

# Exploring how a school community copes with violence

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# **Exploring how a school community copes with violence**

by

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## DECLARATION OF OWN WORK

I,

Lina Mmakgabo Methi, hereby declare that the mini-dissertation titled:

### **Exploring how a school community copes with violence**

which I hereby submit for the degree of Master in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work in design and execution and has not been submitted for any degree at any university. I declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete reference.

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Lina M. Methi

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Date

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## ABSTRACT

My study is informed by a partnership initiated between Gun Free South Africa and the Department of Education (District Tshwane South) with the concern of addressing violence in schools. Schools are often seen as professionalised and distant from their local communities. Learners belong to the very communities that are distanced from the school. They bring to school the unresolved issues from their families and interpersonal relations within the community.

The study aimed to explore and describe the experiences of violence by a school community and how they cope with it. The study was informed by a qualitative and instrumental case study design within an interpretivist paradigm. Furthermore, the study was guided by an integrated conceptual framework derived from an asset-based and ecosystemic model, coping theories and the management system adapted from Babbie (2001).

To address this I incorporated a variety of strategies such as interviews, collages, timeline and concept mapping through which a crystallisation of data could be obtained. I also used informal observations and visual data as additional data generating methods. Through a thematic analysis approach the study reveal the existence of violence as a challenge to the school community, and impacts directly or indirectly to their well-being. The study has further indicated that the perpetrators are known to the victims. The findings of the study suggest that on the basis of the integrated conceptual framework support structures could be mobilized, building partnerships between local schools and the community to provide a firm foundation for educational renewal and community regeneration and to contribute directly to the strengthening and development of the school community. The information gathered might also assist policy developers in developing support and intervention programmes for the restoration of school safety.

### KEY CONCEPTS:

Asset-based approach	Collaboration	Support structures
Ecosystemic model	Bullying	School community
External Assets	Coping	Internal Assets

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

#### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of South Africa of 1996 made schooling compulsory for all children between the ages of 7 and 15 years. The Constitution also proclaims that a learner has the right to an education and, to that end, allows him or her to remain at the same school without fear of victimization. The mandate of the Constitution is to create a safe and tolerant learning environment at schools that celebrates innocence and values human dignity. Regulations for safety measures at public schools were stipulated and published in South African Schools Act (SASA), South Africa (1996) which provides general principles for building a safe environment at schools within the country: supporting that mandate the focus of the SASA, South Africa (1996) is on positive punishment and the development of an appropriate code of conduct. There is, therefore, a need to create a space at schools where educators can teach and learners can learn (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP), 2006).

The issue of violence in schools is a universal concern and studies on the incidence of violence in schools have been widely conducted (Ciarrochi,Forgas & Mayer, 2006). There is a national and international increase in the occurrence of crime, violence and abuse, that take the form of teasing and harassment, assaults, rape, verbal abuse, and bullying that affect all aspects of the communities and schools (CJCP, 2006). However, the reasons behind the increase are complex and difficult to probe (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). Violence in schools is usually perpetrated within a child's familiar environment by people they know. Learners inflict violence on fellow learners, educators inflict violence on learners, older boys physically assault younger boys, and boy learners sexually assault girl learners.

Various initiatives driven by government, civil society and business have been directed at addressing the issue of such violence and, through establishing community partnerships, sustainability might be prolonged and better coordinated efforts made that take the assets and strengths of the community members into consideration, together with the resources and opportunities that exist in local organizations, associations and institutions. School authorities

and school communities need, therefore, to develop practical strategies to create a safe environment at schools, that responds effectively and fairly to incidents of violence and any form of harassment, should they occur. Burton (2008a:77), in his report on violence in schools, suggests that a coordinated effort between all schools should be made in dealing with such violence.

## **1.2 RATIONALE**

This study is informed by a partnership initiated between the Landelijke Stichting TegenZinloosGeweld (LSTZG), Oxfam Novib, Gun free SA, and the Department of Education (District Tshwane South) with the concern of exploring the issue of violence in schools. Teachers in South Africa and the Netherlands are engaged in an exchange programme, to learn from each other as to what can be done to develop young people's capacities in both countries. According to the Department of Education (2007) the LSTZG and Oxfam Novib started their *Words over Weapons (WOW)* campaign in 2005, with the aim of initiating dialogue with South African young people in addressing violence in schools. Facilitators were trained and the pilot project was initiated within five secondary schools in the District of Tshwane. After the content of the programme had been developed the first phase of the pilot project was commenced in August 2006 and lasted until February 2007. It was expected that the project would then be implemented as a pilot project in selected schools in various districts of the Gauteng Department of Education as from March 2007, to then be implemented throughout the province after the evaluation of the pilot project.

## **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY**

Through this study the researcher will explore and describe how a school community copes with increasing violence at school, in order to build collaboration with the community, to enhance the possibility of creating an integrated and collaborative network to create a safe space for all concerned.

### **1.3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The primary research question is: How does a school community cope with violence?

In exploring the primary research question the following secondary questions will be addressed:

- What are the feelings of the school community about violence at school?
- What are the thoughts of the school community about violence at school?
- What would the school community like to see addressed?
- How does the school community like to address the issue of violence in schools?
- What intervention programs does the community envision?
- What are the assets and resources available in the community, and how can they be mobilised?

## **1.4 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

To ensure a clear understanding of the meaning of this study, the basic terms and concepts that will be used are to be defined as follows:

### **1.4.1 COLLABORATION**

To *collaborate* is to work together on an activity or project to produce results. It involves various parties working jointly towards a common goal. Corsini (2002:184) defines collaboration as “an interpersonal relationship that combines cooperation with sensitivity to the needs of another person”. From the Community Psychology perspective collaboration involves collective action that provides an effective vehicle for those fighting for social change and improvement of the human condition (Seedat, Duncan, and Lazarus 2001) To the effect of this study, collaboration is twofold: (1) It refers to how the researcher is to collaborate with the school community in exploring how they cope with violence; and (2) it explores and investigates how the school community disseminates information and how they can mobilise the assets, resources and capacities available, in order to cope with violence.

### **1.4.2 SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

A community is a group of people living together in one place practicing common ownership, especially in the context of social values and responsibility. In the context of this study the *school community* refers to the relationship between the school system and the community system. The relationship is characterised by the constant communication network that exists, collective intelligence (Sergiovanni, 2004), and spending more time on issues of substance such as *what should we be doing to improve the safety of our schools?* With reference to Community Psychology the term school community refers to an understanding of people in

the context of their communities, how they are influenced by contextual factors and the capacity people have to influence their context (Naidoo, Duncan, Roos, Pillay and Bowman, 2007). School communities should serve as centers of values, sentiments and beliefs that provide the needed cement for uniting people in a common cause (Sergiovanni, 2004). To build a school community it is therefore important to look at it in a broader context locating the assets, skills, capacities of residents, opportunities and resources, associations and local institutions (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001; Roos & Temane, 2007) rather than isolating concepts. Roos and Temane (2007) acknowledge the unique attributes that enhance its potential to engender well-being as community competence. According to Roos and Temane (2007) community competence focuses on the value of understanding the processes, factors and dynamics involved in maintaining positive individuals and social coherence.

#### **1.4.3 COPING**

According to Van den Bos (2007) and Lazarus (in Corsini, 2002), *coping* refers to the use of cognitive and behavioural strategies to manage the demands of a situation when these are appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources or to reduce the negative emotions and conflict caused by stress. It is an effort by an individual to survive the existing or emerging problems and challenges in the short term. It is how well or effective one is able to manage ones mental capabilities as a result of increased physical or emotional pressures (Corsini, 2002). It is a process through which the individual manages the demands of person-environment relationships that are appraised as stressful along with their accompanying emotions.

#### **1.4.4 VIOLENCE**

*Violence* refers to any verbal or physical act producing pain in the recipient of that act. According to Soanes and Stevenson (2005), violence is behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage or kill someone or something. It is an unlawful exercise or exhibition of emotional or destructive force. Other forms of violence include vandalism, fighting, weapons possession, drug and alcohol use. Violence in schools could result in the establishment of a poor school environment characterized by fear, anti-social behaviour, poor learning climate and lack of trust. Recent reports indicate that acts of violence could have a

negative impact on the development of the potential of the learner to participate in society (Oosthuizen, De Waal, De Wet, Rossouw, Smit & Van Huyssteen, 2008).

#### **1.4.5 BULLYING**

*Bullying* is the most pervasive form of school violence. It occurs when purposeful acts of meanness are repeated over time in a situation where there is an imbalance of power. It can begin as early as pre-school, peaks in primary school and generally declines through high school (Burton, 2008a). Bullying is defined by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) (2008:6) as *an aggressive behaviour consisting of repeated physical, verbal or non-verbal acts displayed repeatedly over a period of time by one person against another, that are intended to inflict injury or discomfort and takes place in a relationship marked by a real or perceived imbalance of power.*

### **1.5 RESEARCH PLAN**

#### **1.5.1 LITERATURE STUDY**

In this research project a literature study will be undertaken to gather information and to make a conceptual analysis of how a community cope with violence utilising the asset based approach. The existing literature sources on community development and community participation will be studied. The literature sources will include, amongst others, textbooks, manuals, journal articles, newspaper articles, school records, school safety policy, and government policies on safety and security, regulations on safety measures, the Children's Act as well as the South African Schools Act.

#### **1.5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The researcher elected to implement an instrumental case study, to explore and describe how learners, educators and parents cope with increasing violence at school. The purpose of selecting an instrumental case was to provide greater insight into an issue of concern, namely violence in school, and plays a supportive role to facilitate our understanding of how the community copes with violence (Stake, 2000). It also complements the epistemology of this study, namely interpretivism, where the aim is to understand and make meaning of interpretations from the reality of others. From an interpretivist perspective, the typical

characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a comprehensive (holistic) understanding of how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon under study, which in this instance is violence in schools (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a).

Furthermore, for this case study principles from the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach will be applied. The reason for choosing to add features of that design is because it is interactive in nature and serves as an effective tool to find out what people are thinking or feeling about the violence in their school, and to learn about their ideas, knowledge, feelings, opinions, attitudes and self-reported behaviour (Grazianno & Rauli, 2004). The PAR approach was selected as being one of the principles of community development where a solid local knowledge base will be used for development and where local people who, for years, experienced violence within their school and, as such, have something outsiders do not have (Swanepoel, 1997).

### **1.5.2.1 Paradigm**

Paradigms act as perspectives that provide a rationale for the research and commit the researcher to particular methods of data collection, observation, and interpretation (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). To that end the interpretivist paradigm was selected, as it views a person's own perception of the world as being primary (Coolican, 2004). The interpretivist paradigm is not observing phenomena from outside the system but is inextricably bound into the human situation which is being studied (Walliman, 2001). For the purpose of this study the researcher wanted to try to get as close as possible to the participants by spending time with them (Creswell, 2005), to understand what they are saying and to get firsthand information. Coolican (2004) contends that to capture life as it is and to permit participants the greatest liberty to act as normal, research needs to be conducted in naturalistic settings. Through the application of the interpretivist paradigm the researcher laboured to understand the interpretations at a particular point in a particular context (Merriam, 2002).

### **1.5.2.2 Selection of participants**

Purposive sampling was used to draw subjects from the school community in the local township. The School Safety Coordinator was requested to select ten Grade 11 learners who

were involved in the Words over Weapon project in the previous year. Permission to have their children participate in the project was then obtained from the parents of the learner who had been thus identified. Permission was also obtained from the other participants, namely, the school principal, the educator, South African Police Service (SAPS), School Governing Body (SGB), and Community Policing Forum (CPF).

#### **1.5.2.3 Data collection**

Creswell (2003) visualises *data collection* as being a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions. This research study allowed the researcher to employ diverse methods of data collection (Stoecker, 2005), which included a focus group interview, narrative activities (such as a collage), a concept map, and a timeline technique which illustrated the recurrence of violence incidences at school. A note of observations and field notes were recorded in a reflective journal.

The data collection process was divided into two phases and the participants were divided into two groups, namely, adult participants and learner participants. The adult participants were engaged in the focus group interview, while the learner participants participated in the narrative activities.

#### **1.5.3.4 Data analysis**

The interviews were audio taped and later transcribed into print. The interview transcript validation process involved each participant being given a copy of the transcript to review and confirm if they had been heard correctly and allow them to add to the information provided. The content of the responses were analysed, to determine themes and patterns of behaviour that were prevalent in the school community members. To assist this process a system of coding was used, that involved putting tags, names or labels against pieces of data (Punch, 2005) to classify and attach meaning to the collected data. The information collected enabled me to sort, summarise and pull together themes, and to identify patterns of behaviour, record the participants' feelings and thoughts as well as an indication of what change they would like to see within their setting.

## 1.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Bryman (2004), reliability and validity are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research. In qualitative research validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of data achieved and the extent of crystallisation. In this study the researcher provided alternative criteria for judging quality in qualitative research as credibility, dependability, conformability as overriding kinds of internal validity as proposed by Seale (2000), and transferability as criteria for external validity (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). This aspect will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

## 1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the purpose of this study the code and principles of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) were strictly adhered to, specifically with regard to the norms, values and principles of ethical practice for psychotherapists and counsellors. Those principles include the principle of obtaining informed consent, the principle of anonymity and confidentiality, and the principle of the right to protection from harm, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

## 1.8 THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE IN THIS RESEARCH

The researcher's role in this study was to develop rapport and establish a relationship of trust with each participant, to encourage their participation to the maximum. To achieve that a variety of data collecting methods were employed which engaged the participants in a leisurely and interesting manner. A focus group interview and narrative activities were used to reinforce collaboration and ensure that the data generated from the activities could be verified and cross-checked. To that aim the researcher played an active part as an interviewer. To avoid ethical issues from arising out of that process the information gathered from the participants the data were collected on audiotape, which were later transcribed and verified by the participants (Stoecker, 2005).

The researcher played the role of a *mirror*, as Matentjie (2006) purports, to enable participants to reflect on what is put on paper as being a true representation of their ideas and thoughts, with the opportunity to change or add to their inputs. Further, the researcher fulfilled the role of data collector, transcriber and data analyst with regard to compiling the

findings of this study; and, lastly, the researcher also organised the venue and conducted the time management for all the meetings with the participants.

Being a familiar member of the school gave the researcher an insider-perspective and an advantage to creating the trust needed for the research process. And that familiarity supported her understanding of the circumstances and social context in which the community operates every day: though she was aware that being an insider might also pose its challenges, i.e. of being perceived as a member of the community and not as a researcher. While her insider-view also brought about a certain level of bias, the researcher believed that the quality criteria built into the research process would guide that process strongly.

## **1.9 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction and rationale**

Chapter 1 provided an outline of this research study, namely, the rationale for undertaking the study, and the general and specific aims of the research. The conceptualisation of this study and a brief outline of the research design and methodology were also presented.

### **Chapter 2: Literature review**

In Chapter 2 a review of selected literature to examine the increase in the occurrence of violence in schools is presented. The focuses of this review is on the past and current state of violence in schools and highlights efforts made in dealing with such violence. The current knowledge of the conceptual framework of the coping theory is also documented, which includes the asst-based approach as a way of dealing with violence in schools.

### **Chapter 3: Research design and methodology**

Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of the research design and the methodology employed in this study. In this chapter the method used to select the participants, the data collection and analyses methods are also clarified.

### **Chapter 4: Thematic analysis of research findings**

Chapter 4 presents a detailed thematic discussion of the findings and interpretation of the results as they relate to the research question and the application of the theoretical framework.

## **Chapter 5: Summary, recommendations and conclusion**

Chapter 5 presents the collected data in an integrated format as well as the conclusions drawn and recommendations made with regard to the research finding.

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## CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The first part of this chapter will review literature that elaborate on the current state of violence in schools, reflecting on the challenges that are faced by the learners, educators and the school community at large, and how the learning process is impacted by such violence. Another objective of the literature review is to familiarise the reader with an overview of the current and past state of violence in schools and highlight efforts already formulated and implemented, particularly within the South African context, and report on the outcome thereof. Lastly, a critical review is presented of the impact this study may have on the subject in general.

The second part of this chapter will explore literature on intervention strategies put together by various institutions, which will be evaluated from an ecosystemic perspective. The remaining part of the chapter will highlight the factors contributing to the escalation of violence in schools, explore and describe how the school community copes with that problem. The reader will be familiarised with intervention strategies currently employed nationally and internationally, as a stepping stone towards an integrative collaboration that the researcher regards as a suitable framework for this study.

### 2.2 PAST AND CURRENT STATE OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

The concept *violence* means the application of force which results in the injury or destruction of persons or property. Firstly, violence could be in the form of various physical behaviour, such as bullying, which includes hitting, kicking, spitting, slapping, hair pulling, fighting, unwanted touching. Secondly, it could be in the form of verbal aggression, such as insults, degrading, teasing, name calling, threats, passing blame, defaming, taunting, slander, victimisation and blackmail, which are non-physical displays of hostility and harassment (Oosthuizen *et al.*, 2008). Violence can also take the form of psycho-social behaviour that includes shootings, weapons, gangs, manipulation, extortion, drug and alcohol abuse, and intimidation. According to the SAHRC (2008:9) “psychological violence often consists of

repeated, unwelcome, unreciprocated and imposed action that may have a devastating effect on the victim". Recent surveys indicate that the most prevalent types of youth crime include murder, armed robbery, damage to and destruction of school property, stone throwing, name calling, knife attacks and stabbings, beating up of educators by learners, hostage taking, sexual harassment, arson, carrying of dangerous weapons, drugs and stolen cellular phones (Zulu, Urbani, Van der Merwe & Van der Walt, 2004). In some schools the use of dangerous weapons or harassment on the journey to and from school, on stairways, in hallways, in the toilets or even at the tuck shop and exit and entrance areas pose a serious problem to innocent children.

Over the past decade society has witnessed an outbreak of school violence, both in the United States (US) and in other countries. However, in the US it is reported that highly publicized school shootings are rare and victimisation of school-aged children has declined both at and away from school (Smith & Sandhu, 2004). Despite that contention, current studies reveal that, while no recent nationwide study of the real extent of youth violence is available, small scale and regional studies indicate that youth violence is on the increase – at least slightly – in the American society, with an increase in the severity of the incidents taking place on school grounds due to the large number of students who carry guns for protection, using their guns to solve disputes (Sheley, McGee & Wright, 1995). However, in other countries, such as the Netherlands, certain forms of antisocial behaviour are still reported by teachers, with minor behavioural problems appearing to be relatively common in Dutch schools. Research by the Dutch Education Department shows that 8% of secondary school students bring a weapon to school and serious bullying, which is often accompanied by physical violence, occurs in 90% of their schools (Department of Education, 2007).

Shaw (2004) reported that schools in South Africa – which is a society with historically high levels of violence – generally experience serious problems of violence, guns, and gangs. Serrao (2008) states that schools in South Africa rank the most dangerous in the world and that pupils feel unsafe in school premises. The SAHRC (2006) also found that drugs and gangs are a major problem within 66% of all schools located in high-crime areas and 10% of the assaults that take place against children occur at schools. Research done by The Human Rights Watch (2001) also confirms that in South Africa the level of school violence is extremely high and there are regular reports of serious violence, gang activity, rape and sexual assault of girls in schools.

To review the state of violence in schools in South Africa, school violence has been tracked and recorded on an ongoing basis during 2007/8 by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) in their National Schools Violence Study: statistics collected specifically on contextual school associated violence within the community and family environments reveal how bad school violence is within the country, which is characterised by varying forms of violence, such as robbery, physical assault, sexual assault, and rape (Burton, 2008b). That problem is exacerbated by the fact that many secondary schools that serve previously disadvantaged areas are still well-known for low pass rates, unsustained school attendance, dropping out due to pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse and gang activities (Christie, 1991, in Zulu *et al.*, 2004:171). However, Esteve (2000) contends that, in reality, the occasional violence in educational institutions located in economically and socially depressed areas, particularly those of big cities, reflect the social climate, the tensions and violence of those areas. That alludes to a systemic perspective showing the interrelatedness of the socioeconomic status and lifestyles of the community with the prevailing violence in communities and incidences in schools.

## **2.3 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS**

Schools face a challenge of teaching children who are distracted from learning by a variety of issues that impact on their emotional, social and cognitive well-being. It is difficult to draw conclusions as to what the causes of violence are and the secondary effect thereof: as alluded to by Ciarrochi *et al.* (2006), from the South African schools perspective, the list does not even come near to being exhaustive. These factors cover a wide range of parameters, which are ranked from most serious to least serious. Children are faced with difficulties caused by conditions of non academic factors associated with poverty, unemployment, welfare dependence, single mothers, health related problems, the absence of both parents in the home and lack of parenting skills (Clauss-Ehlers & Weist, 2004). According to the Xaba (2003), high unemployment rate, poverty and social deprivation together with the ready availability of drugs and alcohol which led to widespread substance abuse.

Academic factors include language and acculturation challenges, low achievement, and retention in grade level, behaviour problems, and poor attendance in school. These factors are interrelated and affect the quality of an individual's life in various ways.

Vogel (2002) contends that individual violent behaviour may be one of the symptoms of a disturbance in the brain mechanisms that control, initiate and suppress violent behaviour. It is also contended that uncontrolled violent behaviour is known to be one of the symptoms of structural brain damage that can be due to a lack of oxygen, head injury, viral infection or tumours (Vogel, 2002). Other factors that could contribute to aggressive behaviour and violence, as highlighted by Vogel (2002), can be attributed to corporal punishment, domestic violence, child abuse and family disintegration.

One factor may cause multiple responses. The conditions of domestic violence, child abuse and family disintegration will pre-occupy a child's attention and pose the potential to deviant behaviour: serving as an expression of the rage and helplessness experienced by the child concerned. Research also shows that parents who are stressed because of financial or other marital/personal problems tend to have poor communication with their children, to be hostile or distant and to use extreme practices in their attempt to enforce discipline. Matthews, Griggs, and Caine (1999) are also of the opinion that youth perpetrators often have family backgrounds in which they were abused, emotionally and physically neglected or removed from their primary families for some reason, or even abandoned to become street children. Stress experienced by such children, according to Vogel (2002:24), can have an effect on their behaviour, especially when the child becomes overwhelmed and overloaded with life challenges. Burton (2008b) contends that much of what occurs in schools is learnt through exposure to violence at home and outside the school environment. The combined cumulative effects of violence in schools to which many children encounter on a daily basis puts our nation's youth in dire circumstances regarding their future life.

According to Siers (2007), the use of corporal punishment in schools was banned in 1996 through the South African School's Act but, more than ten years later, research indicates that some educators are still using corporal punishment in degrading and humiliating ways, such as forcing children to hold positions for long periods of time. On the same note Van Wyk (2001) confirms that, in spite of prohibitive legislation, corporal punishment is still being applied in South Africa. Children continue to face constant exposure to violence in the hands of educators, which could be one of the reasons why there is evidence of prevailing violence in schools. Dunne, Humphreys and Leach (2003/4) reported that corporal punishment is the most widely reported form of implicit violence in schools and there are numerous studies and reports documenting its abuse worldwide. However, South Africa stood out in that the

government introduced initiatives by banning corporal punishment, to promote a school environment in which children can feel safe: prosocial methods are used for resolving conflict and staff is able to reduce reliance on power assertive control strategies (Barbarin, Richter & De Wet, 2001).

