

A youth empowerment model designed to tackle school violence in South Africa



Fathima Dewan

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Fathima Dewan



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The publisher (AOSIS) endorses the South African 'National Scholarly Book Publishers Forum Best Practice for Peer-Review of Scholarly Books'. The book proposal form was evaluated by our Social Sciences, Humanities, Education and Business Management editorial board. The manuscript underwent an evaluation to compare the level of originality with other published works and was subjected to rigorous two-step peer-review before publication by two technical expert reviewers who did not include the volume editor and were independent of the author, with the identities of the reviewers not revealed to the author. The reviewers were independent of the publisher author. The publisher shared feedback on the similarity report and the reviewers' inputs with the manuscript's author to improve the manuscript. Where the reviewers recommended revision and improvements, the author responded adequately to such recommendations. The reviewers commented positively on the scholarly merits of the manuscript and recommended that the book be published.

Research justification

This book aims to address how youth empowerment can be used to tackle the issue of school-based violence in South African secondary schools. This research offers a platform for young people to become change agents in their school environment by being actively involved in planning and developing peer-led violence awareness and prevention strategies.

The findings could hold potential advantages for school-based violence intervention programmes, particularly as previous research has not examined it from the perspective of youth empowerment. To gain an in-depth insight into issues of school-based violence and the utilisation of youth empowerment, this study utilised a mixed methodology, action research approach. Action research was deemed to be appropriate as it is participatory, collaborative research which seeks to involve participants in developing, undertaking and evaluating a particular research agenda. Like action research, the conceptual framework for the study was linked to positive youth development and youth empowerment theory. In this approach, the researcher has explored how to work collaboratively with youth and tap into their potential to become active contributors towards change in their schools and communities. This is also true for youth who come from the most disadvantaged societies.

Through the use of questionnaires, focus group discussions and an action team, this study highlighted the ongoing issues of school violence and particularly the importance of youth involvement in an intervention strategy. Given the limited literature on the use of youth empowerment in South African schools, this book provides a useful narrative of how this can be incorporated into violence intervention strategies in schools.

This book represents a more than 50% reworking of the author's dissertation for her Doctor of Philosophy: Public Administration – Peace Studies, 'Developing a youth empowerment model for peaceful schools: A case study', 2021, in the Faculty of Management Studies, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa, with Dr SB Kaye as promoter and Prof. G Harris as co-promoter. The book has not been published elsewhere.

The author declares that this book constitutes original work and is not plagiarised.

The target audience of this scholarly book is scholars specialising in and those seeking an understanding of school-based violence with an emphasis on developing youth-led interventions in schools.

Fathima Dewan, Child and Youth Care Programme, Department of Community Health Studies, Faculty of Health Sciences, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa.

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Abbreviations

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AVP	Alternatives to Violence Project
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
BTech	Bachelor of Technology
CJCP	Centre of Justice and Crime Prevention
CMDA	Cato Manor Development Association
CPF	Community Police Forum
CSVr	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
DBE	Department of Basic Education
EU	European Union
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICON	The International Centre of Nonviolence
J-PAL Africa	Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Africa
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning
MEd	Master of Education
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NIDS	National Income Dynamics Survey
NISSP	The National Inclusive Safer Schools Partnership
NNSSF	National Norms and Standards for School Funding
NSSF	National School Safety Framework
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy degree
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SANCA	South African National Council in Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
SAPS	South African Police Service

SeVISSA	Addressing Sexual Violence Against Young Girls in Schools in South Africa
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General
SSAF	Safer South Africa Foundation
SSCC	Safe Schools Call Centre
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa
TYPE	Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment Pyramid
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WCED	Western Cape Department of Education
WHO	World Health Organization
YES	Youth Empowerment Solutions program
YPAR	Youth Participatory Action Research

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Biographical note

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my daughters Asmaa and Hana and to my family, who have shown unconditional love and support throughout this journey. They inspire me every day to be the best that I can be. My blessings and love are with you always.

Preface

The South African history of colonialism and segregation has resulted in an unequal education system with a number of challenges, school-based violence being one of them. School-based violence is of major concern internationally and in the South African schooling system, particularly in secondary schools. According to various studies and media reports, school-based violence is escalating in South African secondary schools at an alarming rate. Causes of violence stem from outside as well as within the school environment, which leads to an unsafe environment that is not conducive to learning and teaching. In addition, it has a negative impact on the physical, social, cognitive and emotional well-being of learners and teachers. To compound matters, family and community environment also play a role in escalating school violence. To address the issue of reducing school-based violence, there is a need to develop interventions that are evidence-based and developmental in nature.

For this study, which was undertaken at one secondary school in Cato Manor, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, an initial questionnaire was distributed to Grade 10 learners and teachers to obtain baseline data. Thereafter, three focus group discussions were held with learners. It was found that violence was a regular occurrence at the school, with bullying, fighting, stealing and teasing being the most prevalent types. In addition, corporal punishment was found to be widely practised by teachers. Peer pressure, substance abuse, gangsterism and family factors were cited as the main causes of violence at the school. Subsequently, fourteen learners who participated in the focus group discussion volunteered to be part of an action group to develop and implement a programme focused on addressing the issues of violence identified at the school. This book discusses how an action research approach using a conceptual framework focusing on youth empowerment culminated in a school awareness campaign. The youth empowerment project demonstrated that even in an under-resourced school, empowerment can be used as a useful strategy to address the issue of school violence. Using youth in such programmes can increase their motivation to collectively influence changes within their school.

A preliminary evaluation of the impact of the youth empowerment programme indicated that it did make the learners at the school aware of the issues that they are faced with daily.

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Overview and methodological stance

■ Introduction

Violence in schools is of major concern across the world. It is visible in media reports almost on a weekly basis. It has repercussions for the well-being of young people, their families and communities. The victimisation, perpetration and witnessing of school-based violence may condition young people to accept and justify the use of violence to resolve conflict with others. This could have an adverse effect on future developmental outcomes for young people.

Literature has cited an array of causes of school violence, namely, bullying, fighting, sexual harassment, stealing, gangsterism and substance abuse (Maternowska, Potts & Fry 2018). A longitudinal study carried out over a span of 20 years with 2,000 children throughout Gauteng province found that only 1% of children were not exposed to any type of violence. Two-thirds were exposed to community violence, a third to school-based violence and more than half to violence at home. Violence exposure increased to 86% by adolescence (Richter et al. 2018). This statistic is quite alarming, and despite various interventions in place to address school-based violence, there is still a great need for targeted interventions at school to address these issues.

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Leoschut and Kafaar (2017) aver that schools are a useful starting point for intervention as they have a great influence on the development of children who spend most of their day there, and schools are where violence is directly experienced. They also propose that in order to create safer schools and a better school climate, schools should involve learners in decision-making around school policies as well as the design of strategies to address school violence. To this effect, empowerment was used as a strategy in this study to address school-based violence.

The study was an action research project undertaken at a secondary school in the Cato Manor area, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It was intended to empower learners to plan and implement a violence awareness campaign targeted at addressing the violence experienced at the school. To further illustrate this, the chapter will provide an overview of the research undertaken as well as the methodological stance of the study.

■ The history of Cato Manor

The secondary school chosen for this study is in Cato Manor. Cato Manor, from its geographic location, has had a long history of political instability, segregation, discrimination and violence, the impact of which is still being experienced today. It is thus important to place the setting for this study in context, as Cato Manor is an important area for the study of violence and inequality.

Cato Manor is located seven kilometres from central Durban and has a population of approximately 93,000 people within 2,000 hectares of land (eThekweni Municipality 2011). Being very close to the city centre makes it accessible for people for employment and education opportunities. The rapid urbanisation of Durban occurred in the 1930s and 1940s because of the government providing housing for the white communities residing around Durban. This led to a demand for labour for these housing developments. An influx of African migrant workers into Durban seeking employment led to them occupying land in Cato Manor (Gray & Maharaj 2017).

Naidoo (n.d.), a museum officer at the local history museum in Durban, documented the history of Cato Manor in her article entitled 'Provenances of knowledge and preservation of referred sources'. Cato Manor was originally a land reserved for Indian ownership under the *Asiatic Land Tenure & [Indian] Representation Act No 28 (1946)*, which sought to confine Indian people to certain designated areas. Indian people bought the land from white farmers after their period of indentured labour ended and used it for market gardening. *Under the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945*, Africans employed in central Durban were allowed to occupy land

in urban areas. This led to the emergence of a vast number of informal settlements in the Cato Manor area. Indian landowners leased out shacks to African dwellers.

However, the conditions within these informal settlements were appalling, with poor sanitation and no access to basic amenities. Overcrowding and exposure to diseases became major problems. Due to these appalling conditions, Cato Manor became rife with poverty, and residents were forced to live in unhygienic and dangerous conditions. In 1944, the local government issued notices to the Indian landowners to provide better services to the informal settlement dwellers. However, instead of improving services, the Indian landowners evicted the African dwellers. This created racial tensions between the two groups. A racial incident involving the assault of an African youth by an Indian shopkeeper in the Durban central business district culminated in the 1949 riots. The hardest-hit area was Cato Manor, with many lives being lost on both sides and hundreds of people being left homeless.

Due to the implementation of the *Group Areas Act (1950)*, the Indian and African residents were forcefully moved to low-income housing developments in KwaMashu, Umlazi, Chatsworth and Phoenix. Many African residents moved back to the rural areas. The land was vacant for many years after this. With the onset of democracy, Indian and African people returned to live in the area in a low-cost housing development. Informal settlements increased again. The Cato Manor Development Association (CMDA) was formed in 1993 with the aim to redevelop the area and improve infrastructure. In 1994, the area was recognised as a special presidential project in the urban renewal category of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). It therefore received large amounts of money from the RDP budget. The CMDA was operational from 1993 until 2003, and during that time it also received money from the European Union (EU). With funding received, infrastructure such as roads, parks, sports fields, schools, libraries, community halls and clinics was built. Housing was also a key mandate for the area, but despite the efforts to provide housing, there is still a shortage. Because of this, informal settlements form a large part of the area (Gray & Maharaj 2017).

Gray and Maharaj's (2017, p. 1) study at Cato Manor in 2017 focused on poverty, inequality and violence. They stated that 'forced evictions, housing shortages, conflict over land, municipal corruption, police brutality, poor service delivery, repression, xenophobia, poverty and inequality have sparked many acts of violence in Cato Manor'. Structural violence is evident in the area because of its poor economic status. This is seen through unemployment and poverty, which are rife. Drugs, gender-based violence, domestic violence, taxi violence, crime and protests over

service delivery are also major problems. The issue of violence is increased by the growing drug problem, with drugs being targeted at the youth. Drugs have also led to an increase in crime in the area as drug users burglarise homes and sell the stolen possessions to feed their habit. Xenophobic attacks are linked to the influx of immigrants to the area. This is because residents feel that foreigners are taking up the employment opportunities that would otherwise benefit local people. This, they stated, has caused an increase in unemployment and is spiralling local people into further poverty.

Cato Manor was part of a study conducted by Mottiar (2014), which focused on social protests in three areas in Durban, namely, Cato Manor, Merebank and Wentworth. It was found that protest action was more popular in Cato Manor than in the other two areas, and it was referred to as a protest hotspot. Reasons for protest action revolved around service delivery, that is, better access to water and electricity and the shortage of quality housing. Findings suggest that protests are used by discontented residents as a mechanism to be heard at the local government level. Protests are used as an 'invented means of participation' resulting from residents being excluded from formal reporting structures and corruption by ward councillors. Participants felt that within a democracy, it was their right to protest, and this mindset of the right to protest action is linked to the area's violent past.

■ The research problem and significance of the study

Crime surveys and statistics have consistently shown that South Africa is one of the most violent countries in the world. According to Africa Check (2020), an independent fact-checking organisation in Africa, the official crime statistics for 2019/20 showed that incidents of murder increased slightly from 21,022 in 2018/19 to 21,325 in 2019/20. The average number of murders committed per day was 58. Sexual offences increased from 52,420 in 2018/19 to 53,293 in 2019/20. The largest number of incidences was that of rape, with a figure of 42,289. This means that 116 rapes occurred each day. In addition, on average, 142 robberies were committed each day, and 453 people were assaulted each day. Updated statistics by *BusinessTech* in 2023 have shown that there has been an alarming increase of 18.5% in contact crime (which includes murder, attempted murder, sexual offences, assault and robbery) in the 2021/22 versus 2022/23 reporting quarter.

These high levels of violence have their roots in the country's colonial past and structural oppression implemented through apartheid. This has

filtered down into the very essence of the fabric of South African family and community life and is still felt today, nearly three decades after democracy. High levels of violence are thus evident in family, school and community life. There are media reports every day of violent incidents occurring in these three contexts.

The conceptual framework for the study was linked to positive youth development and youth empowerment theory. In this approach, researchers have explored how to tap into the potential of the youth and look beyond their deficiencies so that they may be viewed as valuable members who contribute towards the progress of society. This is also true for youth who come from the most disadvantaged societies (Andreou 2015; Christens & Peterson 2012; Ozer 2017).

Empowerment is a complex process that involves social action. Through the democratic processes of empowerment, individuals and groups are engaged in meaningful decision-making, active participation and action in order to bring about change in policies, structures, values and norms in their social context (Scales, Benson & Roehlkepartain 2011; Zeldin et al. 2016; Zimmerman 1995). Within the South African context, one of the values that the National Youth Policy (2015–2020) espouses is youth empowerment. The policy states that:

Interventions should empower young people as assets for national development, raising their confidence so that they can contribute meaningfully to their own development and that of broader society. Young people are instruments and agents of their own development. Young people should be considered as agents of change, not passive recipients of government services. (p. 9)

■ The aim and objectives of the study

The overall aim of this research was to develop, implement and evaluate a programme that utilises important aspects of youth empowerment, such as social action and participation, to reduce school-based violence. The broad concept of youth empowerment served as a strategy to create awareness about violence within the school setting. The study had the following specific objectives:

1. To investigate the forms, extent, causes and consequences of violence in the secondary school setting.
2. To explore the theory and practice of youth empowerment in a school setting.
3. To develop and implement a youth empowerment programme that specifically addresses the problem of school-based violence.
4. To undertake a preliminary evaluation of the impact of the youth empowerment programme.

School violence is a major concern, both nationally and internationally. This area of research is important in order to create greater awareness and inform the development of effective strategies that address this issue. The following research questions were posed to further understand this phenomenon, its impact on learners and how it can be addressed:

1. What are the forms, extent, causes and consequences of violence in a secondary school?
2. How is youth empowerment practised in a school setting?
3. How can youth empowerment be used to address school-based violence?

■ Definition of key concepts

- **Violence:** Violence is broadly understood as physical or psychological harm inflicted on others. It occurs within the context of families, schools, communities and broader society. It has its roots in socialisation within these contexts, as well as ideologies and structures that oppress one group of people over the other. The World Health Organization's (WHO's) (Krug et al. 2002, p. 5) report on violence and health 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'. Furthermore, Capp et al. (eds. 2017, p. 1) state that 'school violence can be understood as any behaviour that is intended to harm other people at school or near school grounds. This may include bullying and victimisation, or more severe forms of violence involving weapons'.
- **Empowerment:** Augsberger, Gecker and Collins (2018, p. 1) define empowerment as 'a strengths-based concept that focuses on acquiring the skills, knowledge, and resources to promote positive change at an individual, community, and organisational level'. Pineda-Herrero et al. (2018, p. 601) define empowerment as 'a process of growth, strengthening, enabling and confidence building in individuals, organisations and communities in order to further positive changes in the context, to gain power, authority, decision-making ability and change both individually as well as collectively'.
- **Positive youth development:** Taylor et al. (2017, p. 1165) define positive youth development as 'building young people's positive social competencies, social skills and attitudes through increased positive relationships, social supports and opportunities that strengthen assets and help youth flourish within their environment'. Damon (2004, p. 17)

states that positive youth development perspective emphasises ‘the manifest potentialities rather than the supposed incapacities of young people – including young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and those with the most troubled histories’. In essence, positive youth development focuses on the recognition and utilisation of strengths rather than a pathology-based view of youth. Thus, positive youth development is linked to the concept of youth empowerment.

- **Youth empowerment:** The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (2007–2015, p. 15) defines youth empowerment thus: ‘empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. These enabling conditions include a stable environment of equality, peace and democracy and access to knowledge, information and skills, and a positive value system’. In practice, this means giving youth a sense of belonging, shifting power between adults and youth and giving youth opportunities for active participation in decision-making. In addition, the Development Bank of South Africa (2023) refers to youth empowerment as ‘the prioritisation and inclusion of youth in all levels of decision-making processes. It involves researching youth challenges, engaging the youth in possible solutions and designing targeted strategies to mitigate the risks and encourage development impact’.
- **Action research:** Herr and Anderson (2015) posit that the aim of action research is to develop or transform the researcher, participants and setting and that action research is a socially engaged way of being a researcher. They define action research as ‘inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organisation or community, but never to or on them’. Action research is therefore collaborative and democratic in nature. Furthermore, Kumar (2019, p. 200) states that ‘action research, in common with participatory research and collaborative enquiry, is based upon a philosophy of involvement and participation of a community in the total process from problem identification to implementation of solutions’.

■ Research design and methodology

Denzin and Lincoln (eds. 2008, p. 33) postulate that ‘a research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical materials’. According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004), the

design type chosen for a study should reflect a coherent and logical use of research methods that produces data that link effectively to the purpose of the research. The philosophical view underpinning this study was a qualitative research design with an emphasis on the mixed methods approach. The qualitative, mixed method approach focused on a case study and action research. The study was located within the interpretivist paradigm. According to De Vos et al. (2011, p. 309), interpretivism is the 'assumption that reality should be interpreted through the meaning that research participants give to their life world'. It is therefore important to consider the subjective realities of people as they make sense of the phenomenon they are experiencing.

■ Mixed methods

A mixed methodology approach, which employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, was used in this study. Quantitative methodology (using questionnaires) and qualitative methodology (using focus group discussions) were used to achieve objective one. Qualitative methodology (using focus group discussions and action research) was used to achieve Objectives 2, 3 and 4. Thus, although being a mixed methods study, qualitative research was largely used to achieve the objectives of this study. The researcher believes that the methods employed yielded valid, credible evidence. The following sections elaborate on each aspect of the research design. Green (2007) states that using a mixed methods approach will yield a better understanding of the research issue than relying on one method of inquiry.

According to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011), mixed methods research involves the researcher collecting and analysing data and integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods in drawing conclusions. Ritchie et al. (2014) are of the view that quantitative methods add breadth to the study and qualitative methods add depth to the study. They stated that the researcher needs to see both methods as equal but separate as both will assist in answering different aspects of the same issue, thus providing unique, distinctive evidence. When qualitative methods follow quantitative methods, as was the case in this study, they provide depth and detail to the phenomena being studied. Thus, triangulation is important in mixed methods research as it provides a fuller description of the study from different perspectives. Each perspective adds its own value to the study while at the same time substantiating the other. The reason for using both quantitative and qualitative methods is explained in Table 1.1.

TABLE 1.1: Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research.

Categories	Quantitative research	Qualitative research
Objective	To quantify data and extrapolate results to a broader population This study – Objective 1	To gain a detailed understanding of underlying reasons, beliefs and motivations This study – Objectives 1-4
Purpose	To measure, count or quantify a problem	To understand what the influences or contexts are
Data	Numerical data	Textual data
Study population	Large sample size of representative cases This study – 77 Grade 10 learners	Small number of participants, purposively selected This study – three focus group discussions consisting of five to eight learners, as well as the fourteen learners who were part of the action group
Data collection methods	Population surveys, opinion polls This study – a questionnaire	In-depth interviews and group discussions This study – three focus group discussions and the action research group
Analysis	Analysis is statistical	Analysis is interpretive
Outcome	To identify the prevalence, averages and patterns in data	To develop an understanding. To identify and explain behaviour, beliefs or actions

Source: Hennink et al. (2011, p. 16).

■ Qualitative research approach

Wig (2001, cited in Braun & Clark 2013) notes that:

[A] good qualitative research design is one in which the method of data analysis is appropriate to the research question, and where the method of data collection generates data that are appropriate to the method of analysis. (p. 42)

According to Henning et al. (2004), qualitative research is exploratory in nature and provides a descriptive narrative of the contextual issues that participants face. Denzin and Lincoln (eds. 2008, p. 4) define qualitative research as ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world’. In addition, Fouche, Strydom and Roestenburg (2021) suggest that qualitative research is a flexible approach that allows the researcher to identify issues from the perspective of participants so as to understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to the phenomenon being studied. This is referred to as the interpretive approach.

Thus, in this study, I sought to explore the learners’ perspectives on violence at their school and how they wished to address it. Braun and Clark (2013, p. 10) argue that ‘qualitative research captures the complexity, mess and contradiction that characterise the real world, yet allows us to

make sense of patterns of meaning'. They suggested that a fundamental aspect of qualitative research is that it is focused on finding meaning and is based on exploring multiple versions of reality that are closely linked to the context being studied. The impact of contextual issues on the research issue being studied is an important aspect to consider. Thus, qualitative research is exploratory in nature, context-based, and produces rich, in-depth data. It seeks to understand the phenomenon being studied from the lived experiences and meaning that participants bring to the process.

The earlier cited authors state that through the interpretive approach, the subjectivity of the researcher who brings their own perspective, emotions, position and background to the research is seen as a strength of the paradigm rather than a weakness. This is because qualitative research seeks to give the researcher a voice and allows visibility in the research process. It is important that the researcher reflects upon their influence on the research process. This is termed *personal reflexivity*. The researcher needs to be open-minded, empathic, a good listener, non-judgemental and flexible. Ritchie et al. (2014, p. 4) outline the following common characteristics of qualitative research:

- aims and objectives that are directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about the sense that they make of their social world and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and history
- the use of non-standardised, adaptable methods of data generation that are sensitive to the social context of the study and can be adapted for each participant or case to allow the exploration of emergent issues
- data that are detailed, rich and complex
- analysis that retains complexity and nuance and respects the uniqueness of each participant or case, as well as recurrent, cross-cutting themes
- openness to emergent categories and theories at the analysis and interpretation stage
- outputs that include detailed descriptions of the phenomena being researched, grounded in the perspectives and accounts of participants
- a reflexive approach, where the role and perspective of the researcher in the research process are acknowledged.

In addition, Ritchie et al. (2014, pp. 31–35) state that qualitative research has broad functions that provide unique evidence for a study. These functions are, namely, contextual research, explanatory research, evaluative research and generative research. Contextual research describes phenomena as experienced by participants. Explanatory research elaborates on why phenomena occur by looking at the influencing factors behind them. Evaluative research looks at how effectively phenomena

work by looking at the processes and outcomes that occur. This is particularly linked to policy implementation and the design of programmes. Finally, generative research is linked to developing a new understanding of the phenomena being studied and developing new actions based on the new perspective.

■ Case study

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005, p. 25) define case study research as 'directed at understanding the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of a particular case in all its complexity'. According to Davies (2007, p. 34), case study methodology involves using 'a variety of research methods to produce a rounded portrayal of an identified subject'. Stake (2005, cited in eds. Denzin & Lincoln 2008, p. 121) states that 'the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system'.

Moreover, Kumar (2019) proposes that:

The case study design is based upon the assumption that the case being studied is typical of cases of a certain type and therefore a single case can provide insight into the events and situations prevalent in a group from where the case has been drawn. In a case study design the case you select becomes the basis of a thorough, holistic and in-depth exploration of the aspect(s) that you want to find out about. (p. 196)

Likewise, Thomas (2016) concludes that:

Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems which are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will illuminate and explicate some analytical theme, or object. (p. 23)

He further states that the positionality of the researcher is key in this approach as the researcher needs to be actively involved and fully immersed in the context with the participants. It is important when using a case study approach that all aspects of the context, such as social, situational, cultural, and historical contexts, be described. In addition, various methods of data collection need to be included. This will give the reader an in-depth understanding of the case being studied.

According to Welman et al. (2005), the following two elements need to be considered when doing a case study. Firstly, it should be clearly defined and have boundaries (one secondary school in Cato Manor was chosen for this study) and secondly, triangulation is used to strengthen the case. Triangulation in this study was achieved through questionnaires with teachers and learners, focus groups with learners and an evaluation.

An instrumental case study was used for the study. An instrumental case study is the study of a case, for example, a person, group, organisation, etc.,

to provide insight in order to draw generalisations or formulate a theory. The case being studied offers a thick description of the phenomenon being studied (eds. Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2010). The rationale for choosing the instrumental case study approach is that the exploration of the issue of school violence and subsequent development, implementation and evaluation of the specific youth empowerment programme were located within one secondary school in the Cato Manor area. The purpose was to provide unique, in-depth information in relation to the particular context.

■ Action research

According to Kumar (2019, p. 200), action research is cyclic in nature and is linked to participatory, collaborative research. The ultimate goal of action research is that it seeks to involve participants in developing, undertaking and evaluating a particular research agenda. Further discussion of the action research strategy employed in this study will be discussed in a later chapter.

■ Data collection methods

The main data collection methods included a questionnaire (quantitative) and three focus group discussions (qualitative). The questionnaire and focus group discussions are elaborated on in the next section. Once the focus group discussions were concluded, learners volunteered to participate in the action group. I explained to the learners what being part of the action group entailed – that is, as a team, the learners would develop, implement and evaluate a youth empowerment programme specifically focused on reducing violence in the school. Twelve female learners and two male learners volunteered to be part of the action group.

□ Questionnaire

The first part of the study was quantitative. The questionnaire was used to obtain data from a large sample of learners (77) and a smaller sample of teachers (ten) in order to understand the nature of violence in the school setting. Seventy-seven learners completed the questionnaires, with 41 females and 36 males. The use of a questionnaire was deemed to be appropriate for this study as baseline data were first required from a large sample of learners for further in-depth discussion in the focus groups. The Life Orientation teacher was present at both sessions in case learners needed an interpretation of the questions in Zulu. The teacher questionnaire was used to supplement the data obtained from learners. Teachers were only involved in this part of the study.

□ Focus group

According to Welman et al. (2005):

Focus groups are described as in-depth group interviews. These groups consist of a small number of individuals that are drawn together for the purpose of expressing their opinions on a specific set of open questions. (p. 201)

The qualitative aspect of the study included three focus group discussions comprising between five and eight learners each to explore issues raised in the questionnaire in greater detail. Once the questionnaire with learners was conducted, on the same day, the researcher asked for volunteers for the focus group discussions. The focus group discussions, lasting approximately an hour each, were carried out over three days, with one focus group being held each day after school. Nineteen learners volunteered for the focus group discussions. There was one male group, one female group and one mixed group. By separating the groups, it was felt that learners would feel comfortable discussing certain gender-specific issues that might arise (e.g. sexual harassment). It was noted that in the mixed group, this topic was touched on lightly, but in the gender-specific groups, a more in-depth discussion ensued.

Focus groups are a valuable method to use when the researcher wants to elicit the perspective of a number of people at the same time. Engaging with a focus group allows the researcher to discuss a topic in an in-depth, detailed manner, as well as gain a range of opinions and unique perspectives. Braun and Clark (2013) state that during discussions with the group, completely new information might be generated that is unexpected. The authors further state that 'being part of research in a group context, potentially results in a different consciousness among participants, and so research can become a tool to foster social change' (Braun & Clark 2013, p. 111). This statement ties in with the purpose of this research on youth empowerment, which is related to critical consciousness and bringing about social change.

According to Davies (2007), it is important to engage with participants in a setting that is comfortable, familiar, and free from disturbances and where they will feel comfortable sharing sensitive and confidential opinions. For this study, the focus group discussions and the subsequent work with the action group were conducted in the library seminar room which was situated directly next to the school. The library seminar room was situated on the upper level of the library in a private space. The venue was thus convenient, accessible and free from distractions. I felt that because of the sensitive nature of the topic, they would feel more comfortable working away from the environment where violence occurs. I found that the choice of venue played an important part in providing learners with a safe space

TABLE 1.2: Advantages and disadvantages of using focus group discussions as a data collection tool.

Advantages of focus groups	Disadvantages of focus groups
The natural setting allows people to express opinions and ideas freely	Only one or a few topics can be discussed
Open expression among members of marginalised social groups is encouraged	Focus group participants produce fewer ideas than in individual interviews
People tend to feel empowered, especially in action-oriented research projects	A moderator may unknowingly limit the open, free expression of group members
The interpretation of quantitative survey results is facilitated	A polarisation effect exists (attitudes become more extreme after group discussion)
Participants may question one another and explain their answers to each other	-

Source: Neuman (2006, p. 412).

to explore issues in the focus group discussions and thereafter develop their action plan for the youth empowerment programme.

Braun and Clark (2013) assert that when interviewing people, one needs to be aware of and be sensitive to the power relationship that exists between the researcher and the participants. In the case of this study, I was of a different race, of a different class, a lecturer at a university, and much older than the participants. I tried my best to put the participants at ease and to make them feel comfortable. My background in child and youth care work enabled me to use my interactional skills to achieve this. The use of focus group discussions was deemed to be appropriate for the study as it allowed me to probe information gathered from the questionnaire in an in-depth manner.

Neuman (2006, p. 412) outlined the advantages and disadvantages of using focus group discussions as a data collection tool, as presented in Table 1.2.

■ Data collection instruments

□ Questionnaire

The questionnaire had a set of closed- and open-ended questions which sought information related to the forms, extent, causes and consequences of violence in the secondary school setting and to explore youth empowerment in the school setting. The use of a questionnaire (quantitative) was effective as it provided information across a broader spectrum of Grade 10 learners in the school and a smaller sample of teachers. According to Welman et al. (2005), questionnaires should have clear instructions, easily understood questions, avoid jargon and have an organised format. In addition, they state that using open-ended questions in a questionnaire is useful as it provides a rich source of information that respondents might not have been able to answer or express in closed questions.

□ **Piloting the questionnaire**

According to Davies (2007, p. 47), piloting a research instrument means to 'try it out on subjects as similar as possible to those whom you are going to target in the main study'. A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted with 20 Grade 10 learners at the chosen school prior to the main survey. These learners were not included in the main sample. The purpose of the pilot was to determine whether the questions were clear and set at an appropriate level and whether any pertinent questions might have been left out (Neuman 2006). The feedback from the pilot implementation was incorporated into the questionnaire before it was disseminated to a larger sample of learners. Teachers were not included in the pilot.

□ **Focus group discussion guide**

According to Henning et al. (2004), focus group discussion guides are important to guide the discussion with the group of participants. The guide serves as a script and allows proper protocols to be followed. The guide should include a welcome, overview of the topic, statement of ground rules and a set of questions. Questions should be clear, bias-free, open-ended and should move from general to specific. This will allow the researcher to probe and gain better insight into the participant's perspective. For the purposes of the study, a semi-structured focus group discussion format was used. I asked the learners a core set of questions in order to delve deeper into certain issues. However, as the discussion continued, I deviated to other unplanned questions that arose out of the discussion that added value to the data collected.

At the start of each focus group discussion, I introduced myself to the learners, thanked them for their participation, asked for permission for the discussion to be tape-recorded, outlined the aim of the focus group discussion, and assured them that the discussion would be confidential. It is important to show interest and to be non-judgemental about what the participants are stating. Social interaction among participants is also a key aspect of focus group discussions. The learners seemed keen to answer the questions and did not feel afraid to express their opinions and feelings or offer an alternative opinion to the one offered by the others in the group.

At the end of each question, once everyone had been given an opportunity to speak, I summarised the points to check whether all the pertinent information had been discussed and whether anyone wanted to add anything else. Summarising was helpful as it allowed me to check whether my understanding corresponds with that of the participants. In addition, at the end of each focus group discussion, each participant, in

turn, was given an opportunity to add any final information. To ensure that all data were captured correctly, a voice-recording device was used with the permission of the learners.

■ Population

The secondary school chosen for the case study is located in Cato Manor, Durban. The school is in the middle of the densely populated Cato Crest informal settlement, which is one of the poorest urban areas in Durban, with a high unemployment rate. It is a no-fee public school that caters for learners from Grades 8 to 12. The medium of instruction is Zulu and English. It had an all-African learner population of 1,330 learners. The teacher population consisted of 43 teachers. Of the 43 teachers, 34 were female and nine were male.

■ Sample size

The learner complement consisted of approximately 250 Grade 10 learners. Purposive sampling was used to select 90 Grade 10 learners for the first part of the study, which was to complete the questionnaire. According to Braun and Clark (2013, p. 56), the aim of purposive sampling is to 'generate insight and in-depth understanding of the topic of interest. It involves selecting data cases on the basis that they will provide information rich data'. Grade 10 learners were in the middle of their schooling career and had already had two years of schooling experience. They were therefore deemed to be the most appropriate group for the study.

The staff complement consisted of 43 teachers, with 34 being female and nine being male. The questionnaire was completed by ten teaching staff who volunteered to be part of the study. Teachers were only involved in providing data for the first part of the study, that is, the questionnaire.

■ Overview of sampling technique (questionnaire, focus group, action group)

As stated, purposive sampling was used in this study. Henning et al. (2004, p. 4) state that 'purposive sampling which has elements of theoretical sampling look towards people who fit the criteria for desirable participants and who can help to build substantive theory further'. Welman et al. (2005) assert that purposive sampling is used where the focus is on the importance of the case and in-depth information focused on key themes. Braun and Clark (2013, p. 59) state it succinctly as 'ultimately, your sample is a crucial determinant of what you find with your research'.

I visited the school in the week prior to the questionnaire being conducted in order to meet and brief the learners about this study. This was also done after school and lasted approximately half an hour. The Life Orientation teacher was also present at this session. During this session, I informed the learners regarding what the research was about and the process of the research; that is, if they chose to participate, it would involve completing a questionnaire. If they chose to continue, it would involve taking part in a 1-h focus group discussion after school, and if they still wished to continue, it would mean that they would be part of an action group that would develop and implement a violence prevention programme to address the specific issues at school.

I informed them that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. I also informed them that the information they provided in the questionnaire and focus group discussions would be confidential. Only if they participated in developing and implementing the violence prevention programme would they be known. I gave them the assent form to complete, as well as the informed consent letters for their parents to complete and return to school. The informed consent letter was both in Zulu and English.

At the end of each of the focus group discussions, I asked for volunteers for the action group. I explained to the learners what being part of the action group entailed – that is, as a team, the learners would develop, implement, and evaluate a youth empowerment programme specifically focused on reducing violence in the school.

Twelve female learners and only two male learners volunteered for the action project part of the research. This was a disappointment as I would have liked more males to have participated in the action team. It would have been as though the male voice was drowned out by the female voice in tackling the issue of school-based violence. As it was based on volunteering, I could not force the other male learners to join.

■ Data analysis

According to Braun and Clark (2013):

An analytic sensibility refers to the skill of reading and interpreting data through the particular theoretical lens of your chosen method. It also refers to being able to produce insights into the meanings of the data that go beyond the obvious or surface-level content of the data, to notice patterns or meanings that link to broader psychological, social or theoretical concerns. (p. 201)

Quantitative data analysis involves converting data to numerical form so that data can be tested, interpreted and conclusions can be drawn from it. Data are classified and the summary is tabulated (in tables and graphs) so

as to make meaning and find patterns in the information generated. Data can be analysed manually or by computer software packages. Various levels of measurement are used, such as nominal (classify into categories), ordinal (order by rank), interval (distance between values is meaningful but with an absolute zero) and ratio (distance between values is meaningful and there is an absolute zero point). Nominal and ordinal variables were used for the study. The method of analysis used was multivariate; that is, more than one variable was tested for most questions in the questionnaire (De Vos et al. 2011).

For the quantitative part of the study, the statistical software STATA was used to analyse the closed-ended questions in the questionnaire. This resulted in frequency distributions and a mean for each question asked, as well as cross-tabulations according to gender (Davies 2007). I conducted a manual thematic analysis of the open-ended questions found in the questionnaire.

