will be violent even tomorrow”* (participant 2)

Half (50%) of the participants suggested that violence leads learners to bunk school and classes. Parents are not on the school premises as some are working while others are preoccupied with their household’s duties. Hence, they are not exposed to what takes place at school on a daily basis. This suggestion was supported by the following participant:

*“Parents are at home...like me I don’t know what is going on right now at school...but maybe my child is bunking classes...I don’t know...but I am telling you it’s this violence that is the cause”* (participant 1)

*“Our children will tell you that they are going to the school. But you will be surprised when their class teacher tells you that they were not in school... I know it’s because of this violence. We have many children here in our community who are no longer going to school because of this violence. We as parents are worried because if they bunk and drop out of school because school is the future. I didn’t go to school but if they quit what does that mean... I don’t know”* (participant 8)

To verify the current findings, parental involvement has been found to be poor in the schools of disadvantaged communities (Singh & Mbokodi, 2004). This poor involvement can make parents be unaware of what takes place in school such as when learners bunk school. However, they can be aware of this if they see learners during school hours walking around in the township.

Social Learning Theory states that humans learn and adopt behaviour from their significant others (Bandura, 1977). The culture of violence that has been found to be prevalent in South African societies and in schools continues to prevail despite measures put in place by the government to address it because some learners perceive it as normal and as a means to resolving their conflicts and they adopt it (Van der Merwe, 2010). Based on the above

mentioned, one can hypothesise that a lack of good role models in the children's lives is a contributing factor to the violence that has been accepted as normal because learners are exposed to role models that engage in violence.

Participants 1 and 3 mentioned that learners lose concentration in the classroom because of their fear of being threatened and assaulted by other learners. They expressed that these learners are afraid during class periods knowing that the perpetrators will be waiting for them during the school break. The participants went on to say that it was impossible for these learners to understand what the educators were teaching if they could not concentrate and were fearful, thus these learners would not pass the grade:

*"I am sure these children are not concentrating in the classroom because they know they will be beaten during the school break" (participant 1)*

*"How can these learners pass if they can't concentrate?...I don't think they will pass the grade because they are scared" (participant 3)*

In support of these statements, De Wet (2006) states that school violence can affect learners, causing them to lose concentration in the classroom. Crawage (2005) mentioned that loss of concentration was seen among the learners as being due to school violence. Fear of being threatened and assaulted by the perpetrators has a negative effect on the victims' concentration in the classroom. Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) found that victims of peer violence are preoccupied by fear of what is to happen after the class period or during the break and this affects their concentration in the classroom. This mental disturbance may cause academic decline and possibly dropping out of school as a means to resolving the problem. This may be perpetuated by poor parental involvement as participant 3 stated that parents in the community of Alexandra don't want to involve themselves on school matters and this affects learners' schooling. Parental involvement in communities with low socio-economic status has been found to be poor in schools (Singh, Mbokodi, & Msila, 2004). Hence, victims of violence in schools in the community of Alexandra might be left feeling vulnerable and eventually fail the grade and possibly drop out of school as a means of escape.

### 4.1.2 Effects on the educators

The participants expressed that educators are also affected by the violence that happens in school. Even though this research was focused on understanding the effects of school violence on learners, the participants' highlighted the importance of understanding the impact on educators, since educators are part of the school structure and interact with learners on a daily basis. Some of the effects that were mentioned by the participants are that educators may feel helpless, fearful, stressed, unsupported, inexperienced, may lose interest in teaching and were physically beaten by the learners. Educators are affected in many diverse ways by school violence. Some participants mentioned that school educators experienced difficulties and could not intervene in addressing violent behaviour among the learners because they were fearful of what these learners could do to them. Educators were described as afraid of being threatened and assaulted by the learners if they intervened during learner to learner school violence. The following participants' extracts demonstrate this:

*“Educators have a fear to resolve conflicts among these learners because they're fearful for their lives. These children are not scared of these educators” (participant 4)*

*“These educators are scared to stop the learners who are fighting because these children can turn against them....and who will help these educators when that happens... no one” (participant 10)*

Half of the participants mentioned that educators are consistently distressed and this makes them feel demotivated and lose interest in the education profession as they feel the school environment is unsafe. This feeling makes educators cautious of their behaviour when around the learners as the threat to be beaten up is real. This is indicated by the following extracts:

*“These educators are always stressed...they are because they feel these schools are not safe” (participant 2)*

*“The learners sometimes beat the educators” (participant 9)*

*“You will see that these educators don’t feel safe at school because our children beat them so they must always be careful how they behave next to our children because they can get a clap...you know, these schools are not safe” (participant 5)*

*“I am sure that these educators want to quit teaching because of what is going on in these schools...and they are always stressed” (participant 1)*

*“These educators are worried and want to quit because it’s not easy on them’ (participant 10)*

One participant believed that this stress led to situations where the educator’s family was affected by the stress that the educator brought home from school.

*“The educators are always stressed... this affects their families because they take this stress to their homes. You find that their children suffer because mommy is stressed. This thing is not good. Educators need our help so that they can enjoy teaching” (participant 2)*

Similarly, Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2010) found that educators were fearful that the learners could assault them if they intervened among the learners who engaged in violence. They felt that they were in a disempowered situation which could also make them feel they were wasting their time teaching such learners. Educators possibly felt that they were not receiving enough support from the parents, the community and relevant government institutions (Burton 2008), and felt helpless to tackle this situation on their own. This feeling can make them to be demotivated and lose interest in their profession. Burton and Leoschut (2012) found that lack of parental involvement and relevant structures discouraged educators from doing their work at school which could be a reason educators felt like quitting their profession. Van der Walt and Maree (2010) stated that because of the unsafe and hostile school environment, educators had a strong wish to leave their teaching profession. Vettenberg (2002) found that educators feeling unsafe in the classroom and on school premises led to a lack of commitment to their educational activities. The distress that educators experienced on a daily basis which was driven by fear could be the reason they might feel like quitting their profession. Hence, the lack of security in school premises could be a contributing factor to the decision to leave their jobs (Van Jaarsveld, 2008).

The participants perceived that educators' personal lives were affected by the effects of school violence. The literature found that educators' personal lives were affected by school violence (SAHRC, 2008). Educators' families might be affected by the consistent stress and fear which is caused by school violence. Disempowerment of educators in school due to violence can cause them to be aggressive (Crawage, 2005). The lack of support and counselling might mean that these educators will vent out their stress and aggression on their families at home and this can further create other problems. When adults in the home feel emotionally drained they may lack the physical and emotional resources to supervise their children and this leads to a cycle of other psychosocial challenges.