Children have different temperamental responses when under a high level of stress. The child's response to environmental stimuli can also be influenced by his personality characteristics of self-worth, learnt coping skills and the child's perception of how he or she is likely to be threatened by the stressor. The fact that there are learners who present with problems and who experience problems throughout their school life is unavoidable. Many of those learners could be said to have been socially excluded from an early age (Lovey, 2002) and most use the defence mechanisms such as denial, regression, withdrawal or impulsive acting out of their emotion (Vogel, 2002:24) to temporarily regain a sense of balance.

According to Oosthuizen *et al.* (2008), Hogan (2000) and Ferguson, Sam Miguel and Hartley (2009), there is consistent evidence that violent imagery on television, film and video and computer games have substantial short term effects on arousal, thoughts and emotions, thus increasing the likelihood of aggressive or fearful behaviour in younger children, especially boys. In the majority of households children have almost free access to all television programmes. The fact of the matter is that the mass media, especially films and television, contain high levels of violence and it is easily accessible to the children. Zwane (2008:4) reported that these days children are easily exposed unsupervised to violence from movies and games played on play stations. The imitation and modelling of aggressive behaviour can be attributed to the observed violence in the media, which may be processed as a more intense informational input which is more likely to occupy the observer's attention (Magill, 1996). Some parents believe that music and drugs have a great influence in children. Thus one may conclude that negligence, ignorance, lack of parenting skills, and poor role models in the community also play a major role in raising children who are more violent. According to Roper (2006:1), positive parenting helps children become confident, resilient, creative, competent people who are able to engage with life with enthusiasm and responsibility.

School violence is no longer a stranger in the rural public school (Netshitakame & Vollenhoven, 2002:313-318). Time and again there are media reports of assaults, violence and injuries to learners at school. For example, on 5 February 2004 The Mail and Guardian

reported on the sexual abuse and sexual harassment of learners in and around schools. On 24 May 2006 Pretoria News reported on angry school pupils rioting after an alleged rape. However, level of seriousness of reported violence is still higher in urban areas than in rural areas, and this could be associated with the fact that most schools that serve Black areas are located in disadvantaged contexts characterized by high levels of unemployment, extremes of wealth and poverty, continuing racism, the easy availability of guns and patriarchal values and behaviour. Such schools are said to be located geographically in a gang-infested area where gang involvement, violence, vandalism and crimes occur (Xaba, 2003). However, according to Matthew *et al.* (1999) the culture of violence is not exclusive to townships and informal settlements and may be due to the historic reasons already cited, such as poverty and unemployment, which help to fuel it. Matthew *et al.* (1999:15) continue to say “the inability to offer decent family life is widely offered as a key reason for violence in townships and informal settlements.” Schools located in those vicinities tend to be problematic and the communities surrounding the schools are often too disadvantaged to support quality education.

According to Kerr and Nelson (1998), socially isolated families with few resources and alternative activities for children are prone to produce violent youth. Community conditions also contribute to violence where social organizations, that is, family and community standards, disintegrate and youth are not bonded to conventional norms (Kerr & Nelson, 1998). Such environmental conditions involve lack of choice, inadequate teaching strategies, limited access to engaging materials and activities, and poorly developed routines. Thus Matthews *et al.* (1999) contend that families, schools and communities appear to be caught in a victim-perpetrator cycle, in which violence is seen as a valid means of change and conflict management. Gersten, Schiller and Vaughn (2000:139) define such contexts as “deficient contexts and must be supported first in order to reduce problem behaviour”.

## 2.4 THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

According to Zwane (2008:4), “a school is a place where children are geared up for the world with all its challenges. It has always been developed to be a place of safety, away from all the brutality of the world, and a safe haven for kids suffering from various forms of abuse.” Parents send their children to school in the hope of securing quality education for them in a safe and secure environment (Zulu *et al.*, 2004). To the contrary, learners are turning that

haven into a nightmare, where school violence impacts negatively on the morale of all the stakeholders: it also impacts on the teaching and learning spirit. According to Ngcongo (in Zulu *et al.*, 2004:170-175), violence affects learner-learner, educator-educator and learner-educator relationships. As a result lack of trust, insecurity, hatred, lack of discipline and poor performance become unavoidable. Positive expectations, in the form of good results, have not been met in a number of schools in South Africa during the last decades (Zulu *et al.* 2004). Hence most of the previously disadvantaged schools are still regarded as under-performing, revealing low pass rates, unsustained school attendance, dropping-out due to pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse and gangsterism (Christie, 1991, in Zulu *et al.*, 2004:170-175).

The consequences of the violent or aggressive behaviours may be physical danger to self and others as well as limited educational or employment opportunities, rejection by members of the community, social isolation and separation from family (Gersten *et al.*, 2000). The quality of life, natural and man-made environments, physical, social and mental well-being is undermined by all sorts of injuries, antisocial behaviours and violence (Pilon, 2009). McIntyre (2000) identifies multiple factors that contribute to and/or inhibit healthy individual and community development and suggests that violence can have a negative impact on, among other things, a child's education, health, emotional well-being, sense of self, and the ability to communicate with others. Barbarin *et al.* (2001) allude that exposure to violence has psychological effects on children and symptoms that could be observed include loneliness, sadness, and loss of desire for amusement, daydreaming, inattention, disrupted sleep, nightmares, easy perturbation, intrusive disturbing imagery, separation anxiety and fear of death.

## 2.5 INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

The above-mentioned factors should carry enough weight to alarm the various stakeholders to establish initiatives that could be instrumental toward addressing the problem of violence in schools. Literature reveals that various institutions and organisations have implemented various intervention strategies. It is a commonly understood factor that intervention for learners confronted with challenging circumstances can be successful if started at an early age (Lovey, 2002). It is therefore crucial that intervention be instituted when the child is still in his/her childhood years.

Zwane (2004:4) believes that violence in schools can be reduced only if learner population inside the classroom is smaller, to enable educators to be more ‘hands on’ with learners and teach them life values, such as tolerance. Zwane further promotes the idea that teachers need to create and maintain good relations between themselves and their learners, to be able to assess and identify the current challenges the children are going through in their lives, to provide the necessary intervention and support the child’s needs.

Schools are entrusted with ensuring the safety of all learners, educators and parents. To ensure safety for all, the researcher deems it proper for the schools to have Emergency Management Plans (EMP) in place, as proposed in the cited article (undated) (<http://www.schoolsafetypartners.org/cr2009/LLis/School-EPlanning.pdf>).

The emergency plan should be embedded in the school policy and code of conduct, and should account for possible hazards that could impact the school and should incorporate the prevention, preparedness, and response, recovery and mitigation phases of emergency management. To maintain sustainability of law and order, a school audit should be conducted frequently to determine any signs of violence on the school premises. The school management team and the educators must walk around the school premises, especially through unsafe areas to protect learners as well as the valuable treasures of the school, which includes the sports fields, furniture, and the physical structure of the school. According to the South African Schools Act (1996), Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) (2006) the school must be declared a Zero Tolerance Zone, which must be emphasised by the principal and the staff.

The following are some of the strategies implemented to deal with violence in schools in South Africa, namely, policy and legislative mandates, local and international interventions: which are discussed below:

### **2.5.1 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE MANDATES**

Section 28(2) of the Constitution of South Africa makes provision for the education and safety of children to be considered as being of paramount importance. The approach of the Department of Education to safety in schools evolved from 1999, when the Tirisano Plan was

introduced, as a measure to enhance a fully functioning education and training system (Joubert, 2007). That plan was followed by the Safe Schools Project in 2000 and, subsequently, the Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools, which were published in the Government Gazette No. 22754 of October 2001. The amendment Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools followed that on 10 November 2006. Furthermore, in an effort to prevent violence many schools have instituted policies that include the use of metal detectors, security guards, surveillance cameras, dress codes, “zero tolerance” policies that result in suspension or expulsion for certain classes of aggressive or threatening behaviour (Smith & Sandhu, 2004).

The Safety Schools Project focussed on the development of policies on safety in schools, the management of drugs and drug abuse, and harassment policy (Joubert, 2007). Subsequent pilot projects were introduced as ‘Hlayiseka’ and ‘Words over Weapons’. That progression reflects efforts put by the department of Education in addressing the issue of violence in schools within South Africa. One may ask if policy mandates are implemented – taking the increase in school violence after all those efforts into consideration. It would seem there is a gap in the efforts demonstrated by the authorities because various strategies have been employed by every incoming Minister of Education – but only as pilot projects which were never implemented in all the schools, with a new strategy being introduced every time there was an alarm about violence in schools. Prinsloo (2005) cites the following national legislation, which fulfils its constitutional duty in ensuring a safe environment in all schools:

- (a) The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA) states the preamble that:
  - All schools are declared drug free and dangerous objects free zone;
  - The principal may take steps as he/she may consider necessary for the safeguarding of the public school premises, as well as the protection of the people therein;
  - Strict access control of school premises should be in place: and
  - Action plans ought to be in place to address violence and secure safe schools.
  - Schools should draw up and effectively implement progressive codes of conduct for learners within the framework of existing policy guidelines.
- (b) The Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993, which ensures a safe and healthy work environment, with certain provisions of the act applicable to schools.

- (c) Children's Act, No 38 of 2005 which protect the rights of every child, as defined in the Constitution. The provision of this Act and those of the Domestic Violence Act, 1998 (Act 116 of 1998) place legal obligation on teachers to report any form of maltreatment, neglect, abuse, degradation of children to the social welfare or police (Prinsloo, 2005).
- (d) The Road Safety Act 29 of 1989, which ensures that learners are transported safely.

The former Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, also took heed to recently launch Youth Pledge Against Crime and Violence in schools (Nkomo, Weber & Malada, 2007), as a form of support towards the elimination of violence in schools. The SAHRC (2006) propagates certain fundamental rights, which the state has the duty to respect and fulfil, and those rights are enshrined in the Constitution. The Constitution grants every child the right to grow up in a home free from violence and conflict. However, those rights have the potential of being infringed upon by the perpetuation of school based violence (GDE District Memorandum No 296, of 2008). Children experience violence and conflict which permeates all levels of the society as well as threats to public safety from criminality and economically motivated violence, which continue to dominate public discourse (Barbarin *et al.*, 2001). Du Plessis (2008) acknowledges that the Bill of Rights contains provisions to protect the rights of both learners to learn and educators to teach in a safe environment, free from all forms of violence.

In contrary, children experience violence and conflict which permeates all levels of society. The SAHRC is deeply concerned about the high level of violence and conflict and strives to promote a human rights culture. In the South African Schools Act (SASA) Act 84 Of 1996, and the Regulation for Safety Measures at Public Schools (2001) dangerous weapons and objects are prohibited from being on the public school premises.

It is expected of school authorities to deliver crime prevention and safety activities, where educators and principals, in addition to their expositing workload, now have to assume responsibility for other non-academic activities (Bouwer, 2006). Ciarrochi *et al.* (2006) believes that being educated involves being knowledgeable, responsible and caring, non-violent and drug-free, and one's intellectual skills must be supplemented by emotional and life skills, to enhance a healthy lifestyle. That will mean that if the school community is not wholly supported, educators are susceptible to increased stress levels, which will impact on

their ability to perform well in the classroom. This necessitates the involvement and engagement of external stakeholders in understanding the situation (Carr, 2004). That is supported and reinforced by international organizations, such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and Non-Governmental organization facilitated by the Nelson Mandela Children's fund (Mbambo, 2006), by placing issues of children's rights onto local government agenda plans.

### **2.5.2 LOCAL INTERVENTIONS**

Although alternative intervention strategies have been tried and tested, the researcher had always wondered what the opinions of the communities experiencing the problems might be. More often than not the people on the ground level are not given a chance to voice their ideas, feelings, thoughts and knowledge as to what can be done to eradicate the problem of violence in schools. Zwane (2008:4) strongly believes that the gravity of the problem of violence and safety in schools warrants a mass mobilisation of school safety communities and a well coordinated collaborative action. Burton (2008a) is also of the opinion that school violence requires a framework for interventions that cuts across sectors and conventional school based stakeholders.

Promoting the involvement of other agents in school life is another intervention option that is currently being pursued. Educators and principals are not experts in violence or crime prevention, and their ability to implement safety and security measures will require support from external sources. In South Africa, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) is one example of the non-governmental organisation established in 2005 by the Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA) to develop prevention strategies for violence in schools. The CJCP developed a project called 'Hlayiseka Early Warning System' with the intention of assisting schools and communities to join hands in the fight against school-based crime and violence. *Hlayiseka* is a Tsonga name meaning "Be safe". The organisation aims at developing, informing and promoting innovative evidence based crime prevention strategies targeting groups identified as being vulnerable or offending (CJCP, 2006). Educators were trained to use the tool-kit in identifying trends of violence to enable them to proactively prevent future violent occurrences (Zwane, 2008:4). The project is rolled out to several schools in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and now in Gauteng provinces in collaboration with the Department of Education. That system is recommended for schools that have no security system in place and staff that do not have the expertise to deal with violent situations: it

provides the school authorities with guidelines on how to establish, implement, record, and evaluate information and how to address any short falls.

The Department of Education, Tshwane South District has established a partnership with the South African Police Service (SAPS) youth desk and Community Policing Forum (CPF) as a measure to deal with issues of drug abuse and violence in schools. Every school was allocated a representative in an ‘adopt-a-cop’ initiative, which included representative from the CPF, to work collaboratively as a crime prevention strategy. Each school is expected to launch a school safety project, establish a safety team that comprises of the principal, educators, learners and a volunteer parent from the neighbouring community. Such action encourages the involvement and engagement of external stakeholders in understanding the situation (Carr, 2004).

Some schools in the Tshwane South District are involving youth workers, who work in less formal ways in school life and often make a difference to e.g. learners’ self concept and attitude towards learning (Lovey, 2002). The ‘Words over Weapons’ Programme is an example of the initiatives implemented to combat crime and violence in schools, particularly in local townships. That programme is aimed at equipping learners with alternatives to the violence and conflict in their lives. It is aimed at enhancing conflict management skills; provide alternatives to violence, and interpersonal skills development. However, that programme was at the stage of being implemented with interactive exchange of resources between various institutions and organizations through e-Learning. The principal, educators, learners, parents of the school under study were also involved in the project, with the aim of making their school a safe place for all. Although this strategy was one of the attempts to grapple with the provision of an integrated approach to addressing and preventing school violence, it would seem the project was cancelled due to financial constraints. The schools that were involved, including the school under study, lost contact with the management of the project.

The literature review revealed other local partnerships between Department of Education, Department of Community Safety and the South African Police Service (SAPS) youth desk from the Community Policing Forum (CPF) to deal with issues of drug abuse and violence in schools (Zwane, 2008:4). The Gauteng National Association of School Governing Bodies (NASGB) has also acknowledged the effort of the GDE and deployed general assistants who

have been assigned to deal with security matters in local schools, although they are not trained to perform this duty.

### **2.5.3 INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS**

Violence has turned to be part of the human experience, with its impact being felt in various forms in all parts of the world. Violence in schools in America is regarded as a social problem that concerns the greater population (Lassiter & Perry, 2009). As long as there has been violence, there have also been systems which have been put in place to prevent or to reduce it. According to Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi and Lozano (2002) attempts to deal with violence in schools have been made around the world, from small-scale individual and community efforts to national policy and legislative initiatives. Oleweus and Limber (2002) also introduced a bullying prevention programme, which targets students in elementary and middle school. That programme prompts school personnel to create an environment within their school that is characterised by warmth and involvement, provides firm limits on unacceptable behaviour, consistently applies non-hostile consequences to violations of rules, and allows adults to act as both authority figures and role models. Such intervention strategy promotes a school climate where students feel connected to the school and supported by their teachers and other school staff (Krug *et al.*, 2002).

Other intervention strategies involve the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, which was launched and presented to the United Nations General Assembly on 11 October 2006, in New York, with the aim of ending all forms of violence against children. Furthermore the International Policy Conference on the African Child, which was hosted by the African Child Policy Forum, in Addis Ababa, in May 2006, also notes international initiatives that were implemented there. The conference was subtitled “Violence against Girls in Africa” but looked more generally at violence against African children (Bower, 2006:8). The Conference resulted in a declaration in which helping children to develop in a way that enables them to advocate on their own behalf was mentioned as one of the strategies to combat violence against children.

Other recommendations for classroom based approaches include the prohibition of corporal punishment and other humiliating forms of punishment, while requiring a focus on the skills the teacher brings to the classroom and the kinds of school wide support available to assist

with challenging and aggressive behaviour in the classroom (Conoley & Goldstein, 2004). That implies that teachers need to understand how to derive possible meanings from observable behaviour, and attempt to understand behavioural and emotional consequences of various life events or circumstances present within a child's background (Conoley & Goldstein, 2004). Furthermore, those skills must be applied within a classroom environment created by a caring, nurturing and respectful teacher.

In 2004, comprehensive strategies to prevent sexual violence were also developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and intervention activities were classified according to primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

- Primary Prevention refers to activities that take place before sexual violence has occurred to prevent initial perpetration or victimization.
- Secondary Prevention refers to immediate responses after the sexual violence has occurred to deal with the short term consequences of violence.
- Tertiary Prevention refers to long term responses after sexual violence has occurred to deal with the lasting consequences of violence and sex offender treatment interventions.

## **2.6. COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS**

For children to develop optimally, society needs to provide the necessary support to them and their parents (Roper, 2006:5). Corsini (2002) defines collaboration as an interpersonal relationship that combines cooperation with sensitivity to the needs of another person. Several studies have investigated the role of general social support as a protective factor for youths who have experienced violence, with mixed findings which are contextualised. In his report, Burton (2008b) identifies the school as being micro societies – comprising learners, teachers, principals, school management teams, School Governing Bodies and parents or caregivers – that should endeavour to combine their efforts and act a coherent unit in order to reduce and eradicate violence at schools. In research conducted by Berman, Kurtines, Silverman and Serafini (1996) it was found that adolescents who perceived greater social support from peers and adults reported fewer post traumatic stress disorders. However, Roper (2006) contends that if parents leave their distressed children to cry, opportunities for learning about and managing feelings remain unknown to them and their capacity to manage them is compromised. Thus low family support is associated with an increase in anxiety

symptoms over time (Ozer & Weinstein, 2004). When parents show children continued respect and sensitivity throughout their childhood, their self-respect and confidence grow and they learn to respect and care about other people.

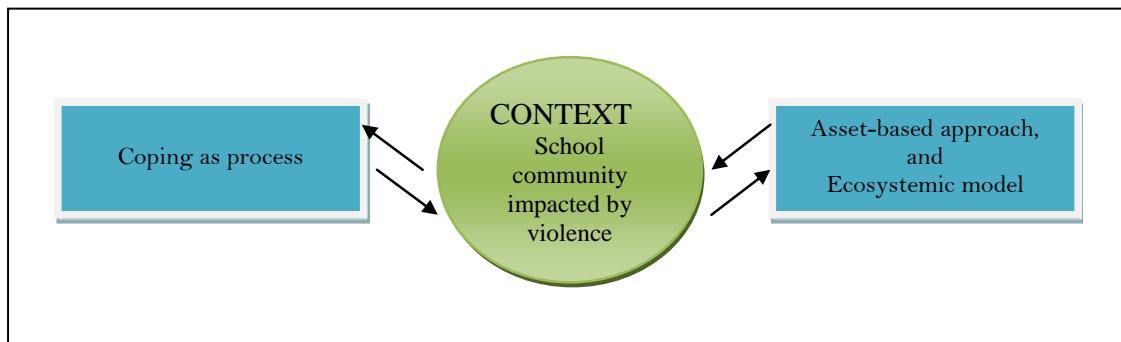
Safety and security do not just happen: they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. Morrison (2007) contends that the focus needs to be shifted from a range of responsive practices that restore relationships to a responsive framework that regulates the implementation, development and sustainability of the restorative practices in schools. Thus parents and educators ought to work together because they have a common responsibility to prepare children physically, mentally, spiritually, morally and culturally for adult life (Seemise, 2001). When the school community works collaboratively in trying to effectively manage the behaviour of children they have a common ground from which to work. Collaboration involves various parties working jointly towards the common goal. Engelbrecht and Green (2001) contend that a community-based support would require that intersectoral collaboration be pursued as a priority. Furthermore, they acknowledge that mechanisms for coordinated partnerships and teamwork have to be put in place to bring together as many resources, perspectives and types of experience as possible to enhance safety at school. That notion is supported by Schwartz (1996) when he says that the collaborative efforts of religious and recreational organisations, social services, public housing, health agencies, the business community, the schools and law enforcement agencies can be put together on an activity or project to produce results.

For the purpose of this study this researcher views *collaboration* as the process of collective activity where a group of people act together and plan to collaborate with a group of people who have mutual interest, sentiments or concern with regard to the safety of learners at school. It was her aim to generate an awareness of the school community experiences of violence within their environment, while exploring and investigating the coping mechanisms employed. Further, an awareness of the school community assets, resources and capacities available would be created, along with a generation of ideas on how they may be used to cope with the escalating violence. Thus, through vigilant coping strategies, effective efforts to abort unacceptable behaviour through collaborative efforts may be realised.

## 2.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the available literature the researcher considers the challenge of violence in schools within the South African context as being a matter of concern, taking into consideration the reflection of the moral decline amongst the youth as revealed in literature review. For this study the community selected for this research provided the necessary background on their experiences of violence which might serve as a strategy as to how they could cope with it. As community members experience the impact and effects of violence on a primary level, Ferreira (2006) contends that they are the people that need to address the related challenges in their own unique manner and in such a way that responses fit into their unique context and daily lives. This study therefore presents an integrated conceptual framework that contextualises experiences of violence by the school community and highlights how collective intercollaborative action processes within the school community might advance the coping process to enhance safety at a school. Figure 2.1 represents the conceptual framework, which is followed by a discussion of the framework.

**FIGURE 2.1: An Integrated Conceptual Framework**



### 2.7.1 DISCUSSION OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The integrated framework was developed from combining the theory on coping as an intervention strategy to increase an individual's effectiveness in appraising the demands of life, an asset based approach, and the ecosystemic model. The aim of applying an integrated approach was to help the school community members to gain awareness of their context and intentionally focus on the prevailing assets, create a sense of immediacy, ownership and intrinsic responsibility (Ebersöhn & Elof, 2003).