The qualitative data from the three focus group discussions were transcribed. According to Henning et al. (2004), the transcripts from focus group discussions and interviews are analysed in order to identify emerging categories and themes. Braun and Clark (2013) referred to this as thematic analysis. Qualitative analysis provides a rich, thick description of the data collected. Braun and Clark (p. 24) define rich descriptions as 'detailed descriptions of the object of study, in which the complexity and contradictions of participants' stories of their lives are included'. Furthermore, the authors state that 'pattern-based analysis rests on the presumption that ideas which recur across a dataset capture something psychologically or socially meaningful' (Braun & Clark 2013, p. 223). In addition, Hennink et al. (2011, p. 218) describe thick descriptions as 'reading data and delving deeper allows you to notice connections and relationships between issues within the data'. In order to achieve a thick description, familiarisation with data is required. Familiarisation allows the researcher to 'make distinctions that are meaningful and display content that is illuminating' (Ritchie et al. 2014, p. 345).

Henning et al. (2004, p. 127) assert that the data analysis process has the following elements:

- An analysis commences with reading all the data and then dividing the data into smaller and more meaningful units.
- Data segments or units are organised into a system that is predominantly derived from the data, which implies that the analysis is inductive.
- The researcher uses comparisons to build and refine categories, define conceptual similarities and discover patterns.

- Categories are flexible and may be modified during the analysis.
- Importantly, the analysis should truly reflect the respondents' perceptions.
- The result of an analysis is a kind of higher-order synthesis in the form of a descriptive picture, patterns or themes, or emerging substantive theory.

Developing codes is a key activity of data analysis in qualitative research. Hennink et al. (2011, p. 217) state that 'Identifying codes allows the researcher to identify the range of issues raised in the data and understand the meanings attached to these'. Inductive codes are codes raised by the participants, and deductive codes are raised by the researcher through the interview questions or theories explored. Furthermore, they stated that analysis should include both sets of codes as inductive codes add richness to the data as they are deemed to be important by the participants and may have been overlooked by the researcher. In addition, the authors stated that comparison and categorising occur during coding (Hennink et al. 2011):

Comparison refines issues in the data by clarifying what makes each issue distinct from others; it can uncover patterns of each issue in the data and identify the nature of links between issues. (p. 243)

Categorizing involves codes with similar characteristics and grouping these together into meaningful categories. Individual codes highlight single issues in the data while categories bring together a group of codes that collectively represent a broader concept or issue. (p. 246)

For in-depth analysis, open, selective and axial coding were used. Open coding is examining and breaking down the data. Selective coding is used to identify core categories. Axial coding is then used to make meaningful connections between categories (Craig 2009; Kumar 2019; Neuman 2006). For this study, the findings from the questionnaire and focus groups were compared. The findings between the learner and teacher questionnaires were also compared. The results from these will be discussed in a later chapter.

Once the youth empowerment programme had been implemented, an evaluation of the programme was done with a group of Grade 10 learners who were present when the violence awareness campaign was done. Evaluation is the process of measuring the impact of the intervention. 'Something new is created and then evaluated' (De Vos et al. 2011, p. 450). The evaluation of the youth empowerment programme was done in the form of a set of reflective questions to determine the impact of the programme.

■ Researcher bias

According to Braun and Clark (2013, p. 37), reflexivity is important when conducting qualitative research. Reflexivity refers to the process of 'critically reflecting on the knowledge we produce, and our role in producing that knowledge'. 'Reflexivity is vital for reflecting on, learning from, and moving beyond, the discriminatory research practices we almost all (unintentionally) engage in' (p. 67). Thus, it is important in action research that the researcher reflects on their role in the research process and that which they bring in terms of their values, beliefs and experiences (Herr & Anderson 2015). To avoid bias and to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the study, triangulation is used. Triangulation in this study was achieved through questionnaires with teachers and learners, focus groups with learners and an evaluation.

■ Validity and reliability in quantitative research

In quantitative research, the concepts of validity and reliability are important constructs the researcher uses to determine the credibility of the study. Validity refers to whether the instrument that is used is correctly measuring what it was set out to measure. Reliability refers to whether the instrument used is consistent and accurate and whether it will provide the same result every time. Statistical procedures and the instrument itself determine validity and reliability (De Vos et al. 2011; Kumar 2019). As such, if the questionnaire was used in another school where violence was problematic, then it would yield similar results.

■ Validity and trustworthiness in qualitative research

According to Braun and Clark (2013), validity in qualitative research is whether a measure accurately captures reality. In qualitative research, this is difficult as the focus is on multiple realities. They asserted that ecological validity would be more appropriate to qualitative research. Ecological validity concerns whether the context of data collection and the findings of the research can be applied to the real world. The context of the data collection of this study (questionnaires, focus groups and action teams in a school setting), as well as the findings of issues related to school-based violence, can be related to the real-world setting as this phenomenon is something that is problematic in many schools.

Trustworthiness is determined through credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability (De Vos et al. 2011; Kumar 2019). Credibility

refers to whether the research has been able to accurately capture the perspectives of the participants. Confirmability refers to whether the results can be confirmed by the participants. Participants were given an opportunity to voice their opinions and thoughts in the focus groups and action group. The results are, therefore, the direct perspectives of participants as they were captured.

Transferability is whether the results of the study can be generalised to other settings. Dependability is similar to reliability in quantitative research. That means that if we had to use the same measure again, it would yield similar results. The scope of the study is limited to one secondary school. Students in other schools might not have the same responses or experiences. One therefore needs to be aware of not generalising the findings. It can, however, be transferred to other settings. According to Herr and Anderson (2015), the process of collaboration and knowledge generated within the research can be transferred to another school setting that is faced with school-based violence. This lends itself to external validity or transferability of the findings. In the case of this study, the same programme will not be developed by learners in another school; however, the processes involved in setting up the action group with the learners can be considered by another school that is also faced with issues of violence.

■ Triangulation

The reliability and validity of a study are also established through triangulation. According to Davies (2007, p. 34), 'triangulation is based on the idea of using two or three different methods to explore the same subject'. Stake (2005, cited in eds. Denzin & Lincoln 2008, p. 133) posits that triangulation 'has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation'. Furthermore, Craig (2009, p. 123) states that 'triangulation reinforces the validity and trustworthiness of action research'. Braun and Clark (2013) define triangulation as:

[T]he process whereby two or more methods of data collection or sources of data are used to examine the same phenomenon, with the aim of getting close to the truth of the object of study as possible. (p. 285)

By using triangulation, the researcher is able to capture the multiple perspectives or realities of the research phenomenon.

In this study, triangulation was achieved through using three data collection methods. Firstly, the questionnaire was implemented. Thereafter, the three focus group discussions were used to verify information found in the questionnaire. The third was in the form of the evaluation, which was done

after the implementation of the programme. Questions in both the questionnaire and focus groups were linked to the research objectives. Denzin and Lincoln (eds. 2008, p. 7) state that 'multiple methods or triangulation reflects the attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena'.

■ Ethical considerations

'Ethics are the norms that guide the relationship between the researcher and participants with a view to protect the latter from harm, disrespect or unfair treatment' (Chevalier & Buckler 2013, p. 171). Researchers need to respect the freedom of people to participate in their research by assuring them that they can withdraw at any time without any detrimental consequences. Researchers must also respect the participants by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity at all times. Participants need to understand the purpose of the research, that their privacy will be protected, and that no harm will come to them during the process of the research (Kumar 2019; Welman et al. 2005). Integrity, honesty and accuracy are also expected by the researcher when reporting on their findings. Researchers should not misrepresent the data or the participants (Braun & Clark 2013; Kumar 2019).

A gatekeeper's letter from the Department of Basic Education as well as the school principal was sought after ethical clearance for the study was given by the university. Learners were asked for their assent to participate in the study. The researcher visited the school to do an information session with all the Grade 10 learners. Parents were also requested to complete an informed consent letter. Participation in the study was voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality were adhered to in the questionnaire, during the focus group discussions and in the evaluation. However, the action research team who planned and implemented the youth empowerment programme were informed beforehand that the action group would not be confidential as everyone would know who they were. They agreed to this.

■ Overview of the book

■ Chapter 1

The chapter presents the background of the study, the research problem and significance of the study, the study aim and objectives, the research design and an overview of the book chapters.

■ Chapter 2

The chapter presents background on the history of schooling in South Africa and the challenges with the South African schooling system.

■ Chapter 3

The chapter presents the theoretical underpinnings of violence and a review and discussion of literature studies (national and international) highlighting the nature, forms, causes and consequences of violence on teachers and learners.

■ Chapter 4

The chapter presents the data and analysis related to the questionnaire and focus group discussions.

■ Chapter 5

The chapter discusses the theoretical underpinnings of empowerment, positive youth development and national and international youth empowerment interventions.

■ Chapter 6

The chapter presents elements of participatory action research and an in-depth review of the planning, implementation and evaluation of the action research project.

■ Chapter 7

The final chapter provides the summary, reflections and recommendations that emanated from the study.

■ Conclusion

This chapter provided the background, significance and objectives of the study. It also highlighted a history of Cato Manor in order to contextualise an understanding of the study setting. The research design, which included the mixed methods approach, data collection, justification of the sampling technique, application of validity, reliability and trustworthiness and ethical considerations, was also discussed. The next chapter focuses on the history of schooling in South Africa and the present challenges in the educational system affecting both learners and teachers.

The history of schooling in South Africa and current challenges

■ Introduction

According to a report by Amnesty International (2020), education in South Africa is seen as one of the most unequal in the world, according to the social and economic status of its citizens. The current state of education and the inequality that exists is embedded in the country's history of colonialism, segregation and structural racism. Thus, before one can explore the issue of school-based violence, it is necessary to understand the context and history of schooling in South Africa as well as the current challenges that persist. This will provide a greater understanding of the issues that learners and teachers face and the impact that these have on educational outcomes as well as the perpetration of school-based violence.

■ The history of schooling in South Africa

Schooling in South Africa has its roots in the colonial period in the 17th century when mission schools were established by the church. On the one hand, mission schools were positive because they provided education to indigenous children who would otherwise have no access to education. Teachers who taught at these schools were well educated and therefore

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provided a good educational foundation. However, the negative aspects of such schools outweighed the positives. This is because the central purpose of mission schools was to spread Christianity to indigenous people through indoctrination. Superiority of white people over black people and a sense of obedience were inculcated in local tribal people (Lewis & Steyn 2003).

The *Bantu Education Act of 1953* further entrenched a sense of inequality and division. There were various Departments of Education for each of the race groups as well as homelands, each with its own set of curricula, standards of education and funding. By the 1970s, the funding for African school children was one-tenth of their white counterparts. The difference in funding meant a vast difference in the equipment, resources, facilities and entire school experience of white children and the other race groups. There was also a vast difference in the quality of training for teachers and the learner-to-teacher ratio in schools. This impacted the quality of education and, ultimately, the pass rate of the various race groups (Amnesty International 2020). By 2010, the matric pass rates in ex-Model C schools were 90%, whereas in township and rural schools it was under 50%–70%. In addition, schools in township and rural areas face greater safety risks (Prew 2013).

Badat and Sayed (2014) and Christie and McKinney (2017) concurred that colonialism and apartheid policies denied African children a right to good, quality education due to its racially based system of segregation, discrimination and inequality. The post-apartheid provision of education is still dealing with a history of unequal funding and access, which continues to pose a very large challenge for the Department of Basic Education. To address the unequal funding of the apartheid era, the government instituted the ranking of schools into quintiles, with quintile one representing poor schools and quintile five representing the wealthiest ones. This has been gazetted in the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF). According to the NNSSF, 60% of learners who attend public schools fall within the range of quintile one to three. The schools identified in this quintile will be considered no-fee schools in 2023 (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2023). The quintile system considers the unemployment and literacy rate of the community in which the school is situated. The quintile system determines the funding allocated to schools as well as instituting a school exemption policy. Data from the National Income Dynamics Survey (NIDS) indicated that 40% of African children attend a quintile one school and only 9% attend a quintile five school. On the other hand, over 90% of white children attend a quintile five school. These data clearly indicate that after 25 years of democracy, African children are still at a poorly disadvantaged level when it concerns educational opportunities (Roodt 2018).

However, it seems that this ranking system is flawed because it still does not address the funding gap of poor schools. The amount received by government for learners at no-fee schools amounts to less than ZAR1,100 per learner per annum as opposed to fees charged at ex-Model C schools, which amount to more than ZAR10,000 per annum. The income gap between these two types of schools is growing. As such, the wealthy and ex-Model C schools are still thriving and poorer schools are declining. This is because wealthy parents and the school governing bodies within wealthy schools are able to fill the gap in funding not supplied by the government. As such, these schools still enjoy the benefits of being well-equipped, properly maintained and well-managed (Van Dyk & White 2019). Due to this, there still exists a link between learners from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and unequal access to good quality basic secondary and tertiary education. According to Amnesty International (2020):

[M]any schools and the communities they serve continue to live with the consequences of the political and economic decisions made during the apartheid era. The result is that a child's experience of education in South Africa still very much depends on where they are born, how wealthy they are and the colour of their skin. (p. 1)

The report further states that inequality is seen in the statistics derived from the education system where (Amnesty International 2020):

The widest gap [exists] between the test scores of the top twenty percent of schools and the rest. Children in the top two hundred schools achieve more distinctions in maths than children in the next six thousand schools combined. More than three quarters of children aged nine cannot read for meaning. Of one hundred learners that start school, fifty to sixty will make it to matric, forty to fifty will pass matric, and only fourteen will go to university. (p. 1)

In addition, the Global Information and Technology Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2016) ranked South Africa 75 out of 76 schools based on its maths and science results. These statistics are notably alarming and paint a bleak picture of the educational landscape of this country. The government has been discussing plans to equip learners for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the foundation of which is science and technology. The question is: How is this to be achieved if learners lack basic competency in language and numeracy?

Since the onset of democracy, curriculum changes have occurred to discard racist, outdated content and replace it with a curriculum that espouses the values and principles laid down in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) (1996). As such, the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and Curriculum 2005 (C2005) were launched to transform the educational system in South Africa. The focus of these was to move learning from being teacher-centred to being learner-centred with an emphasis on learning outcomes and competencies

of learners. Curriculum 2005 was used to reflect the implementation of OBE philosophy within the school system (Ramrathan 2015). However, these came with challenges as there was a lack of proper training in this new pedagogy as well as a lack of learning materials to support learning. In addition, there was much resistance by educators, as they felt that this new curriculum was adopted from Western countries without considering whether it would be suitable for the South African educational context (Schmidt 2017). After a review, these were replaced by the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and National Curriculum Statement (NCS), which have fewer outcomes and assessment criteria.

There are indications that the government has made strides in providing better access to education for all children. However, the quality of education in many schools needs to be redressed so that disadvantaged learners can obtain an equal footing with their counterparts in better-resourced schools so that they may change their life trajectories and set a course in life that does not perpetuate a cycle of poverty and inequality. According to a study done by the Equal Education Law Centre (2022), 80% of high schools are dysfunctional. Some of the reasons for this dysfunction will be addressed in the next section.

■ Challenges in the schooling system

■ Poverty and inequality

South Africa has made progress economically since the onset of democracy. One of the policies implemented by the government in 1996 to address previous unequal wealth distribution and to enhance economic growth was Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). Since then, the government has implemented other policies with a similar aim such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), skills development and social grants. However, despite these strategies by the government, economic growth still remains very low (Tendengu, Kapingura & Tsegaye 2022). There is still a vast difference between the rich and poor in this country. This is seen in the high levels of unemployment and poverty that exist within South African society and the differences in access to health care, housing and the quality of education.

According to the World Bank (2020), 55.5% of people in South Africa live in poverty. The South African Unemployment Statistics Report (StatsSA 2023) highlighted that the unemployment rate in South Africa in 2023 was 31.9%. Furthermore, the Development Bank of South Africa (2023) reported that socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty and inequality are seen in the school context. Inadequate quality of education

received by children from poor households and the lack of resources at home impact school attainment, leading to dropping out of school (Hartnack 2017). Ngepah, Makgallemele and Saba (2023) conceded that 'education should be used as a tool to reduce poverty vulnerability by increasing in quality'.

The dire consequences of poverty were evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when teaching and learning were moved to online platforms. Lack of technology training, devices and data/Wi-Fi, as well as a lack of conducive home spaces, greatly impacted learning in poor households (Mthlana, Abenyegan and Dlamini 2021; Mukuna & Aloka 2020; Terzi, Unterhalter & Suissa 2023).

■ Substance abuse and teenage pregnancy

The use of substances is one of the main reasons for school dropouts and grade repetition. Negative peer pressure, under-performing in school, family dysfunction, inadequate care, inadequate school support and losing hope in life situations push adolescents to drug use (Hartnack 2017; Mohale & Mokwena 2020; Nzama & Ajani 2021). Prolonged substance abuse can affect brain development and, therefore, cause delays in learning (Modisaotsile 2012). Marijuana, *okka* pipe and crystal meth or *tik* are the most prevalent types of drugs used (Sedibe & Hendricks 2020). Peltzer and Pharwana-Mefuya (2018) found in a population-based survey that drug use in youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years old increased from 4.2% in 2008 to 5.7% in 2012, with cannabis and *whoonga* widely used among youth.

Teenage pregnancy is another major problem in South Africa and can severely impact the future of a learner due to falling behind in schoolwork or dropping out of school (Mouton, Louw & Strydom 2013; Nkosi & Pretorius 2019). This is because of the added responsibility that motherhood brings to the life of a young person who is already grappling with other issues such as poverty, a dysfunctional family system, unsupportive parents, etc. (Modisaotsile 2012).

■ Lack of parental involvement

Due to the large teacher-to-learner ratio in many classrooms across South Africa, many children fall through the cracks. Parents can be a great asset to the teacher and to the achievement of their children; however, they are uninvolved in their children's education by not assisting with homework, not attending school meetings and not managing the disruptive behaviour of their children. It is important for parents to be aware of what their children are learning in school, the extra-curricular activities that they are

involved in, the issues that they are facing at school and the friends that they keep. The reason for the lack of involvement could merely be a sense of apathy, but in reality, many parents are unable to be involved due to inadequate understanding of the content because they themselves are products of a poor educational system. Furthermore, parents may be working long hours and may be too tired to assist with homework (Modisaotsile 2012; Nkosi & Adebayo 2021). In addition, most parents are not involved in assisting teachers with the development of morals and values. If these are lacking at home, then it is difficult for teachers to expect good behaviour from learners at school. This makes the task of teaching more difficult (Segalo & Rambuda 2018).

■ Poor quality of teaching and learning

Amnesty International (2020) and a study by Du Plessis and Lethwere (2020) highlighted that poor-quality teaching and learning result from insufficiently trained teachers, overcrowded classes with above-the-norm teacher-to-learner ratios, as well as a shortage of classrooms. Amnesty International (2020) found a ratio of 1:70 in one school. This could possibly be the case in many schools across South Africa. The impact of poor-quality learning and teaching on learners is the high drop-out rates. Teachers they spoke to indicated challenges related to overload of work, lacking the skills to deal with disruptive learners, a focus on covering content rather than focusing on quality teaching methods, continuous changes to the curriculum and insufficient continuing training and development for these curriculum changes.

Of major concern is the amount of time spent on actual teaching. The teaching time is lower in schools with larger class ratios and with learners who come from poor backgrounds. The Amnesty International report (2020) found that teachers spend more time managing the behaviour of learners than going through actual content. It was found that only 66% of class time is spent on teaching. Loss of teaching time impacts the problem-solving and critical-thinking skills of learners. This is because disruptive classrooms hinder discussions and demonstrations. As a result, teachers resort to the transmission mode of teaching rather than active learning (Matsepe, Maluleke & Cross 2019). These challenges are quite substantial and could lead to stress and demotivation among teachers (Motseke 2019).

Stein (2017) posits that the right of learners to be educated in their choice of language is a tool to break the legacy of apartheid, where learners were forced to learn in English and Afrikaans. Learners need to be able to grasp concepts, and this is done most effectively through home language instruction. Home language also enables parents to assist their children

with homework. Learners and parents then have a choice to choose English due to the benefits of tertiary education and future employment. However, Von Esch, Motha and Kubota (2020) highlight that in understanding the language of teaching and learning pedagogies used in classrooms, the link between race, colonialism and its impact on current teaching and learning practices cannot be ignored. Current educational practices need to be interrogated and transformed in light of this.

In addition, Prew (2013) states that poor results in school are linked to children being taught in their home language in the foundation phase and then being taught in English from Grade 4 until the end of secondary school. Poor educational outcomes are linked to the fact that children cannot make sense of what is being taught because they do not understand the teacher. Many teachers are ill-equipped to teach in multi-lingual classrooms (Prew 2013). The author further suggests that home language instruction is extended into the primary and secondary schooling phases or that a stronger Foundation Phase for English is established. Poor teaching and learning experiences cause a lack of basic numeracy and language skills, which in turn causes a delay in learning in future grades and leads to grade repetition or children dropping out of school (Hartnack 2017). Roodt (2018) avers that even though the matric pass rate is increasing every year, evidence from universities suggests that the standard of education is dropping as students coming from most secondary schools into universities are ill-prepared and ill-equipped to deal with higher learning.

■ **Poor infrastructure and facilities**

Research done by Amnesty International between 2017 and 2019 at schools in Gauteng and Eastern Cape found that the DBE was not adhering to the standards of its own minimum norms and standards for educational facilities. There were many cases of poorly maintained buildings that were posing a danger and health hazard for learners and teachers. Lack of furniture and equipment, lack of textbooks, lack of library and computer facilities and overcrowded classes were major issues as well (Bansilal & Rosenberg 2016; Barnes 2021). In addition, a lack of visible security measures increased the problem of burglaries and vandalism of schools. The biggest concern, however, was the lack of basic sanitation and access to water, with pit latrines still being used 25 years into democracy. The report indicates a shocking statement by the DBE that it would take the department fourteen years to replace pit latrines across all schools in South Africa. There have been numerous media reports of children who have died by falling into these latrines.

■ Racism

South Africa's colonial past and measures put into place by apartheid policies have led to structural oppression and racism. In a newspaper article in *Spotlight Africa*, Qwabe and Potterton (2020) highlighted racism in South African schools and stated that structural racism and white privilege remain an issue across the world. The student and teacher component in many wealthy upmarket schools remains mainly white learners and teachers. Other middle-class schools have few black teachers even though black children are in the majority. In addition, the school code of conduct in these schools is not cognisant of the values and culture of non-white learners. Furthermore, the authors report that schools need to consider transformation seriously by embracing diversity. Makoelle (2014), in an article on an analysis of black African learners' perceptions in previously advantaged white schools, found that despite transformation in the education system with the onset of democracy, not much has truly changed in the education system as there are still ethnic and racial divides present. This corroborates the sentiments of Qwabe and Potterton (2020). It seems that six years later, exclusionary attitudes are still prevalent in these schools.

Naidoo, Pillay and Conley (2018), in their article on the effectiveness of school management in managing racial integration at public schools, cite the challenges currently being faced by schools. These challenges include policies that do not match the Bill of Rights within the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), which states categorically about the issues of racism and protecting the dignity and worth of individuals. The authors state that there is an absence of policies to deal with the issue of racism within schools and among teachers who are unable to cope with the racial integration of learners or who are unable to manage racial conflict among learners and between learners and teachers. Furthermore, the curriculum does not accommodate the diverse needs of learners from different backgrounds and the need for a decolonised curriculum. This is corroborated by Naidoo and De Beer (2022).

Naidoo et al. (2018) also state that the poor inter-racial relationships between learners and between learners and teachers are of concern in multi-racial schools. This is highlighted in the report by the Gauteng Department of Education in 2022 about incidents of racism and sexual harassment at Hoërskool Jan Viljoen in Randfontein. The incident at the school involved violent online videos that included racial slurs. Subsequently, the school descended into disorder, which led to community protests.

Name-calling and labelling related to race are rife in schools, and many conflicts occur because of learners speaking in their mother tongue. They found that learners from townships and informal settlements are degraded

by learners and teachers from the suburbs. It seems that teachers are still unaware of the effects of racial discrimination. This is quite concerning as teachers are *in loco parentis* in the school context and should therefore act as responsible custodians in teaching children morally correct behaviour. Ultimately, there should be consistency in implementing policies related to race, as some schools' codes of conduct do not address the issue of racism (Naidoo et al. 2018).

Thus, merely having policies in place does nothing to change the negative attitude or behaviour of learners and teachers. Constructive measures through active learning programmes and opportunities need to be developed and implemented to address this phenomenon. Multicultural education emphasising social justice is necessary if people are to address this issue effectively. Social justice is necessary to create awareness of the historical roots of prejudice, stereotyping and racism. However, it is important to note that implementing social justice programmes in poorly resourced multicultural schools with high levels of violence and poverty is a challenge (Alexander 2016).

■ Single and child-headed households

Both single-mother and child-headed households are a major concern in South Africa. In both of these situations, children lack male role models and, therefore, look to their peers for role modelling. This can impact the increase of violence in schools through negative peer pressure.

Single motherhood results from death, divorce, separation or abandonment. Children from single-parent families experience poverty and material deprivation due to inadequate resources and income. Because of the long working hours of parents, children have to take on additional chores and take care of younger siblings. Lack of parental contact, care and involvement leads to poor educational performance. The lack of resources also impacts the schooling experience of children. These factors impact the overall well-being of children (eds. Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado 2018).

Child-headed households are formed as a result of the death of parents because of, among others, illnesses, civil wars, labour migration or abandonment. The oldest sibling then has to take responsibility for the household. Extended families cannot take on the role of caretakers because of the creation of nuclear families by labour migration as a legacy of apartheid. Children are thus left without adult support systems. Children from these households suffer from poor living standards and malnutrition. In addition, the oldest sibling has to drop out of school and find employment because of a lack of adult income in the home. There is limited access to education for the oldest sibling and the other siblings in the household

because of insufficient financial resources to support quality schooling (Shava, Gunhidzirai & Shava 2016).

■ Conclusion

Schooling in South Africa has been impacted by the legacy of apartheid policies such as the *Bantu Education Act*. Despite the strides made by the government to address inequality by implementing revised funding and curriculum design, there are myriad challenges that still plague a vast number of schools. These challenges, which are highlighted in this chapter, include poverty, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, lack of parental involvement, poor quality of teaching and learning, racism, single-parent and child-headed households and poor infrastructure. Until these challenges are addressed adequately, the issue of school-based violence will persist in South Africa. The next chapter will explore the theoretical perspectives of violence by focusing on the nature of school-based violence, its forms, causes, as well as the role played by the peer group, school, family and community.

Understanding school violence and theoretical perspectives

■ Introduction

The previous chapter explored the history of schooling in South Africa and the current challenges in the country's education system. According to the *World Report on Violence against Children (2006)*, most of the violence that children experience is perpetrated by family members, peers, fellow classmates and teachers. A further report by the WHO in 2020 highlighted that on a global level, an estimated 1 billion children and adolescents had been victims of physical, sexual and emotional violence over the previous year.

To understand the nature of school-based violence, this chapter will provide a review of local and international literature that has guided this study. The review will focus on violence broadly as well as positioning violence within the South African context. The nature of adolescent development and an in-depth analysis of the nature, causes, effects and consequences of school-based violence will be explored. Theories of violence and the impact of other contextual issues such as peer group, family and community on the prevalence of school-based violence will also be highlighted. For the purposes of this chapter, the words *youth*, *young people* and *adolescent* have been used interchangeably to represent the age group of 12–18 years.

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■ The nature of adolescent development

'The term adolescence is derived from the Latin verb *adolescere*, meaning to grow up or to grow to adulthood' (Gouws, Kruger & Burger 2008, p. 2). Adolescence or youth development starts between the ages of eleven and thirteen years old and ends between the ages of seventeen and 23 years old.

Up until the 19th century, children were seen as miniature models of their parents. They shared the same tasks, entertainment and expectations as their parents, were married at a young age and were not involved in formal schooling. The change in adolescence was a result of agricultural societies transforming into industrial ones. It was only in the 20th century, with the emergence of formal schooling and children's rights, that adolescence was clearly understood and distinguished as a separate stage of development (Louw & Louw 2014).

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development and Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development are just two of many theories that clearly outline the different stages of child and adolescent development. Erikson's theory focuses on the formation of identity through the successful negotiation of a 'crisis' in each stage of development. Piaget's theory focuses on how children and adolescents understand and interpret their world and includes aspects such as knowledge acquisition, memory, thinking, imagination, decision-making and language (Louw & Louw 2014).

It was also during the 20th century that the concept of youth culture emerged. Consequently, as a result of the changes that have occurred in the 20th century, a young person navigating through this phase is faced with many challenges within themselves, their peer group, school, family and community. These challenges include behavioural problems, health risks, substance abuse, unprotected sex, pregnancy, as well as physical, sexual and psychological violence in different contexts. Issues of parental authority, emotional turmoil and risky behaviour are also a concern (Hawley 2011).

Furthermore, global figures indicate a surge in the adolescent population, especially in the low-income group. More than 1.2 billion adolescents, which is 16% of the world's population, are faced with social challenges nowadays. 'Adolescent development involves profound changes in social contexts, social roles and social responsibilities. Thus, adolescents enter puberty earlier and become independent earlier' (Dahl et al. 2018, p. 441).

According to Marcus (2007, p. 10), 'adolescence is a period of great destabilization of individual development with major personality disruption as a result of pubertal upheavals'. The key features of adolescent development are related to the search for identity, gaining independence from parents, social emancipation and a sense of belonging within their

peer group. According to Erikson (cited in Louw & Louw 2014, p. 342), identity refers to 'the individual's awareness of themselves as an independent, unique person with a specific place in society'.

'Identity development implies that adolescents need to define who they are, what is important to them and what directions they want to take in life?' (Louw & Louw 2014, p. 342). The young person experiences role confusion if they do not attain a stable sense of identity. In addition, they are extremely self-conscious of the impression that others form of them. The adolescent contemplates how others in their social context perceive them and how this perception fits into their sense of self. However, Dahl et al. (2018) see adolescence as a pivotal time in development that can be used to enhance the mastery, social learning and autonomy of young people.

Their social development is centred on relationships with their parents, other adults, siblings, teachers, friends and peers. In their search for independence and identity, the adolescent foregoes relationships with their parents for a closer relationship with friends and peers. This might result in conflict with parents and other authority figures such as teachers. At this stage of development, more than in any other stage, friends and peers become a key socialising agent for young people. This influence of friends and peers has either a positive or negative effect on the attitudes and behaviour of the adolescent. In their quest for social emancipation, they are confronted with making their own decisions, conforming to the group and questioning their values and principles.

In their desire to be accepted within the group, some young people become loud and provocative and therefore take on a negative identity. In addition, youth believe that they are invincible, which leads to high risk-taking behaviour involving, for example, drugs, sex, alcohol, weapon carrying and anti-social behaviour (Ali, Swahn & Sterling 2011; Gouws et al. 2008). This influence of peers could lead to the adolescent engaging in school-based violence. Thus, the transition between childhood and adulthood is a very tumultuous and confusing time for a young person (Louw & Louw 2014).

■ Legislation protecting children and youth

Violence is a major concern across the world. The victimisation, perpetration and witnessing of violence may condition young people to accept and justify the use of violence to resolve conflict with others. The children of South Africa are protected by various statutes promulgated at a national and international level. These pieces of legislation also strive to enhance the holistic development of children and aim to ensure that they reach their full potential.

These include Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948, p. 54), which states that 'Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'. Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that 'State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity' (United Nations 2001, p. 11).

Article 29 of the UNCRC (UN 2001, p. 12) and Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union 1990) state that:

Education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential and that education should lead to the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance and equality of sexes. (p. 4)

The *South African Schools Act No. 84* (Government Gazette 1996), in its preamble, states that:

[*The school system*] will provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance and uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators.

The South African Constitution (RSA 1996) aims to provide safe environments for children to live and learn free from discrimination, maltreatment and violence. Yet, despite the pieces of legislation cited above, studies and news reports suggest that many children in South Africa do not enjoy their human rights to the fullest extent. They are victims of violence in their families and communities. In addition, many schools are tainted with violence and are thus unable to fulfil the values enshrined in these pieces of legislation. The rights of children are undermined, and their well-being is threatened at an alarming scale.

■ Violence in South African society

As stated in the first chapter of this book, crime surveys and statistics have consistently shown that South Africa is one of the most violent countries in the world. The statistics are quite alarming and confirm that South Africans live in a violent society and that violence spills over into families, schools and communities. Aggression and violence have become the norm and have become deeply embedded in the fabric of society in all contexts, even in parliament.

The violence and crime experienced in South African society have their roots in colonial history and structural oppression through

apartheid (Clark 2012; Collins 2013; Mathews & Benvenuti 2014; Pahad & Graham 2012; SACE 2011). This has led to decades of political unrest and instability, the repercussions of which are still being felt today. Risk factors and violence present in South African society are evident in the family, community and society as a whole (eds. Bezuidenhout & Joubert 2008). Similarly, Burton (2008) states that:

Violence in South African schools is embedded in the broader violent South African environment, is a phenomenon that has both structural and cultural dimensions and schools as social institutions reflect violence and contribute to its occurrence. (p. 2)

The assessment report by the Department of Social Development and the World Bank on Youth Violence, Policy and Programmes (World Bank 2012, p. 11) cites the factors associated with youth violence in South Africa as:

- The dislocation created by apartheid, which profoundly altered social structures and created parents who lacked the parenting skills required to raise healthy children.
- The violent legacy of the political struggle, which entrenched the notion of violence as a legitimate means of achieving change.
- The political transition and the associated reshaping of forms of social control and legitimacy.
- The rising criminality and violence associated with South Africa's growing population of young people or its youth bulge.
- High levels of poverty and inequality.
- High levels of substance abuse.
- Violent imagery and messaging in the media and in films and computer games.
- The normalisation of violence.
- Gender identities and gender insecurities, particularly among young men.

Dube and Hlalele (2018) aver that:

[T]he social injustices that propel school violence include the unfair treatment of learners and educators, unfair distribution of school resources, insensitivity to gender and discrimination that degrade learners and educators. (p. 78)

■ Violent media and aggression

According to the report of the Media Violence Commission (2012, p. 1), 'the media landscape is ever changing with new technologies resulting in greater interactivity on smaller, graphically superior, and computationally more powerful devices'. Young people today have 24-h access to media forms such as digital television, music, the Internet, social media, video games and online gaming. These can be educational and contribute to developing a greater knowledge base, pro-social values and interaction.

However, there are also great risks with this. Media impacts the thinking, affective state and behaviour of the person viewing it. The report outlined various studies and meta-analyses that looked at the link between media and heightened aggression in young people. The report found that exposure to violent media increases the aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviour of young people, not necessarily in the short term but in the long term.

In addition, young people observe and then imitate the actions of others. The young person viewing violent content will therefore imitate the actions observed. Media characters who are seen as role models have a greater influence on the young person's behaviour. Consequently, if violent images are seen repeatedly, then this becomes part of the stored memory of the individual, becomes more accessible, and is more likely to influence behaviour. Young people become desensitised to violent content as they see the behaviour displayed as one that is socially justified (Dogutas 2013; eds. Ward, Van der Merwe & Dawes 2013).

Despite its benefits, nowadays, social media has been used as a platform through which learners perpetuate acts of violence against others. Exposure to violence in various social media platforms may be linked to harmful psychosocial effects such as emotional distress, negative body image, risky behaviour, increase in aggressive behaviour, cyberaddiction, cyber-bullying, cyberstalking, normalisation of violence and an unrealistic view of the world (Boudhane 2023; Byars et al. 2020; Guo 2021; Vannucci et al. 2020).

