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# **PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS AND PRE-ADOLESCENT CHILDREN ON THE PHENOMENON OF ACTING-OUT BEHAVIOUR**

**by**

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## SUMMARY

Perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

by

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The researcher aimed to answer the following question: What are the perceptions of pre-adolescent children and educators with regard to the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour? The goal of the study was to explore the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour. Pre-adolescence and socio-economic problems were discussed and behavioural theories, behavioural difficulties and acting-out behaviour were explored.

The population consisted of educators and grade 5 to grade 7 learners in the two participating schools. Ten educators and twenty learners in each grade were selected by means of stratified random sampling, to participate in the study.

The survey design was utilised, as the researcher wished to explore perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent learners on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour. The researcher formulated two questionnaires that were reader-friendly to both educators and learners respectively. The questionnaires focused on aspects of acting-out behaviour observed in the developmental level which is of concern to the study.

Research results have indicated that acting-out behaviour is an ever-increasing phenomenon, even though the term “acting-out” is relatively unknown. The educators and learner respondents had very similar views on acting-out behaviour and the reasons for this negative behaviour displayed by children. It can therefore be concluded that acting-out behaviour is perceived as being very real in the lives of today’s children and is very often regarded as problematic behaviour and only addressed as such. Characteristics of acting-out behaviour include lying, swearing, aggressiveness, hitting and kicking, badmouthing others, poor school marks, bullying and seeking attention. Parental conflict is the highest cause of emotional problems and consequently behavioural problems in children. The family system is also the most important system in the pre-adolescent’s life. Consequently it is recommended that families need to be considered as a key system in the development of acting-out behaviour, but most importantly also, as a key factor in dealing with such behaviour. Further research on, especially, intervention methods with regard to acting-out behaviour and socio-economic factors are recommended and emphasised.



## KEY TERMS

Behaviour

Acting-out behaviour

Pre-adolescence

Perceptions

Educators

Socio-economic problems/circumstances

Peers

Family

School

Research

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# CHAPTER 1

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

According to Harwood (2006:22) and Maughan (2001:176) there are increasing numbers of children and young people with behavioural problems. The probability that 15 year old children will have behaviour problems has more than doubled since previous years and approximately one fifth of youths have diagnosable emotional or behavioural problems each year, causing at least temporary interference with their functioning in a family, school or community setting, according to Bunting and Cohen *et al.* (in Harwood, 2006:22, 23). The researcher believes that behavioural problems can be linked to socio-economic circumstances where children merely “act out” their emotions, based on own professional experience.

The term “acting-out” needs to be clearly defined. Acting-out behaviour has been defined by Adamec and Pierce (2000) as “... negative behaviour such as stealing, lying, constant whining and other behavioural problems.” Venter (2008) believes that acting-out behaviour is a symptom of deeper emotional problems or trauma in a child’s life. Acting-out behaviour is mostly characterised by the portrayal of social behaviour that has a disruptive effect on the individual and those around him/her (Walker, 1979:2), and therefore the researcher deems the phenomenon of acting out to be more than the behaviour portrayed by the child. It is a symptom of deeper emotional issues caused by the circumstances children are exposed to. Acting-out behaviour includes hitting, yelling, screaming, throwing tantrums, running around the room, destroying property, and distorting the truth (Walker, 1979:2, 4, 5; Harwood, 2006:22). Loeber and Schmalling (in Costello & Angold, 2001:22) corroborate that the behaviour commonly identified with the various conduct disorders in childhood are lying, cheating and conning. Hinde (2001:39) states that being impatient, disruptive, selfish, sulking, boasting, teasing, and aggressiveness are all aspects of bad behaviour. Angold and Costello (2001:127) identified lying, stealing, begging, bullying and quarrelling as the most common behaviour disorders. *Acting Up, Acting Out ...* (2008) includes behaviours such as biting, spitting, being overly active, throwing things, and even hurting others and themselves. The researcher thus gathers that acting-out behaviour includes lying, stealing, bullying,

aggressiveness, yelling, hitting, throwing things, running around the room, constant whining, disruptive behaviour, and hurting themselves and others.

Within the family setting, the child may have severe oppositional behaviour, such as physical aggression escalating towards violent crimes and other coexisting problems, such as stealing (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:10). The behaviour portrayed can intimidate peers and develop into mutual hostility. When a child portrays acting-out behaviour, people automatically get caught in a “blame game”. Parents are easily blamed and given the responsibility to reduce the behaviour, whereas parents often blame the school. Parents also blame the child for not controlling his/her behaviour and siblings may be antagonistic towards children portraying aggressive behaviour (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:42, 46). Therefore the possibility exists that if the underlying problems causing acting-out behaviour are not addressed early on, serious problems may develop as a result.

The researcher has realised that in her field of work more and more families and/or community members are bringing young children with uncontrollable behaviour to social services for help. After careful assessment, most of these children’s socio-economic circumstances have been found to be negative and destructive in terms of their development. Social problems therefore seem to play a significant role in problematic behaviour. Dunn (2001:60) states that the extremes of aggressive behaviour implicate problems in the child’s social understanding and adjustment to societal values and demands. According to Janse van Rensburg (2008), children act out because they have a need to cope with their experiences and emotions, but they do not have the “coping skills”. Their acting-out behaviour is a cry for help and attention. One cause of acting-out behaviour can be low family income, as children of poor families and abusive backgrounds do not have the containing environment that other children have to develop adult ego functions in order to survive (Harwood, 2006:25). Negative parenting and a lack of parenting skills can also cause children to act out in their behaviour. Boys may respond aggressively, whereas girls may withdraw as a response (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:44; Maughan, 2001:172). Contextual factors include socioeconomic disadvantage or poverty, disadvantaged neighbourhoods, community violence, stressful life events, and school factors (Herbert & Martinez, 2001:67; Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:56-58).

Kiesner, Dishion and Poulin (2001:265, 266) state that parents can exercise coercive training at home through positive reinforcement. Kazdin (2001:439) states that parent



management training, problem-solving skills training, functional family therapy and multi-systemic therapy are methods that can be used to address acting-out behaviour. The researcher believes that it is indeed a fact that families play important roles with regard to children portraying acting-out behaviour, whether it is a contributing factor, a responsibility towards reducing the behaviour, or the prevalence of the behaviour, based on own professional experience. A good way thus to address acting-out behaviour within a therapeutic setting is to work with both the child and the child's family (Venter, 2008). When it comes to gender, this type of behaviour is more prevalent in boys, while girls may rather exhibit comorbid internalising of problems in their adolescent stage (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:10, 33; Angold & Costello, 2001:127; Campbell in Maughan, 2001:177). Janse van Rensburg (2008) states that children with acting-out behaviour are easily rejected by society, as society tries to "fix" the children's behaviour without addressing the underlying problem. Therefore the "problem" is only temporarily addressed and the child is still being labelled as a problem child.

According to Dafinoiu (2003a:124):

... the best expert in a certain problem is the very person confronted with that problem, and the processes of providing knowledge and solving social problems, of changing reality, should not be separated from each other.

The researcher decided to do a study involving pre-adolescent children and their educators, as they are the persons who are confronted with acting-out behaviour on a daily basis, and therefore were considered to be able to provide a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour. The researcher believed that the views or perceptions of children and educators regarding acting-out behaviour would enable her to describe this phenomenon and attain insight and understanding as a result, in order for professionals to effectively address acting-out behaviour.

## **1.2. PROBLEM FORMULATION**

Healy, Boli, Babbie and Halley (1999:27) have summed up the beginning of a research study by saying that "... one way to research a problem is to start with a theory that can be tested." Before the researcher elaborates on the theory on which her research was based, she will first attempt to define research problems and then relate it to the problem at hand within the study.

According to Mouton (2001:52), there is a difference between a research problem and a real-life problem. A researchable problem refers to a problem that implicitly or explicitly involves a research question. This question needs acquired information for it to be answered (Mouton, 2001:53). The researcher is of the opinion that within the social science professions a problem to be studied is rather seen as a social issue than a problem. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:29,148) define a problem formulation/statement as a statement that "... gives a more accurate approach to the issue and clarifies the purpose of the study." Robson (2002:61) states that enquiry with regard to social issues is concerned with contributing to knowledge. The researcher thus deems the problem formulation to be the first step in defining what knowledge the researcher wishes to attain from a proposed study. D'Cruz and Jones (2004:15) state that a researcher's study is often founded on needs or issues that have confronted him/her in the course of work which prompted ideas, and when personal experiences come into play it provides for special interest. The researcher therefore realised the need for a study through observing social circumstances and, as a result, came to formulate tendencies and problems in social issues. Valuable research can also be birthed through the studying of scientific articles, books and documents on a specific social field of interest, where the shortcomings regarding that specific field or social issue can be realised and transformed into a research study.

The researcher recognised an emerging social issue; that of children with acting-out behaviour. These children are caught in the web of their socio-economic circumstances where the parents do not know what to make of their behaviour and the children's behaviour has become a burden for all. Literature and knowledge regarding the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour is limited and therefore acting-out behaviour needed to be clarified and researched to increase knowledge and social understanding regarding this phenomenon. This specific type of behaviour problem is an ever-increasing problem within the social context of South Africa, as well as a field with limited literature and research. The researcher has, through her exploration, aimed to understand acting-out behaviour and how society experiences this problem, and came to conclusions on possible ways to address this phenomenon and/or prevent the negative behaviour from spiralling into a never-ending problem.

Problematic behaviour is ever increasingly displayed by children and, if not dealt with appropriately, tends to become uncontrollable behaviour when children reach

adolescence. Within the social work field the social workers often find that the behaviour is a coping mechanism of children having to deal with numerous social problems (Venter, 2008). The impact of the problem can clearly be seen in the increase of children with uncontrollable behaviour being referred to social services. These children are often labelled by family members and others within society as problematic children or naughty children. This in turn has a negative effect on the children, causing them to be either antisocial or asocial (Venter, 2008; Walker, 1979:3, 4). The problem of acting-out behaviour is far-reaching. Children displaying this behaviour due to impoverished or disruptive family circumstances can be found in any school, and the behaviour will become worse if not treated at a young age (Harwood, 2006:22).

The problem can thus be seen as an ever-increasing phenomenon of acting-out behaviour in children, with the behaviour becoming more prominent and more of an issue as the child grows older. Very little literature exists with regard to acting-out behaviour and how to deal with children displaying this kind of behaviour. This results in the labelling of children and the continued ignorance of parents and teachers. Understanding the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour could result in appropriate referral and intervention by professionals.

### **1.3. THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.3.1. Goal**

A goal can be defined as a broad general statement whereto action or energy is directed (Royse, 1999:260). According to Fouché (2002:107), the goal is the "... end toward which effort or ambition is directed." Goal also implies the dream. The goal thus indicates what the purpose of the research study is. According to Gray (2005:32), there are three classifications with regard to reasons for research: explanatory, descriptive and exploratory. Fouché (2002:109) explains exploratory research as to be conducted to "gain insight into" something. Exploratory studies have three main purposes, according to Babbie (2005:89, 90), namely to satisfy a researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding, to test the feasibility of the undertaking of a more careful study, and to develop methods to be employed in a more careful study. A researcher who wishes to examine a new interest or a subject that is relatively new and unstudied will thus undertake an explorative research study.

The goal for this study was to explore the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

### **1.3.2. Objectives**

According to Fouché (2002:107), the objectives are the “... steps one has to take, one by one, realistically at grass-roots level, within a certain time-span” to reach the goal. Royse (1999:260) states that the main difference between a goal and objectives is in this: “Goals state what the program and its associated activities should be about, while objectives provide for pragmatic accountability.” Royse (1999:260) highlights that an objective should be specific, measurable and/or referenced to a date. The researcher summarises that objectives must be in line with the goal and must be attainable. The objectives assisted the researcher in clearly structuring the research process, and therefore ensured a smoother path towards reaching the goal of the study.

The objectives were as follows:

- To conceptualise theoretically the social phenomenon of acting-out behaviour in children within the pre-adolescent developmental stage.
- To conduct empirical research to explore the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations, based on research findings regarding acting-out behaviour, and suggest possible intervention strategies to enhance positive social behaviour of pre-adolescent children.

### **1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION**

Before a researcher can formulate a hypothesis or research question, he/she needs to have established the unit of analysis, the goal of the research study and the approach to be followed (Fouché, 2002:106).

Mouton (2001:51) defines the unit of analysis as the “what” of the study; that which the researcher is interested in investigating. Babbie (2005:96) defines units of analysis as the things being examined to create summary descriptions of all the units and to provide explanations of differences among them. A unit of analysis can be an individual, group, organisation or social artefacts. This can refer to an individual, a group or a community. Variables refer to properties of some events or phenomena that can be measured and

can take several values. A distinction can be made between the dependent variable (the variable being measured) and the independent variable (the controlled variable that does not depend on the subject's choice) (Lungu, 2003a:131). Within this research study, the unit of analysis were grade 5 to grade 7 children and their educators.

According to Robson (2002:59), the research question is used when conducting an explorative study. Research questions or hypotheses are "... merely the configuration of issues into a transparent and measurable formulation" (Gray, 2005:69). A research question is a sentence that has a connection to a theoretical framework and ends with a question mark (Alford in Gray, 2005:70). It can also be described as that which tells us what the researcher is trying to find out. The process of question setting usually involves moving between the general and the specific (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004:20). According to D'Cruz and Jones (2004:21), there are four criteria to be met in question setting, namely feasibility, relevance, researchability and ethics. Feasibility refers to bringing the project down to size and doing the study thoroughly rather than superficially. The feasibility of the study can be attained through sampling, which will later be explained. "Relevance refers to the credibility the research study needs to have in addressing the concerns of the profession and the social work and human services sector generally" (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004:21). By being researchable, the question posed thus has the potential to be answered through the generation of research knowledge. By being considered ethical, it states that the question or the study will be consistent with the ethical conduct of research.

The researcher formulated the following research question, as she wanted to explore the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour. The question posed was a researchable question, as the researcher was only able to answer it by means of research knowledge gained from the study. The research question had been made feasible by bringing it down to size and providing boundaries within which the question should have been answered: The research question for this study was: What are the perceptions of pre-adolescent children and educators with regard to the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour?

## **1.5. RESEARCH APPROACH**

There are two main types of approaches according to which a researcher can conduct his/her study; that of quantitative research and that of qualitative research. "Quantitative

research is the systematic scientific investigation of quantitative properties and phenomena, and their relationships” (Wikipedia, sv ‘Quantitative research’). Most quantitative researchers tend to rely on a positivist approach, as well as using variables and hypotheses to approach the study (Neuman, 2006:151). Neuman (2006:153) also states that “(q)uantitative research addresses the issue of integrity by relying on an objective technology - such as precise statements, standard techniques, numerical measures, statistics, and replication.” The researcher draws from these statements that quantitative studies rely more on scientific methodologies and less on a researcher’s own subjective input, providing solid recommendations. Quantitative research basically implies that a researcher begins with a concept and then creates empirical measures that will capture the concept in a form expressed in numbers precisely, or in other words: “... begin with an abstract idea, follow with a measurement procedure, and end with empirical data that represent the ideas” (Neuman, 2006:179, 181).

When a researcher decides to make use of the quantitative approach, he/she will typically start with a general idea, but because it is too broad the researcher will need to narrow it down to a specific research question. Royse (1999:280) confirms that when approaching a study quantitatively, a problem or testable hypothesis must be identified. Creswell (in Fouché & Delpont, 2002:79) takes it further by stating that a quantitative study is defined as “...an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers and analyzed with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalisations of the theory hold true.”

The researcher made use of the quantitative approach when she conducted her study. The researcher chose this approach as the following characteristics of the quantitative approach, according to Reid and Smith (in Fouché, 2002:105), could have been applied to the study: “The researcher’s role is that of objective observer; studies are focused on relatively specific questions or hypotheses; it remains constant throughout the investigation.” The researcher produced a research question which correlated with the goal of the study and could only be answered by means of a quantitative approach and thereby gaining research knowledge on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

The quantitative approach had been chosen for this study, as the researcher took on the role of an objective observer whilst the perceptions and opinions of the participants were

gathered and thereafter measured to provide an accurate report on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour, as viewed by those experiencing the effects of it on a daily basis. Gathering of the necessary information regarding acting-out behaviour in a quantitative manner enabled the researcher to obtain a substantial amount of data, which in turn provided a thorough description on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

## **1.6. TYPE OF RESEARCH**

A research study can either be applied or basic research. Applied research is, according to De Vos (2002:46), the type of research most often used by researchers within the social science professions, as applied research refers to addressing immediate problems facing the professional in practice. Applied research's intent is to have some real world effects (Babbie, 1995:338). Fouché (2002:108) believes that applied research implies scientific planning in order to induce change in troublesome situations, whereas basic research is concerned with empirical observations used to formulate or refine theory. Applied research is thus the type of research that can aid service delivery and intervention in practice. Royse (1999:14) articulates that a question can be a result of either induction or deduction. Induction sets out from the specific to general, whereas deduction is about utilising knowledge of theory or principles to formulate an application to a specific case. In the social work profession most of the questions asked are based on induction, as the research done in this field tend to be more applied research.

The researcher is of the opinion that her study was based on induction, as she directed the knowledge concerning acting-out behaviour into a questionnaire, to gathering information for the purpose of applying the findings within the social work field. The researcher thus made use of applied research, as the findings of her study will be readily available to the schools that participated in the study in order to address the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour and was conducted mostly for the purpose of more effective intervention in the social services professions. The study was thus exploratory (as the goal of the study was also to explore, thus correlating with the focus of the study), as the specific subject of acting-out behaviour is relatively unstudied and the researcher wished to explore all the facets of acting-out behaviour in order to realise ways to address the problem.

## 1.7. RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

The research design is the blueprint of a study (Royse, 1999:24; De Vos, 2002:137; Balnaves & Caputi, 2001:27). It outlines the approach to be used to collect data and it defines the conditions of data collection; how the subjects will be selected and what instruments will be used. According to Fouché and De Vos (2002:139-148), the designs undertaken in the quantitative research study are: pre-experimental/hypothesis-developing/exploratory design, quantitative- descriptive (survey) designs, and quasi-experimental and true-experimental designs under which more specific subtypes are categorised.

Survey designs are used when "... researchers sample many respondents who answer the same questions, measure many variables, test multiple hypotheses, and infer temporal order from questions about past behaviour, experiences, or characteristics" (Neuman, 2006:276). The researcher believes the survey design to be extremely informative and concise if approached in the correct way, and therefore it is the best way to achieve the goal of the study. Gravetter and Forzano (2003:168) define survey research design as a research study where a survey is utilised to obtain a description of a group or individuals. Babbie (2004:243) states simply that surveys are used "...for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory purposes." According to Fink (2003a:1), surveys are systems whereby information from or about people are being collected for the purposes of describing, comparing or explaining their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. Gravetter and Forzano (2003:168) state that surveys are part of observational research. Surveys can be seen as "... studies of beliefs, opinions and attitudes or behaviour based on people's responses to specific questions" (Lungu, 2003b:30).

Surveys, according to Neuman (2006:273), are developed within the positivist approach; they produce information that is inherently statistical and are appropriate for research questions regarding self-reported beliefs or behaviours. These designs, according to Fouché and De Vos (2002:142), are normally of a quantitative nature, requiring questionnaires as data collection methods and ideally utilising randomised sampling methods to select respondents. According to Royse (1999:139-140), exploratory surveys are common types in social research where the samples are relatively small, and even though the samples may be small, these studies produce sufficient knowledge on certain



issues. The designs of exploratory studies are usually non-experimental, according to D’Cruz and Jones (2004:83). A survey design can also be seen as an efficient method of obtaining large amounts of information, according to Gravetter and Forzano (2003:168). A good survey study will have specific measurable objectives, a sound research design, a sound choice of the population and/or sample, reliable and valid instruments, an appropriate analysis, and accurate reporting of results (Fink, 2003a:1). This implies that pre-adolescent children need not be observed in their day-to-day functioning to determine their perceptions of acting-out behaviour; their opinions can be asked by means of a survey.

### **1.7.1 Data collection method**

The data collection methods within the quantitative research approach employ measuring instruments such as questionnaires (Delpont, 2002:165). A questionnaire is a research tool through which people are asked to respond to a set of questions in a fixed order. Questionnaires need to be valid, reliable and objective, and aim to obtain facts about a phenomenon from people that are considered knowledgeable on the issue (Gray, 2005:187; Delpont, 2002:172). The questionnaire in itself must have a transformation of the objectives of the research study into specific questions and the answers to the questions will then supply the necessary data for the purpose of the study (Dafinoiu, 2003b:100). Construction of the survey can be done in order to gain the best possible answers through the following: demographic questions can be placed at the end of the questionnaire, sensitive questions can be placed in the middle as the respondent has “warmed up” to the topic, questions with the same general topic should be grouped together, all questions with the same format should be grouped together, and the vocabulary and language should be easy for the participants to understand (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003:169). The researcher gathers from literature that the way in which the questionnaire is constructed may also determine the outcome of the data analysis.

Reliability and validity of a testing instrument are important aspects that need to be taken into consideration. According to Rubin and Babbie (2007:101, 103) “... reliability is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, would yield the same result each time”, whereas validity “... refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration” (Lungu, 2003b:38). Fink (2003a:60-62) states that internal validity is

important to obtain external validity. External validity indicates that the results of the design procedures apply to the target population. Internal validity can be checked on the maturation of the sample (changes within individuals resulting from natural, biological or psychological development), how the people were selected to be in the group, and attrition (loss of study participants and the data they could have provided). According to Lungu (2003b:38), internal validity is the most important of the two, as it will indicate the extent to which the experiment really proves the reality of the causal relationship being researched.

After the researcher has constructed the questionnaire, the questionnaires need to be delivered to the respondents and collected after they have been completed. A self-administered questionnaire is a type of data collection technique in survey studies. According to Babbie (2005:266), the most common form is the mailed questionnaire, but it may also be appropriate to administer a questionnaire to a group of respondents that are gathered at the same place at the same time. Gravetter and Forzano (2003:173) state that "... the most efficient method for administering a survey is to assemble a group of participants and have all the participants complete the survey at the same time." This method can be called group-administered questionnaires. Group-administered also implies that the researcher be present to answer all the questions of the respondents regarding the questionnaires (Pretorius & Theron in Austin, 2002:8). The advantages of group-administered questionnaires exceed the disadvantages thereof. Its main disadvantage is that there is a risk of interviewer bias, but this is lessened by the group setting. The advantages of this method are the following: it is efficient to administer with groups, it is flexible, and it is less time-consuming (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003:174). This technique was chosen because children are more likely to give their true answers, as it would be administered anonymously within a group setting.

The researcher constructed two questionnaires, as the setting of questions needed to be different for the educators and the pre-adolescent children (See Addendums A and B). This ensured that all of the respondents were able to understand the questions and found them relevant. The questionnaire for the educators consisted of questions regarding what they believed acting-out behaviour to be, the characteristics thereof, the effects it has, why children act out and how to address the issue of acting-out behaviour. The questionnaire for the pre-adolescents was more child-friendly. The questions centred on what behaviours create problems for them and for the teachers, why they

saw it as problematic and difficult, why they thought children behave in manners that are considered to be “naughty”, and how they thought these “naughty” behaviours could be addressed. The questionnaires were compiled in Afrikaans seeing that learners and educators are Afrikaans speaking.

### **1.7.2 Data analysis**

According to Stevens (in Delport, 2002:166), the questionnaire used for measurement must involve the assigning of numbers according to fixed rules to reflect the differences between the persons or objects in terms of characteristics or attributes. Balnaves and Caputi (2001:77) state that the researcher’s questionnaire should reflect the “... appropriate levels of measurement necessary for further statistical analysis.” After the data has been collected, the researcher will start to analyse the data. However, she may “... have amassed a volume of observations in a form that probably isn’t immediately interpretable” (Babbie, 2005:113).

According to Robson (2002:387), the primary aim of this phase is to “... set out guidelines and principles to use in selecting appropriate procedures, and to discuss how the results obtained from these procedures might be interpreted.” Mouton (2001:108) believes that data analysis entails the “breaking-up” of data into manageable parts, themes or relationships. In quantitative data analysis these parts and themes refer to numerical values obtained by counting or measuring of the data collected by means of, for example, questionnaires to answer the research question (De Vos, Fouché & Venter, 2002:223, 225). The choice of method will depend on the size of the sample and whether the surveyor’s purpose is to describe, compare, associate or predict (Fink, 2003a:5). According to Babbie (2005:113), the researcher can interpret the data in order to draw conclusions reflecting the interests, ideas and theories that instigated the study after the data has been collected in a suitable form. The researcher must first develop categories from the data and then converse the data items into numerical codes that represent attributes composing variables in assigned locations in a data file (Babbie, 2005:418).

The researcher believes that the phase of data analysis enables a researcher to structure findings and to make the most valid and objective recommendations through organised interpretation of data collected. In the researcher’s study, two samples were drawn; one from the educators and one from the pre-adolescent children. The

researcher collected the questionnaires from both samples and afterwards organised and grouped the data of each sample according to the themes identified through the reviewing of literature. The data was then placed into appropriate groupings and from there the data was interpreted and the findings represented through numerical and scientific presentation. The analysis of the data also entailed comparing the data obtained from the two sets of samples and presenting the overall perceptions on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

## **1.8. PILOT STUDY**

In the *New Dictionary of Social Work* (1995:45), a pilot study is defined as the “... process whereby the research design for a prospective survey is tested.” The pilot study also aids the researcher in identifying the problems and benefits of the research design (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001:87), as well as telling the researcher how much time it will take for the respondents to complete the questionnaire (Fink, 2006:6). The researcher agrees with literature that the pilot study aided the research study to run smoothly and reach the goal of the study.

### **1.8.1 Testing the measurement instrument/questionnaire**

Royse (1999:167) states that the pilot test is where the researcher gives the instrument to persons who are as similar as possible to the population of the study to determine whether or not the information the researcher wants will be supplied by the respondents. A pilot test was run prior to the study, where the researcher tested the interpretation and comprehension of the questions and whether or not relevant information was being retrieved. Through examining the answers, the researcher could refine the questionnaire (Neuman, 2006:312). In order for the researcher to be able to identify any problems concerning the design, the researcher needed to pre-test the data collection instrument to ensure all possible problems or uncertainties are removed before the study commences. Measuring instruments are often employed as quantitative data collection methods (Delport, 2002:165) and these instruments should be pilot-tested on persons similar to those persons who will be chosen for the sample of the study.

Within the quantitative research sphere, measurement instruments are questionnaires, checklists, indexes and scales. The researcher made use of a questionnaire that served as the instrument whereby data was collected and was therefore also pre-tested before

it was administered to the sample (Babbie, 2005:289). The researcher made use of groups or persons as similar as possible to the actual respondent group as this more efficiently established that the information the researcher wished to acquire would have been supplied by the respondents (Royse, 1999:167). The researcher randomly selected two respondents with similar characteristics as those in the sample, and they answered the questionnaire that was used in the study. These respondents consisted of one educator and one pre-adolescent that were not part of the main study.

The researcher had to create a questionnaire based on the literature review for the purpose of the study, and therefore she needed to test whether the respondents' answers would aid her in achieving the goal of the study, thus measuring what it needs to measure. The researcher did not influence the respondents in any way in order to prove the reliability of the questionnaire. The respondents' answers implicated the same level of understanding; and can therefore be seen as a level of reliability. The researcher analysed the information that was needed from the feedback given by the respondents, and observations made by the researcher herself, and ensured that the questions asked in the questionnaire would provide the researcher with the appropriate information needed to answer her research question.

### **1.8.2 Feasibility of the study**

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:43) state that a pilot study tests the "...feasibility of the research project, the practical possibilities to carry it out, the correctness of some concepts and the adequacy of the method and instrument of measurement." The purpose is thus to investigate the feasibility of the project and to bring possible deficiencies to the fore. When a researcher tests the design for the prospective study, he/she gives attention to its feasibility and to the questionnaire itself. When a researcher tests the feasibility of the study, he/she will focus on the aspect of time, the costs involved, how viable the study would be, how approachable it would be, and if consent has been given to proceed with the study by the concerned institution (Feasibility Study, 2007).

The researcher is of the opinion that the feasibility of the study was maintained because of the short duration of the study, as the respondents were requested to participate in a survey only. The expenditures of the study were solely on the side of the researcher and these expenses mainly pertained to travelling and printing costs. The research study is

viable in that its results would be available to the participants and schools for the purpose of further intervention. The information obtained would also be relevant for professionals within the social services professions.

The researcher selected respondents from various schools and therefore the respondents that were part of the study were selected from more than one school. Within the researcher's direct environment there were numerous primary schools that could be asked to participate in the study, therefore ensuring voluntary participation. The researcher was familiar with the youth workers and educators in primary schools, which ensured administrative cooperation. The researcher obtained consent from the Department of Education (See Addendum C), and thereafter approached the school principals to motivate the relevance of the outcomes to the schools, which were accepted by both schools (One of the participating schools wished to remain anonymous, and therefore their permission has not been added as an addendum) (See Addendum D). The researcher also conducted the empirical part of the study in such a manner that the children's school studies were not interrupted unnecessarily, as the existing timetables of the schools provided the researcher with times that were convenient for the respondents to participate in the research.

## **1.9. DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD**

The research universe refers to "... all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested" (Strydom & Venter, 2002:198). Gray (2005:82) defines a population as the "... total number of possible units or elements that are included in the study." Strydom and Venter (2002:199) explain sampling as the means by which a research study is made feasible, as it is less time-consuming than including the whole population in the study. Sampling, according to Babbie (1995:188), is the process of selecting observations. Sampling allows for efficiency and precision in a survey study, as well as focussing the survey precisely on the characteristics of interest (Fink, 2003b:2, 3). The researcher views the population, thus, as the larger whole of which all smaller units are part, whereas the sample is merely a part to give an idea of the research population.

In the research study the population consisted of the entire grade 5 to grade 7 learners and their educators in two primary schools, as the researcher was concerned with acting-out behaviour in the pre-adolescent phase of development. The researcher thus chose to draw a sample from these pre-adolescent children and their educators in order to obtain their opinions and perceptions of acting-out behaviour as they were seen to be the ones confronted by this escalating problem on a daily basis. The problem, however, were that the number of learners added up to too many questionnaires to be completed. Handing out the questionnaires to the population would not have been feasible, as the data would not have been manageable and the collecting and analysing of the data would have been extremely time-consuming. Therefore, gathering a representative of the population provided the researcher with findings from which recommendations could be generalised to the whole population.

The sample is a miniature of the population and must be representative in order to obtain accurate and better quality information from the research undertaken (Gray, 2005:83, 84; Strydom & Venter, 2002:201; Fink, 2003b:1). A representative sample merely means that "... the important characteristics of those within the sample are distributed similarly to the way they are distributed in the larger population" (Fink, 2003b:1). Babbie (1995:192) also states that "... a sample will be representative of the population from which it is selected if the aggregate characteristics of the sample closely approximate those same aggregate characteristics in the population." Fink (2003a:4) states that an ideal sample will be one where the characteristics of the individuals who are part of the sample are distributed in the same proportions as they can be found in the entire population of which the sample is a part. The core types of sampling are non-probability and probability sampling. When a researcher decides upon probability sampling, the sample will be a representation of the population if all the members of the population have an equal chance of being selected as part of the sample (Babbie, 2005:195). Thus, by utilising the probability sampling method, a statistical basis is provided to state that a sample is representative of the study or target population (Fink, 2003b:9). Babbie (2005:192) adds that, in order to provide useful descriptions of the total population in probability sampling, "... a sample of individuals from a population must contain essentially the same variations that exist in the population."

When stratified random sampling is utilised, the population is divided into subgroups or strata, after which a random sample is selected from each subgroup (Fink, 2006:48).

Babbie (2005:212, 213) states that through utilising the stratified sampling method, a greater degree of representativeness is obtained by decreasing the probable sampling error. It also ensures appropriate numbers of elements are drawn from homogeneous sections of a population, as the researcher organises the population into homogeneous groups and then selects an appropriate number of elements from it. According to Fink (2003b:43), the size of the sample should ideally be a miniature version of the population. A sample size refers to the number of units (individuals, entities or groups selected for the survey) that need to be surveyed to have precise and reliable results. The sampling variability will decrease when the sample size increases (Fink, 2003b:34). According to Neuman (2006:241, 242), a researcher's decision with regard to the best sample size will depend on the degree of accuracy that is required, the degree of variability or diversity in the population and, lastly, the number of different variables that will simultaneously be examined in data analysis.

Within the research study, the researcher made use of stratified random sampling in order to obtain the most representative sample. The researcher randomly selected 10 participants (5 boys and 5 girls) in each grade level and 5 educators from each school that were to participate in the study, in order to obtain broad but manageable data. The total of the pre-adolescent children sample added up to 60 respondents (10 participants from each of the three grades, multiplied by the two schools involved in the study) and the sample consisting of the educators added up to 10 respondents (5 educators drawn from each of the two schools).

#### **1.10. ETHICAL ASPECTS**

The term ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning character or custom (Gray, 2005:58). Ethics are defined as a "... system of morals, rules of behaviour" (Struwig & Stead, 2001:66; Social Work Research, [sa]). Ethics provide the researcher with a code of moral guidelines on how to conduct the study in a morally acceptable way. It can also be added that "(e)thical behaviour implies social work practice that upholds the moral obligation or duty to act in a way that is consonant with professional values" (Social Work Research, [sa]).

According to Strydom (2002:63), ethical guidelines "... serve as a basis on which each researcher ought to evaluate his own conduct." Social Work Research ([sa]) gives four



reasons for ethical principles: to help protect clients or respondents, to delineate professional responsibilities, to direct the gathering of data and to guide change toward worthwhile goals. The researcher must not only carry out the study in a morally acceptable way, but must also be competent and adequately skilled (Strydom, 2002:69). Ethics need to be integral and inseparable from the researcher's study, starting at the beginning stage and continuing throughout as people are involved; because where people are involved ethical dilemmas will lurk in any study (Robson, 2002:66; Gray, 2005:58). The researcher should also acknowledge the ethical values inherent to the society to be studied, according to Rubin and Babbie (2007:37). Ethics are thus extremely essential when the researcher proposes to conduct a study, in order for the study to be valid and to provide the researcher with the desired results.

The researcher abided by and conducted herself according to the following ethical aspects: avoidance of harm, informed consent, avoidance of deception of subjects and/or respondents, confidentiality, actions and competence of the researcher, release or publication of the findings and debriefing of respondents (Strydom, 2002:64). These aspects will now be discussed:

#### **1.10.1 Avoidance of harm**

According to Babbie (2005:63), social research should never injure those being studied or those who participate. Subjects participating in the study can be harmed physically and/or emotionally, but in the social sciences profession emotional harm is the most likely harm to be caused, if any harm is in fact done (Strydom, 2002:64). Harm can mean that a fragile self-esteem can be injured through some probing questions. If unpleasant effects are likely to occur from the procedure, the researcher should have scientific ground for it. In order to ensure no harm is being done to subjects, the researcher should look for the subtlest dangers and then guard against them (Babbie, 2005:63). Strydom (2002:64) points out that the respondents must be informed prior to the study of any possible harm it may inflict on them, in order for the respondents to be able to withdraw if they wish to, as voluntary participation is of the utmost importance in research. According to the researcher, the possible harm that might have been inflicted on the respondents was minimal, if compared to real life situations, but the researcher never used this fact as a motivation to allow possible harm for the benefit of the study. Research procedures were followed in such a manner as to avoid harm and certain procedures could have been altered to avoid harm, while still reaching the desired goal.



In the study the researcher was aware that there may have been children that participated who came from destructive socio-economic circumstances and who may suffer from behaviour problems, and therefore took these possibilities into consideration when constructing the questionnaire.

### **1.10.2 Informed consent**

Informed consent implies that the person providing consent must be informed of all aspects regarding the research. Mouton (2001:244) expresses the importance of gaining the respondents' consent to participate in the study. He states that it is the responsibility of the researcher to inform the respondents of the aims of the study, why they have been chosen, the foreseeable repercussions of the research, and the publication of the findings. It is also the responsibility of the researcher to inform respondents of possible risks and benefits, in order to ensure that no one is forced into giving their participation (Gray, 2005:252; Rubin & Babbie, 2007:38). The respondents should also be informed of the expected duration, according to Royse (1999:308). Informed consent can thus be seen as a "social contract" between the researcher and the participant (Dafinoiu, 2003c:193). The researcher believes the informed consent to be the confirmation of the professional relationship between the researcher and the respondents, where the researcher declares truthfully the nature of involvement and sets out all that the study entails and aims to do in order for the respondents to withdraw if need be (See Addendum E, F and G). The researcher provided all the potential respondents and the parents of the children participating in the survey with a letter informing them of her study. The letter included all the above-mentioned essential information applicable to the study, for which they were asked to provide their consent (The educators, as well as the parents of the learner respondents provided informed consent and the learners provided their informed assent). As with the questionnaires, the informed consent and informed assent letters were compiled in Afrikaans.

### **1.10.3 Deception of subjects and/or respondents**

Deception of respondents refers to the withholding of information, deliberately misinterpreting facts, intentionally misleading subjects, and/or lying about the purpose of the study to benefit the study's outcomes (Strydom, 2002:66). When unexpected developments occur, deception of which the researcher was not aware might follow, but Strydom (2002:67) and Dafinoiu (2003c:195) state that it must be discussed with the respondents immediately thereafter by debriefing the respondents. Royse (1999:311)

states that deception should be avoided at all times, except when there is no other way of collecting necessary data. The researcher had no intention of deceiving the respondents and guarded against any type of deception.