Although participant 5 agrees with the above, (educators want to stop teaching because they do not feel safe at schools anymore), participants 4 and 6 blame the educators for not being strong enough to discipline these learners. These participants believe that it is the educators' fault that children are engaging in violence in schools because the educators are not fulfilling their responsibilities.

*"I blame educators for what is happening at school because it's their responsibility to make sure everything goes well...now if they are coming to us crying...it's strange....in fact it's their fault that our children are violent at school because they are not doing what they are supposed to do"(participant 4)*

The literature has found that parents and educators tend to blame each other with regards to who has to take the responsibility of addressing learners' violent behaviour (Smit & Liebenberg, 2003). This could mean that participant 4 and 6 abdicate responsibility from the parents and place it on the educators as the ones who should address school violence. Pahad (2009) found that educators perceived parents as negligent in school related activities. One can hypothesise that parents or educators might feel overwhelmed and cannot take responsibility on their own which confirms the importance of their collaboration in addressing school violence and this will later be discussed under interventions to reduce and eventually eradicate school violence.

## **4.2 Factors that contribute to school violence**

Question two of this study explored the contributing factors of school violence. Themes that emerged were: domestic violence, peer pressure, disrespect, substance abuse and children/learners rights. The Eco-systemic framework, which was described in chapter two, is used to present and discuss these contributing factors. These factors are explained as family, community and social factors.

### **4.2.1 Family factors**

As mentioned in Chapter two of this study, family factors play a role in contributing to school violence. The following are some of the family circumstances that cause violent behaviour in learners that were identified by the participants.

#### **4.2.1.1 Domestic violence**

Half of the participants stated that family circumstances contribute to school violence. The majority of participants stated that children who grow up witnessing family conflict and domestic violence become susceptible to violent behaviour. Children may perceive violence as an acceptable means of resolving conflict at school:

*“Our husbands beat us in front of our kids, and that can be the reason why our children are so violent in schools” (participant 5)*

*“Many women are beaten by their husbands. Our children don’t like this. We can’t expect our children to be normal if they witness this behaviour happening at home. We teach them to solve their problems by being violent as well. I try by all means for my child not to see us fighting because he will also be violent. What am saying is we teach them to be violent and expect them not to be violent” (participant 8)*

*“Sometimes a child sees in their homes a fight... This could be another cause of school violence” (participant 1)*

Similar to the above findings, Ward, Gould, Kelly and Mauff (2015) found that the effects of parents’ behaviour such as violence at home had negative consequences on a child’s behaviour. Havelin (2000) stated that family violence and conflict is one of the causes of violence at school. According to some participants, the home is the environment where

children learn how to behave in society, and children become violent at school if they witness and experience violence at home. This means that family life that is dysfunctional and has high levels of conflict or low levels of cohesion contributes significantly to children's behaviour outside of the home when encountering conflict (Duncan, 2004, Oosthuizen & Dewaal, 2005, Ward, 2007). Participants 1 and 2 agreed as they expressed that children copy what is happening at home and practise it at school, which demonstrates how family life impacts the behaviour of the child or of the learner.

Few of the participants attributed children's exposure to violent behaviour at home as a precursor to resolving conflict at school by means of using violence. The following extracts provide evidence:

*"The child will think that's how to solve problems...when we fight at home"*  
(participant 4)

*"They think fighting at school is the way to solve their problems...we as parents teach them that because of violence at home (participant 8)*

To verify the findings from the participants, research by Burton and Leoschut (2010) has found that the home and family environment plays a crucial role in teaching adolescents and teenagers the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, which is necessary in our communities (including in schools). Because some learners come from homes where there is violence, these children believe that it is normal to resolve conflict among their peers using violence (Bezuidenhout, 2008). Learners who come from such violent families might utilise a school setting as a platform to express their feelings by engaging in school violence. The reason could be that the child has learned that one does not communicate feelings, instead one acts on them which could result in school violence. Violent family members at home could be role models for children. The child can model violent behaviour as that behaviour is learned from the significant other (Havelin, 2000). Parents need to become aware that their home life has a significant impact on their children's behaviour at school and domestic violence should be recognised as the contributing factor to school violence.

#### 4.2.1.2 Peer pressure

The majority of the parents consider peer pressure among the learners as another cause of school violence. They have expressed that learners are negatively influenced by their peers because of a need for approval from their group, a need to express dissatisfaction about their lives, and a need for social status. These findings will be explored below.

The participants expressed that learners can be part of gangs because of a need for approval which leads them to participate in delinquent activities. The following extracts provide evidence:

*“I caught my child drunk last year... I know it's because of the influence of friends at school” (participant 4)*

*“Our children would choose a bad friend who likes to fight. They will have to fight as well because they want approval in their group of friends” (Participant 3).*

*“I think these children join these groups...they will be told to do wrong things, but because they want to be approved by the group members...they will do it” (participant 6)*

Jefthas and Artz (2007) confirm in their study that one of the causal factors of violence among the youth is peer pressure. Participants stated that children choose friends who influence them negatively and they therefore engage in violent behaviour because they want approval from these friends. Rankapole (2000) believes that the influence of peer pressure can be great, because children may behave in a particular manner with the intention of earning their peers' approval and in this case be involved in school violence in order to be approved of by the group. Burton and Leoschut (2008) agree that, during the adolescent stage, peers play a significant role in a learner's attitude and behaviour.

There is a possibility that a need for affection as well as family conflict may motivate learners to join gangs and engage in delinquent behaviour for emotional approval which they did not receive from their primary figures (e.g. parents or guardians). Bowlby's (1944) research on the origins of delinquent behaviour found that causes of this behaviour may be a reactive attachment disorder (Follan & Minnis, 2010). This means that there is a possibility that learners join gangs and seek approval due to difficulties during the first few years of life.

Some participants mentioned that children choose to be involved with “bad” peers because they unconsciously want to express their dissatisfaction at something that might have happened either at home or at school.

*“These children join these groups because maybe they don’t like what is happening at home” (participant 1)*

*“I think these learners are joining these bad groups because they are tired of what they see at home” (participant 5)*

The participants expressed that children do not express their feelings to their parents, and instead they engage in delinquent behaviour as a way of expressing their thoughts. Participant 10 said that there are many factors in the home that make children feel dissatisfied, thus they join badly-behaved groups of their peers. Madigan, Mora and Pederson (2006) mentioned that the quality of attachment and the relationship between a baby and a mother and father has an effect on the child’s behaviour later in life. One can therefore hypothesise that a poor attachment and/or relationship between learners and with their parents may be the reason for them to be part of the gangs. Another possibility is the in-built anger which can manifest through violent behaviour at school. This anger could result from either violence the child witnesses at home or in the community.