The literature contrasts between two approaches to coping:

- 1). According to Van den Bos (2007), Lazarus (in Corsini, 2002) and Lazarus and Folkman, (1984) coping refers to the use of cognitive and behavioural strategies to manage the demands of a situation. Lazarus (1993), terms that approach as a *coping style*. He regards a coping style as a characteristic of personality, valuing strategies that reduce tension as effective coping strategies. It would seem that approach is psychoanalytical in nature, in that it considers personal attributes and denotes defence mechanisms which could be healthier or less regressed than others, presumably as a result of stress or trauma.
- 2). Another approach is referred to as *coping process*. Coping as a process refers more to a systemic perspective which provides for the critical developmental influence of the factors contributing to violence over a period of time (Du Plessis, 2008). Lazarus (1993) regards it as efforts to manage stress that change over time and are shaped by the adaptational context out of which it is generated. The advantage of coping as process is that coping thought and actions under stress can be measured independently, to determine whether they are good or bad, and enable the community to redefine their efforts. Another advantage of the coping process approach is that the community will be able to address the immediate concerns that they experience within their daily lives, rather than focusing attention to the overall issue of violence once it has spread.

The focus of this study will shift away from the hierarchical style of coping, to coping as a process, as that approach assumes change cannot be related to time (Ferreira, 2006). Rather, the process coping will be focused upon, as it unfolds what a person actually thinks or does and changes as one's thoughts and actions as the situation unfolds (Lazarus, 1993). This process is influenced by available resources within a community for coping, such as skills, abilities, social resources, physical resources, and psychological resources, cultural, political and institutional agencies (Eckenode, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The coping process is thus influenced by the availability of assets, such as external environmental factors, an individual's capacity to cope and the ecosystemic model which represents the interrelatedness and interdependence of various systems to explain how resources, capacities and opportunities within the context can be mobilised to deal with the violence at a school. Those are the major areas from which people can draw to enhance their coping processes.

In conceptualising the asset-based approach Ebersohn and Eloff (2006a) acknowledge the assumption underpinning the coping theory that people are equipped to address life challenges and develop life solutions by accessing certain processes to facilitate coping. In any given context there are assets, capacities, resources, and opportunities – which includes those that are acknowledged and those that are not yet acknowledged (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006a). The researcher suggests that the school community should mobilise their existing assets and strengths inherent within the community members, as well as on the existing contextual assets and resources that might be of assistance to enhance school safety. Applying the asset-based approach will empower the school community members to shift away from a mentality of professional dominance to one in which collaboration, dynamic partnerships and participation are emphasised and practiced (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006b).

The benefits of using the asset based approach in this research might assist in identifying internal capacities, mobilise community resources, establish networking and links through a collaborative interaction between the school and the community, and promote advocacy and information sharing (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2006b) as a way of enhancing the coping process. Through an integrated approach the relationship between the assets and existing institutions may be highlighted to enhance the process of coping. The aspects of *coping thoughts* and *actions under stress* could then be measured separately from their outcomes, to independently examine their adaptiveness or maladaptiveness. Those measurements could also be reused over a period of time and across diverse stressful encounters. That action might be useful to the school management and/or school community to examine both consistencies and inconsistencies in the way individuals cope over time and across stressful encounters. The adaptiveness or maladaptiveness of the school community members could then be evaluated in relation to their context, their morale, social functioning or somatic health (Lazarus, 1993).

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

A review of the literature related to this study was presented in Chapter 2. The literature reviewed provided the theoretical background that supported the conceptual framework applied in relation to this study. A summary is presented of the way in which an integration of process oriented coping theory, the asset-based approach and ecosystemic approach could be integrated and used as a vehicle to enhance safety in schools. The literature revealed that

communities are responsible for their well-being and, as such, they are obliged to be proactive in dealing with challenges within their community.

Chapter 3 presents the methods to be applied in exploring how a community copes with violence in their school.

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## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter three the research design and methodology will be discussed, exploring various stakeholders' experience of increasing violence in schools. Data collection, analysis techniques and interpretation procedures used in realising the objectives of this study will also be discussed so as to create a good understanding of the research.

#### 3.2 PARADIGM

Creswell (2005) describes a research paradigm as a basic set of beliefs that guide the action of the researcher. Researchers use various epistemological perspectives in addressing how they know what they know and how the perceptions, ideas and knowledge that they have constructed are related to the reality to which they refer. For the purpose of this study the researcher followed the interpretive research paradigm, since this deals with understanding and describing what the participants make of incidents in their particular circumstances. Terre Blanche and Kelly (2004) view interpretive researchers as wishing to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations or phenomena as they occur in the real world.

The researcher chose to use the interpretivist approach because it depends on first-hand information and aims at understanding and interpreting meanings and intentions that underlie everyday human actions. Cohen *et al.* (2002) also contend that interpretivism is characterized by a concern for the individual and its central endeavour to understand the subjective world of human experience. Within the interpretive paradigm, phenomena and events are understood through mental processes of interpretation which are influenced by and interact with the social context. The epistemological stance in this research regarding the way the community copes with violence is therefore conducted through an interpretative approach. The researcher aimed at understanding the participants in terms of their own definitions, meanings and perceptions of their experience of violence at school and how they cope with it.

The nature of interpretivism is to preserve the original voice of the participants. Working with and within a school community also led me to consider the principles of Participation Action Research (PAR) as a technique to make the community members aware of the usefulness of the research project, to help them confront their issues directly and to involve them in the decision-making process for their well-being. Applying the PAR principles also helped the researcher in achieving an understanding of the nature of the participants' realities. Another advantage of adding features of this design is that it is interactive in nature and serves as an effective tool to find out what people are thinking or feeling about violence in their schools (Grazianno & Rauli, 2004). This correlates with PAR and its aim to produce knowledge in an active partnership with those affected by that knowledge, and for the purpose of improving their social, educational and material conditions (Bhana, in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). PAR promotes the involvement of all the role-players in a decision-making process (Strydom (2005), implementing programs and sharing in benefits. Although Babbie and Mouton (2001) defines PAR as a research paradigm where the researcher's function is to empower the participants to act effectively in their own interest The community members were introduced to the usefulness of the research project to allow them an opportunity to interact with their experiences of violence in their school community, and to directly involve them in the decision-making process. Babbie & Mouton (2001) further accentuates that PAR gives the community access to information with power: something denied them in the past. In my interaction with them, information was shared from various stakeholders, with various perceptions provided.

The researcher integrated intepretivism and PAR principles are also selected as one of the approaches of community development where a solid, local knowledge base will be used for development, and where local people who, for years, experienced violence in school have something outsiders do not (Swanepoel, 1997). Participation is a broad term meaning different things to different people. It can refer to people's involvement in a decision-making process, implementing programmes, sharing in benefits of development and involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes (Kumar, 2002). Paul (1989) defines community participation as an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance, or other values they cherish. This is possible only if the people are involved and not enforced, because development can only take place with the preparedness of local people, if they desire to possess the development plans and are

permitted to make their own physical and economic input in implementing them (Kotze, 1997). Figure 3.1 below highlights some of the characteristic values of PAR:

**FIGURE 3.1: Characteristic Values of PAR**

	<b>Principles of PAR</b>	<b>Application in my study</b>
<b>Values</b>	Promotes balance between self-determination and distributive justice. High degree of concern for well being of individuals and communities.	I looked into the community values and measures that are taken to uphold these values.
<b>Assumptions</b>	Promotes grounded knowledge through collaborative relationships which emphasises mutuality, obligations and the removal of oppression.	Through concept and asset mapping by the participants, the knowledge base of the participants has been enhanced and this might stimulate ideas to create safe schools.
<b>Practices</b>	Problems defined in terms of interpersonal and social oppression. Interventions seek to change individuals as well as the social system.	In my interaction with the participants the researcher tried to know <i>with</i> them rather than about them, to foster knowledge and to encourage egalitarian relationships as a way of reducing the tensions that create barriers between people.
<b>Benefits</b>	Promote sense of community and empowerment of every member of a school community.	In my data collection process the researcher involved some of the school community members to conduct the collage and lifeline activities. The researcher also trained the research assistant on basic interviewing skills

(Adapted from Bhana in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002:229)

Although the researcher acknowledges that the voices, experiences and perceptions of the participants were socially constructed, there were limitations that presented themselves in applying the PAR principles during the research process. For instance, some contradictory statements arose from the perceptions of the participants, reflecting some differences of power sharing among the participants as they belonged to different categories in their occupations. Realising the differences amongst the participants alerted me to some bias and subjectivity that might be created, and the possibility of making it difficult for the researcher to be objective in analyzing data. As a researcher and participant observer, the researcher had an opportunity to see things that may routinely have escaped awareness among the participants. The researcher had to encourage the participants to elaborate on their opinions by asking probing back-up questions, and giving others a chance to add their input to support or oppose the speaker, in a non-threatening manner. Other practical challenges posed by the PAR model included the involvement of and sincere commitment of the participants to

assume total ownership of the research process. Guidance from the researcher, based on ethical principles, was applied to enhance participation.

### 3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

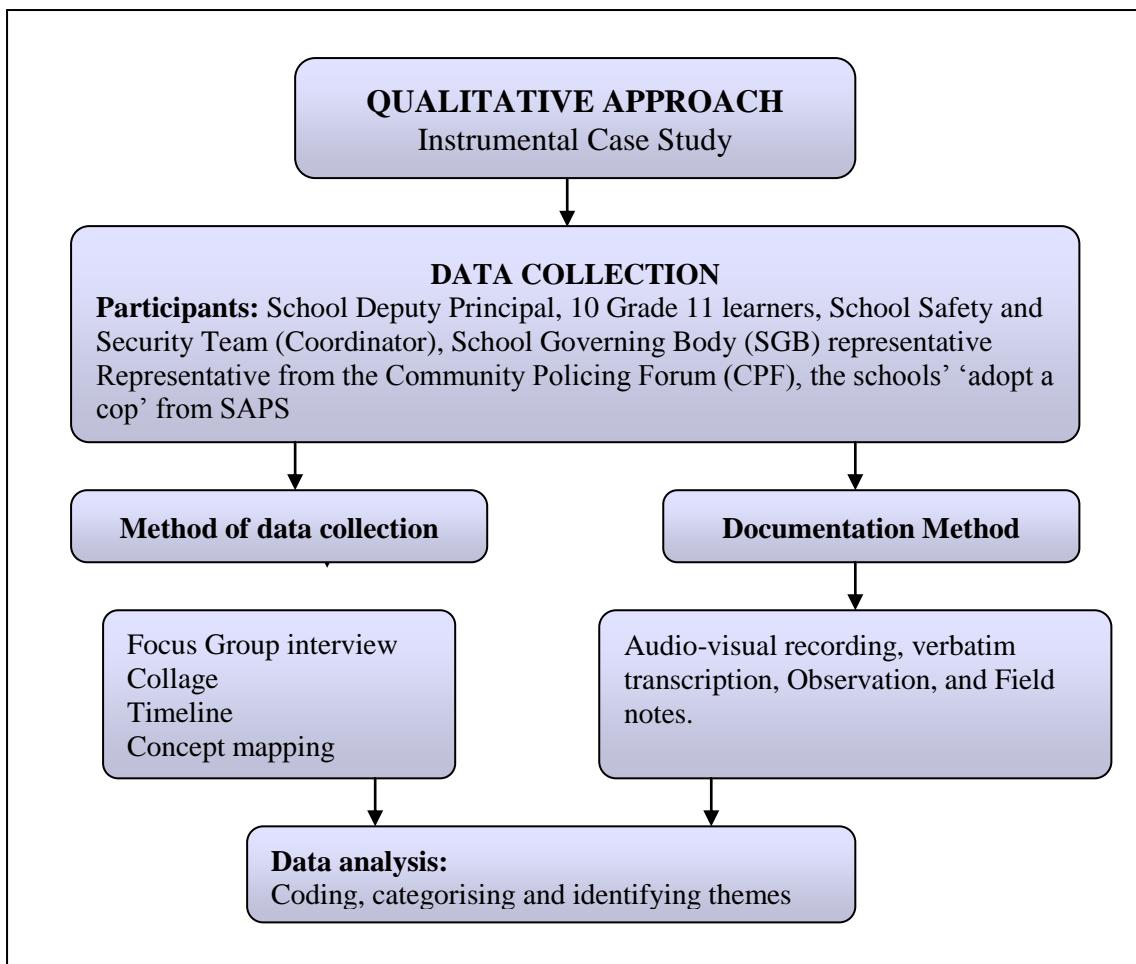
A research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. The researcher selected undertaking an instrumental case study to explore and describe how learners, educators and parents cope with an increasing violence at school. The case study is described as a process and product of an inquiry (Stake, 2000), and is a detailed study of a single unit that aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, whilst recognizing its complexity and its context (Punch, 2005). The purpose of selecting an instrumental case is to provide greater insight into an issue of concern, namely, violence in schools. Furthermore a case study design strives towards a comprehensive, holistic understanding of how participants relate to and interact with each other in a specific situation, and how they make meaning of the phenomenon under study, in this case violence in schools (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a). The case study complements the epistemology of this study, namely interpretivism, where the aim is to understand and make meaning of interpretations from the reality of others.

Another advantage of this design is that it allows multiple sources of data collection methods in a naturalistic setting, and allows for a multiple-perspective analysis in which the researcher considers not just the voice of the other relevant groups of actors, such as the stakeholders of the WOW-project, but opens the possibility of giving a voice to the educators, parents, principal, community leaders, churches, police force, social workers and even the powerless and voiceless, in particular the learners (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a). Figure 3.2 provides a summary of the research process that includes the approach, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, as well as methods used to document data. The various aspects of this process will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The instrumental case study does have its limitations, a common criticism being its generalisability. The research findings cannot be automatically generalised because they are based on a single case. Strydom (2005) contends that the narrow focus on only one community prevents the researcher from generalising research findings to other ones. The unit, for example in this study the school community, is thus studied in its own right and for

its unique importance, and not as a sample (Payne & Payne, 2004), therefore the results cannot necessarily be generalised to other situations. However, generalisation is not the aim of this study, but rather transferability. Furthermore, the researcher takes many subjective decisions and seeks objectivity in analyzing results, and the findings cannot always be readily made available (Berg, 2001).

**FIGURE 3.2: The Research Process**



### 3.4 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Selecting participants in a study is an important feature of research as it may affect the outcome. To ensure that there is a correlation between the purpose of the study and the participants the researcher engaged herself in school safety activities and attended workshops organised by the Department of Education to establish a network with schools experiencing violence. The researcher thus employed purposive sampling to draw subjects from the community population of a school in the local township. In purposive sampling the sample is

selected on the grounds of existing knowledge of the participants and the researcher's purposeful choice of them. The reason for the researchers' selection of these participants was that the researcher had been the safety coordinator in a neighbouring school for which she was working, and she had established a good working relationship and easy access to this particular school, its learners and their parents. According to Strydom (2005), the ideal research field has a number of advantages, namely that it is easily accessible: cooperation with participants can easily be achieved: the researcher can move about freely: and the required information can easily be obtained. Another factor that motivated the researcher to the selection of the school was its good reputation with grade 12 results over the previous five years, despite its having been exposed to the influence of violence in some way.

The school community from which the participants were drawn was also involved with the *Words over Weapons* (WOW) pilot project, in which the researcher had established rapport with the personnel facilitating the project. Strydom (2005) contends that the quality of data is enhanced if good relationships can be maintained with all the members of the community throughout the project. The researcher had established a relationship with the district official who was coordinating the programme in 2007, and with whom she interacted during the workshops organised by the Department of Education (DoE). Further interactions with her were unfortunately terminated due to her becoming ill. However, the researcher established a good rapport with the deputy principal, an educator coordinating the school safety project, selected Grade 11 learners who took part in the WOW programme in 2008, one School Governing Body (SGB) representative, one WOW project facilitator, who served as the research assistant, one representative from the Community Policing Forum (CPF), and the schools' 'adopt a cop' from South African Police Services (SAPS).

An educator was assigned to select learners to take part in the study. Those who were in grade 11 and had taken part in the school safety project the previous year were given preference. They consisted of learners from the ages of 16 to 18. Parents gave consent for their children to participate and the school allocated the researcher time to conduct the study without interrupting learners in their daily lessons. A descriptive outline of the participants follows:

**TABLE 3.1: A Description of the Participants**

Participant A	Participant A is a 45 year-old female and serves as the deputy principal of the school. She represented the School Management Team.
Participant B	Participant B is a 48 year-old male. He has been coordinating the School Safety Project at school for 10 years and has 22 years teaching experience. He was selected to share his experiences in his capacity and from the background of his interaction with other schools and communities in addressing violence in schools.
Participant C	Participant C is a 38 year-old male serving as member of the SGB for the past 4 years. Represented the voice of the parent body of the school.
Participant D	Participant D is a 38 year old male working for the SAPS. Served as an Adopt-a-Cop serving the school to address violence in school.
Participant E	Participant E is a 40 year old male who is a member of the CPF. The CPF work with the police, schools, parents, social workers and the community as a whole.
Learner participants	The learner participant is inclusive of a group of five girls and five boys from grade 11 class. Their ages range from 16 to 18 and have been learners in the school for 4 years. They have shown to be actively involved in assisting the school in addressing violence through their participation in school activities.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

Creswell (2003) visualizes data collection as a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering relevant information for answering emerging research questions. This research allows me to employ diverse methods of data collection (Stoecker, 2005) as proposed by the PAR model (Strydom, 2005). Methodological crystallisation was employed in order to gain a good understanding of how the participants made meaning of their experiences. To be able to identify with the participants empathetically, the researcher assumed the role of participant observer (Cohen *et al.*, 2002) and established a relationship based on trust with the participants. The following is a description of methods used to gather data:

#### **3.5.1 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW**

A focus group is used when a small selected group of eight-to-twelve members is drawn together to apply their knowledge, experience and expertise to a specific problem (Greer, 2005). The interviewees selected are known to have been involved in a school safety project and were asked about their experiences (Bryman, 2004). The researcher chose to use the focus group because it offered the researcher an opportunity to study the ways in which individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meaning around it

(Bryman, 2004). During the focus group discussion, probing was used to further explore and understand the context of the school community.

The focus group also gave me an opportunity to elicit perceptions, feelings, attitudes and ideals of the participants (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, in Mguni, 2007) regarding violence in schools. Participants were free to share different point of views, and through their interactions a large amount of data were produced. The advantage of a focus group interview is that it allows greater depth of information (Cohen *et al.*, 2002) and has a higher response rate than other methods of data collection. The depth of information gathered during the focus group discussion confirmed the former statement and this influenced me not to involve the adults in the narrative activities. Another advantage of using the focus group discussion is that it helped me in understanding the opinions of the participants, as the researcher obtained firsthand information.

Although it was convenient to use the focus group, the challenges of bringing people together and time constraints were experienced. The researcher faces the challenges of establishing rapport, coping with unexpected participant behaviour and handling emotional outbursts (Creswell, 2005) when using qualitative interviews. The researcher was on the alert for such projections and employed probing skills to obtain the maximum amount of data and to verify that what the researcher had heard was actually what the participant meant (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a). The researcher conducted the interviews alone and the research assistant helped with taking photographs. Cohen *et al.* (2002) also believe that the focus group interview, as a research technique, is prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer. Therefore, a journal was kept to record and help me reflect on the details of observations and the choices the researcher made throughout the research process. The researcher also used a “member check” technique to enhance the validity of the study (Merriam, 1998:173) that is, sending the transcription of the interviews to the interviewees so that they could check my understanding of what had been discussed.

### **3.5.2 NARRATIVE ACTIVITIES**

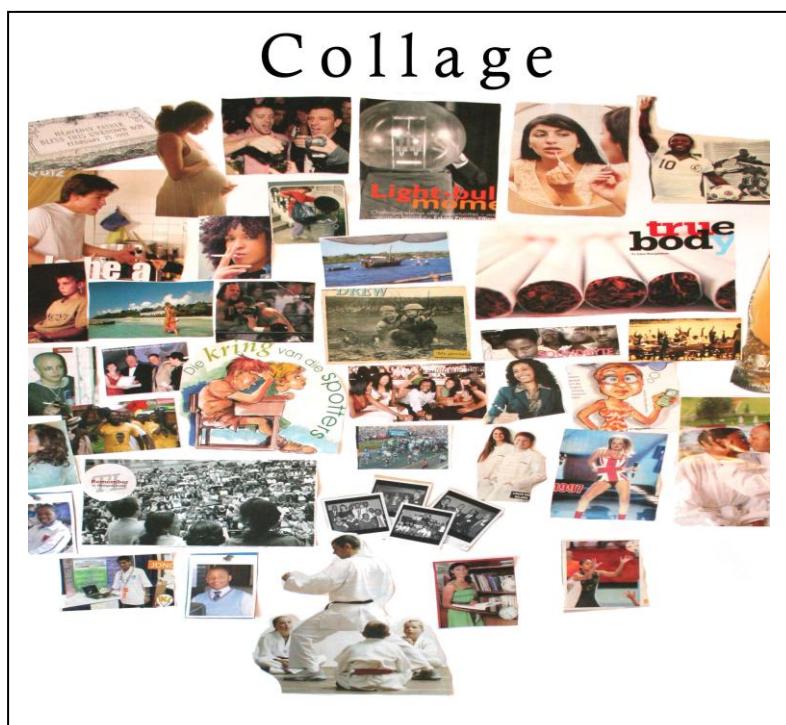
The collage, timeline and concept map were facilitated with learners only. The aim was to allow them a variety of methods for self-expression in a non-threatening manner. The reflective journal was also used to record field notes in all my encounters with the

participants. The researcher also used an audio tape recorder and a digital camera for visual data collection.

### 3.5.2.1 Collage

A collage is a form of pictorial storytelling about a specific topic, in which the subjects are free to select materials that depict their context or any aspects of the topic (Maree, 2007). Participants were provided with magazines, scissors, paper, glue and charts with which to design their collages. The advantage of using a collage is that it allows the participants to confront themselves with previously unconsidered information about their context, through a process that raises awareness and influences thoughts and decision-making on the course of action and the setting of goals (Cochran, 1997; Maree, 2007). The role of the research assistant was to distribute stationery, tape record their responses and take photos during the activities. In this kind of storytelling the subjects were requested to select any combination of pictures, materials, photographs, written words, slogans, cards, and symbols that they felt represented their situation. Figure 3.3 below is an example of a collage compiled by learners.