#### **1.10.4 Confidentiality**

A distinction between anonymity and confidentiality can be made. Confidentiality implies that the researcher and some other professionals are familiar with the identity of a participant, but the information is kept private, whereas anonymity implies that not even the researcher is aware of the identity of the respondent afterwards (Strydom, 2002:68). Anonymity mostly refers to research studies where the researcher makes use of mailed questionnaires where no identifying particulars of a respondent are known (Rubin & Babbie, 2007:40). Dafinoiu (2003c:192) states that, most of the time, a research project will ensure confidentiality of information rather than anonymity. According to Babbie (2005:64), "... the clearest concern in the protection of the subjects' interests and well-being is the protection of their identity, especially in survey research." Through stratified random sampling the researcher selected respondents to partake in her study and thus their identity were known to the researcher only through their informed consent and assent. The researcher, however, ensured that identification by name and surname was not required in the questionnaire. The researcher handled the data confidentially, in other words the researcher respected the privacy of the respondents when discussing her research with professionals involved and when reporting on the research.

Gray (2005:120) believes that one of the most essential principles with regard to ethics is confidentiality. It is the right of the respondent to remain anonymous. Rubin and Babbie (2007:40) suggest that the researcher can replace the names and identifying particulars of respondents with identification numbers. Thereafter a master file of identification numbers can be compiled where all the information can be filed for future reference. The researcher can summarise that confidentiality refers to the information that the respondents provide. The researcher will not reveal the identity of the person providing the information and the information was and will be handled with the utmost care by the researcher. Therefore, the researcher made it clear that all information obtained will be treated as confidential and will only be revealed if permission has been obtained.

### **1.10.5 Actions and competence of the researcher**

It is the responsibility of a researcher to ensure that he/she is adequately skilled and competent with regard to the topic of the study. According to Strydom (2002:69), a researcher should ensure that he/she receives adequate supervision and must keep ethical considerations in mind. It is the opinion of the researcher that she ensured that she is competent with regard to the topic of her study and has been accountable in her actions, as this gained the respondents' trust and full co-operation. The researcher aimed to exude knowledge with regard to acting-out behaviour, the developmental stages of children and socio-economic circumstances, such as poverty, divorce and homelessness and ensured that all her actions were transparent in order to gain the co-operation of the respondents.

The researcher is a qualified social worker registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions. The researcher has also completed the theory and practical requirements for the MSW (Play Therapy) degree, and thus has the necessary skills and experience that will enable her to successfully implement and complete the proposed study. Being a registered social worker practicing in the social work field, the researcher is bound by the ethical conduct in her service delivery and was guided by her supervisor throughout her conduct of the study.

### **1.10.6 Release or publication of the findings**

The research report must be as accurate and as objective as possible. It must contain all essential information and must not contain any form of emphasis so as to bias the results, as it is considered unethical to do so. Due recognition to all sources must be given, shortcomings must be admitted in the report, and subjects must be informed about the findings in an objective manner as a way of expressing gratitude for their participation (Strydom, 2002:71, 72). The researcher has thus ensured that findings with regard to the phenomenon of "acting-out" behaviour be published for the benefit of all participants involved and professionals in order to base further studies and interventions thereon, and ensured that it is ethically and professionally correct, as well as accessible to professionals involved with children and families.

### **1.10.7 The right to withdraw**

Research participants have the right to withdraw at any time during the study and, according to Gray (2005:389), the respondents need to be aware of this right (which was

respected by the researcher). Babbie (2005:62) states that nobody should be forced to participate. Due to the fact that respondents withdrew from the study, the researcher found it necessary to enrol more respondents, in order to have the desired number of respondents as a sample.

Other ethical aspects that are of importance, is not to be guilty of plagiarism at any stage of the writing of the research report and to acknowledge each person that contributed (Struwig & Stead, 2001:70; Williams, Tutty & Grinnell, 1995:40). The study was dependent on the co-operation of the researcher with the schools, the parents and the children.

The findings of the study will directly benefit the researcher, her colleagues and other professionals working with children, and will indirectly benefit the respondents.

### **1.11. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

During the course of the study the following problems and limitations were identified:

- The researcher had to make use of literature older than ten years, as literature on “acting-out” behaviour was limited and therefore all literature on “acting-out” behaviour that was found was utilised for the purpose of the study. Literature sources referred to are: Acting out..., 1998; Barkley and Benton, 1998; Gericke, 1998; Walker, 1979.
- After the researcher selected the sample through utilising the stratified random sampling method, the researcher issued all the respondents with informed consent and assent letters. Some of the learners did not want to participate and other learners’ parents refused to allow them to participate. Additional respondents, who agreed to participate in the study, were identified.
- Two of the respondents from one of the participating schools were absent on the date arranged for conducting the study. A later time was arranged to complete the questionnaire.
- Chapter four, on the empirical study and findings, is very lengthy. A conscious attempt was made to condense these findings. The nature of the study, where the opinions of both learners and educators were sought, inevitably leads to a lengthy chapter.

## 1.12. DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

### 1.12.1 Acting-out Behaviour

The term “acting-out” is used to describe any situation where an individual’s behaviour seems to reflect the expression of subconscious feelings or conflicts in actions rather than words. It can range from mild behaviour to dangerous behaviour such as self-harm (Acting out..., 1998). Acting-out has also been defined as “... negative behaviour such as stealing, lying, constant whining and other behavioural problems ... often these disciplinary problems can be indirectly tied to unhappy experiences while the child lived in an abusive or neglectful home, faced many foster care placements or endured other psychological hardships” (Adamec & Pierce, 2000).

The researcher believes that acting-out behaviour is behaviour that is not socially acceptable, but portrayed by a child due to the inability to verbalise feelings caused by traumatic experiences.

### 1.12.2 Pre-adolescence

De Klerk and Le Roux (2004:23) define the ages of 11 to 15 years as the pre-adolescent stage. Preadolescence is also defined as “... the period of human development just preceding adolescence, *specifically*: the period between the approximate ages of 9 and 12” (Preadolescence, 2008).

“Pre-adolescence is a stage of human development through childhood that occurs in a child’s years before adolescence ... 9 to 13 year olds” (Wikipedia, sv ‘Preadolescence’).

The researcher concludes that pre-adolescence is a stage of child development that occurs prior to the adolescent stage where the children are approximately between 9 and 13 years of age.

### 1.12.3 Educators

“Education encompasses teaching and learning many things intangible yet profound: the development of knowledge, wisdom, judgement, logic; often methods of communication (literacy, language); and other specialised skills” (Wikipedia, sv ‘Education’).

*“Leer- en leefinhoud moet aan die kind oorgedra of gedemonstreer word. Die oordra van inhoud (doelgerigte bemoeienis) kan alleen langs die weg van onderrig geskied.*

*Onderrig is dus 'n handeling wat geskied wanneer inhoud aan iemand oorgedra of gedemonstreer word*" (Johnson, 2008:67).

Educators are thus those persons who are qualified or have the necessary skills to pass on specific knowledge, skills and wisdom to others.

#### **1.12.4 Perceptions**

"Guiding our decisions and behaviour are our perceptions and in its purest form, the word 'perception' is defined as the process, act, or faculty of perceiving" (Origin and current status of learnerships, [sa]). According to Oberholzer (2005), perception can be defined as "... a process whereby people acquire information about their environment through their five senses to gather information about physical objects, people and events."

Perceptions can thus be defined as a process whereby information is gathered through our senses in order to guide our decisions and behaviour and provide a framework of how we view events or people.

#### **1.13. DIVISION OF THE RESEARCH REPORT**

Chapter 1: An introductory view to the research and includes the following:

Motivation for the choice of the research topic, problem formulation, the goals of the study, the research approach, design and procedure, the pilot study, description of the sample and sampling methods, as well as limitations in the practical implementation of the research and definitions of key concepts.

Chapter 2: The developmental stage in which the respondents of the study are, pre-adolescence, will be focused on, as well as key elements in a pre-adolescent child's life. The researcher will also aim to focus on socio-economic circumstances that these children are facing on a daily basis.

Chapter 3: This chapter will provide a clearer view on all types of behavioural problems and theories on behaviour, as well as provide a detailed view on acting-out behaviour and the phenomenon of this behaviour.

Chapter 4: The focus will be on the empirical research and the interpretation thereof. The findings will be depicted as graphic presentations with additional explanations of the findings.



Chapter 5: The conclusion of the research study. In this final chapter conclusions and recommendations will be made according to the research findings.



## CHAPTER 2

### PRE-ADOLESCENCE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AFFECTING CHILDREN

#### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

The behavioural problems displayed by children may have many different causes and therefore the behaviour cannot just be seen as problematic in itself, all predisposing factors need to be taken into consideration. Barkley and Benton (1998:45) state that "... if you're unaware of which parts of the child's environment are contributing to the defiant behaviour, you don't stand a chance of resolving the problems." In order to understand and appropriately decrease the negative and problematic behaviour one thus needs to understand why the child is behaving in a specific way. According to Henry *et al.* (in Maughan, 2001:178) a combination of negative parenting, low social status, family instability and parental disagreements may influence antisocial outcomes. Predisposing genetic factors also play a role in this regard (Cadore *et al.* in Harwood, 2006:76; Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:38; Simonoff, 2001:226). A child may express uncontrollable behaviour due to predisposing genetic factors, but environmental factors are the factors that increase the risk of displaying problematic behaviours.

There are a wide variety of contributing socio-economic factors that can influence behaviour, but each child's behaviour should be addressed individually, on the grounds of his/her socio-economic circumstances, as well as understanding the child's predisposing genetic factors, the child's personality and vulnerability, and the developmental phase in which the child is/were when the behaviour originated. The children who participated as respondents in this study were in the pre-adolescent developmental phase, a very critical phase before the onset of the adolescent phase. Pre-adolescent children have a cognitive understanding of the world and of consequences for actions; they are also prone to be highly influenced by peers while struggling to gain independence. When a child is exposed to negative socio-economic circumstances, the problematic behaviour that may accompany it, must be addressed as early as possible, as the behaviour will increase the older the child gets. It is therefore necessary to address problematic behaviour before the child enters the adolescent

phase, as this phase offers its own stumbling blocks that may be harder to overcome in order to successfully reach the next level.

In this chapter the researcher will firstly focus on and analyse the pre-adolescent phase of development, as this is a critical phase in a child's life that influences his/her development. The respondents of the study will consist of pre-adolescents and therefore an understanding of this life stage in totality is essential. Socio-economic problems that may influence behaviour, as well as the behaviour that may be acted-out by a child due to these circumstances will then be discussed and viewed specifically in a pre-adolescent child's life.

## **2.2. PRE-ADOLESCENCE**

### **2.2.1. The pre-adolescent stage**

The life stage in which the respondents are, is the stage of pre-adolescence, as the children are aged between 11 and 13 years. De Klerk and Le Roux (2004:23) define the ages 11 to 15 years as the pre-adolescent stage. The age of the respondents is an important aspect to consider as children's issues need to be addressed at their developmental level (Geldard & Geldard, 2001:45). This statement thus indicates that the needs and developmental aspects accompanying the age level of the participants involved need to be taken into account.

Pre-adolescence can be defined as the stage between childhood and adolescence. This person is thus neither a child nor an adolescent. He/she experiences developmental demands, causing great anxiety, as well as a need for true role models. The stage where children's ages range from 7 to 12 years are defined by Piaget (in Benokraitis, 2005:332) as the concrete operational stage where the children learn to distinguish between cause and effect and become able to anticipate what the causes will be without having to try the behaviour first. The child is also in a stage of orienting his or her 'self-benefit' with regard to certain situations (Kohlberg in Geldard & Geldard, 2001:32). Therefore the participants in the study will be able to communicate the implications of behavioural problems as they are fully aware of behavioural effects and causes and what actions can be taken to avoid the acting-out of emotions and feelings due to traumatic experiences.

The fact that children in the pre-adolescent stage are on the brink of becoming adolescents gives meaning to their search for acceptance by others, as this aspect increasingly start to influence their direction of thinking. Saunders (1996:60) commemorates this aspect, by saying that during the ages of 11 to 13 years, the adolescent experiences a state of intense egocentrism and self-absorption. Peers become more important and their self-concept more invested into the feedback they receive from their close friends as social interaction and the way it occurs are key aspects of this developmental process (Berk, 1997:430; Geldard & Geldard, 2001:5).

The process of social interaction and peer assessment is also crucial in the forming of the child's identity and the reason for its importance is that adolescence is mainly characterised by the individual's search for his or her true identity. Erikson (in Saunders, 1996:7) also sees the development of a pre-adolescent's identity as the most important developmental task during the pre-adolescent stage of life. Sternberg (2001: 359) states that social development is also closely linked or includes various other areas of development. Berk (1997:445) accentuates that during the ages of 10 to 15 years, children can step outside a two-person situation and imagine how the self and the other are viewed. The child views others from his or her own perceptions and needs. Children must progressively build skills in areas to achieve successful development outcomes. By the end of mid-childhood normally adjusted children will have achieved many major milestones in the development of their competence emotionally, and by early adolescence the capacity to exert control over emotional expression should be present in at least some situations (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003:272, 273).

## **2.2.2. The needs and developmental aspects of importance in this life stage.**

### **2.2.2.1. Identity formation**

The formation of one's identity is an important task and part of pre-adolescence and adolescence. The child's interaction with others and the feelings and behaviours associating these interactions and relationships are ways in which identity is acquired resulting ultimately in the child's development. Erik Erikson (in Saunders, 1996:7) identified the following essential tasks during the pre-adolescent stage with identity at the heart of being a pre-adolescent:



Pre-adolescent stage	Task
Trust versus mistrust	Future planning
Autonomy versus doubt	Assertiveness and identity forming
Initiative versus guilt	Role experimentation
Industry versus worthlessness	Accomplishments due to confidence
Identity versus identity confusion	Identity formation

The abovementioned tasks and aspects of the life stage of pre-adolescence are all essential in order to aid the adolescent in moving on to the next developmental level, which is the critical adolescent stage.

### **2.2.2.2. The battle between independence and acceptance.**

The formation of the identity, however important it may be, is not the only need during this developmental stage. During this stage of their lives, pre-adolescents strive for independence from their parents and from their peers while at the same time trying to find their place in the world. This is where the complication arises as they are also desperately in want of acceptance from their peers. Thus the conclusion can be drawn that children in the pre-adolescent stage strive towards their identities and independence (De Klerk & Le Roux, 2004:23). They also develop crushes; engage in hero-worshipping; have perfectionist tendencies and set unrealistic standards for themselves as they move towards independence and separateness while at the same time becoming passionately dependent on their friends (Geldard & Geldard, 2001:37). They are thus very vulnerable and can be easily influenced if the needed amount of attention is given to the child. The process of independence and separation is a difficult process that involves changes in the spheres of the adolescent and those surrounding him/her that very often seems like rebellion and breaking the parent-child relationship. The child moves to establish an identification profile of his or her own but still relies heavily on family domains (Zeitlin & Refaat, 2000:78). Granic, Dishion and Hollenstein (2003:62) state that during this stage of life the parenting context characterised by high degrees of warmth and responsiveness on the one hand and firm behaviour control and maturity demands on the other, is critical for promoting healthy development.

### **2.2.2.3. The importance of friends**

In order to acquire their own identity, pre-adolescents will increasingly spend more time with their friends while at the same time wanting to be independent (Saunders, 1996:28;

Bennett, 1999:113; Brown & Klute, 2003:331). During the pre-adolescent phase children learn about intimacy and loyalty from the friendships they have with their fellow peers. It is thus logical that during this stage pre-adolescents will increasingly look to their peers rather than their parents where behaviour is concerned (Geldard & Geldard, 2001:40; Bennett, 1999:114).

Friends are the people that the pre-adolescent spend most of his/her time with and thus where the need to belong and to be accepted is crucial, as friends are the ones aiding one in finding one's place in the world. According to Jongsma, Peterson and McInnis (2003:184) there is a strong susceptibility that negative peer influences will contribute to problems with authority figures at home, school and in the community. Negative peer influences also include a recurrent pattern of engaging in disruptive, negative attention-seeking behaviours at school or in the community to elicit attention, approval or support from peers, as well as a tendency to gravitate toward negative peer groups because of underlying feelings of low self-esteem and insecurity. Jongsma *et al.* (2003:184) state that a history of rejection within the family system/peer group contributes to the adolescent desiring acceptance and a feeling of belonging mostly in negative peer groups.

#### **2.2.2.4. The self and self-esteem of the pre-adolescent.**

The pre-adolescent's self-esteem is dependent on what he or she thinks his/her peers think about him/her. The self is formed from interaction with the environment as well as the individual's perceptions regarding this interaction and what the individual acknowledges as part of himself or herself. The concept of the self can also be seen as the "... whole picture of what we think we are, what we think we can become, what we think others think of us and what we would like to be", according to Saunders (1996:10). Thus the feedback children receive from their peers has profound influence on the children's cognitive and interpersonal development (Piaget in Saunders, 1996:48).

Granic *et al.* (2003:67) state that:

... emotions focus an individual's attention on certain aspects of a situation, prompting changes in action readiness ... thus, anger is elicited when a goal is perceived to be intentionally blocked and appraisals of blame are elicited, sadness emerges when a blocked goal is appraised as insurmountable, shame is elicited when the goal of being admired is thwarted and appraisals of worthlessness are triggered ... Over the development of time, recurrent emotion-cognition amalgams sensitise the



individual to particular ways of processing information and engaging with the world.

The emotional state of the pre-adolescent child can be misunderstood and can change the behaviour of the child. The researcher agrees with literature that a child in the pre-adolescent phase is faced with a variety of emotions and feelings as he/she progresses through all the developmental tasks, which may in effect become difficult even for the pre-adolescent to fully comprehend his/her experiences, based on own professional experience. Rosenblum and Lewis (2003:270) state that emotional states are inferred constructs that involve specific physiological changes and consequent changes in behaviour that occurs as a response to a particular stimulus. For the pre-adolescent his/her emotional experience is actually his/her interpretation and evaluation of the emotional state and behaviour. The realisation of one's self-concept is thus important, as one's concept of the self will determine the emotional experience.

Humans do not only interact in one environment and therefore have different tasks to perform. The self-concept of the individual is thus formed by all these different experiences. The mere fact that we have different tasks to perform in different areas of our lives explains the different concepts of the self. Saunders (1996:10-13) categorises these different types of self concept as the physical concept of the self, the personal concept, the social concept, the concept of worth, the self concept of one's family and the self concept of self criticism. For pre-adolescents the formation of all these concepts is important as they are on the path of discovering their true identity. Berk (1997:429) also highlights one of these types, by stating that adolescents' self-descriptions place great emphasis on their social virtues and their need to be liked and to be viewed positively by others.

Pre-adolescent and adolescent children need a positive learning environment which consists of safety to express themselves, the freedom to make their own choices, being respected, receiving support and having their talents recognised, acquiring empathy and receiving the needed stimulation for optimal growth. Later in this chapter the researcher will focus on situations where a positive learning environment is lacking and the subsequent impact on the behaviour of these children.

### **2.2.2.5. Behavioural problems in the pre-adolescent life stage**

According to Rosenblum and Lewis (2003:271), increasingly complex emotions are the consequence of increasingly personal and psychological interpretations of internal and external events and conscious or unconscious judgments about their significance. When children become older and move into the adolescent phase, problem behaviour can easily spread through peer influences, collective socialisation, and neighbourhood role models (Maughan, 2001:187). Peers, as has been discussed earlier, are very important in a pre-adolescent child's life and can either be an incidental factor in the display of acting-out behaviour (in depth outlined in chapter three), or they can play a mediating role where they are mostly responsible for a child's portrayal of disruptive behaviour. Peers can also play a moderating role or they can be a mix of all of the above roles in a child's display of acting-out behaviour.

Psycho-social problems include innate factors such as temperament and biologically based individual differences. This is compared to opinions emphasising the power of the environment and experience to shape the individual's behaviour and ways of perceiving the world (Cooper, 2000:44). The pre-adolescent's behavioural problems can therefore be inclined to sustaining negative behaviour as there is a link between adult delinquency and childhood behaviour problems. According to Rutter and Smith (in Cooper, 2000:44) the majority of offences are committed by teenagers and young adults in their twenties. 70% to 90% of young adults that have been arrested for violent offences were rated as highly aggressive in early adolescence (Cooper, 2000:46).

## **2.3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS**

There are five phases involved in the development of aggression and conduct problems, according to Pettit, Polaha and Mize (2001:305). The first phase relates to early experiences (for example, physical abuse, aggressive models, and insecure attachments). Phase two includes the knowledge structure (with reference to hostile world schema and self-defensive goals). Phase three relates to perceptual attribution processes, phase four is seen in the behaviour acted out by the child and if that is not properly addressed, the child will develop conduct problems at phase five. Behaviour therefore does not suddenly appear, but develops out of predisposing factors, that if not addressed, will develop into other problems and ultimately become visible through the manifestation of the child's problematic behaviour. Such problematic behaviours will be

focussed on in chapter three. According to Bloomquist and Schnell (2002:48), the instability of the external family environment may have a negative effect on a child's own internal stability, which then results in the manifestation of behavioural and emotional problems. Personal problems, financial trouble, the marital relationship, employment problems, and relationships with relatives, friends and other children in the family can adversely affect parents in ways that contribute to defiance. This can have a reciprocal effect and affect the child directly (Barkley & Benton, 1998:43).

It is not only the family setting that can contribute to defiance in children, and therefore other factors need to be taken into account. The social system in which the child finds himself/herself can predispose the child to developing problems (Gericke, 1998:43). Within the family setting it seems that there are generally higher prevalence rates in single parent families; families where there are frequent change of parental figures; parents having psychopathological illnesses or abusing substances; where there are marital problems and poor parental skills portrayed by the parents. Higher rates of behaviour disorders also exist where families live in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:20). Montgomery (2000:169) adds that difficult social, school, and learning circumstances can induce anxiety and distress and lead to behavioural problems. According to Walker (1979:6) changed social conditions in the larger society reflects in a child's school behaviour. The researcher gathers that behaviour can be influenced by the family setting, school setting, or larger society, but that these settings could also have detrimental effects on each other, causing greater problems than originally existed.

Contextual factors include: socioeconomic disadvantage or poverty, disadvantaged neighbourhoods, community violence, stressful life events, and school factors, as well as increases in crime rate, breakdown in the authority of institutions and general disruption and weakening of the family as the primary unit of socialisation in society (Herbert & Martinez, 2001:67; Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:56-58; Walker, 1979:6). Some of these contextual factors that can predispose acting-out behaviour have been highlighted by the researcher below.

### **2.3.1. Poverty and disadvantaged environments/neighbourhoods**

"Poverty has a significant direct effect on young children as that is the time when individuals are most prone to detrimental developmental effects of inadequate nutrition



and stimulation” (Porter, 2003:179). Family contextual factors such as low income can cause considerable limitations that restrict environmental options for children and adolescents (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:473). Flouri (2005:127) states that the most detrimental part of poverty is that poor people can only afford housing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These areas in turn are areas that provide lower-quality schools, fewer role-models, less social control and fewer job networks, thus adding to an already unmanageable problem situation. Bloomquist and Schnell (2002:56) make the statement that when a family lives in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, stressors and other problems related to living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are actual influences impacting on children.

Low family income can be seen as an inseparable part of the problems in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, and as Herbert and Martinez (2001:67) state, inappropriate aggression and violence are pervasive features of contemporary society. Community violence thus has a reciprocal effect on people’s and especially, children’s behaviour. Low family income also has a detrimental effect on children of poor families and abusive backgrounds as they do not have the containing environment that other children have to develop adult ego functions to survive (Harwood, 2006:25). Maughan (2001:185) also states that poverty imposes stress on parents and lessens the support available to them, causing a higher risk of acting-out behaviour in children. Poverty is a major concern, as it is linked to poor housing, limited social supports when families live in neighbourhoods where others are equally stressed, and where they only have access to inadequate health care and low quality child care and educational services. Pre-adolescent children need healthy social environments in order to develop adult ego functions, therefore a culturally deprived environment and low socio-economic standards can deprive the pre-adolescent child from optimal developmental and exploration possibilities (Gericke, 1998:43).

The relationship of poverty to disorders is very complex as it is related to the parenting style and relationship with the child’s mother rather than genetic ethnicity (Zeitlin & Refaat, 2000:74). Parents may also neglect their children as they become caught up in their own issues of survival, and fail to provide adequate guidance, which in turn can lead to undesirable peer relationships (as previously discussed, highly important in a pre-adolescent child’s social functioning). Parents may also develop mental illnesses in response to their trying circumstances, and strain may be caused on the relationship

between the parents (Porter, 2003:179). Families who live in these circumstances can be greatly empowered by the proper help offered, but more often than not assistance to do so can be threatening to them or can be seen as judgmental, undermining and authoritarian, and therefore it needs to be done with the utmost sensitivity.

### **2.3.2. Family problems**

The child's family is the most important support system a child can have, and therefore ineffective parenting and problems within the relationship between the parent and the child can cause stress, which can have a negative effect on the process of learning and development of emotional and behavioural problems (Gericke, 1998:37). Family discord and poor relations can cause chronic problems, but can also improve if circumstances improve. Insecure attachments with parents may lead to feeling no self-worth and trying to compensate by seeking attention and being disruptive (Hinde, 2001:40). Negative parenting and a lack of parenting skills can cause children to act out in their behaviour (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:44; Maughan, 2001:172). Acting-out behaviour may be more evident in the behaviour displayed by boys than in the behaviour displayed by girls, as boys will respond aggressively, whereas girls may withdraw as response. Hill (2001:111) elaborates by stating that inconsistent parenting also contributes to behavioural problems. Poor parenting includes poor supervision, harsh discipline, rejection of the child and low involvement (Flouri, 2005:99, 100).

Problems affect the family setting, the relationships within the family, as well as parenting in itself. A survey regarding ten to eighteen year olds to investigate the longitudinal stability of problematic behaviours found that the co-variation between antisocial parenting and negative parenting was not evoked by the child, but rather that it is consistent with plausible parental effect on children's antisocial behaviour (Rodgers & Bard, 2003:11, 12). Bloomquist and Schnell (2002:47, 49) go on by saying that depending on the intensity of verbal or physical violence between parents, the higher the aggressiveness or emotional maladjustment the child will portray.

When a child loses contact with a parent due to death, termination of parental rights, parent's incarceration, a geographic move, or parents' emotional abandonment, a strong emotional response is experienced when the loss is mentioned. A marked drop in school grades and increase in angry outbursts, as well as hyperactivity or clinginess when

separated from parents can be observed (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:137). Letters to the lost parent or drawings can be utilised to guide the child through the grieving process.

### **2.3.3. Divorce**

Divorce is another socio-economic problem that affects a child in numerous ways. Divorce, according to Porter (2003:180), presents children with many challenges to add to their normal demands of growing up. Porter (2003:180) also states that “(n)egative effects on children that we think are caused by divorce instead mainly occur if the conflict between parents continues after their separation and if separation exacerbates the family’s poverty.” The intensity of emotions and problems that accompanies the divorce will thus have a lesser or greater effect on a child. Divorce will always have a damaging effect on a child, as it entails that the child’s whole life gets disrupted, and the child then suffers from grief for the loss of a parent. The pre-adolescent child can be thrown in a confusion of emotions and uncertainties with regard to his/her roles in society and place in the family system. This can cause anger, sadness, anxiety and attention-seeking behaviour. These children will also tend to blame themselves (Gericke, 1998:38). Children from a previous union of respective parents are sometimes brought into a new single family unit, which can result in interpersonal conflict, anger and frustration. Resistance and defiance to the new stepparent follows, as well as overt/covert defiance (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:76). Children also sometimes make verbal threats to a biological parent of going to live with the other parent, and sometimes even report abuse to the other parent. According to Jongsma *et al.* (2003:77, 79) family therapy is essential to enable the members to express openly their feelings, to identify the losses or changes in life and bring acceptance.

### **2.3.4. Single parenting**

Research studies have indicated that single mothers who are socially isolated are most likely to have aggressive children. Rutter (in Gericke, 1998:38) adds that single parents, especially single mothers, have financial and emotional stress and cannot provide a stable living environment to their children due to their circumstances. Single mothers may become exhausted from carrying the extra burden and may feel guilty about the separation or divorce and in effect may not be as consistent as they should be in enforcing discipline. When mothers suffer from depression or are highly distressed, they are less able to attend to the needs of those that are not their own (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:41, 42). Mothers’ ways of handling the conflict can also be seen as a

cause of acting-out behaviour (Hinde, 2001:61). A single mother does not project the same authoritative image as a father may to a son, and thus the son may test the mother with his behaviour (Barkley & Benton, 1998:43).

### **2.3.5. Child maltreatment and abuse**

Child maltreatment includes neglecting of a child's physical or emotional needs, physical, emotional, verbal and sexual abuse (Porter, 2003:184). Neglect constitutes more reported cases, but children can also suffer from multiple forms of abuse simultaneously. According to Gericke (1998:55), abuse implies "... intentionally causing or inflicting physical pain or emotional damage to a child, or hindering of a child's optimal development when failing to provide standards and conditions for development, usually by the parent or custodian." Abuse within a dysfunctional family relationship is characterised by neglect, indifference, violence, humiliation and terrorisation of children, isolation, corruption of children and unreliable parenting.

Abuse has detrimental effects on a child, whether a child has been abused emotionally, verbally, physically or sexually. According to Porter (2003:182), verbal abuse can be seen as the glue that holds all the other forms in place. Verbal abuse includes putting a spouse down or yelling. Physical abuse involves the infliction of injury. Gericke (1998:55) also states that physical abuse entails wilful, non-accidental injuries that usually have visible proof such as burns or bruises. Emotional abuse is the deprivation or neglect of emotional needs of a child over a period of time that results in fundamental disturbances of the child's personality development. It also entails withholding of love and affection, constant denigrating of a child or making excessive demands on the capabilities of a child that can cause undue mental anguish (Gericke, 1998:55).

When the atmosphere in a child's family home is one of violence and tension, the child suffers tremendously and may likely be a recipient of violence. Porter (2003:184) states that isolated families and those lacking in support are more prone to child abuse, and that parents' substance abuse is an increasing cause of child neglect. The effects of child abuse differ depending on the severity, how often it occurs, child's age when it occurs, the relationship between the child and the perpetrator and the fact that in most cases many types of abuse occur (Porter, 2003:184). Family violence and alcoholism is also characterised by lies, excuses and secrets, which are as common as air in these homes, and it creates tremendous emotional chaos for children (Gericke, 1998:39).

The child whose parents have some sort of a psychopathology is also at risk of developing psychological problems in general. A mentally ill parent is less available for his/her child and thus the child cannot experience a responsive two-way relationship. Parents suffering from depression also show poor parenting skills (Gericke, 1998:38, 39). There can thus be many different means whereby parents make themselves guilty of neglect or maltreatment, whether it is physical, emotional or sexual, or merely the absence of a proper parental role-model, but the effects will always be extremely damaging.

### **2.3.6. Acting-out behaviour due to socio-economic problems**

When children live with spousal abuse, the following effects can be observed: the child may show disrespect for the abused parent as an imitation of the violent parent; the child's behaviour might become uncontrollable as he/she may experience the abused parent as not having enough status to discipline him/her. The child may also be similarly dismissive of all other caregivers and refuse to be guided by the teacher. A child living in an abusive home often becomes very bossy or competitive with siblings or peers, might become aggressive when attempting to solve disputes either because it is all they have been shown or in reaction to tension they experience within the home. These children can also take on the responsibility for protecting the abused parent (Porter, 2003:182, 183). The attachments that children tend to make with certain people in their lives can also be an indicator of neglect or abuse. Children who have been neglected never learnt how to form attachments, whereas abused children can develop attachments that are damaging to them (Porter, 2003:185). Child maltreatment is associated with a wide spectrum of difficulties which include externalising and internalising symptoms and a low self-esteem. Children who have been reared in homes where they have been exposed to threats and physical abuse tend to develop a heightened arousal towards conflict, anger and distress (Maughan, 2001:182, 183).

According to Porter (2003:185) child abuse leads to a negative self-esteem where the child may try to be perfect to try to stop the abuse. Abused children often feel to blame for the abuse because of some sort of imperfection the child exemplifies or things he/she may have done wrong which must be justified by the abuse. Emotional signs that may indicate child abuse include being highly dependant, knowing little about his/her own feelings and never learning how to regulate anger and aggression, displaying few emotional coping strategies; possibly showing signs of depression or anxiety. Socially

abused children may tend to withdraw from friendly overtures of caring adults or peers as negative experiences of relationships teach them to avoid it. Some children may assault or threaten adults and may not approach others for comfort when distressed, as they have learned not to expect nurturance from others (Porter, 2003:185). They may lack empathy and even delight in another child's distress. Behaviourally they can very often be impulsive as a result of not having learned to regulate emotions. Behaviour can also regress where the child can display some demanding patterns that were typical some time ago or a totally new behaviour may be adopted. Abused children can become frequently disruptive and aggressive. Sexually abused children can become secretive or display sexualised behaviour and may re-enact what is happening to them with dolls, drawings or toys. Physically an abused child may have burns, bruises, fractures. Developing signs can be seen in the declining in development or regression to baby talk or bed wetting and believing that he/she is not capable of problem solving (Porter, 2003:185). Physical abuse may not in its own lead to children's behaviour problems, but in the presence of other factors, emotional and behavioural problems may emerge (Bennett, 2000:218). Behavioural indicators are most detectable when abuse has just occurred. If the abuse has been occurring for a time period, the behaviour may be hard to detect as it has been going on for a time (Porter, 2003:185).

Children from divorced families tend to exhibit higher levels of externalising problems like aggression and conduct disorder, than children from intact families. The effects of divorce also depend on factors such as the quality of the parent-child relationship, the gender of the custodial parent, remarriage, and parental style (Bennett, 2000:220). A child who has been adopted may tend to participate in extreme testing of all limits (for example lying, breaking rules, academic underachievement, truancy, stealing, drugs and alcohol, verbal abuse of parents, and promiscuity), and therefore the building of a trusting relationship and the identification of losses is important to overcome acting-out behaviour (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:28; Adamec & Pierce, 2000). Child delinquency and stealing are behaviours associated with poverty and dysfunctional neighbourhoods, as children can take up these behaviours in order to survive.

#### **2.4. SUMMARY**

There seems to be consistent links between poverty, social disadvantages and behavioural problems (Maughan, 2001:185). The developmental level of the child needs

also to be taken into consideration, as the developmental level of the child also aids in understanding the child and the behaviour displayed by the child. Children in the pre-adolescent phase are very susceptible to influence whether it be peers or significant people in their lives. They are in a great battle with their inner-self and therefore the problematic behaviour displayed by them can be negatively experienced by others, as others may feel that they are old enough to realise the impropriety of their actions. Children should thus never be labelled as “troubled” or “problematic” and the behaviour displayed by the child cannot merely be generalised to one or other cause, as each child experiences problem situations in different ways and demonstrate behaviour in different ways. Modelling of aggression within the family setting and emotional stress experienced by a child may impair the child’s capacity to regulate emotional responses and family discord may disrupt the quality of parenting.

## CHAPTER 3

### BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS AND ACTING-OUT BEHAVIOUR

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen's terminology of "troublesome" and "manageable" hallmark the descriptions of conduct problems used by many parents when they describe their adolescent child's behaviour (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:470). According to Barkley and Benton (1998:1) parents often feel distressed when it comes to the behaviour of their children. They would ask why it is that they cannot control their own child. 5% to 8% of children in America have problematic behaviour and this percentage only indicates those children whose behaviour has become so problematic that it has become a disorder. There are thus many more cases of problematic behaviour that drives parents and those involved in a child's life crazy. According to Barrett (2000:160) there is some evidence that a significant number of children identified by their parents as hard to manage at age 2 and 3 continue to be difficult in childhood, and children assessed at age 3 as having behavioural problems and poor language skills are more likely to present with conduct disorders or other behavioural problems in middle childhood. These statistics thus evidently link predisposing factors with the development of behavioural problems.

Problematic behaviour can be seen where the child refuses to do what adults expect of him/her, or where the child is temperamental or break or ignore common rules (Barkley & Benton, 1998:1). Due to children's problematic behaviour they do not fit in with others or get along with others, which in turn might stand in the way of their succeeding in school and developing a normal life. Porter (2003:57) adds that the child's behaviour may cause other children to dislike the child and therefore the child may be gravitated towards other aggressive children.

Children manifesting problematic behaviour often come from families that are stressed, disrupted or disorganised (Barrett, 2000:160). Behaviour problems can be caused by obstacles that parents have to face, such as ill health, poverty, lack of social support or other social disadvantages. It has been stated in the previous chapter that families facing challenging circumstances are often too strained with having to survive and may



not have the resources and skills or the energy to aid the child in healthy development. Thus, linking to this aspect, when a child has conduct problems, the marital relationship can be put under tremendous strain. The behaviour can also harm the parent-child relationship and weaken the bond all children need to mature into happy and healthy adults (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:470; Barkley & Benton, 1998:1). However, some children are also distinctly more difficult to manage than others, and some more vulnerable and therefore this aspect should always be taken into consideration together with the child's circumstances when analysing the child's behaviour (Barrett, 2000:148).