A few of the participants mentioned that others join these peer groups for social status. They want to be notorious in school, and in that way they receive acknowledgement from their peers even though their behaviour has negative consequences in their lives. The following quote reflects the participant’s views:

*“Some children join these groups because they want to be recognised in the school. I remember those days when I was at school. I was too quiet and this would bother me. I think very few of my classmates remember me. I wanted to be famous. I am sure they join these groups so that they can be famous” (Participant 6)*

Akinsola (2010) is in agreement with the participants that seeking to be recognised can lead to school violence. Gangs are recognised as an important way of gaining recognition and social status. Despite the negative consequences that come from joining gangs, learners can use gangs to express their feelings of exclusion and be taken more seriously. Nesdale (2001) stated that learners’ tend to join gangs in order to boost their self-esteem. Hence, gangs can be a platform to find recognition as learners might feel unrecognised due to a number of

factors such as a poor attachment and/or relationships with significant other, which may lead to growing anger and feelings of rejection (Anyio, 2015).

Very few of the participants stated that they were aware of the influence of peer pressure on their children at school, and this created fear in the parents because they could relate to the pressures their children feel as they once experienced similar pressures.

*“You know.... We are aware that they influence each other badly, and this creates fear in us as parents...hmm...because we know, we have been there before...and they will end up like us... that’s what we are fighting for...we want them to have a better future that’s all”( participant 2)*

According to the above quotation, parents were aware that peer group influence can result in future failure and it is not what they want to see for their children. Parents send their children to school so that the children become educated and can become responsible adults (Van der Merwe & Van der Walt 2004). However, gang violence in schools seems to pose a threat to the future of children according to the participants and the literature. Research has found that Alexandra Township has a high level of gang violence and criminality (Langa, 2012). Parents’ experience of their own community with the criminal and violent elements could be the reason participants identified gangs as the cause of school violence.

## ***4.2.2 Community Factors***

### **4.2.2.1 Substance use**

The majority of the participants argue that substance use (such as alcohol and drugs, including marijuana) causes school violence. They expressed that the Alexandra community has a high number of shebeens and it is easy for the learners to access drugs and other substances during school breaks. Some participants mentioned that tuck-shops and vendors sell learners or children cigarettes without considering their age. It has also been mentioned that learners’ concentration due to substance use gets affected and this leads to poor academic performance. Because substance use often develops into an addiction, this leads these children who use substances to steal from the elders in the community in order to maintain their substance use habits.

As mentioned above, the participants stated that substance use such as smoking and use of drugs in the school premises is what causes school violence in Alexandra. The following quotes provide evidence:

*“These things they are smoking are what cause violence” (participant 8)*

*“Drugs and dagga are the cause of school violence” (participant 5)*

Consistent with these current findings, Mncube and Harber (2012), stated that drugs have been found to be linked with school violence, which is seen to be on the increase in South African communities. Bennet and Hollway (2005) concurred through the findings in their research that a link between violence in schools and substance use can be made. Learners might be engaged in substance use for a variety of reasons, such as dealing with stress or to calm their nerves due to family or community issues (Anyio, 2015).

Half of the participants stated that their community has a large number of shebeens, thus it is easy for the learners to have access to substances. Participants said that when the children go to buy cigarettes in the shebeens and tuck-shops, vendors sell them to the children without considering the learners' ages. Participant 10 confirms that the people who own tuck-shops in their community do not care about the children because they sell alcohol to learners without questioning their age.

*“Our children have easy access to these drugs, they sell it to them without any questions... I think it's because of these many shebeens in our community which make it easy for these children to use these drugs... it will be easy for them to do violence in schools” (participant 2)*

*“They no longer care if the child is under 18 years or what...they sell it to them” (Participant 1)*

*“I feel these people who own these shops don't care about our kids...because they sell these things to them” (Participant 6)*

In relation to the findings of this study, Elizabeth and Stanko (2008) stated that the early use of substances such as drugs among teenagers tends to have an impact on their tendency to become violent. In communities where it is easy to access alcohol the youth are more likely to engage in violent behaviours (Benmark & Keys, 2000). Such easy access and witnessing others drinking leads to drunkenness in the adolescents (Florence & Koch, 2011). Children in

township communities can be in a position where they are being constantly exposed to substance use from the adults and places like taverns, which model such behaviour. Participant 5 stated that children see adults constantly drinking and concluded that they copy such behaviour. It has been found that in township communities, adolescents have easy access to substances and this increases the likelihood of violence (Smit, 2010). The use of a mixture of mandrax and cannabis in the community of Alexandra has been on the increase (Langa, 2005). This finding illustrates the increasing prevalence of substance use in the community of Alexandra even though the research was carried out a decade ago. Community members can give learners access to substances. Research found that some community members sell drugs at school gates (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). The adults who are in a possession of and sell these substances might feel less responsible for what damage these substances can do to the learners simply because no one took responsibility and protected them when they were young. Substance use has been found to be prevalent in most South African communities including suburban areas. Bringing awareness to the communities can help protect the coming generation from being easily exposed to substances. Ensink, Robertson, Zisis, and Leger (1997) found that alcohol is commonly used in all age groups in the South African communities.

Because continuous substance abuse leads to addiction, participants mentioned that learners may engage in other destructive behaviours such as mugging their elders in order to maintain their habits of substance use. Parents feel threatened and afraid when they are walking home from work on the streets.

*“They smoke nyaope and mug and other crazy things....” (Participant 3)*

*“We are very scared when we walking on the streets especially at night because they mug us....some take our cell phones and sell them cheap to get money to buy these things” (participant 9)*

Similar to the above statements of the participants, the literature has found a relationship between substance abuse and crime (Chabangu, 2014). Adolescents can engage in criminal activities such as mugging community members in order to sustain their habits. Learners who are financially disadvantaged can be involved in violence in order to maintain their drug habit (Neser, 2005). Participant 4 expressed the opinion that learners assault community members in order to maintain their drug addiction. Alexandra township is an under resourced community, and learners can be involved in crime due to poverty. Another possibility is that

since substances affect cognitive reasoning, this can have an impact which can lead them to participate in criminal and mugging activities.

Participants 4, 8 and 10 named other effects of substance abuse besides engaging in violent behaviour, such as lack of concentration and dropping out of school by the learners in order to seek ways of sustaining their addiction.