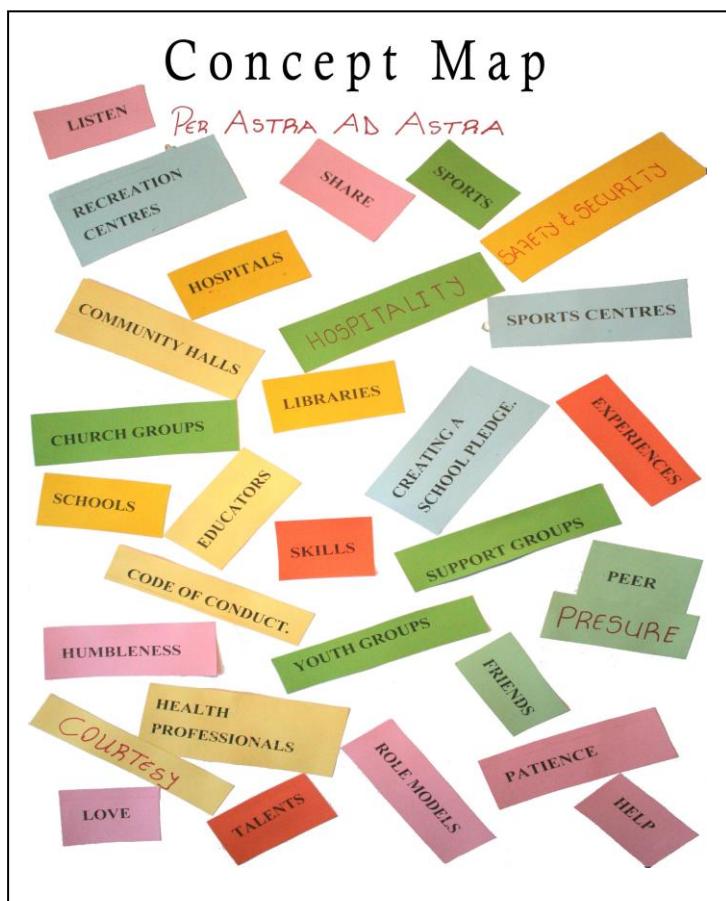
**FIGURE 3.3: Collage**



### 3.5.2.2 Concept map

A concept map was used as a way of structuring information so as to help the participants with creative thinking, decision-making and problem-solving (Knight, 2002). The researcher had asked the participants to brainstorm ideas concerning assets, resources and opportunities available in their context that could be used in reducing violence in their school. Having thought of as many as they could, they then organised them. The research assistant moved within the groups to encourage full participation as he took photographs of the learners. He also assisted me in categorizing and coding data collected to determine common ideas, relationships, patterns and themes. Figure 3.4 below shows the concept map developed by learners.

**FIGURE 3.4: Concept Map**



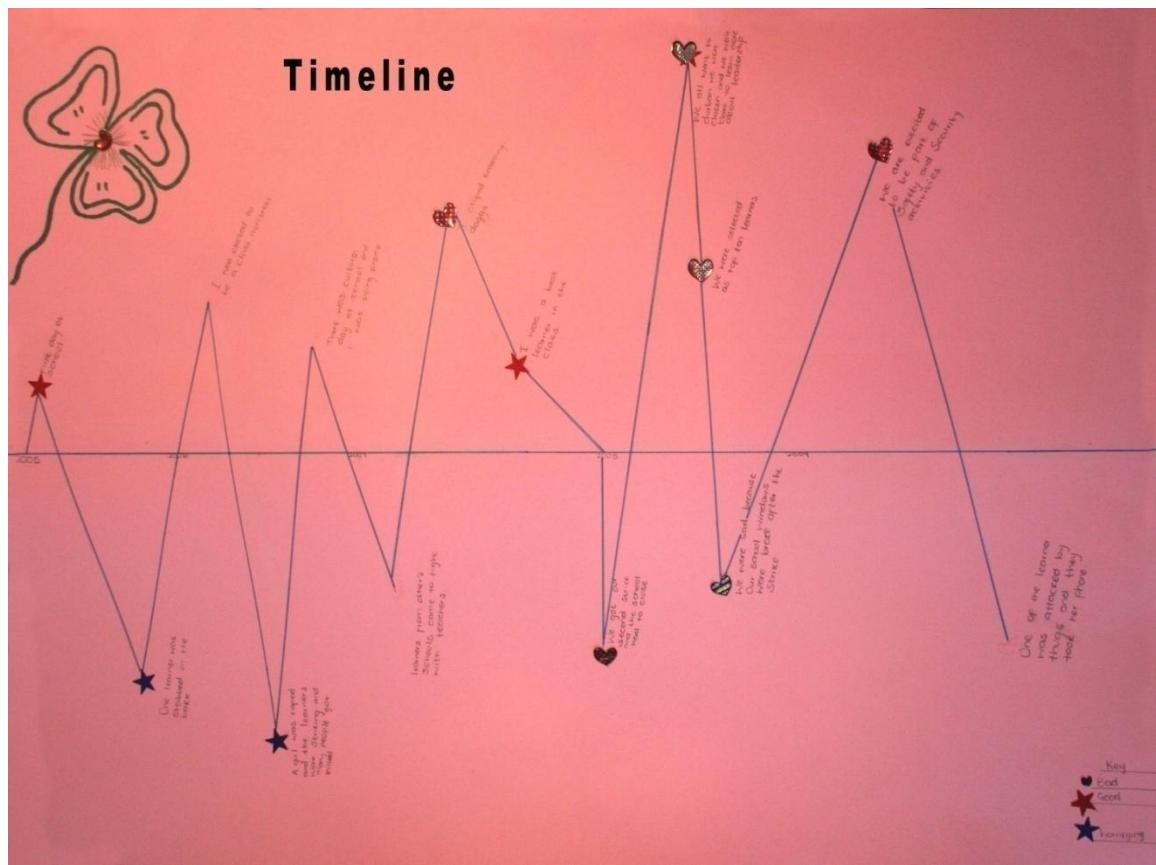
### 3.5.2.3 Timeline

A timeline is an activity that allows participants to depict activities that occurred in their environment in an autobiographical review (Maree, 2007). The participants were requested to

reveal and unpack the incidences of violence that occurred in the school, their intensity and, explicitly, how they perceived, reacted to and managed the demands of their situation. The researcher chose to use the timeline for baseline information to determine what coping mechanisms were being used or followed in dealing with violence at school. Since the researcher only referred to incidences of violence the researcher prefer to refer to the responses in terms of timelines.

The research assistant undertook the role of giving the instructions of the activity and helping to monitor the process. He assisted in issuing stationery to the participants and assumed the responsibility for taking photographs during the compilation of narrative activities, as well as audio-recording their responses during the presentation of the practical activities. Figure 3.5 below is an example of a timeline:

**FIGURE 3.5:** Timeline



### **3.5.3     AUDIO-VISUAL DATA**

The research assistant helped in collecting audio-visual data. Although the adult participants gave consent for the photographs to be taken during the focus group discussion, the images were not well captured owing to limited space for movement in the small office we used. However, several other visual materials of the narrative activities, for instance the place in which learners were involved, and the setting of the school premises, were used to supplement data gathered during the research process. In addition to visual data collected the research assistant audio-taped the participants' responses in turns, although some participants were not audible and their responses were not captured. This might have an impact on the analysis of data, however, the audio-taped information is accessible at my convenience, and other data is supplemented by my reflective journal.

### **3.5.4     PARTICIPANT OBSERVER**

According to Patton (2002), the purpose of observational data is to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities and the meanings of the perspectives of those observed. Observation involves participating in the actions of the people in the research setting so as to learn about their ways of doing very well (Henning, 2004). As a researcher and participant observer, the researcher was able to obtain and capture data which gave me a holistic perspective about the context. The researcher was able to interact closely with the participants and gain firsthand experience without relying on prior conceptualizations of the setting (Patton, 2002). My stance as a participant observer was in line with PAR principles and enabled me to have a good picture of the environment, including both the positive and the negative sides of it. The researcher was familiar with the setting and communication with the participants was not a problem as the researcher understands the local village language and ways of expression.

### **3.5.5     FIELD NOTES AND REFLECTIVE JOURNAL**

I reflected on my data-gathering process, taking into consideration Babbie and Mouton (2001) point that people are likely to behave differently if they see someone writing down everything one says or does. The researcher used research diary to document observations as well as notes made during informal conversations and during feedback sessions. The field notes formed part of the data collection strategy by which the researcher noted general

observations of activities and experiences during my visits to the school, as well as what was heard or discussed before and after the interview sessions. The information in my research diary came in useful as it provided me with a reflective balance of what transpired during the research process.

### **3.5.6 FIELD VISITS**

All the activities were conducted at a specific school but on different days, however, the initial meeting was convened on the same day to allow me to introduce myself and the research assistant to the participants, and to explain to them the purpose of my study and PAR principles. The researcher conducted two field visits, which included the focus group interview with the adult participants and narrative presentations of the narrative activities of the learners. The process of data collection was divided into two phases, as shown in Table 3.2 below:

**TABLE 3.2: Summary of Field Visits Frame**

Action	Purpose	Duration
<b>Field Visit: Day 1</b> Focus group with the principal, an educator, SAPS representative, SGB representative, and CPF representative. Audi-visual documentation of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To determine the current status of safety at school from the participant's view through the <b>Focus group discussions</b>.</li> <li>▪ The researcher facilitated the focus group interview with the school representatives and community representatives. The research assistant was responsible for the audio-visual documentation of data.</li> </ul>	Approximately 90 Minutes
<b>Field Visit: Day 2</b> Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The researcher conducted the activity with the help of the facilitator.</li> <li>▪ Learners were divided into three groups and one group was asked to design the collage, the other group a timeline and the last group did the concept mapping.</li> <li>▪ Each group was given instructions according to the activity they have to perform.</li> <li>▪ A tape recorder was used to record their responses and photos of their products were taken by the facilitator.</li> <li>▪ The facilitator also helped in coding and categorizing concepts derived from collage concept map and timeline.</li> </ul>	Approximately 90 Minutes

### 3.5.6.1 Objectives and processes of field visit 1

The objective of my first visit was to explore the experiences and challenges faced by the school community. The researcher aimed to explore the assets, resources and capacities, and the role of different stakeholders in their contribution to enhancing safe schools. The participants appeared to be reluctant to take part (see extract taken from my field notes below), but after the researcher had introduced myself and the research assistant, and explained the purpose of my study to the participants, they became more relaxed and engaged in sharing their views.

#### **Extract taken from my field notes:**

*Our appointment was scheduled for 9h00-10h45. The researcher had a difficult time getting started even though all the participants confirmed that they will be available. The principal could not join the panel because he had flu and was not feeling well. He then delegated the deputy principal to join the focus group. The deputy principal gave consent to take part, but indicated that she can only be with us for a short while because she had some personal commitments to attend to.*

Although the research assistant was moving around to reach and capture every speaker's response and comments, in some instances my voice could not be captured because the research assistant focused more on the participants' responses than on my comments and questions. However, the questions are clearly outlined in the transcript of the focus group (see appendix B). The focus group discussion was supplemented by observation, audio-visual data and field notes.

### 3.5.6.2 Objectives and processes of field visit 2

The various narrative activities, such as the collage, timeline and concept mapping, were used to stimulate the participants' creative thinking, decision-making and problem-solving. To avoid taking learners out of class during school hours for several days, as they were not in a position to attend during weekends or in afternoons, the participants were divided into three groups and each group was allocated a different task of preparing either a collage, timeline or concept map. The researcher provided an example of a collage and a timeline chart, and provided full explanations in my instructions as to what they were supposed to do.

The purpose of engaging the participant learners in narrative activities was to allow them to confront themselves with previously unconsidered information about their context. It required them to unpack the incidences of violence that occurred in their school, and show how the whole process raised their awareness and influenced their thoughts and decision-making in the course of action and the setting of goals to manage the demands of their situation.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The aim of data analysis is to understand the various constitutive elements of one's data through an inspection of the relationship between concepts, constructs and variables, to see whether or not there are any trends that can be identified or isolated, and to establish themes in the data (Mnguni, 2006). The raw data from the focus group interview, collage, concept map and timeline were transcribed from the audio-tape and video-tape. Interview transcription provides an opportunity to become immersed in the data. The researcher then read the transcript several times to get a sense of the interview before breaking it into parts. The researcher typed and organised handwritten transcripts and some of the field notes to get a chance to internalize and get a feeling for the cumulative data as a whole.

The transcribed data were then coded and categorised into themes, focusing on the participants' responses, actions and feelings. Creswell (2005) states that classifying means taking apart the text or qualitative information part and looking for categories, themes, and dimensions of information. In the process, the researcher looked for similarities and differences in the participant's responses, 'coding' data by key words and grouping them together into core themes and sub themes. The researcher also looked for redundant themes with the aim of reducing the codes to a controllable number.

The interpretation of data were done after data were analysed and grouped into themes and sub-themes. The researcher subsequently interpreted the themes identified to determine how the data collected could help in illuminating the question explored (Kruger, De Vos, Fouche & Venter, 2005).

Other available data collected prior to the site visits, as well as after the field work, included my comments, thoughts and reflections in relation to my study, and was documented in my research diary.

### **3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

According to Bryman (2004), reliability and validity are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research. In qualitative research, validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of data achieved and the extent of crystallisation. Leedy contends that validity refers to the accuracy, meaningfulness and credibility of the research project as a whole. The alternative criteria for judging quality in qualitative research to be discussed in the following paragraphs are credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability.

#### **3.7.1 CREDIBILITY**

Credibility is concerned with ensuring that what a particular researcher arrives at in a study is acceptable to others. It aims at providing a true picture of the phenomenon being studied. The credibility of findings, according to Bryman (2004) ensures that research is carried out according to good practice and is open for evaluation by participants to confirm that the investigator has correctly understood that social context. In this study the researcher used crystallisation whereby more than one method or source of data collection is used. Cohen *et al.* (2002) state that a multi-method approach is vital when the researcher wants a holistic view of a particular subject.

The subjectivity of respondents, their opinions, attitudes and perspectives, and the degree of bias were also controlled through persistent observation and member checking throughout the study. The researcher sent transcribed data back to the participants for approval and to allow them an opportunity to confirm the credibility of the information and the narrative accounts. The identified themes were also discussed with the participants for verification and to ensure that they were accurate and dependable (Creswell, 2003).

### **3.7.2 TRANSFERABILITY**

Transferability refers to the extent to which a study can be applied to other respondents or in other contexts (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). It involves providing rich descriptions of the perceptions of selected participants (Pitney, 2004), sufficient to provide a database for making judgments about the applicability of the findings to some other settings (Bryman, 2004). To achieve this, the researcher analysed and interpreted the information gathered separately, thus gaining a good understanding of the individual participants' responses.

### **3.7.3 DEPENDABILITY**

According to Payne and Payne (2004), dependability refers to the general applicability of the research results. It entails the auditing procedure where the participants are provided with an account of the researcher's findings. According to Bryman (2004), this entails ensuring that complete records of all phases of the research process are kept in an accessible manner. In this study the researcher strived for dependability by documentation of data through audiotape, photographs, a reflective journal and field observation notes compiled during the research process. The researcher used my intern co-supervisor, who works with me in the DoE and is familiar with the development of conducting a research, as my auditing peer to establish how far proper procedures were being and had been followed during the research, as well as at the end (Bryman, 2004). She offered intensive and continuous feedback during the duration of my research and even after my data had been processed.

### **3.7.4 CONFORMABILITY**

Conformability questions the degree of what quantitative researchers would call "observer bias" (Payne & Payne, 2004). The researcher should demonstrate that he or she has acted in good faith and has not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research findings (Bryman, 2004). To achieve this, the researcher employed a research assistant who helped with supervising learners when completing the narrative activities. The researcher also used representatives of different organisations to ensure that the process was transparent, allowing them to speak and by making available all data collected for review by participants.

### **3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In the context of this study the researcher strictly adhered to the code and principles of the Health Professions Council of South Africa, specifically in my interaction with participants. The researcher ensured that my research was carried out within an ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, and respect for democratic value and human rights, as envisaged by the Constitution of the RSA. The researcher did everything in my power to ensure that there was good communication and mutual trust between us. According to Keeves and Lakomski (1999), when a case study involves the portrayal of persons or institutions in forms that may enable recognition, the ethical issues are paramount. This is determined by the researcher – participant relationship (Merriam, 2002). As a result, negotiations between the researcher and those researched should not be ignored. This can be done through abiding by the following ethical principles, to ensure that participants are in no way deceived, they know what is going on during the research process, they do not experience any form of harm or distress, and they maintain their privacy.

#### **3.8.1 OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT**

Before the commencement of the study the researcher ensured that permission was obtained from the Department of Education, as well the school from which learners and educators were to be selected. All participants involved gave their informed consent, namely the parents of the learners, the learners themselves (even though they were minors), the school principal, school safety team (educator coordinating the school safety project), two School Governing Body (SGB) representatives, one representative from the Community Policing Forum (CPF) and the schools' 'adopt a cop' from SAPS. The researcher made sure that participation was voluntary, and that no one was forced to participate (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). To ensure that the participants' consent was voluntary and informed the researcher drew up a research protocol to be signed by each participant.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), it is the responsibility of the researcher to explain the purpose of the research to each participant, which the researcher did so as to ensure that the participants were not left with bad feelings or doubts about themselves as a result of being involved in the research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Coolican, 2004).

### **3.8.2 ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

The protection of the participants' interests and wellbeing was my concern during the period of the study. Social research often requires people to reveal personal information about themselves, information that may be unknown to their friends and associates (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Berg (2001) defines confidentiality as an active attempt to remove from the research record any elements that might indicate the subjects' identities, and anonymity means the subject remains nameless. In most qualitative research the researcher knows the participants, therefore anonymity becomes impossible. In this case, as the researcher personally interacted with the participant, the researcher provided a high degree of confidentiality.

The identities of the participants were not to be disclosed. All names and addresses were to be removed from interview transcripts and letters and would be replaced by identification numbers (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Data were audio-visually recorded with the consent of the participants and letters used for names so as to protect their identity. The researcher made sure that any field notes, tape-recorded material, transcripts and other data collected were preserved in a safe place for verification. The research assistant, my co-intern and supervisor also signed the ethical form, in which they declared that they would keep information confidential.

### **3.8.3 THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION FROM HARM**

During the course of this study the researcher focused on probable risk to the participants, such as revealing information that would embarrass participants or endanger their home life, friendship, or work. To ensure that participants would be protected from harm the researcher gave them my contact details, as well as those of my supervisor, in case there would be some uncertainties or dissatisfactions about any matter of concern. The researcher also constantly reminded the participants of their right to withdraw from the study should they wish to do so for any reason whatsoever.

## **3.9 LIMITATIONS AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

In planning this case study there are several issues the researcher found useful to consider. As the researcher was the main instrument for the collection and analysis of data, this created the

possibility of researcher bias in the research findings. To address this, the researcher used a crystallisation of data applying PAR principles. However, applying crystallisation posed a danger to the credibility of information collected, especially with the narrative activities, where learners had to prepare and make presentations alternately in the same class on the same day. To protect data collected there were some exceptional adjustments and changes that were made to allow interactive participation and to ensure that the research included all the subtle details and provided a global picture of the experiences of the school community. The researcher thus divided my research process into two phases, varying activities according to the level of participants. For instance, on my first visit the researcher interviewed the adult participants alone, to enhance the most effective use of discussion time, free from the learners. Learners were engaged in interactive activities such as collage, concept map and timeline on my second visit. By making use of multiple methods of data collection the researcher could increasingly and easily identify the emerging themes.

### **3.10 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has described the methodological and research process of my study. It provided a more detailed description of the research design, paradigm, participatory action research approach as well as the data gathering sessions. The results of the data analysis and the categorization of themes will be presented in chapter 4.

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## CHAPTER 4

### THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The research methodology applied for this study was presented in Chapter 3, together with an explanation of the research design, data collection methods and the approach to the analysis of the data and its interpretation. The chosen research design and the other methodological approaches were justified in terms of the research questions and the purpose of this study, as reflected in Chapter 1.

In this Chapter the results of this study are presented as a detailed discussion of the themes that emerged during the thematic analysis of the raw data: the aim of Chapter 3 is to explore the context of this study, followed by a discussion of those themes. Data gathered through the researcher's observation and visual images are used to support this discussion.

#### **4.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

##### **4.2.1 THE RESEARCH SCHOOL**

The school that formed the back-drop for this study is a secondary school situated in an urban township. A strong working relationship was already formed between the researcher and the school management which resulted from her interaction with members of that school's safety team during workshops organised by the Department of Education. The vision of the school is to teach the virtue of excellence in empowering learners with knowledge and life skills. The mission of the school is to create excellent education opportunities for the learners. At the time of the research the school had a staff of 45 educators, 13 non-teaching staff and 1447 learners, presenting the ratio of 1:35 per class. Amongst the non-teaching staff there are two administrative officers, gardeners and cleaners and a security guard.

The majority of the learners in this school come from previously disadvantaged areas with low socioeconomic status. Some of those children come from single mother families, extended family caregivers, child rearing families, guardian/parent unemployment, HIV/AIDS and poverty related challenges. Some of the learners walk a long distance to get to

the school, often coming across the thugs in the streets along their way who have bad intentions. Some use local means of transport and taxis - school buses are limited and not easily accessible. The school is surrounded by a high concrete fence, the neighbourhood surrounding the school appear to be well known for its high crime rate, which poses even more challenges to families in that area. The yard is littered. There are no proper play/sports grounds for learners: however, there is enough space with potential for new development.

Figure 4.1 presents snap shots of areas within the school premises:

**FIGURE 4.1: Pictures of selected areas within the school setting**



It is reported that the school has a close working relationship with several community organisations which represent the assets of the school. During the afternoons and school holidays certain Non-Governmental Organisations help learners by providing extra lessons in Mathematics and Science. Leadership skills are also being offered annually to top 10 learners in Grade 10 (**TLP: p15**). The contribution of those organisations is seen to be playing a major role in motivating the learners and enhancing the outstanding matriculation results of successive years. The school produced the following pass rates respectively, 2004 - 82%: 2005 - 85%: 2006 - 92%: 2007 - 91%: and 2008 - 94%.

According to the School Governing Body (SGB) representative the quality of the relationship between the school and the community, especially some of the parents, tends to be unsatisfactory because they play a passive and submissive role in fulfilling their

responsibility. However, the school has implemented an ‘adopt- a- cop’ project that was mandated during the Tirisano project<sup>1</sup> which worked together with members of the community policing forum and child protection unit as support structures. The school safety and security committee has shown itself to be active and has drafted the school safety policy in line with the South African Schools Act of 1996.

#### **4.3 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS OF DATA ANALYSIS AND LITERATURE CONTROL**

In order to assist the reader to understand, as a way of quality control, codes will be used as key of the original transcript (see Appendix C). For example, codes are stated as follows: (*FPA1: p1*). This refers to Focus group participant A’s first response during the interview, found on page 1 of data analysis transcript.