The challenging behaviour is thus just the visible tip of a problem of disaffection where the child may act out his/her feelings, but the only visibly part thereof is the behaviour (Montgomery, 2000:164). According to Porter (2003:35), meeting a child's emotional needs is important to help the child to be well-adjusted. Failure to regulate emotions will lead to behavioural outbursts. An understanding with regard to perspectives on behavioural problems and various behavioural problems first need to be made in order to make a distinction between acting-out behaviour and other conduct problems, and why children act out certain disruptive behaviours.

## **3.2. THEORIES CONCERNING BEHAVIOUR**

### **3.2.1. Behavioural theory**

The behavioural theory is one of the most powerful theoretical tools available to understand the way behaviour is shaped by experience (Cooper, 2000:49). This theory states that all behaviour is learned. Behaviour occurs in response to positive or negative reinforces which then encourage or discourage the repetition of behaviours to which they are applied. Through modelling, the individual imitates the behaviours of others. Modelling can either entail receiving direct personal reinforcement or where a person observes the model receiving reinforcement (Cooper, 2000:50). Behavioural therapy seeks to replace abnormal/difficult behaviour with more acceptable behavioural patterns (Jones, 2000:120). The person dealing with a child must understand the child's environment as well as have an understanding of past reinforcement history: The patterns of significant interaction in the family as well as the quality of the physical environment's influence on a child's behaviours and expectations need to be understood.

### **3.2.2. Psychodynamic theory**

The psychodynamic theory states that “... any individual’s current intra-psychological experience is most effectively understood with reference to their early childhood experiences and mental processes” (Cooper, 2000:50). This theory is thus primarily concerned with the psychological causes and experiences that have an effect on a child’s behaviour. Based on own professional experience, the researcher is of the opinion that young children especially do not always know how to process what has happened or is happening to them and therefore react in ways to handle the experience, which can ultimately be understood when this theory is utilised to draw mental processes and defence mechanisms utilised by the child.

### **3.2.3. Systems theory**

The systems theory is based on the belief that individuals never exist in a vacuum, and that perceptions and behaviours are heavily influenced by, and act as an influence on behaviours and perceptions of all with whom they interact (Cooper, 2000:52). The child is at the centre of a series of systems which include the child, family, peers, school and society, and the relationship between the child and these systems is important as the child is affected by each. These systems are extremely important in a pre-adolescent’s social development and need for belonging, as pre-adolescent children are in a phase where they increasingly depend on their peers in terms of socialising and acceptance, but yet rely heavily on the foundation of their family life and relationships. Children that do not have a family or is outside of a peer group or school have additional difficulty and are more vulnerable to adverse influence (Zeitlin & Refaat, 2000:73).

### **3.2.4. Social groupings**

According to Cooper (2000:53), sometimes a group is maintained at the expense of an individual in the group. This individual can be observed as the scapegoat or class clown in everyday settings. The individual can be used as the focus for negative feelings and fears to secure solidarity and harmony, for instance where the parents focus on the child’s problems, rather than their own. This entails the child to spiral further into the problem, which is in fact the group setting and not the individual. There is seemingly no support for a child in such a setting, as those that are supposed to provide the child with opportunities to grow suppress these opportunities by being ignorant to the real

problems. The child that is seen as the reason for everything that is wrong very often finds himself in a disadvantaged, poverty-stricken neighbourhood.

### **3.2.5. Social learning and operant conditioning**

Development is seen as a series of spiralling social transactions. It is thus not strange that direct experiences and vicarious learning through observation of others will influence a child's behaviour (Jones, 2000:121). Some aggressive and deviant behaviour are likely to be based on observational learning (aggressive role-models or other significant persons in a child's life) and exposure to aggression on film and television may serve to mediate aggressive behaviour. Exposure to pro-social behaviour has a less powerful influence on the child, as children take up negative behaviour more easily than positive behaviour. Bandura's cognitive social learning perspective states that a child will acquire aggressive behaviour through: being exposed to aggressive models, by being directly reinforced for behaving aggressively as well as through having parents who either condone or encourage the use of aggressive problem solving strategies (Pettit *et al.*, 2001:306).

According to Barrett (2000:149) "... currently popular models of development emphasise interactive nature of relationship between the environment and innate factors and multiplicity of pathways through which any one individual may develop." A person can thus be seen as a whole consisting of various intricate parts and ever-changing in relationships and roles throughout his/her life. A child will therefore be part of a different system than an adult would, due to the development phase of each. Children have therefore become identified as having their own distinctive group to society with their own culture(s), their own grievances and own political issues and have become more exposed in certain ways too (Cooper, 2000:54). They are thus part of the larger society, but also part of a culture of childhood and all it entails. It is thus essential to see children both with their environment and their development to gain an understanding of children, according to Zeitlin and Refaat (2000:73).

### **3.2.6. Lifespan developmental approach**

This approach emphasises the interaction between the individual's prior dispositions and learning and the environments in which he or she is placed. The individual's interactions with the social environment are also emphasised here (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:473). According to Scarr and McCartney (in Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:473) there are four effects

that shape the environment and the individual's behaviour. Firstly, the passive type: In this type the individual has no choice in his/her selection of environment and only has a limited ability to affect the environment. Second is the evocative type: In this type behaviour occurs through responses elicited from others. Explosive temper tantrums by a child may predict harsh parental discipline and aggression toward peers may lead to rejection by his/her peers. Rejection consequently deprives the aggressive child of positive developmental influences. Thirdly, the child may also react to environmental events, like an aggressive response to an insult. Lastly is the active type (or where the individual selects his/her environment). The individual chooses the environment that suits his/her disposition and goals, for example the choosing of a peer group. This can however be damaging to the pre-adolescent child, as pre-adolescent children tend to seek out negative peer influences as a means of gaining attention and acceptance when they have not received it from their family system. Capaldi and Shortt (2003:473) state that the movement into an environment that provide support for conduct problems and fewer interpersonal sanctions contributes to maintaining stability of conduct problems or the increasing engagement in such behaviours.

### **3.2.7. Mediational family model**

In the mediational family model parental psychopathology is viewed as an underlying risk context for the family and is related to other contextual risk factors like unemployment, and ineffective parenting (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:474). Parental psychopathology includes parental antisocial behaviour, depression and substance abuse. A visual representation of these factors in terms of parental psychopathology is provided in diagram 1. A risk factor for behavioural problems in children can be described as parents who have acquired few parenting skills and/or learned inappropriate parenting behaviours such as aggressive or coercive techniques and apply harsh abusive discipline. Variables like stress and depression are posited to disrupt or diminish parenting by taking time and attention away from the child. According to Capaldi and Shortt (2003:475) negative social exchanges between parents and their children will increase during times of family distress. Prevention of these negative social exchanges may prevent increases in conduct problems. According to this model children who experience more negative and hostile affect are likely to be more aggressive and those who act impulsively are more likely to engage in rule-breaking behaviours. Children who express negative affect may evoke more harsh responses from their parents.

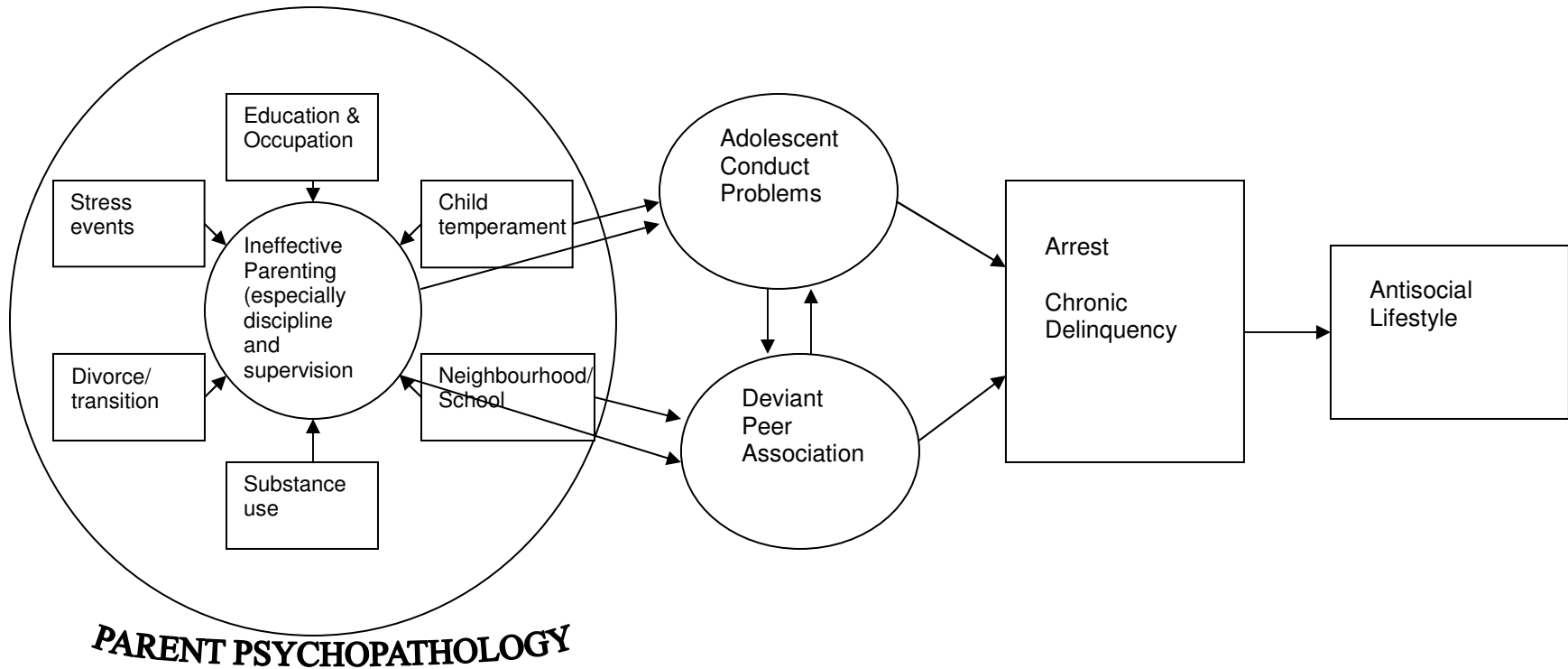


Diagram 1: Parent Psychopathology (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:474)

### 3.3. BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

Problem behaviours are usually those kinds of behaviours that distract others, need a lot of attention and/or intervention, or those that cause harm to others (Acting Up, Acting Out..., 2008). According to Jones and Jones (2000:93), many children with emotional and behavioural difficulties are labelled as hyperactive and considered to be unable to concentrate. Behaviour is at its most malleable in early years of life, and early development consists of critical periods at the end of which no amount of input will be able to bring about desired changes (Barrett, 2000:149). In adolescence children are at greatest risk of experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties (Cooper, 2000:43). Capaldi and Shortt (2003:471) are of the opinion that conduct problems should be a major focus of attention in order to assist parents, to understand the aetiology of the behaviours, to inform and conduct preventive interventions and treatment programs. Conduct problems should thus be addressed as early as possible, as they tend to cast long shadows into adulthood, as well as contribute to problems such as failure to finish high school, violence, and lack of job skills, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, poor relationships, as well as physical and psychological aggression toward intimate partners (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:471).

According to Rogers (in Porter, 2003:67), there is a distinction between primary and secondary behaviours. Primary behaviours can be seen as the result of what is going on inside the child, whereas secondary behaviours refer to the child's reaction to the correction of these primary behaviours. A child may lack the ability to perform a more mature behaviour because of age (the child may not have learned how to act thoughtfully due to the developmental level he/she is in at that stage), developmental level, disorganised nervous system (may have autism or ADHD), or copying inappropriate role models (Porter, 2003:68).

Behavioural problems can be due to heredity, although behaviour patterns within the family cannot necessarily be seen as heredity as the environment as well as various circumstances and experiences also have an effect on behavioural patterns. The socio-economic circumstance(s) in which the family function therefore has a defining impact on behaviour and the development thereof, as well as the developmental needs of the child and the attaining thereof. Biological factors such as the nervous system and the

neurological system can also be a cause, as it entails that if these systems are not adequately developing or functioning effectively, it can have a very negative effect on the learning process (Gericke, 1998:34). Children with difficult temperaments, such as quick tempers, may tend to develop more behavioural problems. According to Jones (2000:121) both the temperament and physical appearance of a young child influence the ways in which others react towards them. The prenatal condition can also have an effect due to the emotional state of the mother at that time (Gericke, 1998:34).

When a child loses his/her temper, argues with adults, actively defies or refuses to comply with requests or rules, deliberately annoys others, blames others for his/her mistakes or misbehaviours, is touchy or easily annoyed by others, is angry or resentful, spiteful or vindictive, and displays four of these behaviours very often, this child has behavioural problems (Barkley & Benton, 1998:7, 8). Behavioural problems differ and therefore the best known behavioural problems will now be discussed.

### **3.3.1. Oppositional defiant behaviour**

Defiant behaviour appears with widely varying degrees of aggression. The degrees of aggression take time to develop and arise from a complicated set of causes. According to Barkley and Benton (1998:10), “(o)ppositional, defiant behaviour can run the gamut from whining, complaining, and crying, to arguing, yelling, screaming, and swearing. It may range from simply drifting away from chores to destroying property and getting into fights.” Characteristics of oppositional defiant behaviour include: changing from content to angry in a second; fighting the inevitable (for example going to bed); insisting on having his/her own way when playing with friends; lying or cheating to escape responsibilities for actions; is easily irritated, hostile for no particular reason; ignoring commands; deliberately disobeys; breaking rules indiscriminately; badgering or taunting; can’t control temper; breaking/destroying things out of anger; self-destructive behaviour (Barkley & Benton, 1998:10, 11). Oppositional defiant behaviour occurs when a pattern of negativistic, hostile and defiant behaviour has been observed for at least 6 months (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:472). Oppositional defiant behaviour is thus embedded in aggression and the intensity thereof will define whether behaviour will be “labelled” as “oppositional defiant behaviour” or simply problematic behaviour. Oppositional defiant behaviours can very often be seen in a child with acting-out behaviour (discussed in detail later in this chapter), as the child may behave aggressively due to the child

perceiving life as unjust and being unable to voice his/her feelings and emotions in any other way. The researcher gathers that this type of behaviour can be the result of acting-out behaviour that has never been addressed appropriately or has been neglected and therefore has been going on for a very long period of time.

### **3.3.2. Aggression/ Aggressive behaviour**

Aggressive behaviour includes repeated angry outbursts that are out of proportion to a precipitating event; excessive screaming, cursing, use of verbally abusive language when frustrated or stressed; frequent fighting and intimidation of others; a persistent pattern of destroying property or throwing objects; underlying feelings of depression, anxiety or insecurity that contributes to angry outbursts and aggressive behaviours (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:38). In most cases aggression is fired by anger and other feelings such as envy, jealousy and greed. Aggression manifests itself in rebellion, hostility, cheekiness, quarrelsomeness and lying, theft and vandalism (Gericke, 1998:52).

According to Jongsma *et al.* (2003:41, 43, 44) aggressive behaviour can be addressed by confronting angry outbursts and statements of blame-shifting, making a list of targets and causes of anger, listing significant life experiences that have produced strong feelings of anger, hurt or disappointment. Family sculpting can help to observe the dynamics within the family that may contribute to the emergence of anger control problems, by defining roles and behaviours of each member. The empty chair technique can be utilised to coach the child in expressing angry feelings in a constructive manner.

### **3.3.3. Conduct disorder**

Conduct disorder is one of the most common types of childhood disorders. Conduct disorder in children is usually found where there is a high rate of unemployment or in lower socio-economic communities (Gericke, 1998:54). This type of behaviour is in conflict with the interests, norms, and customs of the community and can cause damage to personal relationships (includes extreme aggression and anti-social behaviour). This type of behaviour manifests in disobedience, hostility, theft, fire setting, truancy, meanness, vengefulness, malicious mischief, physical fighting, lying, running away from home, gang activities, forcing others into sexual activities and use of drugs and alcohol (Gericke, 1998:54; Cooper, 2000:46). Conduct disorders are thus those persistent behaviours in which children engage that violate the basic rights of others and/or norms



of society (Cooper, 2000:43; Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:472). Researcher is of the opinion that conduct disorders seem to be prevalent in poor socio-economic communities, and can be confused with acting-out behaviour as the behaviour of a child with a conduct disorder is influenced by socio-economic circumstances. Acting-out behaviour, however, will later be discussed and clearly outlined to distinguish it from other behavioural problems.

#### **3.3.4. ADHD**

ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is the most common childhood disorder and it is characterised by impulsiveness, excessive motor activity, an inability to pay attention to details, difficulty in following through on instructions and organising tasks and activities, forgetfulness, fidgeting, excessive talking, running and climbing in inappropriate situations, interruptions and intrusions on others, and difficulty to cope in group situations (Gericke, 1998:54; Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:56). There is a consistent relationship between the core features of ADHD criteria and juvenile delinquency.

A child with ADHD can be taught to express his/her feelings through controlled, respectful verbalisations and healthy physical outlets by the teaching of effective communication and assertiveness skills to express feelings in a controlled fashion and meet needs through constructive actions (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:61). The therapist can utilise role-playing and modelling to teach implementation. Verbalisation of acceptance of responsibility for misbehaviour must be increased, and stressors or painful emotions that trigger an increase in hyperactivity must be identified. Positive interactions and more one-on-one time with parents must increase (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:62, 63). ADHD cannot be fully treated and diminished, but with the aid of medicine prescribed by a psychiatrist and therapeutic tools, the behaviour can be controlled and/or minimised.

#### **3.4. ACTING-OUT BEHAVIOUR**

The child is an individual and functioning as a system on its own. Gericke (1998:44, 45) states that the child is central in his/her own system, but is in constant interaction with other individuals and higher level systems. These systems include the child's family, friends, peers, school, and neighbourhood, predisposing factors, as well as his/her internal genetics. A change in any system will thus ultimately ripple through the whole

system and cause changes as it moves through the different systems. These systems are also so intertwined that an understanding with regard to the functioning of a child with problems cannot be reached if all the factors and interrelated patterns have not been taken into consideration. Behaviour thus develops as a result of the interaction between the child and his/her environment (Gericke, 1998:50). Montgomery (2000:163) states that considering the environment and the child's part in his/her system, boys tend to act out more than girls. This may be because boys' acting-out behaviour is more perceptible than that of girls.

According to Jones (2000:119) and Montgomery (2000:163) children rarely make direct requests for help themselves, their disturbed behaviour is often a signal of past or ongoing distress. By the time that others have reacted on the difficult behaviour, it is well established, even though original problems may not be in evidence any more. Cooper (2000:47) states that "acting-out" problems are problems affecting the emotional and psychological well-being of young people. These problems indicate that life has become increasingly difficult for children and young people in western society and as a result they have to deal with their inner processes on top of all the circumstances they are exposed to while trying to adhere to the demands of their development. The behaviour that is displayed by a child because of these factors differs accordingly. Acting-out behaviour can range from mildly disruptive to dangerous, and can result in social isolation and limits a child's ability to engage in and learn from new experiences (Acting Out..., 1998).

#### **3.4.1. Why Children act out**

"A child's behaviour is often a response to something that has just happened either to the child, around the child, or a reaction to what a child thinks may happen" (Acting Up, Acting Out..., 2008). Gericke (1998:33) states that "(t)here are many interacting factors that may lead to academic difficulty or failure and behavioural or emotional problems in children. All of these factors have to be taken into consideration in order to help a child." The child is an individual, a family member, a school pupil, and a part of a larger social system and all of these roles are interrelated to form a whole system (Gericke, 1998:33, 34). "A great many risk factors in childhood from the domains of family contextual factors (for example poverty), parental factors (for example, substance abuse), parenting behaviours (for example, harsh discipline), child behaviour (for example, hyperactivity),

and peer factors (for example, peer rejection) are associated with conduct problems in adolescence” (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:472). This statement made by Capaldi and Shortt correlates with the knowledge gathered in this study with regard to systems in the pre-adolescent’s life, the socio-economic circumstances he/she is exposed to, and the pre-adolescent in his/her developmental phase. Events, relationships and situations inside and outside of the child’s home can consequently affect the child’s behaviour (Barkley & Benton, 1998:26).

A child relies on the adults in his/her life to create an accepting environment in which he/she can feel emotionally safe and confident about his/her ability to meet the demands placed on him/her (Porter, 2003:36). Gericke (1998:37, 38) states that the family members are the first people the child has contact with, and therefore they learn behaviour primarily from modelling the behaviour of the parent and identify with the parent. When the child has no appropriate role-model or no role-models, the child can become unsure of who he/she is and how to behave (Gericke, 1998:38). A child may thus act out as means of expressing powerful, painful and/or confusing feelings that they are unable to verbalise (Acting out..., 1998).

Gericke (1998:40) states that the family is the primary system, but it is also exposed to the larger society, and society expects it to change, like in all systems, which may in turn alter the child’s behaviour. The tendency to “act out” can also result from believing that the source of reinforcement is beyond one’s control due to some external factors such as chance (Montgomery, 2000:163). The school system is a major system in a pre-adolescent’s life and can therefore also influence the child’s behaviour and development. When a child believes that his/her school is ability-focused, it can lead to declines in learners’ educational values, achievement and self-esteem, and increases in anger, depressive symptoms and school truancy as they move from 7th to 8th grade (Eccles & Roeser, 2003:131). Academic underachievement can occur due to feelings of depression, insecurity and low self-esteem that interfere with the learning and academic progress; a recurrent pattern of engaging in acting-out, disruptive and negative attention-seeking behaviour when encountering frustration in learning; as well as a response to environmental stress (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:17).

According to Gericke (1998:39) “(t)he lack of secure, stable, reliable parental figures, poor parental supervision, inconsistent management, harsh attitudes and disciplinary practices and erratic child-rearing practices is the main cause of behavioural problems such as conduct disorder and juvenile delinquency.” When safety and security is not felt, stress is birthed. According to Porter (2003:37), “... stress is a physical reaction to feeling out of control, particularly of negative events in life, in contrast with worries which are the cognitive component, and anxiety which is the emotional aspect of distress.” In chapter two the researcher focused on pre-adolescence and socio-economic circumstances. From the literature gathered in chapter two it is evident that the child’s antisocial behaviour is more often than not a result of negative parenting and that the behaviour displayed by the child can accordingly have an effect on the parents’ parenting skills (Barkley & Benton, 1998:43). When children are part of stressed families, they can become overwrought themselves, and where children have emotional or behavioural difficulties, they can themselves create stress in those around them that in turn rebounds on them again (Porter, 2003:37). Montgomery (2000:167) is of the opinion that ‘at risk’ factors can reside in the social background of an individual child so that, for example, discipline at home is too severe or inconsistent and thus creates resistance to normal control techniques. Family relationships might be disturbed and stressful with marital discord and violent quarrelling creating great distress amongst children.

Montgomery (2000:163) states that poor social skills and poor adaptive behaviour can be the external locus of control for acting-out behaviour. The central problem is that emotions and behaviours are deeply interwoven, and has to be “untangled” with the utmost care to get to the core of the problem (Gericke, 1998:50). Therefore the child who has emotional problems will ultimately develop behavioural problems which indicate that they cannot be separated. It has also been found that the lower the sense of self-esteem, the more difficult and disruptive the behaviour of the child is (Montgomery, 2000:164). When the child is in the pre-adolescent phase of development, one of the developmental milestones is to develop his/her identity and through that develop a sense of self. The pre-adolescent child’s formation of his/her self-esteem is dependent on the acceptance and support obtained by the family system and his/her peers. If the child does not receive the needed acceptance and love, or is exposed to detrimental socio-economic circumstances, his/her self-esteem can be adversely affected. According to Jongsma *et al.* (2003:148) a child who has a low self-esteem will verbalise

self-disparaging remarks, will see the self as unattractive, worthless, stupid, a loser, a burden and/or unimportant. Such a child may also act out in negative, attention-seeking ways.

Persons who display acting-out personality traits may feel the following, according to Messina and Messina (2007): lack of freedom to vent frustration directly onto its source, emotional withdrawal from problem situations, dependence on others to fill unsatisfied needs for belonging to a family or some kind of unit, starving for attention from those in their lives, lots of bottled up emotions, need for belonging, acceptance and being wanted or cared for, they may sense that they are being neglected, ignored or are unwanted, sense of no support from their environment, an intense need for love and intimacy, self-hatred for not being “good enough”, an intense sense of rejection and loneliness, intense hurt. These children can also be consumed with anger at their parents for not caring, at a person in their life who has a major problem, at the world for accepting their behaviour as “real”, and at themselves for their current problem state. Messina and Messina (2007) also state that these children tend to have irrational beliefs, for instance, no one loves them or understands them, that there is no sense in trying to make it work in their environment since no one else is willing to work on the problems, attack first before you get attacked, everyone in authority is messed up, so ignore them, don’t trust anyone, and/or to get everything one can grab as one won’t be given anything.

#### **3.4.2. Characteristics of acting-out behaviour**

Tantrums, such as crying, screaming, hitting, and kicking, signal that there is a loss of emotional control (Porter, 2003:69). Adamec and Pierce (2000) define acting-out behaviour as “(n)egative behaviour such as stealing, lying, constant whining and other behavioural problems ... often these problems can be directly tied to unhappy experiences that occurred while the child lived in an abusive or neglectful home, faced many foster care placements or endured other physical hardships.” Acting-out behaviour is mostly characterised by the portrayal of social behaviour that have a disruptive effect, according to Walker (1979:2). These behaviour types include hitting, yelling, screaming, throwing tantrums, running around the room, destroying property, and distorting the truth (Walker, 1979:2, 4, 5; Harwood, 2006:22). Loeber and Schmalling (in Costello & Angold, 2001:22) corroborate that the behaviour commonly identified with the various conduct disorders in childhood are lying, cheating, and conning. Hinde (2001:39) states that

being disruptive, selfish, sulking, boasting, teasing, impatient and aggressive are all aspects of bad behaviour. Angold and Costello (2001:127) identified lying, stealing, begging, bullying and quarrelling as the most common behaviour disorders. Within the family setting, the child may have severe oppositional behaviour toward physical aggression escalating towards violent crimes and other coexisting problems such as stealing (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:10). These behavioural traits are linked with acting-out behaviour because of the emotional causes of the behaviour.

Acting out (2002) describes acting-out behaviour as the desires that are forbidden by the “super ego” but desired by the “id”, and therefore a child who acts out his or her desires may do so with little thought. If a child knows that he/she is doing wrong, he/she may try to hide the action, which can later develop into a coping mechanism such as denial to protect the self. A child may from time to time react with disruptive behaviour when needs have not been met (Porter, 2003:70). Porter (2003:70) has identified the three R’s of problematic behaviour: resistance, rebellion, and retaliation, together with submission and escape. According to Montgomery (2000:163) acting-out behaviours include fidgeting, being noisy, attention-seeking, disruptive, lying, stealing, bullying, becoming withdrawn, isolated, and when these behaviours become persistent patterns across a range of subjects and activities, it is regarded as an emotional and behavioural difficulty. According to Acting out (2002), this kind of behaviour actually implies that the individual is not coping and is therefore utilising behaviours as coping mechanisms.

Appearance to the world of the acting out personality includes, the “scapegoat” of the environment, irresponsible, troublemaker, getting into a lot of mischief, runaway, delinquent or pre-delinquent behaviour, brushes with legal authority, not easily taking direction, bringing disgrace to family, friends, or self, lacking tolerance for others, poor achievement record, angry, hostile or belligerent, failing at school, unwilling to abide by rules, prone to utilising a self-destructive behaviour pattern, lack of worth or feeling of belonging in the system or family unit, sullen and uncooperative, bombastic, shallow, self-centred, manipulative and exploitive (Messina & Messina, 2007). Based on own professional experience, the researcher is of the opinion that these behavioural traits may be linked to rebellion in pre-adolescent children and therefore brushed off as such, rather than giving attention to and finding the real cause for the behaviour. It is too often assumed that pre-adolescent children are confused, figuring out who they are, and

merely reacting to environmental demands and emotions, and therefore too much attention is given to the behaviour in stead of the problems causing these “outbursts”.

Negative consequences of acting-out behaviour include: a low self-esteem, poor nutrition and health, involvement in hazardous exploits and accidents, alcoholism or chemical dependency, heavy sense of guilt for personal negative behaviour traits, self loathing and self hatred, shallow relationships, lack of trust in others, difficulties in showing love for others, the peer group becomes the primary reference or system for involvement in life, anger increases, violations of accepted standards of behaviour at home, school or the community, use of emotional defences of rationalising, and shifting the focus away from the troubled person to the acting-out behaviour, and therefore the behaviour will not decrease, but rather increase (Messina & Messina, 2007).

Capaldi and Shortt (2003:472) believe that the questions to be asked are:

- How or by what processes are these risk factors associated with conduct problems?
- Which factors play a causal role in the emergence of conduct problems?
- How can we intervene in terms of these factors to prevent or treat conduct problems?

These questions can thus also be asked with regard to acting-out behaviour, as it entails problems with regard to a child’s conduct.

### **3.5. MANAGING AND DEALING WITH ACTING-OUT BEHAVIOUR**

Spanking and harsh words are more often than not the worst way to address acting-out behaviour, as severe physical or verbal abuse may have been the reason for initial development of the child’s negative behaviour (Adamec & Pierce, 2000). The most important question with regard to problematic behaviour can be seen as “... what is usually the outcome of this situation” (Barkley & Benton, 1998:55), as the answer to this question provides the first step in addressing the problem behaviour. When one looks at behaviour, there are three aspects to consider, namely, the child’s development (development indicates where the child is in his/her growth on all levels), the child’s family life (circumstances at home can affect a child’s behaviour), and the child’s physical well-being (Acting Up, Acting Out..., 2008). Therefore it is important to look at

these aspects more closely. The developmental phase that is of concern in this study, as well as socio-economic circumstances that children are exposed to on a daily basis that have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter should be the foundation for viewing the child's emotional well-being and accompanying behaviour. Teachers and parents are key role players in changing behaviour. According to a study done by Gadeyne, Ghesquire and Ongena (in Flouri, 2005:27), problem behaviour in children predicted high levels of control in mothers and low levels of support in fathers. Kiesner *et al.* (2001:265, 266) state that parents can exercise coercive training at home through positive reinforcement. Kazdin (2001:439) states that parent management training, problem-solving skills training, functional family therapy and multi-systemic therapy are methods that can be used to address acting-out behaviour. It is indeed a fact that families play large roles with regard to children portraying acting-out behaviour, whether it is as a contributing factor, a responsibility towards reducing the behaviour, or the prevalence of the behaviour.

Teachers can provide important perspectives on children's behavioural problems (Barkley & Benton, 1998:60). Gericke (1998:40) states that educational achievement, success and positive educational experience help the child to develop a positive attitude towards the learning process and decreases the chances for the development of behavioural and emotional problems. The child's school environment is thus a very crucial part of managing and dealing with the behaviour, as a child's educator can empower the child. The school environment should merely be an extension of a well-functioning family that offers emotional stability and a structured environment. A child that does not have a well-functioning family life may not experience the school environment as a healthy part of his life as he/she may either revolt to bullying behaviour or be the victim of sour remarks by his/her friends. The school environment, however, can also be perceived as a safe environment for the child, but would still be unhealthy as the child will depend too heavily on this environment to provide in his/her needs for belonging and security.

Paying attention to a child is extremely important and can affect a child's behaviour. By paying the wrong kind of attention, parents unintentionally may encourage the child's oppositional behaviour and by taking an inconsistent approach to the child, the parent actually urges the child to seek predictability even if it means behaving badly to get



negative reaction (Barkley & Benton, 1998:37). Sometimes difficult behaviour is increased to get a reaction and therefore the educator must find ways to reduce the attention given to the disruption without appearing to condone it (Jones, 2000:125). Porter (2003:76, 77) points out that judging, criticising or blaming, praising (in other words, trying to talk a child out of his/her feelings), name-calling, diagnosing or interpreting what the child is feeling, as well as telling the child what it is one thinks he/she ought to do about the problem through directing, threatening, interrogating or advising the child are all roadblocks in helping the child. According to Montgomery (2000:166) consequences of punishment can have a negative effect on the child, leading to protestations, negativism and resentment. Jones (2000:125) adds that for many children being shouted at have little effect, as it has happened so many times already, and when the child does not get the usual reaction, he/she may intensify the attempt to gain attention. A time-out can be given, but should not be for too long as it can develop into a new conflict (Jones, 2000:125).

Behaviour is very often too deeply entrenched in older children to be resolved solely through helping the self, according to Barkley and Benton (1998:3). Behavioural management must be based on a protective, nurturing, encouraging and educational relationship between the parent/teacher and child (Porter, 2003:52). Barkley and Benton (1998:2) indicate that consistency is the key method or cornerstone of parenting. Consistency refers to the setting of rules and the imposing of consequences for bad behaviour. Another important thing a person must remember is to act and not to react, to think initiative and choice (Barkley & Benton, 1998:73). When parents react to the child's acting-out behaviour, they may only increase the negativity of the behaviour. Parents can either work together with the pre-adolescent as he/she is in a phase where making decisions and feeling like an important part of the family or having some control of his/her life, are highly important factors for the pre-adolescent child. Instead of trying to fix the negative feelings, the caregiver must aim to support the child using empathy while the child is trying to resolve the feelings on his/her own (Porter, 2003:75). Certain disruptive behaviour is provoked by difficult living conditions, and therefore the person dealing with this behaviour must increase support so that the child can meet behavioural expectations. Non-punitive means for correcting behaviour that has been provoked by stress must be implemented by the person addressing the child's behaviour (Porter, 2003:175).

The teacher, parent or other adult dealing with problematic behaviour must in all situations try to see things the child's way, stop blaming and keeping his/her distance. Porter (2003:53) adds that when adults listen to and are cued into a child's needs, the child in turn will learn to trust the caregiver and will develop confidence in the quality and consistency of their caring. The consequences to good or bad behaviour needs to be made immediately and must also be specific and consistent (Barley & Benton, 1998:74, 75). The response also needs to be in tune with the seriousness of the behaviour's disruption, for example, when the child is not harming anyone, merely irritating a person, the best response is to ignore the disruption, but when a child becomes uncooperative, a full-on confrontation is necessary (Porter, 2003:85-87). Intervention is thus dependent on both the nature of the disturbance and what the individual child and family are prepared to accept (Jones, 2000:119).

There needs to be a special time slot with the child and a praise and reward system in place to build the child's sense of self-worth, but there must also be a system such as fines for misbehaviour and time-out for acting-out behaviour, according to Barkley and Benton (1998:129, 156). Jones (2000:125) states that social reinforcement and approval or disapproval has a greater influence on behaviour than material gain. The communication of attention, acceptance, appreciation, affirmation, affection and genuine interest are key tools when dealing with children, especially children with problematic behaviour (Porter, 2003:54). Educators and other persons involved in a child's life must support parents, especially when emotional pain is involved in the family's life (Porter, 2003:176, 177). The strategy when confronted by a child displaying acting-out behaviour is to address or manage the behaviour by teaching the child acceptable behaviours to express his/her feelings, and then supporting the child in dealing with the feelings the child expresses in his/her acting-out behaviour. Often this strategy is followed in a therapeutic setting rather than in the child's natural environment (Acting out..., 1998).

Professionally, cognitive therapy with children has extended behavioural modification to focus on the importance of self-esteem and self-worth (Jones, 2000:123). Social skills training, assertiveness, anger management and self-control are important aspects in therapy. Confronting of antisocial behaviour and attitude is important, as well as teaching appropriate verbalisations and healthy physical outlets (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:102).

Conducting therapy sessions with the whole family can very effectively address problems within the family, as well as acting-out behaviour displayed by a child. According to the social grouping theory the child displaying negative behaviour is very often the scapegoat on which all of the family's problems are being focused, and therefore family therapy can be utilised to address acting-out behaviour. Family therapy moves the unit of analysis from problem child to family, as in many cases the child has become a symptom carrier for family problems (Jones, 2000:123). Jones (2000:127) also states that training in relaxation is an important therapeutic tool and can be used beneficially with children and adolescents displaying a range of difficult behaviours, including aggression. Another technique that can be utilised is to allow the child to first look angry, then act angry, and lastly to put words to the anger (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:143). Self-instructional training and the turtle response can be utilised (the child pulls in the arms and legs and lowering the head when confronted by a conflict situation and doing breathing or distraction exercises). Deep breathing and relaxation skills can be taught to a child with acting-out behaviour (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:25). According to Jones (2000:129-131) group work is extremely effective in social skills training. As pre-adolescent children increasingly rely on their peers for social interaction and learning new behaviour, addressing the behaviour in a group setting can enable the pre-adolescents to find belonging and support each other in dealing with their problems constructively.

### **3.6. SUMMARY**

Behavioural problems seem to amplify each year and have become everyday grievances for children and the significant people involved in their lives. Behaviour in itself can never be addressed on its own, but should rather be seen as the symptom of a problematic system. There are instances where behaviour can be ascribed to neurological and genetic factors (such as ADHD), but not all behaviours are easily explainable or treatable. Behavioural problems such as oppositional defiant behaviour, aggressiveness, conduct disorder and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder are common problems that each vary in characteristics but can cause harm in the "labelling" of these conduct problems. Behaviour can also be understood by evaluating it through the use of theories that have been formulated on behaviour. Many theories with regard to behaviour exist and the researcher can draw from these theories that behaviour can

be learned from role-models in a child's life and even from external sources, such as computer games or television programs. Other external circumstances, such as low-income housing and the environment can, however, also influence a child's behaviour. The family is seen as a core factor or influence and thus psychosocial problems existing within the family setting will have an influence on the child and his/her behaviour. The child's own development and personality traits may also make the child vulnerable for influences on his/her behaviour.