■ The theoretical perspectives of violence

■ Violence and aggression defined

According to Rutherford et al. (2007), interpersonal violence is defined as:

Violence which includes acts of violence and intimidation that occur between family members, between intimate partners or between individuals, whether or not they are known to one another, and where the violence is not specifically intended to further the aims of any group or cause. This category includes child maltreatment, youth violence, some forms of sexual violence and abuse of elders. (p. 677)

The assessment report by the Department of Social Development and World Bank on Youth Violence, Policy and Programmes (World Bank 2012) provides the following definition:

[*Youth violence is*] the involvement of young people, whether as victims or perpetrators, in incidents involving the threat or use of physical violence in the context on interpersonal, inter-communal or other conflict and crime. This violence may be inflicted with or without a weapon, and may or may not result in physical injuries or death. (p. 5)

Interpersonal violence occurs between individuals who may or may not be related within the family, community and institutional settings such as school. 'Aggression and violence involve interpersonal confrontations with the goal of harm to another' (Marcus 2007, p. 10). Marcus further states that aggression and violence can be manifested in two ways. 'Reactive aggression is angry, impulsive aggression and proactive aggression is intended to achieve the goal of obtaining something from the opponent' (p. 10). According to Huesmann (2018), aggression in adolescents is the product of personal traits and environmental factors. Through observational learning, adolescents create social cognitions about the world which they then manifest in behaviour. He stated that violence can be viewed as a 'contagious disease which can be caught simply through its repeated observation' (Huesmann 2018, p. 119).

These definitions denote the serious nature of violence and aggression that results in harm at the individual, family and societal levels. The topic of violence is something that is of great significance to family, school, community and society and thus needs to be understood in its fullest context. Only then will effective interventions be implemented to address this concerning phenomenon.

■ Theories of violence

A number of theories explore the concept of violence and aggression at a biological, social and contextual level. An exploration of these theories is important to understand the root causes of violence. The specific theories chosen for discussion are related to the phenomenon of school violence, particularly in the context of Cato Manor. Much of what is discussed encompasses seminal theories that greatly influenced the development of the understanding of the root causes of violence and the role of context in school violence perpetration.

□ Eco-systemic models of development

A key theory to understanding the impact of violence on the development of a young person is the eco-systemic model of development. This model provides insight into the impact of the context on the holistic development of an individual. The ecological model by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1999) is a well-known eco-systemic theory that looks at how factors in the environment hinder or support the development of an individual throughout their lifetime. Du Plessis (2008) formulated the bio-eco-systemic model from Bronfenbrenner's original theory. Both frameworks suggest that one cannot only look at school violence as a problem residing in the individual, but one needs to look at how each system within the ecological model impacts the

prevalence of school violence. The ecological model focuses on the environment, the processes between the systems, and the individual characteristics of the developing person. Bronfenbrenner (1999) posits that:

Throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio-psychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. It is a basic premise that development is a function of forces emanating from multiple settings and from the relations between these settings. (p. 5)

The model has five systems, namely:

- *Microsystems* are settings in which the child has direct contact with significant others such as parents, teachers, friends, peers, etc. This system focuses on the quality of the family and school environment and the relationship with peer groups and friends. The belief systems of significant others within the microsystem influence the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of the young person. An example is the influence of the peer group to engage in anti-social behaviour.
- The *mesosystem* is the relationship between two or more settings in the microsystem, for example, the home and school environment. The relationship between the two contexts will impact on the development of the child. For example, the lack of parental involvement in the schooling of the child will affect the child's academic achievement.
- The *exosystem* comprises settings in which the child does not directly participate, but in which decisions are taken which affect the child or their parents directly or indirectly. For example, the decision that the school governing body takes to hire security guards to patrol the school will impact the feeling of safety that the child feels while at school.
- The *macrosystem* involves institutions, belief patterns, ideology and behaviour operating at the level of society. For example, violence seen as a norm in South African society teaches young people that it is acceptable to behave in a violent manner.
- The *chronosystem* is the cultural and historical period in which the individual lives. An example would be the impact that apartheid has had on the development of the parents of adolescents. This, in turn, will influence how adolescents are raised by their parents.

The positive features and risk factors present within each of the settings converge to influence the levels of violence in the young person's life. Ecosystemic models suggest that experiences and the environment are not seen as independent of the individual but as something that shapes their development.

□ Galtung's theory of violence

Galtung (1969, 1996), in his pioneering research on violence and peace, distinguished between physical and psychological violence as well as between personal/direct violence and structural/indirect violence. He stated that physical violence occurs when one inflicts hurt or harm on the other, and psychological violence occurs when one inflicts harm on the mental well-being or soul of the other. Personal or direct violence involves a subject who performs the act of violence and directly harms another person. This type of violence is visible and overt.

Structural/indirect violence, on the other hand, may not involve a subject that directly harms another but rather is 'violence that is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances' (Galtung 1969, p. 171). Structural violence is known as social injustice. In South Africa, structural violence was seen in the repressive structures of the apartheid era, where there was an unequal distribution of resources based on race. The repercussions are still experienced today.

Poverty, which is seen as a form of structural violence, hinders parents from providing for the material needs of their children. According to the report on child poverty in South Africa (StatsSA 2020), 60% of children are *multidimensionally poor*, and more than 50% of children are living below the lower-bound national poverty line, with rural female-headed households experiencing higher levels of poverty than male-headed households. In addition, the highest poverty rate is among black South Africans. Poverty-stricken schools are often in violent gang-ridden communities, which further hinders the development of children (Meyer & Chetty 2017).

Galtung also distinguished between manifest and latent violence. Much of the violence seen in schools today is manifest as it is clearly observable by the actions and behaviour of learners and teachers. According to Galtung (1969, p. 184), 'personal violence tends to breed manifest violence'. In essence, structural violence has led to much of the socio-economic conditions present today, as well as the legacy of a violent society. Lee (2019) elaborated on Galtung's theory by stating that structural violence refers to avoidable limitations that people with more power exert over others with lesser power through politics, economic resources, religion and culture. These limitations inhibit people from opportunities that ultimately hinder them from achieving a life of quality.

Similarly, Burton's Human Needs Theory (1997) suggests that human needs require gratification. If there are structures within society that

suppress these needs which hinder them from being met, it can lead to conflict and crime (Burton 1997, cited in Muro-Ruiz 2002). Cato Manor, due to its history, is a community where poverty and unemployment are rife, and therefore, many learners at the school bear the brunt of these conditions on their holistic development.

□ Instinct theories of aggression

One of the oldest theories of aggression, which was formulated by Sigmund Freud (1915, cited in Giacolini & Sabatello 2019), argued that human beings have inborn tendencies to be violent and are programmed to behave aggressively towards others. In other words, it is by one's basic human nature that one shows aggression towards others. A related view by Konrad Lorenz suggests that human beings possess a fighting instinct that was developed during evolution in order to ensure that the strongest survived and passed their genes on to the next generation (Drndarevic 2021). If one views school-based violence from the instinct theory perspective, one can thus state that when young people are violent towards others, they are not to blame for their behaviour but are merely playing out their basic nature as human beings and that they are therefore predisposed to being violent.

□ Bandura's social learning theory of aggression

Albert Bandura formulated the ground-breaking theory on social learning. According to the social learning view:

[M]an is neither driven by inner forces nor buffeted helplessly by environmental influences. Rather, psychological functioning is best understood in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between behaviour and its controlling conditions. (Bandura 1971, p. 2)

The central idea around social learning theory is that the social environment in which a person is raised and socialised has a major role in determining their current and future behaviour. In terms of school violence, the young person has positive relationships with significant others who model and reinforce violent behaviour. New patterns of behaviour are acquired in two ways, namely, through direct experience or vicariously through observation.

The individual observes the behaviour of significant others with whom they regularly associate. This significant other (parent, teacher, sibling, peer, etc.), who is seen as a person of influence, sets an example for the individual. Once the behaviour of the example is observed, it is then imitated in various settings such as the family, school, peer group, etc. Reinforcement of behaviour by others, such as parents, teachers and peers, regulates the new behaviour pattern.

A young person is socialised and observes violence in the family, school or community by significant others such as parents, peers, teachers and other adults. These violent acts are then imitated in the school setting (Botha, Myburgh & Poggenpoel 2012). On the other hand, they might observe physical or sexual assault in the school setting by teachers or peers and then imitate such acts in the family or community setting. In view of Bandura's theory, it is likely that the violence that one sees manifested in the school, family and community setting is a result of negative socialisation.

Renn (2006, cited in King 2012) acknowledges the impact of social learning on violent behaviour by stating that the quality of love and security by caregivers during infancy impacts the ability of the individual to regulate their emotions, thereby leading to affective violence.

□ Hirschi's social bond/social control theory

As with the instinct theory, Hirschi's Social Bond/Social Control theory (1969), which is still widely applicable today (Cheon, Katz & Freeman 2023), also suggested that aggression is an innate part of one's human nature. Hirschi argued, however, that most people control these urges to be aggressive. Controlling one's aggressive urges is related to the bonds that one forms with pro-social values, pro-social people and pro-social institutions. These bonds are social conventions rather than formally enforced laws. There are four interrelated forms of these bonds, namely, attachment, commitment, involvement and belief, which can be used to understand school-based violence. In Hirschi's view:

Attachment refers to the level of psychological affection one has for pro-social others and institutions. *Commitment* refers to the importance of the social relationships that people value, which they would not want to risk jeopardising. *Involvement* relates to the opportunity costs associated with how people spend their time. *Belief* refers to the degree to which one adheres to the values associated with behaviours that conform to the law (Hirschi 1969, pp. 58–59).

According to Hirschi, parents, peers and schools are important aspects of *attachment*. If young people form close attachments with their parents, pro-social peers and schools, then they are less likely to become involved in deviant behaviour. Young people will be unable to form close attachments with their parents if they have poor relationships with them due to the lack of support or being a victim of violence. If they have deviant peers, then they themselves become involved in deviant behaviour. In a school rife with violence, it becomes very difficult for a learner to feel any form of close attachment. The question is how, then, does one ensure that by dealing with issues of school-based violence, the learners do in fact form a close attachment with their school?

In terms of *commitment*, young people will be less likely to be involved in school-based violence if they fear looking bad and jeopardising their relationships with their parents, peers, teachers or other significant adults. In terms of *involvement*, young people will be less likely to be involved in school-based violence if they are engaged in developmentally appropriate, stimulating activities. In terms of *belief*, young people who have not internalised conventional beliefs related to pro-social values and attitudes are more likely to engage in deviant behaviour. Young people who do not value rules, for example, will have a lax attitude towards the rules in school and, therefore, engage in assaulting and stealing from their classmates.

□ Agnew's general strain theory

Agnew's General Strain theory, which has gained notable attention since its development in 1992, differs from Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Hirschi's Social Control/Social Bond Theory because it focuses 'explicitly on negative relationships with others: relationships in which others prevent the individual from achieving positively valued goals' (Agnew 1992, pp. 48–49). According to Agnew, there are three major types of strain, with each strain describing a different type of negative relationship with others:

Other individuals may prevent one from achieving positively valued goals, remove or threaten to remove positively valued stimuli that one possesses or present or threaten to present one with noxious or negatively valued stimuli. (p. 50)

Strain theory also suggests that young people are forced into deviant behaviour due to negative emotional states linked to anger that derives from being involved in negative relationships (Agnew 1992):

This negative affect creates pressure for corrective action and may lead adolescents to make use of illegitimate channels of goal achievement, attack or escape from their source of adversity and/or manage their affect through the use of illicit drugs. (p. 49)

In terms of school violence, an adolescent may become involved in acts of violence due to achieving goals through illegitimate means such as acquiring possessions through theft, bullying other learners to do their homework or allowing them to cheat on a test. They could also become a bully themselves if they have been victimised by others or defend themselves when being bullied by others. Thus, young people who have been victimised in school may turn to drugs to relieve some of the negative effects related to the experience of violence at home or in school.

□ Drive theory of aggression

Drive theories posit that 'aggression stems from external conditions that arouse the motive to harm or injure others' (Baron & Byrne 2000, p. 443).

One of the most well-known of the drive theories is the Frustration Aggression Hypothesis (Dollard et al. 1939, cited in Breuer & Elson 2017). This hypothesis states that an external condition such as frustration can drive a person to behave aggressively and harm another person. Similarly, Galtung's (1969) theory on violence postulates that conflict is the result of frustration that occurs because of goal-states being blocked. He further suggested that the source of frustration is the scarcity of resources. Thus, according to this theory, adolescents involved in school violence could be behaving in such a manner due to the frustration that they feel as a result of family (conflict, lack of support, low economic status, etc.) or school problems (academic, peer group or being victimised).

Following the discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of violence, the nature, form and consequences of school violence will be explored in the sections below.

■ The nature of school-based violence

The school, like the family, is a very significant agent of socialisation for a young person. On average, a child in secondary school spends a minimum of six hours per day at school. This is where children do not just gain knowledge about subject content but learn about character development as well. According to Gouws et al. (2008):

[A]mong the most critical development tasks that have to be performed by adolescents is socialisation, is finding their place in society, acquiring interpersonal skills, tolerating personal and cultural differences and developing self-confidence. (p. 80)

It would seem that school would be an ideal place for the young person to learn and model these traits, but sadly, this is not the case.

School-based violence is of national and global concern. It is not a new phenomenon and has been reported on for the past two decades. For example, studies by Burnett (1998), Maree (2000), Harber (2001), and the World Report on Violence and Health (Krug et al. 2002) have pointed to the alarming rate of violence in schools. 'Violence seems to be escalating in South African schools, aggravating the existing lack of discipline in schools and impacting extremely negatively on learners' (Maree 2000, p. 10).

As with current studies (Hochfeld et al. 2022; Qwabe, Maluleke & Olutola 2022), these studies have also focused on issues such as harsh disciplinary measures, psychological violence, sexual violence and gender-based violence. Causes of violence such as substance abuse, weapons, gangs, poverty and unemployment were also mentioned. The studies also point to the consequences of violence as being anxiety and depressive disorders, behavioural problems, substance abuse and other social and

health problems. It seems that the status quo has remained intact. The assessment report by the Department of Social Development and World Bank on Youth Violence, Policy and Programmes (2012) states that young people in South Africa are at a high risk of violence manifested through crime, maltreatment, corporal punishment and bullying. Perpetration of violent acts mostly occurs in schools.

A study by Ngqela and Lewis (2012) carried out at a township school in the Western Cape to understand township adolescents' experience of school violence found a lack of safety in school and in the classroom due to poor classroom management, educator absenteeism and gang activity. A report by the African Child Policy Forum (2016) indicated that children across the African continent experience high levels of violence at school. Figures from the report indicate that 92% of learners in Togo, 86% in Sierra Leone, 73% in Egypt, 71% in Ghana, and 60% in Kenya had been victims of violence perpetrated by teachers and classmates.

A large-scale study carried out by Mncube and Harber (2014) in four secondary schools in each of the six provinces in South Africa to elicit perceptions and experiences of learners, teachers and parents about school-based violence found that 55% of the learners were victims of school violence. Furthermore, 28% had experienced violence daily. Gangsterism, weapon carrying, drugs use and bullying were rife in schools. Teachers were psychologically and physically violent towards learners and used corporal punishment. Similarly, a study done by Kutwayo et al. (2022) at public high schools in three townships found that 55% of male learners had experienced provocation from peers and interpersonal aggression, and 58% of female learners reported feeling unsafe.

A national study by Burton and Leoschut (2012) from the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) confirmed that school-based violence is a point of concern in South Africa. According to the study in 2008, 22% of secondary school learners had been victims of school-based violence twelve months before the study. In 2012, 22.2% of secondary school learners had been victims of school-based violence, twelve months before the study. These figures show that within the four years of the two studies, the levels of school violence have remained constant.

The sample for the 2012 study consisted of 5,939 learners, 121 principals and 239 educators across the nine provinces. More than one-fifth of the learners in the study had been exposed to violence at school. Violence thus contaminates the environment, instilling fear in children and creating obstacles to the learning process. Children should be protected in the school environment but are instead subjected to fear and anxiety. School-based violence is best understood from a situational perspective in terms of the motive for violent behaviour, the presence of others, the use of

weapons, drugs or alcohol and where the violent act has taken place within the school environment.

■ Forms of school-based violence

Young people are exposed to interpersonal violence in family, school and community contexts. These contexts send a pro-violence message to young people. Many of these young people are victims of violence perpetrated by parents, caregivers and teachers. Violence at school is manifested in many forms. According to the South African Human Rights Commission (2006, p. 5), 'bullying, gender-based violence, accidental violence, discrimination and violence, sexual violence and harassment, theft of property, physical and psychological violence' were the most common forms of school-based violence.

In their national study, Burton and Leoschut (2012) found that 12.2% of learners had been threatened with violence, 6.3% had been assaulted, 4.7% had been sexually assaulted and raped, and 4.5% had been robbed at school. The rate of assault of secondary school learners was 63 per 1,000; 46 per 1,000 were sexually assaulted; 45 per 1,000 were robbed; and 441 per 1,000 had personal property stolen. The most common form of violence was perpetrated by one learner on another. This was followed by learner-on-educator violence or vice versa.

A study done by Bender and Emslie (2010) in two urban secondary schools, one public and the other private, found that the most prevalent form of violence was physical and verbal bullying, as well as theft. In addition, Pillay and Ragpot (2010) reported that physical and verbal bullying, self-defence, gangsterism and sexual harassment were forms of violence across schools. Mothibi, Mathopo and Mofokeng (2017) and Ntshengedzeni, Khalabai and Simeon (2024) also found that gang formation was a result of school-based violence, as many learners joined gangs to protect themselves against bullies.

■ Gender-based school violence

Gender violence is one of the major forms of violence in the school setting. It is reported that more than 30% of girls are sexually assaulted at school (SACE 2011). According to the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF] 2012, p. 7), 'for many young women, the most common place where sexual coercion and harassment are experienced is in school'. Burton and Leoschut's study (2012) revealed that 46.9 learners per 1,000 were victims of sexual assault at school. Sexual violence deprives learners of their sense of dignity and their right to equality. Furthermore, Taole (2016) found that the display of power relations by both male and female teachers promotes

the levels of gender violence in schools. Gender violence is demonstrated by female teachers who use derogatory language to demean learners. It is demonstrated by male teachers who employ corporal punishment to discipline learners who are out of line.

The socially accepted view of violence against females and children is carried over from one generation to the next and causes a vicious cycle of continued perpetration. Children and females are seen as weak and vulnerable, and males are seen as dominant with power and control. Males see violence as a legitimate way to protect themselves and obtain respect from others. Males are more likely to be victims and perpetrators of physical violence, and females are more likely to be victims of sexual violence (Mahlangu, Gevers & De Lannoy 2014; Shiva Kumar et al. 2017).

Tsabedze, Maepa and Pila-Nemutandani (2018) state that boys engage in physical aggression and girls engage in verbal aggression. This is linked to beliefs about masculinity. In addition, a study by Mothibi et al. (2017) found an upward trend in the sexual harassment of girls in schools. Similarly, a study by Jewkes et al. (2019) found that rape and intimate partner violence are of concern in South Africa, and early perpetration starts during high school. Sexual violence impacts the female learner's ability to complete schooling due to physical and psychological effects (Jewkes et al. 2019; Rammuda 2023). Drivers of rape and intimate partner violence were linked to 'patriarchal gender norms, youth masculinities, poor relationship skills and a culture of acceptance of violence' (Jewkes et al. 2019, p. 4). In addition, sexual harassment can lead to risky sexual behaviour in girls (Mabetha & De Wet 2018).

Aggression and violence are seen as socially acceptable for males to display and for resolving disagreements and conflict (Mahlangu et al. 2014; Mathews & Benvenut 2014). Gender-based violence stems from stereotypical roles that are socially imposed, where masculinity is traditionally equated with sexual prowess, achievement, success and superiority. Traditional gender norms propel males to display masculinity as well as distress through aggressive acts.

Notole and Kheswa (2017, p. 134) posit that sexually aggressive behaviour is displayed by males with 'low self-efficacy, who are likely to resist peer pressure, lack self-confidence and low assertiveness'. They also stated that factors associated with sexual aggression include parenting styles, dysfunctional families, poverty, low self-esteem and culture. Parenting styles are linked to emotionally unsupportive and uninvolved parents, which leads adolescents to seek inappropriate guidance from peers. Adolescents from dysfunctional families are more likely to join gangs and deviant peers, which is likely to result in aggressive sexual tendencies. Poverty is linked to sexual aggression, and as such, communities are rife

with negative behaviour. Low self-esteem has been linked to negative thoughts and feelings, which have then been demonstrated by overt anti-social behaviour patterns. The impact of culture on male aggressive behaviour cannot be denied as males are socialised into behaving according to certain stereotypes linked to masculinity from a young age. Thus, such behaviour is normalised in the African culture.

According to Bhana (2012, p. 352), 'schools are integrally related to the social contexts and cultures that constitute gender power and expressions of gender violence'. In her study of one secondary school in Inanda, KwaZulu-Natal, girls reported that they feared their boyfriends due to sexual violence and masculine conduct. Teachers also victimised girls through sexual involvement and rape. Girls also feared sexual violence by men in their neighbourhood and family. These men used their economic, cultural, age and gender status to disempower girls with a sense of sexual entitlement.

A study by Hamlall and Morrell (2012) found that peer expectations and affirmation of aggressive behaviour served as validation of the aggressor's masculinity in public, avoiding humiliation and defending oneself, and aggressive actions by others led to conflict most of the time. Furthermore, Hamlall (2014), in his study on the construction of violent masculinities in school, found that the use of harsh discipline measures and aggression by male teachers to maintain control resulted in heightened violent behaviour in boys and a climate of hostility in school. The violent handling of conflict by the teachers modelled violent values of hostility and confrontation, which resulted in the boys distorting the view of masculinity. There are far-reaching consequences of gender-based violence for the well-being of female students. These consequences include poor academic performance, dropping out, truancy, low self-esteem, stress, contracting sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy (Malongo & Mwaile 2019; Uyanne 2021). A submission by the DBE (n.d.) to a task group dealing with sexual violence in schools reported that there is a high rate of under-reporting by learners due to fear, stigma and blame; schools have ineffective systems in place to deal with incidents and many schools downplay incidents for fear of ruining the schools' reputation.

In addition, LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and intersex) youth experience more violence at school as opposed to their heterosexual counterparts. They are at risk of violence due to gender non-conforming. The UNESCO (2019) report on monitoring school-based violence on sexual orientation found that LGBTQI+ youth felt unsafe, sad and hopeless. In addition, 42.8% considered committing suicide. Francis (2017) states that as a result of heterosexist school culture and curricula, LGBTQI+ adolescents are subjected to prejudice and discrimination by peers, educators and principals.

The manner in which girls deal with the issues of gender-based violence in school is related to the way in which gender-related issues and violence are dealt with in the family and community setting. In many ways, there is bias in both these settings towards male dominance. Ultimately, many girls are powerless against the dominant male culture of power and authority. This bias towards the powerful role of gender norms and gender attitudes in favour of masculinity places more risk on boys to engage in gender-based school-based violence (Ngqela & Lewis 2012; Pradubmook-Sherer & Sherer 2014; Varella et al. 2023). 'Schools breed and perpetuate the gendered inequalities from the communities they serve and reproduce dominant unequal power relations between boys and girls. These gender roles produce a gender hierarchy' (Taole 2016, p. 45). Girls are at the receiving end as they are perceived as inferior, defenceless and fear punishment for reporting incidents of sexual violence (Malongo & Mwale 2019). There is a need to include gender-based violence in the school curriculum as well as to empower girls to report perpetrators (Rambuda 2023).

■ Causes of school-based violence

Causes of school-based violence can be distinguished in three ways, namely, the school environment, teachers and learners. These factors will be discussed in relation to the learners in Cato Manor.

■ The school environment

Factors related to the school environment include learners feeling unsafe, a shortage of teachers, inadequate facilities, large teacher-to-learner ratios, a disorganised school environment and a general lack of discipline (Bezuidenhout & Joubert 2008). A national study by Burton and Leoschut (2012) reported that learners felt the most unsafe in classrooms as this is where most victimisation took place. Reasons cited for this were unsupervised classrooms through teacher absenteeism and a lack of classroom behaviour control and monitoring by the teacher. This is of major concern as violence here can create apprehension and fear in learners and therefore becomes a barrier to learning and leads to low academic achievement.

Informal and formal gangs that operated within the school grounds or that had infiltrated from outside also posed a threat to learners (Madikizela-Madiya & Mncube 2014). In addition, indiscipline, drugs, weapons, easy access of outsiders to the school, overcrowded classrooms and a lack of recreational facilities were cited as causes of violence (Khumalo 2019; Mguzulwa & Gxubane 2019; Mkhomi & Mavuso 2021; Ntshengedzeni et al. 2024; Smiley et al. 2021). A study carried out by Johnson, Burke and Gielen

(2011) to determine the role of the school environment on violence found that relationship difficulties, gangs, peer pressure and misbehaviour were linked to school-based violence. In addition, a study carried out by O'Donnell, Roberts and Schwab-Stone (2011) at four secondary schools in Gambia on school climate and post-traumatic stress found that both males and females reported a negative school climate. There were high levels of the witnessing of violence and victimisation in school and in the community, with females reporting higher levels of post-traumatic stress.

Furthermore, racism is also of concern at multi-racial schools. Racial attacks affect learners' sense of dignity and worth. This sense of worthlessness leads to them displaying violent behaviour, demonstrated by bullying, teasing, fighting and rebelling against teachers and school management authority. The diverse needs of learners from different backgrounds are not considered, which results in racial conflict arising between learners and between learners and educators. Educators are unable to cope with the racial integration of learners or are unable to manage racial conflict among learners and between learners and educators (Naidoo & De Beer 2022; Naidoo, Pillay & Conley 2018).

■ The teachers

The causes of school violence linked to teachers include the use of corporal punishment by teachers, incompetence, absenteeism, the authority of the teacher being disrespected, and those who are discouraged and unmotivated (Bezuidenhout & Joubert 2008; Shiva Kumar et al. 2017), a lack of commitment to school, poor school attendance, a lack of effective classroom discipline and poor relationships with learners (Burton & Leoschut 2012; Maternowska, Potts & Fry 2018). In addition, Motseke (2019) avers that high levels of stress are experienced by teachers due to non-academic problems of learners, such as fighting, substance abuse and ill-discipline in class.

According to the study by Burton and Leoschut (2012), 52.1% of teachers were verbally abused by learners, 12.4% were victims of physical violence and 3.3% were victims of sexual violence perpetrated by learners. As perpetrators, 28% verbally abused learners, 14% used physical violence and 2.5% sexually assaulted learners. The South African Human Rights Commission (2006) has also reported incidents directed at teachers by learners that have included physical attacks, acting disrespectfully, swearing and taunting teachers, learners disrupting classes, and sexist and racist comments made to the teacher. In addition, the Human Science Research Council policy brief (2016) indicated that the violence perpetrated against teachers affects their morale. They feel helpless in light of what is happening in the classroom. This, in turn, adversely affects the learning environment. Makhasane and

Majong (2023) report that the challenges associated with learner-on-teacher violence are that there is a lack of support from the DBE, inadequate policies and a lack of parental support to address the issue.

On the other hand, many learners are exposed to humiliating forms of psychological, physical, sexual and gender-based violence by teachers (Maternowska et al. 2018). De Wet (2024) identified five of the most common types of teacher-on-learner violence as corporal punishment, emotional abuse, discrimination, sexual abuse and neglect of their *in loco parentis* responsibilities.

Male teachers use their age, authority, promise of better grades and economic status to pressure learners into sexual relationships with them. Girls fear reprisal and punishment from the teacher and therefore submit to their demands (Bhana 2012; Le Roux & Mokhele 2011).

According to a report by StatsSA in 2021 on the exposure of children to child maltreatment, it was found that:

In 2019, just over 1 million out of 13 million school-going children aged 5-17 years reported that they had experienced some form of violence. Of those who experienced violence at school, close to 84% experienced corporal punishment by teachers, followed by verbal abuse by teachers (13.7%) and physical violence by teachers (10.6%). Between 2009 and 2019, the percentage of children who experienced verbal abuse by other learners increased by six percentage points from 18.1% in 2009 to 24.1% in 2019. (n.p.)

As the statistics denote, corporal punishment, although prohibited by law since 1996, is still practised widely in schools. Most cases of corporal punishment go unreported and school management fails to discipline teachers who use corporal punishment as a discipline technique. Many teachers use corporal punishment as they lack the appropriate skills and techniques to manage behaviour effectively. Some teachers even have parental consent to administer corporal punishment (Mayisela 2018; SACE 2011; South African Human Rights Commission 2006). In addition, the beliefs and attitudes that teachers have about violence influence their classroom climate (Makhasane & Chikoko 2016; Shiva Kumar et al. 2017). Corporal punishment is also linked to teacher stress and the socialisation of male teachers that violence is a norm (Taole 2016).

Burton and Leoschut's study (2012) highlighted that 48.8% of learners were victims of physical punishment by educators and principals. The study found that the highest prevalence of corporal punishment (73.7%) was in KwaZulu-Natal. This had increased from the 48.7% reported in the 2008 study. What was interesting in the study was that nine out of ten principals stated that educators were aware of the ban on corporal punishment, yet despite this, they still used it as a means of discipline rather than alternative methods of discipline.

According to Mncube and Dube (2019), the use of corporal punishment demonstrates a lack of teacher professionalism and democracy. The autocratic handling of learners' behaviour by educators through the use of physical and verbal aggression heightens violence in the classroom context. The use of a power relationship hinders mutual respect and engagement and impacts learning (Mhlangu et al. 2021; Shiva Kumar et al. 2017).

A study carried out by Ghorab and Al-Khaldi (2014) to determine the level of violence against school children and to understand the causes and the impact on anxiety and attitudes towards learning found that children were subjected to high degrees of physical and psychological violence by teachers and that high levels of negative reinforcement were used by teachers as a form of punishment. The attitude of teachers in terms of gender and power also influences the manner in which they interact with learners. If teachers themselves come from backgrounds of family and community violence, then this is likely to impact their attitudes and behaviour and the ultimate perpetuation of violence against learners.

Failure to discipline learners effectively due to defiance by learners and being unskilled in effective discipline techniques leads to teachers using harsh disciplinary measures against learners. This has a detrimental effect on the dignity and worth of the learner, on the relationship between the learner and teacher and on effective teaching and learning in the classroom (Hunter & Morrell 2021; Segalo & Rambuda 2018).

Gevers and Flisher (in eds. Ward et al. 2013) contend that teachers who do not perpetrate violence but who are silent and do not act against perpetrators, even when they have knowledge of the same, are as much to blame as the perpetrators themselves. Most cases of corporal punishment go unreported and school management often fails to discipline teachers who continue to use corporal punishment as a discipline technique. Many teachers were found to use corporal punishment as they lack the appropriate skills and techniques to manage behaviour effectively (Mayisela 2018; Sibisi, Sibisi & Mpofo 2024). In addition, the beliefs and attitudes that teachers have about violence influence their classroom climate (Makhasane & Chikoko 2016; Shiva Kumar et al. 2017).

Gagnon, Sylvester and Marsh (2021) and Hendricks and Mutongoza (2024) state that there is a need for teacher training on managing learner aggression. Rather than using punitive discipline techniques, Padayachee and Gcelu (2019) suggest that teachers use assertive discipline, reinforcement, communication and rule-setting with associated consequences and restorative methods to instil discipline in classrooms as well as positive behavioural intervention support (Gagnon et al. 2021). In addition, Dube and Hlalele (2018) propose that one-on-one dialogue with learners guided by respect rather than power is a better alternative to

corporal punishment. They believe that violence in schools can be reduced if young people are treated with respect and are given a voice.

■ The learners

Personality, age, gender, behavioural and psychological variables determine the extent to which young people engage in violence or are victimised. Individual causes of school-based violence include adolescents with aggressive tendencies (Bezuidenhout & Joubert 2008; Leoschut & Bonora 2007), adolescents who do not feel like they are coping and who, due to their frustration and dislike of subjects, academically detach themselves from school and their peers and exhibit violent behaviour (Marcus 2007; Singh & Steyn 2014). The temperament of the young person can also contribute to violent tendencies. Temperament refers to a particular personality style that predisposes individuals to behave in particular ways and affects how they deal with new experiences and stressors (King 2012).

Biological factors related to violence could be the result of neurological damage through pregnancy and birth complications when they occur in combination with family problems. Psychological and behavioural characteristics that relate to violence include hyperactivity, attention problems, poor impulse control, risk-taking, poor cognitive development, low intelligence and involvement in anti-social behaviour (Leoschut & Bonora 2007; eds. Ward et al. 2013; Krug et al. 2002). In addition, the interpersonal relationships that young people have with their family, friends and peer group can shape their personality traits, which could lead to violent tendencies.

Alcohol, drugs, weapons and gangs are key causes of violence perpetrated at school (Mahaye & Ajani 2023; Mncube & Harber 2014; UNICEF 2012). The presence of criminal acquaintances, both peers and significant adults, is a strong predictor of future anti-social behaviour. According to Burton and Leoschut (2012), one in seven learners had access to alcohol, one in ten had access to drugs, and nearly one-tenth had access to weapons. A study carried out by Pahad and Graham (2012) in Alexandra, Gauteng, found that individual factors related to school violence were age, gender, drugs and the psychological health of the victim. Younger learners were more susceptible to being victims, and boys perpetrated violence more than girls.

According to Bester and Du Plessis (2010), the causes of violence are bullying, retaliation against bullying, gangsterism, a lack of consequences for perpetrators of violence, alcohol abuse, gambling, peer approval, sexism and xenophobia. In addition, a lack of tolerance towards diversity has resulted in aggression (Botha et al. 2012). School violence is generally

gender-based, with weapon carrying, bullying and sexual and physical assault being predominantly male activities, while verbal assault is a predominantly female activity. Experiences of being victimised at school are usually not a once-off experience for learners. School violence affects not only victims but the witnesses as well. Witnessing acts of violence at school causes fear and uncertainty in learners, which in turn affects one's ability to concentrate and learn (Burton & Leoschut 2012; SACE 2011).

Violence against children in the school setting is the result of violence in their other socialising contexts, such as the family and community.

■ The role of the family in school-based violence

'Parental behaviour and the family environment are central factors in the development of violent behaviour in young people' (Maternowska et al. 2018; Krug et al. 2002). If the young person is socialised in a family environment that is rife in dysfunction and violence, then this can have a detrimental effect on their holistic development as well as place them at a greater risk for engaging in violent anti-social behaviour in other settings such as the school and community. Young people who are exposed to such violence learn that violence is a norm and this is how one solves problems and resolves conflict (Leoschut & Bonora 2007; Leoschut & Kafaar 2017; Masath, Nkuba & Hecker 2023; Ntshengedzeni et al. 2024).

Steyn and Singh (2018) and Hendricks and Mutongoza (2024) posit that violence is exacerbated by children who come from broken homes where there is poor discipline and a lack of control by parents, as well as by parents who themselves model aggressive behaviour. In addition, Masath et al. (2023) found that in Tanzania, a higher rate of family violence is linked to a higher rate of violence by teachers and peers. This results in polyvictimisation of children and can lead to an increase in mental health problems. It is therefore important to develop interventions that challenge the normalisation of violence.

Many adolescents today are being raised in homes with single parents. Children from single-parent families are at a greater risk for violence as compared to those raised in two-parent families (Burton & Leoschut 2012; Leoschut & Kafaar 2017). According to their national study, one in three learners was raised in a single-parent family, and one in seven was raised by grandparents. The circumstances that result in single-parent families include a high divorce rate, death of a parent through AIDS or another illness, parents working far away from the family home, incarceration and out-of-wedlock birth. The absence of one parent might lead to a lack of parental supervision and low socio-economic status and place young people at a greater risk of engaging in violent behaviour.