##### **KEY FOR THE ABBREVIATIONS IS:**

- FPB: Focus Group Participant B
- FPC: Focus Group Participant D
- FPD: Focus Group Participant E
- FPE: Focus Group Participant F
- CMP: Concept Map Presentation
- CLP: Collage Presentation
- TLP: Timeline Presentation

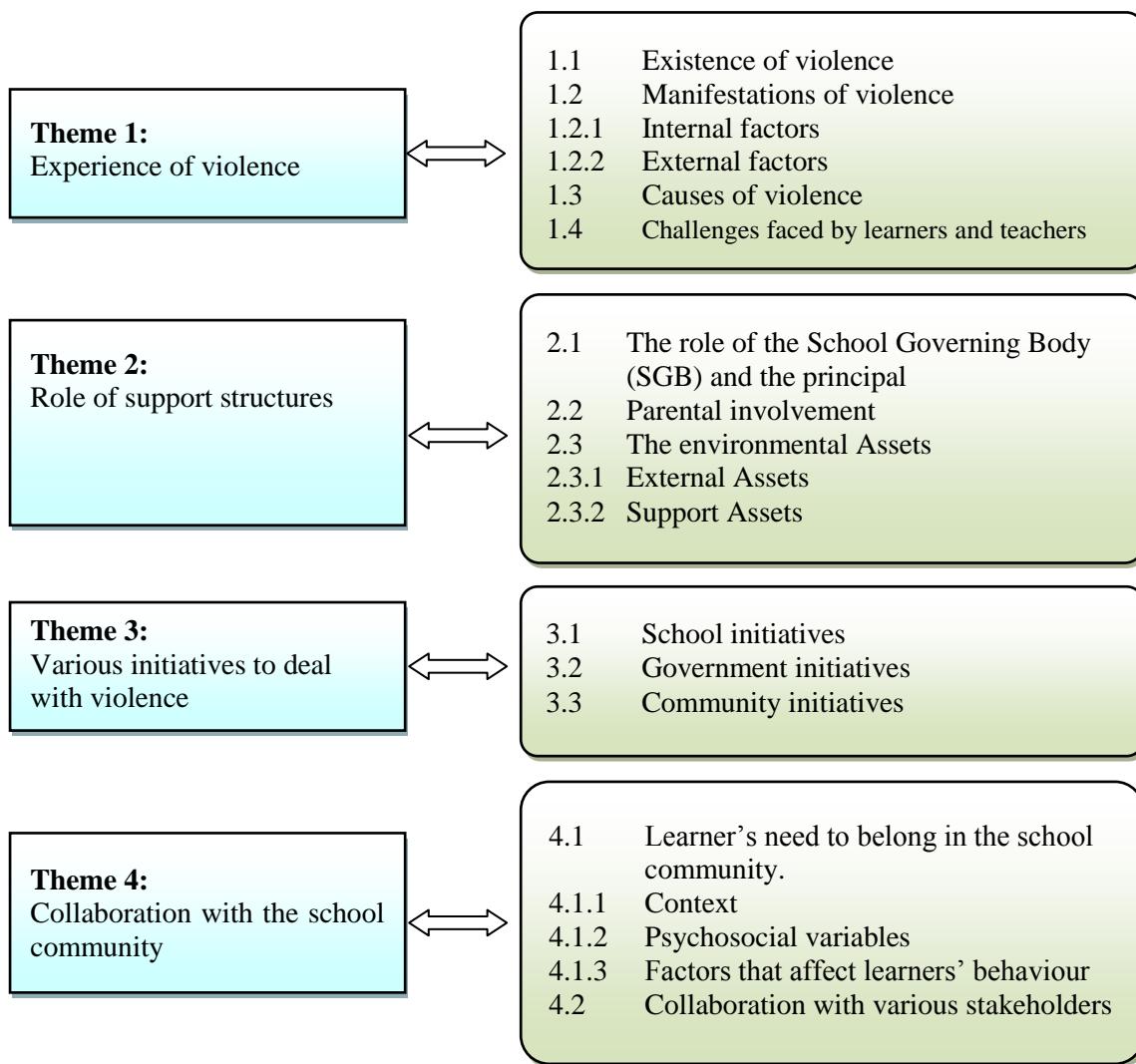
By engaging in the PAR process the participants have been able to articulate how they experience violence on a daily basis. The participants co-created spaces and places where they could speak about their daily lives and were able to initiate proactive strategies for promoting and sustaining non-violence in their school community.

In this section the results of this study is presented with the focus on themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis, as reflected in Figure 4.2:

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2.

**FIGURE 4.2: Findings of the Data Analysis**



## 4.4 THEME 1: EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL

This theme serves to confirm that violence in schools exists on a continued basis, as reflected by the responses of the participants. The following sub-themes emerged from Theme 1: The existence of violence in schools, the nature of violence, the causes of violence at school, and challenges faced by learners and teachers.

### 4.4.1 SUB-THEME 1.1: THE EXISTENCE OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

The issue of violence in schools has become a theme of great importance on the national agenda as well as in the eyes of many parents, who are worried for their children's safety

(Shafii & Shafii, 2001). The same experience seems to exist in the school under study, as reflected in the responses of the participants. The participants confirmed the existence of violence in the school community and that it poses a challenge to the teachers and the entire school community. There were, however, seemingly contradictory statements from the participants with regard to the existence of violence and perhaps the extent of the violence at the school under study. Some participants confirmed the existence of violence within the school premises by saying: "*I think violence is very much serious and very much disturbing*" (*FPD1: p3*), as well as: "... *we are experiencing a major problem concerning violence*" (*FPE1: p4*). However, another participant raised the concern about violence within the community and not in the school per se. She indicated that "... *in our school we don't have violence*" (*PFA1: p1*). She however reported the existence of violence within the community at large and the challenge it poses to the whole school community. She said: "*It is a serious challenge here*" (*PFA1: p1*). The participant continued to say: "*One thing that we have, generally in all institutions in our communities and all over*" (*FPA2: p1*), *it is disturbing and it is scary*" (*FPB2: p2*).

Mills (2001) contends that it is erroneous to conclude that schools are unsafe because, in some areas – rather than being places of violence – they provide havens and places of safety away from the violent community. However, there appears to be a misperception that there is an increase of violence in schools due to the high level of media attention that focuses on recent incidences of school shootings and crime related events (Furlong, Morrison, Austin, Huh-Kim & Skager, 2001). Furlong *et al.* (2001) state, if people are asked to evaluate the intensity and trend of violence occurring in schools, individuals tend to draw upon information that is most easily accessible to them, especially that of the mass media reports about school shootings. As a result incomplete and misleading presentation of the information about such violence may significantly influence decisions made by individuals, including policymakers, in ways that do not reflect the reality of the situation. Furthermore, the media, in its reporting of isolated incidents of violence in schools, contributes to misleading perceptions within a community (Mills, 2001).

From the South African context Zulu *et al.* (2004) contend that schools have become highly volatile and unpredictable places and violence has become a part of everyday life in (some) schools. Their perception suggests that, because schools in South Africa have in the past frequently been disrupted by violence and unrest, in reaction to the political situation in the

country, students have since then been active in demonstrating violent behaviour as their coping mechanism. To support the latter statement Matthews *et al.* (1999) indicate that both the state-led violence of apartheid and the most violent struggle against it produced a ‘culture of violence’ that permeated society, including schools. Matthews *et al.* (1999) further add by saying, the high level of violence in our schools reflects a complicated combination of past history and recent stresses on individual, school and community in a society marked by deep inequalities and changes within the school operations. Contrary to previous research, the study conducted by Barbarian *et al.* (2001:16) reveals that the wave of political violence had subsided by 1994 but, that having been said, the overall level of violence since then has not diminished. Seemingly the above statements would carry weight because, despite the end of the apartheid in the democratic elections in 1994, violence in schools has never ceased to be on the media headlines. This researcher regards the existence of violence within and around the premises of the school used for the purpose of this research as being serious enough to be addressed.

#### 4.4.2 SUB-THEME 1.2: THE MANIFESTATIONS OF VIOLENCE

The nature of violence suggests a scope of violence and victim-perpetrator cycles experienced by learners. The main areas of violence reported by the participants are stealing of cell phones and money, bullying as well as more serious forms of crime, including, stabbing, attempted rape and rape. “*The learners come across people snatching their cell phones, sometimes even attempted rape among the girl child*” (FPB2: p2). These categories will be delineated into internal and external factors that contribute to the scope of violence in schools.

Dunne *et al.* (2003/4) describe the nature of gender violence in schools as explicit (sexual) violence and implicit gender violence. Implicit gender violence, according to Dunne *et al.* (2003/4) refers to violence in schools which is perpetrated by teachers and students, and explicit refers to sexual abuse of girl learners by male teachers (or adults) and boys. The scope of violence experienced by the school community under study suggests that there are both internal and external factors that contribute to violence in schools. The internal factors, referred to as implicit gender violence by Dunne *et al.* (2003/4), generated by school violence affect learner-learner relationships in the form of stabbing/fighting/bullying. The external

factors, referred to as explicit (sexual) violence, which could be attributed to violence at school affects mostly the girl learners in the form of rape or attempted rape.

Although the fact that violence does exist in schools is confirmed and supported by the literature, the participants feel strongly that the perpetrators are usually from the community members. “*...we are experiencing problems from outside. It is violence against our learners*” (*FPB2: p2*). According to Shafii and Shafii (2001), school violence can be understood both as a problem of the social environment of schools and as a problem of violence prone individuals and those youngsters likely to be victimized. The perception of some of the participants is that violence is lower within the school premises and higher within the neighbouring community, and is influenced mostly by out of school learners lingering around the school premises. “*The violence is not that much, except maybe, from outside the school premises, maybe after school when the learners come to school on their way it's where they get problems*” (*FPC1: p2*). One of the participants reported that: “*Where we find serious violence is when non-learners just come into our yard, go to the classroom without asking for permission. Those are the people who cause violence to our school*” (*FPE2: p4*).

#### (a) Sub-theme 1.2.1: Internal factors

Possible explanations of violence emerging from research could be attributed to asymmetrical power relations that are enacted not only through gender but also through age differences and authority (Dunne *et al.*, 2003): and in some cases through social indicators such as ethnicity, disability, and language, although such evidence was not obvious in the school under study. The use of physical force (fighting) with or without weapons and bullying is reported to be common amongst the learners. One of the participants’ reported that “*If we have a problem of violence like maybe we'll have the learners fighting for minor things like a pencil*” (*FPE1: p4*). Incidences of fighting with weapons were also cited: A learner reported that “*Last year my former classmate was stabbed at the back by one of his friends in the computer centre*” (*CLP: p18*) (*TLP: p19*). It was also reported that early this year (2009) a tragic incident occurred where “*...one of the learners was attacked and stabbed by thugs for his cell phone*” (*TLP: p19*). It appears as though most of these learner-to-learner incidences occur in the absence of the teacher.

With regard to bullying a participant indicated that “*... some learners are bullied to an extent that they can't report even if they see something*” (*FPB4: p7*). Seemingly learners

who are victims of bullying do not report to their teachers. That could be because they are scared of the perpetrators because of the difference in power. Bullying is regarded as a form of peer harassment and is an indication that the child is likely to develop into a violent adult (Vogel, 2002:25). It encompasses a spectrum of aggressive actions, both physical and verbal (Liang, Flisher & Lombard, 2007:162). Bullying is the most pervasive form of violence and can begin as early as pre-school but generally starts in elementary school, peaks in middle school and declines throughout high school. Bullying is repeated, unprovoked behaviour intended to cause harm or distress to a victim who is vulnerable due to a real or perceived imbalance of power (Oosthuizen *et al.*, 2008). Although not all aggression is bullying, bullying is always aggression defined as hurtful and hostile behaviour, motivated by hate or bias, ignorance or fear (Rivers, Duncan and Besag, 2007). Liang *et al.* (2007:162) contend that bullying others and being bullied is related to weapon carrying and involvement in physical fighting, or in some cases the desire to retaliate against another perpetrator (Rivers *et al.*, 2007).

The social dynamics of the classroom and playground, paying particular attention to physical violence in general and bullying in particular is common in schools that are overcrowded and learners tend to be arranged into categories of social acceptance (Rivers *et al.*, 2007). With reference to the statistics of the school, as reflected in the researcher's field journal, the number of learners of the school under study is at a ratio of 1:35: which implies that the school does not seem to be affected by overcrowding. However, Shaw (2004) states that most schools in most countries report problems of aggression, minor assaults and bullying, and those characteristics have been identified by the participants.

Children who bully others tend to show lack of empathy, often misread their peers' actions and assume hostile intentions where none were intended (Vogel, 2002:26), enjoy dominance or control over victims and are defiant and have difficulty following rules. The repercussions of bullying might affect the bully emotionally. The bully learns it is possible to gain emotional, social or monetary benefit from the bullying, so their modus operandi may become habitual (Rivers *et al.*, 2007). Bullying on the other hand has negative effects on bullied children. Typical victims are anxious, physically weak and tend to have a negative attitude towards violence (Liang *et al.*, 2007:162) and have the greatest number of future psychological problems and peer relationship problems (Barbarin *et al.*, 2001:16). Studies

show that victims of bullying may lose self-esteem, feel shame, suffer anxiety and come to dislike school and play truant to avoid victimisation (Rivers et al., 2007)

**(b) Sub-theme 1.2.2: External factors**

Although the fact that violence does exist in school is confirmed and supported by literature, the participants feel strongly that the perpetrators are usually from the community members. Learners seem to be attacked by out of school learners and dropouts while on their way to and from school, as alluded in sub-theme 2. Seemingly girl learners are often victims, as alluded by one of the participants “*that girl learners are mostly frightened and horrified with the attacks at school*” (*TLP: p19*). The literature reveals that sexual harassment and violence affecting girls is a serious problem in many schools in South Africa (Prinsloo, 2006; Dunne et al., 2003). It was reported that “... *in 2006 a girl was raped*” (*TLP: p19*). Research conducted by Prinsloo (2006) reveals in South Africa many girls experienced violence in school: they are raped, sexually abused, sexually harassed and assaulted by male learners and educators.

According to Prinsloo (2006) sexual abuse are also perpetrated outside the school by adult men, sometimes called ‘sugar daddies’, who engage in transactional sex (sex in exchange for gifts or money) with children under the age of consent (16 in most countries, 14 in others). The researcher found this to be in line with the participants’ report about the taxi drivers who are alleged to be boyfriends to some of the girl learners. This was supported by another participant when he said that “... *sometimes the learner is not coming to school and at the same time is not staying at home. When you investigate that you will find that the child is somewhere at the boyfriend and is still a minor ... those drivers automatically become the boyfriend of the learner*” (*FPC5: p8*). Prinsloo (2006) contends that such forms of abuse need to be examined in the context of heightened concerns surrounding HIV infection rates among adolescents, in particular girls, who are the most vulnerable to infection.

**4.4.3 SUB-THEME 1.3: POSSIBLE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS**

This sub-theme refers to the characteristics that predispose the school to higher rates of violence. Hawkins, Hernkohl, Brewer, Catalano, Harachi and Cothorn (2000) outline the following community and neighborhood factors as predisposing the school to violence: poverty, community disorganization, availability of drugs and firearms, and exposure to

violence and racial prejudice. Although firearms were not specifically identified, the participants mentioned the use of sharp instruments, such as, scissors, pens, mathematical instruments being used as weapons. For instance one participant said: “**We have one case whereby a learner stabbed another learner with a scissor**” (*FPD1:p3*). The importance of classroom management cannot be over-emphasised, as this will not only benefit the educators but the learners too. The National Curriculum Statement (2002) envisions teachers who are qualified, competent, dedicated and caring, and who will be able to fulfil the various roles outlined in (Brunton, 2003)

Learner support material is used to assist learners in studying, organising and understanding new skills or knowledge. It usually comprises of a variety of objects with varying textures. Some are hard, sharp, smooth or rough. Working with learning support resources demands constant monitoring on the part of the teacher. Netshitahame *et al.* (2002:1) contend that the educator should provide proper supervision, instructions and control the learners to ensure their safety. This is very important because children sometimes act absentmindedly, especially when they are in a group. It is therefore the responsibility of the educator to provide sufficient supervision and to safeguard the learners from any unforeseen danger.

In her casual talk with the learners, they indicated to the researcher that teachers do not monitor them during break times: this could be the reason why they are free to even sell cigarettes and drugs within the schoolyard. Drug abuse and drug trafficking is also reported to be posing a serious danger amongst the learners. It was reported that when learners are on lunchtime there are some who are selling cigarettes with the business moving at a normal rate. But there will be one whose cigarettes are ‘spiced’ with something and selling like hot cakes. “**These are some kinds of drugs you cannot recognize. They use it like sixo<sup>2</sup>, but inside it is a drug**” (*FPE2: p4*). Apparently there are adults who are selling those drugs to learners during break and after school. The participant said: “**During break there are people who are trafficking drugs into the school yard**” (*FPE2: p5*). . Participants expressed the perception that learners who abuse drugs are susceptible to violent acts within the schoolyard. One of the participants indicated that: “**... some of the factors that contribute to violence at school are that some of the learners are using drugs and if learners are using drugs they become violent to other learners**” (*FPE2: p5*).

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<sup>2</sup> Powder to make a fizzy drink

The learners confirmed an unacceptable behaviour displayed by some of their classmates and reported that: “*...some children come to school drunk during school hours. Some smoke cigarette. Not only boys smoke cigarette, even girls smoke cigarette*” (CLP: p18). Innocent learners are thus exposed to drugs and drug abuse in early adolescence. According to Sullivan, Kung, and Farrell (2004:489), such exposure is problematic because it is predictive of increased use and misuse in later stages and caution for parental monitoring and family support.

Research reveals that forms of antisocial behaviour, such as, stealing, destruction of property, delinquency, smoking, early sexual intercourse and drug selling are associated with a greater risk of violence among males (Hawkins *et al.*, 2000). Matthews *et al.* (1999) warn that drug and alcohol abuse are widely identified as a source of increased crime and violence in schools. Drugs are connected to conflicts over drug sales, drug usage and changes in behaviour. Building on this line of research Sullivan *et al.* (2004:488) contends that witnessing violence is a major stressor that has been associated with problematic behaviour, including drug use.

Participants also identified the mode of transport used by learners to and from school as posing a threat of violence and criminal acts to the school community. Many children stay in the remote area in the far east of Mamelodi and depend on taxis for transport and are always late. One of the participants indicated that: “*We try to talk to the parents to talk to the owners of the taxi to try to at least make sure that learners are at school on time*” (FPB7: p12). From the study the participants appeared to be dissatisfied about the behavior of the taxi drivers, especially towards disciplinary measures employed by teachers. It also appeared that the teachers feel helpless about it and do not know what to do about it. One of the participants reported that: “*The taxi will come by 8h10 with music at high volume and the learners are late ..., it is so disturbing...*” (FPB7: p12).

The majority of the taxis used by learners in the townships appear to be road unworthy and most of the drivers are dropouts and are alleged to not possess a driver’s license. In a survey conducted by Williams and Ferguson (2004) it was reported that most teenagers say they want to obtain a driver’s license as soon as possible upon reaching the legal age to do so, and the goal of many driving schools is on learning enough skills to pass the driving test without

considering the developmental and lifestyle features typical of young adolescents (risk taking, feelings of invulnerability, and immature decision making) which influence the way they drive.

In her research, Nightingale (2004) commenting on issues, barriers and solutions to transport for adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities identified the following categories as some of barriers and the attitudes displayed by the taxi drivers, which this researcher finds to be relevant to the learners of the school under study:

- Learners were often dropped off too late, up to an hour or more later than the course start time;
- Learners were picked up too early, cutting down the length of lessons or activities;
- Drivers would hassle both the teaching and support staff to release learners from their classes to be taken home early: and
- Drivers would make learners and staff feels intimidated, especially with their high volume music, as was alluded to by one of the participants.

As noted in the field notes, there are other school physical facilities that pose safety problems to the school community. The school grounds are not well equipped and seem to be used as dumping area for old furniture. At the same spot hawkers sell food for the learners during break. The toilets at the school are also not kept to acceptable hygienic standards. The cleaning staffs at the school clean only the toilets in the administration block and leave the learners to clean their own toilets. Seemingly there is no supervision from the teachers' side on the cleaning of the learners' toilets. The classroom conditions are also not up to standard. Some have broken windows, cracked walls and broken doors. The school is frequently vandalized: especially during school holidays.

From the research conducted by Dunne *et al.* (2003/4), it was found that aggressive and intimidating behaviour, unsolicited physical contact, such as, touching and groping, assault, coercive sex and rape all constitute abuse. Evidence suggests that children who have been physically abused or neglected are more likely than others to commit violent crimes later in life as alluded to in chapter 2. The latter statement is supported by Matthews et al., (1999) who contend that children who suffer family violence are more likely to be bullies and be bullied. Bullying is thus linked to experiences of violence in the home, as children learn that violence is a primary mechanism for negotiating relationships

#### 4.4.4 SUB-THEME 1.4: CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

According to Barbarin *et al.* (2001) exposure to violence, witnessed or directly experienced can be related to children's self-reports of distress and parents' observations of distress in their children. The observed symptoms may include, as reflected in the learner participants, anxiety, sadness, inattention, difficulty concentrating and fear of being attacked (Barbarin *et al.*, 2001). Regardless of the incident which was reported by the learners where “*... one of the learners was stabbed at the back with a knife*” (*TLP: p19*), they showed they could still cope with their school work and produce a good pass rate at the end of the year. Barbarin *et al.* (2001) acknowledges that children may cope with the fear and loss associated with violence by restricting their activities and pretending not to care about anything.

The disciplinary measure of locking the school gates appears to be reinforcing a serious behaviour challenge amongst the learners. It is reported that “*If they find that the gates are locked they go and commit suicide or some criminal activity*” (*FPD4: p8*). Girl learners are reported to be exposed to sexual harassment, physical attacks and drug trafficking by community members, as indicated in Sub-themes 1 and 2. It is also reported that adults are involved in drug trafficking within the school community. “*We found the person selling dagga: we had to arrest that person dealing with dagga ...*” (*FPC5: p8*). Learners are thus tempted to be involved in selling drugs at school because they are easily accessible within the school community.

Learners are also faced with a challenge of missing out on lessons when fights and violent attacks occur within the school premises. It appears “*...some boys come to school with weapons: in 2008 a classmate was stabbed at the back by one of his friends (CLP: p18)*”. Classes tend to be disrupted constantly and such acts seem to be traumatic and emotionally challenging to the learners. Learners appear to be exposed to violence both at school and in the community. The violent incidents reported by learners include seeing a known person beaten up, seeing a known person stabbed, chased or robbed or being beaten up or stabbed. Learners reported that, “*... learners from other school fight with our teachers*” (*TLP: p19*). Barbarin *et al.* (2001:17) distinguish between direct and indirect exposure to violence. Direct experience of violence is said to occur when an individual or household is victimised or placed in immediate danger. The indirect or vicarious experience is said to occur when an individual is a witness to such incidents of violence, such as, assault or abuse. The individual

does not have to be directly involved but can be indirectly negatively impacted by the consequences of the circumstances.

Barbarin *et al.* (2001:17) highlight factors, such as, mode (direct or indirect or vicarious experience), and proximity (how close the target of violence is to the child) as being different forms of exposure with the same impact on the effect of violence. The incidences reported by learners involve people they are close to and know very well “*... a classmate stabbed at the back in the computer centre*” (*CLP: p18*), which leaves them feeling psychologically distressed and vulnerable.

The quality of the teacher-learner relationship affects whether the learner’s personal needs are met in the classroom. Generally learners prefer teachers who are warm and friendly. Effective teachers understand the influence they have on learners and use that influence positively (Jones & Jones, 2001). According to Oosthuizen (1998:209, in Prinsloo 2005), teachers have a legal duty in terms of the common law principle *in loc parentis* to ensure the safety of learners in their care. As a result in today’s classroom teachers assume the multiple roles of police officer, therapist doctor, and parent. Although learners feel that educators play an important role at school because their “*... parents don’t have a chance to guide them about life*” (*CMP: p18*), some of the educators appear to perceive their role as challenging, especially with regard to their safety. It is reported that “*... some of the educators do not want to be in the safety and security team, they are afraid of victimization*” (*FPE: p15*). According to Jones & Jones (2001) the reluctance on the part of teachers to be involved in safety matters could be due to the fact that teachers receive rather limited training in classroom management, and their responses to learners’ misbehaviour tend to be loosely connected and often tacit ideas about coping with chronic learner behaviour problem. With the new responsibilities demanded of teachers in the Inclusive Education Policy teachers must teach, care for the psychological equilibrium of the learners, help their social integration and attend to their sexual education and prevention of drug taking (Esteve, 2000). Again teachers are expected to detect warning signs for a student at risk for committing acts of violence. That is dangerous because students who are not dangerous may be falsely labelled as being dangerous.

Due to the transformation in the education system within South Africa the relations between teachers and learners appears to have changed also. In the past the teacher had all the

privileges and authority, and the pupils had only duties and could suffer all kind of humiliation (Esteve, 2000). Although that was manifestly unjust, Esteve (2000) finds the situation in which teachers are verbally, physically, or psychologically attacked by learners equally unjust, where the disciplinary mechanisms designed to correct injustice do not function.

#### **4.5 THEME 2: THE ROLE OF SUPPORT STRUCTURES**

The role of various stakeholders within the school community will be viewed from a Bio-Ecological Systems approach and integrated to promote a multi-level approach (Pilon, 2009:341) to suggest guidelines to improve collaboration and networking within the school community members.

Bronfenbrenner's model is an example of a multidimensional model of human development and is used to describe the complex interactions among different systems (Swart & Pettipher, 2006). According to that model there are patterns of interactions that occur in a system resulting in dependence and interdependence of various levels of the system. The participants indicated that there is relationship between the school and some of the resources identified as shown in Figure 4.3. According to the ecosystemic model, providing help from the context is dependent on the meaning clients derive from their environmental interactions and that has potential in yielding improved ecological equilibrium (Conyne & Cook, 2004).

This research is grounded ecologically in seeking to view and respond to the school community in connection with other systems that surround the school (Goodman, 2004). However, although the participants acknowledged the availability of resources in their community they seemed to be uncertain about the accessibility of some. Almost all levels of the ecosystem are considered in this research. For instance: the micro-systems, which include the setting and contexts of an individual, such as their families, the community and the school were represented: and the meso-systems, which include the connections between the micro-systems. The exo-systems, which include the interaction of the school with social institutions or identified support structures, were acknowledged by the participants as being significant others who are supportive to the school. The macro-systems include dominant social and economic structures that influence all the other social systems. An example of such macro-systems would be values, beliefs and cultural practices. Following an ecosystemic model will

give the reader a global picture of the mutual role of individuals, groups and the environment to understand how problems arise and how to deal with them at micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-level (Pilon, 2009:341).

The participants felt that the school community needs to put some effort to establish a relationship with other stakeholders, to enhance the reciprocal and circular nature of interaction that, over time, will build a more complex relationship. For example, one participant said: "*When we observe a child that is not the way he was before when we admitted him at school ... we need to involve the social development and or SANCA people who are dealing with drug abuse*" (*FPD6: p11*). That would include the exo-systems, such as, the social workers, SAPS, CPF, SANCA, Ward councillors, SGB, and private business people.

Pilon (2009:341) contends that a process of change is not a matter of throwing out old things or acquiring new things but the development of a new way for being in the world. A comprehensive approach to partnerships between schools, families, institutions, organisations, and communities will therefore be of great essence in handling the issue of violence in schools, enabling the school community to build on its strengths. The sub-themes to follow will outline the role of the internal and external resources on different levels of the ecosystem, indicating how new partnerships may be established.

#### **4.5.1 SUB-THEME 2.1: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY (SGB) AND THE PRINCIPAL**

According to the School Education Act 6 (1995) the professional management of the school is undertaken by the School Principal under the authority of the School Governing Body (SGB). The relationship between individual governing bodies and their professional staff - headed by the school principal - is one of the most significant variables in determining the success of both the governing body and the school. Most education systems make a distinction between the responsibility of the governing body and operational management by the school principal. It is the responsibility of the principal to provide the parents with information from the education authorities and execute the decision subsequently taken by the SGB, while notifying head office of their actions. In this instance, the SGB of the school under study revealed itself to be motivated and actively involved in school governance "*We*

*encouraged parents to take part in making policies and review them every year to see if they are working” (FPB6: p10).*

The democratisation of education includes the idea that stakeholders, such as, parents, teachers, learners and other people (which includes members of the community near the school) should participate in the activities of the school. The participants have alluded to the existence of the School Governing Body and its involvement in school governance: in developing policies: and in the influence they have on school management and leadership. It was mentioned that: “*... with the system that we are using the policy that is drawn by the school, the parents and the learners*” (FPA: p1). The policies developed serve as procedures for responding to violence, natural disasters and other crises.

According to the SASA (RSA 1996), the composition of the SGB comprises of elected parents, teachers, representative of the support or non-teaching staff, learner membership (in secondary schools), community representatives and the school principal. In the school under study, the SGB membership seems to be in line with SASA (RSA 1996) because the participants indicated that: “*Mostly parents, teachers and even community leaders are involved in SGB*” (FPB6: p10). Parents constitute a majority of the governing body membership. The inclusion of learners in the SGB is mandated by the South African Schools Act of 1996 and is also consistent with the democratic notion of giving all stakeholders a say in school governance (Heystek, 2001). That Act recognises learners as an important group of stakeholders, including them in the decision-making process in public secondary schools.

The role and responsibilities of the SGB, amongst others, are “*... to develop school policy in line with the Department of Education to try to control the issue of crime*” (FPB6: p10), develop and adopt a code of conduct for learners: develop and adopt code of rights and responsibilities for all sectors within the school (School Education Act 6, 1995), SASA (RSA 1996). According to Van Wyk (2007), in general governing bodies have not been proactive in setting policies. The principal often gives substantial support in carrying out their responsibilities. That could be attributed, in part, to low levels of literacy amongst the parent governors in schools found in Black areas. Findings from the research conducted by Van Wyk (2007) reveal that most of them are illiterate and therefore fail to execute the tasks delegated to them. She highlights how the skills deficit among SGB members weakens the effective functioning of SGBs, particularly in poorly resourced black schools. Van Wyk

(2007) attributed deficient SGB functioning to contextual limitations to societal issues, such as violence and gangsterism. She expressed the need to address that situation as vulnerable learners and teachers end-up being victims of those gangsters or thugs that have become a threat to peace and order in our communities. Drug misuse and abuse result in irresponsible thugs walking the streets. In the final analyses nobody will be safe (Van Wyk, 2007). This seems to be gradually changing with the democratic era. Provincial Departments of Education are now required to provide training and support to SGBs to help them perform their functions, although there are a number of problems with such training. In some cases the literacy level of parents is not considered with the level of training - being either too simple or too complicated - whereas in other cases the trainers themselves appeared to lack understanding on the functioning of schools.

The participants reported the governing body of the school featured in this research as being proactive in the running of the school. ***“The SGB is more about governance. It is working closely with the school management in solving the problem” (FPB2: p2)***. Furthermore, the participants said: ***“...we mostly call the parents, as SGB, and then we draw the policy alluded to, then if they agree upon them they become implemented” (FPB3: p2)***. All the same, appropriate training is crucial if the SGB is to perform its functions effectively.

#### **4.5.2 SUB-THEME 2.2: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Participants also portrayed a general lack of parental involvement as an issue of concern. Parents, it is reported, consistently do not attend school meetings and the teachers always wait for a reaction after calling the parents if the child has misbehaved at school. The participant said ***“... parents must come to school if they are called... it does not help if we just issue out a letter and the parent does not attend to the problem” (FPD1: p3)***. An increasing body of literature emphasises the important role of family in the life of a child. According to Smith and Sandhu (2004), if the child's family interactions are characterised by lack of responsiveness, inconsistency, hostility and rejection this can lead to early onset of antisocial behaviour. Parents need to be there for their children and attend to their educational needs. One of the participants indicated that: ***“...parents must not shift their responsibility to the teachers. They must not just say these kids must just go to school and the teachers will see whatever they do with them” (FPD1: p3)***. Another factor contributing to the situation is the inability of parents to discipline their children due to a variety of reasons. The

participant says: “... *you will find that the parents cannot control the child, they are helpless ...*” (*FPC5: p9*). Their helplessness is further displayed when they constantly contact the police for help regarding their own children. The participant says that: “*Sometimes you find that the parents do phone us to say the researcher am at home and my child does not want to go to school or the parent would come to school to complain to the principal that it is almost a week that my child doesn't want to come to school*” (*FPC5: p8*). Matthews *et al.* (1999) contend that schools cannot replace dysfunctional families. Parents need to give their children a safe, consistent and loving environment, teach them self-discipline, responsibility and conflict resolution skills (Vogel, 2002).

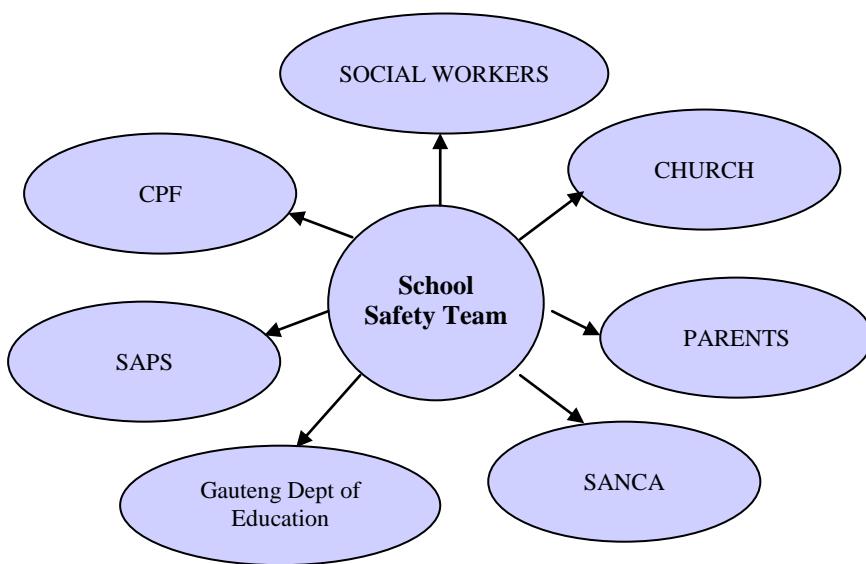
#### **4.5.3 SUB-THEME 2.3: THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS**

This sub-theme will explain the strengths of the community and how community assets can lead and direct the process of coping. There are efforts reported in the study of which some focus on risk reduction (which will be discussed in section 4.6.1 under disciplinary measures), while others focus more intentionally on promoting positive human development, as preventative measures. According to Benson (2002), environmental assets are developmental in nature and synthesize contextual and individual factors to create a unified picture of positive development capable of uniting citizens and multiple socialising systems around a shared vision. This study focuses on the developmental assets identified during the focus group discussion, which include external assets and support assets. Those developmental assets form part of the micro, macro and exo-systems of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical foundations on the ecology of human development alluded to on par 4.2.3.

##### **(a) Sub-theme 2.3.1: External assets**

The participants identified positive resources that are available within the community that could be mobilised to enhance safety at the school. The term *external assets* refer to positive developmental experiences of relationship and opportunity that adults offer young people. Figure 4.3 presents a diagram that depicts external assets and resources identified by the participants during the focus group discussion as available support structures:

**FIGURE 4.3: External Assets and Resources Identified by Participants**



Although the participants were aware of the availability of those external assets and the major role they can play in the positive development of the school, there would seem to be a problem with their accessibility. In their responses the participants repeatedly referred to the external assets as *potential* resources, with no indication of current interaction being indicated. They consistently reported that: “*... People we can involve are SANCA... We need to involve Social Development*” (FPD6: p11). “*The other relevant people are social workers*” (FPC7: p13). “*Sports organizers can assist the child by involving them in sports activities ... even church leaders can be used*” (FPC6: p13). According to Matentjie (2006), if those assets could be mobilised they may add value to the enhancement of safety at the school. She goes on to say, when assets are identified and mobilised to reinforce the drive for change they have to demonstrate that they are adding value to the modification of learner behaviour in this context, consistently and over a period of time. If the support assets are well accentuated learners will be encouraged to become actors within their community, with a focus on being valued and useful within it.

There are those assets which the school would seem to be utilising. For example, within the community “*... ward councillors are involved on the issues that concern the school because the school is within their area of management*” (FPB8: p12). “*Life Orientation educators are also said to be responsible for dealing with learners' behaviour, drugs abuse*” (FPB9: p12). “*The school safety committee is also reported to work hand in hand with the Life Orientation teachers*” (FPB9: p12). Benson (2002:127) proposes that it is

conceptually sound to organise around increasing the external assets, to enhance the development of internal assets, such as commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

**(b) Sub-theme 2.3.2: Support assets**

Benson (2002) defines the *support assets* as being a range of opportunities for experiencing affirmation, approval and acceptance within multiple settings (family, intergenerational relationships, neighbourhood, and school). During the focus group discussion the participants reported that the police, together with the community policing forum, established a project where they patrol around the school yard Mondays to Thursdays from 7h00 to 9h00 to protect the learners on their way to school from thugs. The participant said “*... on that project we patrol these passages to clean them so that when learners come to school they find that the passages are clean*” (*FPC3: p3*). Such support is welcomed by the school community because it is aimed at protecting the well-being of their children: that includes relational support and a warm and caring environment (Benson, 2002:127).

During the narrative activities the learners confirmed they were receiving support with some of the external service providers within their environment. The academic support gained from the significant others, as reflected in the field notes, appears to play a major role in the positive development of the school. Hence, the school is said to have produced good results consistently. Benson (2002:127) contends that external assets emerge through constant exposure to informal interactions with caring and principled adults and peers, and they are reinforced by a larger network of community institutions. The notion that students who are connected to school through involvement in school activities, who perceive school as meaningful and their teachers as supportive, and who experience a sense of pride and satisfaction regarding school are less inclined toward negative and destructive behaviour, including aggression. To reinforce such an attitude, Sprague and Walker (2005) contend that a set of school-based positive values need to be created and promoted which indicate that learners ought to treat one another with care and respect for the rights of others.

Learners also reported that they had opportunities for leadership training and being involved in soccer cup final games. They reported that: “*Last year our school won the soccer cup, sponsored by Mamelodi Sundowns Cup*” (*CLP: p18*). Interaction with the support structures reveal the potential to add to the personal and social development of the child. Ozer and

Weinstein (2004:463) are of the opinion supportive relationships and safe environments are protective factors that may reduce the likelihood of psychological problems among adolescents, who often confront experiences of community violence over and above the other challenges of adolescence.

#### **4.6 THEME 3: VARIOUS INITIATIVES TO DEAL WITH VIOLENCE**

Individuals are actively responsive to forces that impinge upon them. Community coping within the framework of this study emerged in terms of strategic measures employed by the school community as a way of dealing with their circumstances. Sub-themes that emerged within this theme during data analysis include efforts to prevent or ameliorate school violence as: school initiatives, government initiatives and community initiatives. Prevention focuses on relieving the stress, hostility and tension that can precede violence, and amelioration or intervention entails responding promptly and effectively to threats and danger risks (Denenberg, Denenberg & Braverman, 1998). The sub-themes established from the raw data gathered are presented in the section that follows:

##### **4.6.1 SUB-THEME 3.1: SCHOOL INITIATIVES**

In this sub-theme some of the amelioration or intervention strategies employed by the school under study, including the implementation of policies, and disciplinary measures is discussed.

One of the initiatives within the school is the development of policies. Policies are developed to guide and to provide legislative framework for implementation and it is the responsibility of the School Governing Body (SGB) and School Management Team (SMT) to monitor and evaluate the progress of implementation. *“Basically the school has drawn up some policies to discipline these learners ... The policy that is drawn by the school, the parents and the learners is helping us”* (FPA1: p1). This statement is supported by a participant when he says *“... we mostly call the parents, as SGB, and then we draw the policy”* (FPB3: p1). There are policies in place to regulate and control the issue of violence at school. However, instead of relying on school policy only, Pilon (2009) suggests that parents can also be used as monitors and aids for the teachers. This action is found to be inexpensive and can be an effective deterrent, since students may be more reluctant to behave badly when watched by someone they regularly see-in the neighbourhood. Pilon (2009) further acknowledges that

involving parents gives the learners a sense of ownership of anti-violence efforts and may help them reconsider their own attitudes about violence.

Disciplinary measures implemented by educators include searching (for weapons) and physical labour. “*Sometimes when I (the teacher) am free I just go to the toilets and start searching the boys*” (*FPE2: p4*). “*Sometimes they work in the library to arrange books in alphabetical order so that they should not be left outside where thugs will get a chance to molest them, do drugs and crime*” (*FPE4: p9*). According to the SASA, RSA (1996) a police official or, in his absence, the principal or a delegate may, without a search warrant, search any public school premises if he or she has a reasonable suspicion that a dangerous object or illegal drugs may be present on the public premises, in contravention of the regulations. In addition the regulation proposes that clear signs must be displayed at the entrance of all public schools to alert that any person who enters the school may be subjected to such a search. However, the guidelines for the consideration of SGB in adopting a code of conduct for learners emphasises that human dignity must be maintained during searches. Learners must be searched in private by persons of their own gender, preferably in the presence of at least one other person: and a record must be kept of the proceedings and outcomes of searches (Barry, 2006). Seemingly these guidelines are not taken into consideration when searches are conducted in the school under study, and teachers need to take precautionary measures before implementing any disciplinary action.

The physical labour practiced at this school involves: arranging books in the school library, picking up papers or cleaning the school yard. Arranging books in the library can have an indirect positive reinforcement in attracting learners to reading and enhancing their reading ability. Participants indicated that disciplinary measures which are currently employed by the school do not seem to be effective “... *because the learners are enjoying it*” (*FPE3: p10*).

However, the researcher find the library to be a safe place which learners, if guided and supervised by teachers, can turn into a positive experience. Perhaps, if teachers can perceive the attitude displayed by a learner as being positive during punishment, they can capitalise on that to promote good behaviour.

It would appear that the disciplinary measures enforced at that school are gender biased towards boys: as it is reported that searching is only done in the boys toilets, when it is

reported that there are also girls who smoke cigarettes within the school premises. “***Not only boys' smoke, even girls smoke cigarette***” (*CLP: p15*). It would appear that the behaviour of the girls is left unattended to, as they go unnoticed by the teachers. What might happen is an increase in unacceptable behaviour by girls, as they are not punished. Dunne *et al.* (2003) acknowledge that such behaviour is a significant contributor to irregular attendance, underachievement of girls, pregnancy (which in some cases may be the result of sexual abuse) and truancy (which may ultimately lead to permanent drop-out). The South African Constitution makes provision for female learners to be entitled to equal opportunities and equal treatment in school. Therefore, both boys and girls should be disciplined equally.

The school seems to depend on parental involvement as a form of discipline. “***We mostly call the parents***” (*FPB3: p2*). “***We write letters and parents must come to school if a learner is misbehaving***” (*FPD1: p3*). However, the inadequate feedback from this disciplinary measure seems to be contributing to the persistence of violence at school. As a result another measure often used is the adoption and implementation of the school safety policy that is drafted by the School Management Team and the Safety and Security Team. “***They say there is some discipline that they are making and there are some policies that they are trying***” (*FPD1: p3*). The participants did not clearly outline the principles embedded in the school safety policy or allude to their effectiveness. However, although this is a measure practiced by the school it does not seem to be effective because one of the participants reported that the “***Parents do not care and say that they are going to work***” (*FPD1: p4*). The participant further reflected a concern as to “***... what is the measure that the principal or teachers are taking if they just issued a letter to a learner who is violent at school and the parent does not attend to the problem, ... If we cannot address that issue it is going to be a continuous issue and the school will be sitting with this situation without any solution***” (*FPD1: p4*). According to Morrison (2007), there are disciplinary methods that schools can employ which involve suspension, temporary exclusion from school, and (permanent) expulsion. According to SASA (RSA, 1996), expulsion refers to the permanent ending of a learner’s right to attend a particular school; and suspension refers to the temporary ending of a learner’s right to attend a particular school. Seemingly the school tends to align itself with the principles of policy of the Department of Education in drafting their policies. It was reported that “***The role of the SGB is to make policies which are in line with the Department of Education to try and control the issue of crime***” (*FPB6: p10*). However, the applicability seems not to be evident as participants indicated a dissatisfaction with the effect of disciplinary methods

employed at the school under study and the level of frustration expressed due to “... *not knowing what to do because we are not allowed to use corporal punishment and sometimes the punishment we give is not effective because they enjoy picking up papers...*” (FPB6: p10).

Although the participant educator believes that using physical activity as a form of discipline sets an example to the other learners, “... *if we give them something to do to show others that they must not be late*” (FPE4: p9), some of the other participants feel that these disciplinary measures do not seem to be effective because learners seem to enjoy it. Hence, they do not show any improvement in their negative behaviour and they do not deliver the letters to their parents. Another a measure of discipline is that the gates are always closed after the bell has rung and late comers are turned back home to call their parents. The learners tend to play truant and they will say “... *their parents are at work*” (PDF4: p8), *but when you give them a letter they don't give them to their parents*” (FPE3: p10).

However, there does seem to be preventative measures in place, which the school community rely on. Some of those preventative measures, as cited by the participants, include gate control, a communication and reporting system, providing information and knowledge: “*We have the gate controller who works here on daily basis. Even teachers in the morning, we alternate in days to man the gate from 7h20 to 7h50, We help with controlling the behaviour of learners, check uniform and everything*” (FPB5: p7). Teachers believe that this action scares naughty learners to even think of trying something unacceptable because “... *if a particular learner wants to bring something he will think that because he is going to find a group of teachers at the gate and they may try to see what the researcher have in my bag, end up not bringing wrong stuff to the premises*” (PFB5: p7). Pilon (2009) acknowledges that school staff members have traditionally served as monitors at the gate, but increasingly schools are hiring security guards to patrol the building and provide security at events. With regard to the school under study there is no specific person employed as a security guard: instead the caretaker mans the gate as well as the safety of the entire building.

Institutionalisation of policies demonstrates a commitment to violence prevention and helps staff and learners feel safe (Pilon, 2009). “*Basically the school has drawn up some policies to discipline these learners who bring things that they are not supposed to bring. There is a procedure that we follow if a learner is found with a knife or drugs and we work together*

*with the police” (FPA3: p2).* It is expected that every school should have its code of conduct that clearly explains school rules and punishments for defaulters and procedures that must be followed during disciplinary investigations (SASA, RSA 1996; Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools 2001). Some schools also institute zero tolerance provisions for guns or any form of dangerous weapons (Pilon, 2009; SASA, RSA 1996; CJCP, 2006). *Zero tolerance* refers to a widely accepted and enforced policy in which students are notified prior to entering the school that there will be no acceptance of violence in terms of specific behaviour, weapons or drugs within the school environment (McCabe & Martin, 2005). To prevent learners from bringing in weapons some schools use metal detectors, while others administer systematic or random searches of learners’ bodies, possessions and lockers (Pilon, 2009).

Classroom management also came up as a preventative measure for the class teacher to: control attendance, set class rules, monitor behaviour consistently. One of the participants indicated that “*...if a class teacher can do that before the commencement of each period that we can see that each and every learner does not have anything that is harmful*” (FPD1: p2). Apparently some of the participants believe that educators should have a good understanding of their learners in the classroom. Learners come to school with various contextual factors, such as emotional or behavioural barriers which they find difficult to cope with in their daily functioning. One of the participants believes that “*... each and every class teacher must understand the behaviour of the learners. If the child’s attitudes or behaviour changes it can be reported sooner and the child can be assisted*” (FPC5: p5). One of the participants stated that: “*... we need to talk to the kid’s every time because these kids do not understand that they’ve got violence at school or someone who bullies them and where to report*” (FPD3: p6). One of the participants also encourages that “*... if learners can work hand in hand with the class teacher the school can be safe*” (FPE3: p6).

One of the participants indicated the need for the school to establish an appropriate system for reporting any unacceptable behaviour. He says: “*We need to teach them that the only people who can make their school safe is themselves ... each and everything they see that is not right from the school must report to the principal that learner X has this and the researcher don’t feel comfortable at school and the researcher cannot learn*” (FPD4: p6). *If the learners can report anything which they think is wrong beforetime*” (FPD4: p6). Denenberg *et al.* (1998) state that learners should be encouraged, for their own safety, to

report all menacing remarks or behavior, and this should be evaluated carefully by the violence prevention team. Denenberg *et al.* (1998) go on to state that a cornerstone of violence prevention is the reporting of even casual threats. However, Sylverstsen, Flanagan and Stout (2009) contend that when adolescents make important decisions, they weigh the costs and benefits of their choices. In considering whether to go to the teacher or principal, in order to stop a peer from acting on a dangerous plan, they will likely consider whether disclosing to an adult would result in more trouble for them or their peer. Learners, therefore, need to be motivated to report any unacceptable behaviour that might put their lives in danger.

One of the participants also highlighted the importance of providing learners with information about violence because it appears that most learners, especially the very young ones, are naïve and vulnerable. One of the participants stated that: “*... we need to talk to the kid’s every time because these kids do not understand that they’ve got violence at school or someone who bullies them and where to report*” (*FPD3: p6*). According to Denenberg *et al.* (1998) and Matthews *et al.* (1999), intervention should include teaching the child alternative socially appropriate replacement responses, such as problem-solving and anger control skills, conflict resolution skills, and interpersonal relations at home and in school. This is in line with the preventative education propagated by the National Policy in the Management of Drug Abuse by Learners in Public and Independent schools (1996). The objective of that policy is to negate, counteract or delay the likelihood of experimentation with drugs, by providing information about the dangers of their use and misuse, as well as to encourage those who are experiencing problems to get the help they need. Drug education is thus included in the Learning Area of Life Orientation in the Revised National Curriculum Statement for grades R to 9 and the National Curriculum for Further Education and Training. Matthews *et al.* (1999) also propose that in-service and pre-service teacher training, reaching out to parents and dealing with the aftermath of violence should be taken into consideration when planning intervention strategies.

The mode of communication between the staff members and learners should be taught and understood by all stakeholders because Denenberg *et al.* (1998) believe that the breakdown in communication is one of the first casualties of an emergency. Once the communication channel is established that means “*... learners will be free to report because in our communities and even at school some learners are bullied to an extent that they can’t*

*report even if they see something, they don't want to be involved in this and that. So it is important for learners to feel safe so that they can report whatever they see what the school management and the teachers are not able to see" (FPB4: p7).*

#### **4.6.2 SUB-THEME 3.2: GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES**

The effectiveness of prevention initiatives is increased with the support of legal policies. It must be acknowledged that legislation now exists to reduce the issue of violence in schools. This sub-theme will unfold the government initiatives with regard to policies that are in place, highlighting their implementation, monitoring and effectiveness.

The participants alluded that, as discussed in Chapter 2, there are also government policies in place as a regulatory measure to discipline and safety in schools. Literature reveals that in South Africa in particular, there are attempts by the Department of Education to deal with the issue of violence in schools (Burton, 2008a). Various strategies, such as the Tirisano plan, Hlayiseka (Burton, 2008a) and Words over Weapons (District Memorandum), have been launched as a measure to address violence in schools. However, some of the participants appear to be experiencing a feeling of helplessness because they think the Department of Education is not doing enough to regulate the issue of violence in schools, especially when it comes to implementation and monitoring of the measures introduced. One of the participants said: "*I don't know if there is anything that the Department of Education is doing about that because we cannot even check every school*" (FPD1: p2). This concern was also reiterated by another participant when he said: "*If only Department of Education can come up with school safety plans because we from the police would like to come with a school plan but we can't unless we see the Department of Education's school safety plan*" (FPC7: p13).

South African government is a signatory to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, and compels the country to pass the laws and take social, educational and administrative measures to protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation (Prinsloo, 2005). Furthermore, the SASA, (RSA, 1996) and the Regulation for Safety Measures at Public Schools (2001) are policy and legislative mandates that have been developed to regulate the prohibition of weapons in schools and the issue of school violence. While legislation already

exists at all level of government, what needs to be done is the periodical reviewing of policies for their appropriateness, effectiveness and completeness, to maintain their usefulness over time.

The participants reported that the district office constantly organises workshops to train teachers on issues of violence “*... sometimes there are workshops in connection with safety organised by the Department of Education and they invite the police to come and workshop teachers on how to handle learners who are violent and who are abusing drugs at school*” (*FPE8: p13*). One of the participants proposed that “*It could be a good thing if the stakeholders can be engaged in continuous meetings to address issues of school safety, the problems of the learners, and theft at school*” (*FPD8: p15*). Seemingly this always turns to be unsuccessful because of the reluctance of teachers to attend meetings. The participant indicated that: “*...We issue the letters in advance but only to find that only a few attend... the principals are not coming so that we can hear from them and engage them with the fight against crime and the problems of the learners*” (*FPD8: p15*). Literature reveals that to dispel fears and help teachers feel supported, meetings about violence issues should be held regularly (Pilon, 2009). The attendance of teachers and principals in such meetings can be invaluable because they have information about the threats of violence in the school and have personal knowledge of the learners. Again, from the researcher’s personal observation of meetings she had attended, some teachers seemed to be attending to represent their schools without showing any interest or engagement in the discussions. As a result implementation of decisions taken failed due, in most cases, to lack of involvement.

#### 4.6.3 SUB THEME 3.3: COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

In order to sustain long term changes in a community, individuals must reinforce and support those changes (Leë, Guy, Perry, Sniffen & Mixson, 2007). Strategies to be used should allow individual children to gain understanding of the family network, encourage strengths and help a child make sense of its environment. According to the general documents in the SASA (RSA, 1996), effective partnerships need to be developed within schools and between schools, communities, law enforcement agents, parents, social services and civil society. The purpose of those partnerships is to develop an integrated approach and shared responsibility for the school as part of the community. In this sub-theme the strategies and community mobilisation of assts and resources as community initiatives is examined.

The police have established a partnership with the school under investigation, in an attempt to address the issue of violence there. The partnership is in response to the ‘adopt-a cop’ initiative of the Department of Education, where every school is allocated a police officer to collaborate with the school with regard to any matter that requires the expertise of the police force. The police concerned should be available to attend to the activities of the school at all times, especially when called for and should also be invited during extra-mural activities to support the school. “*We have decided to come with a project ... that project we are doing with the community is to patrol the passages and clean them (thugs) so that when learners come to school they find the passages are clean*” (FPC3: p3).

Leë *et al.* (2007) contend that when the people have an opportunity to participate in decision making, helping to formulate the strategies that affect them, they will develop a sense of ownership in what they have determined, and be committed to seeing that the decisions are sound and the strategies are useful, effective and implemented. To that effect one of the participants expressed a feeling of helplessness with regard to lack of appropriate mechanisms to eradicate violence. The participant continuously reiterated that “... *there must be other mechanism that we need to do, and firstly the behaviours of these children is the main thing that influence the need to come with the mechanism*” (FPDI: p3). The participant alludes that there should be mechanisms in place to control the use of dangerous learning material in relation to the behaviour of some learners.

However, the participants alluded to the engagement of the Community Policing Forum (CPF) as working together with the police in providing their commitment to prevent violence, by establishing a safety project. According to Scheidegger (2006), the CPF comprise of people from different social backgrounds who get involved and proactively contribute to a safe and productive social environment. Their members each take charge of an area of several blocks and make frequent calls on each resident, in an exchange of information: whereby the residents become walking, talking information centre’s (Matthews *et al.*, 1999). To support this statement one of the participants said: “... *the role we play as the community, we need to encourage these learners to come to school and learn*” (FPD4: p8). The participant expressed a sense of responsibility upon their shoulders when he said: “... *we feel that we must push them to come to school...we just want to intervene and say if learners are late*

*“they must be kept out but at a certain time they (teachers) must let them in so that they must be safe .... Our role is to take them back and bring them to school” (FPD4: p8).*

Community mobilisation is a participatory process focused on changing community norms, basic patterns of social interaction, values, customs and institutions in ways that will significantly improve the quality of life in a community (Lee *et al.*, 2007). Social problem solving approaches could be taught to enhance coping skills in children. According to the participants, learners need to be motivated to go to school and this must begin at home. *“Learners should be taught to behave at home and the school is where they are going to be taught how to improve their lives and to pave their way to the future” (FPB10: p14).*

#### **4.7 THEME 4: COLLABORATION WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

The heart of collaboration is the willingness of the participants to engage in shared problem solving and decision making in a participatory process, focusing on changing community norms through community mobilisation (Lee *et al.*, 2007). That requires a respect for and appreciation of the potential contributions of everyone involved in the process. Addressing school violence is a challenge that requires collaboration between the school and the community, including expertise and support (O’Donnell, 2001) from the significant others. That requires the school and community agencies to work together in supporting positive behaviour. A school and community foundation that connects children with caring adults enables children and youth to maintain their attachments to family and school, and to develop their competencies in many domains (Furlong, Paige & Osher, 2003). McCabe and Martins (2005) recognize that in reducing youth violence there is a need for a systematic approach with collaborative actions involving schools, families and communities. The following sub-themes will outline the meso-system as the realm of interaction between micro-systems, such as the home and school, and the local community as well as the exo-system, that is potentially significant but indirectly influential to the existing violence in schools, and the ecological mind-set of the school climate and how collaboration could be applied to understand and prevent school violence.

##### **4.7.1 SUB-THEME 4.1: LEARNERS’ NEED TO BELONG IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

According to Osterman (2000), a sense of belonging is an important factor in understanding student behaviour and performance. A sense of belonging in the school community has been found to correlate positively and/or negatively with school performance, emotional well-being, delinquency and health-risk behaviour. Oosthuizen *et al.* (2008:68) acknowledge that “the feeling of alienation, caused by rejection, humiliation, and a sense of hopelessness, motivates some children and youth to act out in revenge and to hurt others as they have been hurt”. From an ecological perspective successful collaboration rests on knowledge of the school community involved, including basic patterns of social interaction, values, customs and institutions and ways that will significantly improve the quality of life in a community (Lee *et al.*, 2007). Osterman (2000) states that the social context plays a significant part in determining whether individual needs of the school population are satisfied. The important thing about the context is how school members treat each other and how the school community addresses violence. After reviewing the interrelatedness of meso-systems and exo-systems, three components – which constitute a school climate – were identified, each of which influences an individual’s behaviour in either a positive or negative manner. In the context of this study components have been identified as possible aspects that could stimulate a sense of belonging for individuals within the school community: those components include: the context, psychosocial variables, and classroom factors that affect learner behaviour.

**(a) Sub-theme 4.1.1: Context**

Behaviour is defined within the setting in which it occurs. The extent of ‘goodness of fit’ and ‘poorness of fit’ displayed by learners within the school have serious implications for the learner him- or herself and other persons involved (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001). In this study, context is considered within the ecosystemic perspective of the school or the classroom atmosphere, individual members of the school community and their relationships within the school, and societal influences such as the local community and the school governing body (Hernandez & Seem, 2004).

The school context requires basic infrastructure and resources like a functioning SGB, trained teachers and support structures (Burton, 2008b). Contexts differ in the extent to which they address individual needs and learners can be expected to function optimally, depending on the extent to which their basic needs are satisfied (Osterman, 2000). It emerged from the data that to enhance a sense of belonging there are school rules and policies regarding codes of conduct and how violations of those codes should be addressed. According to Hernandez and

Seem (2004), behavioural expectations refer to the importance of defining the parameters of acceptable behaviour through a school culture. According to one of the participants “*... there must be policies... if you admit we must just try to make it clear to the learners and the parents, there must be a clause that binds the school that a school is you are here to learn and we are not encouraging you to use drugs*” (*FPD3: p6*). One of the participants said: “*... we need to encourage these learners to come to school and learn*” (*FPD4: p8*). Again it was mentioned that “*... if learners can work hand in hand with the class teachers then the school can be safe*” (*FPE3: p6*).

Osterman (2000) describes the importance of teaming as a basis for creating a network to provide emotional and moral support, personal dignity, intellectual assistance, and personal encouragement. To achieve that major emphasis should be placed on improving the nature of relationships within the meso-systems and the exo-systems. As reflected in the field notes for this study, there are also projects brought to the school by significant others with different kinds of expertise, as a way of contribution to the development of the learners and the school as a whole and striving for school-community collaboration: as being accepted, included or welcomed leads to positive emotions, while being rejected, excluded or ignored leads to intense feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness (Osterman, 2000), which are potential triggers of poorness of fit.

**(b) Sub-theme 4.1.2: Psychosocial variables**

There are a number of psychosocial variables identified in the school community under study. Those include factors learners bring to the classroom, interpersonal relationships, school management style and perceptions of school safety. Those factors are discussed in the paragraphs to follow.

Learner variables include the child’s academic skills and talents, self-esteem, temperament, emotional maturity, physical development, social skills, learning style, attitude towards learning and perceptions of violence at school. With regard to the school under study high academic expectations for learners appears to be the objective of the school and this challenges learners to focus on their school work and be successful in their studies. The school records reveal academic achievement sustained in the matric pass rate for the past four years. Osterman (2000) links the sense of belonging to outcomes of particular significance in the development of basic psychological processes important to student success, academic

attitudes and motives, social and personal attitudes, engagement and participation and academic achievement.

Learners are even motivated through rewards “*... top 10 learners were chosen to attend leadership training in Durban*” (*TLP: p19*). Even though that practice is seen as motivational, it appears to be biased: as those learners who are not doing well academically seem to be denied an opportunity to develop other aspects of their strengths and abilities - considering the fact that not all learners who achieve better grades have the potential to be leaders.

Research shows that supportive relationships with others are linked to students’ internalization, self-regulation, and a sense of autonomy. Positive peer relationships amongst the learners and the influence of significant others in the environment serve as motivation to enhance a sense of community. There would seem to be a good relationship among some of the learners in the school under study. The learners reported going on trips together “*We went on a trip to Durban ...*” (*CLP: p18*). That practice enhances the social life and good interpersonal relationships amongst the learners. The more time they spend together the more they learn to understand and tolerate one another. They are able to motivate and be emphatic toward one another and encourage acceptable conduct. They reported that “*... one of our classmates stopped smoking dagga and we were happy for him*” (*TLP: p19*).

The nature of relationships between some teachers and some learners appears to be acceptable as there were no negative reports highlighted. According to Furlong and Morrison (2000) strong interpersonal relationships with peers and adults can play a prominent role in a positive school climate. However, there are still those learners who portray antisocial behaviour, as alluded to in Theme 1, regardless of the school rules and positive influence from the teachers. In Theme 3 it was mentioned that “*... some of the learners are using drugs and they become violent to other learners*” (*FPD2: p5*). Such a situation needs to be addressed, and the participants indicated that teachers are proactive about it since they show themselves to be doing something about it: “*... we need to know how these learners are getting these drugs to school*” (*FPD2: p5*).

How schools are run influences the school climate (Hernandez & Seem, 2004). The school management team sets the tone for the kind of communication and cooperation that occurs in

the school. According to (Sprague & Walker, 2005), higher morale among educators and learners and lower levels of disorder are found in schools where educators, the administration and SGB problem-solve and work together towards action plans. From the researcher's observation there would seem to be a relationship of trust and respect among the learners and the staff, including the SGB, as during her visits to the school she saw the staff members acting positively and helpfully toward visitors. In this instance, the deputy principal was helpful in organizing the venue where discussions were held, while the School Safety Coordinator arranged for the learners to participate in this study.

From my personal observation learner's perceptions of school safety within the school under study showed increased levels of optimism as well as potential improvement in academic performance, and lower levels of depression and problematic behaviour. However, the participants showed increasing fears with the constant attacks they experienced from the out of school learners, as discussed in par.4.4.2. In response to those fears, students are seen to bring weapons to school, retaliate more often or act out behaviourally. However, the reporting system alluded to in Theme 3, Sub-theme 1 and the level of communication established by the school management team seem to be contributing positively towards the reduction of violence within the school premises. It was however, reported that "*... some children come to school with weapons*" (CLP: p18). This shows how learners perceive their school environment and feel they have be prepared to protect themselves against any danger.

**(c) Sub-theme 4.1.3: Factors that affect learners' behaviours**

Factors that affect learners' behaviour include the attitudes, social relationships, lack of trust and respect, and communication style. Such behaviours need to be treated with caution because they can influence positive or negative perceptions of a school climate. Teachers are expected to set good examples in reinforcing good behaviour. It was observed that the learners of the school under study displayed a positive attitude towards their schooling. They showed themselves to be eager to learn and participated in this study with enthusiasm. They interacted with one another in groups in a relaxed and less intimidating manner and were able to communicate their thoughts openly. Seemingly positive interpersonal relationship context both influenced their behaviour and influenced others' behaviour towards them. As a result the researcher was able to interact with them freely during her study.

**4.7.2 SUB-THEME 4.2: COLLABORATION WITH VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS**

One feature of school life that helps people feel valued and cared for, and encourages them to feel warmth and concern towards the school and people they meet there, is their level of engagement and participation in the various school processes (Weare, 2000). In dealing with anti-social behaviour, Furlong, Morrison, Skiba and Cornell (2004) identify the need to explore the social context of behaviour. The collaboration between the school, community, classroom, family and peers should interact with a learner's characteristics, to help prevent the supporting of the development of undesired behaviour. Burton (2008a) acknowledges that the most effective way to deal with violence is to initiate cross cutting engagement of stakeholders without ignoring the collective intelligence that schools might otherwise have (Sergiovanni, 2004). The collaborative efforts of stakeholders to prevent and ameliorate violence at school will be discussed in this sub-theme.

The participants identified the need for an establishment of a collaborative relationship with various stakeholders, as a measure to responding to the specifics of the local environment. The National Education Policy Act (1996) also acknowledges that schools and institutions should, as far as is possible, involve organizations specializing in drug education, intervention and other associated programmes to augment the education provided by the school-based educators. One of the participants indicated that “... ***we need to involve the Social Department and or South African Narcotics Association (SANCA) people who are dealing with drug abuse***” (*FPD6: p11*). Increasingly schools are being seen as having a key role to play in collaborating with various health-related local agencies, such as the health services, psychologists, social workers, and the police. Weare (2000) acknowledges that such agencies should work directly with learners experiencing emotional difficulties or with behavioural problems. Benson (2007) contends that such a relationship is equally powerful in predicting thriving behaviours, with an increase in assets associated with dramatic rise in academic achievement, school grades, leadership, prosocial behaviour, delay in gratification and affirmation of diversity.

The service provided by social workers is dedicated to the promotion of the general welfare of all segments of society (Goodman, 2006). Teachers of Life Orientation are also perceived as having a positive impact in the lives of learners. “***Life Orientation educators also play a major role in dealing with learner's behaviour, drugs and life skills in general***” (*FPB9: p12*). According to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (2004), Life Orientation as a Learning Area needs to equip learners with knowledge, skills attitudes and values to meet

their life challenges in an informed, confident, and responsible way. The need exists for teachers of Life Orientation to collaborate with other stakeholders in their attempts to help learners. Children, who witness violence, whether in their homes or communities, can suffer psychological consequences (Matthews *et al.*, 1999). Linking with multidisciplinary services is essential because all concerned work together and speak with one voice if a distressed child or family are to be helped effectively (Weare, 2000). “*Church leaders can be invited to schools to assist learners having problems at home, just to give them moral support*” (*FPC6: p13*). Churches can work together with the state welfare services and mental health services to promote healthy choices and engender low risk behaviour amongst the youth through guidance and counselling (Matthews *et al.*, 1999).

The participants also proposed involving sports organisers in the community, as a measure to prevent crime and drug abuse. “*Sports organizers can assist the child by involving them in sports activities, so that they don't have time to do crime*” (*FPC6: p13*). Planned, coordinated and most importantly, consistent extra-mural activities are needed at all schools, to involve learners in positive activities and reduce their exposure to gangs and violence or criminal opportunities (Burton, 2008b). Furthermore, sports play a major role in physical development and improvement of one's self-esteem (Mohlamonyane, 2005). Sports and Recreation South Africa (2003) acknowledges that sports are an investment in the health, vitality and productivity of the people. The benefits acquired in sports include an overall improvement in the quality of life, physical development, mental alertness and moral well-being of the population (Mohlamonyane, 2005).

As the children experience problems with taxi drivers, the need exists for arranging a meeting with the “*... chairpersons of the taxi association*” (*FPD6: p11*), to plan a good working relationship with them. National Transport Policy (1996) represents the earliest attempt of the post apartheid government to address the unique transport needs of South Africans, including learners. According to the Constitution of South Africa everyone has the right to basic education. The Human Rights Watch (2001) also maintains that it is the legal responsibility of the government to provide transport for learners where the lack of reliable transportation affects school attendance or performance. Some of the learners who participated in this study are travel a long distance from the disadvantaged area where they live to school and, they report, the mode of transport used is not reliable and safe. Some of the participants see collaborating with the taxi owners and/or taxi association management team as possibly being

a good idea. “*Parents are trying to talk to the taxi drivers but we don’t see much change. .... I (the teacher) think if we can talk to the taxi association it can work*” (FPB7: p12).

It is important that the school management team work with local government to enhance school safety. South Africa’s first democratic elections marked a reform of local governments into local authorities. According to Scheidegger (2006), local government is closest to the people and, it is considered, participation in that gives people a sense of empowerment and agency. In the same township different areas are divided into wards and every ward is governed by a counsellor, with other members that form a committee. The participants acknowledged the existence of ward counsellors in their community. “... *Community leaders and ward counsellors are also considered important because the schools are within their wards*” (FPB8: p12). The ward committee is the structure that links the community to the state and it has an essential role to play in limiting access to alcohol and drugs in and around the school environment. In their capacity, community leaders, as members of the local government, can drive the cleaning and maintenance of public spaces around the school and can engage the police in dealing with illegal alcohol and drug outlets around the school (Burton, 2008b).

The participant learners also expressed their need analysis and identified friendships as playing an influential role in the negative behaviour that is displayed by most learners. “*We have to be careful when choosing friends because there are friends who are influencing us like peer pressure ... and other to cause problems in your life*” (CMP: p17). That statement cautions the learners to be careful when choosing friends, to avoid problems. This implies that learners need to be taught social skills. Forman (1993) defines social skills as the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and beneficial to self and to others. Social skills help the child attain important social outcomes such as peer group acceptance, positive judgments by significant others, academic competence, a positive self concept and good psychological adjustment (Oosthuizen *et al.*, 2008).

#### **4.8 SYNOPSIS OF FINDINGS**

The results of this study were outlined in Chapter 4, wherein the themes and sub-themes that emerged through a process of inductive thematic analysis were presented. Four themes, from

which several sub-themes were identified, provided a bigger picture of the participant's experiences of violence. Those thematic categories include: (1) the experiences of violence by the school community, (2) the role played by the support structures within the school community, (3) how the school community copes with violence, and (4) the collaborative effort within the school community. In the following sub-sections a synthesis of the findings are presented.

#### **4.8.1 EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE**

The participants in this research study confirmed the existence of violence as a school community challenge that needs immediate attention, as it impacts negatively to both individuals and the school community at large. It was acknowledged that most of the violence experienced by the school community is caused by out of school learners. In the context of this study, the nature of violence is experienced as: the use of physical force in fighting, stabbing, bullying, and sexual abuse. The perpetrators are alleged to physically attack learners on their way to and from school, harass them and forcefully rob them of possessions (such as cell phones and money). The researcher experienced the use of physical force and sexual harassment as being life threatening and traumatic, as it is mostly directed to vulnerable and innocent learners.

The results of this study further reveal the accessibility of drugs and dangerous weapons as the causes of violence and antisocial behaviour in the context of the school under study. Taking into consideration the physical condition of the school and the implementation of policies, there would seem to be no evidence of collaboration amongst the various systems within the school community. Further, out of school learners gain access to the school premises without being noticed, due to inefficient implementation of policies.

The results obtained through this study with regard to challenges experienced by the school community include physical and sexual abuse. Learners also experience emotional trauma because they witness most of the incidences of violence and feel helpless about it. In addition, the high school teachers are found not to be supervising learners during break, as they assume the learners are big boys and girls. The perpetrators are aware of this and take advantage of the situation. Some of the teachers also feel helpless, as they think they are not getting enough support from their employer. As a result they distance themselves from taking

part in safety measures at school and show lack of motivation to assist. The responsibility of safety and security thus seems to be directed to only those few teachers who are willing to help.

#### **4.8.2 THE ROLE OF THE SUPPORT STRUCTURES**

Although the results of my study reflect the availability of the support structures, the lack of accessibility to those structures requires they be integrated into the system, to enhance dependence and interdependence of the various levels of the system. The support structures identified in the context of this study include: the School Governing Body (SGB), the School Management Team (SMT) and the environmental assets. The SGB refers to the parental involvement, whereas the SMT refers to the support of the principal and the teachers, while environmental assets refers to the external and support assets available within the community.

It is the researcher's view, based on the data obtained from the participants, there is a good working relationship between the SGB and the SMT. However, the fact that there are those teachers who exempt themselves from the responsibility of safety at school limits the efforts put out by the other staff members and this might impact negatively in the management of increased violence at the school. There is also a need to mobilise the external and support assets identified, but with caution, for them to reinforce positive behavioural change.

#### **4.8.3 HOW THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY COPIES WITH VIOLENCE**

The participants identified initiatives adopted at various levels of the system as a measure to prevent or ameliorate the issue of violence in the school context. In accordance with the conceptual framework chosen for this study, that is in line with the ecosystemic model viewed from the four levels of the school community (the individual, the school community, the wider community and the whole social system, including the government). In integrating the concept of *coping* - the underlying theory to this study - the researcher could perceive the mechanisms employed by the school community, to address the issue of violence in the school, being the outcome of the collaborative decision making process of the SGB: which reflects a dynamic interaction between the school community and their environment. The continuous and constant interaction between various levels as a coping process, of adapting to

and managing internal and external demands of the environment, is acknowledged (Lazarus, 1993).

A combination of disciplinary strategies is employed by the school management. For instance, at school level disciplinary measures, such as random searching and physical labour, are currently employed. However, those methods appear to not be effective, as they do not bring the desired change in learner behaviour, as seen in the increase in violence. That was determined through reviewing the filing system established for the recording of offenses utilized by the school management.

Another disciplinary method preferred by the school management is that of parental involvement. Consistently, teachers contact the parents of ‘problem’ learners, with the request they come to the school, to address any form of misconduct by their child, though there would seem to be those parents who do not understand the importance of attending to such invitations. Such lack of cooperation results in discipline becoming the responsibility of the teacher only, which discourages some of the teachers, who then become reluctant to help. However, the involvement of significant others is also seen to be effective and draws the attention of potential networks within the community.

Preventative measures that were identified and are being employed by the school include: gate control, communication and reporting, and provision of information and knowledge about violence. As the researcher, it is my observation that a communication and reporting system are included in the school policies but do not seem to be implemented and monitored, as the learners are not seen to be reporting incidences of violence to the teachers. The participants strongly recommend that a reporting system be established, so that learners could report to their class teachers any emergencies. However, it would seem such information and knowledge is cascaded to learners through their curriculum.

As mentioned in Sub-theme 2, the government is seen to establish prevention initiatives through legal policies and projects. The school under study is on par with those government policies, in that they have aligned their safety policy with that of the Department of Education and the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996). The Department of Education is also reported to organize developmental training for teachers with regard to safety at school. However, the some of the participants reported reluctance on the side of some teachers and

principals to participate in those meetings: which undermines the efforts of the employer. In contrast to that, other participants alleged they do not receive any form of support from the Department of Education in this regard. The researcher finds the situations reported above contradictory.

According to the researcher's findings the community initiative identified by the participants is the safety project introduced by the police (SAPS) and the community policing forum (CPF). The two organisations join efforts to eradicate violence at the school, to ensure the safety of learners on their way to and from school. They patrol the areas surrounding the school in the morning and in the afternoon, to scare away the perpetrators. The school management supports the idea and joins in controlling the gates in the morning, when the learners arrive at the school.

#### **4.8.4 COLLABORATION WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

It emerged from this study that there are factors that promote safety at the school under study. Factors that emerged in this theme include: the school climate, psychosocial variables within the school community, and factors that affect learner behaviours.

Considering the context in this study there are established school rules, policies and a code of conduct, designed to enhance school safety. The SGB would appear to be active and supportive, and a relationship has been established with significant others within the school community who do collaborate with the school. It would, therefore, seem there is potential for the school management to access other resources and opportunities identified in the community, providing effective network links could be established: the identified external and support assets includes: social workers, South African Narcotics Association, Taxi Association, Community leaders, and church leaders.

From this study, it has emerged that there are behavioural expectations, as stipulated in the code of conduct for learners, which define the culture of the school. Acceptable behaviour, policies and code of conduct emerged as variables that set the tone for behaviour modification and that learners ought to abide by. Positive characteristics, social development and academic achievement are also among the goals of the school under study. While the focus on academic achievement is evident in the sustained high matriculation pass rate of the

past few years, social development is promoted through the nature of interpersonal relationships between learners and teachers, and the communication style at the school.

#### **4.9 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 4 presented an analysis of data and findings observed in relation to the existing literature: indicating similarities as well as contradictions, with possible explanation. Four themes and their subsequent sub-themes were identified during data analysis. That was followed by a synopsis of the findings that emerged.

In Chapter 5 the research questions that guided this inquiry are answered and the potential contribution of this study to society is discussed. That is followed by conclusions and recommendations for future research.

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## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 5 a summary of the preceding chapters is presented, followed by a review of the purpose of the research questions that guided this study. That is followed by an explanation of the conclusions drawn with regard to the findings of this research. Recommendations for future research and development conclude the chapter.

#### **5.2 SUMMARY OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS**

Chapter 1 presents an outline of this study and the explanation for the researcher's interest in the topic and the rationale for this study are provided. The research questions were introduced, along with an explanation of the purpose of this research. The main concepts relating to the context of this study were clarified. The paradigmatic perspective from which this study was approached was stated, and the chosen research design, data gathering techniques, quality criteria and ethical considerations were considered.

In Chapter 2 the existing literature on the topic was explored, which formed the background to this study and presented the researcher's conceptual framework. The past and current state of violence in schools experienced in other countries, such as US and the Netherlands, was considered in relation to that of the South African context. Factors contributing to violence in school and the impact of that on the quality of life, social well-being, academic performance and school management were discussed. That included discussions on intervention strategies that are currently in place, as well as policy and legislative mandates implemented within the South African context. The importance of collaboration as a possible measure for intervention was also considered. A detailed discussion on the researcher's integrated conceptual framework concluded the chapter.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the research plan, whereby the paradigm, research design and the choices made on the methods of data collection and analysis are justified. In addition, efforts made to enhance the trustworthiness of this study and the ethical guidelines adhered to during

the research process are explained. The limitations that could have compromised this study and the activities that made my study possible were also discussed.

Chapter 4 presents an explanation of the comparison between the existing literature on the topic and how the school community under study copes with violence at school. The results of this study are interpreted in terms of the researcher's integrated conceptual framework (see Chapter 2) in relation to existing literature.

### **5.3 REVIEW OF THE PURPOSE AND THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF MY STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to explore how a chosen school community copes with violence at school. In this section the secondary research questions are addressed, which answers include reflections in terms of the primary research question.

#### **5.3.1 SECONDARY QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE THE FEELINGS OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ABOUT VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL?**

The members of the school community where this study was undertaken expressed feelings of frustration and helplessness, due to the seriousness of the ever increasing violence within and around their school. It would appear that some of the teachers prefer to avoid dealing with their feelings generated due to that situation: as a result they disengage themselves from the safety and security activities, thus preventing them from taking responsibility of supporting learners to deal with violence at school.

The learners expressed their fears and anxieties that impact on their learning processes. They reported that they are frightened and horrified by the violent incidences that occur within the school premises and on their way to and from school. The results of this study reveal learners to be influenced by intrinsic motivation to change their behaviour, as that gave them hope and optimism to continue to do well in their academic performance. In their articulations they revealed they are concerned about the increasing violence at school but, through personal resilience, they were still able to be consistent with their good performance, as revealed in the high matriculation pass rate. The learners seem to be aware of the available resources and are motivated to make use of them, when given the chance.

### **5.3.2 SECONDARY QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE THOUGHTS OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ABOUT VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL?**

The school community under study here are of the opinion that the violence is mostly caused by out of school learners who attack learners as they are on their way to and from school. The teachers view most of the learner-to-learner violence they experience as being so minor that they are able to address it internally, without involving other stakeholders. However, there are violent incidences of a more serious nature that do require the services of external help for intervention. This last mentioned area requires to be developed as it became evident that, even though the school community was aware of the environmental assets and resources at their disposal, they still needed to be mobilised.

### **5.3.3 SECONDARY QUESTION 3: WHAT WOULD THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY LIKE TO SEE ADDRESSED?**

The participants expressed a concern with regard to the following:

- Creating networks with other stakeholders;
- Developing strategies that are effective in dealing with violence at school;
- Strengthening a relationship with the Department of Education;
- Strengthening partnerships with families and the community at large: and
- Developing programmes that would engage learners with positive, health promoting activities.

### **5.3.4 SECONDARY QUESTION 4: HOW DOES THE COMMUNITY WANT TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS?**

The members of the school community who participated in this study propose that an integrated approach, where a network could be established with available stakeholders within the community, may address this problem effectively. Seeing the escalating violence at school the participants have come to realise that they cannot achieve their social goals alone. The participants spoke in one voice that they must work rigorously in collaboration and coordination with other stakeholders available within the community if they are to make a significant difference. The community does have various resources, including churches, businesses and caring individuals. What is required is the establishment of a network to

mobilise the resources towards enhancing safety at school. The researcher recommends that the management of the school take the initiative in providing the leadership, coordination and monitoring needed to establish such a network.

For instance, parents and parenting practices can be a factor contributing to student problem behaviours (Goldstein & Conoley, 1997). Parents are often found to be resourceful with regard to valuable information about their children's needs and what will or will not be appropriate for them. The school community encourages the intensifying of the collaboration between the school and the parents. Initiative efforts made by teachers include honest and open communication channels being made through the sending of letters and regular invitations to meetings.

It was also suggested that providing learners with applicable information as being another possible means of intervention. The school could organise youth development programmes, in the form of workshops, training or campaigns, youth sports, cultural activities, traditional dance, music competitions, or any form of extra-mural activity whereby learners are given an opportunity to enhance a positive and productive sense of self-worth. Teachers should take the initiative to guide and monitor the process.

### **5.3.5 SECONDARY QUESTION 5: WHAT INTERVENTION PROGRAMS DOES THE COMMUNITY ENVISION?**

The participants proposed intervention at three levels: school initiative, community initiatives and government initiatives.

At the school level, it is suggested, that the SGB should work collaboratively with the SMT in developing policies and the implementation thereof. Those policies should include the code of conduct for learners, disciplinary protocol, incident reporting system and searching procedures. The policies need to be reviewed regularly, to keep them abreast with newly developed regulations. The policies should be clear, consistent, embodying firm and fair rules that are clearly outlined.

Parental involvement is also envisioned as a priority because children benefit when their parents and teachers work together. Partnership with parents does not just happen: it must be

developed with thought and care. Communication channels should be sought with care, to ensure that messages are not distorted along the way.

From the data gathered it became evident that it is important to educate the learners about violence and bullying by providing them with knowledge and appropriate information. This type of education and training should be disseminated on an ongoing basis and be modelled by the SMT and the entire staff members.

At community level, community partnerships need be established by the school management, to develop a close collaboration with community social service agencies, to provide learners and their families access to counselling, financial assistance and protection. In the Children's Act of 2008, it is stated that all professionals in health, social services and education should work collectively to meet children's needs. Assets and resources identified within the school community under study are outlined in Figure 4.3. It is the responsibility of the SMT to establish rapport with local business and other service providers, to provide resources and other services, to prevent violence at school or following an incident at school.

School policies and procedures are informed by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), educational legislation - such as the South African School's Act of 1996, the Regulation for Safety Measures at Public Schools (2001), and Children's Act of 1989. When developing policies school authorities must consider what would be best for the children, how their needs can be fairly met, while at the same time upholding the law.

### **5.3.6 SECONDARY QUESTION 5: WHAT ARE THE ASSETS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE COMMUNITY, AND HOW CAN THEY BE MOBILISED?**

A summary of the assets and resources identified in the school community under study are presented in Chapter 4, in Figure 4.3. This school community proposed to collaborate with the stakeholders within the community, as a way of creating networks and reinforcing support, to cope with the existing violence at school. Teachers, in their capacity as educators, have a potential to build rapport with other stakeholders. That could be established gradually through invitations to school activities, so building a relationship with individuals. Through constant interaction the usefulness of a particular asset could be established and prioritised. Once such relationships are established they should be sustained through constant interaction.

## 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.4.1 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

In light of the findings of this study the researcher suggests further studies that can be carried out in various disadvantaged environments, as follows:

- A study might be undertaken to explore the standards of learner transport services, taking into consideration the condition and road worthiness of taxis, the possession of drivers' license, and the moral standards of drivers.
- Exploring the link between school and community and the processes through which such interrelationships take place.
- Exploring the election and training process of School Governing Bodies in previously disadvantaged areas.
- Strengthening of school-home partnerships, with the focus on different family structures.
- Networking strategies to enhance mobilisation of assets, resources and opportunities.

### 5.4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Having been guided by the integrated conceptual framework used for this study, the researcher would suggest that future educational psychologists and/or other social practitioners consider using a systemic approach when addressing issues affecting learners, to conscientise families about the challenging behaviour their children are experiencing and their roles and responsibilities in supporting the child.
- By using narrative activities used in the data collection process, research could be conducted with children facing various environmental challenges in their lives. Such narrative activities reflect mental representation of cognitive processes as the reference point of their experiences.

- The researcher recommends that the PAR principles be employed in addressing school and community issues, for the reciprocal and democratic relationship it promotes between the researcher and the participants.

#### **5.4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING**

- Violent behaviour is learnt through modelling and reinforcement. Using the same process age appropriate life skills training in self-esteem development, self assertive behaviour, conflict management and stress management (especially for children living in poverty or under difficult family circumstances) could be applied to help transform negative feelings into positive coping skills.
- In-service workshops, courses and guest speakers need be used to engender the ability in those who need it to identify learners at risk, establish an effective reporting system, and knowledge on how to diffuse violent situations. Such training will prepare staff for emergencies, such as coping with school shooting incidents and how to expedite recovery efforts, and may serve to empower and assist teachers and school community members as to how to act when violence erupts at their school. Though school shootings seem to be rare, when compared to other forms of violence in the school under study, teachers should understand that there are a range of circumstances that may lead to school shootings. The researcher thus recommends that comprehensive school safety programmes involving teachers, learners, parents, and community members be developed to prepare them for any incident of violence. Such programmes need to be given sufficient time and resources if they are to deliver a positive result, and schools need to take a long term approach to work in these areas and not expect too much too soon.
- Out-of-school programmes (either independently operated or school-sponsored) are also recommended, to keep youth constructively engaged when their families are unavailable, providing them with attention from caring adults who are also good role models.
- Together with clearly defined goals (i.e. the vision and mission) that guide ongoing school improvement activities, active and consistent monitoring by authorities or the school management team is recommended. The principal should help establish

norms of non-violence, maintain a high profile, visit classrooms regularly and be accessible to the staff and learners.

- The school should address drug and alcohol abuse with more stimulating programmes of learning. A drug awareness campaign may also steer some children away from such abuse.

## 5.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

In responding to the primary research question set for this study, namely, how a school community copes with violence, the researcher assumed the insights gained could contribute to the practical knowledge of policy makers on the current status of violence in schools. School policies relating to discipline, bullying, and drug abuse have an important part to play in shaping the overall context of the school community. This knowledge could thus facilitate policy strategy with regard to preventative measures that could be employed when following an ecosystemic approach.

The findings of this study have cautioned the school community at the school under study on the nature and causes of violence that prevail in their environment. This study has revealed that even though external support might be limited, and perhaps not readily accessible, it is available and the need exists for a proper network to be established, to mobilise it by means of an asset-based approach. This initiative could reduce dependency on the Department of Education for such support.

There are parents who find it hard to believe that their children may behave inappropriately, even after they have been cautioned by adults. This study generated awareness to such parents and families, whose children might require assistance from an educational psychologist. Integrating efforts to curb bullying and violence in schools will invariably make the involvement of those children's parents their first priority at every level of the intervention.

This study could also contribute by enriching the body of existing literature, by providing insight into the emotional experiences of learners and the effects of violence on school

performance by learners. Further, collaboration among the stakeholders is shown to have potential for enhancing school safety.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken to determine how the community under study copes with violence in their school. Consideration was given to past and current incidences of violence at schools internationally: that was compared with the status of violence in schools in South Africa. It was found that violence in the school could be managed by using an integrated approach, whereby assets are mobilised and their effectiveness enhanced by a management system accessed through the school and/or the Department of Education. Furthermore, a properly developed management system will help with auditing and monitoring of intervention programmes, to determine success factors and best practices.

By employing crystallised methods of data collection, insight was gained with regard to factors that contribute to violence at school and the nature of the violence experienced by the school community. From the focus group interview participants showed much concern about the status of violence at school and seemed to be eager to engage in any form of intervention available to deal with that problem. The narrative activities helped the learners to reflect on their past experiences and evoked feelings they had carried with for some time. To some the activities were therapeutic in nature.

This research produced answers to the primary as well as the secondary questions. The importance of having a multi-disciplinary team working as a measure that moves beyond a limited focus on the school alone was revealed. Since the causes of violence are multidimensional it is not enough to know or have access to only one basic method of prevention or intervention. Thus, adding the competence of various health and social services to the interventions available is regarded as being a valuable strategy.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A**  
**Ethics**

**Appendix B**  
**Transcript and Analysis of Focus Group Interview**

**Appendix C**  
**Visual Data on Selected Areas of the School Surrounding**

**Appendix D**  
**Excerpts from Field Journal**

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## APPENDIX A

### ETHICS

- Ethical clearance certificate
- Permission to do research
- Informed consent and accent letters

## APPENDIX B

### FIELD VISIT: DAY 1 – 25 FEBRUARY 2009

#### TRANSCRIPT AND ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

<b>KEY:</b>	<b>FPA:</b> <b>FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT A</b>
	<b>FPB:</b> <b>FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT B</b>
	<b>FPC:</b> <b>FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT C</b>
	<b>FPD:</b> <b>FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT D</b>
	<b>FPE:</b> <b>FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT E</b>
	<b>Q1:</b> <b>QUESTION 1, 2, 3, 4, 5</b>
	<b>FQ:</b> <b>FOLLOW UP QUESTION</b>

Reference	Responses	Themes
<b>Q1:</b>	<b>What are your thoughts or feelings about violence in your school?</b>	
<b>FPA1;p1</b>	<p>It is a very serious challenge here. One thing that we have, generally in all institutions in our communities and all over, I can say in our school we don't have violence. We do have learners that will break the law, but with the system that we are using the policy that is drawn by the school, the parents and the learners is helping us including the policies that are also very active in supporting everything that we do regarding that.</p>	<p>Confirmation of the existence of violence in schools. Cause of violence Support structures</p>
<b>FQ</b> <b>FPB1;p1</b>	<b>But how do you feel about violence in your school?</b> <p>It is disturbing, even school governance, many SGB in the townships are working hand in glove with the principal and the management of the school on how to curb the problem of violence.</p> <p>It is scary because some learners sometimes, even if it is not within the school premises, they come across people snatching their cell phones, sometimes even attempted rape among the girl child and so on. So it is a concern to the school in general.</p>	<p>Seriousness of violence Support structures</p>
<b>FPA2;p1</b>	<p>It is there, I don't know maybe in terms of the feeling. It is there and is very hard because, really we are facing it alone and these learners are from home with different characters; coming to school with those things maybe either allowed by their parents, I'm not sure, The thing is it is really disturbing.</p>	<p>Seriousness of violence Manifestation of violence</p> <p>Confirmation of violence Contradiction to support structures mentioned. Causes or factors influencing the behaviour of learners.</p>

(Full transcript of data available on request – original audio recording enclosed)

## APPENDIX C

### VISUAL DATA ON SELECTED AREAS OF THE SCHOOL SURROUNDING



## APPENDIX D

### EXCERPTS FROM FIELD JOURNAL