Acting out behaviour includes lying, hitting, screaming, being disruptive, withdrawal, bullying, attention-seeking, and other behaviours due to underlying feelings, and are merely defence mechanisms utilised by the child in order to survive situations.

## EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

In chapters two and three a thorough literature study was done, providing a holistic view of the pre-adolescent, socio-economic and socio-emotional circumstances to which children fall victim, and behavioural problems, specifically acting-out behaviour. It was pointed out that pre-adolescence is a stage where the child experiences internal conflicts with regard to independence and acceptance. The quality of peer and social relationships, along with the family life of a child are determining factors regarding a pre-adolescent's experiences and behaviour. Pre-adolescents can be exposed to circumstances such as abuse, poverty, divorce and death and seeing that a pre-adolescent is struggling to find his/her worth in life, these aspects may have detrimental rippling effects on such a young life. The literature study also indicated that acting-out behaviour, although an everyday phenomenon, has not been researched extensively.

In an attempt to gain more knowledge on this phenomenon, the researcher formulated the goal of the study as:

**To explore the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.**

The following objectives were formulated:

- To conceptualise theoretically the social phenomenon of acting-out behaviour in children within the pre-adolescent developmental stage.
- To conduct empirical research to explore the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations, based on research findings regarding acting-out behaviour, and suggest possible intervention strategies to enhance positive social behaviour of pre-adolescent children.

The researcher utilised a quantitative approach. According to Creswell (in Fouché & Delport, 2002:79) the quantitative approach is described as "... an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers and analysed with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the



predictive generalisations of the researcher made use of applied research as she aimed to provide professionals with results and findings that could be utilised in practice, as that which Babbie (1995:338) stipulates applied research to be intended for.

As an investigation into the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour perceived by pre-adolescent children and educators, this chapter will provide a broad, yet detailed outlook on acting-out behaviour as experienced by respondents in contact with this type of behaviour on a daily basis. The main focus of this chapter is to display, analyse and interpret the data that was collected by means of a questionnaire constructed by the researcher. The data will be represented by means of various types of graphic presentations.

## **4.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.2.1. Research design**

The researcher utilised the survey design. By means of a survey, the researcher can obtain information to describe, compare or explain people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour (Fink, 2003a:1). Within this particular design the researcher utilised a self-constructed questionnaire that served to obtain information on the respondents' perceptions of the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

#### **4.2.1.1. Sample and sampling method**

The respondents consisted of sixty grade five to grade seven learners and ten educators from two participating primary schools. These grade groups were selected, as the learners are all aged between ten and thirteen years of age, and in the pre-adolescent developmental phase. The participating schools were chosen as they are situated within a radius of twenty kilometres from the researcher's home, thereby enabling the researcher to conduct her study without too much effort with regard to travelling and communication with the participating schools.

The sampling method utilised in this study was probability sampling, more specifically stratified random sampling. Stratified random sampling entailed that the researcher subdivide the population (all the learners in grade five, six and seven, as well as their

educators of each participating  strata, where after a sample was randomly selected (Fink, 2006:48).

#### **4.2.1.2. Data collection method**

The researcher utilised a self-constructed questionnaire as a data collection method to obtain educators' and pre-adolescent learners' perceptions on acting-out behaviour (See Addendums A and B).

Gray (2005:187) and Delport (2002:172) stated that a questionnaire is a research tool through which people are asked to respond to a set of questions in a fixed order. It must be valid, reliable and objective and aim to obtain facts about a phenomenon from people that are considered knowledgeable on the issue. The researcher considered the respondents to be knowledgeable as they come into contact with different behavioural problems, especially acting-out behaviour, on a daily basis in the school environment. The researcher utilised the literature obtained in chapters two and three to formulate two questionnaires (similar in content, but constructed respondent-friendly) for the purpose of obtaining the respondents' perceptions on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour. The data was thereafter collected by means of a group-administered questionnaire as the most efficient means of administering a survey can be seen as having all the participants complete the survey at the same time (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003:173).

The researcher constructed questions based on the literature by means of scales, questions and a checklist and validated the questionnaires through the pilot study that was conducted. The pilot test was done by administering the questionnaire on two respondents similar to those who partook in the study (1 educator and one pre-adolescent learner). The researcher constructed a number of open questions in each section of the questionnaire in order to provide the respondents with the opportunity to provide additional information. Delport (2002:179) states that open questions have advantages when the variable in question is relatively unexplored or unknown. The questionnaires were divided into two sections. Section A dealt with demographical type of questions, formulated in the form of nominal scaling. It consists of one variable and can also be seen as the coding of a closed-ended question. A question where the respondents are asked to list their gender or age is an example of nominal scaling.



Section B was divided into three questions focused on misbehaviour and behaviour in general, as well as focussing on important factors in the pre-adolescent child's life. Section B started off with a general open question on what the respondents believed the reasons for misbehaviour/“naughty” behaviour are. As pre-adolescents are part of family, social, and school-environment settings on a daily basis they have to form their identities, find out where they belong and learn behaviour from role-models or significant people in their lives (Zeitlin & Refaat, 2000:78; Maughan, 2001:187; Geldard & Geldard, 2001:5). The researcher formulated an itemised rating scale where the respondents had to prioritise different aspects where behaviour can be learned, from most probable (1) to least probable (6). Thereafter the respondents compared five factors in a pre-adolescent's life and ranked them according to their perception of the respective factors' importance.

The next three questions delved deeper into acting-out behaviour through an open question on the term “acting-out”, and two scaled questions on the reasons for this type of behaviour and situations that may cause a child to act out. The researcher again started this section with an open question to establish how well-known the term “acting-out” behaviour is. Thereafter the researcher constructed two scaled questions that elaborated on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour. Scaled questions, according to Delport (2002:182) can be useful when the researcher aims to gain information about non-exact and more subjective aspects. The researcher utilised scaled questions where the respondents could mark a certain point on the scales to indicate reasons for misbehaviour and also to indicate under which circumstances they believed children will act out with negative behaviour.

The next section of the questionnaire focused primarily on the behaviour displayed when a child acts out. A checklist, follow-up questions and open-ended questions in the form of incomplete sentences were utilised. The checklist, a “... type of questionnaire consisting of a series of items” (Delport, 2002:184) was utilised as the researcher listed a series of types of behaviours where the respondents could indicate as many as they perceived to fit in with acting-out behaviour. The researcher then provided the respondents with open questions where they could add other behaviours that were not included in the checklist, but which they believed to be acting-out behaviour types. Socio-economic and pre-adolescent developmental phase aspects were included in the form of incomplete sentences, involving aggression, self-concept, neglect, bullying, and





abuse. Thereafter the question/ intervention with regard to acting-out behaviour by means of a scaled question and follow-up open questions.

The researcher concluded the questionnaire with more generalised questions on the gender and age groups of children that would most prominently act out when confronted with negative and traumatic circumstances. This was done through multiple-choice questions where the respondents could choose any of the options to provide clear information on the aspects of who (boys or girls) will act out more and when (during which age group) will a child's acting-out behaviour be most apparent; followed by an open question on the respondent's motivation.

The researcher analysed the results and grouped the findings in order to formulate clear and descriptive findings on the respondents' perceptions on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

### **4.3. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Within the quantitative approach, data can be analysed manually or through the utilisation of a computer. After obtaining data the researcher breaks the data down into manageable parts to obtain answers to research questions and to test research hypotheses by interpretation of the data obtained (De Vos *et al.*, 2002:222-223).

The researcher made use of Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word to produce graphic presentations of the data analysed and interpreted. The quantitative data collected will now be displayed by means of graphic presentations, as well as written explanations. Even though this is not a comparative study, the researcher (on two occasions) presented the findings of both educators and learners in one graphic presentation. This was done in an attempt to condense a very lengthy chapter. Research findings obtained from learners and educators were, however, discussed separately throughout the chapter.

#### **4.3.1. Respondent profile**

The respondents' gender, race, ages and grade groups were analysed and presented accordingly.

#### 4.3.1.1. Gender

The respondents' genders are presented in the tables below according to the learners' genders and the educators' genders respectively.

**Table 1: Gender of learner respondents**

<b>GENDER OF LEARNER RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>DISTRIBUTION</b>
BOYS (GRADE 5 – GRADE 7)	30
GIRLS (GRADE 5 – GRADE 7)	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>

**Table 2: Gender of educator respondents**

<b>GENDER OF EDUCATOR RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>DISTRIBUTION</b>
MALES	4
FEMALES	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>

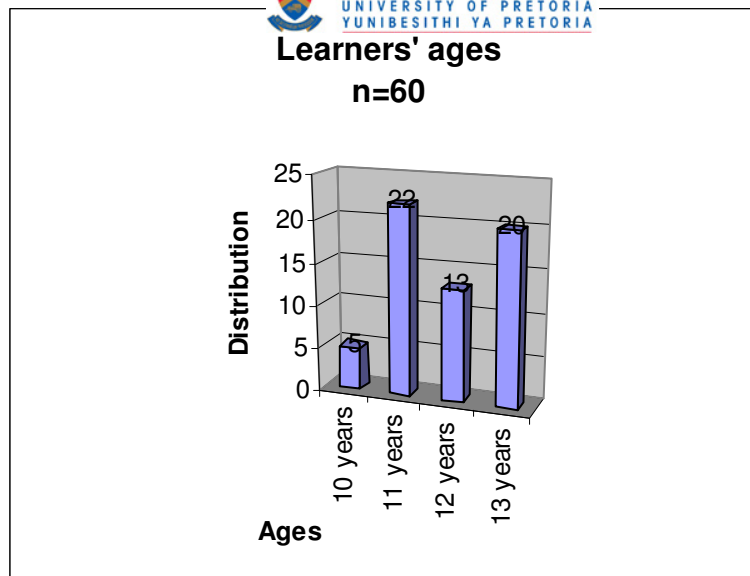
The researcher aimed to have a respondent profile that was similar in terms of a male-female ratio in order to provide an equally distributed view on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour. Due to the prerequisite for learner respondents to consist of five girls and five boys in each grade, the researcher succeeded in obtaining an equal respondent base in this category. The educators that participated consisted of six female and four male respondents, providing an almost equal gender base for a general view on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

#### 4.3.1.2. Race

All the respondents indicated that their racial group is Caucasian. This factor indicates that there are no multi-racial views on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour in this study, which limits the understanding of acting-out behaviour to that of one racial group.

#### 4.3.1.3. Age groups

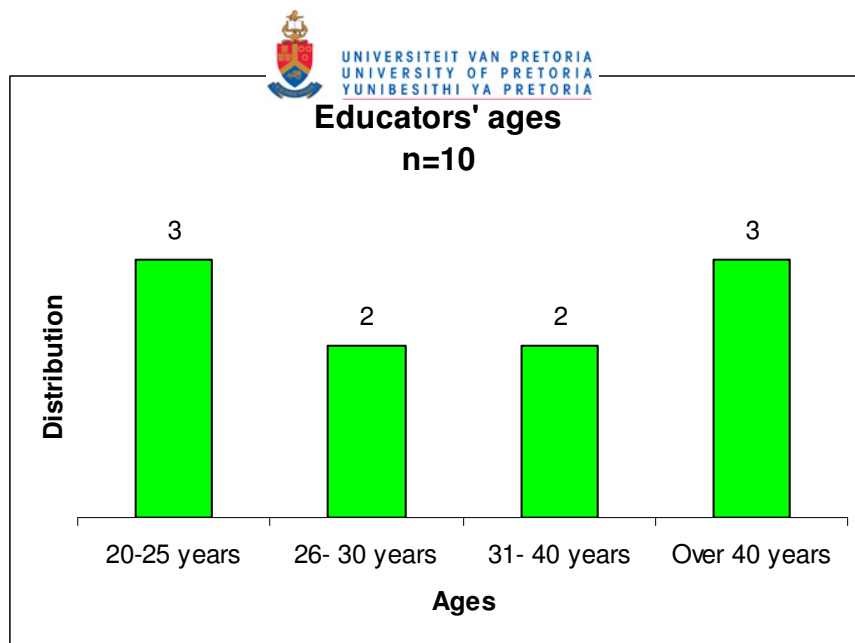
Due to the respondents' ages ranging from ten years old to over forty years of age, the researcher will graphically represent the respondent profile in terms of age groups according to the learners' ages and thereafter the educators' ages.



**Figure 1: Learners' ages**

The learner respondents consisted of sixty children between the ages of ten and thirteen years of age. Children aged between eleven and fifteen years of age are considered as pre-adolescents according to De Klerk and Le Roux (2004:23), or between the ages of nine and twelve (Preadolescence, 2008). Due to the fact that the study was done at the beginning of the year, some of the learners could have indicated their ages at the time, while others could have indicated the ages they were to reach during the year. According to the respondents' answers most of the respondents that participated in this study were either eleven or thirteen years of age. Five respondents indicated that they were ten years of age. These results thus indicate that some of the respondents were approaching the pre-adolescent phase of development; however the majority were in the pre-adolescent phase.

The educators' ages were also considered to be important, as a good representation on different age levels were considered to be viable for knowledge with regard to acting-out behaviour and how to approach this phenomenon. Figure 2 provides an indication of the age groups of the educator respondents.

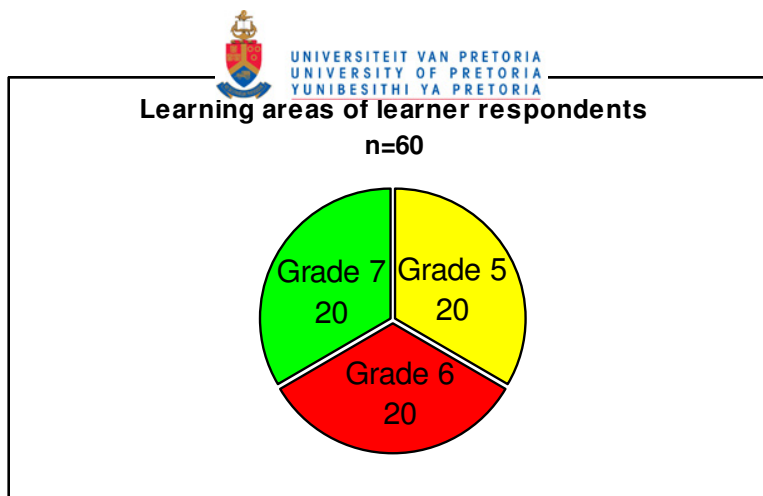


**Figure 2: Educators' ages**

Most of the respondents in this study were either very young, between twenty and twenty five years of age or over the age of forty. The age distribution of the educators that formed part of the respondent profile can be seen as a beneficial factor as views, experience and knowledge were obtained on all age and knowledge levels.

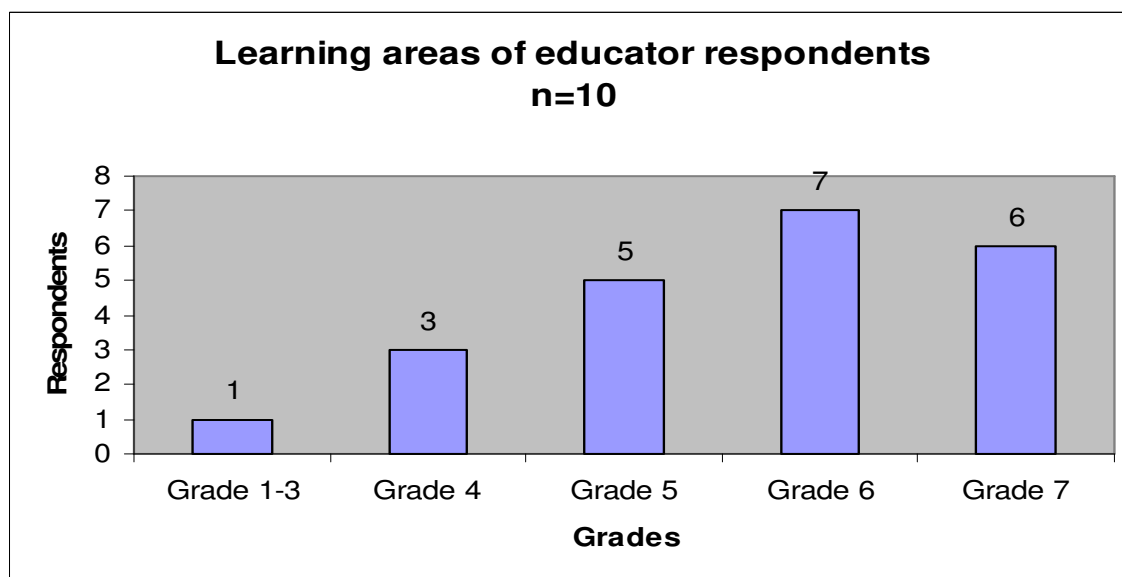
#### **4.3.1.4. Grade groups involved**

In this study the researcher focused her attention on the developmental phase of pre-adolescence. The learners who are in this phase are usually between grades five and seven, and therefore learner respondents were selected from these grade groups. As the sampling method was stratified random sampling, the educators participating in this study were not necessarily involved in these grade groups and therefore a presentation on the involvement of the respondents in this developmental phase will be focused on respectively in figures 3 and 4.



**Figure 3: Learning areas of learner respondents.**

Seventy respondents were selected; twenty respondents from grade 5, twenty respondents from grade 6, and twenty respondents from grade 7, as well as ten educators. A prerequisite for learner respondents was the grade level they were to represent. Figure 3 indicates that there was thus an equal distribution (twenty respondents in each participating grade group) in the presentation of the three grade groups.

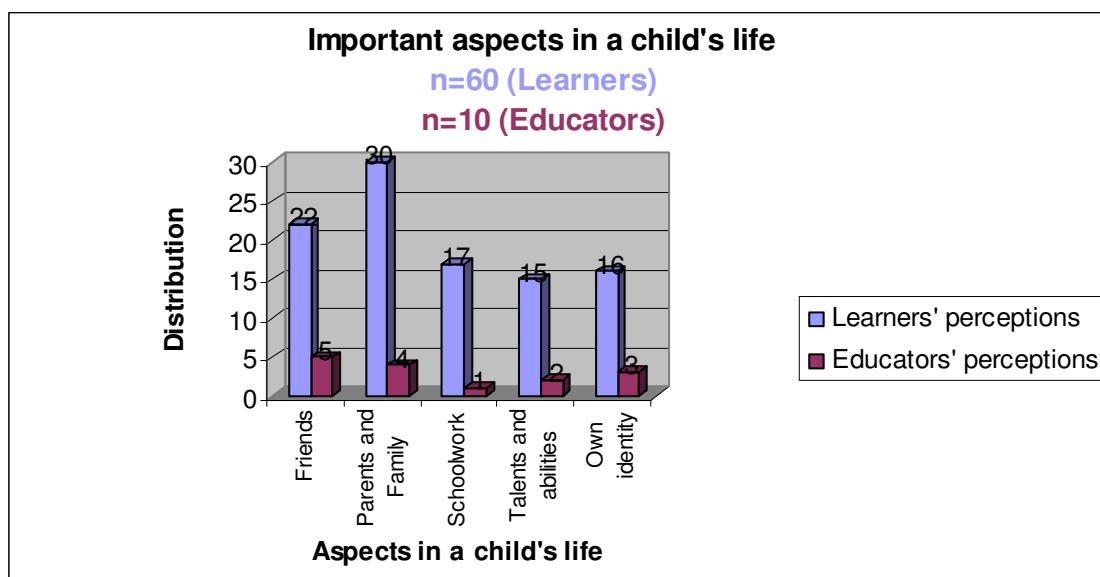


**Figure 4: Learning areas of educator respondents**

Figure 4 indicates the learning areas in which the educator respondents were involved. The educators that participated in the study teach in more than one learning area. They indicated all the learning areas in which they were involved. Seven educators indicated that they taught grade six learning areas. Six educators were involved in grade seven learning areas and five educators in the grade five learning area. The grade five to

### 4.3.2. Important aspects in a pre-adolescent’s life.

Certain aspects that are important to a pre-adolescent child may influence his/her behaviour and ways of thinking. These aspects include friends and peers, personal identity, family influence and role portrayal, the school setting, social virtues and the need to be viewed positively by others (Berk, 1997:429,430; Geldard & Geldard, 2001:5, Saunders, 1996:7; Zeitlin & Refaat, 2000:78). The researcher compiled a comparative rating scale where the respondents could compare aspects and rate them according to their importance in a pre-adolescent’s life (Delpont, 2002:187). Figure 5 represents the educators’ and learners’ perceptions on what is important to a pre-adolescent child.



**Figure 5: Important aspects in a child’s life.**

Learners and educators rated the importance of these aspects and interestingly, as can be seen in figure 5, different interpretations of what were most important to pre-adolescents resulted. According to the educators, friends are deemed most important by a pre-adolescent, followed by the pre-adolescent’s parents and family. The educators rated schoolwork as least important for pre-adolescents. The learners indicated that their families and parents were the most important aspect in their lives, followed by their friends, and deemed their own identities as least important. The educators rated own identity much higher (3<sup>rd</sup> most important aspect) than the learners rated the importance of one’s own identity (least important). The significance or the concept of identity was probably too difficult for the learners to understand. From the findings it is also evident



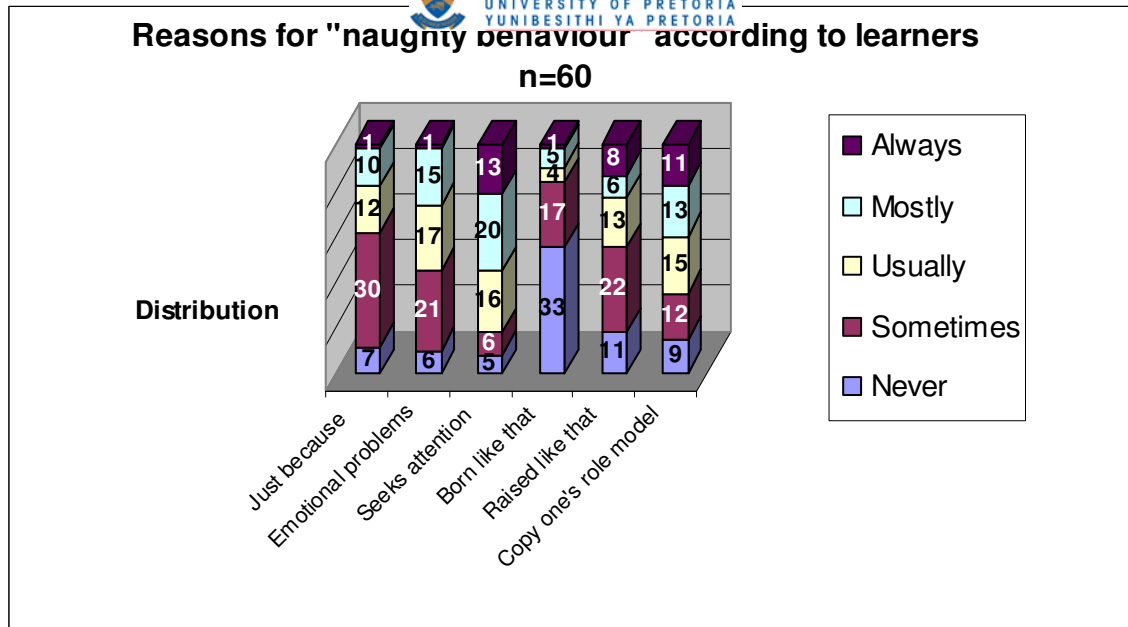
that the learners rated schoolwork as an important aspect in their lives, whereas the educators believed schoolwork to be the least important aspect in the lives of learners. Pre-adolescents thus do not view schoolwork as unimportant even though it is often believed to be the case.

These results correlate with the opinion of Zeitlin and Refaat (2000:78) with regard to pre-adolescents relying heavily on their family domains while moving to establish an identity of their own. The results indicate that even if friends and socialising increasingly take up most of a pre-adolescent's time and therefore seems like an aspect that overshadows all other factors in a pre-adolescent's life, a pre-adolescent's parents and home environment remain the foundation where the child can feel safe to develop and is therefore considered to be the most important to a pre-adolescent child.

#### **4.3.3. Perceptions regarding the reasons for negative behaviour.**

Theories with regard to behaviour have been developed to explain the origins of behaviour. The behavioural theory, for example, believes all behaviour to be learned, and the systems theory believes that the child's behaviour is influenced by those he interacts with (Cooper, 2000:49; 52). Behaviour can also be learned through observation, according to the social learning and operant conditioning theory (Jones, 2000:121). There can thus be many opinions or perceptions with regard to the aspects that can cause and influence behaviour, especially negative behaviour. Therefore, the perceptions of the respondents on where negative behaviour is learned most often were requested to formulate a bigger perspective on behaviour and what provokes it. The respondents were asked to rate origins for misbehaviour as either always; mostly; usually; sometimes or never.

The learners' and educators' views on where behaviour is learned will be presented individually, as it can be very insightful to differentiate between what pre-adolescents view as reasons for negative behaviour. Figures 6 and 7 indicate these respective views.



**Figure 6: Reasons for “naughty behaviour” according to learners.**

Figure 6 indicates the learner respondents’ views on where behaviour is learned. The larger percentage of respondents, 35%, indicated that emotional problems will only sometimes be the cause of misbehaviour, and attention-seeking (55%) was discovered to be most of the time and even always, the cause for misbehaviour. More than half of the respondents stated that a child is ‘never’ born with a tendency to misbehave (55%). The learner respondents also believed that a child will misbehave some of the time because he/she was raised like that (37%), while their views on the influence of role models on his/her behaviour did not provide a clear distinction on the link between misbehaviour and copying the behaviour of a role model. A pre-adolescent will least likely misbehave for no reason, according to the learner respondents, as 62% of the respondents indicated that a child will sometimes to never misbehave without any reason or motive behind the behaviour.

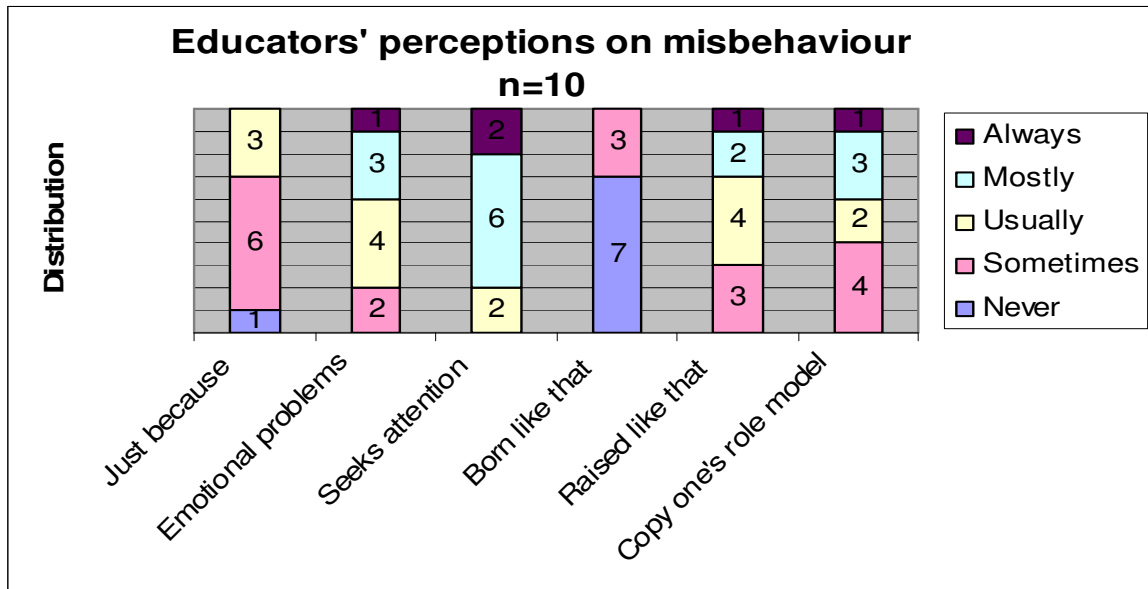
It therefore seems that the learner respondents are of the opinion that a child will misbehave in order to gain attention or due to emotional problems. Negative behaviour can thus be acted out due to a number of reasons and can be supported by the various behavioural theories as stipulated above. 55% of pre-adolescents also believed that one is never born with such behaviour and therefore no person is in essence a “bad” person.

Figure 7 indicates the educators’ opinions on the origin of learned behaviour. The educators indicated strongly that a child is never born with a tendency to misbehave





(70%), which correlated perfectly. 80% of educators also indicated that attention-seeking was a major cause for misbehaviour and misconduct. Misbehaviour due to emotional problems was perceived to be a phenomenon that occurred frequently, but it was not seen as the main reason for misbehaviour. 40% of the educators indicated that a child will sometimes misbehave in an attempt to imitate his/her role model. The educators also believed that children will rarely misbehave just because they want to (60%) or because they have been raised like that.



**Figure 7: Educators' perceptions on misbehaviour**

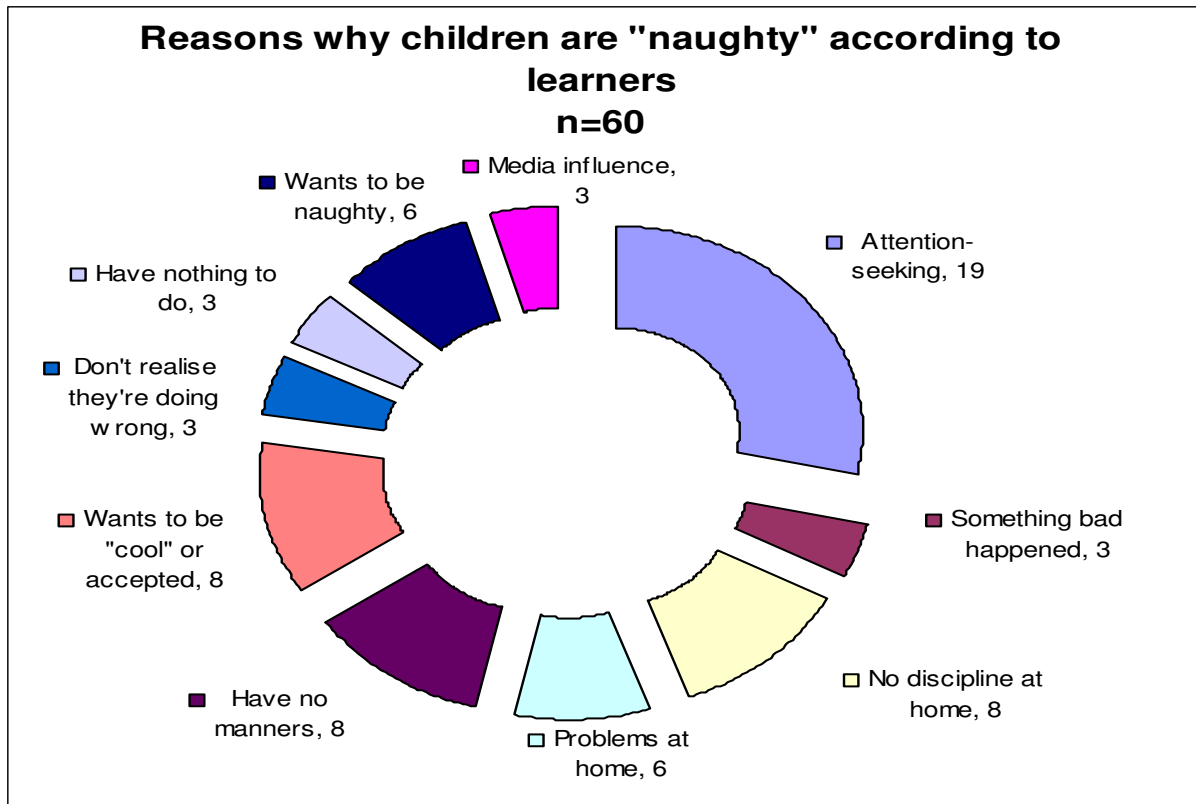
Overall 37% of all respondents were of the opinion that children misbehave mostly to seek attention and 21% stated that they believed children will not merely misbehave most of the time, but will always misbehave in order to gain attention. An even more impressive indication on views with regard to reasons for misbehaviour was that of "born like that". 75% of all respondents firmly stated that a child is never born with a tendency to misbehave and merely 2% of all respondents stated that a child is always born with this tendency.

These percentages indicated that virtually all of the respondents believed that misbehaviour occurs later in a child's life, due to external or internal factors. It is also important to note that the learners and educators, even though in completely different phases of life, had similar views on where behaviour can be learned, therefore validating them as experts for the purpose of this study. According to Dafinoiu (2003a:124) an expert



is someone who is confronted with the processes of providing knowledge and solutions in that situation. As the learners are the ones in the developmental phase of concern, and educators have to be knowledgeable with regard to children and behaviour in order to effectively teach, they therefore seem to be aware of where children are learning behaviour and what their experiences are.

Figures 8 and 9 represent broad perceptions on where behaviour is learned. Messina and Messina (2007) believe the reasons for misbehaviour or being “naughty” include a lack of freedom to vent their frustrations, craving attention, a need for belonging, acceptance, being viewed as good enough, anger and hurt. The results presented in figures 8 and 9 indicate the integrated views by learners and educators on why children misbehave. The respondents were given an open question on why children misbehave, and these were their views:

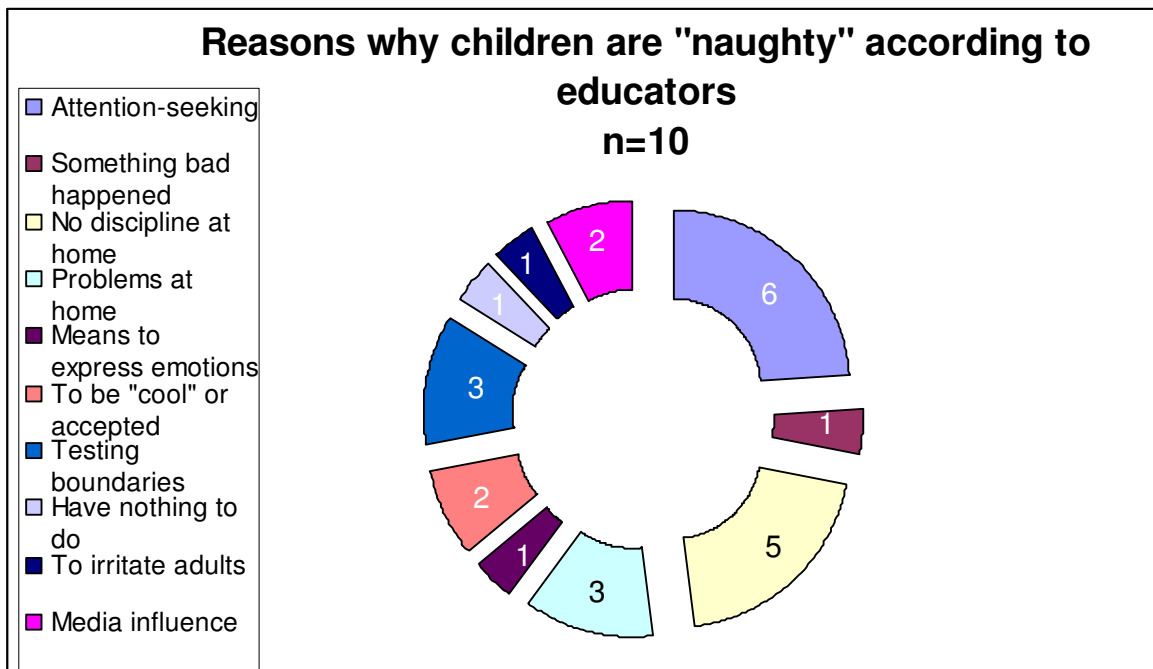


**Figure 8: Reasons why children are “naughty” according to learners**

Figure 8 represents the learners’ views on what they believed the reasons to be for children’s misbehaviour. The learner respondents believed that children will mostly misbehave in order to obtain attention (32%), followed by misbehaving to be “cool” or



accepted (13%), the fact that the child is being accepted at home (13%), or plainly due to the fact that they have no manners at all (13%). The learner respondents also stated that a child may misbehave when he/she experiences problems at home (10%) or when something bad has happened (5%), thus displaying acting-out behaviour. These statements made by the learner respondents matched with Messina and Messina's (2007) reasons for misbehaviour, as indicated above. Other reasons for misbehaviour, according to the learner respondents, included having nothing to do (5%), not realising that they are doing something wrong (5%), being influenced by the media (5%) and wanting to be naughty (10%).



**Figure 9: Reasons why children are “naughty” according to educators**

Almost 25% of the educator respondents stated that children behave in a negative manner to seek attention, correlating with the learner respondents' views on where behaviour is learned. The second highest score was that of 20% in terms of no discipline in the home environment, which may result in children behaving negatively. Other reasons for “naughty” behaviour included to be “cool” or accepted (8%), problems in the home environment (12%), to irritate adults (4%), having nothing to do (4%), media influence (8%), something bad happened (4%), a means to express emotions (4%) and testing their boundaries (12%).