Even if there are two parents in the family, factors such as poverty or low socio-economic status, physical and sexual violence, parental conflict, poor family cohesion, poor attachment between children and parents, poor parental support and involvement, a lack of communication, poor supervision, parents abusing drugs and alcohol and harsh punishment for misbehaviour can place a young person at risk for engaging in violent aggressive behaviour (Leoschut & Kafaar 2017; Le Roux & Mokhele 2011; Mathews & Benvenuti 2014; eds. Ward et al. 2013).

According to Burton (2008), family risk factors include family conflict and violence, caregiver criminality, anti-social siblings, large family size, low maternal age and education, child abuse and intimate partner violence in the home, poor family management practices, permissive parenting and low levels of family bonding. Many young people have witnessed or been victims of violence in their homes even before they enter secondary school. Parents use violence to discipline children and spend little time bonding with children (Maternowska et al. 2018; Sibisi et al. 2024).

In the study by Burton and Leoschut (2012), one in ten children had been assaulted at home, and more than one-tenth had witnessed family members assaulting each other. In addition, 23.7% of learners had siblings who had been in jail, and 9.4% had parents and caregivers who had been jailed. The study further revealed that violence at home was closely associated with being a victim of assault, sexual assault or robbery at school. Being a victim or witnessing violence at home is compounded by violence in other settings such as the school.

Similarly, Bender and Emslie (2010) cite factors contributing to violence, such as poverty, poor parent-child relationships, the absence of adult role models at home and the educational level of parents. A large-scale study in secondary schools in six provinces in South Africa to explore gang-related violence in schools found that a lack of parental support, a lack of discipline at home and learners exercising rights but not responsibilities contributed to school violence (Mncube & Steinmann 2014). Family factors such as poverty, poor child-rearing, a lack of parental involvement and family violence also contribute to violence at school (Pahad & Graham 2012; Wolhuter & Van der Walt 2020).

Parents, other caregivers and older siblings serve as role models to young people. Young people model that which they see. Through the example of parents, caregivers and older siblings, young people learn how to behave in socially acceptable and unacceptable ways. Thus, with these types of role models in close proximity, there is a greater risk of young people being involved in violence at school (Mkhomi & Mavuso 2021; Wolhuter & Van der Walt 2020).

Research emphasises that (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation [CSVR] 2010):

[C]hildren who become persistent offenders tend to grow up with more negative family and school experiences. These are characterised by being born into a family in relative poverty and inadequate housing and being brought up with inconsistent and uncaring parenting including violence. (n.p.)

These factors can lead to adolescents being involved in anti-social behaviour at school and in the community. In addition, parent-to-child violence is associated with a higher risk of victimisation at school (Foster & Brooks-Gunn 2015).

Thus, the social norms, dominant beliefs, values and overt behaviour that young people encounter in their family, peer group and community have an impact on the level of interpersonal violence that the young person experiences in the school setting either as a victim or perpetrator.

■ The role of peer groups in school-based violence

Peer groups are important influencers in terms of both the positive and negative behaviour and attitudes of adolescents. Peer influence is achieved through modelling and social reinforcement (Albert & Steinberg 2011). In a positive sense, they assist adolescents with adopting pro-social behaviour and a sense of belonging. On the other hand, they can influence adolescents to behave in anti-social, risk-taking behaviour such as violence and substance abuse. These behaviours are a means of seeking approval from the peer group. The decrease in parental relationships and monitoring leads to an increase in peer influence, both positively as well as negatively (Tome et al. 2012). Mothibi et al. (2017) and Hendricks and Mutongoza (2024) highlight that peer groups have a role to play in peer victimisation and engaging in violence to impress each other. Similarly, Steyn and Singh (2018) state that peer pressure in the form of seeking power and attention is equally problematic.

Peer interactions are important in the identity development of an adolescent. Louw and Louw (2007) state that:

Adolescents have an intense desire to belong. Their social development is therefore characterised by an increasing interest and involvement with the peer group. The peer group plays an important role in psychosocial development in terms of the satisfaction of emotional needs and as an important source of information and creates opportunities for socialisation. (p. 330)

Similarly, Gouws et al. (2008) suggest that:

The adolescent's relationship with peers can be a positive one as it 'offers opportunities for learning and experimenting with new roles, discharging emotional tensions, gaining independence from parents, social acceptability and support, becoming involved in close friendships and developing an individual and group identity'. (p. 81)

Adolescents use the peer group as their moral compass due to the interactions within the group, which becomes a critical determinant in developing a value system. Furthermore, Louw and Louw (2007) state that due to the influence of the peer group and a desire for inclusion, approval and acceptance, the young person conforms to the behaviour and norms that exist within the group. Conformity provides a sense of security for the adolescent as they gain independence from their parents. Conformity is not necessarily a bad attitude, but when the adolescent is forced to conform towards anti-social behaviour, values, principles and attitudes, this then creates a sense of conflict for the young person in relation to the formation of their identity. This conflict then results in a negative identity.

Having delinquent friends increases the risk of the young person engaging in delinquent behaviour at school. Girls are influenced by peer groups and tend to be focused on non-violent relationship-oriented behaviours and are therefore more likely to engage in destructive behaviour such as excluding and spreading rumours about others. Boys, on the other hand, are influenced by peer groups to engage in acts of physical aggression rather than non-violent ones. They seek approval in terms of their masculinity (Farrel, Thompson & Mehari 2017; Hamlall & Morrell 2012). According to the *World Report on Violence against Children* (2006), there is an increase in the perpetration of violence and victimisation at around the age of fifteen for boys. Attitudes supporting peer violence are associated with the perpetration of violence against peers, especially in high-risk communities (Ajani et al. 2024; Ali et al. 2011).

Young people growing up together in a crime-ridden community where there is unemployment, a lack of education, and a low standard of housing will engage with delinquent friends and peers (*World Report on Violence against Children* 2006). 'Adolescents who are surrounded by deviant moral values may become deviant because of their environment. Such delinquency has its origins in the values represented by the surrounding subculture' (Gouws et al. 2008, p. 131). On the other hand, noting the influential role of the peer group, they can be harnessed and used positively in violence prevention strategies.

■ The role of the community on school-based violence

In order to gauge the extent of school-based violence, one needs to look at the community within which the school is located. The factors present within the community can perhaps provide an understanding of the external community factors that impact school-based violence. Crime and violence are widespread in the communities in which young people live (Mkhomi & Mavuso 2021; Sibisi et al. 2024; Song, Qian & Goonight 2019). According to

Burton and Leoschut (2012), the average age that a young person first witnesses community violence is fourteen years old. In addition, 48.7% of their sample had witnessed community violence. A study done in the United States of America (USA) by Lambert et al. (2013) found that by the end of high school, 90% of boys and 80% of girls had witnessed some form of community violence.

Violence and crime in South Africa affect both rich and poor communities alike. However, poorer communities in South Africa are faced with high levels of violence. The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) policy brief (2016) found a clear link between school-based violence and high crime levels in communities. The policy brief also found that low socio-economic status increased the risk of exposure to violence among young people. Poverty increases the chances of an adolescent being involved in delinquency and anti-social peer-group criminal activity (Richter et al. 2018). Poverty also increases the risk of victimisation (Clark 2012; Foster & Brooks-Gunn 2015; Mathews & Benvenuti 2014). In addition, youth who live in violent communities pick up violent behavioural traits early in life due to observational learning (Hendricks & Mutongoza 2024; Mahaye & Ajani 2023; Meyer & Chetty 2017).

The prevalence of a climate of violence in such communities is linked to economic inequality, social exclusion, marginalisation, unemployment, deprivation, drugs, weapons, alcohol, gang activity, criminal involvement, a lack of housing, a lack of access to recreational activities, urban overcrowding and community disorganisation (Collins 2013; Mathews & Benvenuti 2014; UNICEF 2012). According to Bezuidenhout and Joubert (2008):

[Other crime risk factors include] socio-economic conditions with reference to a lack of shared decision-making power between sexes and races, illiteracy rate, political violence, a lack of community involvement, the disparity between rich and poor, a conflict of norms, awareness of freedoms and rights but not responsibility, child prostitution and lack of spirituality. (p. 80)

In addition, there seems to be a belief among South African people, regardless of the culture to which they belong, that being involved in crime is acceptable as long as one does not get caught by the authorities. Crime and violence have become normalised, justified and an accepted part of how society functions (Collins 2013; Mathews & Benvenuti 2014). This belief sets South Africans apart from people from other countries. Violence is the most obvious characteristic of crime in South Africa. 'The arrest rates of young offenders are higher in economically deprived and socially disorganised communities' (Bezuidenhout & Joubert 2008, p. 63). In addition, the culture of service delivery protests, which have become a norm, is a worrying phenomenon in South Africa. Protests linked to poor service delivery often lead to violence and wanton destruction of property. People see it as their democratic right to protest against poor service

delivery, as the right to service delivery is laid down in the constitution. However, the protests perpetuate violence in an already violent country (Ede & Jili 2020).

A study carried out by Avdija and Jobi (2014) found that schools that were larger in size and that were located in high-crime areas were more likely to experience a higher number of violent crimes with weapons, vandalism, drugs, alcohol and theft. Having more security guards increased the risk of violent crime. Rapid urbanisation is placing a strain on resources, which in turn creates conditions for increased crime to occur. Urbanisation has led to the influx of people to cities looking for work. As a result, informal settlements are found everywhere due to inadequate housing. The rate of violence within these informal settlements is high.

Mkhize, Gopal and Colling's (2012) study on the impact of community violence on learners highlighted that 70% of the respondents had reported either direct or indirect exposure to community violence. Similarly, a study by Kaminer et al. (2013) found that the experience of witnessing community violence was the most frequently reported type of violence in their study, with 93% of the respondents stating that they had witnessed somebody being beaten. Thus, the high rates of exposure to community violence result in young people who become desensitised to violence and who see it as a normal part of their existence and a socially acceptable way to resolve conflict.

Schools located within violent-crime-ridden communities are at a greater risk of fostering school-based violence as they reflect the violent norms and acts to which learners are exposed in the community, which then influences their behaviour. There are limited opportunities for young people to engage in activities that expand their potential and skills. This leads to boredom and risk-taking behaviour. According to Dunbar-Krige, Pillay and Henning (2010):

Because there are so many troubled schools in South Africa that try to operate in extremely troubled communities, the school invariably becomes part of the troubled community's ecology, and if neither the school nor its community can resist the onslaught of disabling social forces, both will succumb to them. (p. 7)

Steyn and Singh (2018) conclude that the absence of after-school activities and inadequate resources and facilities resulted in young people being engaged in destructive behaviour in order to evade boredom. According to a statement by the CSV (2010):

By failing to recognise and address the impact of violence on poor communities, official policy compounds the hardship which people in these communities face, reinforcing the exclusionary impact of inequality. In so doing, it fails to engage with the local subcultures of criminality and violence which are most entrenched in poor communities and which feed into the overall problem of violence in South Africa. (p. 3)

■ The effects and consequences of school-based violence

There are numerous negative consequences of school-based violence for both the teacher and learner. For teachers, consequences include negative feelings towards learners, burnout, leaving the profession, stress, depression, detachment, low self-confidence and self-esteem, disempowerment, hopelessness, alcoholism and substance abuse (McMahon et al. 2019; Qwabe et al. 2022; Singh & Steyn 2014). In addition, Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) report that the effects on teachers include low morale, difficulty in completing the syllabus, absenteeism, fear and demotivation. Bester and Du Plessis (2010) argue that violence against teachers is a regular occurrence. This results in teachers feeling anger, fear, detachment from learners and disillusionment. In addition, teachers feel frustrated and unsupported by management if there are no consequences for the learner after a violent incident. This results in feelings of blame and feeling unsafe and disempowered (McMahon et al. 2019, p. 8).

The consequences on young people are linked to the emotional, social, cognitive, educational and behavioural development of learners, which have an impact even in adulthood. These include absenteeism, a decline in achievement, dropping out of school, reluctance to participate in school activities, isolation from peers, depression, eating problems, sleep disorders and psychosomatic complaints (Ghorab & Al-Khaldi 2014; Madikizela-Madiya & Mncube 2014); chaos, lost time and unpleasant classroom environments (Ncontsa & Shumba 2013); post-traumatic stress disorder and mood and anxiety disorders (Mkhize et al. 2012; UNICEF 2012); impaired concentration, fear, a diminished ability to learn, fear of victimisation, truancy, low self-esteem, depression, withdrawal, suicide (Le Roux & Mokhele 2011; Mncube & Steinmann 2014; Ncontsa & Shumba 2013; Ntshengedzeni et al. 2024; Singh & Steyn 2014) and an increase in behavioural problems (Masath et al. 2023)

According to Krug et al. (2002, pp.15-16), the acute and long-term consequences of violence against children include physical health consequences such as abdominal and thoracic injuries, brain injuries, fractures, lacerations and abrasions, and disability. Psychological consequences of school violence include (Krug et al. 2002):

[A]lcohol and drug abuse; criminal, violent, and other risk-taking behaviour; depression and anxiety; eating and sleep disorders; feelings of shame and guilt; poor relationships; poor school performance; poor self-esteem; post-traumatic stress disorder; psychosomatic disorders; suicidal behaviour; and self-harm. (pp. 15-16).

Burton and Leoschut's study (2012) highlights that the consequences of school violence included truancy, absenteeism, dropping out, low academic achievement, poor concentration, anxiety, apprehension, isolation, a lack of interest in school, depression, fatigue, later aggressive behaviour, mistrust towards peers, poor relationships with educators, a poor self-image, poor impulse control, lying, cruelty, fighting, the destruction of property and a disorderly school environment.

A study in five rural secondary schools in Empangeni district, KwaZulu-Natal, concluded that the psychological effects of violence included the low self-esteem of learners when bullied and intimidated by learners and the low morale of teachers when bullied or intimidated by learners. These resulted in feelings of fear, anger, bitterness, insecurity, anxiety, humiliation and hopelessness for both learners and teachers who were victims of violence. Stress, depression, absenteeism, low productivity and suicide were also the consequences of victimisation (Singh & Steyn 2014).

Children who are victims or witnesses of violence become future perpetrators of violent behaviour in their adult life (Mahlangu et al. 2014; Mncube & Steinmann 2014). There is a strong correlation between current victimisation, exposure to violence and future offending (Burton 2008; Collins 2013). This has serious implications for the economic growth and productivity of the country, medical care, psychosocial support, the perpetuation of violence and violent attitudes into adulthood (Special Representative of the Secretary-General [SRSG] 2011, p. 6) as well as the safety and well-being of society as a whole.

■ Conclusion

The literature demonstrates that violence, for many young people, is a normal part of their lives and is present in their homes, schools and communities. It is a social norm that exists within the very structures of society. The message that young people receive from their families and communities is that violence is an acceptable medium to resolve conflicts. Young people internalise this, and it becomes an inherent part of their childhood and adolescent experience. These violent tendencies are then modelled in the school environment and meted out on their teachers and fellow learners.

Prior violence is a predictor of future violence. As such, exposure to family and community violence places the adolescent at a greater risk of being victimised or perpetrating violence at school, with the reason being that young people imitate the violent and aggressive behaviour of significant others in their environment. Violent victimisation influences the attitude and tolerance towards violence. The consequences of

school-based violence have far-reaching effects that impact the holistic development of young people. One of the points of concern is that only school violence incidents are dealt with without looking at the root cause of the behaviour, which might reside in the family or community. The next chapter will discuss the analysis and findings of school-based violence.

Analysis and findings of school violence

■ Introduction

Chapter 3 discussed the theoretical perspectives of violence as well as the nature of violence in South African society, particularly in the school context. This chapter will focus on the data analysis and findings of the quantitative aspect (questionnaires) and qualitative aspect (focus group discussions) of the study. Data analysis and interpretation are important aspects of the research process. It provides structure and meaning to the data that has been collected (Fouche, Strydom & Roestenburg 2021).

The questionnaire was used to obtain data from a large sample of learners (77) and a smaller sample of teachers (ten) in order to understand the nature of violence in the school setting. Once the questionnaire was briefly analysed, three focus group discussions (male, female, mixed) comprising between five and eight learners each were conducted to explore in greater detail issues raised in the questionnaire. The statistical software STATA was used to analyse the closed-ended questions in the questionnaire. This resulted in frequency distributions and a mean for each question asked, as well as cross-tabulations according to gender (Davies 2007). A manual thematic analysis was conducted of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire.

The qualitative data from the three focus group discussions were transcribed. A thematic analysis was done where the transcriptions were

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analysed in order to identify emerging categories and themes. Analysis commenced by reading all the data and then dividing the data into smaller and more meaningful units. Patterns and similarities in all three focus group discussions were found. Themes, sub-themes and categories were then defined according to these patterns and similarities (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004). In addition, the findings between the learner and teacher questionnaires were compared.

■ The case study: Profile of the chosen school

In order to provide a context for the analysis, information in this section will focus on the school, community, learner and teacher demographics. The secondary school chosen for the case study is located in Cato Manor, Durban. The information provided by the deputy principal indicates that the school was established in 2000 as part of the Cato Manor urban renewal project, funded by the EU. It is a no-fee public school that caters for learners from Grades 8 to 12. The medium of instruction is Zulu and English.

At the time of the study, it had an all-African learner population of 1,330 learners. The average number of learners per class was as follows: Grade 8 ($n = 70$), Grade 9 ($n = 60$), Grade 10 ($n = 42$), Grade 11 ($n = 40$) and Grade 12 ($n = 43$). These figures would suggest that there is a large drop-out rate after Grade 9. The teacher population consisted of 43 teachers. Of the 43 teachers, 34 were female and nine were male. In addition, eight of the teachers were Indian and 35 were African. It has 27 classrooms and no school hall. Other facilities included one physics lab, one life sciences lab, one kitchen/hospitality room, two computer rooms and one engineering graphics and design room. The general observation of the school was that the school grounds and buildings were in need of repair. Many classrooms had broken windows. The soccer and netball fields were neglected and unkempt. However, the schoolyard and classrooms were kept clean by the cleaning staff.

The school is in Cato Manor in the middle of the densely populated Cato Crest informal settlement, which is one of the poorest urban areas in Durban, with a high unemployment rate. Cato Crest is seven km from the inner city of Durban (eThekweni Municipality 2011). According to a study by Gray and Maharaj (2017), the Cato Manor area is rife with issues of crime, poverty and inequality. Over the past few years, the area has been affected by service delivery protests, xenophobic violence, gender-based violence and political intolerance. In addition, drugs are a major problem, especially *dagga* and *whoonga*. This is having a devastating effect on families and the community. There is a housing shortage in the area. This is seen from the many shacks and RDP houses in the area surrounding the school, with

shacks in very close proximity to each other, almost as though they are built on top of each other. According to eThekweni Municipality (2011), Cato Crest has an all-African population of 17,857 with 7,610 households within a radius of 62 km. Households have access to water and electricity. Sanitation, however, is a problem. As one drives through the area, there is evidence of outside latrines.

■ Sample size: Learner questionnaire

Purposive sampling was used to select 90 Grade 10 learners for the study. The questionnaire was used to collect baseline data before conducting focus group discussions. Grade 10 learners were in the middle of their schooling career and had already had two years of schooling experience. They were therefore deemed to be the most appropriate group for the study.

Seventy-seven learners completed the questionnaires ($N = 77$), with 41 females (53%) and 36 males (47%). The questionnaire had a set of closed- and open-ended questions that sought information related to the forms, extent, causes and consequences of violence in the secondary school setting, as well as how youth empowerment is/can be experienced in the school setting.

Due to the large number of learners, questionnaires were conducted over two consecutive days after school. The group chosen for the study was divided into two groups. It took approximately half an hour to complete, as the learners were briefed the previous week about the study and the processes entailed. Permission was obtained from the parents and guardians for the learners to participate. Before the learners started the questionnaire, the researcher went through all the questions with them. The Life Orientation teacher was present at both sessions in the event that learners needed an interpretation of the questions in Zulu.

■ Learner questionnaire: Data presentation

Table 4.1 presents the learners' responses on whether violence was a problem at school.

From Table 4.1, in the combined responses for 'agree' and 'strongly agree', both male and female learners acknowledged that violence is a problem at the school. Fourteen per cent and seventeen per cent of the male and female learners, respectively, were neutral, with only a small percentage disagreeing that violence was a problem. The statistics therefore correlate with other studies done nationally that suggest that school violence is indeed of concern and is experienced by many children and adolescents. A national study by Burton and Leoschut (2012) indicated that 22% of secondary school learners had been victims of school-based violence.

TABLE 4.1: Learner responses on whether violence is a problem at school.

Response	Male (%)	Female (%)
Agree	64	42
Strongly agree	11	27
Neutral	14	17
Disagree	11	12
Strongly disagree	0	2

Source: Author's own work.

TABLE 4.2: Learner responses on how often learners see or hear violence at school.

Response	Male (%)	Female (%)
Every day	25	25
A few times a week	31	25
Once a week	25	7
Rarely	14	36
Never	5	7

Source: Author's own work.

Furthermore, the assessment report on youth violence, policy and programmes in South Africa by the World Bank (2012) strongly indicates that young people in South Africa are at a high risk of violence manifested through crime, maltreatment, corporal punishment and bullying, which are perpetrated mostly in schools.

Table 4.2 presents the learners' responses on how often they saw or heard violence at school.

According to the responses in Table 4.2, most of the male learners stated that they had seen or heard violence either every day, a few times a week or at least once a week. Only 14% stated that it occurred rarely. Most of the female responses indicated that violence was seen or heard every day or a few times a week. Only 7% reported that it was witnessed once a week. However, 36% responded that it was seen or heard rarely. This is in contradiction to the results in Table 4.1 where a high percentage (64% male and 42% female) agreed that violence is a problem at the school.

■ Types of violence present at school

Data from the questionnaires suggest that stealing seems to be the most prevalent type of violence at the school, with 73% female and 64% male learners reporting this. Stealing in a school situation is done secretly and does not usually cause physical harm. It can be attributed to structural violence (Galtung 1969, 1996), which is linked to 'unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances'. Poverty, which is seen as a form of structural violence, hinders parents from providing for the material needs of their children. This school is in a poverty-stricken area and thus may be the reason why children resort to stealing.

As compared to female learners (44%), the male learners (25%) did not perceive swearing and teasing as a type of violence, even though it might be quite common. The female learners, with a resounding 73%, perceived fighting to be as prevalent as stealing. Male learners (47%), however, might not perceive fighting as an issue but rather see it as a norm of how boys are expected to behave. This might be because aggression and violence are seen as socially acceptable for males when resolving disagreements and conflict (Mathews & Benvenuti 2014). Males see violence as a legitimate way to protect themselves and obtain respect from others. Thus, males are more likely to be victims and perpetrators of physical violence (Mahlangu, Gevers & De Lannoy 2014; Tsabedze, Maepa and Pila-Nemutandani 2018).

An interesting factor picked up in this study was that only 6% of male and 2% of female learners stated that sexual harassment was a type of violence at the school. These low figures for both males and females are quite contradictory to the literature, which states that sexual harassment is prevalent as a common type of violence at school. A study by Mothibi, Mathopo and Mofokeng (2017) found an upward trend in the sexual harassment of girls in schools. The manner in which girls deal with the issues of gender violence in school is related to the way in which gender-related issues and violence are dealt with in the family and community setting. In many ways, there is bias in both these settings towards male dominance. Ultimately, many girls are powerless against the dominant male culture of power and authority.

This bias towards the powerful role of masculinity places more risk on boys to engage in gender-based school violence (Ngqela & Lewis 2012; Shiva Kumar et al. 2017). Girls are at the receiving end as they are perceived as inferior and defenceless, and they fear punishment for reporting incidents of sexual violence (Malongo & Mwale 2019). It is reported that more than 30% of girls are sexually assaulted at school (SACE 2011). According to UNICEF (2012, p. 7), 'for many young women, the most common place where sexual coercion and harassment are experienced is in school'. This low response rate was further explored in the focus group discussions.

■ Causes of violence at school

Male and female learners had similar views related to the causes of violence. Female learners perceived the most prevalent cause of violence to be peer pressure (66%), followed by drugs (51%), family influences (34%), gangsterism (32%) and poor school environments (24%). For male learners, the most prevalent cause of violence was drugs (75%), followed by peer pressure (42%), family (22%) and gangsterism (17%). Only 8% of male respondents cited alcohol as a cause of violence, as opposed to 27% of female respondents. Both male and female learners did not perceive the community, media and weapons to be prevalent causes of violence in the school.

Alcohol, drugs, weapons and gangs are key causes of violence perpetrated at school (Mncube & Harber 2014; UNICEF 2012). According to Burton and Leoschut (2012), one in seven learners had access to alcohol, and one in ten had access to drugs. Having delinquent friends increases the risk of the young person engaging in delinquent behaviour at school. There is great pressure from the peer group on male learners to be brave. Much of this show of bravery is displayed in physical fighting (Hamlall & Morrell 2012). Mothibi et al. (2017) and Hendricks and Muntongoza (2024) found that peer groups had a role to play in peer victimisation and engaging in violence to impress each other. Similarly, Steyn and Singh (2018) state that peer pressure in the form of seeking power and attention is equally problematic.

According to Madikizela-Madiya and Mncube (2014), informal and formal gangs that operate within the school grounds or that have infiltrated from outside pose a threat to learners. Mothibi et al. (2017) posit that gang formation is a result of school-based violence, as many learners join gangs to protect themselves against bullies. In addition, Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) and Johnson, Burke and Gielen (2011) state that indiscipline, gangs, drugs, weapons, peer pressure and easy access of outsiders to the school were linked to school violence. Hamlall and Morrell (2012) found that peer expectations and affirmation of aggressive behaviour served as validation of the aggressor's masculinity in public, and avoiding humiliation, defending oneself, and aggressive actions by others led to conflict most of the time.

Factors such as poverty or low socio-economic status, physical and sexual violence, and family factors such as parental conflict, poor family cohesion, poor attachment between children and parents, poor parental support and involvement, a lack of communication, poor supervision, parents abusing drugs and alcohol and harsh punishment for misbehaviour can place a young person at risk for engaging in violent, aggressive behaviour (Leoschut & Kafaar 2017; Maternowska, Potts & Fry 2018; eds. Ward, Van der Merwe & Dawes 2013; Wolhuter & Van der Walt 2020).

■ The effects of violence on learners

For female learners, the main effect of violence on learners was bunking (68%), followed by poor school performance (56%), dropping out (51%), poor concentration in class (41%), a lack of interest in school (41%), feeling fearful and anxious (56%) and depression (24%). For male learners, the main effect was also bunking (47%), followed by poor school performance (44%), poor concentration (33%), a lack of interest in school (31%) and feeling fearful and anxious (28%). As compared to the female learners, they did not think that dropping out and depression had an impact on learners.

According to the literature, the consequences of school-based violence are linked to the emotional, social, cognitive, educational and behavioural development of learners, which have an impact even in adulthood. These include absenteeism, a decline in achievement, dropping out of school, reluctance to participate in school activities, isolation from peers, depression, eating problems, sleep disorders and psychosomatic complaints (Ghorab & Al-Khaldi 2014; Madikizela-Madiya & Mncube 2014); chaos, lost time and unpleasant classroom environments (Ncontsa & Shumba 2013); post-traumatic stress disorder, and mood and anxiety disorders (Mkhize, Gopal & Collings 2012); and impaired concentration, fear, a diminished ability to learn, fear of victimisation, truancy, low self-esteem, depression, withdrawal and suicide (Mncube & Steinmann 2014; Ncontsa & Shumba 2013; Ntshengedzeni, Khalabai & Simeon 2024; Singh & Steyn 2014).

According to Krug et al. (2002, pp. 15–16), psychological consequences of school violence include alcohol and drug abuse; criminal, violent and other risk-taking behaviour; depression and anxiety; eating and sleep disorders; feelings of shame and guilt; poor relationships; poor school performance; poor self-esteem; post-traumatic stress disorder; psychosomatic disorders; suicidal behaviour; and self-harm. Burton and Leoschut's (2012) study found that the consequences of school violence included truancy, absenteeism, dropping out, low academic achievement, poor concentration, anxiety, apprehension, isolation, a lack of interest in school, depression, fatigue, later aggressive behaviour, mistrust towards peers, poor relationships with educators, poor self-image, poor impulse control, lying, cruelty, fighting, destruction of property and a disorderly school environment.

■ Learner cross-tabulations

The cross-tabulations focus on male and female responses to certain questions in the questionnaire. Table 4.3 presents how often violence is seen or heard at school linked to the types of violence.

TABLE 4.3: How often violence is seen or heard at school, linked to the types of violence.

How often	Types of violence									
	Bullying (%)		Fighting (%)		Swearing teasing (%)		Stealing (%)		Being threatened (%)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Every day	17	33	33	19	28	19	29	23	25	23
A few times a week	26	28	30	26	20	40	29	26	27	31
Once a week	22	8	17	15	14	19	8	19	14	23
Rarely	24	28	10	36	28	22	29	24	27	23
Never	7	0	3	4	6	0	0	6	5	0
No response	4	3	7	0	4	0	5	2	2	0

Source: Author's own work.

Key: M, male; F, female.

The highest responses for how often types of violence occur indicate that female learners saw or heard of bullying every day, while male learners saw or heard of fighting every day. It is likely that both males and females saw the same events but interpreted them differently or that fighting occurs in spaces occupied by males and is therefore more visible to them. Swearing and teasing were experienced every day by males, and a higher number of females reported that they experienced it a few times a week. Stealing and being threatened had similar response rates for both males and females for occurrences every day and a few times a week. Sexual harassment has been left out due to the minimal responses, which will overinflate the statistics.

Table 4.4 presents the extent to which violence is seen as a problem linked to the effects it has on learners.

The data here indicate that both male and female learners agreed that the effects of violence on learners were feeling fearful and anxious, poor school performance, poor concentration, bunking, a lack of interest, dropping out of school and depression.

■ Teachers

It was important to capture the perspective of teachers on violence at the school. The teaching staff complement consisted of 43 teachers, with 34 being female and nine being male. The questionnaire was completed by ten teaching staff who volunteered to be part of the study. Due to the small sample size, the responses for the closed- and open-ended questions were analysed manually. The closed-ended questions have been presented using tables. Due to the small sample size, the actual number and not percentages have been used for this section. Six female and four male teachers completed the questionnaire. Their ages ranged from 24 to 58 years of age.

■ Questionnaire: Closed questions

□ Teacher responses on whether violence is a problem at school

The responses from teachers about whether violence is a problem at school suggest that half of the teachers (five out of ten) acknowledge that violence is a problem at the school. However, two do not think that it is a problem. Three female teachers were neutral in their responses. These responses are similar to the ones held by learners.

TABLE 4.4: To what extent is violence seen to be a problem linked to the effects of violence on learners.

Extent	Effect of violence on learners													
	Fearful and anxious (%)		Poor performance (%)		Poor concentration (%)		Bunking school (%)		Lack of interest (%)		Drop out of school (%)		Depression (%)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Agree	53	50	61	44	54	48	56	49	54	50	58	43	55	33
Disagree	17	0	13	10	17	4	19	7	12	11	12	11	12	8
Neutral	9	29	10	21	10	24	6	22	16	14	14	17	14	24
Strongly agree	19	21	16	23	17	24	16	22	16	25	14	29	17	33
Strongly disagree	2	0	0	2	2	0	3	0	2	0	2	0	2	0

Source: Author's own work.

Key: M, male; F, female.

□ **Teacher responses on how often violence was seen or heard at school**

Of the three female teachers who stated that they had rarely seen or heard violence at the school, three were neutral in their responses to the first question about violence being a problem at school. The other half of the sample recognised that violence happens every day or once a week. If one had to compare these responses to the learner responses, one would see that the learners perceive violence to occur more frequently than the views held by the teachers. Most of the male learners stated that they had seen or heard violence either every day, a few times a week or at least once a week. Most of the female responses indicated that violence was seen or heard every day or a few times a week.

□ **Types of violence present at school**

The responses from teachers about the violence present at school suggest that bullying, fighting, swearing, teasing and stealing are seen to be the most prevalent types cited by both the male and female teachers. These were also cited by both male and female learners as being the most prevalent types of violence in school. It is interesting to note two aspects: firstly, one of the female teachers acknowledged that corporal punishment is a type of violence at school, and secondly, only one male teacher cited sexual harassment as a type of violence perpetrated at school. The minimal responses from both male and female teachers to sexual harassment are similar to those expressed by the learners. In both instances, the findings are contradictory to the literature that states that sexual harassment is prevalent as a common type of violence at school.

□ **Causes of violence at school**

The responses from both male and female teachers seemed to agree that drugs, the media, family and community have a role to play in school-based violence. Unlike the learners, the teachers felt that exposure to media and the community are contributing factors to the violence manifested in school. The report of the Media Violence Commission (2012) states that the media impacts the cognition, emotional state and behaviour of the viewer and that exposure to violent media has short- and long-term effects on aggressive tendencies of young people.

Negative parental behaviour and obstructive family context are key factors in the development of violent behaviour in young people (Maternowska et al. 2018). Young people who are exposed to such violence learn that violence is a norm and thus use this modelling to resolve their own conflict (Leoschut & Bonora 2007). Schools located within crime-ridden

TABLE 4.5: The effects of violence on learners.

Effect of violence	Male	Female
Fearful and anxious	3	4
Poor school performance	4	3
Poor concentration in class	3	3
Bunking	2	4
Lack of interest in school	3	4
Dropping out	1	2
Depression	1	2

Source: Author's own work.

communities are at a greater risk of school-based violence as they reflect the violent norms that learners are exposed to in the community. This exposure influences the learners' behaviour. In addition, poor communities have limited opportunities for young people to engage in constructive activities. This can lead to boredom and, consequently, to risk-taking behaviour.

The responses also indicate that, like the female learners, the female teachers perceive peer pressure to be the most prevalent cause of violence at the school. According to the literature, having delinquent friends increases the risk of the young person engaging in delinquent behaviour at school (Hamlall & Morrell 2012; SACE 2011). Risk-taking and anti-social behaviour such as using alcohol, drugs, weapons and physical fights are done to gain the approval of the peer group (Mahlangu, Gevers & De Lannoy 2014; eds. Ward et al. 2013). Table 4.5 presents the effects of violence on learners.

As with the male and female learners, both the male and female teachers seem to have similar views on the effects that violence has on learners. These factors include that it leads to feeling fearful and anxious, poor performance, poor concentration, a lack of interest and bunking, and to a lesser extent, dropping out and depression. These consequences for young people are linked to the emotional, social, cognitive, educational and behavioural development of learners.

■ Comparison of responses by learners and teachers to the open-ended questions

This section explores the responses and themes that emerged from the three open-ended questions in the questionnaire completed by the learners and teachers. From the responses in Table 4.6 one can see that there are similarities in the responses to Questions 1 and 3. Question 2 was related to what they, as a learner or teacher, could do to reduce violence in school. Table 4.6 presents a comparison of responses by learners and teachers to the open-ended questions.

TABLE 4.6: Comparison of responses by learners and teachers to the open-ended questions.

Question	Learners	Teachers
1. How do you think violence at school affects teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disturbance in the classroom and trying to solve issues of violence affects teaching time – there is less time for teaching • Affects the performance of teachers • Teachers lose interest in teaching • Learners threaten teachers • Teachers are not respected • Teachers are afraid of learners • Affects teachers emotionally • Teachers end up hating the whole class because of two or three learners • Teachers use corporal punishment because of anger • Stealing from teachers • Teachers leave the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling fearful • Lack of interest in teaching • Leave the profession • Too much time is spent on mediating and disciplining • Emotionally affected • Losing control of learners
2. What can you do to reduce violence at school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating others fairly and supporting each other • Reporting violence to teachers • Forming a group to talk about and deal with violence • Being a good role model • Doing programmes to stop drug abuse • Putting up posters so learners can learn about how to handle violence • Respecting the teacher • Standing up to bullies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplining learners • Motivating learners that teasing, bullying and swearing are not appropriate • Taking strict measures such as detention and doing tasks • Monitoring violent learners and sending them for counselling • Engaging learners in activities that will enable them to grow holistically • 'I am not police' – this statement suggested by one teacher suggests that the teacher does not see their role as one of being involved in disciplining learners
3. How do you think learners, teachers, parents and the community can reduce violence at school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security is needed at school • Learners, teachers, parents, the principal and the community working together • Learners supporting each other • Having counselling for learners • Teachers must not punish learners • Community to remove people who sell drugs • Having programmes that deal with violence and school-based violence • Involving the police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving all stakeholders and ensuring that the school safety committee works – SAPS, parents, ward councillors, CPF, NGOs • Parents should instil good discipline at home • The community should not sell drugs and alcohol to learners • Problem learners need to be referred to NGOs (SANCA) and social workers • Parents should be supportive of teachers and work together • Teachers should monitor learners and report issues of bullying • Educating learners about the consequences of violence • Teachers should be taught alternative methods to corporal punishment

Source: Author's own work.

Key: SAPS, South African Police Service; CPF, Community Police Forum; NGOs, non-governmental organisations; SANCA, South African National Council in Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

■ Focus group interviews – Data presentation

Once the questionnaire was completed, three focus group discussions comprising between five and eight learners each were conducted to explore issues raised in the questionnaire in greater detail. Nineteen learners volunteered for the focus group discussions. The focus group discussions, of approximately an hour each, were carried out over three days after school. The groups were divided into male-only, female-only and mixed groups (both male and female). By separating two groups to be exclusively male or female, it was felt that learners would feel comfortable discussing certain sensitive issues that arose. The learners were willing to share information freely when they were told that it would be confidential.

Table 4.7 presents the learner themes in the male, female and mixed focus groups.

■ Theme 1: Types of violence

□ Sub-theme 1: Learner-on-learner violence

The categories that emerged from learner-on-learner violence were consistent with the types of violence that were highlighted in the questionnaire. All three focus group participants were unanimous and agreed that bullying, teasing, stealing, fighting and swearing happened on a regular basis. Teasing and swearing were seen to be minor issues. Bullying, stealing and fighting were perceived to occur more regularly. Bullying seemed to happen more among boys than girls.

Learner M in the female group stated that ‘Mostly boys bully each other, Grade 8 to 10 learners bully each other’ (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner N in the male group stated, ‘Mostly boys bully each other, sometimes female bully each other. Older boys bully boys from lower grades. Sometimes they bully girls’ (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Learner P in the mixed group stated, ‘bullying happens every day. Every class has a bully’ (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

All three groups confirmed that stealing happened every day and was of major concern. Stealing was perpetrated to obtain money for drugs, gambling or items that were needed. Boys tended to steal more than girls.

Learner S from the female group stated that ‘learners don’t have money, so they steal from you to buy drugs. Also, stealing is caused because they need to buy things they can’t afford’ (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner F in the male group reiterated this by stating: ‘stealing happens because they don’t have things’ (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Learner N from the mixed group further stated that ‘anyone steals, not just the ones doing drugs. They steal to get things for their younger brothers and sisters. If there is a need, they will steal’ (Female, Grade 10, 2016).

TABLE 4.7: Learner themes in male, female and mixed focus groups.

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Types of violence	Learner-on-learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying • Teasing • Stealing • Fighting • Swearing • Gambling • Gangsterism • Sexual harassment
	Teacher-perpetrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name-calling • Corporal punishment
Causes of violence	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drugs • Satisfying needs
	Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer pressure • Image/power/respect
	Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting • Issues at home
	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime • Drugs
Consequences of violence	Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor performance • Fear • Poor concentration • Truancy • Low self-esteem
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of interest in school • Low morale • Fear • Absenteeism • Teaching time wasted • Retaliation
Managing violence	Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting incidents • Peer support • Creating awareness
	School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving infrastructure • Improving security • Providing extra-curricular activities • Psychosocial support to learners

Source: Author's own work.

The issue of gambling was only brought up by the mixed group. One male learner in the mixed group stated that ‘Gambling happens every day at school. Gambling leads to fighting’ (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Another male learner in the group stated that ‘learners steal money from others so they can gamble’ (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

The children come from the poor community surrounding the school, where poverty and unemployment are rife. It seems, therefore, that the

learners steal and gamble in order to fulfil their needs. According to Ward et al. (eds. 2013), UNICEF (2012), Collins (2013) and Mathews and Benvenuti (2014), the prevalence of a climate of economic inequality, social exclusion, marginalisation, unemployment and deprivation is evident in such communities.

According to the questionnaire, sexual harassment was not seen to be of major concern by the learners. When probed in the focus group, all three groups stated that they did not think that it was a major problem at the school. Their responses indicated that it does happen, but when speaking about it, they did not see it as an important problem to be tackled. It was seen as normal and acceptable and was demonstrated as a means of power that boys have over girls. However, the issue of feeling fearful was raised.

Learner T in the female group stated that ‘the boys do it, but the girls don’t mind. They enjoy it’ (Female, Grade10, 2016). When the researcher asked how one knows that the girls are enjoying it, Learner T responded that ‘their faces do not show that they mind being touched’ (Female, Grade 10, 2016). However, another learner in the same female group, Learner X, stated that ‘some girls allow it and some girls do not allow it. They stand up for themselves. The boys won’t try anything with these girls’ (Female, Grade 10, 2016).

Learner P from the male group stated that ‘Boys do it to feel power over the girls’ (Male, Grade 10, 2016). A female learner in the mixed group, Learner F, seemed to have reiterated what male Learner P had stated by stating that ‘Girls do say to the boys don’t do it but they do it anyway because they are boys and they think they have power over the girls’ (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Another female learner in the mixed group, Learner G, further stated that ‘Us girls do not talk about it. It happens, but girls don’t do anything about it. They are scared’ (Female, Grade 10, 2016).

The manner in which girls deal with the issues of gender violence in school is related to the way in which gender-related issues and violence are dealt with in the family and community setting. In many ways, there is bias in both of these settings towards male dominance. Ultimately, many girls are powerless against the dominant male culture of power and authority. This bias towards the powerful role of masculinity places more risk on boys to engage in gender-based school violence (Ngqela & Lewis 2012; Pradubmook-Sherer & Sherer 2014). Girls are at the receiving end as they are perceived as inferior, defenceless and fear punishment for reporting incidents of sexual violence (Malongo & Mwale 2019). Females are seen as weak and vulnerable, and males are seen as dominant, with power and control (Ncontsa & Shumba 2013).

□ Sub-theme 2: Teacher-perpetrated violence

The two main issues brought up were those of name-calling and corporal punishment.

Learner N from the female group talked about name-calling:

'[T]eachers tease learners sometimes. They call you names and how you look. They pick on your grades if you are not doing well. They say it like a joke but it's not a joke.' (Female, Grade 10, 2016)

Learner M from the mixed group stated that 'Teachers must mind their words. They must be respectful to learners so learners will respect them' (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

There was a lengthy discussion centred on corporal punishment. Learners spoke about the types of corporal punishment that occur, the reasons why it is used by teachers, and the effect that it has on learners. All three groups stated that corporal punishment was experienced every day from most teachers and included a slap on the face or hitting on the hand, backside or head with a pipe, ruler or duster.

Responses from the female group for the reasons for corporal punishment included: 'If the class is not clean' (Female, Grade 10, 2016), 'If homework is not done' (Female, Grade 10, 2016), 'If the learner does not know the answer to a question' (Female, Grade 10, 2016) and 'If the learner does not attend the 07:00 class' (Female, Grade 10, 2016).

Responses from the male group included: 'If homework is not done' (Male, Grade 10, 2016), 'Learners being disruptive and disrespectful' (Male, Grade 10, 2016) and 'If the learner does not attend the 07:00 class' (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

Responses from the mixed group included: 'If homework is not done' (Female, Grade 10, 2016), 'When you don't respond when they ask you a question' (Male, Grade 10, 2016), 'If you come late to class' (Female, Grade 10, 2016) and 'If the learner is not attending the 07:00 class' (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

One can thus see that corporal punishment, although prohibited by law since 1996, is still practised at the school. It seems that the educators use corporal punishment as they lack the appropriate skills and techniques to manage behaviour effectively. The responses from the learners suggest that the teachers use petty reasons to punish learners. Most cases of corporal punishment go unreported. By employing corporal punishment for wrongdoing, the school system reinforces the notion that violence is the only way to deal with problems. Instead of taking on the important role of teaching young people pro-social behaviour, corporal punishment increases the behaviour that it seeks to control. The use of corporal punishment demonstrates a lack of teacher professionalism and democracy. The autocratic handling of learners' behaviour by educators through the use of physical and verbal aggression heightens violence in the classroom context. The use of a power relationship hinders mutual respect and engagement (Ghorab & Al-Khalidi 2014; Mncube & Dube 2019).

■ Theme 2: Causes of violence

□ Sub-theme 1: Individual

The individual causes of violence cited by learners were largely focused on drugs and satisfying needs.

Stealing was cited as being linked to drugs. Learner B from the female group stated that ‘they don’t have money, so they steal from you to buy drugs. Also, stealing is caused because they need to buy things they can’t afford’ (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Another learner in the female group stated that ‘If they do not have money to buy drugs, they will take out their anger on you’ (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner M in the male group further reiterated that ‘drugs is [*sic*] a big problem. When they are high, they disrespect and bully others and fight with teachers’ (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Learner F from the male group further stated that ‘If the boys didn’t smoke the *dagga* and cigarettes, they can’t think straight. Then they become angry. They also steal from other people to buy cigarettes and *dagga*’ (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

As noted in the previous section, stealing can be attributed to structural violence (Galtung 1969). Poverty, which is seen as a form of structural violence, hinders parents from providing for the material needs of their children. This school is in a poverty-stricken area and thus may be the reason why children resort to stealing. According to UNICEF (2012), drugs and alcohol are one of the key causes of violence perpetrated at school. A study done by Avdija and Jobi (2014) found that schools larger in size that were located in high-crime areas were more likely to experience a higher number of violent crimes with weapons, vandalism, drugs, alcohol and theft.

Drugs were cited as a major issue at the school. The learners in this school lead stressful lives through the type of community in which they reside as well as being faced with family issues. They are thus more likely to be exposed to drugs through community or family influences in terms of poor role modelling and easy access to substances. Young people who do not receive love and attention from their families are more likely to turn to friends to fill the gap and are therefore likely to adopt negative behaviour related to drug usage. According to Ololade and Mndzebele (2017), drug abuse has been linked to young people experiencing stressful events in their lives, being raised in single-parent families and accessing drugs through friends and peers.

Steyn and Singh (2018) concluded that the absence of after-school activities and inadequate resources and facilities resulted in young people being engaged in destructive behaviour in order to evade boredom. There are limited opportunities for young people to engage in activities that expand their potential and skills. In addition, Mncube

and Harber (2014, p. 328) posit that young people resort to drugs because 'schools are failing to provide an environment that gives students the feeling of security, confidence and sense of personal well-being they need'. Thus, it is important that young people are involved in school activities that would provide a sense of empowerment and engagement in positive peer relationships, deterring them from destructive behaviour and encouraging them to engage in developmentally appropriate activities. Youth empowerment programmes at schools can address this need.

□ Sub-theme 2: Interpersonal

At an interpersonal level, the two main causes of violence were reported to be linked to image/power/respect and peer pressure.

Learners in the female group stated the following: 'Thinking you have more power than the other [...] like my lifestyle, how I look, how I dress, intelligence' (Female, Grade 10, 2016); 'Showing off to your friends, looking good in front of your friends. Wanting to prove you are better than the other person so you will fight' (Female, Grade 10, 2016); and 'Problems at school are caused because of peer pressure. If friends are doing the wrong thing and you want to fit in' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Similarly, Learner T from the male group stated that boys fight because 'you don't want to look weak in front of your friends' (Male, Grade 10, 2016), and Learner P from the mixed group stated that 'Others want to be respected through power, they want to get noticed' (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

Aggression and violence are seen as socially acceptable for males to display and to resolve disagreements and conflict (Mahlangu et al. 2014; Mathews & Benvenuti 2014). Gender-based violence stems from stereotypical roles that are socially imposed, where masculinity is traditionally equated with sexual prowess, achievement, success and superiority. Traditional gender norms mean that males are expected to show off their masculine traits and distress through aggression.

Having delinquent friends increases the risk of the young person engaging in delinquent behaviour at school. There is great pressure from the peer group on male learners to be brave. Much of this show of bravery is displayed in physical fighting (Burton and Leoschut 2012; Hamlall & Morrell 2012; SACE 2011). According to the *World Report on Violence against Children* (2006), there is an increase in the perpetration of violence and victimisation at around fifteen years old for boys. Attitudes supporting peer violence are associated with the perpetration of violence against peers, especially in high-risk communities (Ali, Swahn & Sterling 2011).

Young people growing up together in a crime-ridden community where there is unemployment, a lack of education, and a low standard of housing

will engage with delinquent friends and peers (*World Report on Violence against Children* 2006). 'Adolescents who are surrounded by deviant moral values may become deviant because of their environment. Such delinquency has its origins in the values represented by the surrounding subculture' (Gouws, Kruger & Burger 2008, p. 131). This negative identity results in risk-taking and anti-social behaviour involving alcohol, drugs, weapons and physical fights. Many of these acts are carried out to gain the approval of the peer group. They model and reward anti-social behaviour (Mahlangu et al. 2014; eds. Ward et al. 2013; *World Report on Violence against Children* 2006).

□ Sub-theme 3: Family

All three groups stated that one of the main causes of violence is family issues and parenting skills. Learners who were exposed to violence at home or who were experiencing difficulties at home manifested that anger towards other learners at the school.

To highlight the extent of the problem, Learner T from the female group pointed out that:

'If there is swearing and alcohol in the family, it makes the child angry and they take out the anger in school. The child does the same thing they see at home because they are learning it from their parents.' (Female, Grade 10, 2016)

Learner P in the male group further stated that 'sometimes it starts at home. Sometimes, the child witnesses violence at home, the father hitting the mother' (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Learner M, in the same group, suggested that bullying is linked to family issues by stating that 'bullying is because of anger problems. If something bad happens at home, you take it out at school' (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Learner G from the mixed group seemed to echo similar sentiments by stating that 'Family problems cause school violence. Someone is angry at home and brings that anger to school' (Female, Grade 10, 2016).

Negative behaviour of parents and dysfunctional family environment are key factors in the development of violent behaviour in children and adolescents (Krug et al. 2002, p. 33). The family environment is a key socialising agent in childhood and adolescence. In the family, the young person learns values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour that serve as a moral compass for the young person. If the young person is socialised in a family environment that is rife in dysfunction and violence, then this can have a detrimental effect on their holistic development as well as place them at a greater risk for engaging in violent anti-social behaviour in other settings such as the school and community. Young people who are exposed to such violence learn that violence is the norm, and this is how one solves problems and resolves conflict (Leoschut & Bonora 2007).

□ Sub-theme 4: Community

The two main focus areas discussed here were related to crime in the community and how freely available drugs are. It was stated that people from the community sell drugs to learners in school. It was even reported by Learner N in the mixed group that 'people from the community steal from the school'. When asked what they steal, he stated that 'they steal cabling, copper pipes, water and computers' (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

Schools located within violent, crime-ridden communities are at a greater risk of school-based violence as they reflect the violent norms and acts to which learners are exposed in the community, which then influences their behaviour:

'Because there are so many troubled schools in South Africa that try to operate in extremely troubled communities, the school invariably becomes part of the troubled community's ecology, and if neither the school nor its community can resist the onslaught of disabling social forces, both will succumb to them.' (Dunbar-Krige, Pillay & Henning 2010, p. 7)

■ Theme 3: Consequences of violence

The findings here were consistent with the data from the questionnaires for both learners and teachers.

□ Sub-theme 1: Learners

For learners, the common categories in all three groups were poor performance, fear, poor concentration, truancy and impact on self-esteem. These findings were consistent with the ones found in the literature (Bezuidenhout & Joubert 2008; South African Human Rights Commission 2006; Van der Westhuizen & Maree 2010). In addition, Burton and Leoschut's (2012) study found that the consequences of school violence included truancy, absenteeism, dropping out, low academic achievement, poor concentration, anxiety, apprehension, isolation, a lack of interest in school and depression. In light of this, responses from learners included the following.

Learner B in the female group stated that 'Learners do not concentrate on their studies. Their marks go down' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Another learner in the female group stated, 'Some learners end up not coming to school because they are scared. It affects their self-esteem and how they look at themselves' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner F from the male group stated, 'Some of them fail because you bunk school out of fear. They are not focused in school. They don't think properly in class because they are scared and embarrassed' (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Learner G from the mixed group stated, 'They lack in schoolwork because they lack focus.

They don't want to attend school at all. They lose interest in school because they are scared' (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

□ Sub-theme 2: Teachers

The categories that emerged in all three focus groups related to the consequences of school violence on teachers were consistent with the literature as well. These included a loss of interest in school, low morale, fear, absenteeism, retaliation and wasting teaching time on discipline issues (Le Roux & Mokhele 2011; Mncube & Steinmann 2014; Ncontsa & Shumba 2013; Singh & Steyn 2014). In light of this, responses from the learners included:

Learner M in the female group stated, 'the teacher will not come to class because they are scared of the learner. Some lose morale. Other teachers get aggressive against the learners' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner S from the male group stated, 'they can't teach properly with other children disrespecting them. They end up not teaching and children fall behind in their work. Time is wasted' (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Learner P from the mixed group stated, 'teachers do not want to come to class because learners are rude or high. Some learners beat teachers' (Female, Grade 10, 2016).

■ Theme 4: Managing violence

When discussing how the issue of school-based violence could be managed, the roles of learners and the school were explored.

□ Sub-theme 1: Learners

The categories that emerged were focused on learners reporting incidents, peer support and creating awareness about school-based violence. Learners felt that providing support to peers was important.

Responses from the female group included Learner T stating that 'we should start up a group, maybe make posters and make people aware about violence' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner X stated, 'We could act out scenes to help learners deal with violence' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner B stated, 'We could involve social networks like WhatsApp. Start a group to create awareness on WhatsApp' (Female, Grade 10, 2016).

Responses from the male group included: Learner N stated, 'Maybe start a campaign. Ask learners to make posters to make others aware of violence in school. The learners can be involved with the teachers in a campaign' (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Learner P stated:

'They can report to the teacher if somebody does something to them. The learners who witness can report to the teacher if they see something wrong. They only like to watch.' (Male, Grade 10, 2016)

From the mixed group, the responses included: Learner F stated, 'Learners can talk to their classmates about their problems' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner M stated, 'Create awareness through posters and place it around the school' (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

What came out strongly in the focus group discussions was the need for learners themselves to create awareness about the issues affecting them in school. They wanted to lead the process and feel empowered to be in a position to do something about the situation rather than merely being observers or victims.

Empowerment is a complex process that involves social action. Through the democratic processes of empowerment, individuals and groups are engaged in meaningful decision-making, active participation and action in order to bring about change in policies, structures and values and norms in their social context (Cahill, Quijada & Bradley 2011; Christens & Peterson 2012; Neal 2014; Ozer et al. 2013; Ramey & Rose-Krasnor 2012). It is therefore important that the voices of youth are heard in designing and implementing appropriate activities targeted at reducing school violence (Andreou 2015). Partnering with children and youth is important as the outcomes of a programme tend to be more effective if they take ownership of the process. In addition, involving youth is an intervention in itself as it helps them heal by sharing their experiences with others (Pineiro 2006).

□ Sub-theme 2: School

The learners discussed the need for the school to provide safety and security by improving infrastructure, security and providing extra-curricular activities and psychosocial support for learners. A safe school environment is imperative for a conducive learning environment. Hiring security guards, installing cameras and fixing the perimeter fence was of great concern to all three groups. In addition, providing counselling services to victims and witnesses of violence at school or for those who are exposed to those issues in their families and communities was seen to be lacking in the school. The school where the study took place is under-resourced, with inadequate sporting facilities. A key point was brought up by one of the learners about the need to engage learners in sports such that they are diverted from being involved in risk-taking behaviour. Responses from the female group included:

Learner B stated, 'The school can hire counsellors for the ones doing the bullying and the ones being bullied' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner T stated, 'Parents must be involved because most of the problems start at home' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner S stated, 'Maybe if we could increase more sports, the learners would not have time for violence if he or she is busy. There is soccer and netball, but not everybody is interested in

soccer and netball. There should be other sports like volleyball, tennis and golf' (Female, Grade 10, 2016).

Responses from the male group included: Learner P stated, 'Hire security guards to check bags for drugs. The school should install cameras, hire security, fix the fence and have an alarm system' (Male, Grade 10, 2016).

From the mixed group, the responses were: Learner N stated, 'The school should provide security, fix the school fence and install CCTV cameras' (Female, Grade 10, 2016). Learner P stated, 'They should replace windows and doors in the classrooms' (Male, Grade 10, 2016). Learner G stated, 'They should hire professional counsellors or a social worker' (Female, Grade 10, 2016).

■ Conclusion

This chapter provided findings related to the questionnaire and focus group discussions. The categories that emerged from the themes were consistent with those found in literature. It was also evident that the findings from the questionnaire and focus group discussions were similar in many respects. Various overall themes emerged related to the perception of sexual harassment, peer pressure, the differences in how male and female learners viewed violence, the role of the family in school violence and the issue of poverty and drugs. The next chapter will focus on the theoretical perspective of empowerment and school-based interventions done both internationally and locally.

Positive youth development, empowerment theory and school-based interventions

■ Introduction

The previous chapter provided data presentation and analysis of the questionnaires and focus group discussions. Pineda-Herrero et al. (2018) state that empowerment provides an enabling, developmental space for individuals, organisations and communities to create positive transformation in their contexts. Through the process of empowerment, change occurs both at an individual and collective level as it provides people with an opportunity to gain power through the decisions and choices they make to transform their environments for the better. In view of this, this chapter will provide a discussion of the theoretical framework that guided this study, namely, positive youth development and empowerment. In addition, a review of international and national school-based interventions targeted at reducing school violence and creating a safer school environment for learners and teachers will be done.

■ Positive youth development

A few decades ago, the approach towards youth focused on pathology, deficits and risks. In the past decade, the shift has been to view youth from a strengths-based, resilience perspective called positive youth development

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(Scales 1996). In this approach, researchers have explored how to tap into the potential of youth and look beyond their deficiencies so that they may be viewed as valuable members of society who contribute towards its progress. This is also true for youth who come from the most disadvantaged societies (Andreou 2015; Christens & Peterson 2012; Ozer 2017).

Furthermore, Romer and Hansen (2021, p. 77) assert that ‘every person has an inherent capacity for positive growth – to exercise personal agency – that pushes them to develop skills and competencies consonant with their goals’. Gadaire, Henrich and Finn-Stevenson (2017, p. 767) propose that social competencies are social expectations surrounding emotional regulation, cooperative interaction with peers and adults and self-control. If young people are not exposed to such opportunities, or if the opportunities to which they are exposed are negative, this will create a malady of developmental problems.

In addition, Taylor et al. (2017), in their review of 25 positive youth development programme evaluations, found that such interventions were successful in improving interpersonal skills, relationship-building and commitment to schooling. It further reduced substance abuse and risk-taking behaviour. Positive youth development interventions thus improve positive developmental outcomes and protect against negative developmental outcomes.

■ Empowerment

■ Empowerment defined

Empowerment is a shift from prevention-based interventions to collaborative interventions with community members. One of the early proponents of the concept of empowerment, Rappaport (1981), states that the ultimate goal of empowerment is for people to gain power over their own lives. Definitions of empowerment theory are abundant. Martinez et al. (2017) conceptualise empowerment processes as:

[7]he result of an interaction, negotiated to a greater or lesser degree, between the capabilities of a person, group or community and the options provided by the physical and sociocultural contexts in which they manage their lives. (p. 409)

Loizou and Charalambous (2017) postulate that empowerment pedagogy centres on giving children a voice in the social problems that affect them. In practice, this means giving children a sense of belonging, shifting power between adults and children, and active participation in decision-making.

Jennings et al. (2006, p. 32) posit that ‘empowerment is a multi-level construct consisting of practical approaches and applications, social action processes, and individual and collective outcomes’. The effectiveness of empowerment is that it is not just theoretically grounded but applied

practically as well. Empowerment is also inextricably linked to the idea of social justice and cultural competence, especially for marginalised youth in urban settings (Fuentes, Goncy & Sutherland 2015).

Power is an important construct of empowerment theory. Prilleltensky (2010, p. 242) conceptualised power within empowerment ‘as having the opportunity to (1) access valued resources that satisfy basic human needs, (2) exercise self-determination and democratic participation and (3) experience self-efficacy and develop skills that are conducive to social inclusion’. Power is not necessarily an inherent quality with which children and youth are born but rather something that is attained from experiences and opportunities in the environment.

The key notion from these definitions and conceptualisations is that the fundamental themes that encompass empowerment are centred on social action, interpersonal development, autonomy, shared power and confidence. The researcher aimed to incorporate these themes in the research project undertaken with the learners at the school in Cato Manor.

■ Empowerment and youth

Much of the literature on empowerment is linked to Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Much like positive youth development, YPAR provides a unique platform for young people to acquire skills, knowledge, critical thinking, self-confidence, leadership, autonomy, identity, belonging and teamwork (Ozer 2017). In addition, empowerment lends itself to cooperative learning. Cooperative learning, which is based on the social learning theory, states that learning occurs in a social context where there is a mutual sharing of ideas (Bandura 1971). Prati et al. (2020) maintain that there is a good link between YPAR and civic engagement within schools. It provides youth with an opportunity to develop leadership skills, critical consciousness and connectedness with schools.

Rodrigues and Brown (2009, cited in Anyon et al. 2018, p. 11) conceptualise YPAR as being guided by three key principles:

- **Inquiry-based:** Topics of investigation are grounded in young people’s life experiences and concerns.
- **Participatory:** Young people share power with adults in making decisions about their project and how to move it forward.
- **Transformative:** The purpose of YPAR is to improve the lives of marginalised youth and their communities.

Furthermore, Cahill, Quijada and Bradley (2011) postulate that through participatory action research and a critical youth studies perspective, youth and adults negotiate and exchange ideas on framing problems and developing strategies to address the identified problems. They maintain

that youth should not merely be seen as a source of data collection but rather as serious agents of change in the particular context in which they live or attend school. Teachers should also be part of the project from the planning phase such that support can be garnered and sustainability can be ensured.

Ozer and Douglas (2013) conducted a five-year study in which projects were implemented and evaluated at five high schools in the USA. The topics for the projects included a range of issues, for example, cyber-bullying, sexual health, safety and hygiene in the school bathroom and improving inter-ethnic friendships. The teachers who acted as facilitators assisted the young people in choosing relevant topics from discussions held with groups of young people. Actions were then decided upon to address the chosen topics. The study found that youth participating in the projects increased their socio-political skills and motivation to collectively influence changes within their school.

The themes of mastery, control, self-efficacy, decision-making, problem-solving and critical awareness of the socio-political context, ownership and participation are key aspects of any study related to empowerment. Unger et al. (2019) aver that the needs for the personal wellness of children and youth are related to mastery, control, self-efficacy, voice and choice. These are achieved through a process of shared decision-making, collective vision, accountability for actions and partnership with young people. However, one needs to bear in mind that the nature of the empowerment process is based on contextual factors (Russel et al. 2009; Zimmerman 1995). Thus, the adult facilitating the project with youth should not only focus on the key components of empowerment but also be cognisant that the actual processes and outcomes would be dependent on the specific setting in which the project is implemented. Empowerment has both a value orientation and theoretical component (Zimmerman 2000, cited in Russel et al. 2009):

The value orientation of working in the community promotes goals, aims and strategies for implementing change. The theoretical component acknowledges that many social problems exist because of larger structural inequalities. (p. 893)

When people come together to think critically about social issues impacting their lived experience, this creates a level of critical consciousness that spurs them into effecting change in that lived experience and context. The empowerment lens allows adults to see youth as active in their own development and reflect and act on how to facilitate the process of their development. It allows youth to see themselves as change agents with an active role to play in their school and community. Transformative change is achieved by adults assisting young people to gain independence and enhancing their competency through their relationships with them (Jamatia 2023; Kay & Tisdall 2017; Zeldin et al. 2016).

Programmes and policies that seek to promote the healthy development of youth should include direct opportunities for them to make meaningful contributions to their context. Adults and youth bring their own perspectives, experiences and relationships into the partnership (Ile & Boadu 2018; Woods-Jaeger et al. 2024). In addition, Kay and Tisdall (2017, p. 68) note that 'by perceiving participants as potential experts and creators of knowledge, co-production can provide young people with a place in decision-making'.

Martinez et al. (2017), in their systematic analysis of youth empowerment over a period of fifteen years, concluded that the common dimensions of youth empowerment encompass the personal growth and well-being of participants, interpersonal interactions of young people and adults sharing power and an educational dimension related to acquiring knowledge and developing competency. They also concluded that these dimensions of empowerment are transformative in nature, with young people bringing about social change, and that they are emancipative, where young people are in control of processes.

Scales, Benson and Roehlkepartain (2011), in their notable study on the role of sparks, relationships and empowerment found that youth who showed skill or passion for something that gave them a sense of joy or purpose and who were given a chance to participate in opportunities related to their 'spark', developed a sense of empowerment. They describe 'spark' as 'a passion for a self-identified interest, skill or capacity that metaphorically lights a fire in an adolescent's life, providing energy, joy, purpose, and direction' (p. 264). This 'spark', in turn, strengthened their pro-social behaviours such as empathy, generosity and civic-mindedness. Thus, if a young person shows passion for making a difference in their school or community, creating a supportive environment for the young person to make a difference encourages them to feel empowered. Nurturing the 'sparks' of young people is important for their academic, psychological, socio-emotional and behavioural thriving.

Muturi et al. (2018, p. 242) conducted a study examining the role of youth empowerment in preventing adolescent obesity in low-income communities. Their findings indicate that 'youth empowerment significantly influences adolescents' self-efficacy, perceptions for healthy food choice, healthy eating and attitudes towards physical activity and overall motivation for health'. In addition, they indicate that if young people are involved in decision-making about their health, they are more likely to be motivated to adopt healthier lifestyle choices. A study by Woods-Jaeger et al. (2024) found that utilising the cultural assets of youth can assist in developing health interventions for youth affected by structural racism. Youth-adult developed curricula around trauma and stress have the potential to bring about change in health equity. Similarly, a study by Felter et al. (2023)

established that involving youth in the development and training of trauma-informed care in their communities allowed them to assist individuals within their communities who had experienced trauma. It also had a healing effect on the youth ambassadors themselves.

A study by Augsberger, Gecker and Collins (2018, p. 1) on youth empowerment in the context of a participatory budgeting project found that youth who participated in the project expressed feelings of 'purpose, competence and the ability to engage fellow youth in the budgeting process'. Furthermore, Ojunuba et al. (2023) aver that empowerment education interventions can effectively reduce substance abuse in youth. According to a longitudinal study by Thulin et al. (2022), involving youth in a Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) programme has long-term effects of reducing aggression and increasing pro-social behaviour.

In a school setting, empowerment is achieved by giving learners skills and knowledge to think critically about issues within the school setting so that creative and doable strategies can be developed to address the issues. This leads to change. It allows learners to address issues that are important to them by being directly involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects. A supportive environment in the school setting is important in developing empowered learners. It also assists the researcher in understanding the perspectives of the learners. However, this supportive environment can be difficult to achieve in the South African context because of poorly resourced schools and the inability of schools to provide learners with physical, social and emotional safety. The use of corporal punishment by teachers, violence that is rife in schools, a lack of facilities and resources, large teacher-to-student ratios, crime and poverty hinder the involvement of learners in becoming change agents.

■ Psychological empowerment

Zimmerman (1995, 2000), who is notable in the area of community psychology and empowerment theory, proposes that empowerment occurs at the psychological level. Psychological empowerment means that empowerment occurs at the individual level and is linked to beliefs about competence, control and self-efficacy. The nomological network for psychological empowerment is comprised of intrapersonal, interactional and behavioural components. The intrapersonal component relates to how an individual thinks about their competence and ability to make changes; in other words, it is the individual's perceived control of their ability to make changes and contribute to solutions. The interactional component is related to how the individual makes sense of contextual factors, norms and values that impact on issues.

Finally, the behavioural component is how the individual eventually acts towards change. The behavioural component relates to the active engagement and action that one takes to bring about the envisaged change to the policy, values or structure of the setting. The focus on psychological empowerment has been a common focus for studies on empowerment. Thus, programmes should consolidate the intrapersonal, interactional and behavioural components in order to develop the abilities of young people (Eisman et al. 2016). Szoko et al. (2023) found a link between psychological empowerment, resilience and future orientation in adolescents who participated in a YPAR programme.

Christens (2012, p. 121) expands on the relational aspect of psychological empowerment where relationships are seen as a distinct component. The relational aspect deals specifically with interpersonal processes that shape the socio-political environment and thus bring about transformative change to relationships within settings. He posits that ‘collaborative competence i.e. the set of abilities and propensities necessary for the formation of interpersonal relationships that can forge group membership and solidarity’ is an important aspect of the relational component. The relational aspect of psychological empowerment is thus a key component to the success of empowering young people.

Other aspects of relational empowerment include bridging social divisions with others who are different; facilitating the empowerment of others through providing opportunities to take on roles and responsibilities; identifying their strengths and providing support; mobilising others to participate in the project; and passing on the legacy by collaborating with others to ensure sustainability. The relational aspect is important such that collectively, the group can achieve desired outcomes, bring about change and ensure the sustainability of projects.

Each component of the model can be applied to learners in a school context. The emotional component relates to how the learner perceives their competence and ability to make changes in their school environment. The cognitive component relates to the learner’s awareness of issues at school that require change and how they use their skills and resources to effect that change. The behavioural component involves liaising with school management to bring about change. The relational component is the learner’s active engagement with teachers and other learners to bring about change at their school and, in the process, empower others. This aspect of empowerment can only be achieved in South African schools if the relationships that teachers have with learners are strengthened to include respect, care, shared power, discipline instead of punishment and co-operation between learners and teachers.

■ Theoretical frameworks of empowerment

Empowerment theories provide a useful conceptual framework to focus on the capacity of youth to engage in community change efforts (Hagquist & Starrin 1997):

Empowerment models are characterized by a bottom-up strategy for change and a wide contextual framework. In these models, participant orientation is essential and the school environment and social conditions are considered to be important. (p. 228)

■ Transactional partnering process

Cargo et al. (2003) developed a theoretical framework of empowerment called a *Transactional Partnering Process*. The framework was developed as a result of youth involvement in a neighbourhood action group centred on community health promotion. Youth were involved in sharing their opinions and ideas about improving the health and quality of life of youth within the community. Through the project, they were able to determine identified needs and implement action plans to address those needs. The process involved adults creating an enabling and safe environment where youth were mentored and supported to carry out actions while at the same time experiencing a sense of belonging, participation, respect, care and encouragement from the adults in the setting. The adults upheld beliefs and expectations about the level of responsibility, competence, and abilities of young people to make appropriate decisions and facilitate the planning and implementation of the project. The care, respect and encouragement shown to youth impel growth in relation to character building. This, in turn, leads to positive development in the youth's community. In so doing, they transferred their power to the youth. Providing feedback through suggestions and advice on alternatives and possible obstacles was also an important part of the process.

Larson and Angus (2011) maintain that youth learn strategic thinking in this way. The process ultimately allowed young people to meet the goals and objectives of the project as a collective while enhancing their feelings of confidence, competence, leadership and consciousness of contextual issues. This framework seems to be the pinnacle in encapsulating the key processes of youth empowerment.