*“Once our children have smoked this dagga...they can’t think straight in the classroom” (participant 7)*

*“How do you concentrate in class if you are drunk and having a hangover?”  
(Participant 10)*

*“J dropped out of school because he was smoking a lot” (participant 8)*

*“You will see that they will tell us they want to drop school so that they can go and work. I know that they want to have money so they can buy these drugs. This is very bad. I am not even sure who will employ them because they are not educated enough”  
(Participant 4)*

Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) found that learners reported that it is difficult to concentrate in the classroom when under the influence of drugs. This impacts negatively on their academic performance and leads to grade failure. Educators might be in a position of providing quality teaching but substance use can compromise the learners’ performance. One can hypothesise that a learner who is consistently under the influence of substances can drop out of school as an escape from low self-esteem which is associated with poor school performance. Abdulla (2011) found that learners can drop out of school in order to seek employment with the intention to have enough available finances to buy drugs.

### ***4.2.3 Social factors***

#### **4.2.3.1 New generation with rights**

Most of the parents who participated in this study expressed that rights which were brought by the new dispensation (democratic era) in South Africa as what causes their children to engage in violent behaviour. They believe that knowledge of these rights has given the youth

power and in turn stripped off such power from the parents and the educators. Furthermore, according to the participants, parents now feel powerless and scared to intervene in addressing school violence and punish their children because they fear that they are breaking the law regarding children's rights. As a consequence, the youth take advantage by behaving recklessly and violently because they know that they will not face any negative consequences for their behaviour. This has led the parents to develop anger towards the current government as it contributes to the problems of violence.

Half of the participants expressed that the new South African democratic society which came up with the children's rights is the cause of violence not only at school but also at home. The following reflections provide evidence:

*"This new generation of children will tell you they have rights....they have rights at school, and at home...these rights are the cause of school violence" (participant 7)*

*"Children have rights, maybe that's why they are violent" (participant 10)*

The new South African democratic society intended to build new structures that would be different compared to the past apartheid system (Robinson, 2003). This led to enforcement of the rights of children to be protected from corporal punishment from the educators and abuse from their families (Seggie, 2015). The Human Rights of the United Nations have universally declared that every human being including children has rights and these rights should be respected (Shumba, 2003). According to the new government, the implementation of children's rights is intended to protect the children/learners from being abused either by the educators and their parents. On the other hand, parents in this study felt that the South African government is doing the opposite of what they stand for when they are enforcing children's rights. Shumba (2013) states that Children's rights given by the democratic government are controversial in relation to African culture. Hence, it could be the reason parents refuse children's rights. However, despite their rights, children, including adolescents are experiencing violence from their families and at school through corporal punishment (Morrell, 2001). It is obvious that as much as parents are enforcing harsh discipline on the children, they might hide this behaviour due to the fear of being prosecuted by the government.

The majority of the participants expressed the view that parents feel powerless and are too scared to intervene in addressing school violence because they are not sure how to handle the situation. They believe that they might be condemned and perhaps punished by the government for breaking the law. This feeling of powerlessness from the parents creates uncertainty and anger towards the government for shifting the power they once possessed in order to regulate their children's behaviour. The following quoted extracts provide evidence:

*“When you advise these children of today, they are saying you are abusing them...we end up feeling scared ...we are not sure how to discipline them” (participant 6)*

*“If you are the parent and you shout at your child, she will say I will tell the police that you are abusing me, so what must I do... I might as well do nothing because I don't want to go to the police station” (participant 2)*

*“Our government has given our children rights....they make us look stupid because we are not sure how to discipline our children now” (participant 5)*

*“The children of today are for democracy...what can we say...it's a new generation” (participant 1)*

Participant 7 expressed anger towards the government for providing children's rights:

*“Our government is telling children they have rights....our government does not think....I am so angry about this thing...our government...haai man...our government.....” (Participant 7)*

Consistent with these findings, educators are afraid of being sued by the learners due to the rights they possess from the South African democratic government (Spitznage, 2002). This is supported by participant 10 who reported that educators are now scared to take control in the classroom, due to the rights learners have, and this is the reason educators feel scared of disciplining learners in the classroom. This could further apply to the parents who are also fearful of being sued by their children if they use violent methods of discipline such as corporal punishment. One should be aware that the intention of children's rights is to protect children from the abuse which might come from either parents or educators as a form of discipline. Children have been perceived as taking advantage of the fear educators and

parents have to discipline them which participants think has led to the deterioration of respect among the children. The following quote provides evidence:

*“As a parent, you are lucky if your child is still respecting you” (participant 10)*

*“Even though you try to advise him to stop smoking, he won’t listen to you”  
(participant 2)*

*“The children no longer have respect...maybe they can see we are not sure how to deal with these problems” (participant 1)*

Lawrence (2007) postulated the importance of rights and responsibilities going hand in hand. The result of rights without responsibilities is chaotic. This could mean that learners might have not learned how to take responsibility for their rights which leads parents to feel angry towards the government. Hence, parents feel they no longer have full control and power over their children and the government has made them appear to be impotent in the eyes of their children. Participant 3 indicated that her children are no longer doing their household duties because they know that their parents will not do anything to punish them. The following are some examples of the negative consequences that are perceived as having come with the advent of advocacy for children’s rights:

*“They don’t do their duties because they are hiding behind these rights” (participant 2)*

*“What is the use of these rules because they end up pregnant” (participant 1)*

However, the following participant expressed that she will stand for what she believes in and she does not care about being punished by the current government:

*“I tell my daughter that if she wants to report me to the police station, she can do so. I don’t care. She must listen to my rules” (participant 10)*

On the other hand, research has found that the South African Act 108 of 1996 emphasised the importance of human rights and dignity (Robinson, 2003). The act stipulated that no one should experience punishment or be inhumanely treated. However family violence such as

child abuse has been found to be rife in South Africa, this is against the constitution. This could mean that parents just like educators do exercise harsh discipline which could be the factor that leads to the perpetuation of violence in schools.

### **4.3 Factors that trigger violent behaviour**

An examination into the factors that trigger violent behaviour is pertinent. The majority of the participants in the study alluded to these factors although there was no question asked about it. Although these factors do not directly answer any of the research questions, much emphasis and mention was made of these factors. The intention is that it will provide additional insight into the phenomenon of this study and possibly trigger curiosity for future research in relation to the phenomenon of school violence. Anger was identified as a factor that triggers school violence which could be caused by family circumstances such as poverty and domestic violence and this shall be presented and discussed below.

#### **4.3.1 Anger**

The triggering factors are the immediate precipitating factors – unlike the causes – of violent behaviour. The participants identified that emotional reactions to particular experiences can lead to violent behaviour. Anger is identified as a triggering factor to violent behaviour.