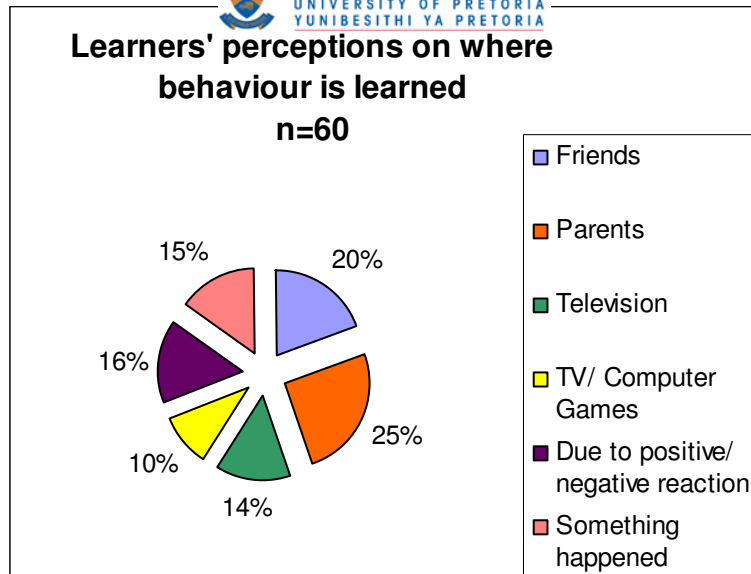


The researcher has seen in practice that children tend to misbehave less when they have work to do that keep them busy. Therefore the statement made by the educators that children will misbehave when they have nothing to do, seems accurate. According to the respondents' perceptions, children can be "naughty" due to several reasons, but what is most noteworthy, is that children's misbehaviour relate to their feelings and perceptions of their situations and the environments they inhabit, their developmental needs and the ever-increasing influence of the media (as technology continues to improve and impact the lives of children).

#### **4.3.4. Perceptions on where behaviour is learned.**

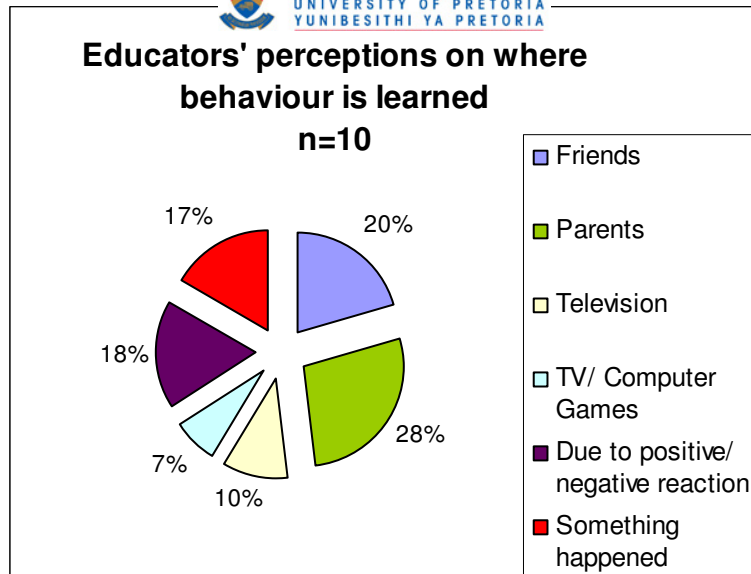
According to Geldard and Geldard (2001:40) as well as Bennett (1999:114), when children approach the pre-adolescent phase, they will increasingly depend on their peers, rather than their parents in terms of behaviour. The family system still remains important in the pre-adolescent's life and therefore socio-emotional problems within the family system can be devastating to a pre-adolescent's development, as he/she might seek out peer groups with a negative influence to fulfil belonging needs if he/she experiences rejection in the family system (Jongsma *et al.*, 2003:184).

The respondents were given a set of possible causes of behaviour, where they had to list the causes from most likely to least likely to be a cause for the behaviour. The learners' views on the causes for behaviour will first be presented in figure 10, thereafter figure 11 will indicate those of the educators and figure 12 represents a combined presentation on the respondents' views.



**Figure 10: Learners' perceptions on where behaviour is learned**

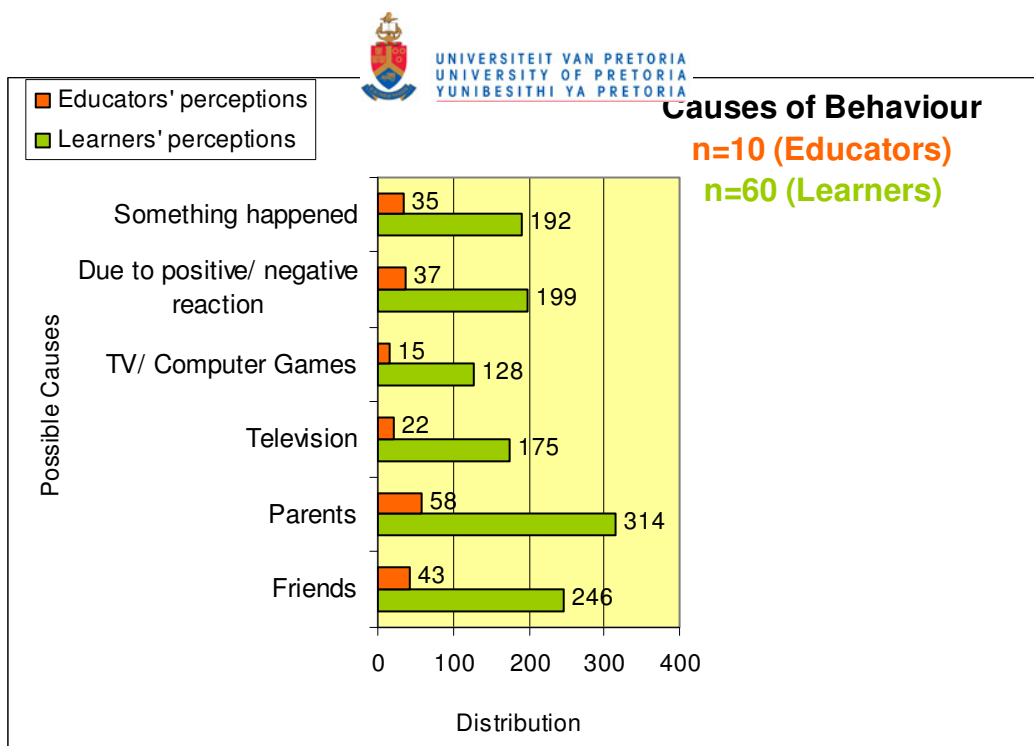
The learners indicated that children will predominantly learn behaviour from their parents (25%) and thereafter from their friends (20%). According to Pettit *et al.* (2001: 306), aggression in films and on television can play a mediating role for aggressive behaviour. Although this has always been believed to be major areas for concern, the learners indicated that they perceived television (14%) and computer games (10%) as the weakest source for learnt behaviour. According to the learners, behaviour will more likely originate from a positive or negative reaction (16%) and due to something that happened to the child (15%) than learning from exposure to media and/or gaming.



**Figure 11: Educators' perceptions on where behaviour is learned**

The educators' perceptions were very similar to that of the learners. The educators were also of the opinion that behaviour is predominantly learned via a child's parents (28%), followed closely by learning behaviour from the child's friends (20%), learning how to behave after receiving a positive or negative reaction (18%) and due to something that happened to the child (17%). The educators believed that watching television programs (10%), as well as television and computer games (a mere 7%) were the least likely to be a source of misbehaviour.

Even though all the respondents indicated that television and computer games, as well as media influences, were least likely to be sources of misbehaviour, these aspects do in fact play major roles in everyday life and therefore in behaviour. Cooper (2000:54) states that the media often targets children and youth as they are the generation most exposed to the media. Jones (2000:121) emphasises that film and television can mediate aggression in children and therefore all media related influences are important where a children's display of behaviour is concerned.



**Figure 12: All participants' views on the causes of behaviour.**

Figure 12 indicates all the respondents' views on the causes or sources of behaviour. In section 4.3.2 the results indicated that the pre-adolescent child's parents and family members remain the most important aspect or sphere in his/her life, and therefore the respondents also believed that the family environment plays the largest part in the development of behaviour. Contrary to the beliefs of Geldard and Geldard (2001:40) and Bennett (1999:114), with regard to friends having a bigger influence on the pre-adolescent's behaviour, the respondents all indicated that the influence of the pre-adolescent's friends on his/her behaviour just fell short of the influence of his/her parents. As pre-adolescents are in a developmental phase where they want to be independent, but also strive to belong somewhere (Geldard & Geldard, 2001:37), it is comprehensible that behaviour can be the result of a negative or positive reaction, as well as something bad that happened to the child, because of his/her social development that reigns high in importance during this developmental phase and impacts his/her development overall. Sternberg (2001:359) states that social development is also closely linked or includes various other areas of development and thus it is not strange that the child will develop, for example cognitively when he or she is developing socially and learning social skills in the process.



It is evident that “parents”, as a source, exceed all other sources of behaviour and that the child’s immediate social environment has a bigger detrimental effect than that of the external media influence.

#### **4.3.5. Acting-out behaviour**

##### **4.3.5.1. Perceptions on acting-out behaviour**

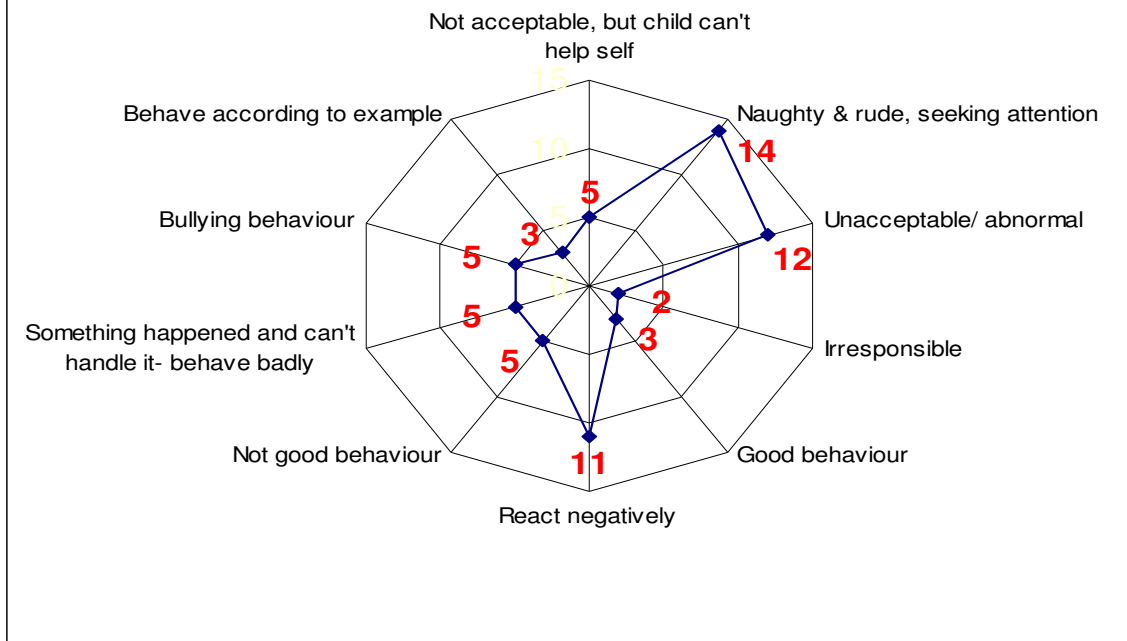
Acting-out behaviour is defined by the researcher as behaviour that is not socially acceptable, but portrayed by a child due to the inability to verbalise feelings caused by traumatic experiences. Perceptions with regard to acting-out behaviour were addressed by asking the respondents what they believed acting-out behaviour to be, as well as taking a deeper look into behaviour acted out by a child due to traumatic circumstances.

The respondents were seen as experts with regard to acting-out behaviour and pre-adolescence as these aspects form part of their environments on a daily basis. The respondents were thus familiar with behaviour when children act out, but it was uncertain whether the respondents were familiar with the term “acting-out”, and therefore the researcher included an open question on acting-out behaviour. The results are presented in figures 13 and 14.



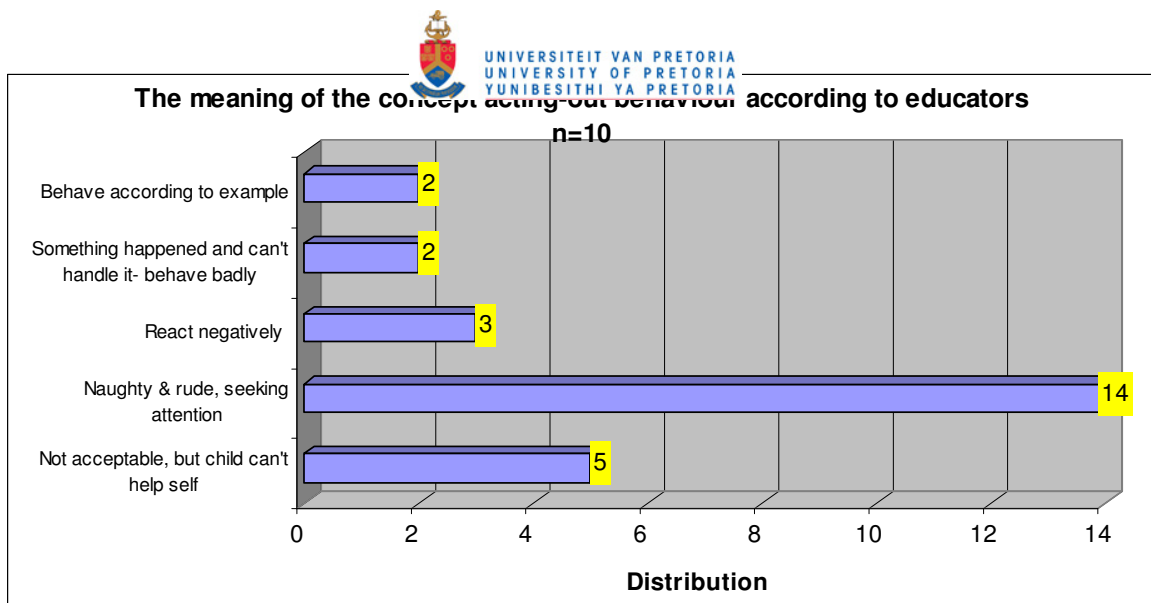


### The meaning of the concept acting-out behaviour according to learners n=60



**Figure 13: The meaning of the concept acting-out behaviour according to learners.**

The respondents were asked to define acting-out behaviour according to their understanding of the phenomenon. 23% of the learner respondents stated that acting-out behaviour is behaviour that can be seen as naughty and rude and ways in which children behave in order to seek attention. Other insights that came about as to what acting-out behaviour is, were: behaviour that is unacceptable or abnormal (20%), behaving negatively due to a negative experience (8%) as well as reacting in a negative manner (18%). 5% of the learners thought that acting-out behaviour indicated good and acceptable behaviour. The remaining learner respondents stated that acting-out behaviour could be seen as behaviour that is not good, irresponsible, bullying behaviour or not acceptable, but the child cannot help himself/herself.



**Figure 14: The meaning of the concept acting-out behaviour according to educators.**

The educator respondents generally indicated that the concept “acting-out” indicated negative behaviour as a reaction to a negative experience due to the child’s inability to express emotions. The majority of the results indicated that the educators perceived acting-out behaviour to be naughty and rude behaviour in order to seek attention (25%) or a negative reaction to something (25%). 17% of the responses linked acting-out behaviour to behaviour that is unacceptable, 17% referred to negative behaviour due to something that happened that the child was unable to handle. 17% believed that a child can also act out by means of following the example of someone’s behaviour.

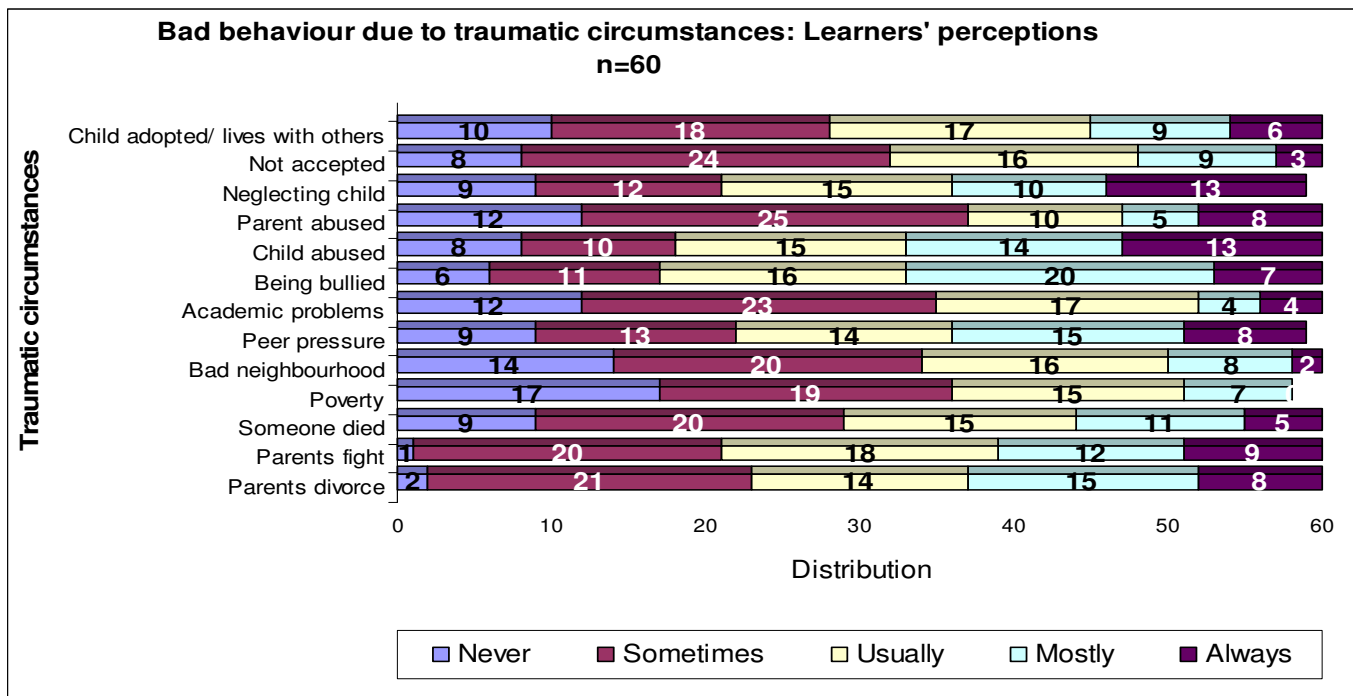
The respondents generally had a good idea with regard to acting-out behaviour, as they described this type of behaviour as unacceptable behaviour or behaviour that the child displays after something bad has happened to him/her. It is, however, noticeable that the respondents are not too familiar with the concept ‘acting-out’, as some of these answers could be the result of the definition provided to the respondents on the questionnaire, as well as the fact that some respondents labelled this type of behaviour as good behaviour.

Acting-out behaviour is in fact unacceptable behaviour due to some or other traumatic circumstances which the child cannot resolve internally and therefore exhibits the behaviour externally in a distorted manner (Acting out..., 1998; Messina & Messina, 2007). The social system in which a child functions can be a predisposition for the child to develop problems (Gericke, 1998:43). According to Barkley and Benton (1998:45) a



parent/guardian who is unaware of the child's environment is contributing to his/her defiant behaviour will not be able to resolve the problem at hand. Traumatic circumstances include divorce, parental fighting, poverty, living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, peer pressure, academic problems, bullying, abuse, neglect, not being accepted, and/or adoption/foster care. These circumstances were rated in a scaled question in order to gain an understanding of circumstances that were considered to provoke the strongest reaction in children, as presented in figures 15 and 16.

The respondents received a list of different traumatic circumstances and situations where they had to indicate whether a traumatic experience is either never, sometimes, usually, mostly, or always the cause of negative behaviour. Figure 15 indicates the learners' perceptions on which traumatic circumstances would more likely cause negative behaviour as a means of coping.

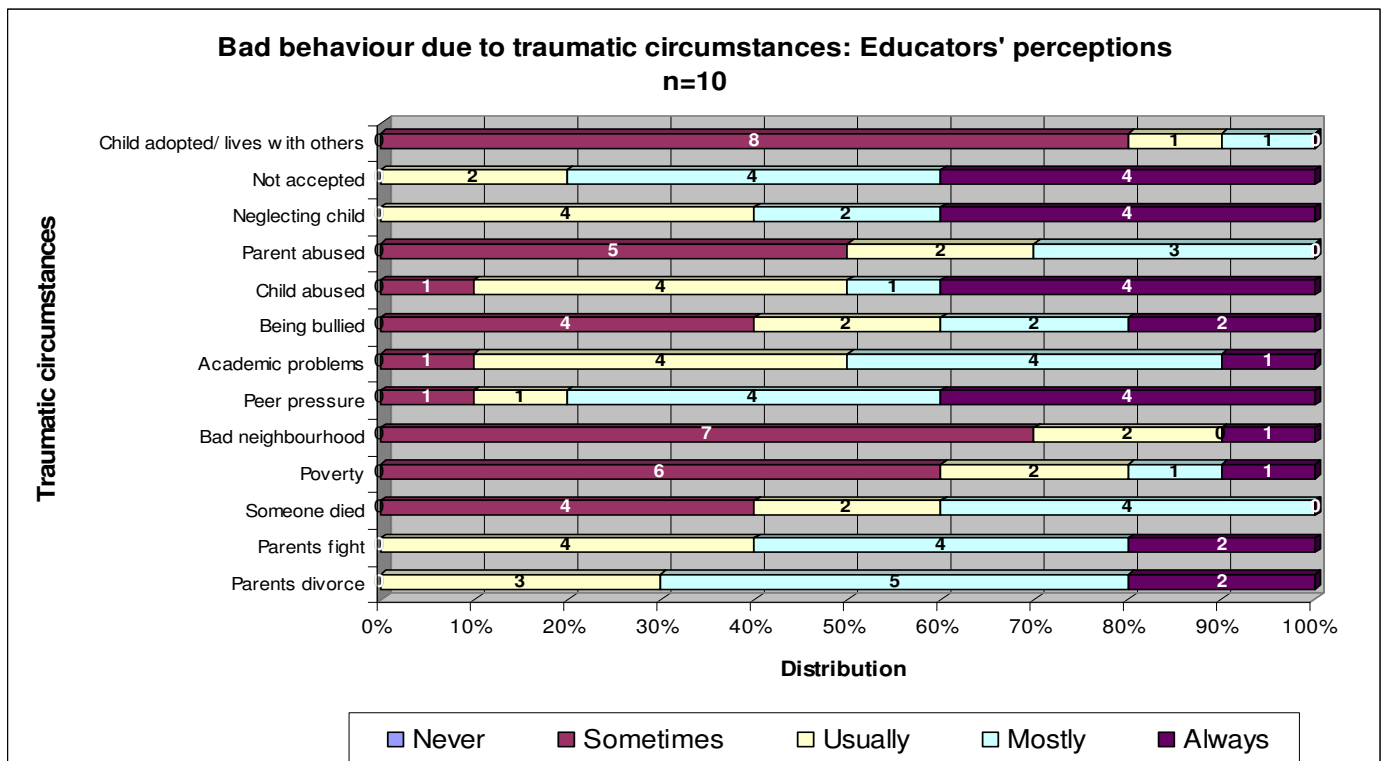


**Figure 15: Bad behaviour due to traumatic circumstances: Learners' perceptions.**

60% of the learners viewed poverty as sometimes or virtually never being a cause of negative behaviour. Living in a bad neighbourhood was also not generally seen as a cause of bad behaviour (57% sometimes or never). Parental fighting and divorce were viewed as aspects that would most definitely provoke some sort of negative behaviour, as only 2% and 3% of learner respondents respectively thought that it will never cause negative behaviour. Adding to these findings, 35% and 38% of the respondents respectively believed that parental fighting and divorce would almost always cause the



child to behave negatively. 22% stated that a child who is being neglected and being abused will always act out as a result. 38% of the learners indicated that academic problems will sometimes cause the child to behave negatively, while 40% believed a child who is not being accepted, will act negatively. A child who has been adopted or lives with other people (30% stated sometimes), a child who is being bullied (33% stated mostly), a child who experiences peer pressure (no clear definite views) or who experiences loss in the form of death (33% stated sometimes) can also behave negatively.



**Figure 16: Bad behaviour due to traumatic circumstances: Educators' perceptions.**

As indicated in figure 16, the educators were all of the opinion that a child will definitely react negatively due to some or other traumatic experience or circumstances they can be exposed to. 80% of the respondents indicated that a child will sometimes act negatively due to being adopted or living with people other than his/her parents. Living in a bad neighbourhood or being poor does not necessarily mean that a child will act negatively, as 70% and 60% of the educator respondents respectively indicated that it may occasionally cause negative behaviour. Almost half of the educators (40%) believed that a child who is not accepted, who is being neglected, being abused and pressured by peers will always act out negatively. The educators also felt strongly about the effect that



parental fighting and divorce w  
viour. 50% of the respondents, however, believed that a child will act out most of the time due to divorce, and 40% indicated that this will be the case when parents fight. Other circumstances were assigned the following results with regard to their influence on behaviour most of the times: 40% due to a beloved's death, 40% due to academic problems, 20% due to being bullied and 30% due to a parent being abused.

The majority of the respondents (38%) were of the opinion that neglecting a child and abusing a child would almost always result in a child behaving badly. According to Porter (2003:182, 183) a child living in an abusive home often becomes very bossy or competitive with siblings or peers, might become aggressive when attempting to solve disputes either because it is all they have been shown or in reaction to tension they experience within the home. Children who have been neglected never learnt how to form attachments, whereas abused children can develop attachments that are damaging to them (Porter, 2003:185).

The majority of the respondents believed that a child whose parents were divorced (54%) or parents who were constantly fighting (52%) would mostly act out. Bloomquist and Schnell (2002:46, 47) confirm these findings by stating that the strongest marital variable associated with childhood behavioural problems in school-age children is parental conflict. These two categories received the least "never" allocations, indicating that almost all of the respondents believed that children would definitely act out when their parents were in conflict or were divorced, even if only some of the time. 53.5% of the respondents indicated that a child will act out due to not receiving acceptance.

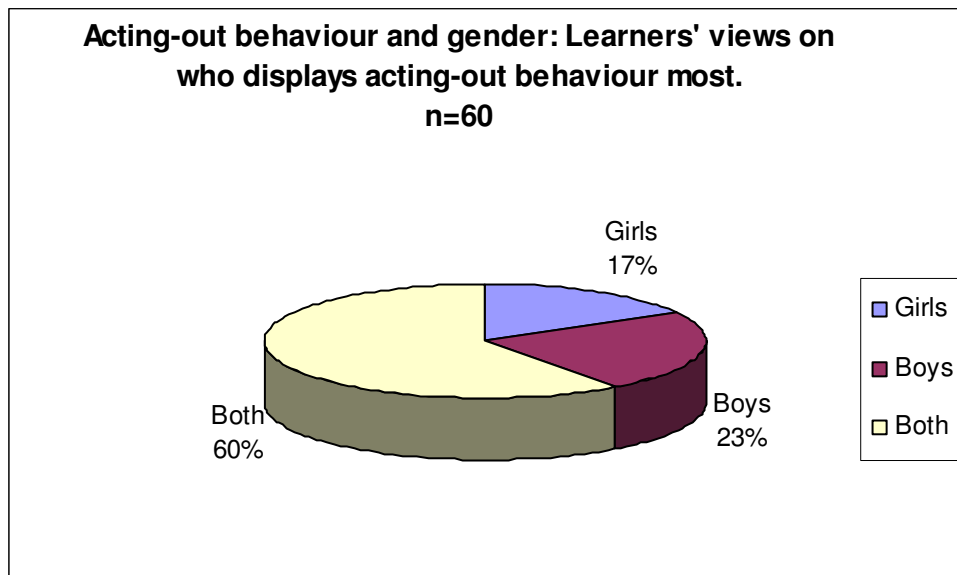
"Poverty" and "bad neighbourhoods" in itself were not seen as a real traumatic experience that would cause negative behaviour. According to Maughan (2001:178, 185) a combination of negative parenting, low social status, parental disagreements may rather be somewhat specific to antisocial outcomes and therefore the consistent link between poverty, social disadvantages and behavioural problems plays a much larger role in acting-out behaviour. The researcher therefore gathers that it is not merely poverty that causes negative behaviour, but that poverty easily lends itself to all these factors (neglect, abuse, fighting) which can create tension and negative behaviour cycles.



#### 4.3.5.2. Perceptions on gender-based acting-out behaviour.

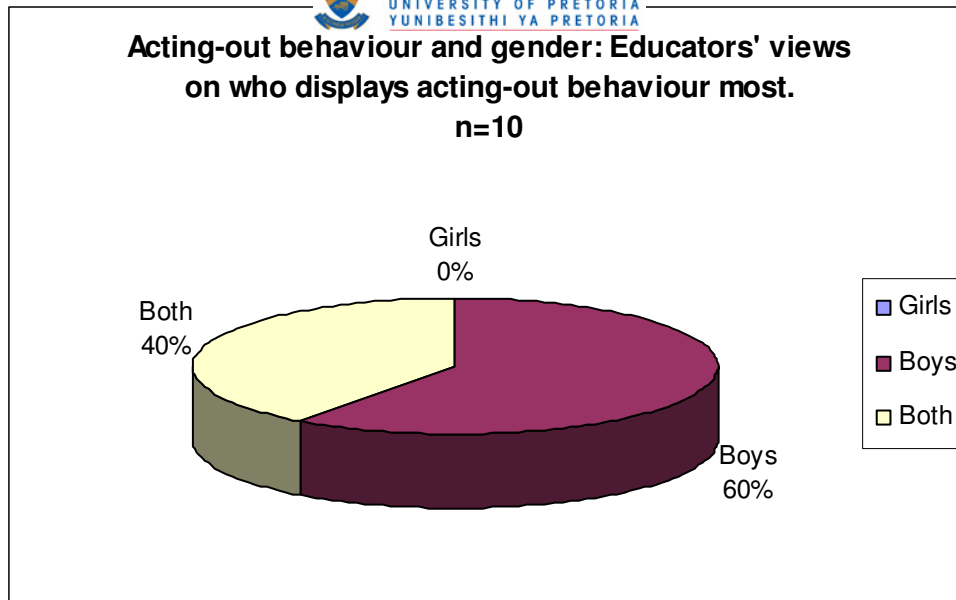
The different perceptions and arguments that people have with regard to gender and gender issues can also be relevant in this study. As acting-out behaviour occurs in numerous traumatic situations and children therefore act out in different ways, the perceptions with regard to which gender acts out more aggressively may influence views on the prevalence of this type of behaviour.

Boys tend to respond aggressively where girls will tend to withdraw and therefore acting-out behaviour may be more evident in the behaviour displayed by boys (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002:44; Maughan, 2001:172). Figures 17 and 18 display the views of the respondents on gender-based acting-out behaviour.



**Figure 17: Acting-out behaviour and gender: Learners' views on who displays acting-out behaviour most.**

The respondents were asked to indicate in terms of gender, who they believed would predominantly display acting-out behaviour. Figure 17 indicates the learners' views with regard to gender and acting-out behaviour. 23% of the learners believed that boys will display acting-out behaviour most, while 17% indicated girls would display this kind of behaviour most. More than half of the learner respondents, approximately 60% believed that both genders will equally display acting-out behaviour.



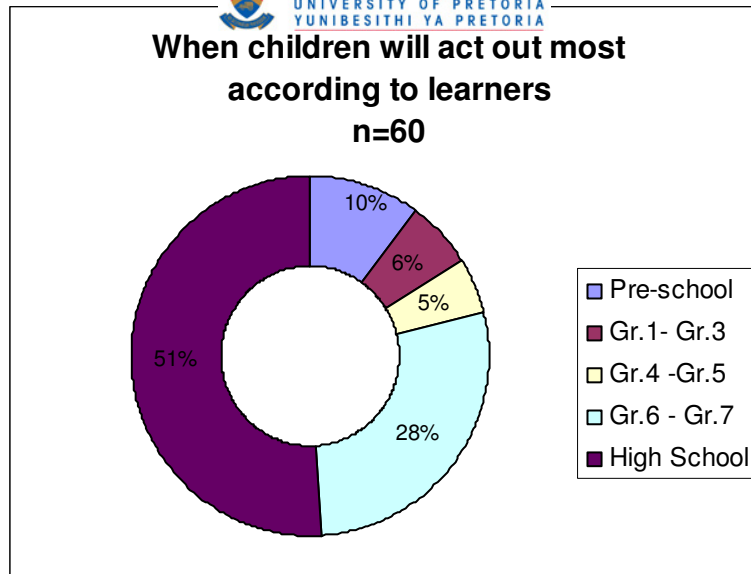
**Figure 18: Acting-out behaviour and gender: Educators' views on who displays acting-out behaviour most.**

The educators' views on which gender will display acting-out behaviour the most is shown in figure 18. It is interesting to note that 60% of the educators believed that boys will display acting-out behaviour most, while 40% believed both genders will equally display acting-out behaviour. None of the educators considered girls to display acting-out behaviour predominantly.

The results identified in figures 17 and 18 show that even though the aggressive behaviour displayed by the male gender is more evident than that of the female gender's acting-out behaviour, both genders will act out when exposed to traumatic circumstances, only in different ways of expression. In terms of acting-out behaviour in boys, this finding confirms the view of Bloomquist and Schnell (2002:44), as well as Maughan (2001:172), that boys tend to respond aggressively, while girls will react by withdrawing, but both will display a form of acting-out behaviour.

#### **4.3.5.3. Perceptions on age and acting-out behaviour.**

The age when acting-out behaviour is most prevalent is essential to consider when studying acting-out behaviour as a phenomenon. Figures 19 and 20 indicate the different grades and the respondents' perceptions with regard to the ages during which children would act out more overtly.

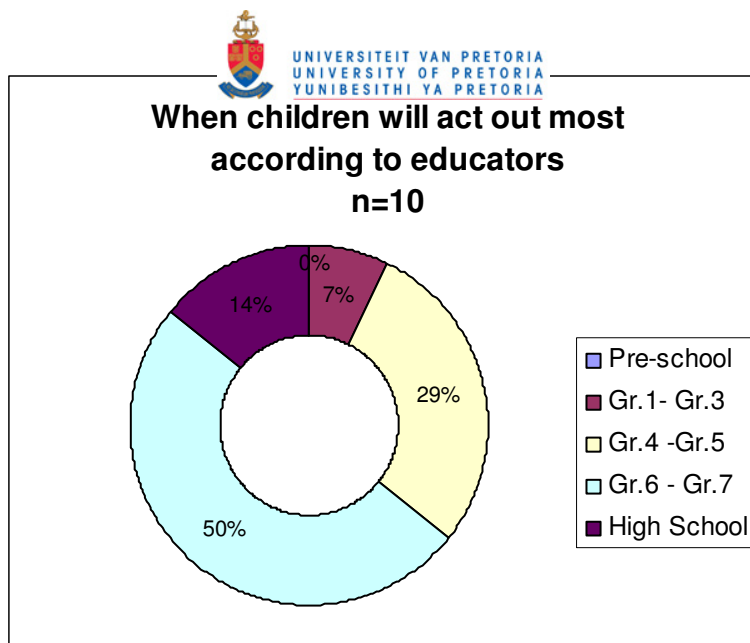


**Figure 19: When children will act out most according to learners**

51% of the learner respondents indicated that a child will act out most during their high school years, followed by grades six to seven with 28%. Grades one to three were seen to be the grades where children would be least likely to act out (6%). 10% of respondents indicated that pre-school children will tend to act out most. Researcher is of the opinion that pre-school children are very young and cannot always understand what is happening in their lives and therefore acting-out behaviour can result due to their yet undeveloped abilities to give meaning to and express emotions, based on own professional experience.

Figure 20 indicates the educators' perceptions on the stage of a child's life when he/she will act out most. 50% of the educators believed that a child between grades 6 and 7 will act out the most, while 29% believed a child between grades 4 and 5 will act out the most. A high school learner will also act out, according to 14% of the educators. The educators indicated that children will mostly act out from grade 1 onwards.





**Figure 20: When children will act out most according to educators**

The responses received from all the respondents indicated that the educators believed that children in the pre-adolescent phase, roughly between grades four and seven, will act out most whereas the learners perceived high school learners to act out. Both learners and educators did not perceive pre-school years as the phase where children will be more likely to act out most. Pre-adolescents are more vulnerable and are still developing on all levels and are thus susceptible to confusion whilst trying to gain control over their emotions by early adolescence (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003:272, 273).