■ Adolescent empowerment cycle

Chinman and Linney's (1998) *Adolescent Empowerment Cycle* describes empowerment as an important construct of adolescent development as it allows young people to develop their identity by taking on meaningful roles, developing skills, bonding and actively participating with peers and others within a social setting. It also involves youth experiencing positive recognition

and reinforcement for their efforts in contributing positively to a group. This leads to greater self-esteem, self-efficacy, a sense of control, and, ultimately, positive empowerment. Other key features of the cycle are an experienced adult facilitating the process, the opportunity to work in a group for the sake of peer approval and reflection on experiences while engaged in the project.

■ Critical youth empowerment

Jennings et al.'s (2006) *Critical Youth Empowerment* model discusses six dimensions of youth empowerment at the individual and group levels to effect change in the youth's setting. These are:

- A welcoming and safe environment where youth feel supported, cared for and respected while at the same time enjoying themselves. They feel comfortable sharing their creativity, thoughts and ideas because adults encourage and trust them to take responsibility and fulfil roles related to achieving the goals set.
- There are opportunities to actively engage and make a meaningful contribution towards bringing about change. In the process, youth learn about leadership, communication, planning and organising (Larson & Angus 2011). They are also given an opportunity to take on new roles and responsibilities.
- There is equitable sharing of power between adults and youth. The adults provide support, guidance, feedback, keep the youth on task and exert authority but without dominating the process (Kohfeldt et al. 2011; Larson & Angus 2011).
- Youth are required to think critically during the process. This is achieved through reflection and reflective action.
- There is participation in socio-political processes by understanding the issues that govern the given context so as to effect change in the values, practices or structures therein (Ozer & Douglas 2013).
- Empowerment that happens at both individual and community levels provides the best outcomes.

■ Typology of youth participation and empowerment

Wong, Zimmerman and Parker's *Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment Pyramid* (TYPE) (2010) outlines five types of participation related to adults and youth involvement in projects, namely, vessel, symbolic, pluralistic, independent and autonomous. Critical consciousness of contextual issues and the impact thereof are key to their typology. The pyramid displays varying levels of participation by youth and control by adults. On the one hand, there are youth who have

active participation and total control. It would seem inappropriate to give youth total control of the process or actions as they require support and guidance from adults. Limited adult involvement might result in the youth missing out on important learning opportunities. On the other hand, there are youth who have a diminished sense of active participation and adults who have the most or total control. This is not ideal as it defeats the whole purpose of empowering youth, that is, youth achieving a sense of control, mastery and self-efficacy through participative decision-making.

Thus, it seems that the *pluralistic* participation type is the best form of youth empowerment as youth are active participants in the process, and there is shared control between youth and adults. The adults and youth can decide on who will make which decisions and to what extent each will be responsible for the planning and implementation of the project. The authors state that this shared control results in a co-learning process that is empowering for both adults and youth.

■ Elements of adult-youth partnerships

According to Checkoway (2011):

Youth participation is important, because when young people participate, it draws upon their expertise, enables them to exercise their rights as citizens, and contributes to a more democratic society. It also promotes their personal development, and provides them with substantive knowledge and practical skills. (p. 340)

He puts forward the following propositions about youth participation, which are key to empowerment (Checkoway 2011, pp. 340–345):

- Is a right protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child?
- Is it a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives?
- Refers to the active engagement and real influence of young people, not to their passive presence or token roles in adult agencies.
- Assumes that young people are competent citizens rather than passive recipients of services.
- It is facilitated by youth leaders and adult allies.
- There are obstacles to youth participation and also opportunities for strengthening their involvement in the future.

Prilleltensky (2010) posits that in order:

[7]o achieve a partnership with children and youth, adults will have to (a) create a welcoming and friendly atmosphere, (b) reduce barriers to participation, (c) value the experiential knowledge of children, (d) build collective ownership of the process and outcomes, and (e) reinforce children and youth for their participation in the process. (p. 247)

Furthermore, Zeldin et al. (2016) describe youth–adult partnerships as shared work between adults and youth who, together, democratically and collectively, dialogue about, plan, implement, and reflect on projects that are being undertaken. The partnership allows for shared meaning-making of the identified issues and the most appropriate strategies to address the issues.

Key aspects of the youth–adult partnership include youth being involved in authentic decision-making in issues affecting them and where adults and youth are seen as co-learners who share ideas and expertise. These processes support the development of both the youth and the adults and see them both as agents of change. Christens and Kirshner (2011) identify common elements of working collaboratively with youth. These elements firstly include relationship development to build trust and understand the perspective of youth about issues that affect them and secondly, social action towards promoting social justice through participatory research and evaluation. These lead to the development of psychological empowerment, as well as civic and socio-political development.

Morrel-Samuels et al. (2018) elaborate on features of the programme environment that facilitate the process of empowerment. They found that task demands, roles, ownership, structure, high expectations and accountability best facilitated the process. Youth understood that working in groups and the various roles that they held also required a level of personal responsibility. Ownership resulted in youth experiencing agency over their work where they were given control to select and implement activities. Group identity and social relationships in terms of positive peer norms, values and behaviours are also reinforced as youth work together as a team. High expectations related to achieving goals and structure by way of meeting deadlines and adhering to rules allowed youth to stay on task. They also found that adults who acted as facilitators gave youth the freedom to explore, discover and experiment on their projects by using the empowerment process. It instilled in the youth a sense of purpose, hope and self-discovery.

■ Empowerment in a school setting

Children spend a large part of their day at school. It is well known that violence is directly experienced and witnessed by children in this setting. As such, schools have a pivotal role to play in designing and implementing violence prevention strategies (Leoschut & Kafaar 2017). The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) multi-country report entitled *Drivers of Violence Affecting Children* (Maternowska, Potts & Fry 2018), which focused on the impact of violence on children and how evidence-based research can contribute to effective violence prevention interventions, also concurs

that schools are an important context which can develop targeted interventions. Furthermore, Villardon-Gallego et al. (2023) assert that it is important to introduce interventions early on in order to create awareness around the negative impact of stereotypes, improve peer relationships and reduce violence.

Unger et al. (2019) found that the better the school climate and culture, the lower the levels of violence experienced at school. They also propose that in order to create a safer school climate, it is imperative that schools should involve all relevant stakeholders, including learners, in discussions of school policies and implementation of intervention programmes. Considering the high levels of violence perpetrated by learners and teachers in South African schools, this might be difficult to achieve. However, a change in strategising around school violence needs to occur. As such, schools need to consider using learners themselves as change agents in tackling this growing phenomenon.

The SRS (2012, p. 24), in his report on Tackling Violence in School: A Global Perspective, stated that 'the most effective approaches to countering violence are tailored to the specific situation and circumstances of particular schools'. The report also mentions that schools are part of the communities in which they are located, and thus programmes to address school violence must take this relationship into account. In this case study, the school as a sociocultural context is where the empowerment project is embedded. The report further stated that:

Effectively addressing violence in schools cannot be done without the meaningful involvement of children themselves. Indeed, children have the capacity to become agents of change, to campaign and raise awareness of the issue, organise themselves and others, protect and support each other, and identify and support victims of violence among their peers. (p. 13)

Schools can be reformed from within by focusing on peer-to-peer social relationships (Shiva Kumar et al. 2017). Thus, partnering with children is a key element in reducing school violence. Teachers can act to address issues of violence in school by becoming agents of social change (Cappy 2016). In addition, Ramey and Rose-Krasnor (2012) state that:

Involving youth in activities provides opportunities for them to] work on real-world goals, exert control over projects and learn skills that may engage their energy and attention. Structured activities, specifically, predict greater thriving because they often involve supportive relationships and nurture the development of talents, interests, caring and a sense of purpose. (p. 86)

It allows youth to develop pro-social behaviour through meaningful engagement in activities that develop skills and responsibility. The researcher found that involving the learners in her empowerment project gave them an opportunity to demonstrate these skills.

Russel et al. (2009), in their study of youth empowerment and high school gay-straight alliances, propose three interrelated dimensions of empowerment, namely, personal, relational, and having and using knowledge. The study highlighted that at the personal level, empowerment led to the young people feeling good about themselves, having a voice which was related to being heard and respected, and experiencing a sense of control and agency; and at the knowledge level, having and using knowledge about the issue and how it impacted on the environment was seen as a resource and was identified as being empowering. At the relational level, social cohesion and a sense of togetherness as well as empowering others in achieving social change were linked to a sense of empowerment. The process of empowering others (peer-to-peer empowerment) was seen as empowering. This is important, seeing that peer relationships are a key developmental milestone in the adolescent phase. Thus, South African schools need to harness peer-to-peer empowerment in order to address the issue of school violence.

Blanchett-Cohen and Brunson (2014) explore youth empowerment from an ecological perspective. They state that one needs to consider individual, group and setting-level practices that encourage youth empowerment to better understand the role that adults need to take on to foster youth empowerment. Individual-level practices included building relationships with youth based on empathetic listening and respect as well as supporting and motivating youth, thereby increasing their self-confidence. Group-level practices included providing support and structure to the project process by facilitating rather than leading and involving youth in decision-making and problem-solving. It is important for the adult as the facilitator to resolve conflicts that arise within the group as well as offer information and alternatives to the group when they cannot find a solution. Practices related to the setting included making youth feel safe and welcomed, providing structure and setting clear boundaries and expectations. The boundaries and expectations related to the role of the adults and the youth so as to guard the adults from taking away control from the youth. During the researcher's empowerment project with the learners, boundaries and expectations were set at the beginning by both the learners and the researcher. Issues such as respect for each other, participation, and support during the planning and implementation phases were addressed. From the outset, the learners were clear that the researcher was there to guide them and not to control the process or outcome.

Neal (2014) describes the importance of settings being empowering and suggests that one considers the intra-setting empowerment of individuals, that is, how can a classroom be an empowering setting or, in the case of this study, how can a setting be empowering for a group of

learners involved in an empowerment programme? Anyon et al. (2018) piloted a YPAR programme to determine the extent to which young people were given a voice in planning and implementing activities and how supportive adults were of them in a community-based after-school programme. Findings from their study suggested that YPAR provides meaningful leadership opportunities to young people from low-income groups. The findings from this study suggest that the learners in the empowerment project were supported in planning and implementing the school violence campaign.

However, Meyer and Chetty (2017) state that currently, in South Africa, the voices of academics, school authorities and the government are above the voices of young people in developing strategies to deal with school violence. The focus should be on peace and emphasising personal transformation. Thus, the researcher needs to be aware of the systems (policies, organisational context and procedures) that operate within the sociocultural context, as this will impact the empowerment process being undertaken with the youth. An example of this is school policy related to dealing with incidents of violence and an organisational context that creates a positive or negative classroom climate. One needs to consider how the setting shapes the process of empowerment and how the process changes the setting. Sometimes, tensions and constraints can arise due to the differences between what the learners want and the expectations, practices and preferences of teachers or school management. Learners are involved in identifying issues and setting action steps to achieve goals, but when it concerns implementation, then these obstacles may impede the progress of the project or the project itself. Ozer et al. (2013) ascribe such constraints as bounded empowerment.

In the current school system, authority rests with the teachers and management. Youth are not seen as co-constructors of knowledge but rather as passive recipients of knowledge with a diminished sense of control over classroom and school affairs. They are not involved in decision-making and participate to a minimal extent in school affairs. In addition, the challenges of learner-learner violence, corporal punishment and overcrowded classrooms make it difficult to achieve the core values of empowerment. Despite various interventions, school violence is escalating.

According to Moloi (2019), learners and teachers can become social agents of change by collaborating on addressing issues of inequality evident in the curriculum. She further stated that 'the focus is on dialogical action that fosters talking with rather than talking at learners in our efforts at curriculum transformation in schools' (p. 4). She asserts that emancipatory pedagogy, which involves social interaction, collaboration, democracy and self-actualisation, is required to create dialogue and action in transforming

the curriculum (p. 6). The author framed youth empowerment in the context of the curriculum, but these ideas can be included when addressing the issue of school-based violence as well.

■ Programme development, implementation and evaluation

Empowerment usually takes the form of organised programmes within particular settings. Zimmerman (1995, p. 584) distinguishes between empowering processes and empowering outcomes. 'Empowering processes means involving community members in the development, implementation and evaluation of interventions and working with community members as coequal partners'. Thus, involving youth in developing and implementing programmes ensures that the programme is relevant and important in developing their skills, attitudes, behaviour and knowledge. Empowering outcomes are the measurement that one uses to study the effects of interventions and the empowering process. This contributes to the formulation of empowerment theory.

It is important that the voices of youth are heard in designing and implementing appropriate activities targeted at reducing school violence (Andreou 2015; Burton 2008; Mahaye & Ajani 2023; Villardon-Gallego et al. 2023). Partnering with children and youth is important as the outcomes of a programme tend to be more effective if they take ownership of the process. In addition, involving youth is an intervention in itself as it helps them heal by sharing their experiences with others (Pinheiro 2006). Interventions that aim to reduce school violence should be based on issues of diversity, peace and tolerance so as to develop a culture of human rights. Furthermore, the awareness of youth that they can make a difference in their context serves as motivation for them to effectively act and become change agents. The school in this study was under-resourced and in the middle of a poor community. When I first met the learners, there was a sense of disempowerment. Being involved in the empowerment project gave the group of learners a sense of purpose, confidence and achievement. Thus, if learners in all schools are given an opportunity to address the issues with which they are faced, this might give them the motivation to tackle school-based violence, because they will be seen as adding value to an otherwise unpleasant situation.

Martinez et al. (2017), in their paper on the power of including youth in the development of prevention strategies, outline four case studies that demonstrated how youth were included in youth-led community projects related to health assessment, environmental issues, participatory budgeting and social justice. The authors found positive youth outcomes across all

four projects. The positive outcomes were related to an increase in skills, knowledge, competencies, leadership, communication, collaboration, and working with and respecting diverse perspectives. An evaluation of the YES, an after-school programme related to a community change project (Zimmerman et al. 2018) which was implemented with diverse groups of youth, found that youth involved in the particular programme demonstrated leadership skills, confidence, better cognitive skills and pro-social behaviour. These elements of youth empowerment were evident in the findings of this study.

Once programmes are implemented, evaluations of the programme are critical in order to understand the value of the programme to the participants and improvements that need to be made for future implementation. Youth empowerment is reinforced in this process as well. In addition, allowing youth to voice their opinion may offer valuable insights for future implementation. The issue of evaluation is an important one and will be discussed in the following section.

■ International school-based interventions

The WHO (2009, p. 3) states that one of the ways to prevent violence is by developing life-skills in children and youth. These could include social development programmes, which include aspects of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships and responsible decision-making.

The following sub-sections are a description of a few international school-based interventions adapted from the websites advertising these programmes.

■ The teen empowerment programme

The teen empowerment programme focuses on police and communities collaborating with youth to develop peaceful and harmonising relationships. Through group facilitation and communication skills, youth are trained to engage with their peers to plan and develop youth-led safety initiatives in their schools and communities. Research on the effectiveness of the programme has indicated that youth who participate in the programme demonstrated increased self-esteem, employability and civic engagement (Pollack 2017).

The conceptual framework of the programme (Pearrow & Pollack 2009, p. 50) is cited as:

- A connection exists between feeling powerless and an increased risk of engaging in dysfunctional behaviours.

- Analysis + Decision-making + Action + Success = Power.
- Youth have the ability to make real and meaningful changes in their schools and communities.
- To make real change, youth need access to adequate resources to implement their ideas.
- The most effective forms of youth leadership are facilitative rather than commanding in nature.
- There is a connection between the skilful use of interactive group work methods and the ability of the group to reach consensus and to maximise the amount of productive work that they are able to accomplish.

■ PLAN international

PLAN International was founded in 1937 and is active in over 75 countries. The organisation's key mandate is to utilise youth engagement to promote children's rights, especially gender equality for girls. Collaboration with communities schools, and governments is seen as important in order to bring about substantial change. The Champions of Change for Gender Equality and Girls' Rights programme is currently implemented in 41 countries, with a key focus on addressing negative masculinity and its link to violence, reproductive health and gender-based violence (Plan International n.d).

■ School-based violence prevention (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention)

Universal school-based violence prevention programmes in the USA focus on developing emotional and social skills in learners. Changing how learners feel and think about violence will assist in violence reduction in schools (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention 2017).

■ South African school-based interventions

Ahmad and Amirul (2017) state that the physical aspects of the classroom environment have an impact on the student's health, enjoyment and learning. In addition, Naude and Meier's (2019) study found that a large class size as well as class and outdoor noises are the root causes of distraction and loss of concentration for learners. These factors thus hinder educators from providing support to learners. Pinheiro (2006), in the *World Report on Violence against Children*, posits that a poor physical environment, such as unkempt, overcrowded, poorly maintained school buildings and grounds, leads to low learner and staff morale. This is true for many schools in South Africa. Empowering learners within this context will be challenging. However, improving the environment does not necessarily require major

expenditure; it can be done as part of a school project. Pinheiro further recommends that schools should implement programmes that specifically address violence which are targeted at the whole school environment, and that life-skills should be implemented to assist in the development of personal skills.

Segoe and Mokgosi (n.d.), in their guidelines for schools on creating safe and secure environments, state that schools should implement school-wide education on violence prevention and safety. They further state that one of the sources of conflict in schools is linked to discrimination and intolerance based on gender, religion, social class, race, disability, etc. Schools can therefore have school-wide awareness campaigns to make learners aware and more tolerant of issues related to diversity. In addition, students should be actively involved in making decisions about programmes and policies for two reasons: (1) they can be used as a resource as they have creative ideas to address school-based issues, and (2) they are more likely to support decisions that are made.

Burton and Leoschut (2012) suggest a whole-school approach to violence prevention where the focus should also be on an environmentally friendly school environment. If students care about the school and feel proud of it, then they are more likely to feel connected to their school. Lazarus, Khan and Johnson (n.d.) concur with Burton and Leoschut and also emphasise intervention strategies targeted at developing school connectedness through a supportive school environment that emphasises pro-social values. They further state that schools should reward efforts by either individuals or groups of learners that foster a sense of pride and community in the schools.

Furthermore, Le Roux and Mokhele (2011) assert that learners should move from passivity to being agents of change. This is achieved by learners taking pride in their school environment by cleaning up and by being involved in the violence reduction programmes at school. Both teachers and learners should be taught skills to deal with conflict appropriately, and schools' codes of conduct should be drafted democratically with input from all stakeholders. However, it is important to note that if teachers themselves are abusive towards learners, then the issue of empowerment becomes a challenging one. Thus, it is imperative that the issue of corporal punishment be addressed by school management. Punitive discipline techniques should be replaced by assertive discipline techniques. They maintain that the most effective intervention strategies are focused on building resilience, social competence and deterrence.

Sibisi, Sibisi and Mpofo (2024), in their study on preventative strategies to curb school violence, recommend that schools should provide anger management programmes and psychosocial support to learners as well as

have fully functioning parent-teacher-learner support groups. In addition, Ntshengedzeni, Khalabai and Simeon (2024) suggest that recreational facilities, maintenance of security systems and the introduction of moral discipline can serve as preventative measures.

According to [saferspaces.org](https://www.saferspaces.org):¹

The Department of Basic Education is responsible for (a) developing national policies and guidelines concerning school safety and (b) monitoring and evaluating school safety interventions across the country (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention [CJCP] 2016). The South African Council for Educators is the national statutory body for teachers in South Africa. Teachers must adhere to the South African Council for Educators Code of Conduct (CJCP 2016). If a teacher is found to have been involved in a criminal act or act of violence, then this must be reported to the South African Council for Educators, who will handle the matter accordingly.

Key policies informing and guiding school safety in South Africa include, the National School Safety Framework, Safety in Education Partnership Protocol between the Department of Basic Education and the South African Police Service, the Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools, the National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of Alcohol and Drug Use amongst Learners in Schools, and the National Anti-Gangsterism Strategy (DBE). (n.p.)

■ Strategies and interventions by the government and South African police services

□ The National School Safety Framework

The National School Safety Framework (NSSF), developed by the DBE, CJCP and other key governmental stakeholders, focuses on a 'whole-of-school approach' to violence prevention and safety promotion in schools. The purpose of this framework is 'to create a safe, violence- and threat-free, supportive learning environment for learners, educators, principals, school governing bodies and administration' (DBE 2015, p. 103).

Yearly surveys are conducted with learners, teachers and principals to identify safety issues at the school. The information collected from these surveys is used to formulate a school safety plan to address the identified issues. In addition, schools are expected to implement various school safety policies in order to adhere to the NSSF. A school code of conduct and policy on using discipline instead of corporal punishment also need to be developed and administered by each school. The role of the school safety committees is to monitor the implementation of the school safety plan and adherence to policies. School principals are mandated to report violent incidents at school and abuse experienced at home by learners (DBE 2015).

1. For further discussion, please refer to: <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/school-violence-in-south-africa?>

One of the shortcomings is that there is a lack of follow-up, effective monitoring and evaluation of how schools across South Africa are implementing this framework by the DBE. One of the drawbacks is that the NSSF is working well in theory but not in practice. This is experienced both at the school and district levels. This was evident in a study carried out by Bongweni and Tyilo (2019) on the implementation of the NSSF in schools to address the issue of gangsterism in the Western Cape (Bongweni & Tyilo 2019). The study found that incorrect procedures are followed because learners and parents are not involved in developing the school code of conduct and school safety policy. Compliance is therefore low for both learners and parents. This is seen by the lack of parental involvement when issues are raised at school and learners are not adhering to the code of conduct. The authors further state that training workshops unilaterally implemented by the DBE without considering the particular needs of schools is posing a challenge in the implementation of the NSSF.

Furthermore, Masekela, Ngobeni and Sepeng (2024), in their study on the implementation of the school safety policy in schools found that involvement by all stakeholders (learners, teachers, parents, school governing body and school management) and the development of reporting and recording systems are necessary for effective management of the policy. In addition, the use of awareness campaigns, employment of school safety officers and workshops for teachers on how to manage violence are important factors to consider in the implementation of the policy.

□ Safety in Education Partnership Protocol

In 2011, the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the DBE drew up the Safety in Education Partnership Protocol. This protocol focuses on school-based violence prevention programmes in order to create safety and reduce criminality at school. A key aspect of the protocol is the linkage and relationship of schools to police stations in the community. Protocols for reporting violent incidents and access control to limit the entry of weapons and illegal substances are also addressed (DBE 2013).

□ Regulations for safety measures at public schools

The Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools, Regulation 1128 of 2006 states that weapons, drugs and alcohol are to be restricted from entering school premises. In addition, learners found under the influence of substances will be prohibited from entering school premises. Random searches will also be done to monitor weapon carrying and illegal substances. Other strategies aimed at managing the use of alcohol and illegal substances in schools are the National Strategy for the Prevention

and Management of Alcohol and Drug Use among Learners in Schools and the National Drug Master Plan (DBE 2021).

□ **National anti-gangsterism strategy**

The South African Cabinet approved the National Anti-Gangsterism Strategy in 1996. The strategy seeks to address gangsterism in schools through school and community-based interventions (Western Cape Education Department [WCED]).

□ **School-based crime prevention programme**

The school-based crime prevention programme is an initiative by the SAPS. The focus of this programme is using school safety committees to create a harmonious relationship between schools and police stations. The programme emphasises community involvement in school-related matters, incident reporting protocols and the prohibition of taverns in close proximity to schools. In addition, learners are made aware of the negative impact of violence through crime and violence awareness campaigns.

□ **The National Inclusive Safer Schools Partnership**

The National Inclusive Safer Schools Partnership (NISSP) is a joint effort between the DBE, Masifunde Learner Development and local civil society organisations. The key focus area of this partnership is on school safety, in particular, gender-based violence. The collaboration between community support organisations, district officials, principals and learners seeks to capacitate key role players in developing safety plans for schools with a focus on child protection, policy implementation, facilitation skills and peer education. Peer education workshops are held with the aim of developing changemakers in schools. The programme is currently being piloted in four provinces, namely Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and North West. Across these four provinces, the target is 100 schools with a reach of 500 learners (Hoffman 2023).

■ **Peace education/peace clubs**

Harber (2018) states that there is a need to transform education from an authoritarian, rote learning pedagogy to one that incorporates justice, respect and inclusiveness. He avers that it is necessary to understand and tackle the root causes of violence in school. He recommends peacebuilding as a tool to transform the educational landscape and thereby address issues that promote violence in the school context. The core competencies of peace education by Bajaj (2016, p.109, cited in Harber 2018, p. 11) link

clearly to youth empowerment principles as they relate to empathy and solidarity, individual and collective agency, as well as participatory and democratic engagement.

John (2018), in his article on 'Peace Education in South Africa', reviewed formal and informal peace education programmes in South Africa. He found that some elements of peace education were incorporated into the Life Orientation curriculum in schools. However, insufficient time was given to topics and teachers were not adequately trained to deliver the topics effectively. He concluded that peace clubs, which were founded in 2012 in South Africa, were a promising intervention to address school violence. This is because it is learner-centred and learner-led. The learners meet on a weekly basis to discuss issues that are affecting them and develop action plans to address the issues. The use of discussion, drama and other creative methodology is incorporated into these action plans.

■ School safety guidelines

Gevers and Flisher (in Ward, Van der Merwe Dawes 2013) outline recommendations for preventing violence in schools based on recommendations developed by Burton (2008). These school safety recommendations focus on the role of the DBE and schools to ensure that school safety standards are implemented and monitored. These minimum standards include codes of conduct for learners, the use of discipline by teachers instead of corporal punishment, maintenance of safety infrastructure, community and police services involvement in school safety measures and safe transit to and from schools for learners and teachers. In addition, psychosocial support should be offered to learners experiencing violence at home, as well as providing learners with extra-curricular activities to keep them safe and occupied after school which they have had an input in designing. Non-adherence by learners, teachers and school management to the minimum safety standards should have actionable consequences.

□ Violence prevention programmes

Table 5.1 describes South African school-based interventions adapted from the websites advertising these programmes.

TABLE 5.1: South African school-based violence prevention programmes.

Name of programme	Overview of programme	Developed and delivered by	Focus
STOP, WALK, TALK, Anti-Bullying Programme	A manual developed to empower teachers to manage cases of bullying, including cyber-bullying at school. The guidelines include zero tolerance for bullying behaviour, classroom rules incorporating anti-bullying behaviour, supervision of children to prevent incidents of bullying, parental involvement in addressing bullying behaviour and involving identified bullies in intervention programmes to teach them pro-social behaviour.	Department of Basic Education	Bullying
Masifunde Learner Development and Umhlali Project	Youth for Safer Communities project, which focuses on providing youth from previously disadvantaged schools with academic mentoring. The Umhlali crime and prevention project focuses on early intervention strategies to build resilience in young people and deter them from criminality. Interventions and programmes offered include early childhood, after-school recreational activities, life-skills, school safety and activities for school dropouts.	Masifunde Learner Development Masifunde Learner Development, in collaboration with the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention	Academic mentoring Early intervention
Addressing Sexual Violence Against Young Girls in Schools in South Africa (SeVISSA)	Currently being implemented in 40 schools in the Gauteng, Limpopo, Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces. The focus is on preventing violence against girls in schools through stakeholder involvement and after-school, extra-curricular activities.	Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, University of Cape Town and Comic Relief	Gender-based violence
Birds and the Bees Peer Education Programme	Focus on peer education to facilitate discussion, create awareness through developing campaigns and offer support to victims of sexual violence at schools in Athlone and Khayelitsha in Cape Town.	Rape Crisis Cape Town	Sexual violence
Safe Schools Programme	Three-pronged approach to school safety, focusing on the school environment (security), behavioural interventions (conflict management, counselling, life-skills, etc.) and systems (community partnership). Key aspects are awareness campaigns to prevent negative risky behaviour, youth clubs, after-school programmes and the availability of a call centre to assist with reporting incidents, counselling and referrals.	Western Cape Education Department	Whole-school approach
After-School Game Changer Programme	Currently offering 300 programmes across the Western Cape with multiple stakeholders and a reach of 84,000 learners. The aim of the programme is to offer after-school activities to children from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to prevent school drop-out and anti-social behaviour. The focus is on academic mentoring and life skill development.	Western Cape government, City of Cape Town, NGOs and civil society organisations	After-school programme

Table 5.1 continues on the next page →

TABLE 5.1 (cont.): South African school-based violence prevention programmes.

Name of programme	Overview of programme	Developed and delivered by	Focus
Youth Violence Prevention Programme	Programmes focused on school safety through interventions such as life-skills training, caring for victims of violence, community involvement, peace education and social responsibility programmes.	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation	Peace education and human rights culture
Alternatives to Violence Programme	Workshop-based skills training in schools to create awareness and reduce violence. The focus is on emotional self-awareness and interpersonal non-violent interactions. It has achieved success in academic mentoring and positive peer relationships.	Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)	Peace education
Promoting Nonviolence in Schools	Similar to AVP. Storytelling is a key methodology used to create safe spaces for participants to share trauma and gain empowerment.	The International Centre of Nonviolence (ICON)	Peace education
The Hlayiseka Project	Toolkit developed to guide schools on how to manage school safety. Key aspects of the toolkit include the identification of school safety issues, adherence to standards and policies related to school safety and learner and teacher surveys to identify the form and extent of safety issues. Data from surveys are used to generate a school safety plan and recording and reporting systems which need to be monitored.	Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention	Toolkit for school safety
Shukuma Moving Mindsets	Focuses on cognitive behavioural therapy by providing learners with social and emotional skills such as communication and conflict resolution to enhance decision-making. Includes mindfulness and meditation. Implemented in all Grade 8 classes in 33 schools in 2023.	Western Cape Education Department, Western Cape government, J-PAL Africa	Cognitive behavioural therapy
Communities for Justice Programme	Exposes learners to the criminal justice system through community-based crime prevention programmes.	Safer South Africa Foundation (SSAF)	Community-based crime prevention
Adopt a School	Works with disadvantaged schools to create a healthy school environment. Programmes focus on leadership and management and the development of teachers and school management structures, safety and security, infrastructure, extra-curricular activities, social welfare of learners and academic support. To date, 660 schools have been adopted. Funding is received from corporations or individuals who adopt a school.	Adopt a School Foundation in partnership with the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation	Whole-school development

Source: Author's own work.

Key: AVP, Alternative to Violence Project; NGO, non-governmental organisation; ICON, International Centre of Nonviolence; J-PAL Africa, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Africa; SSAF, Safer South Africa Foundation; SeVISSA, Sexual Violence Against Young Girls in Schools in South Africa.

■ Using positive youth development and empowerment in school-based interventions

Positive youth development is a field of study that focuses on harnessing the strengths of young people to enable them to thrive in their environments. Similarly, empowerment is an important construct of adolescent development as it allows young people to take on meaningful roles, develop skills and participate with peers and adults. Youth are seen as agents of change through the lens of positive youth development and empowerment. Thus, school management should involve learners in designing and implementing strategies to address school violence in order to create a better school climate. For this study, a group of Grade 10 learners were involved in designing and implementing a school violence awareness campaign at their school.

■ Conclusion

International studies linked to youth empowerment are evident in the literature. The various studies and theoretical frameworks linked to empowerment suggest that the appeal of this approach is that it builds on the inner potential and strengths of a young person while actively engaging them in identifying, acting and bringing about social change in issues that affect them in their contexts. They are not merely passive participants but active social agents encouraged to develop moral identity and social responsibility. Overall, theorists in the field of positive youth development/empowerment agree that activity or project-based contexts create unique opportunities for youth to develop pro-social behaviour, character building, identity development, positive relationships, self-efficacy, self-esteem and competencies related to problem-solving, decision-making and mastery. It is therefore important that learners are involved in the design and implementation of school-based violence reduction interventions.

As discussed in the chapter, South Africa does have interventions that target the reduction of school-based violence; however, there is a lack of clarity on youth empowerment as an intervention tool in reducing school-based violence. Thus, this study aimed to examine the nature of school-based violence and the potential of a youth empowerment programme to change the attitudes and behaviours of learners in addressing the problem. Given the severity of the situation, this study is intended to identify a possible effective solution through the development, implementation and evaluation of a youth empowerment programme to address the issue of school-based violence.

The action research project

■ Introduction

In the previous chapters, the overview of the study, research methodology, data analysis and findings were presented. In addition, theoretical underpinnings both from a school violence and youth empowerment perspective were discussed. According to Kumar (2019), action research is a collaborative, participatory approach that involves including participants of a research study in designing and implementing interventions and programmes to address specific needs identified in their contexts. As such, this chapter will focus on the action research project that was planned and implemented at the school.

■ Feedback from the focus group discussions

Before embarking on the action part of the research, I had to explore the issues concerning violence that were prevalent at the school. To do this, I conducted questionnaires, which provided baseline data. With this baseline data, I then proceeded to conduct three focus group discussions with learners (male, female and mixed) in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the issues. As stated in the previous chapters, the four major themes that emerged from the focus group discussions were the types of violence, causes of violence, consequences of violence and managing violence. With this information, I then proceeded to take the next step, which is the action stage of the research. In the following sections, I will discuss and reflect on this journey.

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■ Action research

As discussed in the literature review, Chinman and Linney's (1998) *Adolescent Empowerment Cycle* describes empowerment as an important construct of adolescent development as it allows young people to develop their identity by taking on meaningful roles, developing skills, bonding and actively participating with peers and others within a social setting. It also involves youth experiencing positive recognition and reinforcement for their efforts in contributing positively to a group. This leads to greater self-esteem, self-efficacy, a sense of control, and, ultimately, positive empowerment. Wong, Zimmerman and Parker (2010) echo similar sentiments. Other key features of the cycle are an experienced adult facilitating the process and the opportunity to work in a group for the sake of peer approval and reflection on experiences while engaged in the project.

The action research component was composed of four stages, namely, planning, implementing, evaluating and exploring how the project undertaken could be sustained by the group of learners involved in the project. At the end of each of the focus group discussions, I requested the learners to volunteer for the action group. I explained to the learners what being part of the action group entailed that, as a team, the learners would develop and implement a youth empowerment programme specifically focused on addressing the issues of violence in their school. Twelve female learners and only two male learners volunteered for this part of the study. This was quite disappointing as I was hoping that more male learners from the focus group would be involved in the project. As it was done on a voluntary basis, I could not force the male participants of the focus group to join the action group.

Much of the literature on empowerment is linked to participatory action research. Through a youth empowerment process and participatory action research, children and youth are given a voice during the research process, whether it involves identifying the problem or providing the solution. This is an empowering process for youth and leads to a positive contribution towards their healthy development and a sense of inclusion and well-being (Prilleltensky 2010). In a school setting, empowerment is achieved by giving learners skills and knowledge to think critically about issues within the school setting so that creative and doable strategies can be developed to address the issues. This leads to change. It allows learners to address issues that are important to them by being directly involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects.

For the purposes of this study, YPAR was used. It has the same elements of action research, but what makes it distinctive is the participation of youth. Rubin and Jones (2002, cited in Herr & Anderson 2015) provide the following definition of participatory action research:

[*Participatory action research is*] research efforts conducted by youth, within or outside of classrooms with the goal of informing and affecting school, and or global problems and issues and in the process contributes to positive development of a variety of academic, social and civic skills in youth. (p. 28)

This definition suggests that young people are agents of change in terms of the issues affecting them. In this study, a group of fourteen Grade 10 learners worked together with the researcher to develop and implement a programme to create awareness about violence in their school.

■ The action research approach

■ The action research cycle

Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, pioneered work around action research in the 1940s and later on at the Tavistock Institute in the 1950s (Herr & Anderson 2015). His interest as a researcher was on how to promote social change using the principles of dialogue, engagement and collaboration. 'Lewin set the stage for knowledge production based on solving real-life problems. He shifted the researcher's role from being a distant observer to involvement in concrete problem-solving' (Greenwood & Levin 1998, p. 19).

Denzin and Lincoln (eds. 2008, p. 379) define action research as 'critical research dealing with real-life problems involving collaboration, dialogue, mutual learning, producing tangible results'. Action research is 'participatory in nature, systematic and structured. The collaborative quality of action research is empowering due to the fact that participant researchers are able to effect change and make improvements' (Craig 2009, p. 4). 'It is conducted with a view to finding a solution for a particular practical problem situation in a specific, applied setting' (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell 2005, p. 25). 'It is implemented with the participation of the people for whom the intervention is designed, usually with their help and with the aim of emancipation for the participants' (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004, p. 47).

Action research is similar to Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of 'conscientization', which 'identifies the inquiry process as aimed at shaping knowledge relevant to action built on a critical understanding of historical and political contexts within which the participants act' (Greenwood & Levin 1998, p. 77). According to McNiff and Whitehead (2011, p. 27), the ontological assumptions of action research are that it is 'value-laden, morally committed and that action researchers perceive themselves as in relation with one another in their social contexts'. This means that the researcher ascribes to certain values which they bring to the research context. These values include empathy and the importance of relationships with others.

Action research is therefore collaborative and democratic in nature. Action research comprises three important elements, namely, action, research and participation. Greenwood and Levin (1998) state that:

Action research is social research carried out by a team encompassing a professional action researcher and members of an organization or community seeking to improve their situation. It promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just or satisfying situation for the stakeholders. (p. 4)

They further state that the following characteristics are at the core of action research (Greenwood & Levin 1998, p. 75):

- Action research is context-bound and addresses real-life problems.
- Action research is an enquiry where participants and researchers co-generate knowledge through collaborative communication processes in which all participants' contributions are taken seriously.
- Action research treats the diversity of experiences and capacities within the local group as an opportunity for the enrichment of the research process.
- The credibility-validity of action research knowledge is measured according to whether actions that arise from it solve problems and increase participants' control over their own situation.

The action research cycle consists of three phases, namely, planning, acting and reflecting. A modified version of the cycle by McNiff and Whitehead (2011, p. 9) captures the systematic, in-depth process of action research. The cycle begins with observing that which is going on in order to identify a concern, reflect and think of a way forward, try out the action, evaluate the effectiveness of the action, modify, and then move in a new direction. Due to time constraints, however, researchers are usually unable to complete one cycle.

The action research design of this study is linked to empowerment theory because both action research and empowerment relate to collaboration, participation and dialogue to bring about social change in the context.

■ The role of the researcher in action research

According to McNiff and Whitehead (2011), action researchers are insiders as they are an integral part of the context they are investigating. Similarly, Herr and Anderson (2015) assert that the 'positionality' of the researcher is important in action research that is their relationship with the setting and participants will determine if the process and product of the actions taken are indeed effective and link to the core philosophical foundation of action research. According to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011), reflexivity in qualitative research is articulated at a personal and interpersonal level, and a researcher needs to be cognizant of both:

Personal reflexivity is how the researcher's own background and assumptions may influence the research process. Interpersonal reflexivity is when the research setting and interpersonal dynamics between researcher and participants can influence knowledge creation. (p. 20)

Cornwall (1996, cited in Herr & Anderson 2015, p. 51) proposes modes of participation used in participatory methods, as presented in Table 6.2. Table 6.1 describes modes of participation used in participatory research and to what extent participants are involved in the research process. Participation varies from a rigid to a flexible approach, where participants are either involved fully or not at all.

In this study, I used co-learning as a mode of participation. I worked together with the learners to understand the issues of violence most prevalent in the school, and then they worked together to develop and implement the violence awareness campaign. Although I guided them in the process, they were largely responsible for brainstorming what they wanted the programme to look like and who should be involved. They were ultimately responsible for implementing the violence awareness campaign.

■ The role of the participants in action research

According to Welman et al. (2005, p. 205), 'participants in action research are actively involved in the planning and implementation of the research outcomes and are thus empowered'. Action research is a participatory process in which participants involved take some responsibility and, in doing so, are able to explore their capabilities and potentials. The diversity within the group means that participants come with a broad range of experience and knowledge. As such, participants are seen as assets and valuable contributors to the knowledge production process. They are able

TABLE 6.1: Modes of participation used in participatory methods.

Mode of participation	Involvement of local people	Relationship of research and action to local people
Co-option	Token; representatives are chosen, but no real input or power	on
Compliance	Tasks are assigned, with incentives; outsiders decide the agenda	for
Consultation	Local opinions are asked for; outsiders analyse and decide on a course of action	for/with
Co-operation	Local people work together with outsiders to determine priorities; responsibility remains with outsiders for directing the process	with
Co-learning	Local people and outsiders share their knowledge to create new understandings and work together to form action plans with outside facilitation	with/by
Collective action	Local people set their own agenda and mobilise to carry it out in the absence of outside initiators and facilitators	By

Source: Adapted from Cornwall (1996, cited in Herr and Anderson 2015, p. 51).

to bring a fresh perspective to the issue being studied and can offer creative solutions. The process also allows them to be independent and accountable. The entire process lends itself to a sense of empowerment for participants.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000, cited in eds. Denzin & Lincoln 2008) aver about the role of participants as ‘the collective’. This means that a group of participants play a supportive role but also help each other to clarify thinking as well as regulate emotions and behaviour. During the sessions, the learners kept each other in check in terms of behaviour. If they found that someone was being disrespectful to another, they pointed this out, going back to the ground rules that had been formulated at the outset of the action meetings.

■ Validity and trustworthiness in action research

Table 6.2 outlines the study in relation to Herr and Anderson’s (2015, p. 67) goals of action research and validity criteria.

TABLE 6.2: Outline of the study in relation to Herr and Anderson’s goals of action research and validity criteria.

Goals of action research	Quality/validity criteria	This study
The achievement of action-oriented outcomes	Outcome validity – the extent to which actions occur, which leads to a resolution of the problem that led to the study.	The group of learners and the researcher designed and implemented a violence awareness campaign centred on issues that arose out of the focus group discussions and brainstorming during the action group sessions.
A sound and appropriate research methodology	Process validity – the use of triangulation to ensure the credibility of results.	A questionnaire was first used, followed by three focus group discussions. Thereafter, the group of learners and the researcher designed the youth empowerment programme. An evaluation of the youth empowerment programme was done with a group of ten learners who were present at the programme.
Results that are relevant to the local setting	Democratic validity – the extent to which the research is done in collaboration with the parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation.	The group of learners were involved right from the beginning in the design and implementation of the violence awareness programme.
The education of both researcher and participants	Catalytic validity – the transformative potential of action research.	The researcher has certainly changed in the process. At first, the researcher went in as the researcher but as she worked with the group of learners intimately over a two-month period, she built a warm relationship with them. That relationship has continued even after the data was collected. The process of being given a say in decision-making to develop a programme and then actually present the programme in front of the entire school made the learners feel special and empowered so that, if given a chance, they will be able to make a difference.

Source: Author’s own work, based on Herr and Anderson (2015, p. 67).

■ The researcher's role and position in the group

My position as the researcher was that I was Indian, middle-class, a lecturer at a university and an adult. This differed from the learners who were African, poor to middle-class and young people. Due to these factors, I was initially an outsider to them. As the sessions progressed, I built a level of trust and rapport with them. I made them feel comfortable during every session by being warm and friendly and respecting their thoughts and opinions. I did not allow a hierarchy to exist between myself and the learners. Throughout the process, I acknowledged their efforts and affirmed that they were a key element of the research. As such, I went from being an outsider to an insider. According to Braun and Clark (2013), good interactional skills are important for building trust and rapport with participants.

The democratic nature of the action research process suggests that a sense of mutualism or interdependence should exist between the researcher and those participating in the research. The researcher views the participants as experts due to them being immersed in the context. They need to build a level of trust, respect and rapport with participants. This will enable the participants to feel safe to offer opinions and solutions.

In addition, there should not be a hierarchy that views the researcher as the one with more power. The locus of power and control is shared between the researcher and those participating in the research. De Schutter and Yopo (1981, cited in Herr & Anderson 2015, p. 17) propose that in participatory research, 'the subject-object relationship is transformed into a subject-subject relationship through dialogue'.

Important elements that the researcher needs to consider are how to create inclusion, equality and harmony in the group where everyone feels comfortable participating and their opinions are considered in decision-making. In addition, the researcher needs to ensure that participants feel empowered and supported to participate, that there is a flow in communication and that conflicts are resolved amicably.

In addition, the personal nurturing of participants is important. I demonstrated this by ensuring that there were refreshments at every session, that participants had the resources needed for the planning and implementation of the project, paid for T-shirts that would be worn on the day, and participated with them during the planning phase. I also served as a liaison between the school management and the learners. Ultimately, the role of a researcher in an action project is that of a facilitator, nurturer, probe, resource person, scribe and liaison with management.

■ Entry into the group

I met the group of Grade 10 learners for thirteen sessions. We met for one and a half hours after school, from 14:30 to 16:00, twice a week. I decided that the best place to meet them would be in the library seminar room, which was in the public library next to the school. This is also where the focus group discussions took place. The room was quiet and spacious, and we could work productively there. The library staff were accommodating and allowed me to book the room in advance. The learners were informed that this would be the meeting place.

The first time that the learners and I met, there was apprehension in the air. The learners were from mixed Grade 10 A to E levels and did not know each other very well. In addition, I did not know these learners very well as I had only spent approximately two hours with each group while doing the focus group discussions. At the initial meeting, a few thoughts went through my mind. Were these learners going to get along? Were they going to cooperate with me and take me seriously, given that these were teenagers? Were they going to commit and attend every session? What was going to be the final product or outcome of these action research sessions? At this stage, I had no idea what the end result of our time together would be. It was quite daunting yet exciting at the same time.

When I met the group for the first time, I formally introduced myself once again and asked them to introduce themselves. I gave each learner a label on which to write their name. I did this for the first few sessions. This made it easier to learn their names. I spoke about the data collection thus far, that is, questionnaires and focus groups, and going forward, and what I hoped to achieve with this part of the research. I stated that I needed their help in developing and implementing a project at the school related to the issue of school violence and that they would be the ones leading the project in terms of ideas and implementation. I was merely the facilitator and would guide them if the need arose. I then did a few icebreakers with them to break the tension in the room. This certainly did help make everyone feel comfortable.

I asked the group to develop a set of ground rules that would characterise how they expected each other to behave during the upcoming sessions. The ground rules that they developed included punctuality, attendance, commitment, respect for each other and participation. I felt that it was important for the group to develop the ground rules rather than me merely telling them what I expected in terms of their behaviour. Developing their own rules would enable them to take ownership of these rules, and they would therefore hold each other accountable.

We then decided that it would be a good idea to have a name for the group, instead of calling themselves the action research group. I split the group into three small groups. Each group was given approximately fifteen minutes to brainstorm two names. Afterwards, each group presented their two names. A vote was taken, and the name chosen was 'Future Leaders of Change'. From then on, the action group was referred to by this chosen name. This name seemed quite fitting, considering what the group planned to do.

As I ended the first session, I asked each member of the group if they had any comments or questions. To my complete surprise, one of the girls stated that she was hungry as it was after school, and she had not eaten anything since lunch break. That statement stopped me in my tracks. If she had not mentioned it, I would have never considered that it was after school, they were volunteering their time to the research, and that I should offer them something to eat. I thanked the girl for her feedback and then told them that going forward, I would offer refreshments at each session. Thereafter, at every session, I would take along cold drinks, biscuits and chips. This seemed to lift their spirits and energy levels at the working sessions.

■ Planning the project

It is important that the voices of youth are heard in designing and implementing appropriate activities targeted at reducing school violence (Andreou 2015; Burton 2008). Partnering with children and youth is important as the outcomes of a programme tend to be more effective if they take ownership of the process. In addition, involving youth is an intervention in itself as it helps them heal by sharing their experiences with others (Pinheiro 2006). Interventions that aim to reduce school violence should be based on issues of diversity, peace and tolerance so as to develop a culture of human rights. Furthermore, the awareness of youth that they can make a difference in their context serves as motivation for them to effectively act and become change agents.

Teachers should also be part of the project from the planning phase so that support can be garnered and sustainability can be ensured. To this end, I included the Life Orientation Grade 10 teacher from the onset of the research. He assisted me by liaising with the management of the school and informing the teachers of the project. At the second session, the members of the Future Leaders of Change started planning the action research project. The event was planned for seven weeks from the first time that they had met.

According to Stringer (2014), when working on an action research project, the researcher and participants need to develop a 'Framework for Interpretation' that considers the group process for interpreting issues. It includes the following steps:

- Meeting with the group.
- Setting the agenda to gain clarity on the purpose of the project.
- Understanding the issues that need to be addressed.
- Identifying priorities for action.
- Formulating follow-up activities and tasks to address the highlighted issues.
- Identifying people who will carry out activities/tasks.
- Determining the time frame within which each activity and task will be completed.
- Accessing resources required for the activities/tasks.

At the onset, I had no idea which suggestions would be put forth by the group about how they would like to address the issues highlighted. It was an exploratory process of trusting them to put forth good ideas that could be implemented. Throughout the process, I merely acted as a guide and facilitator.

■ Step one: Highlighting the issues

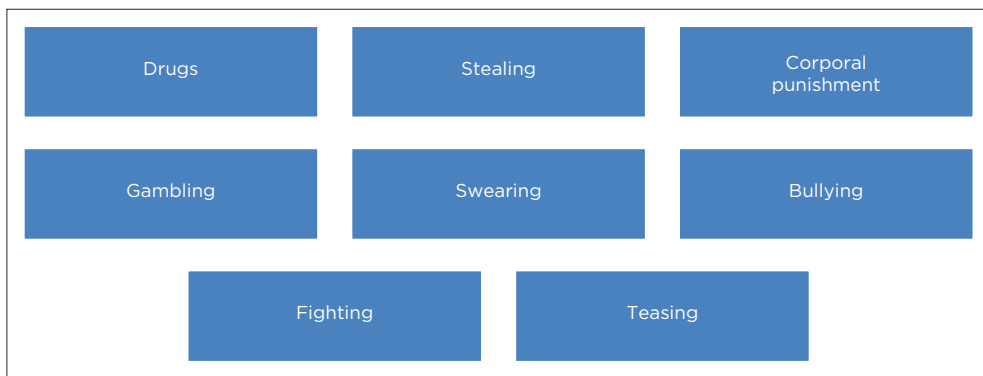
During this session, the learners were asked to brainstorm on the issues related to violence that affected their school. They were asked to take into consideration the issues discussed in the focus groups. From this exercise, the issues presented in Figure 6.1 were highlighted. These issues were congruent with those found in the questionnaires and focus group discussions.

■ Step two: Action plan

The group then discussed how they would address these issues at the school. It was decided by the group that there should be a day of action to create awareness about these issues at school. This day of action would be called 'Standing Up Together Against Violence'.

The group stated that for a greater impact on the other learners, the programme should be done in a creative manner. As such, they decided to incorporate music, poetry, drama and guest speakers into the programme. Denzin (1997, cited in Stringer 2014) states that:

People may be better able to represent their ideas and experiences through performance rather than written reports. Thus, it may be possible to present the outcomes of the research process as a drama, role-play, dance, poem, work of art or combination of these elements. (p. 68)



Source: Author's own work.

FIGURE 6.1: Issues highlighted by learners in this study with regard to how violence affects their school.

He further states that performance is important in action research as participants often include people who have been disempowered and voiceless.

In order to plan a programme for the day of action, the group was split into two teams. Each team had to discuss and reach a consensus on the plan for a programme. I indicated to them that the programme should include activities that included the identified themes of violence, the time allocated for each activity in the programme and the resources needed. I also asked them to consider how they would include learners from other grades in the programme. Each team wrote their ideas on chart paper and then presented them to everyone. A consensus was then reached by the whole group of the types of activities to be included, the sequence of the programme, and the time allocated for each activity.

The draft programme included the following:

- A drama focused on violence in school, at home and in the community.
- A poem by a Grade 9 learner on violence.
- A rap song by a group of learners.
- A music item by the school choir focused on violence.
- Guest speaker, for example, someone from the police or the ward councillor.
- A wall of hope where learners would be given an opportunity to write their messages opposing violence.

I suggested that the action group wear T-shirts on the day of the event. This would set them apart from the other learners, and they would be recognised as the action research group that planned and implemented the event. The group liked this idea and then decided on the colour and design of the T-shirt. The chosen colour was black with white writing, and

the back of the T-shirt had the words 'Future Leaders of Change', and the front had their names.

Denzin (1997, cited in Stringer 2014) postulates that the quality checks that need to be adhered to by the researcher to ensure successful participation and a successful project should include whether:

- Participants experience feelings of self-worth, independence, competence, identity and empowerment.
- Participants are given control over resources, decisions, actions and activities.
- There is communication, unity and harmony in the group.
- Participants feel at ease to participate and be themselves.

The drama was developed by the learners themselves. They were all included in this process. Some decided to participate. Friends from the other grades also participated. The drama also included a song by the school choir, a poem and a rap song linked to the theme of violence. The programme that was developed can be found in the Appendix. My task was to obtain resources to develop the posters and to invite the ward councillor and district police officer in charge of school awareness campaigns. I also decided, upon the advice of my supervisor, to video record the event.

One session was used by the learners to create posters to place around the school to alert the learners and teachers about the upcoming awareness day. I noticed much passion and enjoyment from the group as a whole when they were involved in creating the posters and practising the drama item. Two of the girls from the group decided, with permission from the others, to draft the drama. At the following session, this draft was discussed with the group. The remaining learners were given an opportunity to provide input into the drama. They decided to spend the next two sessions practising the drama. I was taken aback by their level of dedication and commitment to the process. They managed to get a few of their friends to come along to practise as well. Notably, the narrator of the drama was not even from the action group. He was a Grade 11 learner. The poem and rap group were also not part of the original action group. The school choir director was approached by one of the learners from the action group to be included. She happily agreed to participate with the choir and spent two sessions practising with them. I was honoured to be invited by the choir director to one of the practice sessions.

■ Implementing the project

On the day of the programme, the group was involved in assisting in setting up the sound system, putting up pieces of chart paper on the message wall

behind the assembly area where the event was going to take place, as well as getting everyone together to practise the flow of the programme one more time. I could see the excitement and anxiousness but also pride on the faces of the Future Leaders of Change.

I was also quite nervous as I did not know if everything was going to go according to plan in the drama and also in the programme itself. I had empowered the group to develop and implement this mostly by themselves, and so I needed to trust that they were going to be successful. I also wondered how the other learners from the school would respond to the programme and the drama. High school children can be harsh, and I was afraid that they would not respond well to the hard work put in by the Future Leaders of Change. I had begun to feel quite protective of them.

It was very hot on the day of the programme, and there was no shade in the assembly area. I was worried that the audience would feel restless, yet despite the heat, the programme was well received by the audience. The drama proceeded without problems, and the learners applauded the creative elements of the drama, the poem, the rap and the school choir. The talk by the police officer was also well received. He was quite adept and relayed the message well about the types of violence in school, its consequences, and why it is unacceptable. In her address, the school principal also reiterated why school violence is unacceptable and thanked the Future Leaders of Change for their hard work in bringing the programme to fruition. I was very proud to call each one of them up to receive a certificate and to acknowledge the journey on which they had joined me. It was truly a day of accomplishment for both the learners and the researcher.

■ Evaluation of the project

According to Church (2011), programmes, projects and organisations are evaluated in the field of peace building for the purpose of accountability and learning. When evaluating a programme or project it is important to adhere to certain standards, namely, *feasibility* (is it realistic?), *propriety* (is it ethical?), *utility* (does it serve the needs of users?) and *accuracy* (does it accurately determine the value of the programme?). In addition, evaluation criteria should measure the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and coherence of the programme or project. Process evaluations of the programme are critical in order to understand the value of the programme to the participants and improvements that need to be made for future implementation (Franzen et al. 2009). On the day after the event, an evaluation form was filled in by 26 Grade 11 learners and 36 Grade 9 learners. The following questions were asked in the evaluation:

□ What did you enjoy about the awareness campaign?

The majority of both the Grade 9 and Grade 11 learners indicated that they enjoyed the drama and the talk by the police constable. A few learners stated that they enjoyed the information presented and that learners were participating in the campaign.

□ What did you not enjoy about the awareness campaign?

Both the Grade 9 and Grade 11 learners reported that it was very hot and that the venue was not conducive. They suggested that the community hall next to the school should have been used. They also reported that there were not enough speakers; thus, those further away from the drama could not hear properly. Some stated that teachers should have been involved in the campaign and that written information in the form of a pamphlet should have been given as well.

□ What did you learn from the awareness campaign?

The majority of the students stated that they had learnt that fighting, bullying, drugs, stealing and weapon carrying should not be tolerated at school. They also reported that violence and bullies should be reported. This demonstrates that the themes of violence displayed in the drama were portrayed effectively for the learners to identify these issues. Other comments included:

- We must stop fighting and revenge is not a good thing; it can get you into trouble.
- I learnt that a small thing can affect the whole nation, and if you see something or someone abusing people, convince that person in a positive way.
- Not every sticky situation can be resolved through violence.
- Boys must stop abusing girls so that violence would stop.
- To choose good friends, ignore things that will lead you to trouble.
- We must stand up together against school violence.
- It is important to think before you do something to others.

□ How could the campaign be done differently next year?

The comments indicated the following:

- The community hall should be used.
- Pamphlets should be given with more information.
- Include more learners and teachers.

- Bring in victims and perpetrators of school violence to talk about their experiences.
- Include a question-and-answer session.

■ Sustainability of the project

Approximately one month after the programme, I met with the group again and the school student representative president to discuss how the programme and initiative related to the 'Future Leaders of Change' would continue.

It was decided that two of the group members would address the assembly about the 'Future Leaders of Change' programme. Three other group members would go to each Grade 10 class to recruit two girls and two boys who wanted to volunteer to be part of the programme. In addition, four of the current group members would volunteer to see the new group through in the following roles: programme leader, secretary, school executive liaison person, and booking the library seminar room for meetings. The new group would meet twice a month to decide on a project for the year. This happened the year after the programme was implemented in the school. Unfortunately, the programme did not continue the following year because of a lack of commitment and time by the learners. It is thus important for an adult to oversee the process with learners to ensure that the sustainability of the programme continues. The implementation of a peace club would ensure the sustainability of such initiatives.

■ Presentation and reflection about the project at the Durban University of Technology

Reflection is an essential part of action research and can be defined 'as the act of critically exploring what you are doing, why you decided to do it, and what its effects have been' (Mertler 2014, p. 13, cited in Simmons et al. 2021). McNiff and Whitehead (2011) state that explicit reflection on your practice is valuable because you are able to see the connection between what you are doing and learning.

The presentation by the Future Leaders of Change was held at the university a few weeks after the implementation of the violence awareness campaign. Learners were given an opportunity to present their reflections on being a participant in the action group as well as the violence awareness campaign. Below are some of their responses.

■ Violence awareness campaign

The following responses suggest that more awareness campaigns are needed to see an impact at school and that co-operation from school management is necessary to ensure sustainability. The other key point is that for learners to fully grasp the message of violence awareness campaigns, an element of fun and creativity needs to be infused within a programme. In this regard, please see the following responses:

'I am not sure if the violence campaign will make a difference, because we just had the event. We need to continue with campaigns around the school' (Learner L, female, Grade 10, 2016).

The whole school had fun at the event. They were cheering during the play. I think we need to have fun ways to get the message across about school violence.' (Learner S, female, Grade 10, 2016)

'It was good to see the principal giving us permission to take time out of the school day to do our event. Maybe we can talk to her so we can do this more often' (Learner P, female, Grade 10, 2016).

■ Impact of action group on self

The following responses suggest that learners felt positive about being part of the action group. They felt a sense of importance and good self-esteem because they were making a difference, even if it was in a small way. They felt empowered to make a difference because they were given a voice to participate in something worthwhile. The group also gave them a sense of belonging because they worked as a team and new friendships developed. It is noteworthy that being part of the group changed the attitudes and behaviour of learners in the action group. These responses are as follows:

'I wasn't really sure what we would be doing when we first joined the group. It was nice to see what we ended up doing. I feel good because I did something in school that is important.' (Learner T, female, Grade 10, 2016)

'I am a shy person and I don't really know why I joined the group. Maybe I wanted to prove to myself that I can do something. I didn't know anyone else because we all in different classes. But now I know them.' (Learner M, female, Grade 10, 2016)

'I felt so scared on the day of the event but I felt important too. Especially when we were wearing our t-shirts. Everybody knew that we were the 'Future Leaders of Change' (Learner B, female, Grade 10, 2016).

'I enjoyed being part of the group. We worked as a good team. Mam made us feel comfortable and I made new friends' (Learner L, female, Grade 10, 2016)

'I did most of my bullying and fighting with other kids in the classroom when the teacher was not there but more often in the playground during lunch breaks. Until this study, I had thought it was okay to physically attack and mock my fellow learners. We are not taught about the effects of such behaviour and how to conduct ourselves.' (Learner P, male, Grade 10, 2016)

■ Conclusion

This chapter discussed the action research approach employed in the study, which included the important role of participants and the positionality of the researcher. A step-by-step discussion ensued on how the principles of youth empowerment and elements of participatory action research were applied during the planning and implementation of the project. Included in the discussion was the evaluation of the project. The following chapter will provide a summary and reflection of the study.

Summary and reflections of the study

■ Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the planning and implementation of the action research project.

As seen in the previous chapters, school-based violence is of concern in the South African schooling context. Current debates on the forms and causes of school-based violence stem from myriad challenges that face learners at individual, interpersonal, familial and community levels. Literature has highlighted that intervention strategies that yield effective results are those that incorporate learners in their design and implementation.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings as they respond to the research questions. The discussion will encompass the themes from the questionnaires and focus group discussions, as well as the themes derived from the action research component of the study. The chapter concludes with reflections related to the lessons learnt from the action research project. The overall aim of this research was to develop, implement and evaluate a programme that utilises important aspects of youth empowerment, such as social action and participation to reduce school violence. The broad concept of youth empowerment served as a strategy

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to create awareness about violence within the school setting. The study had the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the forms, extent, causes and consequences of violence in the secondary school setting.
2. To explore the theory and practice of youth empowerment in a school setting.
3. To develop and implement a youth empowerment programme that specifically addresses the problem of school-based violence.
4. To undertake a preliminary evaluation of the impact of the youth empowerment programme.

Objective one was explored in the questionnaires and focus group discussions that were performed first and formed the basis for the action research project. The action research project explored objectives two, three and four.

In terms of the extent of violence at school, both male and female learners indicated that it was a regular occurrence at school, occurring every day to a few times a week. This correlates with national and international literature that have highlighted the high levels of violence in secondary schools. Learners exposed to high levels of school violence begin to internalise the normalcy of such events. In addition, it has an impact on their physical, social and emotional well-being. Section 7.2 will focus on school violence, and Section 7.3 will focus on the youth empowerment component.

■ School violence

The findings below confirm that the first research objective was achieved: To examine the forms, extent, causes and consequences of violence in the secondary school setting.

■ Poverty and its link to stealing and drugs

What was quite evident in the questionnaire and focus group discussions was that stealing was a major type of violence seen at the school. Learners had indicated in the focus group discussions that stealing occurred every day and was of major concern. Drugs were also cited as a major cause of school-based violence. Learners stated that the high rate of stealing was linked to obtaining money to buy drugs and to purchase items that they could not afford. This could be the case as the school that formed the basis of the study, which is in Cato Manor, is in the middle of the densely populated Cato Crest informal settlement, which is one of the poorest urban areas in Durban where poverty and unemployment are rife. According to a study by Gray and Maharaj (2017), the Cato Manor area is also rife with issues of crime and inequality. Over the past few years, the area has been affected

by service delivery protests, xenophobic violence, gender-based violence and political intolerance. In addition, drugs are a major problem, especially *dagga* and *whoonga*.

Substance abuse is a problem in both affluent and poor communities. Substance abuse in affluent communities is linked to the values and accepted behaviours displayed by parents and the belief that higher socio-economic status means lower health risks. Adolescents are therefore more likely to experiment with and abuse substances. The issue of drug use in this study could be due to the type of community in which the learners reside as well as being faced with difficult life circumstances because of poverty. They are more likely to be exposed to drugs through community or family influences in terms of poor role modelling and easy access to substances.

In addition, adolescents who do not receive love and attention from their families are more likely to turn to friends to fill the gap and are therefore likely to adopt negative behaviour related to drug usage. Family issues, discussed later in this chapter, were also brought up as a cause of school-based violence. According to Ololade and Mndzebele (2017), drug abuse has been linked to young people experiencing stressful events in their lives, being raised in single-parent families, and accessing drugs through friends and peers. In addition, Mncube and Harber (2014, p. 328) posit that young people resort to drugs because 'schools are failing to provide an environment that gives students the feeling of security, confidence and sense of personal well-being they need'. Schools should be places that offer safety and security to learners. The school in question, which is very under-resourced, in a poor community, and which has high levels of school-based violence occurring frequently, could therefore be contributing to drug use. Thus, the vicious cycle of violence continues.

Even though stealing does not cause direct harm, it does cause indirect harm to learners by physically and psychologically affecting their well-being. Galtung's (1969, 1996) structural violence theory highlights that violence is visible in oppressive systems that ultimately lead to disadvantages in life opportunities. As such, in South Africa, structural violence is linked to poverty because it hinders parents from providing for the basic needs of their children. Thus, children in poverty-stricken schools experience various problems that impact their development. Poverty increases the chances of an adolescent being involved in delinquency and anti-social peer-group criminal activity. Poverty also increases the risk of victimisation. Many of the studies on school violence have been focused on public schools rather than private schools. There seem to be higher reported incidences of violence in under-resourced public schools with learners from poorer communities. This suggests that there is a clear link between poverty and school violence (Clark 2012; Foster & Brooks-Gunn 2015; Mathews & Benevuti 2014; Richter et al. 2018).

■ Aggression in the form of bullying and fighting

Aggression in the form of bullying and fighting was highlighted as the second biggest problem at the school. According to Huesmann (2018), aggression in adolescents is the product of both intrapersonal traits and contextual factors. Through negative socialisation, repeated observational learning and modelling in the home, community and peer group, adolescents create negative cognitions, which they then display in their behaviour. In this case, violence in the school setting.

In addition, Agnew (1992, p. 49), in his strain theory, suggests that adolescents display negative behaviour due to negative emotional states. Negative emotional states are brought about through exposure to negative relationships. The emotional state causes the adolescent to use inappropriate mechanisms to achieve goals and also causes them to become violent towards others. In the context of school violence, an adolescent may become involved in acts of violence, such as acquiring possessions through theft or bullying other learners. Bullying could be a result of victimisation and the need to defend oneself. It was reported in the focus group discussions that boys were involved in physical fighting to show off their strength. This is because aggression is seen as socially acceptable behaviour and a way for males to impress others and resolve conflict. Traditional gender norms result in males using aggression to demonstrate masculinity. According to Moreau et al. (2021), stereotypical views of gender norms are internalised by early adolescence through exposure to family socialisation and cultural patterns. These findings correlate with a study by Hamlall and Morrell (2012) and Hamlall (2014), who found that peer approval of aggressive behaviour served as validation of the aggressor's masculinity in public, avoiding humiliation and defending oneself.

■ Sexual harassment

According to the literature, gender violence is one of the major forms of violence in the school setting. However, what was notable in this study is that only 6% of male and 2% of female learners stated that sexual harassment is a type of violence at the school. This low figure for both males and females is quite contradictory to the literature, which generally states that sexual harassment is prevalent as a common type of violence at school. According to the questionnaire, sexual harassment was not seen to be of major concern by the learners. A submission by the DBE (n.d.) to a task group dealing with sexual violence in schools reported that there is a high rate of under-reporting by learners due to fear, stigma and blame.

This finding could be related to the manner in which gender power and the demonstration of gender violence in the school, family and community

setting are manifested (Bhana 2012). In many ways, there is bias in these settings towards male dominance. Ultimately, many girls are powerless against the dominant male culture of power and authority. This bias towards the powerful role of masculinity places more risk on boys to engage in gender-based violence at school (Ngqela & Lewis 2012; Pradubmook-Sherer & Sherer 2014). Girls are at the receiving end as they are perceived as inferior and defenceless and fear punishment for reporting incidents of sexual violence (Malongo & Mwale 2019). It is for this reason that girls at the school could be underplaying the occurrence of sexual advances and harassment at the school. When probed in the focus groups, all three groups stated that they did not think it was a major problem at the school. Their responses indicated that it does happen but when speaking about it, they did not see it as an important problem to be tackled. It was seen as normal and acceptable and was demonstrated as a means of power that boys have over girls. However, the issue of feeling fearful was raised. Learners displayed power through acts of violence and to gain approval from peers. Approval by peers was linked to conformity and seeking attention.

■ **Teacher-perpetrated violence: Corporal punishment**

During the focus group discussions, there was a lengthy discussion centred on corporal punishment. Learners spoke about the types of corporal punishment that occurred at school, the reasons why it was used by teachers and the effect that it had on learners. All three groups stated that corporal punishment was meted out every day by most teachers and included a slap on the face or hitting on the hand, backside or head with a pipe, ruler or duster. Corporal punishment, although prohibited by law since 1996, is still practised widely at the school. The responses from the learners suggest that the teachers use petty reasons to punish learners and most cases of corporal punishment go unreported, and the school management did not discipline educators who used corporal punishment as a discipline technique.

By employing corporal punishment for wrongdoing, the school system reinforces the notion that violence is the only way to deal with problems. The findings suggest that educators use corporal punishment as they lack the appropriate skills and techniques to manage behaviour effectively. Thus, by using corporal punishment, the teachers reinforce the belief that violence solves violence. Instead of teaching young people how to behave properly, corporal punishment increases the behaviour that it seeks to control. According to Mncube and Dube (2019), the use of corporal punishment demonstrates a lack of teacher professionalism and democracy.

The inappropriate management of learners' behaviour by teachers through the use of physical and verbal aggression increases violence in the classroom. The use of such negative power hinders mutual respect and positive engagement. Mayisela (2018) highlights the fact that parents supporting corporal punishment have a cultural root as they used this in their own parenting practices due to being raised in this way as well. This, therefore, perpetuates the cycle of violence.

■ Peer influence

According to the findings, peer pressure was cited as a major cause of school-based violence by the learners. This is likely because, during the adolescent stage of development, more than in any other stage, friends and peers become a key socialising agent for young people. This influence of friends and peers has either a positive or negative effect on the attitudes and behaviour of the adolescent. In their quest for independence, adolescents make their own decisions, conform to group culture, and question their values and identity. Conformity provides a sense of security for the adolescent as they gain independence from their parents.

However, in their desire to be accepted within the group and in seeking power and attention, adolescents may be pressured into bullying others, taking drugs, carrying weapons, stealing and joining gangs. This stage places youth at risk due to experimenting with risky and anti-social behaviour, which includes school-based violence (Steyn & Singh 2018).

According to Hirsch's (1969) social bond/social control theory, pro-social peers and a positive school environment are important aspects of attachment for adolescents. Attachment with pro-social peers prevents adolescents from engaging in negative behaviour. On the other hand, attachment to anti-social peers results in deviant behaviour. In a school rife with violence (as was the case in this study), it becomes very difficult for a learner to feel any form of close attachment to school. In addition, the decrease in parental relationships and monitoring leads to an increase in peer influence, both positively as well as negatively (Tome et al. 2012).

Mothibi, Mathopo and Mofokeng (2017) concur that peer groups have a role to play in peer victimisation and engaging in violence to flaunt in front of others. Having delinquent friends increases the risk of the young person engaging in delinquent behaviour at school. Girls are influenced by peer groups and tend to be focused on non-violent relationship-oriented behaviours and are, therefore, more likely to engage in destructive behaviour such as excluding and spreading rumours about others. Boys, on the other hand, are influenced by peer groups to engage in acts of physical aggression rather than non-violent ones. They seek approval in terms of their masculinity (Farrel, Thompson & Mehari 2017; Hamlall & Morrell 2012).

Attitudes supporting peer violence are associated with the perpetration of violence against peers, especially in high-risk communities (Ali, Swahn & Sterling 2011). Young people growing up together in a crime-ridden community where there is unemployment, a lack of education and a low standard of housing will engage with delinquent friends and peers (*World Report on Violence against Children 2006*). Cato Manor, the area in which the school in the study is located is rife with issues of low-cost housing, unemployment, crime, poverty, gender-based violence, political intolerance and drugs.

On a positive note, the power of peers can be harnessed to play a valuable role in addressing school violence. They can play an important role as support mechanisms in schools to identify and support learners who have been victims of school violence, as well as being incorporated into school safety initiatives. Peer influence can be used during the empowerment process, both to influence young people to work with each other on school awareness campaigns and to use the power of school awareness campaigns to address the issue of school violence among their peers.

■ **The role of the ecosystem on school-based violence: Family, school and community factors**

Violence in the home and school have a ripple effect on each other as there is an interplay between the individual and the experiences to which the individual is exposed in their family and social environment. One cannot only look at school violence as a problem residing in the individual, but one needs to look at how the ecological system surrounding the individual impacts the prevalence of school violence. One of the key findings of the research was the impact of family factors as a cause of school-based violence. Community and poor school environments were cited as a cause to a lesser extent.

A key theory to understanding the impact of violence on the development of a young person is the eco-systemic model of development (Bronfenbrenner 1999), which considers environmental factors that either support or create barriers to the healthy development of an individual through their lifespan. The positive features and risk factors present within each of the settings converge to influence the levels of violence in the young person's life. Violence in the home, school and community have a ripple effect on each other.

A model comparable to the eco-systemic one is Sameroff's Transactional Model of Development (1975). According to this model, there is an interplay between the individual and the experiences to which the individual is exposed in their family and social environment. Sameroff (1975) called this

equal interplay between the individual and the environment bidirectional effects. Both eco-systemic models suggest that experiences and the environment are not seen as independent of the individual but as something that shapes their development. Consequently, there is an interplay between the individual and their context. Therefore, experiences of violence within the school, the family environment of learners and the Cato Manor community would have a ripple effect on each other.

In addition, observational learning and modelling of behaviour through socialisation have a pivotal role in determining the behaviour of children and adolescents in the family, school and community (Bandura 1971). Violent acts observed in the family and community are imitated in the school setting (Botha, Myburgh & Poggenpoel 2012). On the other hand, observation of violent behaviour by teachers and peers is likely to be displayed at home or in the community. The findings of this research validate that view.

The family environment is a key socialising agent in childhood and adolescence. In the family, the young person learns values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour that serve as a moral compass for the young person. Family factors such as single-parent families, poor economic conditions, poor child-rearing through authoritarian or permissive parenting, family violence, parental substance abuse and modelling of aggression by parents also contribute to violence at school (Leoschut & Kafaar 2017; Le Roux & Mokhele 2011; Mathews & Benevuti 2014; Pahad & Graham 2012; Steyn & Singh 2018; eds. Ward, Van der Merwe & Dawes 2013). If the young person is socialised in a family environment that is rife with dysfunction and violence, then this places them at a greater risk for engaging in violent anti-social behaviour in other settings such as the school and community.

Poorer communities in South Africa (such as the one in the study) are faced with high levels of violence. The HSRC (2016) policy brief found a clear link between school violence and high crime levels in communities. The policy brief also found that low socio-economic status increased the risk of exposure of young people to violence. In addition, youth who live in violent communities pick up violent behavioural traits early in life due to observational learning (Meyer & Chetty 2017). Schools located within violent, crime-ridden communities are at a greater risk of fostering school-based violence, as they reflect the violent norms and acts to which learners are exposed in the community, which then influences their behaviour.

■ Consequences of school violence

In both the questionnaires and focus group discussions, learners were very clear that violence at the school did impact learners. The main consequences of violence were cited as truanting from school, poor concentration in class,

and feelings of fearfulness and anxiety. It also affected the self-esteem of learners. These factors led to poor performance and ultimately dropping out of school. This is consistent with the literature, which has found that the consequences of school-based violence are linked to the emotional, social, cognitive, educational and behavioural development of learners, which have an impact even in adulthood (Ghorab & Al-Khaldi 2014; Madikizela-Madiya & Mncube 2014; Ntshengedzeni, Khalabai & Simeon 2024).

■ **Learner perspectives: Factors to be considered in addressing school violence**

The participants stated that the learners in the school could be involved in reporting incidents, offering peer support and creating awareness around the issue of violence. They also identified improving infrastructure, improving security and providing extra-curricular activities and psychosocial support for learners. A lack of recreational facilities was cited as a cause of violence. Steyn and Singh (2018) conclude that the absence of after-school activities and inadequate resources and facilities at school or in the community resulted in young people being engaged in destructive behaviour in order to evade boredom. There are limited opportunities for young people to engage in activities that expand their potential and skills. The school where the study took place is under-resourced and has inadequate sporting facilities.

A key point was brought up by one of the learners regarding the need to engage learners in sports so that they are diverted from being involved in risk-taking behaviour. What came out strongly was the need for learners themselves to create awareness about the issues affecting them in school. They wanted to be part of the process of finding solutions rather than merely being observers or victims. Thus, it is important that young people are involved in school activities that would provide a sense of empowerment, engage them in positive peer relationships, deter them from destructive behaviour and encourage them to engage in developmentally appropriate activities. Youth empowerment programmes at schools can address this need. Examples of such programmes include the Youth Empowerment Solutions by Zimmerman et al. (2018).

■ **Youth empowerment: Reflection of a youth empowerment project**

After having completed the action research project with the group of young people at the school, which culminated in a school-wide violence awareness campaign, the points mentioned in the following sub-sections were discovered.

The findings below confirm that the following objectives of the study were achieved:

- **Objective 2:** To explore the theory and practice of youth empowerment in a school setting.
- **Objective 3:** To develop and implement a youth empowerment programme that specifically addresses school-based violence.

■ Youth empowerment and action research

For the purposes of this study, YPAR was used. It has the same elements of action research, but that which makes it distinctive is the participation of the youth. Youth empowerment links well with action research. This is because action research, like youth empowerment, is participatory in nature. The collaborative quality of action research is empowering and emancipative due to the fact that participants are actively able to effect change and make improvements (Craig 2009; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004; Welman, Kruger & Mitchell 2005).

Because action research is a participatory process, the learners in the action group were meaningfully involved throughout the process and in doing so, they were able to explore their strengths and potential. The diversity within the group meant that they came with a range of experience and knowledge. The researcher listened to their ideas, and their contribution was seen as valuable to the knowledge production process. They were able to bring a fresh perspective to the issue being studied and offer creative solutions to how the issue of violence could be addressed. Thus, they chose to implement a school-wide violence awareness campaign. The process allowed them to be independent and responsible for the elements of the school violence campaign and how those were to be delivered. The entire process lends itself to a sense of empowerment for the participants.

■ The benefits of youth empowerment in a school context

Youth empowerment is linked to cultivating moral identity in youth. Through empowerment, youth are seen as assets and instruments of change in their own development. Thus, interventions should empower them to be the best that they can be (National Youth Policy 2015–2020). Furthermore, using empowerment harnesses the strengths of children and youth to enable them to tap into their skills, knowledge and resources so as to bring about change in their social context (Augsberger, Gecker & Collins 2018). The empowerment lens allows adults to see youth as active in their own development and reflect and act on how to facilitate the

process of their development. It enables youth to see themselves as change agents with an active role to play in their school and community.

Barnes, Brynard and De Wet (2014) found that the better the school climate and culture, the lower the levels of violence experienced at school. They also proposed that in order to create safer schools and a better school climate, schools should involve learners in decision-making around school policies as well as the design of strategies to address school violence. This was also echoed by the SRSG (2012) in his report on *Tackling Violence in School: A Global Perspective*.

Thus, partnering with children is a key element in reducing school violence. Zimmerman et al. (2018) highlight that youth involved in empowerment programmes demonstrated leadership skills, confidence, better cognitive skills, decision-making and pro-social behaviour. Conversely, when the school climate is poor, youth are disempowered, with a diminished sense of control over school matters. They are not involved in decision-making. The issue of authority is an important one because excessive control by teachers diminishes empowerment.

■ Youth empowerment and marginalised youth

This study was conducted with marginalised youth in a community rife with poverty, violence and inequality. According to Pearrow and Pollack (2009), empowerment is a powerful tool that can be used with marginalised youth. Youth violence is a social justice issue; therefore, empowerment is a key manner in which youth themselves can be given the power to address the issue of school violence. Empowerment in this study consisted of exploring issues from a social justice perspective and then using a practical approach to address the identified issues. Thus, empowerment gives marginalised youth an opportunity to exercise power in a responsible manner.

Through the democratic processes of empowerment, youth are engaged in meaningful decision-making, active participation and action in order to bring about change in their social context. Youth participatory action research provides a unique platform for young people to acquire skills, knowledge, critical thinking, self-confidence, leadership skills and teamwork skills (Livingstone, Celewencki & Calixte 2014, p. 287). As seen in this research study, through a youth empowerment process and participatory action research, youth were given a 'voice' during the research process by identifying the problem of school-based violence that exists at the school and formulating a plan that they, as an action research group, wished to address. This is an empowering process for youth and leads to a positive contribution towards their healthy development and a sense of inclusion and well-being (Prilleltensky 2010).

Youth empowerment is emancipative because it allows youth to control their actions and processes (Martinez et al. 2017). It nurtures the 'spark' in youth to follow through with something about which they are passionate. The researcher has found that if a young person shows passion for making a difference in their school or community, creating a supportive environment for the young person to make a difference encourages them to feel empowered. Nurturing the 'spark' contributes to positive development in all spheres (Scales, Benson & Roehlkepartain 2011).

■ The importance of positionality and relationships

The researcher considered her positionality to be very important when working with the action group. Notably, positionality and the relational aspect are key to an effective empowerment group and achieving the outcomes set out by the researcher (Christens 2012; Herr & Anderson 2015). The democratic nature of the manner in which the researcher worked with the action group created a sense of interdependence between the researcher and the action group. The researcher viewed them as experts because they were the ones who were facing the issues of violence on a daily basis. The researcher built a level of trust, respect and rapport with them. This enabled them to feel safe to offer opinions and solutions.

According to the *Critical Youth Empowerment* model (Jennings et al. 2006), making youth feel welcome and safe is an important dimension of empowerment. The action group was made to feel welcome from the first session. The researcher provided a sense of belonging and safety. This was achieved by learning the learners' names, allowing them to choose a group name that increased their sense of identity (the Future Leaders of Change), and reassuring them that whatever personal information was discussed within the group would remain confidential. They felt supported, cared for and respected, while at the same time enjoying themselves during the planning and implementation of the violence awareness campaign. They felt comfortable sharing their opinions and creative ideas because the researcher encouraged them to take responsibility for those ideas and put them into action by delivering the violence awareness campaign. The group was given the opportunity to explore ideas and put into action those ideas that were deemed to be important. However, guidelines were set at the beginning of the project.

Building relationships with youth is based on empathetic listening and respect as well as supporting and motivating youth, thereby increasing their self-confidence (Blanchett-Cohen & Brunson 2014). During the action research project, the youth developed relationships between themselves and a relationship with the researcher, their facilitator. This relationship was a key factor in the way the group worked with each other and with the researcher.

It ultimately led to the successful implementation of the violence awareness campaign. Group identity and social relationships in terms of positive peer norms, values and behaviours were also reinforced as the youth worked together as a team. Social cohesion and a sense of togetherness, as well as empowering others in achieving social change, are linked to a sense of empowerment. The process of empowering others (peer-to-peer empowerment) is important, seeing that peer relationships are a key developmental milestone in the adolescent phase (Russel et al. 2009).

■ Empowerment is about partnership with youth

Throughout the process of planning and implementation, the group were given many opportunities to actively engage and make a meaningful contribution towards the project. In the process, the youth learnt about leadership, communication, planning and organising (Larson & Angus 2011; Zeldin, Christens & Powers 2013). They were also given an opportunity to take on different roles and responsibilities that came with those roles.

Ownership is important as it results in youth experiencing agency over their work, where they are given control to select and implement activities. It is important for the adult, as the facilitator, to resolve conflicts that arise within the group as well as offer information and alternatives to the group when they cannot find a solution. In addition, setting clear boundaries and expectations related to the role of the adults and the youth is important so as to guard the adults from taking away control from the youth.

In this study, cooperative learning was used as a mode of participation. The group of learners and the researcher worked together to understand the issues of violence most prevalent in the school and then worked together to develop and implement the violence awareness campaign. They were guided in the process, but they were largely responsible for brainstorming on what they would like the programme to look like and who should be involved. They were responsible for implementing the violence awareness campaign. (Christens & Kirshner 2011). Transformative change is achieved by assisting young people to gain independence and enhancing their competency through partnership with them (Kay & Tisdall 2017).

In addition, there was equitable sharing of power between the group and the researcher. The researcher provided support and guidance and kept them focused by using her authority as the adult but without dominating the process. This particular aspect appears in Wong, Zimmerman and Parker's (2010) *Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment Pyramid*, wherein they state that the *pluralistic* participation type is the best form of youth empowerment as youth are active participants in the process and there is shared control between youth and adults. The authors

further state that this shared control results in a co-learning process that is empowering for both adults and youth.

■ Key elements of a youth empowerment model to address school-based violence

This study has demonstrated to me that youth empowerment is a useful tool to use in schools to address the issue of school violence (please refer to Figure 7.1 and Table 7.1). Many intervention programmes at school are based on tools that are developed and implemented by adults, with learners merely being participants. This was evident in the various interventions outlined in Chapter 5. Learners do not see value in it because they are not engaged in exploring issues and implementing solutions themselves. My project was different to the interventions mentioned in Chapter 5 because it used the principles of youth empowerment to address the issue of school violence at the school. I facilitated a process with the learners, but they ultimately took ownership of developing and implementing the programme.

The role of the adult facilitator is important to ensure a process that allows young people to be meaningfully engaged in shared decision-making and ownership of the programme being developed and implemented.



Source: Author's own work.

FIGURE 7.1: Key elements of a youth empowerment model to address school-based violence.

TABLE 7.1: Explanation of the key elements of a youth empowerment model.

Categories	Characteristics
Facilitator characteristics	Empathy Rapport Trust Partnership Respect Sharing power Facilitation Listening
Individual characteristics	Self-confidence Responsibility Participation Creativity Leadership
Group processes	Teamwork Respect Shared decision-making Compromise Problem-solving Creativity Advocacy

Source: Author's own work.

The empowerment process enhances the development of learners at an individual level by honing their leadership, responsibility, participation, creativity and problem-solving skills. This ultimately increases their self-confidence and their ability to see themselves as change agents. The group process is equally important as it offers a unique, valuable learning opportunity that learners can use in future, such as teamwork and advocacy. It provides a platform to work with others and develop values related to respect, shared decision-making, compromise, etc. In addition, it advances their problem-solving and creativity skills. If done properly, the process results in meaningful action that is context-specific. This leads to empowerment and a change (even a subtle one) in the school environment.

This study aimed to harness the potential of youth empowerment to change the attitudes and behaviours of learners in addressing the problem of school-based violence. Literature has indicated that through the democratic processes of empowerment, individuals and groups are engaged in meaningful decision-making, active participation, and action in order to bring about change in their social context. Being involved directly in planning and implementing a programme to address the issues with which they are faced in school is an empowering process, and it gave the learners who were involved in this study an opportunity to have their voices heard, take ownership and contribute in a meaningful manner.

The researcher saw their voice and confidence develop over the weeks that the researcher and learners spent together. On the day that the violence awareness campaign was implemented, the researcher observed a sense of responsibility, pride and achievement in their demeanour. They were clearly stressed by this very large task that lay before them, but they worked together as a team on that day to ensure that what they had planned came to fruition. The principal, in her address to the school, commended the group of learners on the campaign that they had planned.

The youth empowerment project proved that even in an under-resourced school, if there is co-operation from school management and a group of positive, enthusiastic learners, it can be used as a useful strategy to address the issue of school violence. Empowerment advances development at the individual and group levels. It allows youth to see themselves as change agents with an active role to play in their school. Interpersonal interactions between young people and adults sharing power are transformative and emancipative because young people who are usually powerless are in control of the process now.

Empowerment develops competence, confidence, leadership and communication skills in youth. The adult serves as a guide and facilitator. Positionality is key to an effective empowerment group and achieving the outcomes set out by the researcher. The democratic nature of the manner in which the researcher worked with the action group created a sense of interdependence between the researcher and the action group. The researcher viewed them as experts and built a level of trust, respect and rapport with them. This enabled them to feel safe to offer opinions and solutions. This relationship was a key factor in the way the group worked with each other and with the researcher. It is important to set group norms and behaviours as it determines how successfully the process will unfold.

Once programmes are implemented, evaluations of the programme are critical in order to understand the value of the programme to the participants and improvements that need to be made for future implementation. The issue of sustainability is important because if there is no adult or teacher to drive the process, then the programme will not follow through. The researcher found this to be true in this study. Feedback from the group indicated that the programme was not continued the following year because there was no one to drive the process. This was, therefore, a limitation of this study.

■ Recommendations

■ Using peers as support mechanisms

Peer relationships are a key developmental milestone in the adolescent phase as they play an influential role in the lives of young people.

Thus, schools need to harness peer-to-peer empowerment in order to address the issue of school violence. Peer groups can play an important role as support mechanisms in schools to identify and support learners who have been victims of school violence as well as be incorporated into the safety initiatives in school. The participants in the study stated that the learners in the school could be involved in reporting incidents, offering peer support and creating awareness around the issue of violence. For this to happen, the management of the school needs to make a concerted effort to have mechanisms in place for reporting incidents and to develop a structured peer-mentor system. In addition, incorporating learners into decision-making processes within the school is important.

■ **Harnessing the power of youth to tackle school-based violence from within**

Using youth in school-based violence campaigns and programmes can increase their motivation to collectively influence changes within their school. These can be achieved through a process of shared decision-making, collective vision and partnership with young people. Involving youth in developing and implementing programmes ensures that the programme is relevant and important in developing their skills, attitudes, behaviour and knowledge. Partnering with children and youth is important as the outcomes of a programme tend to be more effective if learners themselves take ownership of the process. What came out strongly from the participants was the need for learners themselves to create awareness about the issues affecting them in school. They wanted to be part of the process of finding solutions rather than merely being observers or victims.

The issue of authority is an important one because excessive control by teachers diminishes empowerment. If teachers are to share control with youth, as suggested by Wong et al. (2010), then empowerment is possible. However, with the current educational situation in South Africa, using the empowerment process will be challenging as it contradicts how young people are generally treated and perceived. Thus, a change in mindset is required by both teachers and learners. Decreasing control and increasing empowerment have the potential to address the reduction of school-based violence.

The relational aspect of empowerment is also important if empowerment is to be used as a strategy. Findings have suggested that there is a poor relationship and a sense of distrust and disrespect between learners and teachers. This is increased by the use of corporal punishment instead of discipline. A sense of care, relationship-building, respect and the use of appropriate discipline techniques are vital to the process of empowerment. Not all teachers can be involved in empowering learners to take charge and

address the issues with which they are faced in school. Thus, specific teachers who are enthusiastic about working with learners to improve the school environment in a forum of shared decision-making and responsibility could be tasked with facilitating violence reduction campaigns with the learners. These campaigns could be incorporated into specific subjects in the curriculum.

■ **Providing learners with structured activities**

Young people will be less likely to be involved in school violence if they are engaged in developmentally appropriate, stimulating activities. Participants stated that providing extra-curricular activities would be beneficial to learners as a lack of recreational facilities was cited as one of the causes of violence. Participants stated that there were limited opportunities for young people to engage in activities that expand their potential and skills. The school where the study took place is under-resourced and has inadequate sporting facilities. Learners could be engaged in sports such that they are diverted from being involved in risk-taking behaviour. Funding could be sought by under-resourced schools as part of a community initiative to fix sporting facilities and acquire sporting equipment such that the sporting codes could be offered to learners as a start.

■ **Alternative discipline techniques as part of teacher education**

Corporal punishment, which is prohibited, is widely used. The use of corporal punishment to address the aggressive behaviour of learners perpetuates the violent culture in school. Concerted effort needs to be made by learning institutions offering teacher education to incorporate discipline techniques that address the behaviour of learners but within a rights-based, humanistic perspective. The DBE could develop a range of workshops for teachers currently employed, highlighting the use of discipline rather than punishment.

■ **Policy recommendations**

Policy recommendations emanating from the findings are, among others:

1. School management should make a concerted effort to have mechanisms in place for reporting incidents and to design a structured peer-mentor system.
2. Schools should involve learners in decision-making around school policies and strategies.

3. Young people in schools need to be more involved in organised extra-curricular activities.
4. Techniques of discipline within a rights-based, humanistic perspective should be implemented.

■ Major learning from the study

The first major learning I derived from my study is that empowerment is a powerful tool to use with young people as it brings about change at an intra- and inter-personal level. However, there is a lack of youth-led initiatives at schools tackling violence. Where there are initiatives at school, these are educator-led. The core values of empowerment can be used within the context of peace clubs in schools, both at primary and secondary school levels, as this seems to be the best fit for empowerment. In addition, if done within the context of peace clubs, then the issue of sustainability will be addressed. However, it is critical that an adult facilitates the process.

The second major learning is that one needs to be cognizant of the fact that improving the school environment does not necessarily mean that the community environment will be improved. Therefore, it is crucial that awareness campaigns are done at the community level as well. This will filter down to the family environment as well. This will spread the values of empowerment from one context to the next. This, ultimately, is the true measure of empowerment.

■ Summary

Overall, through this study, the researcher was able to achieve the objectives set out: to examine the forms, extent, causes and consequences of violence in a high school setting and to explore the theory and practice of youth empowerment by developing and implementing a youth empowerment programme that specifically addressed school-based violence. A preliminary evaluation of the impact of the youth empowerment programme indicated that it did make the learners at the school aware of the issues with which they are faced on a daily basis. As a researcher, this study broadened the researcher's knowledge and practice of action research as it takes the researcher out of their comfort zone because action research is only successful through engaging with participants in a meaningful way.

The researcher is encouraged to see the positive impact that it had on the action research group in terms of how it changed their view of violence from the first meeting and the feedback that the researcher received after implementation of the violence awareness campaign. In addition, the researcher was able to witness the impact that empowerment had on the personal development of the action research group. Their confidence,

communication skills, problem-solving ability, creativity, positivity and leadership were clearly evident by the end of the project. The process enabled the researcher to build relationships with some of the participants with whom the researcher still keeps in contact. However, the researcher has realised that the sustainability of future empowerment projects needs to be addressed through a structured system of engaging with school management.

The limitations of the study included the following issues: Firstly, the study focused on only one school in Cato Manor. Other secondary schools in the area that might have had similar violence-related issues were excluded. Secondly, from the large number of learners who completed the questionnaire, only fourteen learners volunteered to be part of the action research group. Of these fourteen learners, only two were male students. This made the group dynamic unequal, and the researcher felt that the issues from a male perspective were not fully discussed and adopted by the group. Thirdly, the sustainability of the programme is a major limitation of the study as the empowerment programme continued for the year after the researcher had left, and momentum ceased after that. It is therefore critical that discussions are held with school management to integrate intervention programmes within the school safety plan and a designated teacher be involved from the outset to follow through with the programme.

■ The use of social media and digital technology

Subsequently, after the finalisation of the study, the researcher discovered that social media could be a powerful tool to incorporate into a youth empowerment intervention. Adolescents today spend a large proportion of their time on various social media platforms. It enables them to connect and freely communicate with others and stay updated with the latest news and trends. Although social media research has highlighted the negative effect it has on adolescent well-being (Paakkari et al. 2021; Senekal, Groenewald & Williams 2023; Thai et al. 2024), social media can be a collaborative, creative tool that adolescents use to engage with peers and adult mentors to identify and develop programmes to address school-based violence (Contreras et al. 2023; Jamatia 2023; Purwanto, Fahmi & Cahyona 2023; Saud et al. 2023). Further research is recommended in this area.

■ Conclusion

Violence in the form of bullying, fighting, stealing and corporal punishment is prevalent in schools today. The issue of poverty and the role of peer,

family and community in the perpetuation of school-based violence cannot be ignored. The use of empowerment as an intervention is a useful strategy to address and reduce school-based violence. In a school setting, empowerment is achieved by giving learners skills and knowledge to think critically about issues within the school setting so that creative and doable strategies can be developed to address the issues. This leads to change. It allows learners to address issues that are important to them by being directly involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects. Involving youth in developing and implementing programmes ensures that the programme is relevant and important in developing their skills, attitudes, behaviour and knowledge. Empowering outcomes are the measurement that one uses to study the effects of interventions and the empowering process. Thus, this contributes to the formulation of empowerment theory.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

■ Developing a youth empowerment model for peaceful schools: A case study

This questionnaire is being conducted to better understand the experiences of learners and teachers in terms of school-based violence.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntary, and you are assured of anonymity. You may withdraw from the study at any stage with no negative consequences for yourself.

Section A

Please place an X in the appropriate box or fill in the blank.

1. What is your present age? _____ years.
2. What is your gender?

Male		Female	
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Section B

Please place an X in the appropriate boxes that apply below.

1. Do you think that violence is a problem at your school?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Disagree

2. How often have you seen or heard of violence at your school?

Every day	
A few times a week	
Once a week	
Rarely	
Never	

There can be more than one response for Questions 3, 4 and 5.

3. What types of violence are present at your school?

Bullying	
Fighting	
Swearing and teasing	
Stealing	
Being threatened	
Sexual harassment	
Other	

4. What do you think are the causes of violence at your school?

Peer pressure	
Drugs	
Alcohol	
Gangsterism	
Easy access to weapons	
Learners imitating what they see on television or in movies	
Family problems	
Community problems	
Poor school environment	
Other: Please specify	

5. What do you think are the consequences of violence at your school?

Feeling fearful and anxious at school	
Poor performance in schoolwork	
Poor concentration in class	
Bunking school	
Lack of interest in school	
Dropping out of school	
Depression	
Other: Please specify	

Section C

Please write a few comments about the questions below:

1. Do you know the procedure for reporting school violence incidents?
Please explain.

2. How do you think you can reduce violence at your school?

3. How do you think others can reduce violence at your school?

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

Appendix 2

■ Developing a youth empowerment model for peaceful schools: A case study

Focus group discussion questions

Date:

Time:

Number of participants:

Number of male and female:

Introduce myself and the purpose of the focus group. Thank learners for their participation. Outline the ethical considerations and ask for permission to tape-record the session. State that the tapes will only be listened to by the researcher (myself) and that the tapes will be stored in a secure place.

PS: The focus groups will only take place after the questionnaire has been analysed. As such, important recurring information obtained from the questionnaire will be elaborated on and discussed in the focus group.

The same questions that were used in the questionnaire will be used as guiding questions in the focus group:

1. To what extent is violence a problem at your school?
2. What types of violence are present at your school?
3. What do you think are the causes of violence at your school?
4. What do you think are the consequences of violence at your school?
5. What is the procedure for handling incidents of violence?
6. What do you think can be done to reduce violence at your school?
7. How can the learners be involved in reducing violence at your school?

Appendix 3

■ Programme: Violence Awareness Campaign (Future Leaders of Change)

Theme: Standing Up Together Against Violence

Date: 21 October 2016

Time: 12:30 – 14:00

Venue: School Assembly Area

- 12:30** Welcome by deputy principal
- 12:35** Music item by school choir
- 12:45** Drama item
- 13:15** Talk by Constable Mokoena – SAPS Cato Manor
- 13:30** Address by school principal about school violence
- 13:40** Vote of thanks and closing by Fathima Dewan
- 13:45** Issuing certificates to learners – Fathima and principal
- 13:55** Music item
- 14:00** Writing messages against violence on the wall of hope

Future Leaders of Change: Drama on Violence in School

	SONG BY SCHOOL CHOIR
Narrator: Learner N (male)	It's a Monday morning, when every learner is tired from the weekend. A group of boys who call themselves Masters of Sway (MOS) are planning to take other learners' school bags.
Learner P (leader of the group; female)	<i>Sho boy.</i>
Learner L (female)	<i>Howzit.</i>
Learner P (female)	Grade 8 boys, there is this job I have for you: taking Nike bags.
Learner N (female)	No, guys, that will take too long. I want weed now, not tomorrow.
Learner P (female)	Let's take this girl's money now.
	<i>The young girl walks past.</i>
Learner L (female)	Hey, you! Bring all your money here.
Learner N (female)	I don't have any.
Learner N (female)	Hey, don't test my temper, you stupid girl. Bring all your money here.
Learner S (female)	<i>(with tears)</i> Here it is... It's all I have.
Learner M (female)	From now on, bring all your money to me every day

Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>The bell rings at 08:00 in the morning for all the learners to attend class. The teacher comes to class.</i>
Class (action group)	Good morning ma'am!
Learner L (female)	Morning, class. Sit down.
Class (action group)	Thank you, ma'am.
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>The teacher continues teaching until a group of learners makes a joke and the whole class laughs. After a few minutes, they do it again.</i>
Learner L (female)	Who was that?
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>The class did not respond. The teacher shouts at the whole class. She then tells the learners to own up, or else she is not going to continue with the lesson. Nobody owns up. She exits the class.</i> THE RAPPER ENTERS HERE WAIT FOR RAP TO FINISH
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>It's 12:30, and every learner is enjoying their lunch break. The MOS are in their usual spot in the corner of the school grounds, smoking weed as always.</i>
Learner P (female)	Guys, we have run out of money to buy weed for this afternoon.
Learner M (female)	Look at that boy. I am sure he has money.
Learner T (male)	Let me handle this job. Leave this job to me.
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>He went to some cheese girl and asked for money.</i>
Learner T (male)	Hey, you, cheese girl.
Learner N (female)	What do you want from me now?
Learner T (male)	<i>(laughing)</i> Oh, wow, cheese girl has changed to stupid girl. Nxa. Bring all your money to me now. I need to smoke.
Learner N (female)	I... don't... have money.
Learner T (male)	<i>(slapping cheese girl)</i> Don't make me a fool. Instead of your money only, bring me your money and cell phone.
Learner N (female)	<i>(crying)</i> I...
Learner T (male)	You still explaining? Hey, stupid girl, your money and cell phone, now!
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>Cheese girl gave all of her lunch money and her cell phone.</i>
Learner T (male)	<i>To cheese girl:</i> Now, that wasn't hard, was it? <i>(laughs)</i>
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>Cheese girl reported the matter to the teacher. The mastermind denied everything. There was no evidence, so the matter could not go forward.</i>
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>Before Period 6, when cheese girl realised that nothing could be done, she thought of another way she could seek revenge. She decided to go to the leader of the other gang at school, called the Dope Dogz. She goes to them and finds them gambling.</i>
Learner N (female)	<i>Salute bo lova.</i>
Learner M (female)	What did you say?
Learner N (female)	I said, <i>salute bo lova.</i>
Learner M (female)	If you ever greet us again like that, I will make sure your life knows no peace, <i>la esgele.</i>
Learner N (female)	Ok, ok, I am never greeting you like that again. I need you guys to do me a favour. It's complicated, but I am sure you guys are going to do it.
Learner P (female)	As long as you are going to join the gang.
Learner N (female)	Definitely. Besides, I am loaded with cash, so I think I will join the gang. I need you guys to sort out the Masters of Swag for me, because they embarrassed me and took my money and cell phone from me.

Learner M (female)	They did what? <i>Yazi yin</i> . We sort them very quick on Thursday, after school.
Learner P (female)	For sure, boss. I will organise, <i>Uyazi nawe</i> .
Learner M (female)	<i>Sharp</i> . In the meantime, give me the dice. Put your money down and bet on your number, Cheese girl. <i>Azishe</i> .
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>Cheese girl joins them in gambling, and they all continue to gamble until after school.</i> <i>Thursday afternoon, Masters of Swag and Dope Dogz are fighting in front of the whole school. One of the Grade 8 learners lost her Nike bag.</i> <i>It's Friday morning.</i>
Learner H (female)	Class, I want to see those who were absent yesterday.
Learner B (female)	Even if I have a valid reason for my absence, ma'am? I had to go to the clinic, ma'am.
Learner H (female)	I hear you, but you will have to face the consequences.
Learner B (female)	Well, ma'am, can I go fetch my mom?
	POEM IS READ
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>The issues of violence continued in school until one of the learners recited their poem at assembly about school violence and how badly it affects learners and teachers. All the learners and teachers were touched, even the gang members.</i> <i>Two days later, in class.</i>
Learner H (female)	Good morning, class. My children, I know I have been harsh to you and I am sorry for that. I should have listened to your reasons first before you faced the consequences.
Learner B (female)	We forgive you.
Learner P (female)	Well, class, we, as the Masters of Swag, also apologise for everything we have put you through, and to show that we are deeply sorry we would like to start an awareness campaign at school about how violence affects all of us.
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>The Masters of Swag and Dope Dogz forgive each other.</i>
Learner S (female)	Class, I would like to come clean. Ma'am, every day at home my father beats my mother. Every chance he gets, he controls us. He makes sure we do what he wants. My mother is too scared to report him. Because of all these issues at home I take out my frustrations on the other learners in school.
Learner H (female)	Wow, thank you for sharing your touching story! I also grew up in a home where violence was a big problem. Each one of us needs to decide whether to be violent or not. It begins with us. The Masters of Swag are right. We need to start a campaign to raise awareness and do something about school violence because it affects all of us. If we don't make a stand, nobody will.
	THE ACTION GROUP CLAPS
Narrator: Learner L (male)	<i>Everyone in class was clapping. The Masters of Swag and Dope Dogz created an awareness campaign about school violence with the help of the teachers.</i> <i>This is our school, and we should be proud of it. We should also ensure that the environment inside and outside the classroom is clean and presentable. We can't expect others to take care of our school if we ourselves don't bother about it.</i> <i>The time to change is now.</i>
	THE END

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This scholarly book explicitly elucidates the burning issue of school violence in South Africa. It aims to investigate violence in secondary schools and utilise important aspects of youth empowerment to develop and implement awareness and prevention strategies. It highlights the major causes of learner violence in the school environment and its negative impact on effective teaching and learning.

This book contains thorough action research conducted in a secondary school in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. The author employs multiple data collection methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. By applying triangulation, this scholarly book offers a broader perspective on the current violence disrupting the smooth operation of secondary schools. Legal aspects and policies discussed in this scholarly book highlight the need to thoroughly utilise resources such as the *South African Schools Act 84 of 1996*, the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 104 of 1996* and the *National Norms and Standards for School Funding 2007*.

This book presents impactful and applicable findings of all structures involved in education, including schools, district offices and the South African Department of Basic Education.

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School bullying has become a global pandemic, affecting educational environments not only in South Africa but worldwide. While school violence has existed for many years, its intensity, viciousness, and harmful effects have seemingly escalated in the last few years. This makes the insights and intervention described in this book particularly timely and relevant, as it offers a potential solution to the challenges faced by numerous schools.

While the book does not purport to have a cure-all for school violence, it highlights the effectiveness of a youth empowerment programme implemented in the study. This programme has enabled young people to take agency and develop intervention strategies, fostering a proactive approach to combatting violence. The study also prompted participants and their school communities to reflect seriously on the impact of violence and its devastating effects on victims.

While the long-term impact of violence on the students might never be fully known, the narrative presented here offers hope to other schools grappling with similar issues. The main takeaway is the recognition of young people's capability and the importance of involving them in leading efforts to address violence in their schools. Attitudinal and behavioural change is a process rather than an event. While the ultimate desired outcome may not be immediately attainable, the progress made along the way creates a semblance of peace and hope, encouraging us to continue striving for a better, more peaceful future.

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