*“Anger is the cause of school violence” (participant 8)*

*“Anger seems to trigger violent behaviour from the learners” (participant 5)*

*“Anger could manifest itself through being involved in violence” (participant 1)*

According to the existing literature learners who have a high level of anger tend to be vulnerable to violent behaviour (Brezina, Piquero & Mazerolle, 2001). Anger seems to influence how learners react when they are faced with conflict. Learners’ coping mechanism and conflict resolution skills could be the determining factor when reacting violently (Curcio & First, 1993). This means that if a learner’s coping mechanisms and conflict resolution skills are poor he/she can react violently otherwise he/she can manage the feeling of anger and

resolve the conflict constructively. On the other hand, the youth are being taught violence as an acceptable way of resolving conflict (Harber, 2001). Learners might easily react with violence when they become angry as a way of resolving their conflict at school. Based on the findings, one can conclude that learners at school are being influenced to act in a particular way by the significant others when faced with a specific situation.

The participants have expressed that the anger which may have emerged either from home and/or community conditions is a triggering factor of school violence. Half (50%) of the participants mentioned that family circumstances contribute towards anger developing in the child and this anger could manifest at school through violence. Family violence has been identified as a trigger for anger. The following extracts illustrate this:

*“Anger is starting from family circumstances and leads to violence at school”  
(participant 3)*

*“This anger is stirred by many factors such as family circumstances” (participant 5)*

*“Sometimes you find that at home there’s violence, a child will have anger at school...if this child feels that way it will be easy for him to fight at school” (participant 10)*

*“When parents are fighting before him, this child will develop anger, when other learners are playing with him, his anger will show itself through fighting with other kids” (participant 4)*

Consistent with these findings, Burton (2008) found that responses by parents or caregivers have an impact on the learners’ behaviour and attitude, which is often displayed in school yards. He further mentions that learners who experience and are exposed to violence at home tend to be violent at school (Burton, 2008). Family life situations have an impact on how learners react when confronted with potential violent situations. This finding creates a relationship between what happens at home and the impact this has on the learners’ behaviour at school. Children’s observations of violence at home as a way of resolving conflict tend to be adopted and can be used in school to resolve violence (Charlton & Kenneth, 1994). This seems to be contrasting what some of the participants believed, participant 9 for example expressed that parents are providing the best possible care and environment for their children but still their children engage in violent behaviour at school. Peer pressure can be another factor which makes learners prone to engaging in violent behaviour at school.

Some participants indicated that poverty triggers feelings of anger and can lead to violent behaviours in learners. This is supported by participant 9 who said that angry responses are easily triggered in the community of Alexandra since it is a poor township where many families experience financial constraints. Some participants expressed the following:

*“Anger could be stirred by poverty” (participant 3)*

*“Alexandra is a poor place...I think that makes children to be angry because they don't have food to eat. I am not sure what we must do in this community in order to improve the situation. That is why sometimes orphans can grow up with anger because they don't have enough to eat most of the time” (participant 10)*

The previous research has found that some of the factors that lead to school violence are deteriorated living conditions, including poverty (De Wet, 2009). De Gouveia (2010) has found that lack of access to food and money can trigger violent behaviour at school. In South Africa, children who grow up in economically-deprived environments have been found to be vulnerable to violence (Barbarin & Richter, 2001). Learners who grow up in poverty may be looking for a means of expressing stress and vulnerability which can easily lead them to violent behaviour. Anger and frustration will tend to be important features of the characters of these learners who are unsure whether their basic needs will be met.

#### **4.4 Proposed interventions from the parents in addressing school violence**

Question 3 explored interventions that can be used to address school violence. The themes that emerged from this question entail corporal punishment, parental involvement and collaboration structures. These themes are presented and discussed in comparison to the relevant literature below.

##### **4.4.1 Reinstating corporal punishment**

The majority of the participants perceived corporal punishment as an appropriate measure for addressing school violence. They said educators must utilise corporal punishment which they think is the best form of discipline. The participants said that this type of punishment will

address chaos, disruption, lack of respect and violence that is witnessed among the learners and is aimed at the educators. This is evident in the following extracts:

*“Educators and parents must use sticks to beat these children” (participant 6)*

*“A child must be beaten so that they can behave...this chaos that we hear of will stop” (participant 10)*

*“Sticks and canes will solve all the problems to these learners....this chaos, disrespect and fight that we hear from the school will finish” (participant 6)*

These views were reflected in the literature, Porteus, Vally and Ruth (2001) stated that parents and the educators are still in favour of corporal punishment based on its deep-rooted means of resolving conflict in society. According to the above quotations, participants expressed the view that educators are not currently utilising corporal punishment as a form of discipline to bring order that is why there is chaos, disruption and lack of respect in schools. On the contrary, corporal punishment has been found to continue to be widespread in South African schools especially township schools (Morrel, 2001). This may mean that educators still practice it, and unfortunately it does not address school violence. This could be the reason why Langa said, “violence breeds violence” (Sowetan Live, 2011, pp 3). This cyclical nature of violence means that violence is perpetuated year by year in schools.

The majority of the participants mentioned that corporal punishment played a significant role in regulating their behaviour when they were learners in their youth. They felt that if it were not for corporal punishment, they would not have learnt respect and appropriate behaviour, which they still practise today as adults. According to the participants such discipline should also be practised by the parents as well as the educators, so that learners can develop good morals that will shape their future positively. The following quotation from a participant confirms this view:

*“When I grew up, my parents and adults that I don’t know at that time would beat me.... Mmm I have scars on my shoulders... I got married because of that. I wonder what will happen to the children of today. I am saying this because they don’t even get married because of their bad behaviour”...educators must start to use corporal punishment so that we can all build a healthy society” (participant 6)*

Although three participants believed that corporal punishment should be utilised at home as a form of discipline in order to help address violent behaviour, one participant had a different view. She stated that there is a possibility that the utilisation of corporal punishment at home could be the reason for the child's rebellious and violent behaviour. The following extract provides evidence:

*I don't know...mmmh maybe it's because I hit my child when he has done something wrong. Maybe that's why he's so stout (naughty)" (participant 6)*

Parents who support corporal punishment believe that "it happened to me and I am ok" (Porteus et al. 2001, pp. 10). The parents support it simply because they were hit as children by their parents and guardians and they believe it has influenced them in their adult lives (Morrel, 2001). In other words, some argue that corporal punishment was used to discipline them and that there were no negative effects, therefore it can be utilised successfully (Porteus et al., 2001). Based on the parents' perception of utilising violence from either home and/or the community to resolve conflict, it seems they still do believe that the formal education system shapes society in important ways. Also, it is believed that educators should enforce corporal punishment in order to resolve the chaos, and disruption that is seen in schools, and that this will further restore the morals that are lost in societies. Research has found that some parents and educators believe that if corporal punishment is administered appropriately and minimally, it can serve a good purpose for the learners at school (Morrel, 2001). The parents stated that parents must utilise corporal punishment as a means of discipline to address violence amongst learners. Parents who use corporal punishment might be enforcing violence and psychological damage to their children as is seen in schools (Waterhouse & Nagia-Luddy, 2009). Contrary to this, Smit (2007) stated that if corporal punishment can be practised appropriately, it has a major positive impact in regulating the behaviour of the learner.

The majority of participants thus felt that corporal punishment should be reinstated by the government in order to address violence in schools. Through this type of discipline, they believe that learners will know how significant education in their lives is. All the participants seem to blame the government for banning corporal punishment, saying it has taken the power to discipline the learners from the educators and the parents.

*“The government must bring back the stick to the school” (participant 4)*

*“Educators don’t know how to deal with the learners’ violence since corporal punishment has been stopped by ANC” (participant 7)*

In verification of the current findings, Monama and Seekoei (2007) support this observation, noting that parents are angry at the government for abolishing corporal punishment (through the South African Act 84 of 1996 in Section 10). They also state that they would not discontinue their established use of corporal punishment just because the government has outlawed the practice. They are of the view that society’s moral values are negatively impacted by corporal punishment. The banning of corporal punishment has been understood as the cause of increases in school violence (Veriava, 2014). Parents as well as educators are still in favour of corporal punishment as they believe that it will restore harmony and order at the schools and empower educators to do their work effectively (Maree et al., 2004). Unfortunately, the democratic government who took over from 1994 has abolished corporal punishment in order to transform the education system in South Africa (Veriava, 2014). Maree and Cherian (2004) who support the banning of corporal punishment state it has a major impact on the learners such as low self-esteem, perpetuating the cycle of abuse, a decline on academic performance, anxiety and fear and that it perpetuates violence to the next generation. It is because of this negative impact that corporal punishment was banished and educators have been introduced to alternative methods of discipline that will not cause either psychological or physical damage to a learner (Bekink, 2006). Corporal punishment is in fact globally declared as a violation of the human rights of a child (Veriava, 2014).

#### **4.4.2 Parental involvement**

The majority of the participants emphasised the significance of parental involvement in schools with the hope that they can contribute their thoughts and insights towards addressing school violence. They believe that good relationships between the educators and the parents will provide support in addressing school violence.

Half of the participants expressed that educators and parents must work together in order to address school violence. They admitted that parents or educators alone could not address this

phenomenon but that through collaborative efforts, positive changes in the learners' behaviour can be realised. The following extracts provide evidence:

*“Educators and parents must have a good relationship so that they can support each other in this situation” (participant 4)*

*“Parents must work hand in hand together. That’s how they can solve school violence” (participant 2)*

A few of the participants mentioned that it was important that parents must be concerned first before they take action to address the phenomenon of school violence. They expressed that feeling concerned is the first step that leads to action. The following extract provides evidence:

*“You must be concerned as a parent” (participant 9)*

*“It’s important that parents must be touched in their heart by this issue so that they can take actions” (participant 10)*

Parental involvement has been identified to have the potential to contribute a positive impact in addressing school violence (Mnyaka, 2006). This could mean that collaboration between the educators and the parents is essential in addressing school violence so is providing support among various stakeholders. As mentioned in the literature review (Chapter 2) there are other benefits of parental involvement in schools. The literature confirms the participants' view that parental involvement is essential in helping learners achieve better marks and perform better in schools, and that to collaborate with school authorities (such as principals and educators) will create a school environment that is more conducive to learning and that this will become a part of the process that helps to deal with barriers that will hinder this process (including school violence) (Okeke, 2014; Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004). Parental involvement has the potential to provide support and space for the educators to think together with the parents of ways forward in addressing school violence. Educators and parents alike may feel they are not alone in this situation and such thoughts will empower them. One can hypothesise that such a relationship will empower both parents and educators in addressing violent behaviour in learners.

The current study found that there is a lack of parental involvement in schools. Parents should believe that they know their children's needs best and that they are in the best position to help the situation at schools (Okeke, 2014). Parents are concerned and aware of their role in schools. Unfortunately other factors which I shall mention below seem to interfere with taking action in this regard.

A minority of the participants said that some parents are too preoccupied with their work and do not involve themselves in the schools and their children's academic progress. The reason for the lack of involvement is because some parents are simply not interested in their child's education, while others are not sure how to involve themselves as they may be illiterate. These participants see these issues as inhibiting parental involvement in schools. This observation is confirmed by participant 5, who stated that parents are busy working and in the process neglecting their children's school work. Some participants expressed the following:

*“Parents must be involved in the schools. This can help because they will know what is going on with their children. But now, parents are mostly at work and don't bother to ask what's happening. It's so disappointing” (participant 10)*

*“I think some parents never went to school, and they are not sure how to involve themselves...I also don't participate because I don't know how” (Participant 2)*

Similarly, the research provides evidence that some parents may not involve themselves in the school because of a number of factors such as poverty, low socio-economic conditions and the illiteracy of parents that affect them (Smit & Liebenberg, 2003). Alexandra is a low income community where many parents are often illiterate and this can have a negative impact on these parents. They might feel they do not have sufficient competence to provide the support that educators need in addressing school violence. Most illiterate parents feel only professionals should be involved in school matters (Okeke, 2014).

Parents might also feel powerless to take part in the school as they might be preoccupied with their community and family issues which leaves less space for them to be involved in school structures. Participant 1 expressed that parents are busy fixing things at home and that this requires their attention. Hence, the absence of parental involvement can be recognised as one of the contributing factors to school violence. On the other hand educators' negative perceptions of parents as negligent might make parents reluctant to be involved in school matters (Pahad, 2009). It is important that educators play a role in influencing parental involvement (Chabangu, 2014). Research has shown that there is poor parental involvement

in poor communities (Smit & Liebenberg, 200). Although it is positive for parents and educators to work hand in hand this does not directly mean that learners will not experience poor academic achievement (Okeke, 2014). One can hypothesise that parental involvement at school does not address all the school problems, but they do help in addressing some.