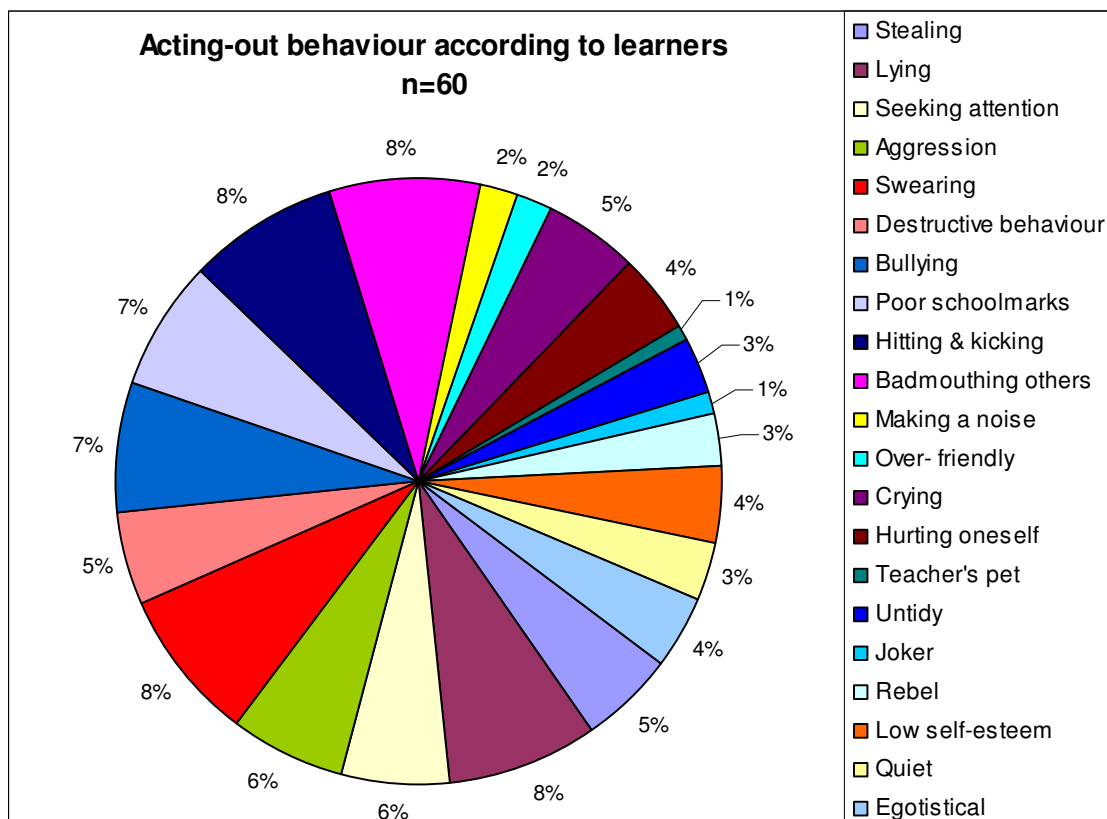
The pre-adolescent to adolescent phase were clearly the phases where the respondents felt acting-out behaviour would be most evident. The pre-adolescent and adolescent in these phases can feel pressured due to the many developmental tasks that need to be successfully achieved whilst in these phases. These are also the phases where the child must delicately find his/her 'self' and a place where he/she belongs (Maughan, 2001:187). The researcher is of the opinion that without a healthy environment/system the acting-out behaviour can worsen in the adolescent phase due to the internal and external instability in the child's life and the demands placed upon him/her.

Children who have to cope with trauma thus need to be attended to whilst young, in order to prevent the acting-out behaviour to spiral into uncontrollable behaviour that is difficult to restrain later on.

#### 4.3.5.4. Perceptions on the types of behaviour displayed when a child is acting out.

Circumstances such as divorce can cause anger, sadness, attention-seeking behaviour and anxiety in a child (Gericke, 1998:38). Traumatic circumstances that can cause acting-out behaviour in a child have been identified in section 4.3.5.1. Figures 21 and 22 indicate the types of behaviour the respondents believe may be acted out under these circumstances.

The respondents were given a checklist of various behaviours where they could indicate all the behaviours they believed to correspond with acting-out behaviour. Figures 21 and 22 specify all the behaviours displayed on the checklist where the respondents had to allocate possible types of acting-out behaviour. The researcher has allocated percentages to these behaviours, according to the research findings.

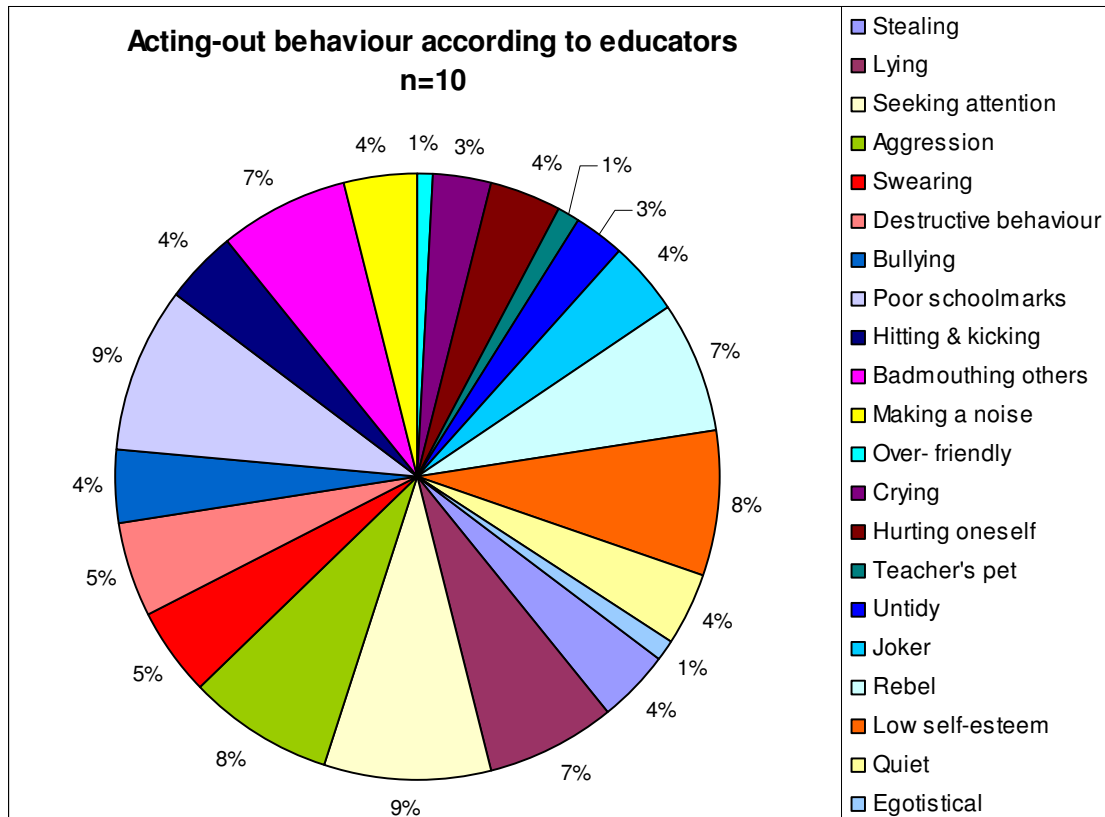


**Figure 21: Acting-out behaviour according to learners.**

The learner respondents indicated all the behaviour types they believed to be exhibited when a child acts-out due to some or other traumatic experience. The behaviour types

that were mostly perceived to include lying (8%), swearing (8%), hitting and kicking (8%), badmouthing others (8%), bullying (7%), poor school marks (7%), seeking attention (6%) and aggressiveness (6%). The learners did not think that being a teacher’s pet (1%), a joker (1%), making a noise (2%), being over-friendly (2%) or being quiet (3%) were necessarily acting-out behaviours.

Figure 22 indicates the educators’ perceptions on behaviours that children will display when acting-out. The behaviour types the educators believed to mostly be linked to acting-out behaviour included seeking attention (9%), getting poor school marks (9%), being aggressive (8%), having a low self-esteem (8%), lying (7%), badmouthing others (7%), and rebelling (7%). The behaviours the educators perceived as least likely to be acted out after a negative or traumatic experience included being egotistical (1%), being over-friendly (1%), being untidy (3%), and crying (3%).



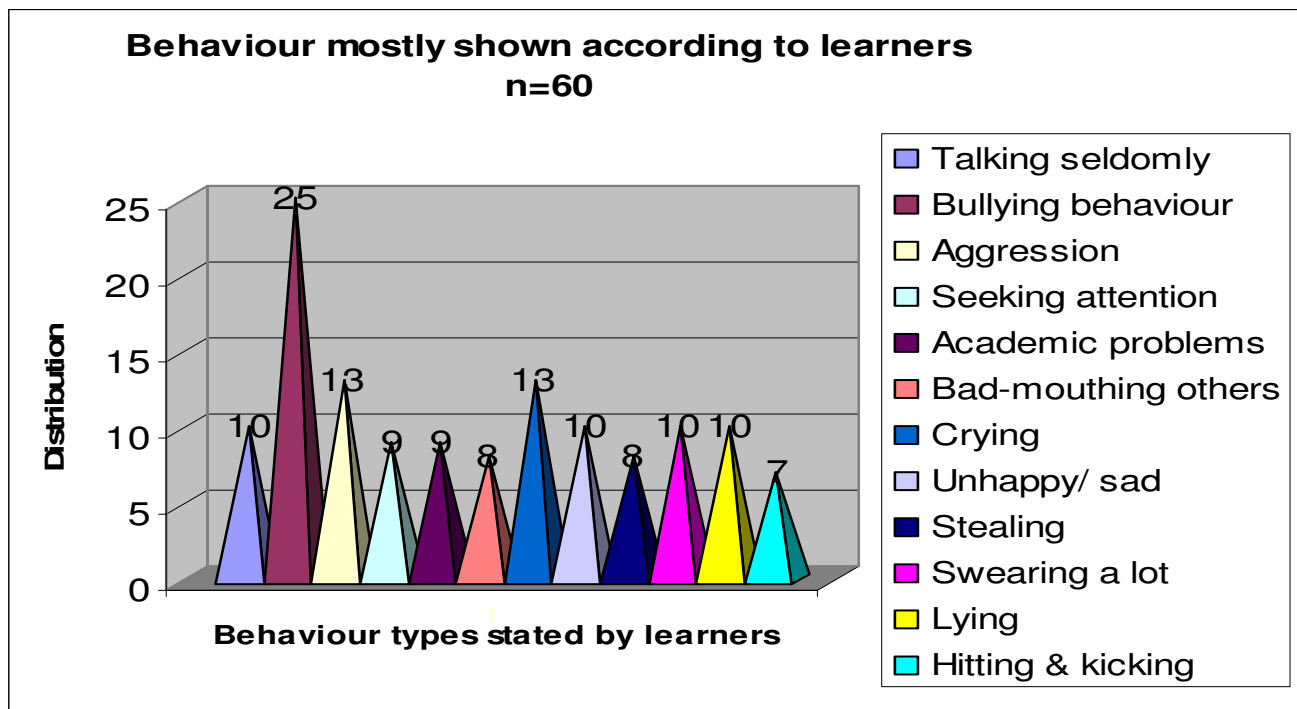
**Figure 22: Acting-out behaviour according to educators**

Lying, swearing, aggressiveness, hitting and kicking, badmouthing others, poor school marks, bullying, and seeking attention were checked by the respondents as behaviours



displayed by a child when he/she is acting-out. These behaviours could thus be seen collectively as a synonym for acting-out behaviour.

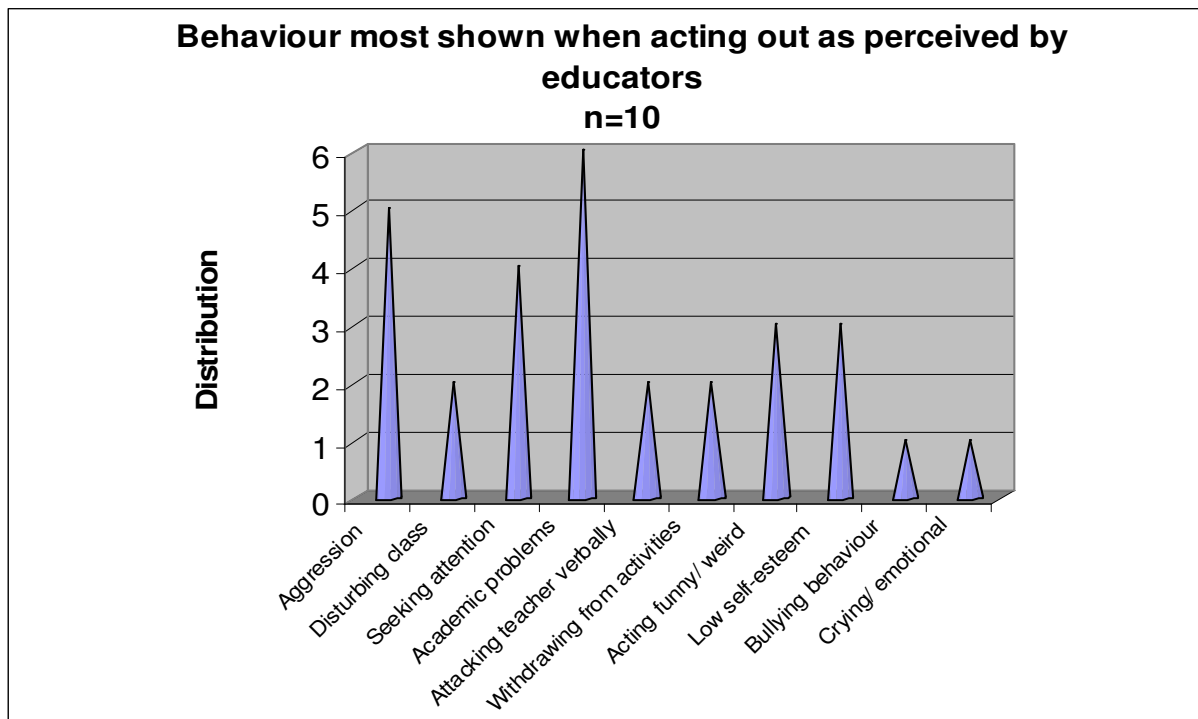
An open follow-up question gave the respondents the opportunity to add their own opinions on which behaviours are displayed by children when they act out. The responses of the learners are indicated in figure 23 and those of the educators in figure 24, as learners and educators may have different opinions on which behaviour types are displayed by a child due to negative situations and the inability to make sense of their emotions.



**Figure 23: Behaviour mostly shown according to learners.**

The behaviour types indicated in figure 21 correlated with those in figure 23, but there seemed to be differences in the most prominent behaviour types displayed when children act out. The learners very clearly believed that ‘bullying behaviour’ (25 of the 60 respondents, 42%) is mostly displayed by a child when he/she is acting-out. The learner respondents also believed that children would also be very ‘aggressive’ (22%) and/or ‘crying’ a lot (22%) after a traumatic experience. Other behaviours exhibited by a child when acting-out, according to the learners, include lying, swearing, talking seldomly, seeking attention, suffering academically, badmouthing others, stealing and hitting and kicking.

The learners' own descriptions of acting-out behaviour differed from those of the educators. The educators believed that children who have experienced some form of trauma would act out by developing academic problems (60%). Children would also exhibit aggression in a significant manner as a form of acting-out behaviour, according to the educators (50%). Bullying behaviour, which was the learners' behaviour to be mostly associated with a child acting-out, was also seen as a type but not the major type of acting-out behaviour (10%).



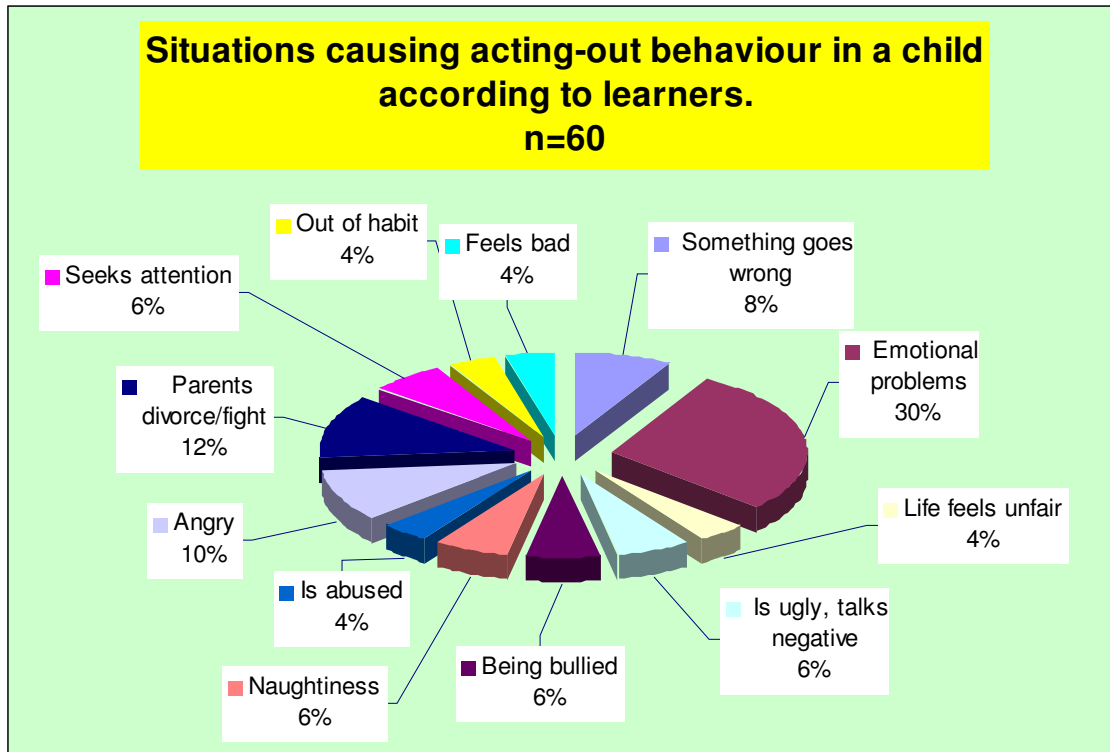
**Figure 24: Behaviour mostly showed when acting out as perceived by educators.**

From these results the following behaviours seem to be prominent when a child acts out in his/her behaviour: bullying, aggressiveness, attention-seeking, poor school marks, lying, and swearing. The respondents were given the opportunity to provide behaviours they believed to be displayed when a child acts out, presented in figures 23 and 24. These results in actual fact highlighted the prominent behaviours displayed in figures 21 and 22, thereby validating those behaviours as possible acting-out behaviours. According to Venter (2008), a child may behave in numerous ways as symptoms of deeper emotional problems or trauma in his/her life. The educators most likely indicated trauma due to prior knowledge and wisdom, whereas the learners referred to their own experiences.



#### 4.3.5.5. Perceptions on the behaviour.

Children act out to express powerful, painful or confusing feelings unable to be otherwise verbalised (Acting out..., 1998). The respondents were asked to complete various sentences with regard to acting-out behaviour. Figures 25 and 26 indicate the responses to the incomplete sentence, 'children act out with bad behaviour when ...'



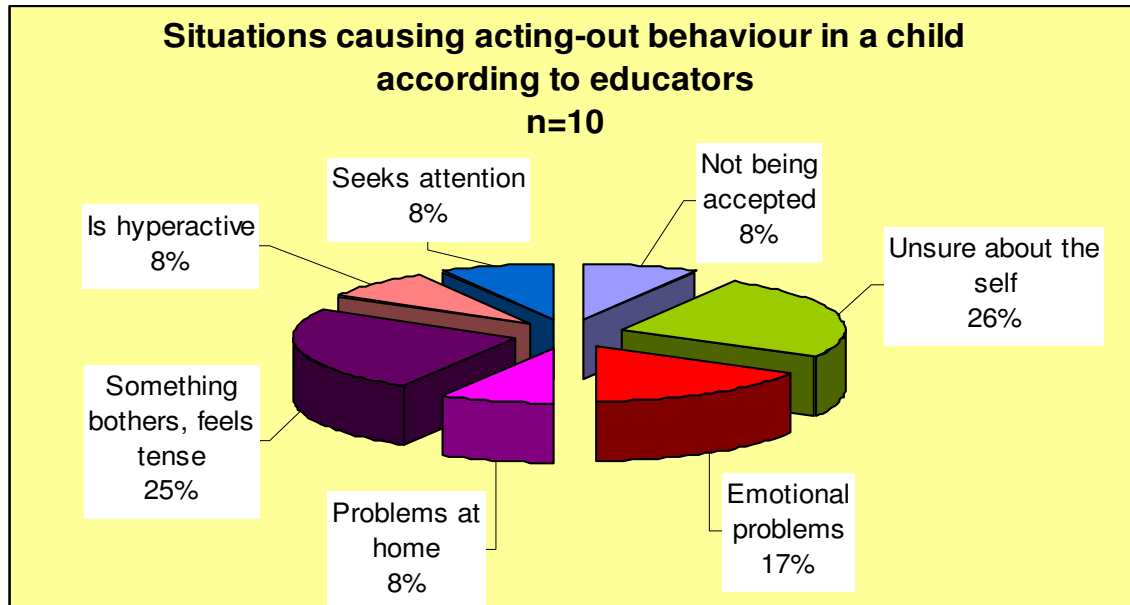
**Figure 25: Situations causing acting-out behaviour in a child according to learners.**

30% of the learner respondents stated that children will act out when they experience emotional problems. 12% of the learner respondents indicated that children will act out due to parental fighting and/or divorce. Other situations that can cause a child to act out included a child seeking attention (6%), a child that is being bullied (6%), a child who is angry (10%), or due to something that has gone wrong (8%). The majority of the learner respondents were of the opinion that emotional problems would cause a child to act out with negative behaviour. These emotional problems could very easily include all the other remarks made by the learners as causes for acting-out behaviour.

Figure 26 indicates the results of the educators' opinions on the causes of acting-out behaviour. 26% of the educators indicated that a child will act out when he/she is unsure about himself/herself. 25% indicated that a child will act out when something bothers



him/her and he/she feels tense. Their view on acting-out behaviour, by linking it to emotional problems. The educators also stated that children can act out in order to gain attention (8%), when they experience problems at home (8%), when they are not being accepted (8%) or are hyperactive (8%).



**Figure 26: Situations causing acting-out behaviour in a child according to educators.**

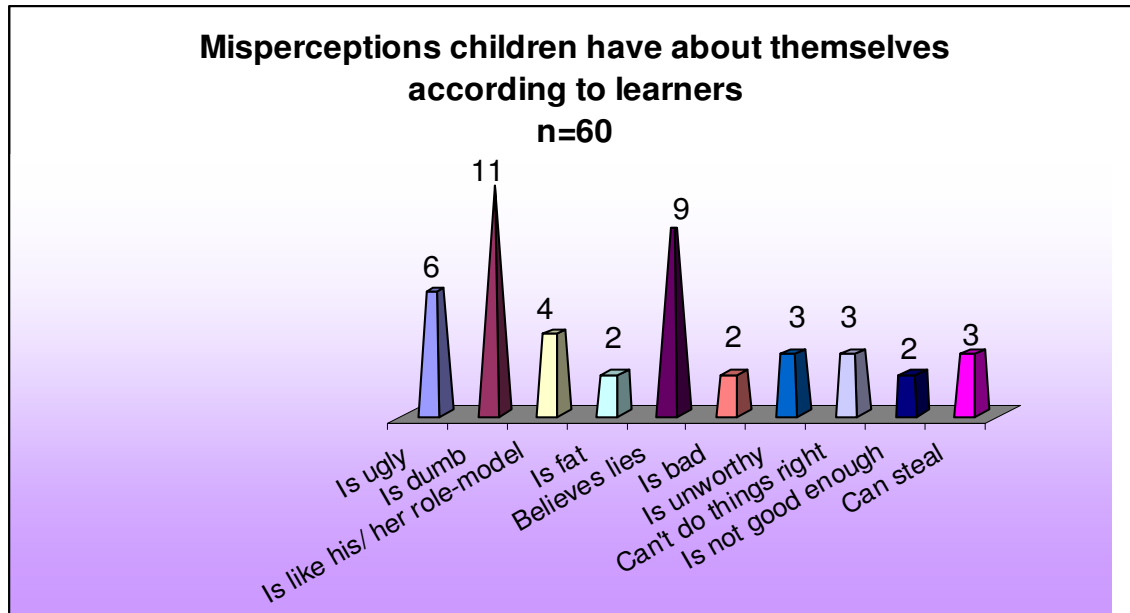
The findings presented in figures 25 and 26 illustrate that the respondents involved in the study are confident that children act out with negative behaviour when they experience some sort of emotional problem. The emotional problems that cause acting-out behaviour are mostly the result of parental conflict and/or divorce, and a means to seek attention. These scenarios can be linked to the developmental phase of the pre-adolescent and the importance of the family in a child and pre-adolescent's life, as pre-adolescents are highly dependent on being accepted by friends, while at the same time needing their family in order to develop into healthy adolescents and ultimately, adults (Berk, 1997:430; Zeitlin & Refaat, 2000:78).

#### **4.3.5.6. Perceptions on behaviour linked to situations and feelings.**

The pre-adolescent child is in a phase where finding his/her place and identity are some of the developmental milestones that need to be successfully attained. Thus the pre-adolescent's development of his/her self-concept, or in other words the "... whole picture of what we think we are, what we think we can become, what we think others think of us



and what we would like to be' successful progression into adulthood (Saunders, 1996:10). According to Bloomquist and Schnell (2002:48) the instability of the family environment and other predisposing factors can have a negative effect on the child's internal stability resulting in the manifestation of behavioural and emotional problems. Therefore, the respondents' perceptions on children's feelings with regard to bullying and aggression and when being abused are important, as well as the perceptions children may have about themselves regarding their emotional instability.



**Figure 27: Misperceptions children have about themselves according to learners.**

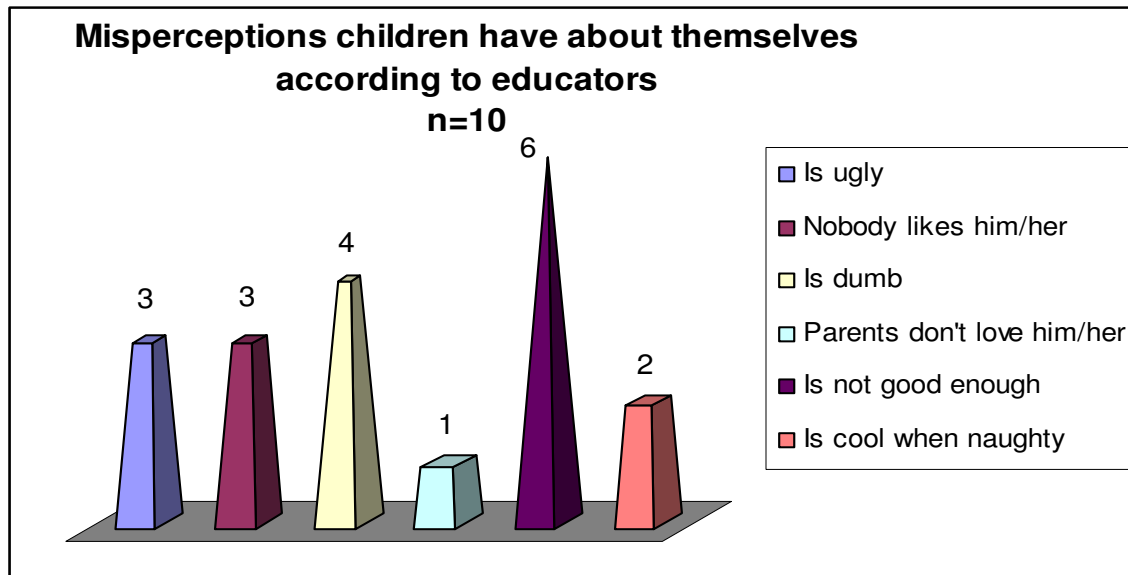
The pre-adolescent phase, according to Granic *et al.* (2003:67), is a phase where the child experiences emotions which influences his/her thinking with regard to the situation and which in turn leads to taking action. Pre-adolescents also consider others' views about them as highly important and may therefore form their self-esteem through interacting with their peers (Saunders, 1996:48). These aspects lead to formulating misperceptions about the self and behaving accordingly. Figure 27 illustrates the learner respondents' views on what children may misperceive about themselves due to functioning in an unhealthy system and/or having a distorted self-concept.

11 of the learner respondents (18%) indicated that a child may falsely believe he/she is dumb, 6 learners (10%) indicated a child may falsely believe he/she is ugly, while 9 learners (15%) merely indicated that children may easily believe lies about themselves. Other misperceptions children may have about themselves included being fat, bad,




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unworthy, cannot do things right like his/her role-model. Due to their circumstances, children may believe that they might steal for various reasons.



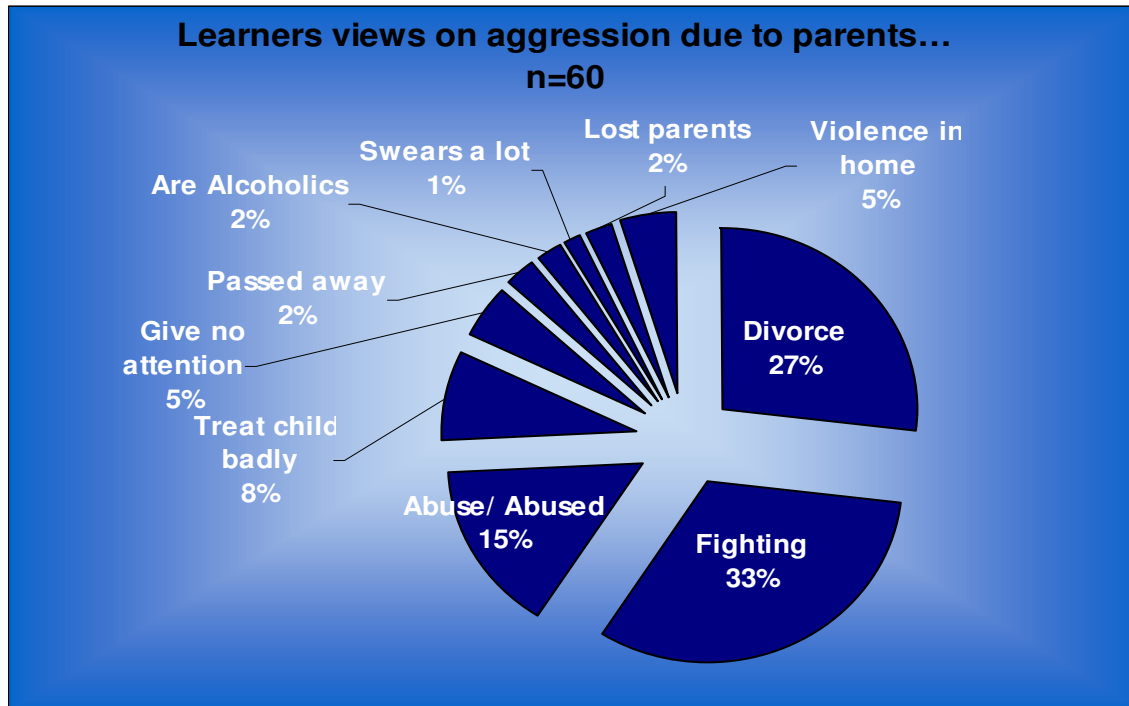
**Figure 28: Misperceptions children have about themselves according to educators.**

Figure 28 displays the educators' views on misperceptions children may have about themselves. The educators believed that children will mostly falsely believe that they are not good enough (6 respondents' view), or that they are dumb (4 respondents' view). Other misperceptions children may have about themselves included being ugly, that nobody likes them and that their parents do not love them. The educators also believed that children can believe that being naughty can make them seem 'cool'.

The respondents mostly believed that a misperception a child may have about himself/herself is most often one of 'being dumb' as so many children taunt each other in this regard. Parents also do not give their children the credit they are due, but rather resort to criticism. One can also see that other prominent misperceptions children have about themselves are that they are ugly, that they are not good enough and that they are unworthy by believing falsehoods others bestow upon them. It is thus evident that children easily believe falsehoods about themselves if they are exposed to unhealthy neighbourhoods and relationships, seeing that they are still forming their self-concept and identity (Saunders, 1996:48; Granic *et al.*, 2003:67). These aspects are thus crucial in their development and realising of their true selves.



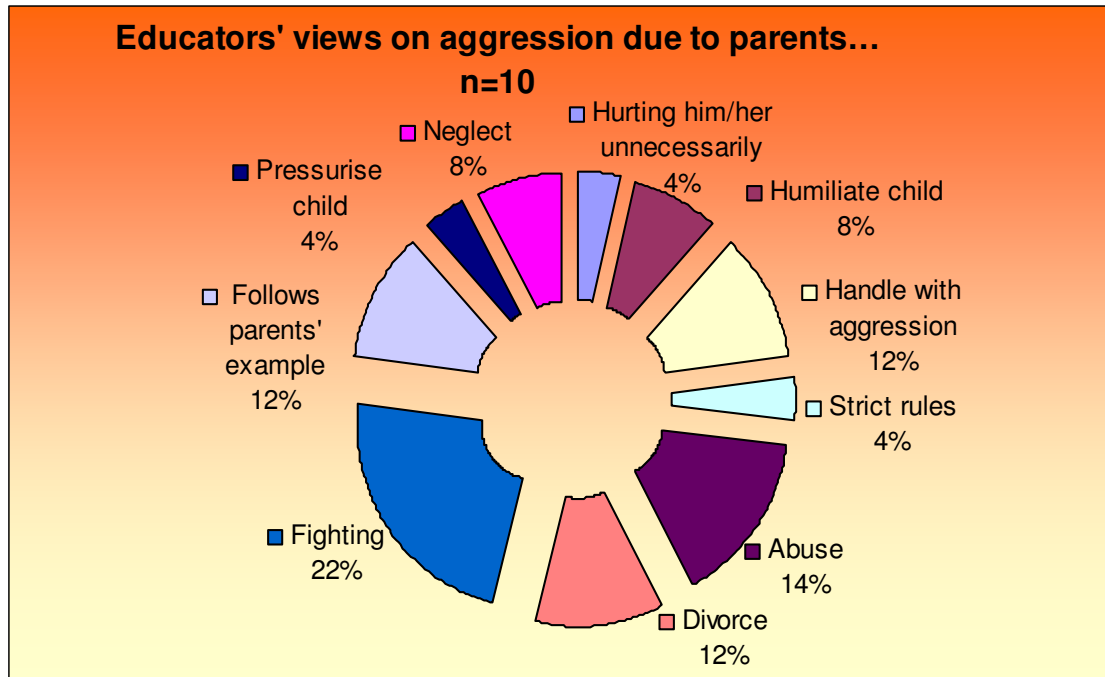
Parents and family members are influential in a child's life. Parents' behaviours and the manner in which they act and react will influence a child's behaviour and social interactions (Granic *et al.*, 2003:62). Conflict within the self and in the family can very often lead to aggression and feelings of uncertainty. The respondents were asked to provide their perceptions on the connection between aggression in children and parental behaviour/circumstances. These perceptions can be seen in the following figures, figures 29 and 30.



**Figure 29: Learners' views on aggression due to parents...**

Figure 29 indicates that more than half the learner respondents immediately linked aggression in a child to parental conflict or divorce. 33% of the respondents were of the opinion that children would act out aggressively due to parents' fighting. Parents that separate from each other and decide to end their marriage (divorce) are perceived to be a prominent reason for children to act out with aggressive behaviour, but are however not the biggest cause of aggression in children (27%). 15% of the respondents also believed that a child who is being abused will display aggressive behaviour. A child who gets treated badly by his/her parents (8%), whose parents do not give him/her any attention (5%), whose parents are violent (5%), alcoholics (2%) or swears a lot (1%) could also act out with aggression. Children who have lost their parents through death or

other circumstances may also  according to 2% of the learner respondents.



**Figure 30: Educators' views on aggression due to parents...**

The educators also believed that parents who continually fight will provoke aggression in their child(ren) (22%), as indicated in figure 30. Divorce was only seen by 12% of the respondents as a situation that would cause aggression in children. According to educators, strict rules do not result in aggression as one would have thought (4%). Another prominent factor leading to aggression refers to children being abused by their parents or their parent(s) who are being abused (14%). 12% stated that children will act out aggressively when their parents treat them aggressively, 8% of the times when a child is being humiliated by his/her parents and when the child is being neglected by his/her parent(s). 12% of the educators stated that a child who acts aggressively is merely following the example of his/her parent(s). These findings correlated with the findings of Petit *et al.* (2001:305) who stated that aggression develops over time through experiences such as physical abuse, aggressive models and insecure attachments.

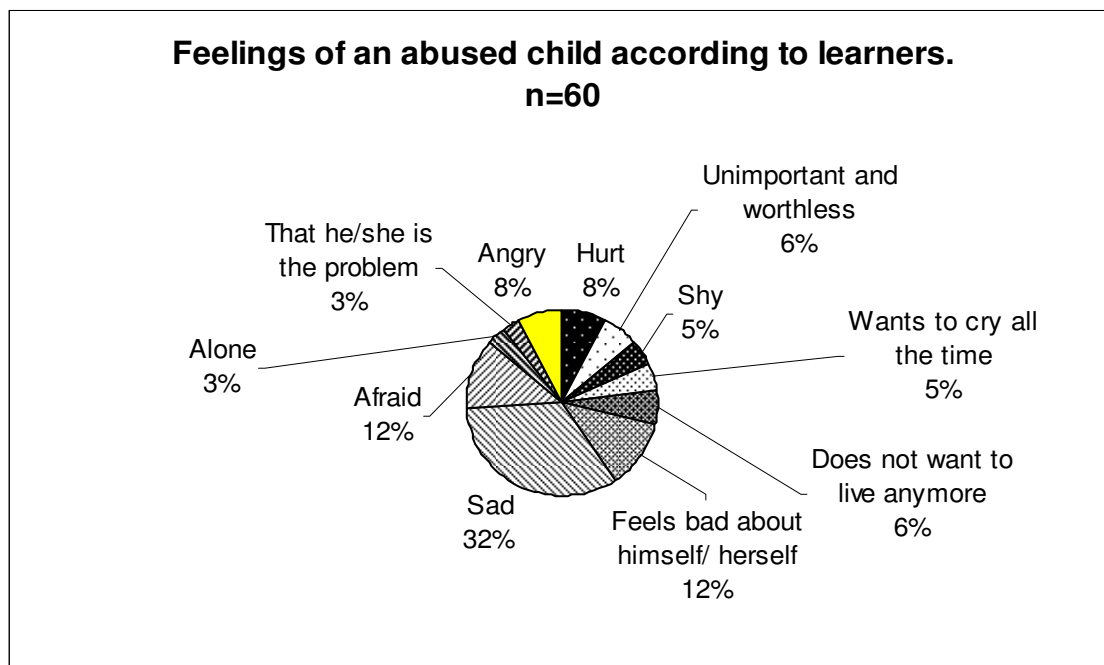
As indicated, 33% of the learner respondents indicated parental fighting to be the aspect that results in the most aggression in a child. The greatest cause of aggression in children with regard to the parental system seems thus not to be parents divorcing each



other, abuse, or violence, but inflict between the parents that causes the most anxiety and unhappiness in a child, as 46% of all of the respondents indicated this to be the case.

Feelings are provoked through many traumatic circumstances. Not the least of these circumstances include children being abused (it was also evident in the previous figures that abuse would most definitely provoke feelings of anger in a child). Child abuse is an extremely important phenomenon to address, as children are exposed to different types of abuse on a daily basis. Emotional abuse entails the withholding of love and affection and constant denigration of the child. Verbal abuse is seen as the glue that holds all the other forms of abuse in place (Porter, 2003:182; Gericke, 1998:55). It is a broad definition for circumstances children have to endure every day and therefore numerous feelings may coincide with these traumatic experiences children often endure. These children tend to develop a heightened arousal towards conflict and distress, they lack empathy, while other emotional and behavioural problems also frequently occur (Bennet, 2000:218; Maughan, 2001:182, 183).

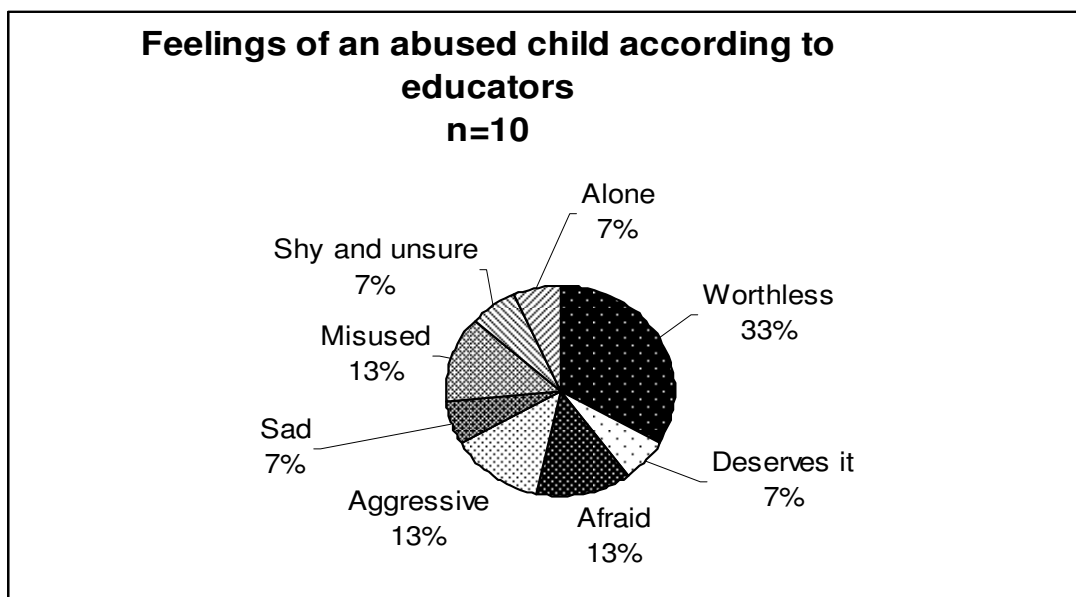
In figures 31 and 32 one is able to see what the abused child may feel whilst acting-out some of these behavioural trends.



**Figure 31: Feelings of an abused child according to learners.**



Figure 31 illustrates the learner's view that a child who is being abused may feel. 32% of the respondents indicated that an abused child will have feelings of sadness. An abused child will also definitely be afraid (12%) and feel bad about himself/herself (12%). These responses correlated with Porter's (2003:185) views that abused children will not have good self-esteems and regress into different kinds of behaviours. Other feelings that an abused child may experience, according to the learners, include: hurt (8%), anger (8%), not wanting to live anymore (6%), wanting to cry all the time (5%), shyness (5%), unimportant and worthless (6%), loneliness (3%) and feeling that he/she is the problem (3%). An abused child can therefore believe lies about himself/herself because of the destructive treatment he/she is exposed to.



**Figure 32: Feelings of an abused child according to educators.**

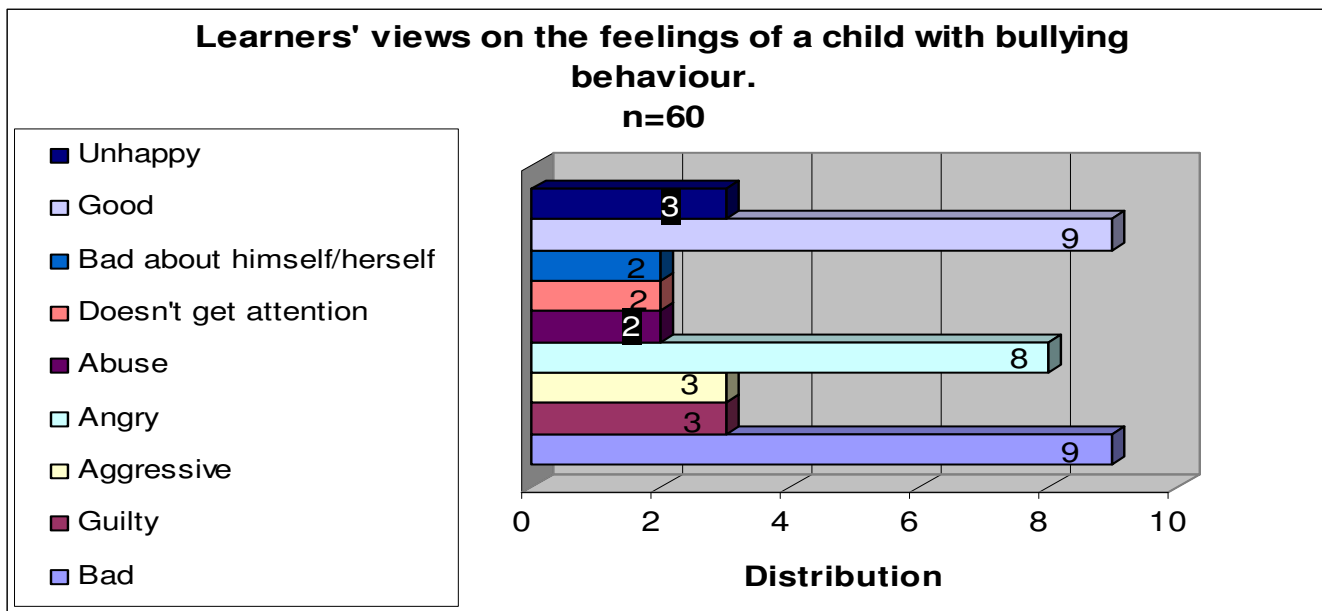
Figure 32 indicates that the educator respondents believed that children would mostly (33%) feel worthless when being abused. Children may also feel shy and unsure (7%), sad (7%), aggressive (13%), misused (13%) and especially afraid (13%) when they were/are being abused (correlating with the learners' views on the abused child's feelings). A dangerous, but insightful comment that 7% of the educator respondents added was that a child may feel that he/she did something to deserve this treatment when no one ever deserves to be abused by another.

There are numerous feelings that accompany the traumatic experience of being abused. It is clear that the feelings that a child may experience when being abused can not



clearly be defined or placed in “abused feelings”, although the abused child may definitely be sad about the experience. The feelings will also differ depending on the abuse and the onset of the abuse.

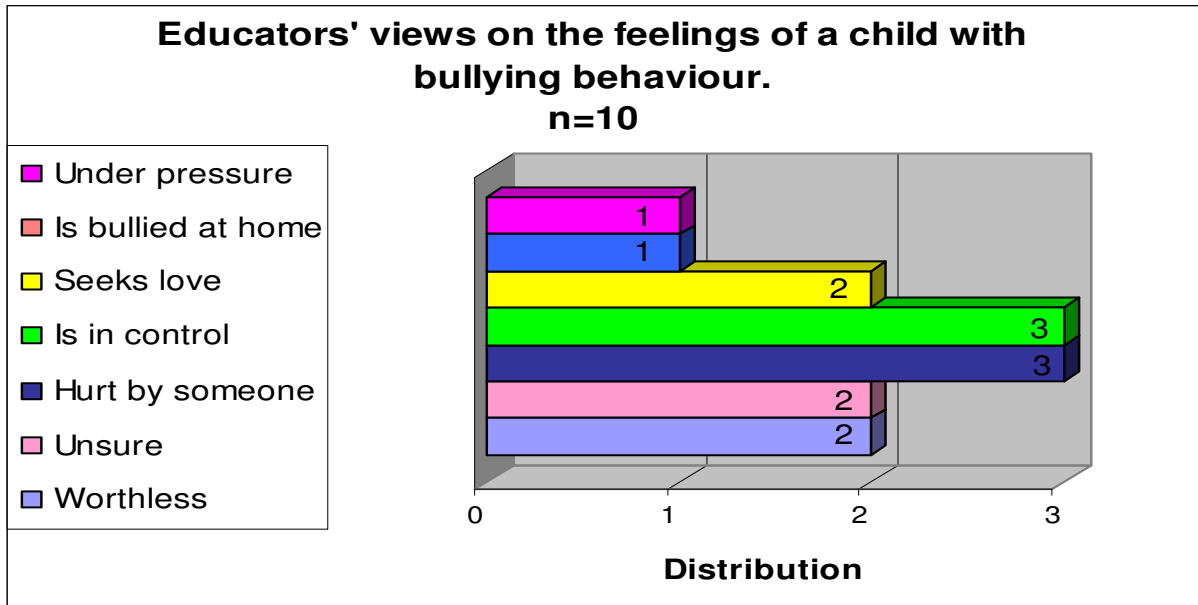
A child that bullies others can also have feelings unknown to those he/she interacts with. Bullying can be a way for a child to express his/her needs and wants as the child may need to be in control of his/her life outside of a dysfunctional system, as the child views others from his/her own needs and perceptions (Berk, 1997:445). Figures 33 and 34 provide a profile on the feelings that a child who bullies others may experience internally, causing the behaviour displayed by the child. The respondents were asked to provide their views in an incomplete sentence on what the feelings might be of a child displaying bullying behaviour.



**Figure 33: Learners' views on the feelings of a child with bullying behaviour.**

The learner respondents indicated various reasons for bullying behaviour in a child. Some of the respondents' views are not included in the graphic representation in figure 33 as the responses varied and are therefore not as significant as those presented above, as well as in figure 34. 9 of the respondents (15%) stated that a child with bullying behaviour will feel good, whilst 9 respondents (15%) also indicated that a child with this behaviour will feel bad. Another major feeling in a child with this type of behaviour is anger (13%). A child may also feel unhappy (3 respondents, 5%), aggressive (3 respondents, 5%), guilty (3 respondents, 5%), bad about himself/herself (2

respondents, 3%), feels abused (3 respondents, 30%), needs attention he/she needs (2 respondents, 20%), feels worthless (2 respondents, 20%), and unsure (2 respondents, 20%).



**Figure 34: Educators' views on the feelings of a child with bullying behaviour.**

The educators believed that a child with bullying behaviour feels primarily hurt (3 respondents, 30%) or try to gain control by bullying others (30%). Other respondent views include feeling worthless (20%), unsure (20%), or merely seeking love (20%), depending on the reason for bullying others. This child can feel under pressure and can also be bullied at home (linking this answer to the child's need to feel in control by bullying others as stated by 3 of the educator respondents).

These respondents are thus of the opinion that bullying behaviour is the result of some sort of feeling, whether it be negative or positive. Bullying behaviour is also seen as a method to gain control, whilst other respondents stated that bullying behaviour can be a means of attention-seeking. According to the results displayed in figures 33 and 34, it can be concluded that bullying behaviour seems to be a type of acting-out behaviour. Montgomery (2000:163) indicates bullying behaviour as a prominent type of acting-out behaviour, and therefore the results indicated in figure 34 correlate with this literature.



#### 4.3.5.7. Perceptions on intervention methods with regard to acting-out behaviour.

The researcher formulated a set of possible intervention methods and requested the respondents to rate the techniques in addressing acting-out behaviour. Intervention methods such as physical punishment and spanking a child, judging, criticising or blaming, or being shouted at have little effect (Adamec & Pierce, 2000; Porter, 2003:76, 77; Jones, 2000:125). The researcher included these as possible intervention methods. Other means of intervention can include techniques such as family therapy, teaching parents parental techniques, supporting and listening to a child, being consistent in dealing with behaviour, teaching new ways in which to behave, teaching relaxation techniques and even group work programs can be highly effective techniques (Kazdin, 2001:439; Porter, 2003:53; Acting out..., 1998; Jones, 2000:127, 129-131).

In the following two figures various intervention methods and their effectiveness with regard to acting-out behaviour are presented. The most effective and the least effective techniques, as displayed in figures 35 and 36, will then be addressed respectively.

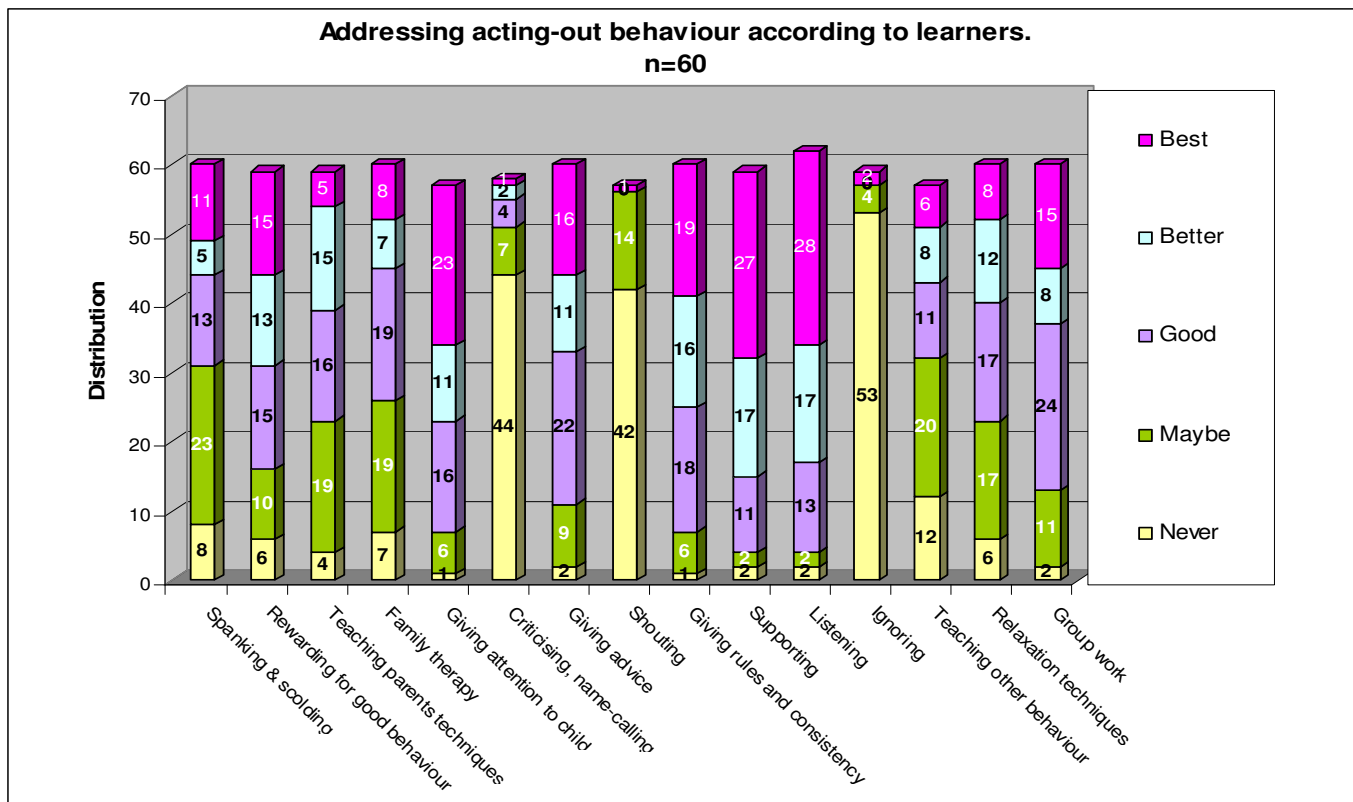


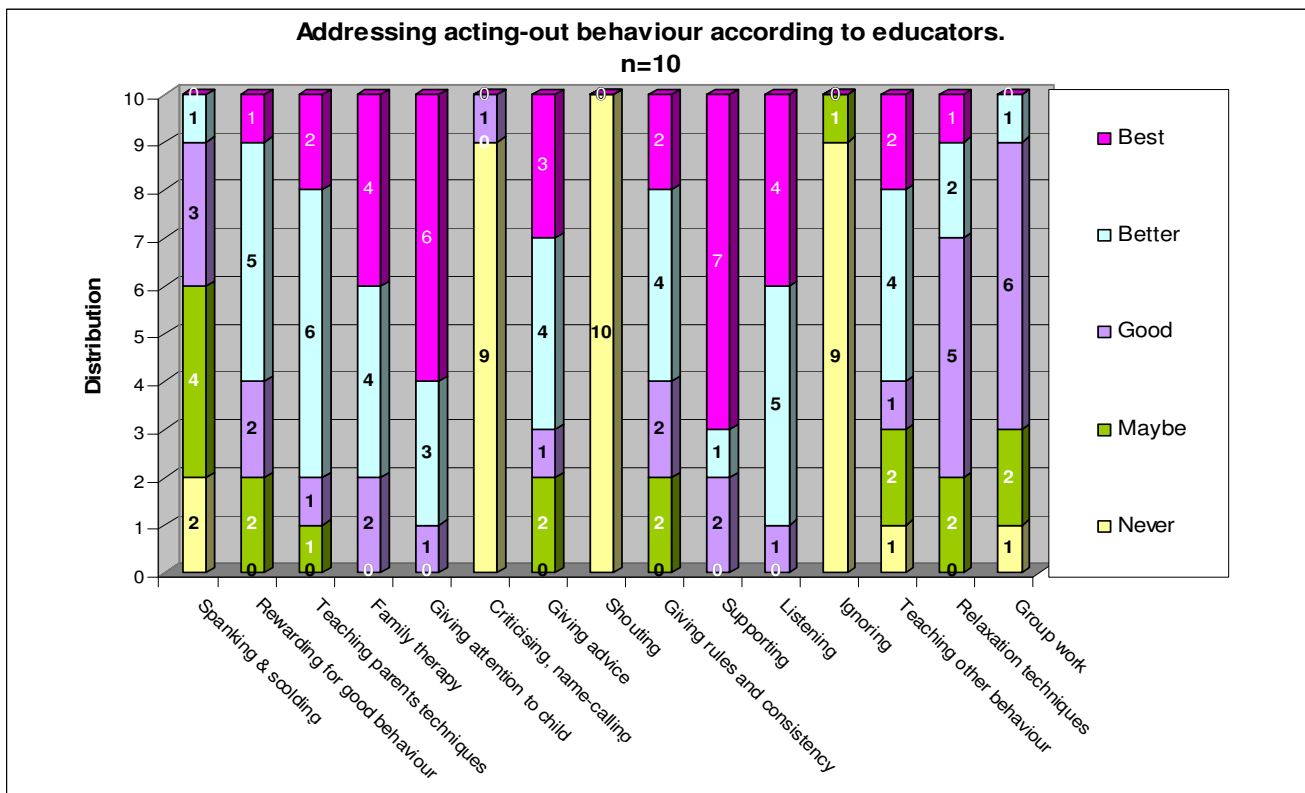
Figure 35: Addressing acting-out behaviour according to learners.





Figure 35 represents the learners that can be utilised to diminish acting-out behaviour and deal with the underlying emotions. The learners indicated that one should never ignore (88%), shout at (70%) or criticise (73%) a child with acting-out behaviour. 38% of the respondents indicated that physically punishing and scolding a child or teaching a child other behaviour (33%) might be utilised to address acting-out behaviour.

The learners stated that they believed the best methods in addressing acting-out behaviour to be, listening to the child (47%), supporting the child (45%) and giving attention to the child (38%).



**Figure 36: Addressing acting-out behaviour according to educators.**

Figure 36 indicates that one should never ignore a child (90%), shout at a child (100%) or criticise and call the child names (90%) as a means of dealing with this type of behaviour. There seems to be a conflict in the perceptions of the educators on whether physical punishment and scolding would be an effective intervention technique or not, but the majority of respondents stated that it may be a technique that can be used, although not the best and most effective technique (40%).

According to the educators, supporting a child (70%) is the best method in dealing with acting-out behaviour, followed by giving attention to a child (60%), listening to a child (40%) and family therapy (40%). These are techniques that everyone involved in a child's life can apply in their interaction with the child.

From these findings it is clear that both educator and learner respondents believed that criticising a child and calling him/her names, ignoring or shouting at a child are the least effective methods in dealing with acting-out behaviour. Teaching new behaviour or techniques, as well as therapy methods such as group work and relaxation techniques received mixed feelings. The learner respondents (40%) were more favourably inclined to group work as an effective intervention method than the educators (0%). These results can be due to the educator respondents not being familiar with therapeutic interventions and their value to participants. Children are involved daily in group activities and could therefore have thought it to be an effective method because of this experience.

Overall the learner respondents believed that supporting a child, thereafter listening and giving attention to the child will be the best way to help the child, while the educators believed listening, giving attention and partaking in family therapy, combined were the best methods in addressing acting-out behaviour. These findings are supported by Porter (2003:53, 75) in terms of the opinion that supporting a child with empathy and trying to understand the child, are the magic ingredients in addressing acting-out behaviour.

The five techniques that the learner respondents felt must rather not be utilised when addressing acting-out behaviour are: ignoring the child, shouting at the child, criticising the child and falling prey to name-calling, teaching the child another way to behave and scolding and punishing the child physically. These methods were considered to be the least effective in dealing with acting-out behaviour and should therefore not be utilised according to the learners. The educator respondents stated that ignoring a child, shouting at a child, criticising and calling a child various names, scolding and punishing the child physically, and group work will be the least effective in addressing acting-out behaviour.

All the respondents were thus of the opinion that criticising, ignoring, shouting, as well as physical punishment were not at all ways to effectively deal with acting-out behaviour.



Porter (2003:76, 77) validates t effective ways in dealing with this behaviour. According to Adamec and Pierce (2000) spanking and harsh words are very often the worst ways to address acting-out behaviour as it may have been the initial reasons for the developing of the child's negative behaviour.

#### **4.4. SUMMARY**

In this chapter the researcher focused on acting-out behaviour and aspects that form part of the phenomenon or influence the phenomenon. The researcher applied the findings of the literature study to formulate a detailed questionnaire to obtain the perceptions of those which she considered to be "experts" on the phenomenon due to their exposure to acting-out behaviour in their everyday lives. Descriptive statistics that were calculated for all the components were presented. In this regard results of the study showed that the respondents realised that children are not merely misbehaving, but that circumstances often influence the child's behaviour. The results also indicated what the respondents considered to be important and provided insight into intervention strategies that they considered should be utilised when addressing acting-out behaviour.

In the next chapter the researcher will, on the basis of these findings, draw conclusions and make recommendations regarding the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

The final chapter of the study will provide a summary of the study as well as highlight conclusions and recommendations for professionals in practice, and for the purpose of further study. This chapter will be presented by providing a brief summary of each chapter together with conclusions and recommendations. The research question will be evaluated as a means of ascertaining the success of the study.

### **5.2. CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

#### **5.2.1. Summary**

The topic of the study was the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour. The opening chapter provided a blueprint for the study's planning and procedures. The research methodology was a main focus of this chapter as it provided a framework for the study.

The researcher outlined the rationale for the study. An increasing number of children are displaying uncontrollable behaviour and need to be removed from their homes. The researcher identified the lack of relevant literature pertaining to acting-out behaviour and focused on the pre-adolescent developmental phase and its association with acting-out behaviour. The need to effectively address the acting-out behaviour displayed by the pre-adolescent child in order to lessen the progression of the behaviour, was also addressed.

The goal of the study was to explore the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour. The research question was directly linked to this goal.

The chapters in this report focused on the various objectives set out to achieve the goal and are evaluated accordingly.



A quantitative research approach was used to objectively investigate the social problem of concern in the study. The researcher utilised applied research, as the study's intent was to provide recommendations focussing on change and means of intervention, as well as to stimulate further research in terms of acting-out behaviour displayed by children, especially pre-adolescent children. A stratified random sampling method ensured representative respondents from the population. The researcher focused on obtaining the perceptions of pre-adolescent children and educators through a survey (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003:168) to augment knowledge on acting-out behaviour and combat this ever-increasing social problem.

According to Fouché and De Vos (2002:142) the questionnaire is the best data collection method in a survey design. The method of data collection that was therefore utilised was a group-administered questionnaire, in order for the questionnaire to appear less threatening to the respondents. The researcher constructed two questionnaires so that the questionnaires were reader-friendly for both the educators and learners. The data was analysed according to the main themes and sub-themes that were evident in the questionnaire. In presenting the findings in chapter 4, the literature from chapters 2 and 3 was integrated together with the researcher's own interpretations.

Ethical issues were adhered to in this study and guided the preparation, implementation and termination of the study. Written informed consent and assent were signed by the respondents and all the learner respondents' parents. The questionnaire that the respondents completed contained questions that may have had relevance to a child's behaviour or circumstances and could have resulted in feelings of unease and discomfort in the children. The respondents were thus informed of these implications and the general relevance of the study, rather than a focus on personal or individual implications.

The introductory chapter concluded with a summary of the key concepts, namely acting-out behaviour, pre-adolescence, educators and perceptions.



## 5.3. CHAPTER TWO: PRE-ADOLESCENCE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AFFECTING CHILDREN

### 5.3.1. Summary

Chapter 2 presented the first part of the theoretical context of the study. The chapter was entitled 'pre-adolescence and socio-economic problems affecting children'. The researcher identified various factors that can influence behaviour, including the developmental stage the child is in and socio-economic circumstances children are exposed to on a daily basis.

The researcher first focused on the pre-adolescent phase. Pre-adolescence is the stage where children are between childhood and adolescence and roughly between the ages of 10 and 15 years (De Klerk & Le Roux, 2004:23; Preadolescence, 2008; Wikipedia, sv 'Preadolescence'). Pre-adolescent children have a cognitive understanding of the world and of consequences for their actions. They are in a conflict of finding independence as well as belonging.

The pre-adolescent child needs to fulfil certain tasks and aspects related to this life stage in order to successfully move to the next developmental phase. Amongst these tasks are future planning, assertiveness and identity forming, role experimentation and accomplishments due to confidence (Saunders, 1996:7). The pre-adolescent finds himself/herself in a 'battle' between independence from his/her parents and acceptance from peers. The child can become subjected to negative peer influences and engage in negative activities, such as disruptive negative attention-seeking behaviours in order to experience a feeling of belonging. Due to the pre-adolescent's need for belonging, his/her self-esteem and formation thereof can be vulnerable to peer- and social interactions. When a pre-adolescent has a positive learning environment at home he/she can safely express himself/herself, has the support to realise his/her talents and receive the stimulation for optimal growth. If the pre-adolescent child does not have such an environment or a stable neighbourhood and role-models, his/her interpretations of experiences can result in disruptive and complex emotions.

Aggression and conduct problems result after a progression of experiences (Pettit *et al.*, 2001:305). Socio-economic problems and experiences are external influences which impact a child's behaviour. Poverty and living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood can



result in considerable limitations in resources and environmental options. Families can also have numerous problems that can cause stress and, therefore negatively affect the process of learning as well as lead to the development of emotional and behavioural problems. Divorce can also have adverse effects on a child, especially when the relationship between the parents is irrevocably strained and conflict continues long after the divorce has been finalised (Porter, 2003:180).

Child maltreatment and abuse occurs when a child's physical or emotional needs have been neglected or when a child has been physically, verbally, emotionally or sexually abused. Children can often be exposed to more than one type of abuse or maltreatment and this can be extremely damaging to the child's development. The child can act out in numerous ways, depending on the socio-economic circumstances, the onset and the intensity of the exposure to circumstances or experiences.

### **5.3.2. Conclusions**

- If one does not know which part of a child's environment is contributing to his/her behaviour, it is impossible to resolve the problem.
- People involved in the child's life, whether they are professional or merely a caring party, must try to understand the reasons for the behaviour in order to address the problem and minimise the negative behaviour.
- It has become evident that more and more behavioural problems are merely the visible tip of a much larger problem of disaffection where the child may act out his/her feelings.
- Problematic behaviour must be addressed as early as possible as the behaviour might intensify as the child gets older.
- Predisposing genetic factors can be the reason for a child's behavioural expression, but environmental factors increase the risk of displaying problematic behaviours.
- The developmental phase which the child is in can influence the behaviour of a child.
- Peers become increasingly important to the pre-adolescent child and therefore the pre-adolescent will look to their peers rather than to their parents where behaviour is concerned.
- The pre-adolescent still relies heavily on his/her family domain as he/she tries to establish an identity profile.



- Pre-adolescents are vulnerable if the needed amount of attention is given to the child. When a child is neglected or rejected at home, he/she will desire acceptance and belonging mostly from negative peer groups.
- Problems within the family setting, school setting or community can induce anxiety and distress and lead to behavioural problems.
- Poverty and disadvantaged neighbourhoods provide for stressors and other problems relating to living in these circumstances which are the actual influences that impact on children.
- Family problems such as negative parenting, divorce, single parenting, death, abuse and maltreatment all influence children adversely.
- Behaviour due to negative socio-economic factors can be seen as a reaction to experiencing tension or because negative reactions to these factors are all that the child has been exposed to.
- Children may form harmful attachments to others, display few emotional coping strategies and be unable to regulate aggression and aggressive feelings due to the lack of stable role-models and abuse.

#### **5.4. CHAPTER THREE: BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS AND ACTING-OUT BEHAVIOUR**

##### **5.4.1. Summary**

Chapter 3 presented the second part of the theoretical context of the study. The chapter was entitled 'behavioural problems and acting-out behaviour.' The researcher identified various theories on behaviour and thereafter concentrated on behavioural problems and acting-out behaviour.

Children that have been identified as hard to manage or assessed with behavioural problems at the age of three years were discovered to be more likely to present with conduct problems in middle childhood.

Various theories on behaviour have been developed. The behavioural theory states that all behaviour is learned and occurs as a response to positive or negative reinforces that can either encourage or discourage the repetition of behaviour. Modelling is a key technique in reinforcing certain behaviours (Cooper, 2000:50). The psychodynamic theory believes that the child's current intra-psychological processes can at best be





understood together with early; and mental processes. The systems theory was derived from the belief that each individual is part of various systems and each system's interaction with the individual will have an effect on the individual as a whole (Zeitlin & Refaat, 2000:73). The social groupings theory believes that there is always a scapegoat for a group's problems where all the attention is thrown on the individual instead of focusing on the real issues (Cooper, 2000:53). In this group the child will ultimately not receive support from the group and the issue will not be resolved. The social learning and operant conditioning theory also sees behaviour as learned, but mainly through observation and exposure to behaviour, such as aggression. The lifespan developmental approach emphasises the individual's interaction with his/her social environment and how the environment can shape the individual's behaviour in four different ways: passive, evocative, reactive and active. The mediational family model is concerned with the parent psychopathology that is an underlying risk and related to other contextual risk factors influencing negative behaviour (Capaldi & Shortt, 2003:474).

This chapter also focused on problematic behaviour, specifically acting-out behaviour. Problematic behaviour is behaviour that is distracting; behaviour needing attention and intervention, and behaviour that can cause harm (Acting Up, Acting Out..., 2008). Behavioural problems need to be attended to as early as possible as it casts shadows into adulthood. It was seen that heredity, environment, circumstances, and the temperament of the child all influence the child's behaviour. Behavioural problems such as oppositional defiant behaviour, aggressive behaviour, conduct disorder and ADHD were individually discussed, as these types of behaviour can be linked to characteristics of acting-out behaviour.

Acting-out behaviour's main significance is the cause of the behaviour. This negative behaviour displayed by a child is always due to a traumatic or negative experience and is considered a problem when the behaviour has been going on for a period of time (Montgomery, 2000:163). The behaviour is usually a signal of distress but the problem is not necessarily evident anymore.

The family is the child's first model of behaviour and therefore a very important system in the child's life. Problems within the family can therefore have a major negative effect on the child. The school is the second most important system in the pre-adolescent's life.



The child can therefore feel neglected, isolated, and alienated from family, others, the world and the self and adopt negative behaviour as a coping mechanism or assume irrational beliefs about him/herself (Messina & Messina, 2007; Acting out, 2002).

There are various methods that can aid in decreasing the acting-out behaviour, but also various methods that may only increase the behaviour and therefore, the child must be dealt with as a system, as a whole functioning in other systems (Gericke, 1998:44, 45).

#### **5.4.2. Conclusions**

- Predisposing factors are linked with the development of behavioural problems.
- Children with behavioural problems often come from family systems that are stressed, disorganised or disrupted, but very often the only visible part of the problem is the child's behaviour and not the problem in itself, which could easily have been the family system.
- When a child's behaviour is analysed, all factors, especially the child's personality, vulnerability and circumstances need to be taken into account.
- There are various theories concerning behaviour and its origins. According to most of the theorists behaviour can be learned, is dependent on the influence of environments and/or systems and can be reactions to certain experiences or developments in a child's life.
- Behavioural problems need to be addressed as early as possible as they tend to cast shadows into adulthood.
- Behavioural problems develop over time and have various onsets or causes. The intensity and destructiveness of the behavioural problems also varies.
- Behaviour develops as a result of the interaction between the child and his/her environment. A child's heredity, temperament, environment and experiences all have effects on the displays of behaviour.
- Parents, teachers and other adults in the child's life need to provide acceptance, emotional safety and confidence to the child.
- Marital discord and violence create distress amongst children.
- When the pre-adolescent does not experience safety at home as well as in the school system, he/she will struggle to form a congruent identity, a healthy sense of self and will tend to form irrational beliefs about himself/herself.
- Negative behaviour displayed by the pre-adolescent child is often brushed-off as rebellion rather than giving attention to and finding the real cause of the behaviour.



- Acting-out behaviour is behaviour in reaction to emotions he/she is unable to otherwise express due to emotional or socio-economic problems.
- The emotional and behavioural difficulty of acting-out behaviour becomes apparent once the behaviour has become a persistent pattern across a range of subjects and activities (Montgomery, 2000:163).
- Acting-out behaviour is a commonly misunderstood and misaddressed behaviour problem that may, if poorly addressed, become worse as the emotions and motivation for the behaviour are kept hidden and the child becomes characterised as a problem child.
- When one looks at the behaviour displayed by the child, it is important to look at the developmental phase of the child, the child's family life and the child's physical well-being.
- Parents and teachers are key role-players in diminishing the negative acting-out behaviour displayed by the pre-adolescent child.
- Acting-out behaviour includes lying, hitting, screaming, being disruptive, withdrawal, bullying, attention-seeking and other behaviours due to underlying feelings, and are merely defence mechanisms utilised by the child in order to survive situations.

## **5.5. CHAPTER FOUR: EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS**

### **5.5.1. Summary**

This chapter outlined the research methodology and most importantly, the actual findings of the research study. The conducting of a pilot study, together with giving attention to ethical issues guided the researcher's planning and implementation of the study. The respondents' rights and preferences were respected and communicated to them accordingly. The sample consisted of seventy respondents of which sixty respondents were learners between grades 5 and 7, and ten respondents were educators at two primary schools. The quantitative method of surveying questionnaires in group settings was utilised to obtain the valuable data. The researcher presented the findings according to the themes and sub-themes evident to her from the questions formulated, as well as resulting from the process of data analysis.

The researcher was interested in the understanding of the respondents regarding the key concepts: pre-adolescence, acting-out behaviour and the educators' and learners' perceptions on these concepts.

The concept 'pre-adolescence' was focused on, as the learner respondents were in the pre-adolescent stage. The concept pre-adolescence was also considered to be of importance as a child's developmental stage and its tasks and demands influence a child's development and ultimately the child's behaviour. The pre-adolescent's social functioning, relationships and developmental aspects were ranked according to their importance by the learner and educator respondents. Social interactions and relationships were deemed as of high importance to the pre-adolescent child.