#### **4.4.3 Collaborative stakeholders in addressing school violence**

The majority of the participants mentioned that there should be collaboration between the Department of Education, parents, police and community members to combat school violence. They have expressed that working together can provide solutions to school violence; although parents alone cannot solve this problem, a larger collaboration can play a significant role in helping to find a solution to this phenomenon. The following statements provide evidence:

*“Police, government, parents and everyone in the community who is interested come join in fighting violence” (participant 2)*

*“Police and the government can do so much. We as parents can also feel encouraged. I am sure the educators can also feel encouraged and contribute.....then together we can fight this violence thing at school” (participant 8)*

These statements are supported by research conducted by Griggs (2002) and Masitsa (2008) which stated that the relationship between police, government structures, parents and educators is crucial for the prevention of school violence. One structure such as the educators cannot eradicate this complex phenomenon. Participant 8 mentioned that she does not think parents or educators can address this issue on their own. Participant 5 indicated that parents and the educators can do much in addressing this phenomenon because even though parents are scared of the learners and thus might feel cautious in addressing this issue with the educators, if they can have supporting structures and the cooperation of the police force, they can be motivated to participate in addressing school violence.

In April 2011, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) signed a collaboration partnership protocol with the South African Police Service in order to provide and prevent criminal activities that might be dominating on school premises (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Police

can help to enforce the law in the school for the purpose of safety. This is supported by participant 1 who expressed that learners carry guns to school. The involvement of police will address such issues and eventually have a positive effect on the learner's perpetuating the violence, the victims of the violence and the educators. Furthermore this will have a positive impact on the quality of teaching of educators in the school. Unfortunately, even though this was suggested before, it seems it is not effective enough which is the reason participants reinforce its importance in the current study. It is important not to generalise this finding, although Harber (2001) has found in his research study that was conducted in Kwazulu Natal that Police are found to be patrolling the school areas and providing safety for the learners.

Some participants expressed that the community needs to be involved in providing support to the school so that educators can provide the quality of teaching that is needed for the learners to be successful in the future. The community has been identified to also provide safety on the school premises. This is reflected in the following quote:

*“It's important that community members should be involved in schools...even though some don't have children that go to the schools, but they can help with safety in these schools so that our children can have a better future” (participant 10)*

In relation to the participants' comments, community involvement can help provide safety and in turn quality teaching from the educators will be realised (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Schools are understood as belonging to and being an integral part of the community. Therefore learners reflect the behaviour of the community (Smit, 2007). This provides a responsibility to the community members to be aware that their behaviour is reflected in the schools. Hence, they can help and provide safety together with the Police officers. Members of the community can help provide support to the educators, and this kind of relationship can provide an opportunity for the educators. The department of education should be aware of the community's needs and may also be relevant when teaching the learners.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### **Strengths, limitations, recommendations, and conclusion**

This chapter focuses on the strengths and limitations of this study, as well as providing a conclusion to the study. Finally, recommendations for future studies are made.

#### **5.1 Strengths of the study**

The significance of this research study is that it gave a voice to the parents of the learners and identified the significant roles they can play in the education system and in addressing school violence. Regardless of the fact that the government has put in place policies to address school violence, the literature and the current study confirm that this phenomenon is on the rise and compromises the current learners' future. Furthermore this study emphasised the role of the parents in the education system, as they are acknowledged by the South African Schools Act as significant stakeholders in the education system. This study used qualitative methods, which were helpful in providing an opportunity for the participants to express their views on how they are affected by this phenomenon according to their experience as parents of the learners.

#### **5.2 Limitations of the study**

Although the results and discussions in this study were significant and provided a basis for future research, the following limitations should be taken into account when reading the results. Firstly, one of the major limitations was that this study collected data from a small sample (ten) of participants whose children attended the same school. Hence, caution is needed when reading the results.

Secondly, the study was conducted on nine females and one male participant. It is important that gender should be balanced so that different perspectives which might have been influenced by how they are socialised can be heard, and this was not the case in this study. Lastly, the study was only conducted in an underprivileged socio-economic community. It is

important that all socio-economic classes be included so that various perspectives can be understood.

### **5.3 Recommendations for future study**

In future studies, the following suggestions can be taken into account:

- (a) This study can be conducted with a qualitative approach in a middle socio-economic society and with much larger sample in order to determine whether the same results can be revealed. The literature does acknowledge that socio-economic factors play a role in this phenomenon of school violence (De Wet, 2009).
- (b) Because this study was conducted qualitatively with a small size sample (10 participants in total), it will be important that it is also conducted quantitatively in order to establish whether or not the same results are obtained. Thus, if knowledge is missed through qualitative methods, it can be gained through quantitative methods since these methods are suitable for larger sample sizes and the results can be generalizable to the larger population.
- (c) Research needs to be conducted involving police officers to see what role they play regarding school violence. This gap in the research has been identified by the participants as possibly having an important role in addressing school violence, thus also providing insight into the relationship between the schools and police institutions.
- (d) Research should be conducted on the school governing body (SGB) to understand how it accesses the views of parents, with the hope that they represent and implement these views in school meetings. There is a possibility that the SGB can only represent the views of a minority of the parents who are actively involved in the education system and SGB structures.
- (e) Research needs to be done on understanding how parents can be supported to be actively involved in schools. This research will help in understanding factors that hinder this supportive relationship from manifesting. Smit and Liebenberg (2003) found that parental involvement in schools is weak.
- (f) It is recommended that there should be discussion sessions in educating parents on suitable alternative methods of discipline. This discussion will give parents an opportunity to have an insight into different options and the positive and negative effects of different methods of discipline.

- (g) Evaluation of physical safety measures in schools that are located in townships should be carried out so that it could be addressed with the hope that it creates safety for the educators and learners.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

This study examined the perceptions of parents concerning school violence in a secondary school in Alexandra. Qualitative methods were applied in this study because it focused on the subjective understanding of the participants, who are the parents of the learners. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory was used to give insight into the causes of school violence that were identified by the participants and they were: substance abuse, domestic violence, peer pressure and the new generational (learners') rights which need to be addressed in order to deal with violence in schools. Anger was further identified as a triggering factor for violent behaviour in learners although this did not answer any of the main research questions. Effects of school violence on the educators and the learners were also identified by the participants. It was found that these effects tend to have an indirect effect on the parents as well, as they are concerned with the well-being and future success of their children. Lastly, suggested interventions were offered such as reinstating corporal punishment, parental involvement and collaborative stakeholders with the hope that policy makers and those who develop school violence intervention programmes can use this knowledge.

Finally, past research and this study have proven beyond a reasonable doubt that violence in school has an impact on the learners and educators and it needs to be urgently addressed so that learners can realise their full potential. Unfortunately even though the study has found that parents' role in addressing school violence is very significant, it has found the parents' participation in addressing this phenomenon is poor. It is my hope that this study touches every parent, educator, community, and politician so that school violence is fully addressed.

### Key points

- The present study explored the subjective understanding of parents concerning school violence in a secondary school in Alexandra.
- The study found that the contributing factors of school violence were: domestic violence, peer pressure, substance abuse, and the fact that there is a new generation with rights.
- The effects of schools violence were found to negatively affect the learners, educators and indirectly the parents.
- Evidence suggests that learners who are continually being exposed to a violent environment (e.g. family violence) are likely to be involved in violence.
- Anger has been identified as a trigger factor of school violence.
- The proposed interventions in addressing school violence are: reinstating of corporal punishment, parental involvement, and collaborative stakeholders in addressing school violence.

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## List of Appendices

### Appendix A: Participant Information sheet

#### Psychology Department

School of Human and Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050



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

#### Parent Information Sheet

Dear Parent/ Legal Guardian,

My name is Maurious Mthimkhulu, and I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining my Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is the perceptions of the parents concerning school violence in a secondary school in Alexandra.

Participation in this research will entail you as a parent answering interviews relative to school violence that happens in schools. This will be done on weekends especially after school meetings. There are no direct risks or benefits to the parents or the school attached to participating in this study. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not in the study. All of the parents responses will be kept confidential and no information which could identify the parent or the school will be included in the research report. The parent's answers will not be seen by anyone in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by myself and my supervisor. The parent may refuse to answer any questions they would prefer not to, and they may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. In the unlikely event that you as parent react to questions in a negative manner, I have been in contact with the non-governmental organisation, which is called Ububele. It offers psychological services in Alexandra. You may contact them for any required intervention to this following number: 011 7865085 or 1, 10<sup>th</sup> road, Kew. The above mentioned report, which will be written once the data has been analysed and processed, will be made available to the school and all interested parties.

Your consent as a parent to participate in this study will be highly appreciated. If you give me a permission to be included in this study please fill in your details on the form below and return it to me. I will then contact you to discuss your participation. Alternatively I can be contacted telephonically at 071 6171 359 or via email at [mmourias@yahoo.com](mailto:mmourias@yahoo.com). If you would like to contact my supervisor regarding any questions you might have, you can contact Prof Joseph Seabi on 011717- 8331 or email [Joseph.Seabi@wits.ac.za](mailto:Joseph.Seabi@wits.ac.za).

Kind Regards,

Maurious Mthimkhulu

## Appendix B: Participant consent Form



### Psychology Department

School of Human and Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

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



### Participant Consent Form

I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to take part in Maurious Mthimkhulu's study on the perceptions of parents concerning school violence in a secondary school in Alexandra.

I hereby give consent for me as a parent to complete the interviews for this study.

I understand that:

- Participation in this study is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw myself from this study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Psychology Department

School of Human and Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050



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

### **Consent form to be audio recorded**

The interview is to be tape recorded for later analysis by the researcher for the final research report. No identifying material in the final report will be presented to ensure confidentiality. These tapes will be kept away, where no unauthorised (outside the researcher and supervisor) individual may have access to.

- (i) The tape is ONLY of you and the researcher talking together. The tape recorder will be switched off at the time you wish.
- (ii) Only people directly involved in the research will listen to the tape. It will only be used for research purposes.
- (iii) **I am aware that tapes will be destroyed after five years being kept in a safe for safety.**

If you agree to this interview being recorded, please sign where shown below.

I have read the above information and consent to it.

Participant

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Letter to the Principal



### Psychology Department

School of Human and Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

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



Good day,

My name is Maurious Mthimkhulu, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Master's degree in Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is on the perceptions of parents concerning school violence, focusing particularly on school violence between learners. Therefore, I would like to request permission to approach parents and request their participation for an interview about their perceptions on school violence. Participation is voluntary and their identities as well as the name of your school will be kept confidential.

Whilst there are no direct benefits to participating in this study, this research will contribute both to the larger body of knowledge on school violence, as well as impact positively on the development performance and social functioning of learners, parents, educators, and administrators. If you have any questions, I can be contacted telephonically at 071 6171359 or via email at [mmourias@yahoo.com](mailto:mmourias@yahoo.com). Alternatively, my supervisor, Prof Joseph Seabi, may be contacted on 011717- 8331 or via email at [Joseph.Seabi@wits.ac.za](mailto:Joseph.Seabi@wits.ac.za).

King Regards

---

Mr Maurious Mthimkhulu

## Appendix E: Principal Consent Form



### Psychology Department

School of Human and Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

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



### Principal Consent Form

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I \_\_\_\_\_ (Principal at \_\_\_\_\_ School) hereby give Maurious Mthimkhulu permission to conduct he's research, regarding the experiences of parents concerning school violence in the secondary schools of Alexandra. I understand that the purpose of this research is for Maurious Mthimkhulu to obtain a Master's Degree at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I understand that:

- Participation in this study is voluntary.
- I can withdraw permission from this study at any time without negative consequence for this school.
- No information that may identify the school will be included in the research.
- The participants' responses will remain confidential.
- The parents may refuse to answer any questions that they would prefer not to

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



**GAUTENG PROVINCE**

Department: Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:  
Reference no: D2015 / 047

**GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER**

Date:	8 May 2014
Validity of Research Approval:	8 May 2014 to 3 October 2014
Name of Researcher:	Mthimkhulu M.S.
Address of Researcher:	P.O. Box 910
	River Club
	2149
Telephone Number:	071 617 1359
Email address:	mmourias@yahoo.com
Research Topic:	Perceptions of the parents concerning school violence in Secondary schools at Alexandria
Number and type of schools:	ONE Secondary School
District/s/HO	Johannesburg North

**Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research**

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

*Mthimkhulu*  
*2014/05/09*

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

1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.

*Making education a societal priority*

**Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research**

9<sup>th</sup> Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001  
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506  
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za  
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

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

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

Kind regards

*Dr David Makhado*

Dr David Makhado  
Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: *2014/08/09*

**Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research**

9<sup>th</sup> Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001  
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506  
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za  
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za



## Psychology Department

School of Human and Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

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



1. How would you define school violence
2. How violence do think affects learners?
3. How do you think learners cope as a consequence of violence?
4. How do you usually react when you hear about incidence of violence in schools?
5. How do the school handle violence in schools?
6. What do you think causes violence in schools?
7. Are the parents involved in helping the school prevent violence in schools?
8. How are parents involved in helping the school prevent violence?
9. How would like parents to be involved in addressing school violence?
10. What role can the community play in addressing school violence?
11. What other interventions beyond parent's role do you think as parents are needed to address school violence?