The researcher thereafter focused on behaviour in general. The respondents indicated their reasons for negative behaviour displayed by children as well as their impressions of the origin of the behaviour. The respondents indicated that they perceived behaviour to be learned rather than children being born with certain behavioural tendencies. Circumstances and experiences play major roles in the learning and inheriting of behaviour. The family system is also the most important system in the pre-adolescent's life and primary model for behaviour.

The respondents indicated that acting-out behaviour is problematic behaviour that they are either exposed to or display on a daily basis due to traumatic experiences. Even though the respondents indicated their familiarity with the behaviour, the term "acting-out" did not appear to be that familiar to them. Traumatic circumstances were seen to have an effect on a child's emotional disposition and consequently influence their behavioural responses to these experiences.

The displaying of acting-out behaviour by males and females can vary in the types of behaviour displayed, but the respondents remained unanimous in their views that both genders would display some sort of acting-out behaviour, whilst the views of the educators and learners differed on the ages when acting-out behaviour would be most evident. The pre-adolescent stage was a prominent, and therefore a valuable stage for exploring acting-out behaviour and its occurrence.

Traumatic circumstances, such as child abuse have detrimental effects on the pre-adolescent child and his/her sense of self, causing the pre-adolescent child to feel insignificant and believe distorted truths about the self. Aggression in children and



bullying behaviour are types of : to unhealthy personal relations or other personal experiences.

The respondents indicated characteristics of acting-out behaviour, as well as identified intervention strategies that will address the acting-out behaviour effectively and strategies that will only do more harm. From the data that was gathered and analysed, certain types of behaviours and interventions stood out and will therefore be formulated as some of the most important conclusions of the study on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour, as perceived by educators and pre-adolescent children.

### 5.5.2. Conclusions

- The family system is the most important system in the pre-adolescent's life, followed by his/her friends. The child's schoolwork, talents and abilities and own identity follows after that. This indicates that social interactions and personal relationships are the basis on which the child builds himself/herself and subsequently realises the sense of self.
- The child will mostly act out in order to seek attention, whether it is negative or positive attention.
- Discipline must be practiced by the family system in order for the child to accept and acknowledge discipline at school.
- Parents still have the greatest influence on pre-adolescent children, even though peers may be perceived to be the most important influence in a pre-adolescent's life.
- The mere fact that a child has been adopted or has been placed in foster care does not mean that that child will necessarily act out. The acting-out behaviour depends on other factors that accompany the event in the child's life.
- Both genders display acting-out behaviour equally. The educator respondents stated that boys would tend to act out more than girls, while the learners stated that it is merely the type of behaviour that may differ, causing the males' behaviour to be more visible.
- The behaviour types that were perceived to be definite behaviour types displayed when acting-out, are: lying, swearing, aggressiveness, hitting and kicking, badmouthing others, poor school marks, bullying and seeking attention.
- Emotional problems are indisputably linked to acting-out behaviour.
- Parental conflict causes more aggression in children than any other circumstances. Divorce was seen as the second highest event/circumstance causing aggression in a



child. Parental conflict and the two traumatic circumstances that would almost always cause a child to act out in certain ways.

- It seems that there is always a reason for the behaviour displayed by the child, be it emotional problems, modelling (role-model or peers) or parental influence.
- The respondents were not really familiar with the term “acting-out”, even though they were familiar with the type of behaviour displayed.
- Poverty and the neighbourhood the child lives in do not predispose the child to acting-out behaviour as such, and therefore it seems that the factors that are linked to these circumstances, such as scarce resources and stress, impact the family system and consequently the child’s emotions and behaviour.
- Academic problems can either be the cause of acting-out behaviour or be a type of acting-out behaviour.
- The majority of acting-out behaviour is perceived to be observed from pre-adolescent stage to high school years.
- Poor social skills and adaptive behaviour determine the child’s vulnerability and tendency to act out as a means of dealing with a traumatic situation.
- Media versus personal contact and experiences: It seems as if personal contact and relationships have a greater effect on the child’s emotions and behaviours than media influences.

### **5.5.3. Recommendations**

The following recommendations are directed at teachers, parents and helping professionals:

- Intervention strategies such as giving attention, support, listening to a child, giving advise to a child, and being consistent with rules, should be followed as a means of attending to the acting-out behaviour. Group work can also be utilised according to the learner respondents.
- Shouting, physical punishment, name-calling and criticising, as well as ignoring the child will not be effective as a means of intervention.
- Education in terms of therapy, group work and relaxation techniques should be provided to learners, educators and families in order to extend the support to the child with acting-out behaviour.
- Parents’ involvement in the child’s life and in the intervention process is extremely important.



- Parental training must be given to parents on acting-out behaviour and relationships, as well as dealing with a child with acting-out behaviour.
- Systems in school environment must be “user-friendly” for children with all types of behaviours. There must also be an interdisciplinary approach in intervention strategies in the school system (such as social services, psychological services, occupational therapy) so as to be an expansion of a safe and supportive foundation for the child.
- Educate school systems and communities on acting-out behaviour.
- Discipline must first be taught by the family, thereafter the discipline displayed by the educators must be congruent to that of the family system, but most importantly a supporting relationship between parents and teachers must be established.
- Role-models are essential, and therefore if the child does not have any positive and constructive role-models at home, he/she must be able to model the behaviour of another adult as a role-model figure.
- Prevention of negative social exchanges may prevent increases in conduct problems.

The following recommendations are suggested as areas for further research:

- Research must be done on acting-out behaviour specifically when the child has been or is continually exposed to parental conflict and divorce.
- Qualitative studies on intervention strategies with regard to acting-out behaviour can enrich literature and knowledge on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.
- The impact of group work on acting-out behaviour can be researched, as well as the effect of family therapy in dealing with acting-out behaviour. A study comparing these interventions can be undertaken.
- The educators’ and parents’ experiences with regard to dealing with a child with acting-out behaviour, how they can be of support to the child and understanding the acting-out behaviour displayed by the child, can be researched to enhance understanding of this phenomenon.

## **5.6. EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question for this study was: What are the perceptions of pre-adolescent children and educators with regard to the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour?



The researcher believes that the perceptions of learners and educators were the question through the provision of the perceptions of learners and educators on the various aspects of acting-out behaviour. The perspectives obtained from the learners and educators provided a more definite take on what acting-out behaviour is and what it entails, what characteristics can be linked to this phenomenon and how to manage and intervene when a child acts out, from the perspective of learners and educators.

## 5.7. ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.

Table 3 focuses on how the above goal and objectives of the study were accomplished.

**Table 3: Accomplishment of study objectives**

Nr.	Objective	Objective achievement
1.	To conceptualise theoretically the social phenomenon of acting-out behaviour in children within the pre-adolescent developmental stage.	This objective was achieved as reflected in the discussion presented in chapter 2 and chapter 3.
2.	To conduct empirical research to explore the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour	This objective was accomplished successfully through a detailed discussion in chapter 4 of the quantitative findings on the perceptions of educators and pre-adolescents on the phenomenon of acting-out behaviour.
3.	To draw conclusions and make recommendations, based on research findings regarding acting-out behaviour, and suggest possible intervention strategies to enhance positive social behaviour of pre-adolescent children.	This objective was achieved through a summarised presentation of findings, conclusions and recommendations in chapter 5.





Predisposing genetic factors are important, but factors such as hereditary factors, socio-economic factors and traumatic experience and emotions plays a role in the child's behaviour and can increase the risk of displaying problematic behaviour. Children can also be exposed to multiple forms of abuse simultaneously, causing the acting-out behaviour to intensify. The child is at the centre of a series of systems, such as family, school, friends and society, of which he/she forms a part on a daily basis. The child has interactions with and is affected by these systems. Behaviour thus develops as a result of the interaction between the child and his/her environment. Acting-out behaviour is problematic as it tends to become visible as persistent patterns in the problematic behaviour when the origin of the displayed behaviour has not been addressed.

When a child reaches the pre-adolescent stage, he/she can be overwhelmed by the demands of the new developmental stage. As the child interacts in the school and peer settings, the behaviour of the pre-adolescent can be observed as rebellion while it may only be the child's emotional confusion. The overall results indicated the importance of the family system and its influence on the child's development, and therefore insecure attachments with parents can lead to the child feeling that he/she has no self-worth, causing the child to seek attention and be disruptive. The lower the child's sense of self, the more vulnerable the child will be and the more disruptive the behaviour of the child might be. The child will ultimately also be vulnerable in believing false truths about himself/herself due to experiencing these perceptions from others. Children, especially pre-adolescents need true and positive role-models, especially as identity development and developing into healthy adults are essential goals for successful progression through childhood stages.

The challenging behaviour of the child is merely the tip of the ice-berg in terms of the problems the child is experiencing. Children rarely make direct requests for help themselves; their cry for help is very often by means of their disturbed behaviour. Parental conflict is the predominant factor causing distress and acting-out behaviour in children, and children's acting-out behaviour is mostly evident from the pre-adolescent stage onwards. If no proper intervention has been followed to tend to the problem behind the acting-out behaviour, this behaviour might expand in its intensity and destructiveness the older the child becomes. Paying attention to a child can affect the child's behaviour



and is therefore ultimately imposed on to, and is cued into a child's needs, the child will learn to trust the caregiver and develop confidence in the care and involvement. This could lead to a decrease in acting-out in his/her behaviour. Acting-out behaviour is an extremely relevant phenomenon that needs to be addressed by all adults involved in the child's life, as well as by professionals involved with the pre-adolescent.

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# ADDENDUM A

VRAELYS: SKOLIERE

“DIE PERSEPSIES VAN ONDERWYSERS EN PRE-ADOLESENTE KINDERS OOR DIE  
VERSKYNSEL VAN UITREAGERENDE GEDRAG”

Baie dankie dat jy ingestem het om deel te neem. Jou antwoorde is baie belangrik.

Antwoord asseblief al die vrae en vul dit in so goed soos jy kan. Al die inligting wat jy gee sal vertroulik hanteer word.

Instruksies:

- Lees elke vraag baie goed deur voordat jy dit antwoord.
- Antwoord elke vraag; moet asseblief niks oop los nie.
- Maak 'n kruisie in die blokkies of skryf die antwoord neer op die lyntjies.

Hierdie vraelys gaan oor uitreagerende gedrag en alle aspekte rondom dit.

*Uitreagerende gedrag is gedrag wat nie aanvaarbaar is nie, maar waar die kind hom of haar gedra op sekere onaanvaarbare maniere omdat iets sleg en pynvol met hom of haar gebeur het en die kind nie weet hoe om die gevoelens en seer te hanteer nie.*

Blaai om en deel jou “expert” kennis.



**AFDELING A**

1. Is jy 'n meisie of 'n seun? (Merk met 'n **X**)

Meisie  Seun

V1

2. Wat is jou rasgroep? (Merk met 'n **X**)

Swart  Wit  Indiër  Bruin

V2

3. Hoe oud is jy? (Merk met 'n **X**)

10  11  12  13  14

V3

4. In watter graad is jy hierdie jaar? (Merk met 'n **X**)

Graad 5  Graad 6  Graad 7

V4

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**AFDELING B**

5. Hoekom dink jy is kinders stout?

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---

---

V5



6. Waar sal jy sê leer 'n mens gedra (orde: **1** die grootste rede, en **6** die kleinste rede). **Voorbeeld:**

<b>Ek kyk graag televisie</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Ek luister graag musiek</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>WAAR MENS GEDRAG KAN AANLEER</b>	<b>Meeste na minste</b>
Mens leer gedrag by jou vriende	
Mens leer gedrag by jou ouers	
Mens leer gedrag deur die televisie	
Mens leer gedrag deur "tv games" of rekenaar speletjies	
Mens leer om aan te hou met gedrag na 'n slegte of goeie reaksie van ander mense af.	
Mens leer gedrag as gevolg van iets wat met jou gebeur het.	

V6

V7

V8

V9

V10

V11

7. Lys wat vir 'n kind tussen Gr 5 en Gr 7 die belangrikste is. (Rangskik in volgorde: **1** die grootste rede, en **5** die kleinste rede).

<b>BELANGRIKE ASPEKTE IN 'N KIND SE LEWE</b>	<b>Meeste na minste</b>
Vriende	
Ouers en familie	
Skoolwerk	
Talente en goed in sport en/of kultuur	
Eie identiteit	

V12

V13

V14

V15

V16





8. Wat sal jy sê beteken “**uitreagere**”

V17

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9. Kinders is stout vir verskillende redes. Hier onder is ‘n tabel waar jy met ‘n **X** merk hoe gereeld jy dink is die ‘redes vir stout wees’ die oorsaak van slegte gedrag. As jy byvoorbeeld dink dat die meeste van die kere is kinders sommer net stout, merk daardie blokkie met ‘n **X**. Gee ‘n antwoord by al die ‘reds vir stout wees’.

REDES VIR STOUT WEES	NOOIT	SOMTYDS	GEWOONLIK	MEESTE KERE	ALTYD
Sommer net					
Gaan sleg met kind					
Soek aandag					
Is so gebore					
Is so grootgemaak					
Probeer soos jou rolmodel wees.					

V18

V19

V20

V21

V22

10. Kinders kan stout wees oor dinge wat sleg gaan in hulle lewens. Wanneer sal jy sê sal kinders stout wees as dinge sleg gaan? As...

OMSTANDIGHEDE	NOOIT	SOMTYDS	GEWOONLIK	MEESTE KERE	ALTYD
Ouers skei					
Ouers baklei					
Iemand gaan dood					
Gesin is baie arm					
Woon in slegte area					
Groepsdruk					
Akademiese probleme					

V23

V24

V25

V26

V27

V28

V29



Word geboelie					
Kind word mishandel					
Ouer word mishandel					
Ouers gee nie om oor kind nie.					
Kind kry nie aanvaarding nie.					
Kind is aangeneem/ bly by ander mense					

V30

V31

V32

V33

V34

V35

11. Wanneer 'n kind slegte gedrag openbaar omdat dit sleg gaan met hom/haar, watter tipe gedrag sal jy sê sal die kind openbaar. (Merk die wat jy dink met 'n **X** in die blokkie langs aan die gedrag. Jy kan meer as 1 kies).

Steel		Aggressief		Maak grappe	
Lieg		Vloek		Rebelleer	
Maak geraas		"Witbroodjie"		Skop en slaan	
Oor-vriendelik		Verniel goed.		Sê ander sleg	
Soek aandag		Boelie ander		Lae selfbeeld	
Huilerig		Baie onnet		Baie stil, praat nie	
Maak jouself seer		Swak skool punte		Is groot-praterig	

V36  v37  v38

V39  v40  v41

V42  v43  v44

V45  v46  v47

V48  v49  v50

V51  v52  v53

V54  v55  v56

12. Noem 3 tipes gedrag wat jy dink kinders meestal sal wys as dit sleg gaan met hulle (dit kan van die tipes wees hier bo en tipes wat nie genoem is nie).

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V57

13. Voltooi die volgende sinne.

'n Kind reageer uit met slegte gedrag as \_\_\_\_\_

'n Kind kan baie aggressie hê as sy/haar ouers \_\_\_\_\_

---

V58

V59

V60



'n Kind kan goed glo wat nie waar is oor hulle \_\_\_\_\_

V61

'n Kind wat geïgnoreer word of afgeskeep word voel \_\_\_\_\_

V62

'n Kind wat ander boelie voel dalk \_\_\_\_\_

V63

'n Kind wat mishandel word voel dalk \_\_\_\_\_

14. Wat kan mens doen om uitreagerende gedrag beter te maak? (Merk met **X**).

GEDRAG HANTEER	NOOIT NIE	DALK	GOED	BETER	BESTE
Pak slae en raas kry					
Beloning vir goeie gedrag					
Ouers tegnieke leer					
Terapie met hele gesin					
Aandag gee aan 'n kind					
Kritiseer, name noem					
Raad gee vir die kind					
Skree op die kind					
Reëls gee en daarby hou					
Ondersteun die kind					
Luister na die kind					
Ignoreer die kind					
Leer ander gedrag aan					
Ontspanningstegnieke					
Groepwerk					

V64

V65

V66

V67

V68

V69

V70

V71

V72

V73

V74

V75

V76

V77

V78

Ander maniere wat kan werk:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

V79

Maniere wat nie sal werk nie:



---

---

V80

15. Merk die 1 blokkie wat jy dink reg is met 'n **X**:

Meisies sal die ergste uitreageer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seuns sal die ergste uitreageer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meisies en seuns reageer ewe veel uit	<input type="checkbox"/>

V81

16. Watter ouderdom sal kinders se uitreagerende gedrag die ergste wees?

Voorskool  Gr.1 tot Gr.3  Gr.4 tot Gr. 5  Gr.6 tot Gr.7   
Hoërskool

V82

Wat dink jy is die rede(s) hiervoor? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

V83

**BAIE DANKIE VIR JOU ANTWOORDE EN JOU TYD. JOU ANTWOORDE  
IS BAIE BELANGRIK EN WAARDEVOL.**



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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

# **ADDENDUM B**

VRAELYS: ONDERWYSERS

“DIE PERSEPSIES VAN ONDERWYSERS EN PRE-ADOLESENTE KINDERS TEN OPSIGTE VAN DIE VERSKYNSEL VAN UITREAGERENDE GEDRAG”

Baie dankie dat u ingestem het om aan die studie deel te neem. U antwoorde is baie waardevol.

Antwoord asseblief al die vrae en vul dit in so goed soos u kan. Al die inligting wat u gee sal konfidensieël hanteer word.

Instruksies:

- Lees elke vraag noukeurig deur voordat u antwoord.
- Beantwoord elke vraag
- Maak 'n kruisie in die blokkies of skryf die antwoord neer.

Hierdie vraelys handel oor uitreagerende gedrag en alle aspekte rondom dit.

*Uitreagerende gedrag is: gedrag wat nie sosiaal aanvaarbaar is nie, maar wat deur die kind getoon word as gevolg van 'n onvermoë om sy/haar gevoelens te verbaliseer na die belewing van traumatiese ervarings.*

Blaai om en deel u “expert” kennis.



**AFDELING A**

1. Is u manlik of vroulik? (Merk met 'n **X**)

Vroulik  Manlik

V1

2. Wat is u ras groep? (Merk met 'n **X**)

Swart  Wit  Indiër  Bruin

V2

3. Wat is u ouderdom? (Merk met 'n **X**)

20 tot 25  26-30  31-40  Ouer as 40

V3

4. Vir watter graadgroep gee u klas? (Merk met 'n **X**)

Graad 5  Graad 6  Graad 7

V4

Graad1 tot 3  Graad 4

---

**AFDELING B**

5. Wat dink u is die rede dat kinders "stout" is?

---

---

---

V5



6. Waar sal u sê leer 'n mens gedrag (Volgorde: **1** die grootste rede, en **6** die kleinste rede). **Voorbeeld:**

<b>Ek kyk graag televisie</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Ek luister graag musiek</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>WAAR MENS GEDRAG KAN AANLEER</b>	<b>Meeste na minste</b>
Mens leer gedrag by jou vriende	
Mens leer gedrag by jou ouers	
Mens leer gedrag deur die televisie	
Mens leer gedrag deur "tv games" of rekenaar speletjies	
Mens leer om aan te hou met gedrag na 'n slegte of goeie reaksie van ander mense af.	
Mens leer gedrag as gevolg van iets wat met jou gebeur het.	

V6

V7

V8

V9

V10

V11

7. Lys wat vir 'n kind tussen Gr 5 en Gr 7 die belangrikste is. (Rangskik in volgorde: **1** die grootste rede, en **5** die kleinste rede).

<b>BELANGRIKE ASPEKTE IN 'N KIND SE LEWE</b>	<b>Meeste na minste</b>
Vriende	
Ouers en familie	
Skoolwerk	
Talente en goed in sport en/of kultuur	
Eie identiteit	

V12

V13

V14

V15

V16





8. Wat sal u sê beteken “**uitreagere**”

V17

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---



---

9. Kinders is stout vir verskillende redes. Hier onder is ‘n tabel waar u met ‘n **X** merk hoe gereeld u dink die gelyste redes die oorsaak van slegte gedrag is. As u byvoorbeeld dink dat die meeste van die kere is kinders stout vir geen rede, merk daardie blokkie met ‘n **X**.

REDES VIR STOUT WEES	NOOIT	SOMTYDS	GEWOONLIK	MEESTE KERE	ALTYD
Sommer net					
Gaan sleg met kind					
Soek aandag					
Is so gebore					
Is so grootgemaak					
Probeer soos sy/haar rolmodel wees.					

V18

V19

V20

V21

V22

10. Kinders kan stout wees as gevolg van traumatise ervarings. Wanneer sal u sê sal kinders uitreageer? As...

OMSTANDIGHEDDE	NOOIT	SOMTYDS	GEWOONLIK	MEESTE KERE	ALTYD
Ouers skei					
Ouers baklei					
Iemand gaan dood					
Gesin is baie arm					
Bly in slegte area					
Groepsdruk					
Akademiese probleme					
Word geboelie					
Kind word mishandel					

V23

V24

V25

V26

V27

V28

V29

V30

V31



Ouer word mishandel					
Ouers gee nie om vir kind nie.					
Kind kry nie aanvaarding nie.					
Kind is aangeneem/ woon by ander mense					

V32

V33

V34

V35

11. Wanneer 'n kind slegte gedrag openbaar omdat dit sleg gaan met hom/haar, watter tipe gedrag sal u sê sal die kind openbaar. (Merk die wat u dink met 'n **X** in die blokkie langs aan die gedrag. U kan meer as 1 kies).

Steel		Aggressief		Maak grappe	
Lieg		Vloek		Rebelleer	
Maak geraas		"Witbroodjie"		Skop en slaan	
Oor-vriendelik		Verniel goed.		Sê ander sleg	
Soek aandag		Boelie ander		Lae selfbeeld	
Huilerig		Baie onnet		Baie stil, praat nie	
Maak jouself seer		Swak skool punte		Is Groot-praterig	

V36  v37  v38

V39  v40  v41

V42  v43  v44

V45  v46  v47

V48  v49  v50

V51  v52  v53

V54  v55  v56

12. Noem 3 tipes gedrag wat u dink kinders meestal sal toon as dit sleg gaan met hulle (dit kan van die tipes wees hier bo en tipes wat nie genoem is nie).

V57

---



---

13. Voltooi die volgende sinne.

'n Kind reageer uit met slegte gedrag as \_\_\_\_\_

V58

'n Kind kan baie aggressie hê as sy/haar ouers \_\_\_\_\_

V59

---



'n Kind kan wanpersepsies oor homself/r \_\_\_\_\_

V60

'n Kind wat geïgnoreer word of afgeskeep word voel \_\_\_\_\_

V61

'n Kind wat ander boelie voel dalk \_\_\_\_\_

V62

'n Kind wat mishandel word voel dalk \_\_\_\_\_

V63

14. Hoe kan uitreagerende gedrag aangespreek word? (Merk met **X**).

GEDRAG HANTEER	NOOIT NIE	DALK	GOED	BETER	BESTE
Pak slae en raas.					
Beloningstelsel vir goeie gedrag					
Ouers tegnieke leer					
Terapie met gesin					
Aandag gee aan 'n kind					
Kritiseer, name noem					
Raad gee vir die kind					
Skree op die kind					
Reëls gee en daarby hou					
Ondersteun die kind					
Luister na die kind					
Ignoreer die kind					
Leer ander gedrag aan					
Ontspanningstegnieke					
Groepwerk					

V64

V65

V66

V67

V68

V69

V70

V71

V72

V73

V74

V75

V76

V77

V78

Ander maniere wat kan werk:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

V79

Maniere wat nie sal werk nie:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

V80



15. Merk die 1 blokkie wat u dink reg

Meisies sal die ergste uitreageer	
Seuns sal die ergste uitreageer	
Meisies en seuns reageer ewe veel uit	

V81

16. Tydens watter ouderdom sal kinders se uitreagerende gedrag die ergste wees?

V82

Voorskool  Gr.1tot Gr.3  Gr.4 tot Gr. 5  Gr.6 tot Gr.7

Hoërskool

Wat dink u is die rede(s) hiervoor? \_\_\_\_\_

V83

**BAIE DANKIE VIR U ANTWOORDE EN U TYD. U ANTWOORDE IS BAIE**

**BELANGRIK EN WAARDEVOL.**



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# **ADDENDUM C**



UMnyango WezeMfundo  
Department of Education

Lefapha la Thuto  
Departement van Onderwys

Enquiries : Shadrack Phele MIRMSA

Tel. No. : [+2711] 355 0285

Tuesday, 14 October 2008

Mrs. Kotze Sulindi  
PO Box 13514  
SINOVILLE  
0129

Dear Mrs. Kotze Sulindi

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: PROJECT

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

Topic of research : "The perceptions of educators and pre-adolescent children on the phenomenon of Acting-Out Behaviour."

Nature of qualification : MSD Play Therapy [Humanities].

Name of institution : University of Pretoria.

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

The Department wishes you success in your academic pursuit.

Yours in Tirisano,

p.p. Shadrack Phele [MIRMSA]

TOM WASPE

CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

Gauteng Department of Education





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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

# **ADDENDUM D**

Serissa weg 354  
Sinoville  
0129  
1 September 2008

Die Skoolhoof  
Laerskool Die Poort

### **SULINDI KOTZE NAVORSINGSTUDIE (MSD SPELTERAPIE, UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA): AANSOEK OM TOEGANG TOT LAERSKOOLO DIE POORT**

Geagte Mnr Pienaar

Die ondergetekende is 'n meestersgraad-student aan die Universiteit van Pretoria en is tans besig met haar navorsingskripsie in Speltherapie. Vir die doeleindes van haar navorsingstudie benodig sy die deelname van kinders uit twee laerskole. Daar is op u skool besluit aangesien u skool in die navorser se omliggende area gevestig is. Vervolgens verskaf ek inligting ten opsigte van die studie. Daar is 'n gedeelte waar u u ingeligte toestemming tot toegang tot u skool kan voorsien.

#### 1. TITEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Persepsies van onderwysers en pre-adolesente kinders rakende die fenomeen van uitreagerende gedrag (Acting-Out behaviour).

#### 2. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Die doel van hierdie studie is om te bepaal wat pre-adolesente en hul onderwysers se sieninge is oor uitreagerende gedrag, wat die oorsaak, voorkoms en behandeling daarvoor is, aangesien kinders en onderwysers binne die skoolmilieu baie blootgestel word aan hierdie tipe gedragsverskynsel. Daar is min literatuur wat spesifiek oor uitreagerende gedrag handel, en dus kan deelnemers bydra tot 'n beter begrip van die tipe gedrag en hoe om dit te benader.

#### 3. PROSEDURES

Die navorser sal tien leerlinge uit elke graad (graad 5- graad 7) selekteer om vraelyste in te vul. Vyf onderwysers sal ook geselekteer word om die vraelyste te voltooi. Die vraelyste sal ingevul word gedurende een tydgleuf, sodat skoolure nie ontwig word nie. Die vraelyste sal handel oor alle aspekte rondom "uitreagerende gedrag" waar die





deelnemers hul sieninge sal neerskryf om sekerheid ook die term te definieër. Die navorser sal beskikbaar wees indien iets onduidelik is vir die deelnemers.

#### 4. MOONTLIKE ONGEMAKLIKHEID

Sommige van die vrae mag lyk asof dit op die kind van toepassing kan wees of gevoelig kan wees, maar sal verduidelik word as vrae in die algemeen wat al die kinders moet beantwoord en glad nie sinspeel op enige kind nie. Indien enige van die kinders ongemaklik voel, sal die navorser, wat 'n gekwalifiseerde maatskaplike werker is, daar wees om met hom/haar te praat om die ongemak te verlig.

#### 5. VOORDELE

Daar sal geen direkte voordele vir enige deelnemer wees nie. Die resultate van die studie mag wel professionele persone en ouers help om "uitreagerende gedrag" te verstaan en te hanteer. Elke deelnemende skool sal na afloop van die navorsing studie 'n afskrif van die navorsingskripsie ontvang.

#### 6. KONFIDENSIALITEIT

Geen identifiserende besonderhede sal op die vraelyste verskyn nie, of bekend gemaak word nie. Die identifiserende besonderhede van al die deelnemers sal slegs bekend wees aan die navorser. Geen deelnemer se naam sal in die skripsie of enige ander publikasie verskyn nie. Die navorsingsdata sal veilig bewaar word vir 15 jaar vir argief doeleindes.

Vir enige vrae kan u Sulindi Kotze kontak by 079 490 8396.

*Hiermee gee ek, hoof van Laerskool Die Poort, toestemming dat die navorsingstudie van me Kotze by Laerskool Die Poort gedoen mag word.*

Hoof se handtekening

08 - 09 - 08

Datum

Navorser se handtekening

8/09/08

Datum

Supervisor se handtekening

8/9/2008

Datum



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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

# ADDENDUM E



## ADDENDUM E

NAVORSER: SULINDI KOTZE, MSD SPELTERAPIE, UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA,  
LYNNWOODWEG, PRETORIA.

Deelnemer naam:	
Datum:	

### DEELNEMER SE INGELIGTE INSTEMMING TOT DIE NAVORSINGSTUDIE

#### 4. TITEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Persepsies van onderwysers en pre-adolessente kinders rakende die fenomeen van uitreagerende gedrag (Acting-Out behaviour).

#### 5. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Die doel van hierdie studie is om uit te vind wat pre-adolessente en hul onderwysers se sieninge is oor uitreagerende gedrag, wat die oorsaak, voorkoms en behandeling daarvoor is, aangesien kinders en skole baie blootgestel word daaraan. Daar is min literatuur wat spesifiek oor uitreagerende gedrag gaan, en dus kan deelnemers bydra tot 'n beter begrip van die tipe gedrag en hoe om dit te benader.

#### 6. PROSEDURES

Ek moet 'n vraelys invul vir Sulindi. Die vraelys gaan my help om my opinie en sieninge neer te skryf sonder dat ander kinders hoef te weet wat ek skryf, al is ek in dieselfde vertrek as ander kinders. As ek iets nie verstaan nie sal Sulindi ook by wees om my vrae te beantwoord.

#### 7. MOONTLIKE ONGEMAKLIKHEID

Ek verstaan dat sommige van die vrae mag lyk asof dit op my van toepassing is, maar dat dit net vrae in die algemeen is wat al die kinders moet beantwoord. Ek weet ook dat as ek ongemaklik voel, Sulindi daar sal wees om mee te praat.



## 8. VOORDELE

Ek verstaan dat deur my deelname aan hierdie studie ek ander kan help om “uitreagerende gedrag” beter te verstaan en te hanteer. Ek verstaan ook dat ek nie geld gaan kry deur deel te neem nie.

## 9. DEELNEMER SE REGTE

Ek het die reg om te weier om aan die navorsing deel te neem.

## 10. KONFIDENSIALITEIT

Ek verstaan dat my naam, my besonderhede, en ander inligting privaat gehou sal word. My naam of geen ander besonderhede van my gaan op die vraelys of in die navorsing gebruik word nie.

11. Vir enige vrae kan ek of my ouers vir Sulindi Kotze bel by 079 490 8396.

*Ek verstaan my regte as 'n navorsingsdeelnemer en ek stem vrywilliglik in om deel te neem aan die studie. Ek verstaan waaroor die studie gaan en hoe dit gedoen gaan word.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Deelnemer se handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Navorser se handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor se handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum



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# ADDENDUM F



## ADDENDUM F

NAVORSER: SULINDI KOTZE, MSD SPELTERAPIE, UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA,  
LYNNWOODWEG, PRETORIA.

Deelnemer naam:	
Datum:	

### OUER SE INGELIGTE TOESTEMMING TOT DIE NAVORSINGSTUDIE

#### 1. TITEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Persepsies van onderwysers en pre-adolessente kinders rakende die fenomeen van uitreagerende gedrag (Acting-Out behaviour).

#### 2. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Die doel van hierdie studie is om uit te vind wat pre-adolessente en hul onderwysers se siening is oor uitreagerende gedrag, wat die oorsaak, voorkoms en behandeling daarvoor is, aangesien kinders en skole baie blootgestel word daaraan. Daar is min literatuur wat spesifiek oor uitreagerende gedrag handel, en dus kan deelnemers bydra tot 'n beter begrip van die tipe gedrag en hoe om dit te benader.

#### 3. PROSEDURES

My/ons kind gaan 'n vraelys invul in groepsverband. Die vraelys gaan handel oor alle aspekte rondom "uitreagerende gedrag" waar my/ons kind sy/haar siening daarvoor gaan neerskryf om te help met die definieëring van die verskynsel. Die navorser sal beskikbaar wees indien iets onduidelik vir my/ons kind is.

#### 4. MOONTLIKE ONGEMAKLIKHEID

Ek/ons verstaan dat sommige van die vrae mag lyk asof dit op my/ons kind van toepassing kan wees of gevoelig kan wees, maar dat dit net vrae in die algemeen is wat al die kinders moet beantwoord en glad nie sinspeel op my/ons kind nie. Ek/ons weet ook dat as my/ons kind ongemaklik voel, die navorser, wat 'n gekwalifiseerde maatskaplike werker daar sal wees om met hom/haar te praat om die ongemak te verlig.

5. VOORDELE

Ek/ons verstaan dat daar nie direkte voordele verbonde sal wees aan die navorsing studie vir my/ons kind nie. Die resultate van die studie mag wel professionele persone en ouers help om “uitreagerende gedrag” te verstaan en te hanteer. Ek/ons verstaan ook dat nie ek/ons of ons kind enige finansiële gewin vanuit die studies al verkry nie.

6. DEELNEMER SE REGTE

Ek/ons het die reg om my/ons kind te onttrek van die studie en verstaan dat daar geen negatiewe gevolge sal wees weens onttrekking nie.

7. KONFIDENSIALITEIT

Ek/ons verstaan dat geen identifiserende besonderhede op die vraelyste sal verskyn nie, of bekend gemaak sal word nie. Die identifiserende besonderhede van al die deelnemers sal slegs bekend wees aan die navorser. My/ons kind se naam sal nie in die mini-skripsie of enige ander publikasie verskyn nie. Die navorsingsdata sal veilig bewaar word vir 15 jaar vir argief doeleindes.

8. Vir enige vrae kan ek/ons vir Sulindi Kotze kontak by 079 490 8396.

*Ek/ons verstaan myons regte as ouer/s van 'n navorsingsdeelnemer en ek/ons gee vrywilliglik toestemming dat my/ons kind kan deelneem aan die studie. Ek verstaan waaroor die studie gaan en hoe dit gedoen gaan word.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ouer/Voog se handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Navorser se handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor se handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

# **ADDENDUM G**





## ADDENDUM G

NAVORSER: SULINDI KOTZE, MSD SPELTERAPIE, UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA,  
LYNNWOODWEG, PRETORIA.

Deelnemer naam:	
Datum:	

### DEELNEMER SE INGELIGTE INSTEMMING TOT DIE NAVORSINGSTUDIE

#### 1. TITEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Persepsies van onderwysers en pre-adolessente kinders rakende die fenomeen van uitreagerende gedrag (Acting-Out behaviour).

#### 2. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Die doel van hierdie studie is om uit te vind wat pre-adolessente en hul onderwysers se siening is oor uitreagerende gedrag, wat die oorsaak, voorkoms en behandeling daarvoor is, aangesien kinders en skole baie blootgestel word daaraan. Daar is min literatuur wat spesifiek oor uitreagerende gedrag gaan, en dus kan deelnemers bydra tot 'n beter begrip van die tipe gedrag en hoe om dit te benader.

#### 3. PROSEDURES

Ek as onderwyser gaan 'n vraelys invul in groepsverband. Die vraelys gaan handel oor alle aspekte rondom "uitreagerende gedrag" waar ek as onderwyser my ervaring en observasie van hierdie gedrag gaan deel. Ek weet ook dat die navorser beskikbaar sal wees om onduidelikhede uit te stryk.

#### 4. MOONTLIKE ONGEMAKLIKHEID

Ek verstaan dat sommige van die vrae mag lyk asof dit op 'n spesifieke kind/my kind/ my as onderwyser van toepassing is, maar dat dit net vrae in die algemeen is wat al die respondente moet beantwoord. Ek weet ook dat as ek ongemaklik voel, die navorser daar sal wees om mee te praat.



5. VOORDELE

Ek verstaan dat daar nie direkte voordele verbonde sal wees aan die navorsing studie vir my as persoon nie. Die resultate van die studie mag wel professionele persone en ouers help om “uitreagerende gedrag” te verstaan en te hanteer. Ek verstaan ook dat ek geen finansiële gewin vanuit die studies al verkry nie.

6. DEELNEMER SE REGTE

Ek het die reg om te onttrek van die studie en verstaan dat daar geen negatiewe gevolge sal wees weens onttrekking nie.

7. KONFIDENSIALITEIT

Ek verstaan dat geen identifiserende besonderhede op die vraelyste sal verskyn nie, of bekend gemaak sal word nie. Die identifiserende besonderhede van al die deelnemers sal slegs bekend wees aan die navorser. My naam sal nie in die mini-skripsie of enige ander publikasie verskyn nie. Die navorsingsdata sal veilig bewaar word vir 15 jaar vir argief doeleindes.

8. Vir enige vrae kan ek vir Sulindi Kotze kontak by 079 490 8396.

*Ek verstaan my regte as 'n navorsingsdeelnemer en ek stem vrywilliglik in om deel te neem aan die studie. Ek verstaan waaroor die studie gaan en hoe dit gedoen gaan word.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Deelnemer se handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Navorser se handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor se handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum