Young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during adolescence

by

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The author, whose name appear on the title page of this mini-dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval (18122401 (HUM053/0619).

The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

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ABSTRACT

Young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during adolescence

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South Africa as a country has a long-standing history of violence since the apartheid years. Violence continues to wreak havoc in communities, affects people of all ages, and is especially prevalent in the poorer communities. Community violence typically includes murder, assault, car hijackings, robberies, and violent protests. People can be exposed to community violence in different ways, namely through victimisation or being a victim of violence, and through witnessing violent events or hearing about it from others. All types of community violence exposure can have harmful effects and cause a lot of suffering physically, emotionally, socially, psychologically as well as economically. These effects are both short-term and long-term.

Adolescents are at risk of exposure to community violence because they become less dependent on parents and spend more time in the community. The high prevalence and extreme nature of violence in South Africa can be a threat to their well-being and development. Gestalt theory, the theoretical framework for the study, explains that exposure to harmful environments can harm the adolescents' ability for self-regulation and effective functioning. To gain more insight into the phenomenon, the aim of this study was to explore young adults' perceptions of community violence that they experienced during adolescence. The study formed part of a group research project, in which individual researchers conducted studies in different geographical areas in South Africa.

With interpretivism as a research paradigm, a qualitative research approach and an instrumental case study design, in-depth information was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with the use of an interview schedule. The study was based on applied research as the intention was that the research findings would be utilised in social work practice. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit 10 participants who were young adults between the ages of 20 and 25 years living in Kempton Park and its surrounding neighbourhoods in Gauteng province, and who had been exposed to community violence during their adolescent years. Themes and sub-themes in the data were identified by means of thematic data analysis.

The research findings show that the participants have been directly and indirectly exposed to different types of community violence, either by being a victim, by witnessing incidents of community violence in person or on social media and television, or by hearing about it from others. All the participants experienced negative effects because of their exposure, for example fearfulness, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), limitations on their free movement in the community, and effects on their school attendance. Furthermore, two often-found reactions, namely desensitisation and the normalisation of community violence, occurred. Distrust in others and in the police and conflict in the family were examples of the effects on families and the community. The effects of the participants' exposure to community violence tended to last into their young adult years.

It is concluded that the high prevalence of community violence in South Africa poses a significant risk to adolescents' physical and mental health and their successful functioning. Because these effects hamper their ability for self-regulation, exposure to community violence can have severe short- and long-term consequences for adolescents. Community violence also affect families and entire communities.

It is recommended that social workers as well as other persons in the helping professions gain knowledge of the phenomenon of community violence and address it holistically by focusing on preventive and supportive services to individuals, families, schools, and communities affected by community violence. Further research on different elements of the topic, for example on perpetrators of community violence, can contribute to knowledge that can inform effective service delivery.

Key concepts:

Community violence
Types of community violence
Effects of community violence
Risk and protective factors in community violence
Exposure to community violence

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a country that faces many types of violence and political struggles and many young people in the country are exposed to violence in their everyday lives (Du Plessis, Kaminer, Hardy & Benjamin, 2015:81; Kaminer, Hardy, Heath, Mosdell & Bawa, 2013a:322; Savahl, Isaacs, Adams, Carels & September, 2013:579). Violence affects people from different age groups, social and economic groups and cultures and is a common occurrence in people's homes, schools and communities (Malherbe & Häefele, 2017:108). Community violence is one of the forms of violence that people are exposed to. South Africa is known as a country in which community violence is widespread (Donenberg, Naidoo, Kendall, Emerson, Ward, Kagee, Simbayi, Vermaak, North, Mthembu & Mackesy-Amiti, 2020:145).

Community violence are acts of violence of a physical nature that occur in a community context, thus in the neighbourhoods where people live (Louw & Louw, 2014a:420; Visser, Coetzee & Claassen, 2016:279). People can be exposed to community violence in three main ways, which are described as the types of exposure to community violence: victimisation, witnessing community violence and hearing about community violence (Buka, Stichick, Birdthisle & Earlset, 2001 in Fowler, Tomsett, Braciszewski, Jaccques-Tiura & Baltes, 2009:229; Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014:74). *Victimisation* occurs when the person is a victim of acts of community violence, for example being threatened, robbed or beaten up (Fowler et al., 2009:229). *Witnessing community violence* refers to an eyewitness of violent acts in the community, whereas *hearing about community violence* refers to hearing about someone else who has been a victim of community violence (Fowler et al., 2009:229; Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014:74).

A distinction is made between a narrow and broad definition of community violence (Louw & Louw, 2014a:420-421). A a narrow definition of community violence focuses on acts of violence that occur in the community, but excludes violence in the home, at schools or shown in the media. The narrow definition also refers to community violence acts that are continuous and long-lasting. The broad definition of community violence includes acts of violence in the community, in schools, homes and in the media. In terms of duration, the broad definition includes events of community violence that occur over a short- or long-term (Louw & Louw, 2014a:420-421).

The focus of this study was on elements from both the above definitions, thus on acts of violence that occurred in the wider community and in schools, on university campuses, and

shown on social media. However, bullying at schools as a specific form of violence, was not included in the scope of the study. Furthermore, the study focused on exposure to single as well as long-term incidents of community violence. The study focused on the effects of exposure to community violence on adolescents.

Exposure to community violence results in harmful effects for children and adolescents. The neurological, physical, emotional, cognitive and social effects of exposure to community violence affects their functioning and results in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and emotional and behavioural problems (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Guerra & Dierkhising, 2011:2; Kaminer et al., 2013a:320). These effects are seen to be influenced by aspects such as the type of exposure to community violence, the proximity to the violent events, the involvement of familiar or unfamiliar persons, and single or continued exposure (Fowler et al, 2009:227; Zinzow, Ruggiero, Resnick, Hanson, Smith, Saunders & Kilpatrick, 2009:447). There is general concern that exposure to community violence can lead to a normalisation of violence as a way to solve problems and/or to desensitisation or blunting of emotions (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Mash & Wolfe, 2016:301; Savahl et al., 2013:589).

There are several risk factors that increase a person's susceptibility to exposure to community violence. The risk factors relate to characteristics of the individual, the family and the community (Chen, 2010:412). Community violence is, for example, known to be more prevalent in communities with high poverty and unemployment rates and illegal drug use (Collings, 2015:36; Van der Merwe, Dawes & Ward, 2013:77). In families, conflict within the family, the parent-child relationship and the behaviour modelled by parents are examples of risk factors for children's exposure to community violence (Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl & Moylan, 2008:94; Kelly, 2010:69; Thirion, 2007:180).

Of importance to this study, is that adolescents are more susceptible to exposure to community violence. Developmental aspects such as becoming less dependent on their parents, spending more time in the community, adolescent impulsivity, and peer group pressure can increase adolescents' exposure to community violence (Donenberg et al., 2020:146; Lambert, Nylund-Gibson, Copeland-Linder & Ialongo, 2010:291; Louw & Louw, 2014b:364). Several South African studies confirm the high levels of exposure of adolescents to community violence (*cf.* Collings, 2015; Kaminer et al., 2013a; Otwombe, Dietrich, Sikkema, Coetzee, Hopkins, Laher & Gray, 2015:2; Richter, Mathews, Kagura & Nonterah, 2018). The consequences of the extensive exposure of adolescents to community violence is therefore a public concern in the country (Donenberg et al., 2020:149).

The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of adolescents' exposure to community violence. For this purpose, information was collected from young adults on their

perceptions of community violence experienced during their adolescent years. The study formed part of a group research project, in which individual researchers conducted studies in different geographical areas in South Africa. The research findings may be used by social workers and other professionals in providing services to adolescents who are exposed to community violence.

1.2 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following concepts apply to this study:

Community violence: Community violence is a form of interpersonal violence, thus violence towards individuals known or not known to one another that takes place outside the home (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:6). Violence refers to "psychological and physical harm perpetrated against another person or group" (Lutya, 2013:239). Community violence occurs in a community or geographical area and is experienced either as a victim or witness of the violent acts (Visser et al., 2016:4; Louw & Louw, 2014a:420; Savahl et al., 2013:579).

Exposure to community violence: Exposure to community violence refers to the direct or indirect experiencing of violent acts in the community (Fowler et al., 2009:229). The exposure occurs mainly in three ways, namely victimisation or being a victim of community violence, witnessing or hearing about acts of community violence (Fowler et al., 2009:229; Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014:74). Exposure to community violence can also occur through observing it on social media (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2009:299). This study focused on community violence as experienced or observed in the community or observed in images on television or social media but excludes violence in the home and bullying in schools.

Young adult: Bonnie, Stroud and Breiner (2015:xv) describe young adulthood as the life stage between the ages of 18 and 26 years. Arnett (2016:27) indicates that it is difficult to demarcate young adulthood as cultural differences occur in defining young adulthood or emerging adulthood. The stage of young adulthood is therefore not always indicated by a specific age, but it is generally accepted in developed countries that this stage lasts "from the late teens through the twenties" (Arnett, 2016:27). The participants in this study were young adults between the ages of 20 and 25 years.

Adolescence: Adolescence refers to the life stage between the ages of approximately 12 and 18 years and is described as the transition from childhood to adulthood (Louw & Louw, 2014b:303-304). Thirion (2007:180) refers to the stage as being characterised by biological and social transition. Adolescence involves rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial change. Developmental tasks during this stage relate to the achievement of autonomy from the family, the formation of a personal identity as well as the development of personal goals and a

personal value system (Berk, 2013:6; Louw & Louw, 2014b:304; 343, 379).

Perceptions: Perception is defined as "a process by which individuals organise and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment" (Dhingra & Dhingra, 2011:63). The APA Dictionary of Psychology (American Psychological Association) defines perception as follows:

> the process or result of becoming aware of objects, relationships, and events by means of the senses, which includes such activities as recognizing, observing, and discriminating. These activities enable organisms to organize and interpret the stimuli received into meaningful knowledge and to act in a coordinated manner.

Based on the above definitions, perceptions in this study refer to the way in which young adults perceive, organise, interpret, and give meaning to acts of community violence that they were exposed to during adolescence.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gestalt theory, developed by Fritz Perls (1893-1970), formed the theoretical framework for the study. *Awareness* is a core concept of Gestalt theory, according to which people's perceptions and experience of their reality are emphasised; leading to the notion that people cannot be understood apart from their environment (Corey, 2013:194). The interdependence of the person and environment is explained by the concept *holism*, which is a fundamental principle of Gestalt theory (Blom, 2006:22). Holism implies that a person is an entity both within the self and within the environment. People's body, emotions, spirituality, language, thoughts, memories, and behaviour are inseparable, and what happens in one aspect, will affect the other aspects. Furthermore, people need the environment to satisfy their needs and can therefore not survive without the environment (Blom, 2006:22; Corey, 2013:196-197).

Gestalt theory adopts a positive view of people as always being in a process of growth and rediscovering themselves and having the capacity to do so by means of self-regulation (Corey, 2013:194; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:216). *Self-regulation* refers to the process of meeting one's needs (Corey, 2013:197). The process involves that people first become aware of their needs (awareness) and then make *contact* by means of the full use of their senses, emotions, language, and movement to satisfy their needs (Blom, 2006:23; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:218). Effective contact and self-regulation enable people to identify and satisfy their needs, reach homeostasis, and adjust to their environment (Corey, 2013:197, 199). A person will continuously experience physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual needs which cause discomfort until contact is made to satisfy the needs and homeostasis is achieved. People satisfy their needs both from within the self and from the

environment (Blom, 2006:24). Therefore, self-regulation relies on the person's full awareness of and contact with the self and the environment (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:217-218).

People's ability for self-regulation will depend on their own capacities as well as on the availability of resources in their environment (Corey, 2013:197). Non-supportive environments will hamper people's capacity for self-regulation and thus their ability to function as a holistic entity (Blom, 2006:24). Community violence has a significant effect on the community, resulting in concerns over community members' safety and well-being (Kelly, 2010:68). From a Gestalt theoretical perspective, the negative effects of community violence on the living environment will negatively affect people's ability for self-regulation. The literature confirms that community violence negatively affects people's psychosocial adjustment (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Louw & Louw, 2014a:422; Savahl et al., 2013:589).

According to Gestalt theory, people can suppress contact-making to cope with negative experiences and environments (Corey, 2013:199). The interruption to contact is referred to as a *contact boundary disturbance*, which leads to a lack of awareness and contact and, as a result, the inability to effectively self-regulate and meet one's needs (Blom, 2006:31). The various contact boundary disturbances, each with a different manifestation, include introjection, retroflection, deflection, projection, confluence, desensitisation, and egotism (Blom, 2006:32-39; Corey, 2013:199-200). As the theoretical framework for the study, Gestalt theory forms the background against which the effects of community violence may be understood.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RATIONALE

Community violence involves events that are traumatic in nature and is aptly described by Lane, Rubinstein, Bergen-Cico, Jennings-Bey, Fish, Larsen, Fullilove, Schimpff, Ducre and Robinson (2017:447) as "neighbourhood trauma due to violence." Exposure to community violence has been found to have severe effects on children's and adolescents' psychological health, both in the short-term and over the long-term (Zinzow et al., 2009:447). Although reactions to exposure to community violence differ from person to person, exposure poses risks to adolescents' neurological, physical, emotional, and social development (Chen, 2010:403; Guerra & Dierkhising, 2011:2; Kelly, 2010:69). Children and adolescents who have been exposed to community violence are prone to experience psychosocial problems such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, aggressive and anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, poor academic performance and involvement with high-risk groups and gangs (Kaminer et al., 2013a:320, 327; Louw & Louw, 2014a:421; Savahl et al., 2013:582). The Gestalt principle of holism highlights the potentially wide-ranging influence of exposure to community violence in that the effects of the exposure on one aspect of a person's functioning, for example physical

safety, could extend to other aspects of his or her functioning, for example academic performance (Corey, 2013:196).

Violence against children is pervasive in South Africa and hampers their ability to develop to their full potential (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014:26). The country is furthermore characterised by extensive occurrences of community violence (Kaminer et al., 2013a:321). Violence occurs among all socio-economic groups and cultures but has been found to be more prevalent in low-income and poverty-stricken communities (Hertweck, Zielger & Logsdon., 2010:202; Kaminer et al., 2013a:326; Malherbe & Häefele, 2017:108). Large numbers of children and adolescents in South Africa grow up in violent environments where they are exposed to violence in their everyday life (Kaminer et al., 2013a:321; Savahl et al., 2013:579). Adolescents are considered as an age group that are at higher risk of exposure to community violence because of an increase in risk-taking behaviour as well as greater involvement with the peer group and engagement in the community (Mahlangu, Gevers & De Lannoy, 2014:73).

Apart from the harmful psychosocial effects of exposure to community violence, concerns are raised over the effects of continuous exposure to community violence on children's views of and reactions to it. Research provides evidence that constant exposure to community violence result in children and adolescents becoming desensitised towards violence and normalising violence as part of life and as a way of solving problems (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013:7; Mash & Wolfe, 2016:301; Savahl et al., 2013:589).

Similar to the Gestalt concept of holism, the profession of social work aims to bring about social change by focussing on the person, the environment, and the interaction between them (Patel, 2015:127). Social workers can therefore be key role players in addressing the problem of community violence. The Framework for Social Welfare Services (Department of Social Development, 2013a:29-30) describes different levels of social work services, emphasising prevention and early intervention services to prevent the progression of social problems. Information on the way in which adolescents perceive community violence could support appropriate social work interventions for children, adolescents, families, and communities who experience the problem of community violence.

However, Mathews and Benvenuti (2014:26) state that in South Africa there is "a limited research base on the causes and effects of violence against children in the local context." A review of the literature showed that most studies on children's and adolescents' exposure to community violence in South Africa are based on quantitative research methods (*cf.* Donenberg et al., 2020; Du Plessis et al., 2015; Kaminer et al., 2013a; Kaminer, Du Plessis, Hardy & Benjamin, 2013b; Otwombe et al., 2015; Richter et al., 2018; Stansfeld, Rothon, Das-Munshi, Mathews, Adams, Clark & Lund, 2017; Sui, Massar, Ruiter & Reddy, 2020).

Qualitative studies were found that focused on the effects of community violence on children between the ages of eight and 13 years (Shields, Nadasen & Pierce, 2008) and on adolescents' experiences of domestic and community violence in Hillbrow, Johannesburg (Scorgie, Baron, Stadler, Venables, Brahmbhatt, Mmari & Delany-Moretlwe, 2017).

Following on the problem statement and rationale, the aim of the study was to explore how adolescents perceive community violence. Data were collected based on young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during adolescence. The research was guided by the following research question: *What are young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during their adolescent years?*

1.5 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore and describe young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during adolescence.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To theoretically conceptualise community violence and contextualise it within the South African context
- To explore and describe how participants were exposed to community violence during their adolescent years
- To explore and describe participants' perceptions of community violence as a phenomenon during their adolescent years
- To explore and describe participants' perceptions of the effects of community violence on them during their adolescent years
- To make recommendations for social workers who provide services to children, adolescents and families exposed to community violence.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher aimed to study young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during adolescence according to their personal constructions of the phenomenon. The research paradigm that informed the study was therefore interpretivism (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:60). The study was based on a qualitative research approach as the researcher aimed to gain first-hand information for understanding the participants' perceptions of community violence as experienced during adolescence (Fouché & Delport, 2011:63; Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:53). Applied research was regarded as an appropriate type of research for this study as the researcher was interested in collecting information that could be used by social workers in practice (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95; Jansen, 2016:9; Kumar, 2011:30). The purpose of the

research was exploratory, to explore the participants' perceptions, and descriptive, to describe their perceptions in the research report (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95-96).

The instrumental case study was seen as the most appropriate research design for this study as the researcher aimed to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of adolescents' exposure to community violence (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:321-322; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:82-83). The study population included young adults in Kempton Park, Gauteng, who have been exposed to community violence during adolescence (Strydom, 2011a:223). The researcher made use of purposive sampling with certain sampling criteria to recruit participants who would reflect the population to which the research findings would be relevant (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:164; Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2012:126). The researcher did not know the sampling criteria; thus, snowball sampling was further used to recruit 10 participants for the study sample (Strydom & Delport, 2011:393).

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were used for data collection so that the researcher could obtain rich, detailed information on the participants' perceptions of community violence as personally experienced by them (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:93). Interviews were conducted in English. A pilot study was conducted with one adolescent who met the terms stated in the sampling criteria and the information obtained was included in the research findings.

Data analysis was conducted by means of thematic analysis to identify recurring ideas and themes in the participants' responses, and strategies were implemented to enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015:223-224, 235; Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:410, 419). The researcher adhered to ethical research considerations, amongst others, avoidance of harm, voluntary participation and informed consent, upholding privacy and confidentiality, and no deception of participants (Bless et al., 2013:29-36).

A more detailed description of the research methodology and ethical considerations will be provided in Chapter 3.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations faced in this study are as follows:

- Because of the small sample size, the research findings cannot be generalised to the larger adolescent population within South Africa despite valuable information having been obtained.
- The study was conducted in a specific community, namely in Kempton Park in the Gauteng province. Communities differ in their characteristics and the research findings can therefore not be generalised to other communities in South Africa as they may experience

different levels and forms of community violence.

- There was not adequate racial and gender representation as the study participants were mostly African and only two of the participants were male.
- All the participants were residing in the same area (Kempton Park CBD and surrounding suburbs) which also does not adequately show different economic levels.

1.8 CONTENTS OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The research report is presented in the following chapters:

Chapter 1: General Introduction to the research report

In the first chapter the researcher provided a general introduction to the study. The chapter included a contextualisation of community violence and adolescence, a description of Gestalt theory as the theoretical framework of the study, the problem statement and rationale for the study, the goal and objectives of the study, and a summary of the research methodology. Limitations of the study were also identified.

Chapter 2: Community violence

Chapter 2 will contain an in-depth review of existing literature on community violence and the effects thereof, with reference to the adolescent life stage.

Chapter 3: Research methods, ethical considerations and empirical findings

The third chapter will contain a description of the research methods relevant to the study as well as the ethical considerations underlying the study. The empirical findings will also be presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations

Chapter 4 will provide an overview of the key findings of the study as well as the conclusions and recommendations based on these findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Every year, a considerable number of children experience exposure to violence in their schools, homes, and communities (Mrug & Windle, 2010:953). Exposure to community violence results in negative effects on children's physical, mental and emotional functioning and these effects can last into adulthood (Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, Hamby & Kracke, 2015:1).

In this chapter the researcher provides a literature review as background to the empirical findings of the study on the perspectives of young adults of their exposure to community violence during adolescence. The empirical findings will be discussed in Chapter 3. An overview of literature on community violence will be presented, including a conceptualisation of community violence, the prevalence thereof internationally and in South Africa, risks and protective factors that influences young people's susceptibility to exposure to community violence, the impact of community violence, and adolescence as the life stage relevant to this study.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

In this section, community violence will be conceptualised by first discussing violence in general. Thereafter, community violence will be defined and different types of exposure to community violence will be discussed.

2.2.1 Defining violence

Hamby (2017:167) states that numerous different, conflicting, and sometimes controversial definitions have been produced in research on violence. The author proposes that an accurate definition of violence must comprise of four elements, namely, it must be intentional, it must be unwanted, it must be nonessential and, finally, it must be harmful (Hamby, 2017:170). In support of Hamby's view, the World Health Organization (WHO) in the 2002 World report on violence and health (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:5) defines violence as the intentional use of physical power against oneself, another or against a group of people with the aim to harm physically or psychologically, or to kill. The authors mention violence as a universal challenge which threatens life in general and as a major cause of death, while causing many people worldwide to suffer from several other problems, including physical, sexual, mental as well as reproductive health problems (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:3).

There are many types of violence, inclusive of domestic, sexual, gender-based, school, gang-related, economic, cultural, political and community violence (Du Plessis et al., 2015; Louw & Louw, 2014a:421; Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:90). Ngqela and Lewis (2012:90) advise on the importance of understanding the different types of violence, because violence is often assumed to be a general problem in the community. The World Health Organization mentions three sub-types of violence based on the relationship between the individual exposed to violence and the person inflicting violence, namely, self-directed violence, collective violence, and interpersonal violence (Brankovic, 2019:2; Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:6).

Self-directed violence is described as violence towards the self, or self-abuse, in which the perpetrator becomes a victim of acts such as suicidal behaviour and self-mutilation, while **interpersonal violence** is a form of violence referring to violence between individuals (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:6). Interpersonal violence is divided into two forms, namely family and intimate partner violence and community violence. The first form of violence usually occurs in the home and entails family or domestic violence, inclusive of intimate partner violence and child and elderly abuse. On the other hand, community violence mostly takes place outside the home between people who are not related and who may or may not know one another (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:6). Visser et al. (2016:279) define community interpersonal violence as being physical in nature, often caused by strangers, taking place in the community, and causing injuries, death, or mental harm. Such violence can include assaults, vehicle hijacking, property crimes, shooting or murder (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:6; Visser et al., 2016:279).

The World Health Organization furthermore refers to **collective violence**, defined as a category of violence occurring within the community environment and which can be subdivided into social, political, and economic violence (Brankovic, 2019:2; Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:6). Collective violence is usually committed on the streets or in public spaces to advance the social agendas of larger groups of individuals, such as terrorists, confederations, political organisations, and military groups (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:6). From these definitions of violence, it can be deduced that community violence refers to a form of interpersonal violence, but also a form of collective violence.

2.2.2 Defining community violence

Community violence is a multifaceted phenomenon and, therefore, there is not a universal definition thereof (Louw & Louw, 2014a:420). Community violence is defined by Visser et al. (2016:279) as physical violent acts that are committed within the community context. There are different types of community violence, for example physical assault, shootings, gang violence, physical fights and attacks, murder, property crimes, vehicle hijackings; and young persons are often exposed to these types of violence in the community (Dahlberg & Krug,

2002:6; Kelly, 2010:61-62; Visser et al., 2016:279). Louw and Louw (2014a:420) emphasise that community violence are acts of violence that occur in the neighbourhood in which individuals and families live.

According to Louw and Louw (2014a:420-421), community violence can be defined by two definitions; a narrow or a broader definition based on the location and duration of the violence. The narrow definition in terms of *location*, refers to violent acts in public areas and committed by individuals not related to the person, for example riots, the use of weapons, violent crimes, conflict between gangs, and drug wars. The narrow definition of community violence excludes violence within the home, school, and social media. The broader definition of community violence refers to violence in public places in the community, but also includes violence in the home, school, and media. In terms of its *duration*, the narrow definition of community violence refers to chronic or long-lasting violence whilst the broader definition also refers to community violence which is short-term. However, no specific time frames or indications of exposure to single or multiple events are provided by either definition (Louw & Louw, 2014a:421).

In this study, the researcher focused on both the narrow and wider definitions of community violence, thus including acts of violence towards other persons and property within the larger community setting. Furthermore, the study focused on violence experienced in schools – however, excluding the phenomenon of bullying at schools – as well as on violence on university campuses and violence witnessed in the social media. In terms of its duration, the study included a focus on both long-term and short-term incidences of community violence

The researcher aimed to determine young adults' perceptions of community violence that they were exposed to during their adolescent years. In the literature, different types of exposure to community violence are described, which will be discussed next.

2.2.3 Types of exposure to community violence

Three subtypes of exposure to community violence are recognised, namely victimisation, witnessing community violence and hearing about community violence (Buka, Stichick, Birdthisle & Earlset, 2001 in Fowler et al., 2009:229; Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014:74; Lambert et al., 2010:290). The three sub-types are distinguished based on direct and indirect ways in which people are exposed to community violence.

Victimisation is seen as being exposed directly to community violence in that the person is the target of acts by another person with the intention to cause harm, for example by means of threats, robberies, shootings, stabbings, beatings, vehicle hijacking or exposure to other forms of assault (Fowler et al., 2009:229; Visser et al., 2016:4). Victimisation thus refers to direct exposure to community violence (Sui et al., 2020:2). Some children are victims of

multiple forms of abuse, for example of violence, crime, and abuse; a phenomenon that is referred to as poly-victimisation (Finkelhor, Turner, Hamby & Ormrod, 2011:1). The mentioned authors suggest that children who experience one type of victimisation are often at risk of experience other types of victimisation as well.

Indirect or vicarious exposure refers to witnessing and hearing about community violence. According to Fowler et al. (2009:229), **witnessing community violence** denotes "eye witnessing an event that involves loss of property, threat of physical injury, actual injury, or death." The prevalence of indirect exposure through witnessing community violence has generally increased due to the increase in the use of social media. Many adolescents observe in the media the unsafe and threatening neighbourhood that they live in (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2009:299). Dlamini, Malinga, Masiane and Tshiololi (2018:6) found in a study that they conducted for the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) that the student protests in South Africa received widespread social media coverage; however, the focus was more on the acts of violence and vandalism than on the social agenda of the protests. This example demonstrates the influence of social media on the increase in witnessing community violence.

Hearing about community violence refers to another form of indirect exposure when a person hears or learns about the victimisation of another person through community violence (Fowler et al., 2009:229). An example of hearing about community violence is when a person hears about someone known to him or her being the victim of a robbery or gang violence. Aisenberg and Herrenkohl (2009:301) describe hearing about community violence as more discrete events that are likely to have different effects to that of more direct exposure such as witnessing or being a victim of community violence. Although some authors suggest that hearing about community violence is less likely to have harmful effects than being victimised or witnessing community violence, Kennedy and Ceballo (20114:74) propose that hearing about community violence can have the same effects as other forms of exposure.

Following a review of several studies on the effects of community violence on children, Fowler et al. (2009:220) report that children's risk for experiencing the harmful effects of exposure to community violence increased the closer they were to a violent event. Therefore, direct exposure to community violence may result in more negative symptoms in children than indirect exposure to the violent events. The researcher believes that the different types of community violence are dynamic and influence each other.

2.3 THE PREVALENCE OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

Community violence is a phenomenon that is not only evident in South Africa but is experienced globally (Brown & Walklate, 2012:343). In 2000, for example, the World Health

Organization Report on Violence and Health estimated that self-directed, interpersonal, and collective violence claimed the lives of 1.6 million people worldwide (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:9). Also, there has been an increase in violent offenses against young people in recent years and it is common for them to be exposed to violence in their communities (Kelly, 2010:61). Ward et al. (2012:25) report that violence, in its different forms and types, is a huge challenge both nationally in South Africa as well as internationally.

2.3.1 International prevalence of community violence

International studies indicate the high prevalence of community violence in different countries. During the 49th World Health Assembly in 1996, violence was declared as a growing worldwide health challenge (Foster, 2013:25). Darawshy (2020:3409), referring to studies conducted in the USA, Europe, and South Africa, concludes that "[r]ates of exposure to CV is alarmingly high for youth in many countries." The high rates of exposure to community violence were also confirmed in Palestine, the country where Darawshy's study was conducted (Darawshy, 2020:3408).

In the United States, it was found that the exposure of children to community violence threatens their lives and well-being (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014:69). Children are witnessing a substantial amount of violence within their families and communities in addition to violence that is personally directed at them (Finkelhor et al., 2009:1411-1423). The findings of a study in the United States by Zinzow et al. (2009:446) indicate that at least two out of five adolescents have observed violence, with community violence being the type of violence most regularly witnessed. The findings of a study by McGill, Lai, Cowart-Osborne, Tiwari, LeBlanc and Kelly (2014:1) shows that American adolescents' exposure to violence within their homes and communities is regarded as a major health challenge, especially amongst those in the age group between 14 and 17 years. The World report on violence and health states that in 2000, death rates relating to violence in low to middle-income countries were higher than in high-income countries (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:10).

2.3.2 The prevalence of community violence in South Africa

Violence has been a problem in South Africa for a long time since the apartheid era up to the current time (Foster, 2013:23). According to Sahval et al. (2013:580), South Africa's history with socio-political struggles resulted in a society characterised by different forms of violent acts. The authors state that, although the 1994 independence came with decreased political violence, other violent practices are still a huge problem in South African communities and are perhaps on the increase. Brankovic (2019:2), with reference to the sub-groups of violence, namely, self-directed violence, collective violence, and interpersonal violence, highlights that "South Africa was consistently among the countries with the highest levels" of four forms of

interpersonal and collective violence, namely homicide, youth violence, gender-based and sexual violence, violence against children, and protest-related public violence. Exposure to violence is believed to be one of the worst challenges that children go through (Sahval et al., 2013:580).

A review of the literature on community violence in South Africa shows that high incidences of violence were prevalent in different South African communities and environments; these being the home, community, school, and within the peer group and intimate relationships. Local studies point to a significant prevalence of community violence in South African societies. Kaminer et al. (2013a:321) refer to a number of studies that hint that children who live in South Africa have for the most part grown up in violent environments, which differs from children of the same ages in the United States. Exposure to violence, crime and other forms of victimisation is widespread, with many of the country's children being exposed to more than one form of a violent act (Rasool, 2017:9113). On their website, SaferSpaces (2020) reports that high numbers of South African youths are repeatedly exposed to violence as victims and/or witnesses in places they reside, in their educational facilities, their communities, and also amongst their peers. Donenberg et al. (2020:145) confirm that community violence is widespread in South Africa, and that "polyvictimisation, the experience of multiple types of violence simultaneously, is normative in SA."

A longitudinal study by Richter et al. (2018:18) that followed the development of over 2 000 children and their families in Soweto, Johannesburg, over 27 years, show the high level of violence that children are exposed to, directly and indirectly, as either victims, perpetrators or as witnesses. The study explored the extent to which children are exposed to violence, which were grouped into six categories of violence. Key findings from this research revealed that whilst 36% of the children reported being victims of all six categories of violence, almost 100% have either witnessed or have been victims of violence in their home, school and/or within their community. Also, 66% of children of school-going age in the study were reported to have heard gunshots or seen someone being attacked. The number of incidents of witnessing community violence rose during their adolescence as well as during their young adulthood years.

In another study conducted at a public high school in Durban, KwaZulu Natal, by Collings (2015:33), 652 Grade 8 to 12 participants reported having been exposed to several types of interpersonal violence before they have reached the age of thirteen. The most common forms of exposure were reportedly witnessing community violence, being physically assaulted at home, sexual abuse, witnessing domestic violence and being physically assaulted by a

community member. These children thus experienced violence in their homes and in their communities.

Almost half of the children (aged 8 to 10 years) participating in a study in Cape Town indicated that they witnessed murder in their communities whereas 94% of adolescents (aged 14 to 21 years) have witnessed someone being beaten in their communities (Otwombe et al., 2015:2). Other studies in two South African communities found that high numbers of children have been exposed to exceptionally high levels of different kinds of violence as either a witness or victim of the violence (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Kaminer et al., 2013a:320). Claassen (2015 in Visser et al., 2016:280) states that South African adolescents in middle class communities experienced community interpersonal violence the most; however, other studies indicate a higher prevalence of community violence in low-income communities, as will be discussed later in this section.

South African crime statistics confirm the high prevalence of violence in the country. Crime statistics of 2016 show that an average of 51 murder cases, 142 sexual offenses cases and 452 common assault cases were recorded on a daily basis in South Africa (South African Police Service, 2016 in Sui, Massar, Kessels, Reddy, Ruiter & Sanders-Phillips, 2018:2). Statistics South Africa (2016:57) conducted a community survey in which it was found that 16.8% of households in the Western Cape, 9% in Gauteng and 7% in KwaZulu-Natal reported crime and violence in their respective communities as being their main challenge. To add to these findings, it was found that most of the South Africans who participated in the survey did not feel safe to walk in their neighbourhoods during the day or at night (Statistics South Africa, 2016:92). In the previously mentioned study in Soweto, it was found that almost a third of children in primary school were reported to have experienced violence, and that the level for adolescents being victims of violence reached a tremendous high rate of 96% (Richter et al., 2018:185).

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013) reported community violence as a serious challenge in South Africa, with huge percentages of youths reportedly having been exposed to this form of violence both direct and indirectly (Kaminer et al., 2013a:321). The most common type of violence experienced by young persons was community interpersonal violence which involves being either a victim of or experiencing violence, for example assault perpetrated by strangers, car hijackings, property damage, being shot at or murdered (Visser et al., 2016:180). Statistics South Africa (2017:28) indicate that due to high levels of deaths caused by crime and accidents, statistics on natural and non-natural deaths are indicated separately. They report that in South Africa "[g]enerally, population age groups massively affected by non-natural deaths are 15-19 (43,1%) and 20-24 (47,9%)" (Statistics South Africa,

2017:30). The report indicates that assault was the second most cause of non-natural deaths (Statistics South Africa, 2017:48).

Foster (2013:26, 32) highlights that the burden brought upon communities by violence fall mostly on the poor with the South African Police Service (SAPS) statistics showing year after year how violent crime predominantly takes place in either the Coloured townships that are poor or the marginalised Black areas. Children residing in communities facing extreme poverty are at higher risk of violence exposure (Hertweck et al., 2010:202). Kaminer et al. (2013a:326) state that community violence exposure seems to be a normal occurrence in Langa, a low-income Xhosa community in the Western Cape. Because violence is very common in South Africa, adolescents can be exposed to it directly or indirectly in their lives at home, school, community, as well as be subjected to violence driven by politics (Sui et al., 2018:6). In South African, boys are generally most affected by violence (Kaminer et al., 2013a:327).

Gangsterism in some communities is the cause of some of the most violent activities affecting the youth nationwide, but mainly in urban areas in South Africa such as Cape Town, where the gangs operate in especially violent ways, with illegal firearms being readily available to them (Donenberg et al., 2020:145; South African Cities Network, 2019:12). The government had to deploy the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in the Cape Flats, Cape Town, due to the upsurge of gangsterism in the area, as was reported on several news platforms on the 11th of July 2019 following an announcement by the police minister, Mr Bheki Cele (News24, 2019).

Political violence also seems to still be experienced by a considerable number of South Africa's people. Sui et al. (2018:17) found in their research that adolescents who were exposed to political violence, which included listening to the ill-treatment of people during Apartheid, experienced anxiety and hopelessness, indicating that Apartheid continued to have negative psychological effects on the youth. However, Sloane and Shechner (2009:280) report that findings on the effects of exposure to political violence on the youth remains inconclusive, ranging from minimal effects to severe impairment. In this regard, the authors state that "earlier assumptions of automatic dysfunction have been queried, with recent evidence of wide-ranging individual differences in response and confirmation of resilience factors promoting healthy development" (Sloane & Shechner, 2009:280).

Shields, Nadasen and Pierce (2009:1204) report that children in South Africa are often exposed to extreme forms of violence. As a result, violence is profoundly normalised among South African youths because they have partaken in violence related activities through politics, criminality, or gangs for a long period (Ward, Dawes & Matzopoulos, 2013:4-5). Normalisation of violence essentially stems from the high violence levels that are prevalent largely throughout

the country (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014:29; Van der Merwe, 2013:86; Ward et al., 2013:4-5). It is often difficult to outline the boundary between victims and perpetrators because many young persons have either been victims or perpetrators of violence. In a study by Richter et al. (2018:185) it was found that during their primary school years, sixty five percent of children were reported to present with violent behaviour, which rose to eighty nine percent during adolescence and eventually declined as they got older. Violence perpetration in the early adulthood stages was however worse than merely fighting others; it normally became as serious as gun or knife threats, domestic violence or even sexually harming someone (Richter et al., 2018:185).

A change has been noted from observing violence just as an individualised phenomenon to recognising the multifaceted social dynamics and circumstances in which violence takes place (Mahlangu et al., 2014:76). Kliewer, Pillay, Borre, Zaharakis, Drazdowski and Jäggi (2017:246) emphasise the need to consider the ecological context as well as report on the links between exposure to violence, parenting, and the use of illegal substances by the youth. As the youth is the future generation of the country, violence does not only affect them but affects the entire community (Selenga & Jooste, 2015:30). It is thus concerning that so many adolescents are experiencing physical and sexual violence in South Africa (Rasool, 2017:9117). Being exposed to and experiencing violence is pervasive in South African children's and young adults' lives, especially for those residing in crowded urban areas such as Soweto (Richter et al., 2018:185). The rate of violence in South Africa is disturbingly high, leading to significant public mental health challenges in the country (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:87). The impact of living in a violent environment on children can be explained by the concept 'holism' in Gestalt theory, which indicates that people should be understood within the context of their environment (Corey, 2013:194).

Children living in violence-prone communities and whose homes do not provide them with the necessary and consistent safety may develop other ways to cope as a daily survival mechanism. Besides these behaviours being dire for families, they carry high consequences for the society (Schiavone, 2009:101). Gestalt theory refers to such ineffective coping methods as contact boundary disturbances, which result in the inability for effective self-regulation and for effectively meeting one's needs (Blom, 2006:31; Corey, 2013:199-20).

2.4 YOUNG PEOPLE'S SUSCEPTIBILITY TO EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

South Africa is a member of regional and international conventions and also has a Constitution which repeals violence against children, as stipulated in Section 28 of the Constitution (Richter et al., 2018:181). To uphold this right, Mahlangu et al. (2014:76) state that "effective and lasting violence prevention and health promotion lies in understanding and responding to risk and

protective factors at multiple levels of the social-ecological model." Copeland-Linder, Lambert and Ialongo (2010:177) propose that protective factors can enhance adolescents' resilience amidst exposure to adverse circumstances by reducing risk of buffering them against the effects of risk factors. Risk and protective factors related to community violence exposure will be discussed below.

2.4.1 Risk factors related to exposure to community violence

Certain factors increase children's risk of being exposed to community violence. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the United States (SAMHSA, 2019:1) defines risk factors as "characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes." The various levels in which risk factors are found, are echoed by the theoretical framework for the study, namely Gestalt theory that emphasises the concept of holism. This concept emphasises that a person's ability to self-regulate, or function effectively, will depend on his or her own capacity as well as on the environment (Corey, 2013:197).

Van der Merwe and Dawes (2007) as quoted in Ngqela and Lewis (2012:90) report that there is a range of causes of violent and antisocial behaviour. Kelly (2010:67) supports the notion that different factors such as race, gender, living environment, and gang involvement influence adolescents' use of or intention to use violence. In agreement, Nicholson, Irwin and Dwivedi (2010:199) believe that children's susceptibility to engage in violent behaviour is dependent on multifaceted and reciprocal factors, namely inherited, parental and circumstantial factors. Numerous elements have time and again been established to be related to violence exposure and the impact thereof. The different elements have been grouped into three categories, namely individual, family and neighbourhood or community characteristics (Chen, 2010:412; Copeland-Linder et al., 2010:177).

2.4.1.1 Individual characteristics

Involvement in violence according to Ward and Ashley (2013:S43) is affected by different risk factors, as well as the timing, duration and the number of risk factors. These authors believe that earlier exposure means longer exposure with higher intensity and several more risk factors being involved. Some of the risks relating to an individual with regards to violence exposure and development of negative behavioural effects, include the age, gender, and race of the person (Chen, 2010:412).

Age is an individual characteristic that relates to susceptibility to violence. Different stages in a child's life are associated with exposure to different forms of violence (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014:28). Adolescence is a period of transition, biologically and socially (Thirion, 2007:180).

Donenberg et al. (2020:146) emphasise that adolescents need to master critical developmental tasks, such as emotional regulation, dealing with complex social situations, and managing changes in relationships with their parents and peers, which make them more vulnerable to the influence of community violence. Gouws, Kruger and Burger (2000 in Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:87) state that due to the nature of the teenage years, adolescents are regularly exposed to violent activities. After the age of 10, witnessing violence and indirect exposure to violence seem to increase strongly and concurrently, and exposure to one type of victimisation was often a good predictor that one would be exposed to other types, thus resulting in poly-victimisation (Finkelhor et al., 2009:1416).

Belonging to a **deviant peer group** was found to increase adolescents' risk of exposure to community violence (Lambert et al., 2010:291). Herrenkohl et al. (2008:94) confirm that "strong bonds of attachment to antisocial others, such as delinquent peers, will increase the likelihood of antisocial behaviour through further modelling and reinforcement of violence and other problem behaviours." Adolescent boys are at higher risk of being victims of violence in their community, especially in communities where the use of weapons is common (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014:29). Donenberg et al. (2020:145) point to the disproportionate prevalence of gang violence in the Western Cape Province. Kelly (2010:69) advised that it is necessary to conduct research that is specific to gang violence and how it affects adolescents and their mental health because of the increase in gang violence over the last several years.

Because of the **impulsivity** that often characterise their behaviours, the youth may behave in a hostile way without considering the consequences, which may put them at higher risk of involvement in violence, including victimisation and witnessing violence (Lambert et al., 2010:291). It is acknowledged by Bacchini, Miranda and Affuso (2011:281) that by embracing a rebellious approach to societal norms and regulations, many of Western societies' adolescents experience developmental challenges. Children with behaviour problems generally have challenges with handling emotionally unbearable situations as they grow up and it is important that they are assisted to develop a sense of reflection when facing emotionally demanding circumstances, which will help them react in socially acceptable ways instead (Nicholson et al., 2010:200). Peer-based violence is widespread within South African society and this reality cannot be ignored as it is the cause of much hurt and suffering to countless young people (Thirion, 2007:185-186). Donenberg et al. (2020:146) emphasise that negative influences by the peer group can increase adolescents' exposure to violence. This influence may be stronger for children who have a poor self-concept who find it difficult to make choices for themselves and say "No" to others (Oaklander, 2007:282).

Risks for being exposed to community violence during adolescence shows a strong link with **gender**. It has consistently been found that adolescent males are at higher risk of exposure to community violence than females because they generally spend more unsupervised time in the neighbourhood than adolescent girls (Lambert et al., 2010:291). Furthermore, boys appear to have been exposed to more severe types of violence than girls (Kaminer et al., 2013a:327), which could in some way reveal why males are more involved in gang-related activities. Mills, as quoted in Ngqela and Lewis (2012:94), state that many boys believe that being tough is what it is to be a man. Males will more likely be involved in rebellious activities than their female counterparts, with such behaviour in men thought to go against social values (Bacchini et al., 2011:283), which can increase their risk of exposure to violence in the community. Although it produces counteractive outcomes, boys' aggressive play towards girls is often regarded as ‘'normal" behaviour within a patriarchal society, and this behaviour is normalised and even encouraged (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:94). Young men will most likely be both victims of violence and inflict violence on other men, leading to injuries and death, whereas young females, on the other hand, will most likely be victimised by men sexually, often whilst dating, which is important to bear in mind as risks resultant of them being females (Mahlangu et al., 2014:73, 76). Cooper and Ward (2012:247) warn that although being a male is an implicit risk factor for involvement in gangs, one should guard against the assumption that females are not involved in gangs.

Substance abuse such as the use of alcohol and drugs becomes a huge contributing factor in young people either becoming victims or perpetrators of violence (Mahlangu et al., 2014:75). The use of alcohol can influence the daily experiences of young people in communities and their participation in violence (Kelly, 2010:67). Zinzow et al. (2009:425) report on the association they found between community violence and substance use, stating that victims who knew their perpetrators and violence taking place outside of educational facilities were often found to be related to substance abuse and delinquent adolescent behaviour.

Interestingly, scholars are attempting to understand violent conduct as being a **genetic** attribute (Nicholson et al., 2010:202). These authors suggest "that aggressive behaviour must be linked to chemical activity in the brain and to changes in the nervous system, suggesting that aggressive children seemed to consistently have lower mean resting heart rate and lower heart rate reactivity" (Nicholson et al., 2010:202-203). Venables (1988 in Nicholson et al., 2010:203) believes that there is an interaction between neurophysiological and psychosocial components, therefore, when an individual's autonomic activity is reduced, it makes the person courageous enough to take risks without considering the consequences.

2.4.1.2 Family characteristics

Child development occurring within a certain type of family plays an important role in influencing and shaping a person's interaction with other people within their families as well as in the community because this context shapes their psychosocial developmental outcomes, for example the formation of identity, assertiveness and self-concept (Idemudia & Makhubela, 2011:3448). Several risk factors in studies on youth violence have been found in the family, with dynamics such as how large the family is, the amount and level of family clashes, having children at a very young age, separation, and marriage annulments, remarrying, and poverty in the family being added stressors (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:69).

The **parent-child relationship** plays a significant role in children's exposure to community violence. The relationship between adolescents and their family seems to be a factor that influences their experiences with community violence, with children lacking a sense of belonging being more prone to joining gangs where they will find a sense of security and be part of a 'family' (Kelly, 2010:69). Voisin, Jenkins and Takahashi (2011:233) are of the view that weak social attachment with primary caregivers makes children more vulnerable to violence as they have no one to help them understand the dangers around them. Kelly (2010:69) expresses that parental awareness of violence in the community as well as the amount of conflict adolescents are exposed to within the family can influence adolescents' experiences of violence. When parents are not aware of community violence, their children are at risk because of their inability to provide support. Low parental monitoring therefore put adolescents at higher risk of exposure to violence in the community (Lambert et al., 2010:291). Unfortunately, with violence exposure comes several psychological and mental health problems and behaviour problems and when there is a lack of social support, there is a lower likelihood for helping adolescents to dissipate negative views and deal with problems (Kelly, 2010:69). Herrenkohl et al. (2008:94) point to how the parent-child relationship can either be too detached or too entangled, stating the following:

> a child who is disconnected from his or her family might also become depressed or withdrawn and socially isolated. Alternatively, a child could become bonded to a caregiver who directly models the use of violence, in which case the relationship would have a direct influence on the use of violence and other problems for the child.

It is apparent that the **views and behaviour that parents or adults model** have an immense effect on adolescents as the family is the socialising environment in which children learn the values and norms of society (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014:32; Thirion, 2007:180). Van der Merwe et al. (2013:71) state that criminal or illegal activities by a caregiver or sibling or by friends of a caregiver or sibling, which may also be violent in nature, are direct role-modelling

acts of deviant behaviour. Because modelling is a central learning process, Ngqela and Lewis (2012:90) assert that pro-violence parental attitudes and constant family clashes are risk factors for violent behaviour. The latter authors emphasise that adults showing violence as acceptable in solving problems normalises its use, which the researcher believes is in turn carried over into schools and peer groups by children. Positive parenting can serve as a model for adolescents that will prevent them from associating with high-risk peers (Donenberg et al., 2020:146).

Because of the influence of parental modelling, a strong influence on adolescents' exposure to violence is the amount of **conflict within the family**. The White Paper on Families in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2013b:3) distinguishes between healthy and dysfunctional families. It defines a dysfunctional family as **"**a family in which conflict, misbehaviour, neglect, or abuse occur continually or regularly" and a healthy family as "a family characterized by good interpersonal relations and good a state of physical, mental, and social well-being among all members." In a study on violence exposure of children in the USA, it was found that children were witnesses to a considerable amount of violence in their families in addition to what was directed at them personally (Finkelhor et al., 2009:1415). SaferSpaces (2021) proposes that young people who are vulnerable because of factors such as family breakdown, a lack of positive role models and a lack of secure attachments, are at risk of joining gangs.

Physical violence is prevalent in many South African homes. Leoschut and Burton (2009:2) highlight that there is a link between young people's exposure to family violence and them engaging in violent crimes, for example robbery and assault. The authors explain that "children and youth learn to be offenders when they are raised in environments surrounded by antisocial role models and point to the considerable influence that family environments have on subsequent child and adolescent behaviour" (Leoschut & Burton, 2009:2). Mathews and Benvenuti (2014:29) caution that the social acceptance or tolerance of violence in the home, such as corporal punishment and intimate partner violence, will result a rise in violence and in the intergenerational transmission thereof.

Physical punishment is commonly practiced as a discipline measure in South Africa (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014:28). In a study by Richter et al. (2018:185), more than half of all children were reportedly exposed to violence in their homes, with numbers rising from childhood to adolescence. Close to half of preschool children were reportedly victims of violence, often by means of being physically disciplined by their caregivers. Van der Merwe et al. (2013:70) found an unacceptably high prevalence of the use of physical punishment by South African parents. Until the recent Constitutional Court's ruling on the 18th of September

2019 against spanking children, punishing children physically was commonly used as a discipline measure in South Africa and almost 60% of parents reported that they hit their children mostly with a belt or with other objects (Richter et al., 2018:181).

Socio-economic stressors may affect a family's susceptibility to violence, with those in lower economic classes likely to experience greater challenges in this respect (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:69). The White Paper of Families in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2013b:5) notes that unemployment affects a family's standard of living. The availability of parents and consistency of parenting practices are negatively affected by financial stressors (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014:32).

2.4.1.3 Neighbourhood and community characteristics

Violence in communities can affect the nature of neighbourhoods. Safety is a great concern for young persons who experience community violence or gang related violence. In this respect, Kelly (2010:61, 68) expresses concern over adolescents' well-being because of the environment in which they reside and the violence they witness. As the youth venture outside their homes and families in search of peer connections, they become more exposed to and start experimenting with violence (Mahlangu et al., 2014:73).

Economic inequality and poverty in a neighbourhood is usually equated with community social disorganisation and violence, especially in a country where poverty is prominent together with huge unemployment rates (Donenberg et al., 2020:145; Van der Merwe et al., 2013:77). The White Paper on Families in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2013b:5) notes that a family's involvement in the labour market is influenced by the way a country's economy is structured, which largely determines the ability of such families to obtain a minimum wage, thereby affecting their standard of living. Recent studies have proved the unequal status amongst different races and economic classes which contributes to worsened disparities (Foster, 2013:23). With this disparity also comes the relationship between class and violence, with proof of violence being much higher in poorer or disadvantaged communities.

Socio-economic circumstances such as poverty in communities, overcrowding and limited resources are risk factors for community violence (Brankovic, 2019:3). Dissatisfaction with basic conditions often leads to riots which are almost always accompanied by violence (Furlong & Morrison, 2000 in Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:91). Van der Merwe (2013:66) explains this phenomenon as follows: "People resort to physical violence especially when they feel that other avenues for communicating their message have been blocked." Unfortunately, these events often result in further socio-economic challenges in the community (Quamina, 2016:5-6). However, it should be noted that an adolescent's status socially and economically does not

always indicate an adolescent's exposure to violence even though it may be an influential factor in one's use of violence (Kelly, 2010:67).

Another environmental aspect that plays an important role in exposure to community violence, is when violence is used as a **conflict resolution technique** in the community; a factor which in turn models and normalises violence in children (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2015:1815). Bennett-Johnson (2004) in Ngqela and Lewis (2012:91) report that persistent poverty, especially in black communities makes people easily susceptible to unemployment which results in most people in such areas being inactive economically for long lengths of time, or sometimes for an indefinite period. In these circumstances, violence is often seen as a necessary means to survive and to access basic necessities and material possessions (Schiavone, 2009:102). This has led to people looking for means to survive socially and economically through alternative ways such as trading in alcohol and drugs (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:91), which give rise to violence.

Drug and alcohol use is described as a contributing factor to community violence (Brankovic, 2019:4; Schiavone, 2009:102). Collings (2015:36) reports that illegal drug use was found to be connected to direct and explicit exposure to violence as illegal substances are readily available on the streets, which increases the chances of young adults partaking as either drug users or peddlers. Ngqela and Lewis (2012:93) state that narcotic substances are used to generate bravery to commit violence and is often accompanied by the high prevalence of and easy access to weapons in the communities. Some children tend to easily get swayed towards harmful situations like gangs and negative peer group associations because of their encounters with community violence (Kelly, 2010:67).

When criminal activities are not addressed by law, it may happen that community members revert to violence to discipline perpetrators. According to Traynor, Laing, Bruce, Hernandez, Kong, Riveraa, Zielinski and Clarke (2020:1) **mob justice or community assault**, has been culturally and historically observed and often happens when the public does not trust the effectiveness of the local governance and law enforcement. Mob justice is described as the rebellious disciplinary measure given to criminals by community members, often resulting from their lack of faith in the justice system to protect citizens (Orock, 2014:409, 423).

In South Africa, violence during adolescence must be considered with the effects of Apartheid, namely **racial disparities, discrimination, and marginalisation** in mind especially because a many of today's youths continue to live in environments that are poor and in which they are not able to protect their rights socially, politically, and economically (Mahlangu et al., 2014:75). For the youth, socio-economic marginalisation negatively affects their education and opportunities in life, which often leads to them validating violence as a way of gaining material

goods and a better social status (Brankovic, 2019:3). Mahlangu et al (2014:75) further report that when young men reach the adolescent stage, they start desiring to dominate positions of success and respect in the community and feel the need to act violently especially towards vulnerable individuals in the community in order to earn societal accreditation. These vulnerable individuals include women, children as well as other males considered less dominant (Mahlangu et al., 2014:75).

Various authors highlight the exposure of young persons of school-going age to different forms of **violence in their learning institutions**. In support, research done by Yurtal (2014:1421) found that students reported often becoming aggressive towards each other during disagreements, claiming this to be unavoidable. Astonishingly, a third of primary school pupils in a study by Richter et al. (2018:184) have reportedly experienced violence at school. In their study, Du Plessis et al. (2015:84) found that a large percentage of the sample of students in their study were either victims of or had witnessed violence at school. Nqela and Lewis (2012:87) are of the opinion that violence in schools tarnishes the school environment and disturbs proper learning processes in children. The researcher acknowledges that bullying in schools was not part of the focus of this study but found it necessary to mention this aspect as it contributes to violence in schools and is largely affecting adolescents today, as debated for a while in South Africa. Gevers and Flisher (2013:175) mention that bullying at school does not only affect the school as an entity; it is also a human right and public health challenge. They note that bullying happens in different forms and has been linked with several negative outcomes such as school dropouts, injuries and, more severely, suicide.

A further challenge involving schools in South Africa is the continued use of **corporal punishment** as a mode of discipline despite it being illegalised (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:72). Regardless of corporal punishment being illegal in South African schools, many schools still use it as a form of discipline (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:72). Corporal punishment in schools has also acted as a behavioural model of violence for school-going children (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:72). The researcher is of the opinion that the different forms of violence experienced at schools can result in children partaking in violence in their communities. This notion is based on evidence in research findings that the trauma faced by children affects their behaviour in school (Lane et al., 2017:451).

Panday et al. (2013:97) highlight the role of young people in **public protests**, which resulted in violence in the educational context:

> Historically in South Africa young people have played a significant role in at least the recent history of the country. The school students' protest action against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in June 1976, which was met by security force brutality, was a significant turning point in resistance to the

> apartheid state. From that time until the un-banning of political organisations in February 1990 and the commencement of negotiations towards a democratic South Africa shortly thereafter, young black people played an increasingly active role in the political struggle. Schools became sites of organisation and resistance.

A more recent example of student protests that resulted in violence on university campuses and in communities, are the “Fees must fall” protests in 2015 to advocate for free tertiary education in South Africa. Protests tend to occur in public spaces and can be planned or compulsive events (Abt, 2017:269). Hendricks and Kanjiri (2021:3) describe how video recordings of the “Fees must fall” protests sparked violent behaviour and the vandalising of property.

In conclusion, children are often exposed to multiple and interrelated risk factors. Ward and Ashley (2012:S43) report that children who were physically abused through beatings, who were sexually abused, who were raised in families with constant violence as well those who attended educationally non-achieving schools or resided in violence-ridden communities were most likely to behave in a violent manner. This finding emphasises the detrimental effects of **poly-victimisation**, which refers to exposure to multiple types of violence (Leoschut & Kafaar, 2017:85). Research findings show the extensive prevalence of poly-victimisation among children and adolescents and highlight the significant pathogenic effects on their mental health (Kaminer et al., 2013b:113). The negative effects of one being unprotected from violence in the community go beyond the urban environment and the impact thereof must also be understood within the cultural context (Chen, 2010:403, 413). It is thus important to find aspects that can buffer children against exposure to community violence and the harmful effects thereof, as will be discussed next.

2.4.2 Protective factors related to exposure to community violence

According to Foster (2013:25), “[i]n 1996 at the 49th World Health Assembly, a resolution was adopted that declared violence to be a major and growing health problem across the world.” The World Health Organization then published a report stating that “reducing violence exposure is a global public health priority, particularly with respect to promoting health and well-being in adolescents” (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002:2-3). A focus on enhancing protective factors can lower the negative effects of community violence by promoting adolescents’ resilience (Copeland-Linder et al., 2010:177). Protective factors are described as “characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor’s impact. Protective factors may be seen as positive countering events” (SAMHSA, 2019:1). Protective factors buffer children from the damaging effects of challenges within their environments, both inside and outside of the home, and promote children’s resilience, which

helps them to cope with trauma (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:79). Protective factors can be found in individual, family, and community characteristics.

2.4.2.1 Individual characteristics

Research shows that a positive **sense of self** or **self-worth** may moderate the effects of life stressors on an individual's psychological functioning and risk behaviour (Copeland-Linder et al., 2010:178). Self-perception is reported to be related to one's personal characteristics that are important in the development of a healthy identity during adolescence; therefore, positive self-perceptions is vital during adolescence as healthy identity development is a key task during this life stage (Copeland-Linder et al., 2010:177). A strong sense of self is achieved when there is a balance between one's intrapersonal, interpersonal, and larger social contexts, and can support an individual to cope with the remarkable psycho-emotional burden of community violence by recognising and regulating his or her responses to witnessing violence (Schiavone, 2009:99). Attempts to objectively view violent behaviour in children and young people are hampered by polarities in perceptions of childhood where, on the one hand, childhood is viewed as a phase of innocence, and on the other hand, children being portrayed as bad or naughty (Nicholson et al., 2010:199). Splitting could hamper a positive view of children as having the capacity for growth. Gestalt theory emphasises a positive view of children as being able to self-regulate and change (Corey, 2013:194; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:223).

Enhancing adolescents' **social skills** can serve as a protective factor. Mahlangu et al. (2014:76) report that strengthening the communication, conflict resolution and problem-solving skills of adolescents will help to prevent violent and aggressive behaviour and enhance respectful relationships in different contexts. Gestalt theory emphasises that providing children with opportunities for mastery, making choices, and functioning within age-appropriate boundaries, enhance their sense of self (Blom, 2006:61, 105). A strong sense of self builds children's ability for self-support and their capacity for self-regulation (Blom, 2006:103; Oaklander, 2006:50), which can assist children to make choices that will protect them against exposure to community violence. Fernando and Ferrari (2013:16) mention that an individual's level of creativity and intelligence may also be a protective factor for adolescents.

Sahval et al. (2013:579) conducted a study to determine whether being **hopeful** predicted a resilient individual and could enhance children's well-being amidst exposure to violence. The authors found a noteworthy association between children having hope and their quality of life and reported their findings as follows: "While exposure to community violence and hope were found to be significant predictors of well-being, hope emerged as a stronger predictor of child

well-being than exposure to community violence" (Sahval et al., 2013:579). According to Fernando and Ferrari (2013:15), in moments when people feel their life being threatened, their ideological beliefs may provide then with a sense of meaning whereby victims become survivors. Furthermore, a person's religious beliefs have also been considered as another protective factor to trauma that can enhance their mental health (Fernando & Ferrari, 2013:16).

Zolkoski and Bullock (2012:2295) state that many children are raised in conditions such as poverty, violence, substance abuse and family or personal challenges, that are not ideal and restrict their development intellectually, socially, and emotionally. From a Gestalt theoretical perspective, these conditions will be regarded as non-supportive environments (Blom, 2006:24). Zolkoski and Bullock (2012:2295) believe that such conditions hinder children from reaching their maximum potential in adulthood; however, children who are affected by such community challenges but still continue to survive fairly, are regarded as resilient.

In agreement with the above, Ward and Ashley (2013:543-544) report that children and adolescents who are raised in environments which expose them to risks may be protected by **resiliency**. Herrenkohl et al. (2008:94) accentuate the aspect of resilience and state that "despite the variety and number of risk factors that many victims encounter, studies suggest that oftentimes many children are resilient to the deleterious effects of violence exposure." It is therefore important to note that not every adolescent exposed to community violence will exhibit mental health or behaviour problems or perform poorly in school (Voisin et al., 2011:233). This information substantiates the characteristics listed by Louw and Louw (2014a:431) as building resilience in children and affecting their response to trauma. Individual characteristics of resilient children include good problem-solving skills, hopefulness, positive self-esteem, empathy, and the awareness of and ability to express various emotions (Louw & Louw, 2014a:431). These characteristics echo aspects of a strong sense of self and being hopeful, as discussed above.

The concept of resilience resonates with Gestalt theory that views people as having the capacity to be self-supportive and meet their needs (Corey, 2013:194; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:223). Gestalt objectives include promoting self-supporting behaviour in children whereby they can take more responsibility for their actions and rely less on support from their social environment. From a Gestalt theoretical perspective, children are taught to self-regulate, be more self-supportive, and make more realistic choices for their behaviour when satisfying their needs (Blom, 2006:52).

2.4.2.2 Family characteristics

The literature indicates that certain family characteristics have a significant influence on children's exposure to community violence. **Family dynamics** can be a protective factor for

adolescents, with positive parenting practices, maternal acceptance and behaviour, as well as a family's religious beliefs being examples of the influence that families have on minimising the effects of adolescents' exposure to violence in the community (Donenberg et al., 2020:146; Kelly, 2010:69; Louw & Louw, 2014a:431).

The role that parents play in the lives of youth who reside in high-risk communities may be imperative as a protective factor. **Parental involvement** in their children's lives is regarded as a protective factor. Copeland-Linder et al. (2010:178) articulate that "[y]outh who have parents who are involved … may feel as if their parents are interested and concerned about them, and this may lead to increased self-worth and self-regulation, which are factors that promote resilience." Berk (2013:473) states that parents who involve their children in decision making processes during conflict resolution tasks in fact encourage children and build their self-esteem. Furthermore, parental involvement in a child's life may have a positive influence on a child's response to trauma (Louw & Louw, 2014a:431).

Another parental role that is emphasised in the context of community violence, is that of **parental monitoring**. According to Bacchini et al. (2011:285) and Copeland-Linder et al. (2010:179), parental monitoring may buffer adolescents against exposure to community violence. The authors explain that witnessing violent events results in heightened levels of anxiety and depression in children. Strong parental monitoring is linked to lower levels of depression, even amidst high exposure to violence, while weak parental monitoring is linked to higher levels of anxiety and depression in children who are exposed to community violence (Bacchini et al., 2011:285). Parental monitoring and awareness of the experiences that their children go through can decrease children's exposure to community violence (Kelly, 2010:69). However, research shows a common trend that parents typically underestimate the extent to which their children are exposed to violence in the neighbourhood (Johnson, Reichenberg, Bradshaw, Haynie & Cheng (2016:3237). The positive effect of parental monitoring on children's behaviour is explained in an example by Johnson et al. (2016:2134), who found that parents and children in South Africa reported that children would most probably not abuse substances if their caregivers were aware of their whereabouts and activities.

For children at risk of violence exposure at schools or in their communities, the amount of **support** from family members can help to minimise the effects of exposure and can become a safeguard or "safe haven" for children (Mahlangu et al., 2014:75). When caregivers are not available to provide support, adolescents may be left feeling insecure, experience separation anxiety, and evaluate the behaviour of their caregivers negatively (Kelly, 2010:69; Louw & Louw, 2014a:431). Adolescents who face recurrent exposure to violence need the support of their family to sustain them and help them feel less alone; a factor which in turn reduces

feelings of guilt (Copeland-Linder et al., 2010:178). Through sharing their experiences with the family, adolescents are offered valuable opportunities to work through their negative experiences and to handle feelings of unhappiness and anxiety (Bacchini et al., 2011:284*)*. Johnson et al. (2016:2126) report that parents who do not adequately understand the effects of exposure to community violence limit their capability to assist their children in dealing with victimisation, which has negative implications for children's holistic well-being.

Secure **attachment** with a primary caregiver is regarded as a protective factor in the context of community violence. Du Plessis et al. (2015:87) emphasise that vulnerability to violence and ultimately several psychological health challenges in children in South Africa may be increased by the lack of attachment with their primary caregivers. The development of teenagers is enhanced when their families act as a secure base from which they can evolve and venture into the wider world (Berk, 2013:473). Fernando and Ferrari (2013:16) emphasise the importance of family cohesion or at least a good bond with a caregiver to help a person to cope during traumatic times.

Johnson et al. (2016:2134) stress the importance of caregivers taking responsibility for being positive **role models** of behaviour in possible conflict situations. The authors report that the influence of a parent or caregiver is a significant preventative factor for possible violent encounters, especially when they set norms and guide their children on how they expect them to behave in society. In this regard, Louw and Louw (2014b:364, 367) explain that although adolescents wish to achieve independence from their parents, it has been found that they still value the guidance and control of their parents related to personal safety and societal issues. It is furthermore important for parents to be aware of violence exposure as many professionals such as psychologists working with adolescent issues rely on reports given by caregivers in service delivery (Johnson et al., 2016:2126).

2.4.2.3 Community characteristics

A **safe community** with little community violence is regarded as an important factor in a child's development (Louw & Louw, 2014a:421). Richter et al. (2018:185) explain that South Africa is still not paying enough attention to either minimising violence or minimising the exposure of children to violence. The mentioned authors emphasise that the situation requires effective and sustainable interventions to deal with violence as a huge challenge that affects people's well-being. Safe neighbourhoods with low levels of community violence are factors that can enhance children's resilience (Louw & Louw, 2014a:431). Sport clubs and social clubs, both in-school and out-of-school, can involve adolescents and families to create safe social environments as it prevents boredom and risk-taking behaviours, and strengthens positive relationships (Mahlangu et al., 2014:77).

The **school environment** can protect children against the harmful effects of community violence. In a study in the United States, Pierre, Burnside and Gaylore-Harden (2020:396) found that adolescents' sense of school belongingness protected them against emotional effects such as depression and anxiety; however, this factor had a lesser influence on externalising behaviours. School belongingness is defined as the learner's perception of the "acceptance, respect, and inclusion" by main role players in the school environment (McMahon, Wernsman & Rose, 2009:269 as quoted by Pierre et al., 2020:389). A strong and positive attachment to teachers and/or peers can thus be a protective factor that buffers children against the negative effects of community violence (Mrug & Windle, 2010:959). Academic achievement and school success were found to mitigate the effects of exposure to traumatic experiences in the neighbourhood (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2009:306; Lane et al., 2017:451). Mahlangu et al. (2014:77) propose that quality education and career guidance for adolescents can provide opportunities for mastery and increase their chances of accessing employment. However, Gevers and Flisher (2013:175) emphasise that high levels of violence minimise the benefits that schools should have for children, namely the provision of opportunities for optimal cognitive development and the development of social, emotional, and cultural competencies to form the basis for success in adulthood.

Louw and Louw (2014a:431) describe **neighbourhood factors** that can promote resilience in children. These characteristics include safe neighbourhoods, as mentioned earlier, and various other factors such as affordable housing, recreational centres, good schools, after-school programmes, school recreational programmes such as sports and music, parental employment opportunities, mentoring and conflict resolving strategies, and good public health services (Louw & Louw, 2014a:431; Wegner & Caldwell, 2012:224). It has furthermore been found that social networks in communities that entail aspects such as collective vigilance, a shared responsibility for the well-being of others, positive role models from adults, and the collective enforcement of pro-social norms serve as protective factors amidst of community violence (Aisenberg & Herenkohl, 2009:306). These suggestions for dealing with community violence emphasise a comprehensive approach, which correlates with the Gestalt principle of holism (Corey, 2013:196).

Rasool (2017:9109, 9118) emphasises the need for **easily accessible resources** to refer and support adolescents to deal with traumatic experiences. Moreover, for treatment purposes, teachers and practitioners should be alerted on how adolescents express themselves after exposure to violence (Visser et al., 2016:287). Generally, what was seen to minimise the effects of being a witness as well as being a victim of violence in schools and communities was one's understanding of the reasons why violence transpires (Shields et al., 2009:1205). Shields and colleagues explain that because children expect to be protected from all forms of

violence, their expectations are dampened when they become victims of community violence because it creates confusion in terms of their locus of control and understanding the roles they hold, making them feel distressed (Shields et al., 2009:1205).

In conclusion, Mahlangu et al. (2014:76) propose a **multi-pronged approach** to address community violence by stating that "interventions can target multiple forms of violence by addressing the core underlying risk factors and building common protective factors." As an example of a multi-pronged approach, Johnson et al. (2016:2133-2134) suggest that interventions aimed at promoting non-violent norms can address adolescents' attitudes about violence, while interventions aimed at enhancing family relationships can support adolescents' disclosure of exposure to violence. Mahlangu et al. (2014:76) agree that community norms that can fuel community violence should be addressed. The authors warn that dominant constructions of gender are regarded as a core risk factor related to violence, including intimate partner and interpersonal violence, and should be challenged.

Van Niekerk and Makoae (2014:35) propose that interpersonal violence is preventable and refer to **three levels of intervention**: primary prevention with a focus on preventing violence from occurring, secondary prevention that entails immediate responses to violence, and tertiary prevention that entails services to lower the impact of exposure to violence. In agreement, Darawshy (2020:3417) emphasises the importance of prevention as well as targeted interventions, for example exposure to positive role models and interventions to address the behavioural and psychological effects of community violence exposure. These interventions can be provided in schools; however, prevention programmes must also include services to empower parents and families, which could enhance protective measures (Darawshy, 2020:3417). Visser et al. (2016:286) regard the availability of community support structures as important in addressing the effects of community violence. Solutions should be found that are not only effective but also viable as efforts to prevent and minimise the exposure of children to community violence in South Africa; an aspect that is proposed to take precedence for all people living in the country (Richter et al., 2018:185).

Donenberg et al. (2020:149) emphasise the need to strengthen protective factors by stating: "The consequences of community violence exposure for SA adolescents' mental health are gravely concerning. Identifying the factors that drive or mitigate psychological problems in the context of persistent community violence is essential to SA's future." Next, the researcher will discuss the impact of community violence on children and adolescents.

2.5 THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

In this section, the researcher will discuss the effects of community violence on children and adolescents. The first part of the discussion will focus on the effects of violence, whereafter

the discussion will focus specifically on the effects of community violence. Sui et al. (2018:2) caution that “South African adolescents are at increased risk of psychological maladjustment due to the country’s alarmingly high rates of crime and violence.” Richter et al. (2018:185) further relate how the individual and social effects of violence are both short-term and long-term whilst being significantly harmful for many generations to come.

2.5.1 The effects of violence on children

According to Stansfeld et al. (2017:257), “[e]xposure to violence may occur in domestic and community settings and both are related to increased risk of mental ill health.” Although findings have not been consistent; several studies have looked at and compared contributions on how violence affects the mental health of children and adolescents (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81). Du Plessis et al. (2015:80), however, express the opinion that studies on the severity of violence on mental health of minors from poor and middle-income countries were for the most part deficient.

There is a common theme across research and literature of a relationship between violence exposure and **psychological problems**. Exposure to community violence are likely to have severe effects on children, which can include poor self-esteem, extended periods of fearfulness, depression, stress and helplessness, numbing their reactions to future violence exposure, lower levels of empathy, and engaging in violent behaviour (Richter et al., 2018:181). According to Chen (2010:410), exposure to violence at school, for example through being pushed, grabbed, shoved, being hit with objects, kicked, or hit with fists and also being beaten up, was often a factor in female Asian American adolescents’ internalising behaviours. Moreover, because young persons are not always able to seek support following victimisation, they are more at risk of developing mental health challenges (Sui et al., 2018:2). Homeyer and Morrison (2008:218) found that play therapists in several countries have agreed on the similarities of the dynamics of issues they deal with in therapy, such as sexual abuse, family violence and alcoholic parents to those found in the United States of America.

Violence causes long-term negative effects on children’s **social and academic functioning** including problems such as poor social relationships, violent behaviour, the abuse of drugs and alcohol, unsafe sexual activities, delinquency, reduced school attendance, poor school performance, and high school dropouts, amongst others (Richter et al., 2018:181). Broadly, there is a perception that there is an increase in extreme violent behaviour in young people who have been exposed to violence (Nicholson et al., 2010:199). Nicholson et al. (2010:204) found that most violent young people involved in therapeutic interventions had experienced violence within a family setting. The authors furthermore state that psychological disorders, nocturnal enuresis, and suicidal inclinations are some of the problems that children experience

when exposed to violence in their home environment. When children are mistreated and exposed to extensive violence in their homes, several mental health challenges develop in their adolescent years which may result in them being more involved in aggressive and antisocial conduct and affect their educational performance (Mahlangu et al., 2014:74-75). In childhood, children reportedly develop coping mechanisms out of fear of getting harmed through a process of 'identification with the aggressor', in which they too become perpetrators of violence (Anna Freud, 1936 as quoted by Nicholson et al., 2010:204).

The negative effects on the health and well-being of victims of violence are most likely **long-term** (Mahlangu et al., 2014:73). In their adult life, children who are exposed to violence are more at risk of abusing drugs and alcohol, becoming young parents, exhibit poor parenting skills and partake in unlawful activities than children who grow up in environments where there is no violence (Nicholson et al., 2010:204; Richter et al., 2018:181). Whilst some children lose the ability to feel compassion for others, others become socially isolated and are not able to develop proper social relationships because of the anxieties or misunderstandings of what is acceptable in society (Jeevasuthan & Hatta, 2013:203). On the other hand, adolescents who were not exposed to violence achieve higher overall self-development than those who were exposed to violence, particularly to domestic violence (Idemudia & Makhubela, 2011:3456). The effects of violence can thus affect forthcoming generations negatively (Richter et al., 2018:181).

Violent acts against children are thus considered an abomination of their rights. In this respect, Richter et al. (2018:181) point to the following relevant legislation and conventions that emphasise the rights of children: Section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) as well as the regional and international rights conventions to which South Africa is a signatory, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990).

2.5.2 The impact of violence on families and communities

Research studies show that, in addition to its effects on individuals, community violence also affects families and communities. When young persons are exposed to violence, it can influence their **sense of security** when they are without adult supervision outside of their homes (Kelly, 2010:69). A study by Shields et al. (2009:1204) found that children were traumatised by observing violence in their residential areas as it was associated with the probability of becoming victims thereof. The authors propose that the trauma may be explained by the fact that children are unprotected from extreme forms and the high prevalence of violence in neighbourhoods where it is normal for them to see a person being threatened, attacked, or robbed with use of a weapon or a gun. Alarmingly, forty percent of the children

who participated in their study had seen a person getting killed (Shields et al., 2009:1204). A child's sense of well-being is threatened by such high levels of violence, which has been shown to provoke psychological distress (Shields et al., 2008 in Shields et al., 2009:1204).

Exposure to community violence may also have a negative effect on **family relationships**. Adolescents' exposure to violence in the community negatively affects child-parent attachment, which is concerning as parental attachment is an important protective factor against the negative effects of community violence exposure on children (Donenberg et al., 2020:147).

Furthermore, the effects of early socialisation among some young people who were exposed to violence may have a significant impact on **normalising the use of violence**. Prolonged exposure to violence in their communities socialise children into the neighbourhood norms (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:75). Delinquent behaviour, amongst other forms of community violence, is strongly related to witnessing violence. Geldard, Geldard and Yin Foo (2018:90) confirm that a child's perceptions are influenced by the family they are raised in, and the family may reinforce the behaviour of a child in numerous ways. Violence may be normalised in families who live in communities with high levels of violence (Malherbe & Häefele, 2017:108), whereby children may grow up to accept violence as a normal part of life.

Community violence could lead to a higher incidence of aggressive behaviour within families and, as community violence increases, there is a decrease in the overall **well-being of the community** (Savahl et al., 2013:386). The effects of violence are not only felt by the victim or perpetrator. In severe cases, death because of violence causes tremendous pain for people closely related to the individual as well as harm to the society at large (Mahlangu et al., 2014:74).

2.5.3 The effects of community violence on children and adolescents

Research shows that community violence can have serious and long-term effects on children and adolescents. Theories about the relationship between witnessing violence and psychological health consequences are commonly supported (Lambert et al., 2010:289; Zinzow et al, 2009:447). Starting in the late 1980s, scholars have acknowledged the possible damaging consequences of exposure to violence on people's mental health (Fowler et al., 2009:227). Although children are exposed to various types of violence, over time several studies have looked at the ways adolescents are affected by community violence to illustrate the severe consequences on the mental health of adolescents, specifically examining externalising behaviours and internalising symptoms like anxiety, depression, aggressiveness, and the intention to use violence, (Kelly, 2010:69).

The psychosocial problems that develop because of witnessing violence can vary from adolescent to adolescent (Kelly, 2010:69). However, it is acknowledged that the healthy development of an adolescent can severely be threatened by exposure to community violence (Chen, 2010:403). Such exposure is hypothesised to have negative effects not only on adolescents' mental health, but also on their social and family relations (Chen, 2010:406). According to Guerra and Dierkhising (2011:2), exposure to community violence can affect children in several ways, including their neurological, physical, emotional, and social development, which interferes with their adjustment. Exposure to violence can, for example, manifest in symptoms of PTSD as well as internalising and externalising problems among adolescents (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Kaminer et al., 2013a:320). Externalising behaviours are violent or aggressive acts, or intentions to partake in violent activities whilst internalising symptoms are described as the undesirable modification in a person's emotional state (Kelly, 2010:62). Adolescents may be especially vulnerable to the effects of violence on their psychological well-being due to the specific brain development taking place during this life stage (Sui et al., 2018:3). The researcher will discuss the effects of community violence according to the physical, behavioural, emotional, social, and cognitive functioning of children and adolescents.

2.5.3.1 Physical effects of community violence

Research studies show that exposure to community violence can have a significant effect on adolescent's physical health and well-being. In their study, Wright et al. (2016:364) categorised seven outcomes of exposure to community violence on somatic well-being, which includes "asthma/respiratory health, cardiovascular health, immune functioning, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis functioning, sleep problems, weight, and a general health category." Caffo and Belaise (2003 in Panday, Ranchod, Ngcaweni & Seedat, 2013:122) report the prevalence of suicide, eating disorders, gastrointestinal and gynaecological problems as long-term health problems caused by violence exposure. In a study by Kliewer, Robins and Borre (2019:440), community violence exposure was found to lead to sleep disturbances and insulin resistance in a sample of adolescents.

Exposure to community violence is regarded as a traumatic incident, referred to by Lane et al. (2017:447) as "neighbourhood trauma due to violence." Trauma is defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2000 in Dye, 2018:381) as "a perceived experience that threatens injury, death, or physical integrity and causes feelings of fear, terror, and helplessness." Trauma is associated with neurobiological changes that cause changes in brain functioning and result in symptoms of PTSD such as re-experiencing traumatic events, avoidance, numbing, and/or hyper-arousal (Dye, 2018:381; Lane et al., 2017:453). Zinzow et

al. (2009:441) suggest that repeatedly being exposed to violence perpetrated by peers and relatives in adolescents' neighbourhood intensifies their chances of developing PTSD. The neurobiological changes caused by trauma involve hormonal changes and disrupts the normal development of the brain, which affects the health of children and puts them at risk of chronic disease (Dye, 2018:384).

Community violence often leads to death, as evident in studies that report on adolescents who saw someone being killed or seeing dead bodies in the community (Donenberg et al., 2020:145). In this way, being a victim of community violence, or victimisation, may lead to physical harm or even the death of adolescents in the community. Mathews and Benvenuti (2014:28) highlight that murder among adolescent males occur mostly because of interpersonal violence outside the home.

2.5.3.2 Behavioural effects of community violence

Research findings support the notion that when adolescents are exposed to violence, it is associated with or can lead to problems with different externalising behaviours (Kelly, 2010:62). A general outcome of studies on community violence points to externalising problems as well as to symptoms of PTSD (Fowler et al., 2009:228). There are many behaviours such as using violence, the intention to use violence, aggression, and deviant behaviours among children and adolescents that are closely related to being exposed to violence (Fowler et al., 2009:227-228; Kelly, 2010:62, 67).

Higher levels of **aggression** were recorded in children who were exposed to community violence (Louw & Louw, 2014a:421). Theories on physiology point out that children who are exposed to violence will be likely to experience arousal during acts of violence, which can result in aggression (Fowler et al, 2009:228). In a study by Du Plessis et al. (2015:85), males reported higher levels of aggression and conduct problems than females after exposure to community violence.

It has therefore not come as a shock that adolescents who have been exposed to violence, displayed an increase in the **use of violence**. Some researchers established a link between people being exposed to violence and their use thereof; however, the researchers were unable to provide support for a causal relationship between the two entities (Kelly, 2010:67). Donenberg et al. (2020:150) propose that aggression and the use of violence can stem from factors such as social learning that leads to aggressive behaviours becoming a way of solving problems, or as an attempt to avoid feelings of fear and helplessness.

Adolescents' exposure to community violence increases the likelihood of them participating in **anti-social behaviours** (Kelly, 2010:67). Violent behaviour, self-identification with high-risk

groups, offensive and defensive fighting, gang fighting, conduct disorders, anti-social behaviour, and substance abuse or dependence are believed to emanate from exposure to community violence during adolescence (Savahl et al., 2013:582). Aggression and other behavioural problems that will most likely develop because of exposure to several types of violence in their young lives, may be the cause of adolescents themselves becoming violent and ultimately participating in criminal activities (Du Plessis et al., 2015:88). Furthermore, the youth may not necessarily take safety measures to keep themselves away from dangerous situations, and the higher risk of community violence exposure may increase their impulsive behaviour (Lambert et al., 2010:291). A positive relationship was found between one being a witness of community violence and risk-taking behaviours due to destructive influences of peer pressure, for example gang involvement (Voisin et al., 2011:234). Earlier studies have tried to contrast the effects of witnessing violence and being a victim of violence but have commonly not acknowledged the effect of these on the degree to which victims commit violent acts (Shields et al., 2009:1194).

Increasingly, empirical research has shown a link between adolescents' exposure to community violence and **risky sexual behaviours**, which were worsened by mental health problems, low school achievement and negative peer pressure (Voisin et al., 2011:234). In their study, Voisin et al. (2011:233) found that, "youth exposed to community violence were three times more likely to report sex without condoms, sex after drug use, and sex with multiple partners than peers not exposed to such violence."

2.5.3.3 Emotional effects of community violence

Esterhuyse et al. (2007:64) state that numerous authors point out that a strong relationship exists between stressors and mental health problems. Being exposed to community violence is known to result in mental health complications (Kaminer et al., 2013a:321). Different psychological problems have been attributed to witnessing violence in the community and within educational facilities and the impact thereof on adolescents' emotions (Kelly, 2010:67).

Psychological health symptoms such as anxiousness, PTSD and depression could all result from exposure to community violence (Louw & Louw, 2014a:421). In a study conducted by Schiavone (2009:101) exposure to community violence was described by the participants as extreme and inappropriate, and stories told revealed patterns of shock, confusion, a sense of vulnerability, fear, and uncertainty about the future. Children and adolescents who have witnessed and/or have been victims of community violence are most likely to develop symptoms of PTSD, also being medically diagnosed with the condition (Fowler et al, 2009:228). As noted by Fowler et al. (2009:228), exposure to community violence can become a chronic challenge resulting in excessive arousal.

Being exposed to community violence shows a significant link with the prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms (Busby, Lambert & Ialongo, 2013:256; Kelly, 2010:67). Witnessing acts of community violence against known persons has a stronger association with anxiety and symptoms of depression than being a witness of these acts against an unknown person. Violent actions against strangers are considered more strongly coupled with aggression rather than anxiety and depression (Lambert, Boyd, Cammack & Ialongo, 2012:3).

Kelly (2010:67) describes anxiety as not being the only emotional effect that adolescents experienced following their exposure to community violence. A substantial indication for future challenges with anger, depressive episodes, posttraumatic stress and detachment in adolescents were related to them being exposed to violence in the community (Kelly, 2010:67-68; Shields et al., 2009:1204). Such reactions can also occur when observing community violence in the media. According to Strasburger, Wilson and Jordan (2009:162), field experiments and correlational studies showed that there is a positive relationship between observing violence on television and aggression in youth. The authors explain that longitudinal studies suggest a cumulative effect over time of exposure to violence.

Lucas (2007), Lucas (2005) and Lucas et al. (2004) as quoted by Sahval et al. (2013:588), state that research has revealed a decrease in emotional responses to certain negative events, such as continued experiences with community violence, resulting in **desensitisation** to stimuli over time. Desensitisation refers to the notion that emotional reactions can be suppressed because of extensive exposure to a stimulus (Strasburger et al., 2009:175). According to Shields et al. (2009:1205), this phenomenon is believed to relate to efforts to maintain one's locus of control as a regulatory factor when exposed to unfair treatment or witnessing violence at school and in the neighbourhood. It has, for example, been found that desensitisation in response to witnessing community violence can lower one's resting heart rate and minimise symptoms of PTSD (Mrug & Windle, 2010:960). Several research studies report that continuous experiences with violence may result in reduced mental reactions to violence (Sahval et al., 2013:589; Schiavone, 2009:101-102). As an example, Kaminer et al. (2013a:326) state that community violence exposure seemed to be viewed as completely normal in a small group of Xhosa youths in Langa, a low-income community with a high prevalence of community violence. As with direct exposure to community violence, continued exposure to television content of a violent nature have been found to result in desensitisation in young adults (Strasburger et al., 2009:162). This view is supported by Louw and Louw (2014c:216) who explain that continuous exposure of children to violence during childhood, even violence shown in cartoons, causes long-term negative effects as they become desensitised, with their mental, emotional, and behavioural responses to violence being

lowered. Therefore, continuously watching violent content on television can affect one's reactions to such stimulation (Strasburger et al., 2009:175).

The pervasiveness of violence in some communities will most likely result in people **feeling insecure** in and around their living environment. When a child becomes a victim in a place where they experience fear but are unable to avoid, their psychological and socio-emotional distress are intensified (Shields et al., 2009:1204). Kelly (2010:62) concludes that exposure to community violence can influence adolescents' psychological development. Consequently, the need to identify these individuals earlier and to provide them with support is recognised (Louw & Louw, 2014a:421).

2.5.3.4 Social effects of community violence

Being exposed to violence causes numerous social adjustment concerns for children, resulting from mood disorders, long periods of anxiety and feelings of powerless (Richter et al., 2018:185). According to Louw and Louw (2014c:216), continued exposure of children to violence during childhood causes long-term negative effects on behaviour in their adolescent and adult years. The negative **behavioural effects** of exposure to family and community violence can even be associated with delinquency (Clark, 2012:83). Based on the social learning theory, adolescents learn violent behaviour through modelling of what they observe in their communities (Hertweck et al., 2010:202). Consequently, these adolescents find it more difficult to decide whether violence is acceptable or not if society views violence as a way of speaking up and solving problems (Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013:7).

One risk associated with children exposed to violence is a **lowering in empathy**, which results in them becoming insensitive, do not care about other people, and become violent towards others (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2015:1815). Based on a literature review on the effects of exposure to gang violence, Kelly (2010:62) indicates that adolescents displayed aggression and violent behaviour, and an intent to use violence when exposed to violence. From the perspective of Gestalt theory, Oaklander (2006:14; 2007:198) explains that children, as an attempt to self-regulate, will do what they have to do to survive and may end up being defensive or show other inappropriate behaviours.

Community violence can furthermore result in **social isolation**. The effects of being involved in violent actions are generally greater during the teenage years than for any other age group. Because of high levels of community violence, adolescents are withheld from engaging in activities that are good for their well-being and development such as school activities and other social and play activities (Schiavone, 2009:102). Therefore, the effects of violence are not only short-term but also have far reaching consequences for generations to come for the individual;

mentally, physically and socially, resulting in extreme public health challenges (Richter et al., 2018:181).

2.5.3.5 Cognitive effects of community violence

There are other responses that are accompanied with adolescents' exposure to community violence besides being either aggressive or also using violence (Kelly, 2010:62). A study conducted with adolescents from a low-income community in the USA, confirmed the findings of other studies that being exposed to community violence positively correlates with **school-related problems** such as poor school attendance, poor academic performance, and a negative attitude towards school and teachers (McGill et al., 2014:1, 5). The latter authors found that the PTSD symptoms associated with exposure to community violence such as increased arousal, intrusive thoughts, irritability and avoidance, negatively affected children's functioning in school and placed them at higher risk for poor school outcomes. These findings are supported by Lane et al. (2017:452) who state that traumatic experiences influence children's behaviour in school.

When a child is exposed to community violence, **poor learning outcomes** are expected as it is challenging to perform well when facing difficult circumstances emotionally and behaviourally (Busby et al., 2013:251). Exposure to violence often results in intrusive thinking which affect children's concentration in class (Chen, 2010:412). Verkuil and Brosschot (2013:69) define intrusive thinking as unintentional and continuous thoughts of something or a negative event. However, Busby et al. (2013:256) disputed this and concluded that although exposure to community violence resulted in symptoms of depression and anxiety, there seemed to be no connection between these symptoms and educational performance.

2.5.4 Factors influencing the impact of community violence

Various studies conclude that the severity of the effects of community violence is influenced by different factors. In terms of the **subtype of exposure** to community violence, victimisation is a probable predictor of symptoms related to violence exposure as compared to being a witness or having heard about community violence from other people (Fowler et al., 2009:227). Shields et al. (2009:1203) conclude in their study in the framework of the educational institutions, that being a victim has to some extent more severe effects on emotional suffering than just being a witness of violence. However, Savahl et al. (2013:579) state that the most harmful experience for children is being exposed to and experiencing any type of violence.

Ngqela and Lewis (2012:94) group the effects of community violence according to **direct and indirect effects**. Direct effects refer to the effects related to an individual's direct experience with violence, either participation in or witnessing a violent incident, whilst indirect effects relate

to the effects the existence of violence has on an individual and on other variables within the environment. Researchers report that there are different dynamics between exposure to community violence as a witness or as a victim. Although the experiences associated with the two types of exposure are related, the implications for adolescent development are different (Bacchini et al, 2011:271). To this effect, Fowler et al. (2009:227) explain that although being a witness of community violence affected a person much more than just hearing about it, both still resulted in problems such as PTSD, of which some symptoms could be suppressed. Research studies support a relationship between witnessing violence and harmful effects on adolescents, as the effects of witnessing violence can possibly be accredited to co-occurring direct exposure to trauma (Zinzow et al., 2009:447-448).

In support of the greater influence of victimisation as a subtype of violence and of direct rather than indirect exposure, as discussed above, Fowler et al. (2009:241) propose that the damaging effects of being exposed to community violence may differ depending on one's closeness to the violent situation. A widespread conceptualisation of **physical and emotional closeness** to community violence suggests that psychological health problems are more likely to occur when violence is experienced in the home or when it involves a familiar person (Zinzow et al., 2009:447). Sui et al. (2018:15) found in their study in the Western Cape Province that adolescents' exposure to community violence resulted in higher scores for depression, anxiousness, hopelessness, distress and thoughts of suicide; a pattern that differed from those who experienced violence in their home environment, where a higher prevalence of anxiety and depression was found.

According to Zinzow et al. (2009:447), the **emotional attachment to the victim** of violence is thus an aspect that may be significant in understanding adolescents' reactions to exposure to community violence. The nature of the emotional or personal association with a victim of witnessed violence can to some extent establish the kind and level of an adolescent's reaction (Lambert et al., 2012:2). While youth who witness violence happening to people familiar to them tend to be greatly affected, those who observe similar violence against persons unknown to them may be less affected because they are less likely to think that they too can be victims of violence (Zinzow et al., 2009:447). In addition, the risk to an adolescent's community support structure is considered higher when the victim is known to the adolescent than the risk when violence is witnessed against a stranger (Zinzow et al., 2009:447).

Zinzow et al. (2009:447) believe the consequences of community violence exposure may be influenced by **community norms** if those committing community violence get praised for violent deeds or if they are influential in a social group or community. Such norms may increase youth aggressiveness and violent behaviour. With their immature view of

invulnerability, youth are most likely to be involved in aggressive behaviour without much concern that this behaviour fuels their risk of harm (Lambert et al., 2012:2). Geldard et al. (2018:144) state that a child's ideas and beliefs about who they are, thus their sense of self, develop through continuous interaction with people with whom they reside and are in close contact. The sense of self, which includes the self-concept, contains individuals' beliefs of what defines who they are through a set of attributes, attitudes, values and abilities (Berk, 2013:456; Oaklander, 2006:52). Community norms may thus influence adolescents' values and attitudes in relation to community violence.

Continued exposure of children to violence therefore remains one of the biggest concerns in terms of their well-being. Constantly exposing children to violence affects their behavioural response to violence in their adolescence and adulthood (Louw & Louw, 2014c:216). Mash and Wolfe (2016:301) are of the opinion that images of violence can arouse children who then find themselves wanting to copy these acts. Constantly being exposed to violence may furthermore result in the weakening of adolescents' emotional responses to violence as this is normalised as a part of life (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Savahl et al., 2013:589). Gestalt theory explains that children's exposure to adverse environments can result in lowered awareness and contact with the self and environment, known as contact boundary disturbances (Blom, 2006:32-39; Corey, 2013:199-200). As a result, children's ability for self-regulation and for meeting their needs is negatively affected (Blom, 2006:31). Louw and Louw (2014a:422) maintain that long-term exposure of children to increased levels of violence will cause severe problems. Other scholars support this notion and highlight PTSD and other severe psychological health problems amongst other symptoms as emanating from continued exposure to community violence (Kaminer et al., 2013a:320, 327).

The **frequency of exposure** to community violence is another factor highlighted as a determining factor for the influence of exposure. Research studies found that individuals are more vulnerable to develop mental health disorders when they have been frequently exposed to community violence and reside in a violent home environment (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81). In situations of multiple exposures to violence, post traumatic indications of distress will most likely occur in adolescents (Kaminer et al., 2013a:328).

Many adolescents witness violence or are victimised in multiple settings (Mrug & Windle, 2010:960). **Poly-victimisation** is a term that describes continuous exposure to several forms of violence in the different areas of one's community, for example the school, home, and religious places of worship (Du Plessis et al., 2015:80; Kaminer et al., 2013a:112). Du Plessis and colleagues propose that although the common inclination in several readings is that intimate household violence causes bigger psychological problems than other forms of

exposure, there was also studies implying that being exposed to diverse types of violence, thus poly-victimisation, may increase a person's vulnerability to different kinds of mental health challenges (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81). Children and adolescents who experience poly-victimisation are more likely to have poorer outcomes in general and are more susceptible to suffering mental health problems in comparison to those who have experienced exposure to only one type of violence (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Mrug & Windle, 2010:954).

Another factor that influences the impact of community violence, is the **individual characteristics** of the person; a factor that was also evident in the discussion of risk and protective factors in relation to community violence. Visser et al. (2016:286) state that there is a connection between the characteristics of the personality, which involves emotional reactions, and exposure to interpersonal violence. Person-specific variances in adolescents' intellectual functioning could also be a determining factor in differences in reactions to such violence; however, exposure to community violence always carries emotional consequences for adolescents (Visser et al., 2016:286).

In conclusion, violence witnessed often happens amid other factors which amplify the negative effects on children (Zinzow et al, 2009:441). Kennedy and Ceballo (2014:75) propose that it is difficult to determine the influence of individual aspects such as the type of violence or the severity thereof in isolation and that the interaction between these aspects may determine an individual's reaction to exposure to community violence. The damaging effects following an adolescent's exposure to community violence may persevere long after the ordeal which could possibly unsettle their future development (Chen, 2010:410). The study focused on the perceptions of young adults of community violence they experienced during adolescence. An overview of the adolescent developmental stage is provided in the next section, with a brief discussion of young adulthood.

2.6 THE ADOLESCENT LIFE STAGE

Adolescence is the developmental stage that is considered as the transition from childhood to adulthood (Louw & Louw, 2014b:303-305). Thirion (2007:180) describes adolescence as "a period of transition, biologically and socially". Mahlangu et al. (2014:73) note that "adolescence sets a tone and influences future progression into adulthood." Adolescence indicates certain developmental characteristics, which will be discussed next.

2.6.1 Physical development

According to Louw and Louw (2014b:303-305), the adolescent developmental stage marks the onset of puberty, leading to important physical and physiological changes. Hormonal changes result in a growth spurt, in the development of primary sexual characteristics which

are related to the reproductive organs, and in the secondary sexual characteristics such as the development of breasts in females and the emergence of underarm and pubic hair (Berk, 2013:203). Louw and Louw (2014b:310) highlight the importance thereof that adolescents accept these rapid physical changes, which is not always an easy task for them.

2.6.2 Cognitive development

In the adolescent life stage, children start to look, think, and act like grownups (Louw & Louw, 2014b:323). Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory indicates that children develop in several stages in which different developmental aspects can be noticed, which relates to their mental capabilities to solve problems (Smith, Cowie & Blades, 2011:443). Adolescents operate within the formal operational stage according to Piaget's theory (Berk, 2013:253). It is believed that in this stage of life, their brain development allows for advanced cognitive capacities which enable adolescents to reason a lot more like adults (Louw & Louw, 2014b:323). The ability for scientific, hypothetico-deductive reasoning and propositional thought are such capacities (Berk, 2013:253-254).

However, researchers found teenagers' thinking to be more haphazard than Piaget had assumed (Smith et al., 2011:464). Adolescents tend to become idealistic and critical, self-focused and self-conscious in their reasoning (Arnett, 2016:263-264; Berk, 2013:253-254). A tendency of adolescents towards distorted thinking patterns is characteristic of their cognitive development. These thinking patterns are evident in two phenomena, namely the so-called imaginary audience and the personal fable (Louw & Louw, 2014b:335). The 'imaginary audience' refers to adolescents' belief that they are always at the centre of other people's attention, and this often leads to them being extremely self-consciousness. The 'personal fable' leads them to believe that they are special and unique, which can result in sensation-seeking behaviours and a sense of being invulnerable; a thinking pattern that is seen as the reason for an increase in risk-taking behaviours during adolescence (Arnett, 2016:367; Berk, 2013:255-256). These factors can thus increase adolescents' risk for being exposed to community violence.

2.6.3 Emotional development

Adolescents' fast growth and physiological changes can influence their emotions (Louw & Louw, 2014b:304-305, 310). Adolescents are, however, required to cope with not only the puberty-related changes, but also with them obtaining independence with associated changes in family and peer relations that come with this life stage (Berk, 2013:205-206; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:486). Adolescence is therefore a stage in which emotional distress is increased, normally described as a period of "storm and stress" (Arnett, 2016:377). However, Berk (2013:205) and Louw and Louw (2014b:304) argue that a generalised view of adolescence as

a period of emotional problems is exaggerated and has been replaced by a more balanced point of view. These authors acknowledge that although some adolescents experience significant emotional and behavioural problems, most adolescents do not experience such challenges.

In the early stages of adolescence, children's ability to regulate their emotions, to follow emotion display rules, and their ability for emotion-centred coping and for showing empathy is enhanced by the capacity to understand emotions and take on different perspectives of a situation (Berk, 2013:419). However, drawn out exposure to community violence or being a victim thereof may affect adolescents' emotional regulation (Bacchini et al., 2011:271).

2.6.4 Psychosocial development

According to Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, adolescents function in the developmental stage of identity versus role confusion in which the pertinent task is to develop a personal identity; thus, defining who they are, what is important to them, and the direction they want to take in life as an individual (Berk, 2013:16; Louw & Louw, 2014b:342-343). During this stage, adolescents experiment with different roles and attitudes as they attempt to form a personal identity (Louw & Louw, 2014b:342-343). Erik Erikson states in his theory that adolescents are susceptible to experience an identity crisis whereby they do not form an integrated identity (Moore, 2005:93). An identity crisis can occur as identity diffusion or role confusion, where they lack clear values and goals for the self (Berk, 2013:470). In an attempt to cope, the adolescent may overly identify with cliques, heroes, crowds and causes, thereby losing their own individuality and causing them to feel anxious and show apathy or even hostility towards norms and values (Louw & Louw, 2014:343; Thomas 2005:93).

Adolescence is also a stage in which to achieve independence and autonomy, which requires relying more on the self and making own decisions (Berk, 2013:577-578). Regardless of them still requiring guidance of their caregivers, they strive to become more independent and their peer interaction and their need to belong to a group become more important for them (Berk, 2013:579). The peer group provides adolescents with an important context for meeting their emotional needs and their need to socialise with peers (Louw & Louw, 2014b:367). The peer group tends to function as a separate culture that helps adolescents during this often-confusing period, adolescents follow each other's ideals, dress code and speech, conform to the peer group, and tend to not tolerate anyone who does not fit in with their peer group (Louw & Louw, 2014b:367, 370; Thomas, 2005:94). According to Erikson (1963 as quoted by Schiavone, 2009:99), "healthy development has long been associated with security, trust, safety, and freedom to explore and master the environment."

Kaminer et al. (2013b:114) report that the more adolescents divide their time between the family, community and school, the greater the likelihood of their exposure to violence. Otwombe et al. (2015:6) established in their study that at the age of 14, some adolescents had their first experiences with violence. According to Louw and Louw (2014a:423), most adolescents have been exposed to more than one form of violence. This could be inclusive of different types of violence like domestic, sexual, community, and school violence as well as being victimised (Du Plessis et al., 2015:80). Du Plessis et al. (2015:81) report that the rate of poly-victimisation seems to be higher amongst adolescents in South Africa in relation to those from higher-income countries. South African youth is exposed to very high levels of domestic, sexual and criminal violence (Kaminer et al., 2013a:321).

Adolescents who successfully complete their psychosocial development tasks, develop a strong sense of self, while those who do not achieve these tasks tend to go against social norms and present with behaviours and attitudes such as intolerance, cruelty, and gang involvement (Thomas, 2005:94). Furthermore, Ward and Ashley (2013:543) highlight that, during adolescence, most children take risks and feel the need to explore as they grow and develop, thereby possibly becoming involved in deviant, antisocial, aggressive, and violent behaviour which effectively destroys and jeopardises their future. Furthermore, it was found that exposure to community violence can adversely affect the development of identity during adolescence (Schiavone, 2009:99). It thus becomes clear that their psychosocial developmental characteristics may put adolescents at risk for exposure to community violence and the harmful effects thereof.

2.6.5 Moral development

Louw and Louw (2014b:379) describe one of the most pertinent developmental tasks of adolescents being that of the development of a personal value system, in which they start to question existing societal values. Adolescents achieve Stage 4 of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory in the progression of moral development when they become respectful to authority and showing their wish to uphold law and order in the society (Louw & Louw, 2014b:382). Therefore, adolescents tend to conform not only to the societal norms but also their families' norms and expectations (Louw & Louw, 2014b:379, 381). The parental home, school, peer group and society have a significant influence on adolescents' moral development (Berk, 2013:504-505; Louw & Louw, 2014b:385-387). Albert Bandura's social learning theory suggests that parents need to reinforce positive moral behaviour in their children and punish immoral behaviour (Sigelman & Rider, 2009:391).

In conclusion, exposure to violence often happens in relation with different factors which contribute to unfavourable outcomes in children (Zinzow et al., 2009:450). The high

prevalence of community violence is a complex problem for entire contemporary communities (Bacchini et al., 2011:286). Exposure to violence, whether occurring in domestic or community settings, increases people's risk of mental ill health (Stansfeld, et al., 2017:257-264). The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of young adults of community violence they experienced during adolescence to shed more light on the phenomenon. Young adults were expected to have the cognitive and emotional maturity to effectively reflect on their experiences of community violence during adolescence. Next, the researcher provides a brief summary of the stage of young adulthood.

2.7 YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Young adulthood refers to the life stage from late adolescence to the twenties and the stage in which they take on responsibilities such as starting a career (Arnett, 2016:27). Bonnie et al. (2015:xv) describe young adulthood as the life stage of persons in the age group between 18 and 26 years. Adults function according to the formal operational stage of Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which is usually achieved during adolescence (Louw & Louw, 2014b:325; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:205).

The formal operational stage involves the capacity for hypothetical thinking and involves cognitive skills to consider different perspectives of a situation and different strategies to solve problems (Louw & Louw, 2014b:325). Furthermore, young adults can apply scientific reasoning, in which they can think about possible occurrences and adopt different viewpoints as points of discussion (Louw & Louw, 2014b:325). Their refined cognitive and psychological skills support self-regulation and mature decision making (Bonnie et al., 2015:52). Young adults are in a life stage in which they generally have refined language use, understand changes that occur over time, have developed a personal identity or clear sense of self, and have reached at least a level of moral development where they understand moral behaviour, namely upholding the existing social laws and the order in society (Louw & Louw, 2014b:327; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:282, 333).

3.8.7 SUMMARY

South Africa, like many other countries of the world, is a country with high levels of community violence. Children are exposed to violence in different settings within their living and school environments. In Chapter 2, the researcher conceptualised community violence and its adverse effects on adolescents, but also on their families and communities. Risk and protective factors related to community violence exposure were furthermore discussed. The literature review in this chapter forms the background to the discussion of the empirical results of the study that will be presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Children are exposed to violence in different settings within their social environments. South Africa is a country that has largely been characterised by different types of violence and large numbers of children are being exposed to community violence either directly or indirectly. Community violence affects people of all cultures, ages and socio-economic classes daily and seems to have become a normal phenomenon. Exposure to community violence can have long and/or short-term negative effects on people. This study sought out to explore and describe young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during adolescence. In this chapter the researcher will discuss the research methodology and ethical considerations followed and present the research findings of the study.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology of the study is discussed according to the research approach, type of research, research design, study population and sampling, data collection and analysis, the aspect of trustworthiness as well as the pilot study.

3.2.1 Research approach

The study was based on interpretivism as a research paradigm as the paradigm proposes that reality is socially constructed rather than objectively determined (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:60). The researcher explored young adults' perceptions of community violence as they personally experienced it during their adolescent years, to gain an understanding of their own constructions of their reality (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:309). A qualitative research approach was adopted that would enable the researcher aimed to gain information as described by a small sample of participants that would provide insight into the nature of the problem of community violence in the lives of adolescents (Fouché & Delport, 2011:63; Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:53). In essence, qualitative research studies focus on the meaning people assign to their experiences and situations (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:53).

3.2.2 Type of research

With this study, the researcher planned to collect information about the phenomenon of community violence, as experienced by adolescents, with the aim of informing social work services to address the problem in practice. Therefore, applied research was the most appropriate type of research for this study as this type of research focuses on using research findings to solve specific problems (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94-95; Jansen, 2016:9; Kumar,

2011:30).

The purpose of the study was exploratory and descriptive. In line with the exploratory purpose, the researcher aimed to present research findings to gain insight into adolescents' exposure to community violence, while the descriptive purpose of the study was met by describing the phenomenon based on the data collected from the participants (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95-96).

3.2.3 Research design

The researcher wished to collect data to become familiar with the experiences of a small sample of participants of their exposure to community violence, which made the case study design an appropriate research design for the study (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320). Case study research assisted the researcher to determine the boundaries of the research and to study the phenomenon more intensively by gaining an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of the participants on exposure to community violence (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:81; Welman et al., 2012:126). Despite the advantages of the case study design to explore the unique experiences of the participants, it is difficult to generalise the research findings due to the small sample size (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320, 322).

The researcher conducted the study to gain an understanding of a social phenomenon, namely that of adolescents' exposure to community violence. With the main focus on understanding the phenomenon, the instrumental case study was regarded as the most appropriate research design for this study (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:321-322; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:82-83).

3.2.4 Research methods

The research methods will be described to explain the study population and sampling, data collection and analysis, and data quality. Lastly, the pilot study will be described.

3.2.4.1 Study population and sampling

The study population, thus individuals who possessed certain characteristics that would be relevant to the study, consisted of young adults who have been exposed to community violence during adolescence, either directly or indirectly, within a South African context (Strydom, 2011a:223). The study population provided the researcher with the set of cases from which the study sample would be obtained (Welman et al., 2012:53). More specifically, the target population for the study consisted of young adults between the ages of 20 and 25 years who have been exposed to community violence during adolescence as these individuals

reflect the population to which the research findings would be relevant (Welman et al., 2012:126). The study was conducted in the Kempton Park area in the Gauteng Province. Kempton Park forms part of the City of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, which has a large and diverse economy and a comprehensive network of roads, railways, airports and telecommunication (Municipalities of South Africa, 2021).

Snowball sampling as a non-probability sampling method was employed as the researcher did not have knowledge of the young adults that have been exposed to community violence during their adolescent years (Strydom & Delport, 2011:393). As this lack of knowledge would complicate access to potential research participants, snowball sampling provided a suitable method for recruiting research participants (Maree & Pietersen, 2016:198; Strydom & Delport, 2011:393). Snowball sampling entailed that the researcher made contact with one person from the relevant study population, who would then bring her into contact with other potential participants.

As the participants were expected to provide information that would assist the researcher to answer the research question and accomplish the goal of the study, participants were purposively selected from the target population to meet the following inclusion criteria (Maree & Pietersen, 2016:198):

- The participants could be males or females between the ages of 20 and 25 years.
- Participants should have been able to converse in English.
- Participants must have been exposed to community violence in the South African context; directly exposed (victimisation) on at least one occasion and/or indirectly exposed (witnessing or hearing about community violence) on a regular basis.

The researcher identified the first participant with the assistance of persons in her social environment. This participant was requested to identify one or more other potential participants who complied with the sampling criteria for the study and the process was repeated until 10 participants were recruited for the study and data saturation had been reached (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:83-84; Strydom & Delport, 2011:393). Each participant identified one other person who met the sampling criteria and who indicated that he or she would be willing to participate in the study. The person's contact details were given to the researcher, who subsequently contacted him or her personally to confirm that participation would be voluntary, to state the purpose and expectations related to participation, and to arrange for the data collection interview. Sampling was thus conducted in an indirect manner. The participants were not from the researcher's social work caseload or from her work environment.

Snowball sampling has the disadvantage that, being dependent on referrals of initially selected

participants, all the participants may all belong to the same social network, which could provide a one-sided picture of the participants' experiences of exposure to community violence (Kumar, 2011:190). The researcher therefore requested each participant to help with the recruitment of only one or two other participants in an effort to include participants from different social networks. However, the participants were all from one community context and, as pointed out by the researcher in the limitations of the study (refer Chapter 1), this aspect would affect the generalisability of the research findings.

3.2.4.2 Data collection

The researcher aimed to obtain rich information on adolescents' experiences of exposure to community violence, as told in the words of young adults who experienced this phenomenon during their adolescent years. One-to-one semi-structured interviews were regarded as the data collection method that would allow the researcher to explore specific themes and questions that focused on the topic (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:93; Welman et al., 2012:166). The interviews were guided by an interview schedule (see Appendix A) containing questions on aspects that the researcher wished to cover (Greeff, 2011:352). The researcher was aware of the disadvantages of this method, namely that one could easily divert from the focus of the interviews. The researcher found the advantage of the use of semi-structured interviews useful in that she could prepare for the interview and maintain the focus of data collection but could also conduct the interview in a flexible manner to explore and clarify information (Greeff, 2011:351; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:93). The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants to ensure that data were captured accurately (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:94).

3.2.4.3 Data analysis

Related to the qualitative research approach, thematic analysis was used as the method of data analysis for the study as this method is relevant to the analysis and interpretation of data gathered through interviews (Clarke et al., 2015:223-225, 228; Schurink et al., 2011:402). Data analysis involved the following phases that occurred in a cyclical rather than in a fixed linear process (Clarke et al., 2015:230; Schurink et al., 2011:402):

- **Phase 1: Familiarisation**

Firstly, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the data collection interviews and organised them into text files. Nieuwenhuis (2016c:115) advises that good data analysis requires that the researcher gains an understanding of the data. The researcher read the entire data set several times to become familiar with the contents thereof (Clarke et al., 2015:231; Schurink et al., 2011:409). During this process, she critically reflected on the data and made notes about key ideas and concepts identified in the data (Clarke et al., 2015:232;

Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:115).

- **Phase 2: Coding**

In this phase of data analysis, the researcher looked for salient themes and recurring ideas and patterns in the data, which is regarded by Schurink et al. (2011:410) as "the heart of qualitative data analysis." The process entailed that the researcher divided the data into analytical units and assigned preliminary labels or codes that were relevant and meaningful to the research question (Clarke et al., 2015:234, Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:116). The different data units were labelled/coded with the use of words and/or short descriptive phrases, while the researcher also noted similarities and differences in the participants' responses (Clarke et al., 2015:235; Schurink et al., 2011:410; Welman et al., 2012:214). This process was repeated so that the researcher continuously refined and revised the codes (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:118).

- **Phase 3: Searching for themes**

The researcher subsequently clustered codes that carried similar meaning together to create initial themes and sub-themes in the data (Clarke et al., 2015:236; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:119). These were visually arranged into a table format to gain an idea of how themes and sub-themes fit together (Clarke et al., 2015:238). Welman et al. (2012:211) describe the identification of themes as a fundamental task in qualitative research. With the preliminary arrangement of the themes and sub-themes in table format, the researcher looked for central ideas that reflected the participants' perceptions and experiences, and considered appropriate theme names (Clarke et al., 2015:236; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:120; Schurink et al., 2011:415).

- **Phase 4: Reviewing the data**

The researcher reviewed all the themes and sub-themes separately and as an entire set to determine the usefulness of the data in describing the phenomenon of adolescents' exposure to community violence as well as whether the participants' perceptions on the topic were accurately represented (Clarke et al., 2015:238; Schurink et al., 2011:415). The researcher furthermore reflected on how the different themes and sub-themes related to one another, which allowed her to make changes to the arrangement of the themes and sub-themes (Clarke et al., 2015:238; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:120).).

- **Phase 5: Defining and naming themes**

After the preparatory work in the previous phases, the researcher finalised the themes, provided theme names, and wrote a short description that would explain the scope of each theme (Clarke et al., 2015:240). This step involved getting to the essence of the phenomenon by finding a logical structure in which the data would be presented as well as comparing

whether the findings correlate with existing literature or bring new insights into the topic (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:120; Schurink et al., 2011:417).

- **Phase 6: Writing-up the research findings**

The final phase of data analysis entailed the writing up of the research findings in the format of the research report (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:121; Schurink et al., 2011:419). The researcher attempted to present the findings in a way that would show the "lessons learned" from the study (Schurink et al., 2011:416). The findings were described with the inclusion of verbal quotes from the data collection interviews to present the unique reality of the participants within their social context, and with integration of existing literature (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:121; Schurink et al., 2011:416).

Nieuwenhuis (2013c:121) emphasises the importance thereof that researchers take steps to enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings. This aspect will be discussed next.

3.2.5 Data quality

Lietz, Langer and Furman (2006:444) assert that trustworthiness is obtained when a study's findings represent the meanings made by the participants as closely as possible. The data quality or trustworthiness of this study was enhanced by the researcher attending to the following constructs throughout the research process: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:191; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:123; Schurink et al., 2011:419).

- **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the accurate and authentic representation of the participants' meanings (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:191). The researcher implemented strategies that are recommended for enhancing credibility. Firstly, the research was conducted by following *theoretically grounded research methods* that guided the researcher's actions (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:123). Furthermore, the researcher guarded against *researcher reactivity* by being aware that her own verbal and non-verbal responses during the data collection interviews, if not neutral, could influence the information gained from the participants (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:191). The researcher made use of *reflexivity*; a process in which she reflected on her own beliefs and perceptions to prevent personal bias influencing the research (Lietz et al., 2006:446-447). In addition, *peer debriefing* was used as a strategy to discuss the research methodology and data analysis with colleagues and with her research supervisor, which allowed her to reflect on the research process and research findings (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:192).

- **Transferability**

Transferability, which relates to the generalisation of research findings to other settings, is regarded as a challenge in qualitative research studies because of probability sampling methods, typically purposive sampling, and small sample sizes (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:195; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:123; Schurink et al., 2011:420). To address transferability, the researcher provided a *thick description* of the research methods and research findings that may allow readers to understand how the research findings may be relevant to other settings (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:195).

- **Dependability**

Dependability, or auditability, refers to the clear documentation of the research procedures so that others can follow how the research study was conducted (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:195; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:124). It is acknowledged that replication of qualitative studies can be problematic because of continuous changes in constructions about the social world (Schurink et al., 2011:421). To enhance dependability, the researcher provided a clear description of the research methods and made use of *peer debriefing*, as described earlier (LIetz & Zayas, 2010:196).

- **Confirmability**

Confirmability requires that the research findings are presented in such a way that it reflects the views and experiences of the participants, rather than the researcher's preferences (Shenton, 2004 in Lietz & Zayas, 2010:197). Confirmability thus relates to the objectivity of the researcher, meaning that others can find a clear connection between the data and the research findings (Schurink et al., 2011:421; Lietz & Zayas, 2010:197). The researcher made use of r*eflexivity* and *peer debriefing* during the implementation of the research process and provided verbatim quotes from the data collection interviews to add to a *thick description* of the research findings. These strategies are relevant to enhancing the objectivity of the research findings (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:197; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:123; Schurink et al., 2011:421).

3.2.5 Pilot study

Nieuwenhuis (2016b:74) cautions that, no matter how well a study has been planned, the implementation thereof may present with challenges. With qualitative studies, Strydom and Delport (2011:394) emphasise the importance of a pilot study to determine whether the interview schedule will allow the researcher to obtain relevant data. The researcher conducted a pilot study with one person who complied with the inclusion criteria of the study to determine whether the questions in the interview schedule were clear and appropriate to obtain data on

the research topic (Strydom & Delport, 2011:394-395). By transcribing and analysing the content of the pilot interview, the researcher found that adequate and relevant information was gained. The data collected during the pilot study was therefore included in the research findings.

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was conducted with young adults and was about a topic that could be sensitive to them, namely their exposure to community violence during adolescence. Therefore, it was important that the researcher uphold ethical standards when conducting the study (Babbie, 2017:64; Bless et al., 2013:28-29; Kumar, 2011:218). The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria provided ethical approval for the study (see Appendix B). To ensure that the researcher conducted the study in accordance with ethical guidelines, the researcher adhered to the following ethical considerations:

3.3.1 Avoidance of harm

The study focused on young adults' perceptions of community violence that they were exposed to during adolescence. A central theme in the literature review of this study was the significant negative impact of exposure to community violence (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Guerra & Dierkhising, 2011:2; Kaminer et al., 2013a:320). The participants could thus be at risk for emotional harm when discussing their experiences with community violence during the data collection interviews (Strydom, 2011b:115). The researcher had to take responsibility to implement measures to protect the participants from harm (Welman et al., 2012:181, 201). During the recruitment of participants, they were provided with detailed information on the goal of the study, what would be expected from them as participants, possible risks involved in participation in the study, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences for them (Babbie, 2017:63; Strydom, 2011b:115). The researcher guarded against manipulating persons to participate in the study, especially if they felt too vulnerable to participate (Strydom, 2011b:115; Welman et al., 2012:201). Voluntary participation, as will be discussed in the next section, was thus also a measure to protect participants against harm. Before the start of the data collection phase of the study, the researcher made arrangements with a social worker who agreed to provide counselling free of charge to participants who experienced emotional distress because of their participation in the study. No participants needed to be referred for counselling.

3.3.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent

A key research principal is that participants should take part freely in the study and thus provide their informed consent (Bless et al., 2013:30; Welman et al., 2012:181). As mentioned

under avoidance of harm, the participants were provided with comprehensive information on the study and their role and rights. The information focused on aspects such as voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, confidentiality, the use of the research data, and a request to digitally record the data collection interviews. The information was included in an informed consent letter that each participant had to sign to indicate that he or she voluntarily participated in the study (see Appendix C). The researcher read through the informed consent forms with each participant to make sure that all the participants fully understood the conditions of participation. The researcher confirmed with each participant that he or she did not feel forced to participate in the study (Strydom, 2011b:116-117).

3.3.3 Upholding privacy and confidentiality

During the data collection interviews, the researcher allowed the participants to decide what information they wanted to share with the researcher; thereby upholding the research ethical principle of privacy (Strydom, 2011b:119; Welman et al., 2012:201). Furthermore, as stated in the letter of informed consent that the participants signed, the researcher ensured that confidentiality was upheld as a research principle (Bless et al., 2013:32). Protecting confidentiality meant that only the researcher would be able to link a response to a specific participant. The researcher ensured confidentiality by using pseudonyms instead of participants' names, by limiting access to the raw data to the researcher and her research supervisor, and by ensuring that the raw data were securely stored during the research as will be stored after completion of the research according to the prescriptions of the University of Pretoria (Strydom, 2011b:119-121).

3.3.4 No deception of participants

The participants received comprehensive and accurate information about the research and what participation involved, so that no deception of participants occurred in the study. Deception involves that researchers intentionally or unintentionally misrepresent or withhold information from participants to ensure that they participate in the study (Bless et al., 2013:34; Strydom, 2011b:118-119). Information on the research was contained in the informed consent letters and before the data collection interviews, participants could also ask the researcher questions on aspects that they did not fully understand. As described in the following section, debriefing was done after each interview, in which the participants received another opportunity to immediately clarify any misunderstandings (Strydom, 2011b:119).

3.3.5 Debriefing of participants

The participants were given the opportunity for debriefing directly after the data collection interviews. Debriefing provided them with an opportunity to discuss their experience of the

interview, to process emotions stemming from the interview as well as to correct any misunderstandings that they had; thereby lowering the risk of negative consequences for the participants (Babbie, 2017:71; Curtis & Curtis, 2011:41; Strydom, 2011b:122).

3.3.6 Actions and competence of the researcher

Welman et al. (2012:182) emphasise that researchers should be competent and adequately trained to acquire the skills to conduct a study. If not, they may put participants at risk of harm and abuse their goodwill, amongst others. The researcher attended an advanced module in research as part of the degree MSW Play-based Intervention and conducted a comprehensive literature study to familiarise herself with the topic of community violence and adolescence (Strydom, 2011b:123). Furthermore, the researcher engaged in continuous self-reflection to engage sensitively with the participants (Strydom, 2011b:123). The researcher's conduct was furthermore guided by the ethical responsibilities and code of conduct as a registered social worker with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (n.d.). The researcher reported the research findings accurately and all literature sources used in the study were acknowledged (Babbie, 2017:72; Strydom, 2011b:123; Welman et al., 2012:182).

3.3.7 Publication of findings

The research findings are presented in the research report that can be accessed through the library at the University of Pretoria. The research results are reported openly and honestly, without falsification of the results (Babbie, 2017:72; Strydom, 2011b:126; Wellman et al., 2012:182). The research findings are furthermore reported in a way to uphold the principle of confidentiality (Strydom, 2011b:126). The report is intended to add to the knowledge base on adolescents' exposure to community violence.

3.4 THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In line with the goal of the study, the researcher collected data from young adult participants on their perspectives of community violence that they were exposed to during their adolescent years. The researcher will firstly provide an overview of the biographical information of the participants before discussing the qualitative research findings according to themes and sub-themes identified in the data.

3.4.1 Biographical information of participants

The sample of the study consisted of 10 participants. The biographical information of the participants is summarised in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Biographical profile of participants

Partici-pants	Age (years)	Gender	Race	Highest educational level	Economic status
1	22	Female	Black	Matric	Medium
2	20	Female	Coloured	Matric	High
3	19	Female	Black	Grade 11	Low
4	23	Female	Black	Bachelor's degree	Medium
5	21	Female	Black	2nd year university	Medium
6	19	Female	Black	Matric	Medium
7	22	Male	Black	Matric	Medium
8	19	Male	Black	Grade 11	Medium
9	22	Female	Black	Matric	Medium
10	21	Female	Black	Certificate	Low

All the participants either resided in the central business district (CBD) or the urban surroundings at the time of exposure to community violence. According to Fowler and colleagues (2009:227), community violence mostly affects youths living in urban communities in America. This seems no different with South African youths living in urban areas whose exposure to violence is quite common (Kelly, 2010:62). As indicated in the sampling criteria for the study, the participants involved in the research all reported to have either been directly or indirectly exposed to violence in their communities.

The participants were mostly female, with only two males that participated in the study. The gender distribution could have been because of the use of snowball sampling, where females were probably more inclined to refer the researcher to other females. The literature indicates that boys are more likely to be exposed to severe types of violence (Kaminer et al., 2013a:327). The Institute of Security Studies (ISS) mention on their website that research has proven that males are mostly at risk of becoming both the victims and perpetrators of crime (ISS Africa, 2020). Similarly, Hinsberger, Sommer, Kaminer, Holtzhausen, Weierstall, Seedat, Madikane and Elbert (2016:1) report in their study that the lives of male youths are often surrounded by violence in the low-income urban communities of South Africa, which often sees them as both victims and perpetrators.

Snowball sampling could also be a factor in the fact that most of the participants were Black, except for one female who was from the Coloured population group. At the time of conducting this research, none of the participants were employed, with two still attending high school and

one in tertiary education. Most of the participants described their economic status as “medium”. One participant mentioned her economic status as high, while two participants mentioned themselves as falling within a low-income economic status.

3.4.2 Qualitative research findings

In this section, the researcher discusses the empirical results of the study according to the themes and sub-themes that were identified through thematic data analysis. The themes and sub-themes are summarised in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Themes and sub-themes

Main Themes	Sub-themes
1 Exposure to community violence	1.1 Witnessing community violence (indirect exposure) 1.2 Being a victim of community violence (victimisation) 1.3 Observing community violence on social media and television 1.4 Hearing about community violence 1.5 Reactions to exposure to scenes of community violence 1.6 Frequency of community violence incidents
2 Effects of community violence during adolescence	2.1 Limits on movement in the community 2.2 Experiencing trauma 2.3 The situation stays in one's mind 2.4 A sense of fear and helplessness 2.5 Disappointment in and annoyance towards others 2.6 Lack of faith in the justice system and police
3 The effects of community violence during young adulthood	3.1 Violence becomes normalised 3.2 Living in fear even as a young adult 3.3 Experiencing desensitisation 3.4 Lasting effects of trauma 3.5 Community violence is unacceptable 3.6 Community violence can be understood in some cases 3.7 No long-term effects
4 Effects of community violence on the community and on families	4.1 Disturbance of people's daily lives and routines 4.2 Community violence becomes a normal and accepted part of life 4.3 Distrust and a lack of community involvement 4.4 Lack of trust in the police 4.5 Economic impact on the community 4.6 Harmful effects on families
5 Causes of community violence	5.1 Poor socio-economic conditions and poor service delivery 5.2 Poor communication and conflict resolution skills 5.3 Lack of faith in the justice system 5.4 Criminal elements in the community 5.5 The phenomenon of xenophobia
6 Solutions to community violence	6.1 Accepting community violence as a reality 6.2 Find alternative conflict resolution strategies

The themes and sub-themes are supported with direct quotes from the participants and discussed in the context of existing literature.

3.4.2.1 Theme 1: Exposure to community violence

Kennedy and Ceballo (2014:73) mention that violence may come in many kinds and types. Common elements in all forms of violence are that violence is intentional, unwanted, nonessential, and harmful (Hamby, 2017:168). Most of the participants have been exposed to community violence by directly witnessing it, by being a victim of community violence, by witnessing it on social media or television, or by hearing about community violence. These aspects will be discussed in the following sub-themes.

- **Sub-theme 1.1: Witnessing community violence (indirect exposure)**

Witnessing community violence entails being an eyewitness to events that involve property loss, physical injury or a threat to injury, or death, amongst others (Fowler et al., 2009:229). Most of the participants' exposure to community violence involved being a witness of violent events. Three types of violence seemed to be especially prevalent in their community: community protests, mob justice, and general violent acts in which the participants witnessed the aftermath of the violence.

Most of the participants were exposed to **community protests** that often turned violent. These protests involved aspects such as service delivery, social issues and xenophobic attacks.

> "So now they [protesters] would burn tyres and block roads ... and if they saw people going to work or school, they would make sure that they destroy their cars. They also had to lock and close all the garage doors because they vandalised everything … they were burning properties and transport (vehicles) and they attacked (and) torched a school bus while the kids were still inside." (Participant 9)
>
> ""It happens during … strikes [for] water. … [with student protests], most of the students were injured … (they) were in groups, some were singing, some were throwing things, some were just making noise like shouting. During that incident, many people got hurt. … They will end up breaking clinics." (Participant 10)
>
> "I am not sure if the Fees Must Fall was community violence, but there were things that were destroyed, so in a way it could be categorised as violence" (Participant 2)
>
> "They were burning shops ... I saw the fire. … I saw the people … they were striking on the streets and looting from the shops ... they said it was … xenophobia and [commuter] taxis." (Participant 3)
>
> "… but the only thing I can remember that affected people close to me was … last year when xenophobia started becoming (a) real problem." (Participant 8)
>
> "Yah so basically there [has] … just been a lot of [violence] like xenophobic attacks." (Participant 7)
>
> "During the xenophobic (attacks) people were set alight" (Participant 2)

As described by the participants, community protests are caused by dissatisfaction, often due to poor service delivery or social issues. The issues reported by the participants include commuter taxis fighting for routes, university students fighting for free tertiary education,

violence against foreigners, political parties fighting against each other and a lack of water. Abt (2017:269) defines protests as planned or impulsive community violence events which often occur in public settings between familiar people or strangers. In South Africa these are also called strikes. Bohler-Muller, Roberts, Struwig, Gordon, Radebe and Alexander (2017:81) state that the country has faced the most community protests and strikes worldwide since the mid-2000's, which is exaggerated by the recent resurgence of the student protest movement. Persistent poverty and unemployment increase the likelihood of community protests as people see it as a way of obtaining material goods and meeting their basic needs (Bennett-Johnson, 2004 in Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:91; Schiavone, 2009:102).

During most community violence incidences, property is damaged as a show of anger by protestors. Sometimes such property includes vehicles or buildings used to provide public much needed services to the community, as also mentioned by the participants. Shaidi (2013:1) argues that service delivery protests by communities show that citizens are dissatisfied with how South African municipalities execute their constitutional responsibilities. The author further proposes: "… if the root causes, as well as the violence and intimidation linked to certain of the protests, are not addressed, this phenomenon could pose a serious risk to the country's democracy, safety and stability" (Shaidi, 2013:13).

Some participants told of how they witnessed incidents of **mob justice** in their community.

> "… they told us there was a robbery in the community … so it was basically mob justice, they burnt down the car." (Participant 4)
>
> "Well, I don't know if mob justice counts as community violence [but] that is basically what I've been exposed to for a very long time … and when one gets caught then everybody in community will beat [the perpetrator]." (Participant 6)
>
> "I think as a human being regardless of what (others) do to you, you never want to see somebody die right in front of you [in incidents of mob justice]." (Participant 6)

As described by the participants, when communities experience issues that must be addressed by law and this does not happen, community members take it upon themselves to discipline the alleged criminals; a situation that can result in severe injuries or death. These events, commonly known as mob justice, often occur when community members no longer trust the justice system (Orock, 2014:409, 423; Traynor et al., 2020:1). According to the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 846 of the 20 336 murders described in the 2017/18 crime statistics analysis by the South African Police Service (SAPS) were associated with mob justice (ISS, 2020). The ISS further mentions that this number could be higher because often the motives for murder are not known and sometimes the South African Police Service (SAPS) cannot account for violence taking place in areas where they are unable to formally provide safety services.

Other participants shared information about witnessing the **aftermath of violence** in the community, for example seeing dead bodies in the community.

> "I've witnessed a lot of people [being killed] so far … Yah, like at times you have no choice, let's say you're just passing or you're going to work and then the next thing you see people like [gathering around]. … the thing is already done … but you can see [that] this is the body of the person." (Participant 1)

> "So, I only saw it from a distance … not directly, (I) just witnessed it. At times I was a few streets away (but) I felt it, I heard it. I also saw the pictures and videos that went viral ... I think I (only) saw the aftermath." (Participant 2)

> "I have seen plenty of people injured." (Participant 7)

Although they may not have necessarily participated or were victimized, some participants have been witnesses to community violence albeit from a distance. Furthermore, some of the participants witnessed the aftermath of violent incidents in which they were exposed to the damage left behind or seeing injured and sometimes dead people. According to Fowler et al. (2009:229), witnessing community violence refers to being an eyewitness of events that may entail destruction of property, threats, injury or even death. Witnessing community violence can have harmful emotional and behavioural consequences, even if the person is not directly involved in the scenes (Bacchini et al., 2011:285; Zinzow et al., 2009:447).

- **Sub-theme 1.2: Being a victim of community violence (victimisation)**

Some of the participants were victims of community violence, mostly in instances of robberies and muggings.

> "... it was basically a robbery ... they had a gun and some knives ... and then they were threatening us." (Participant 4)

> "… we went to a shop and when we got in, there was a guy that had a gun and then he put … all of the customers in one small room. ... he had to push us using his gun ... like being given the gun to your head. … and I guess he took everything [from everyone] in the shop … and [from] some of the cars that were [parked] outside the shopping centre." (Participant 5)

> "Last year I got mugged twice." (Participant 6)

> "… because I have been robbed here in Kempton Park, twice ... they just pointed [at] me with a gun and a knife ... [and] we were being robbed at our own house during [the] night, … they decide to break in." (Participant 10)

As described by the participants, robberies resulted in them being victims of violent acts in the community. Violent crime has been reported to be a huge challenge in many African countries especially in areas where the police is seen as unable to protect citizens (Orock, 2014:408). For many, violence is seen as a necessary means to survive and access basic necessities and material possessions (Schiavone, 2009:102). This has led to people looking for means to

survive socially and economically through alternative ways such as trading in alcohol and drugs (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:91), which in turn gives rise to more violence.

- **Sub-theme 1.3: Observing community violence on social media and television**

The importance of taking into consideration today's new forms of socialisation such as new technology and the internet, and how they affect the youth particularly in their personal and social development was extensively discussed by Sánchez-Hernández, Herrera-Enríquez and Expósito (2020:1). The use of social media has resulted in a greater indirect exposure of members of society to community violence, as was echoed by some of the participants.

> "I think social media, social media has a lot of impact ... I know that social media plays a big role because now people update on social media that this is happening." (Participant 9)
>
> "Yes, I remember there was a video that was sent to me via WhatsApp some years ago … someone was being burnt (alive). There was a tyre that was put around the neck and then it was (set) on fire … so they burnt him until there was nothing." (Participant 4)
>
> "Then usually the internet yah … Yes, I think so coz I think social media or the internet generally … has just become, I'd like to say, our generation's … way of living. Our role models, our everything is on social media." (Participant 6)
>
> "Yah, some news, newspapers and Facebook…But then like you just saw the pictures and videos that went viral." (Participant 2)
>
> "I have seen documentaries and dramas on … xenophobia and things like that on TV." (Participant 5)
>
> "… on the news it [has become] more general when they say people are dying." (Participant 8)
>
> "I watched some other soapie, it's a drama on Mzansi Wethu ...Yah it was, that story is so violent … like everything there ... like at the, in the beginning it was just a violence that was happening … people were just fighting and stuff. But at the end people got hurt and some died." (Participant 10)

As described by the participants, many adolescents use the internet daily and in the process are exposed to community violence through social media. Social media use has ultimately resulted in a greater indirect exposure to community violence for members of society. The participants in this study reported exposure to community violence through media during their adolescence. Participant 6 stated that the use of internet was the "generation's way of living", showing how impactful internet-based social media platforms have become. Kennedy and Ceballo (2014:71) report that high profile cases often shown in the media cause emotional distress for people. An aspect also highlighted by the participants, is that besides the actual events being circulated on social media or reported on in the news, violent drama features and movies are also being aired on public channels, exposing adolescents even further to violence within the comfort of their homes. It is concerning that this indirect form of exposure to community violence can even result in violent behaviour (Hendricks & Kanjiri, 2021:3).

- **Sub-theme 1.4: Hearing about community violence**

Hearing about community violence refers to "learning of another person's victimisation by neighborhood violence" (Fowler et al., 2009:229). At least five of the participants reported having heard of community violence incidents from other people who were either victims or who witnessed the events directly.

> "[I heard that] she was just walking around and then those things just came up … Then she was caught also in the [protests] … yah, she was hurt and then the next thing she was at the hospital … it [injury] was just not that serious … she wasn't part of that [the protests]" (Participant 1)
>
> "Uhhh, my friend witnessed someone like being stabbed in front of her." (Participant 8)
>
> "Ok I remember the time when there were the xenophobic attacks ... There is someone that was in our school that was beaten …" (Participant 4)
>
> "I mean I have a friend like who died … yeah it was in the Kempton Express [local newspaper] and its like that those are just only a few or of the dead people." (Participant 7)

Hearing about community violence, as experienced by the above participants, is regarded as indirect exposure to community violence and the indirect effects thereof (Fowler et al., 2009:229; Nqguela & Lewis, 2020:94). Although it may be assumed that witnessing community violence will have a more profound effect on the person than hearing about it, Fowler et al. (2009:227) explain that hearing about community violence can also result in problems such as PTSD. The effects of such exposure in comparison to being a direct witness are believed to be the same for adolescents, showing that it is still traumatic to hear about violence just as much as it is to witness it directly (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014:74).

- **Sub-theme 1.5: Reactions to exposure to scenes of community violence**

The participants reacted differently when exposed to scenes of community violence. Two participants reported going to the scene to see for themselves what was going on while some participants explained how they experienced a sense of excitement when witnessing the events.

> "You have to see [close by] … what's really going on." (Participant 1)
>
> "We want to see what's going on outside." (Participant 3)
>
> "I wanted to join them ... not (from) the excitement but you felt that ok they are moving towards something." (Participant 2)
>
> "I was excited … and when the teachers come and we ran, it was so fun (laughs)". (Participant 10)

The reaction of the two participants who reported that they enjoyed going closer to the violent event, is also described by Sánchez García and Malcolm (2010:41) in which they state that

even in critically dangerous situations, excitement could be generated through the development of a socially conditioned psychological need. Where persons feel that the potential for 'real' harm is small, they experience mimetic excitement, which is described as excitement in a situation where one does not feel threatened (García & Malcolm, 2010:41).

Two other participants reported watching the community violence scene from a distance, both reporting how traumatic it was to watch even from afar.

> "I think there's a difference between like hearing about it and seeing it on the news and the newspaper ... and actually being there. There was like a huge crowd of people." (Participant 2)
>
> "You just tend to stand there and watch … until the whole thing is resolved" (Participant 7)

Other participants explained how they were filled with shock, sadness and surprise when they observed the violent events.

> "You don't really think at that moment it's just shock … asking is it really happening, is it a dream, what is actually going on … your trend of thought just disappears and you don't really think anything … you will be in shock, confusion follows." (Participant 6)
>
> "Yes, I was shocked, part of me was traumatised." (Participant 10)
>
> "It is just shocking you know, when you see [violent] things happen." (Participant 7)
>
> "I was surprised because it was the first time I witnessed [a protest]. I was walking to work and then I saw busses were going routes I've never seen before and there were helicopters, I was like ok what's happening?" (Participant 2)

Only one participant reported avoiding the scene completely and choosing to stay indoors during the duration of the violent protests.

> "I stayed at home the whole week." (Participant 9)

The research findings show that the participants had different reactions to being exposed to incidents of community violence. Some or the participants experienced a sense of shock and disbelief that the violence happened. It appears that some of the participants were intrigued by the violent events and went closer to it, where others kept a safe distance from the scenes. Silvia (2009:4) describes the feeling of surprise as a factor that directs people to a seemingly important situation resulting in one either becoming interested or getting confused. However, surprises happen unexpectedly and contains an element of unpredictably whilst also being unmanageable (Aradau, 2014:79).

Because violence is common in South Africa, adolescents can be exposed to it directly or indirectly at home, school, community, as well as be subjected to violence driven by politics (Sui et al., 2018:6). The researcher proposes that the element of surprise may draw

adolescents closer to incidents of community violence, which in some instances may result in them being directly exposed to or even becoming victims of community violence. Due to males portraying more risky behaviour, Lambert et al. (2012:7) report that males are more likely to either partake in or be victims of community violence than their female counterparts. One's closeness to the violent events is seen as having an influence on the effects of the exposure to violence, thus children's risk for harmful effects increases the closer they were to a violent event and children who are directly exposed may portray more negative symptoms than those indirectly exposed (Fowler et al., 2009:220; Zinzow et al., 2009:447).

- **Sub-theme 1.6: Frequency of community violence incidents**

Most of the participants described community violence as a common occurrence in their community.

> "Like it was happening a lot especially here in Kempton Park … so I feel like the stories are repetitive, it's just different names but it's the same story every time." (Participant 8)
>
> "Quite often, there are things on the news each day and ehh you know every now and then on on Facebook people share these videos, or on WhatsApp." (Participant 4)
>
> "Like it happens seven times a year (laughs) … They [other countries] do [have violence] but as for South Africa, it takes a number." (Participant 10)
>
> "Nx [tongue click] uhmmm a lot of times when I was still in KP." (Participant 9)
>
> "…the [xenophobic] attacks, everyday just because like maybe there's like an ehhh a foreigner…" (Participant 7)

In recent years, there has been an increase in violent offenses against young people and it is common for them to be exposed to violence in the community (Kelly, 2010:61). As evident from the above quotes, the high prevalence of exposure to community violence was also the experienced by the participants. Community violence is a phenomenon which is not only evident in South Africa but normalised globally (Brown & Walklate, 2012:343). Children are widely exposed to and witness crime and other violent activities in their families and communities (Finkelhor et al., 2009:1413, 1415). In South Africa, poor communities are characterised by constant violence (Hinsberger et al., 2016:1). Frequent and continued exposure to community violence is seen as factors that will influence the effect it has on the person (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Louw & Louw, 2014c:216). Prolonged periods of exposure to community violence or being a victim thereof can affect a person's ability for emotional regulation, lead to suppression of feelings, and result in negative feelings towards the community (Bacchini et al., 2011:270; Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Savahl et al., 2013:589). These effects provide evidence of the Gestalt view that adverse environments negatively affect people's ability for self-regulation (Blom, 2006:31).

Some participants reported experiencing community violence irregularly.

> "It [public protests and looting] is not like it's a normal thing to see … Maybe three times [in a year]." (Participant 1)

> "The one that I experienced and witnessed was just one day ... But then of course it was like a continuous thing that was on the news." (Participant 2)

Although Participant 2 witnessed community violence only once, situations involving violence were repeatedly shown on television. A number of studies hint that South African children grow up for the most part in violent environments which differs from children of the same ages in the United States (Kaminer et al., 2013a:321). The UNODOC (2013) mentioned community violence to be a huge challenge in South Africa, with most adolescents residing in neighbourhoods with inexorable levels of exposure to community violence throughout their lifetimes (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014:77). Exposure to violence, crime and other forms of victimisation is widespread with many of the country's children being exposed to more than one form violent acts (Rasool, 2017:9113). Kennedy and Ceballo (2014:76) report that continued exposure to violence heightens the impact thereof and witnessing several violent events over time may in fact have a greater effect on mental health than a single isolated incident.

3.4.2.2 Theme 2: The effects of community violence during adolescence

The participants described how their exposure to community violence, whether being a victim or exposure through observing or hearing about the violence in their community, affected them as adolescents. Richter et al. (2018:181) mention that exposure to violence poses long-term threats to one's psychosocial and physical health, manifesting in problems such as depression, desensitisation, a lack of empathy and engaging in violent behaviours. Exposure to community violence can affect children in several ways including neurologically, physically, emotionally, and socially whereby the functioning and healthy development of adolescents can severely be threatened (Chen, 2010:403; Guerra & Dierkhising, 2011:2). The research findings in terms of such effects are presented in the following sub-themes.

- **Sub-theme 2.1: Limits on movement in the community**

Most participants reported how community violence forced them to stay indoors out of fear of being victimised, which resulted in them sometimes missing school for at least a week. The participants explained that their free movement in the community was affected by community violence, either because of fears of being exposed to incidents of violence or because of the threats posed by the leaders in the violent events. Some participants described their fear of being confronted with incidents of community violence.

> "I still felt insecure like walking in the streets or going to shops." (Participant 5)

> "Yes, every time when I want to go outside the house, I would have to think twice." (Participant 10)

> "If it is happening next to me, I'll say, what if I go to school and then I don't come back home?" (Participant 3)

> "And then like as soon as I got like exposed to that, it is kind of like I'd say it woke me up … It's like now it's like uhmm because certain areas now that we go to … and like what time … we we we started becoming more cautious actually of like our actions … where are we and what time is it, you know." (Participant 7)

> "…at some point I was also really paranoid, I wouldn't walk at certain places at a certain time, and I wouldn't dress a certain way if I'm going to a certain place." (Participant 6)

> "During xenophobic attacks that would happen in town, so for a few days you can't go to school. No, we couldn't continue travelling on that route." (Participant 4)

Other participants explained how their movements in the community were restricted by the actions of those who participated in public protests.

> "These [leaders in the public protests] were going in schools, they didn't want to see any children going to school, they wanted everyone to be indoors. They were just coming to you and not asking for anything, they would just beat you and do whatever they think they can do with you." (Participant 1)

> "…because they are stopping everyone from going to work, from going to school … I stayed at home the whole week." (Participant 9)

It is evident from the above quotes that people will start to limit themselves from access to certain parts of their neighbourhoods as a measure to protect them from violence (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014:75). When people feel unsafe in their communities, their freedom of movement in the community is hampered (South African Cities Network, 2019:5). Jeevasuthan and Hatta (2013:203) report that some children become isolated socially because of the anxieties or misunderstandings of what is allowed in society. The freedom of mobility in the neighbourhood could result in young people being robbed and attacked while walking about in the community and being a witness to violence between community members. Several participants reported how community violence prevented them or their schoolmates from going to school. Van der Merwe et al. (2013:72) mention that young people can be fearful of travelling to school because of violence in the community. Numerous studies emphasise the challenges that community violence poses for adolescents' educational development (Busby et al., 2013:250; Lane et al., 2017:455) and the influence on their ability to attend to their schoolwork whilst in school (Lane et al., 2017:451).

- **Sub-theme 2.2: Experiencing trauma**

Some of the participants described their exposure to community violence as a traumatic experience.

> "It's not so easy to be at the scene … it's so hard to see someone you know taking their last breath, suffering and all that stuff … I'll be like unstable for the whole day … But yah, it'll just clear as time goes on … As you try to keep yourself busy, trying to think of something else but yah, it's not easy … You end up, you're thinking about it all the time; that's why you're trying to find other things to do." (Participant 1)

> "Uhm, but yah with the xenophobia one that was traumatising ... of course that evokes an emotional reaction I'll be like that's traumatising, that's extreme." (Participant 2)

> "It was traumatising. I was very traumatised, and I got really frightened every time I'd go to maybe like a township … besides it being traumatising." (Participant 4)

> "… that was quite traumatising, you know." (Participant 5)

> "I was shocked, that part of me it was like traumatised." (Participant 10)

> "I think the energies are just … you start believing that the whole thing is happening to you (again) and it brings back the (memories) of the times you were mugged … I think there is a lot of anger and excitement just mashed together." (Participant 6)

As described by the participants, emotional distress was reported as a huge challenge most adolescents faced after their experiences with community violence (Fowler et al., 2009:248). The participants described their exposure to community violence as traumatic, which is confirmed by Lane et al. (2017:447) who describe this phenomenon as traumatic incidents. Therefore, adolescents who are exposed to community violence may experience symptoms that are characteristic to the trauma response, for example re-experiencing the traumatic events, avoiding the scene where the violence occurred, emotional numbing and/or hyper-arousal (Dye, 2018:381; Lane et al., 2017:453). Copeland-Linder et al. (2010:176) note that being either a witness or victim of community violence does have emotional and behavioural problems including posttraumatic stress symptoms. Evidence supports the development of PTSD in youths resulting from exposure to community violence (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014:75). Bacchini et al. (2011:284) note that being a victim of violence affects the way in which people regulate their emotions. They highlight that when people are unable to find effective coping mechanisms to deal with trauma, they negatively react to situations emotionally and present with internalising symptoms. Internalising symptoms result in the undesirable modification in a person's emotional state, such as chronic excessive emotional stimulation or emotional suppression (Fowler et al., 2009:228; Kelly, 2010:67; Strasburger et al., 2009:175). Sikweyiya and Jewkes (2012:6-7) found that women were more likely than men to experience sadness or pain as they were reflecting on painful experiences with violence.

- **Sub-theme 2.3: The situation stays in one's mind**

Some participants described how they had repeated thoughts of the violent situation that they have been exposed to.

> "At times I'll feel like I'm visualising kuti [that] ok, really these things actually happening. … what can we do to avoid this type of things so that no one should have to encounter

such type of a thing? So, at the end of the day, you find I'm so busy in my mind. I'm like, how can we avoid this type of a thing and already the person [perpetrator of violence] it's gone?" (Participant 1)

"Yah coz I lost focus at school and focus on the strike. So that I wanna ... go to school but I'm afraid to go to school because of this and that." (Participant 3)

"I think that that plays a lot in my mind." (Participant 8)

"I got really frightened coz every time I'd go to maybe like a township ... or location then I get really afraid that something like that could happen." (Participant 4)

"… and just constant remembrance of the whole situation of course … that's recurring and won't stop." (Participant 6)

"It just takes my mind. I couldn't think of anything, even now I'm still scared … Because I, it took days for me to forget [but] like not to totally forget." (Participant 10)

The participants described how constantly thinking of the community violence interfered with their functioning. They described a pattern of intrusive thinking, thus of continuous and unintentional thoughts associated with exposure to violence (Chen, 2010:412; Verkuil & Brosschot, 2013:69). This reaction can be related to the re-experiencing of the traumatic events due to PTSD (Dye, 2018:381; Lane et al., 2017:453) In this way, exposure to community violence can result in many problems which affect adolescents' concentration on their schoolwork (Busby et al., 2013:250). Gestalt theory refers to this phenomenon as the effect of a strong foreground need that, if not dealt with, interferes with the child's attention in the present moment (Blom, 2006:24-25). Such pre-occupation with a traumatic event is one of the known effects of exposure to trauma (Louw & Louw, 2014a:429).

- **Sub-theme 2.4: A sense of fear and helplessness**

Richter et al. (2018:181) reported violence as a major cause of personal suffering and fear, amongst other effects on an individual. The participants explained that they experienced fear and a general feeling of helplessness.

"There was fear, like … It's just fearing everything coz there's a time when this happened … we were just walking … a normal day to day living as usual … that feels like, ok anytime anything can happen." (Participant 1)

"I'm afraid, thinking I'm going to die, yah." (Participant 3)

"I think there is fear especially in the process of chasing the person … the thought of you could, you could be the closest to him at that particular moment … which means you're the easiest to harm … So that fear … is there ... Fear is most definitely one of the troubling feelings at that point." (Participant 6)

"… but at the same time, I don't have a choice because that's how the world works." (Participant 8)

"After that incident with the police I just realised whatever happens was meant to happen, I guess … I think it was at that point when I decided that whatever happens, happens because." (Participant 6)

"I felt like I'm losing power, I was feeling so weak." (Participant 10)

Fearfulness appeared to be a common reaction to exposure to community violence among the participants. Fear and a feeling of helplessness as a result of exposure to community violence in some participants resulted in adopting a fatalistic view where they just have to accept a situation that cannot be changed. When a child is victimised in a setting in which they feel fearful and in which they cannot avoid, this may generate elevated levels of mental and emotional distress (Shields et al., 2009:1204). Participant 10 above reported feeling physically powerless during her violent ordeal where she was robbed and threatened with a weapon. Some participants reported shock and confusion following exposure to community violence. The participants' experiences are confirmed in a study conducted by Schiavone (2009:101) in which participants described exposure to community violence as extreme and inappropriate, and told stories which revealed patterns of shock, confusion, a sense of vulnerability, fear, and insecurity about the future. Exposure to community violence may result in generalised feelings of insecurity (Fowler et al., 2009:228).

- **Sub-theme 2.5: Disappointment in and annoyance towards others**

The participants explained how their exposure to community violence changed their perceptions of and behaviours towards others.

> "I was disappointed because … they [protestors] should have tried to be reasonable first. It is so disappointing because some of the people protesting are educated people." (Participant 10)
>
> "I felt that the people were being selfish." (Participant 9)
>
> "I was thinking that people are making our land so dirty ... why can't they go back so that we can be free. The foreigners also fight back, and they disturb us at school." (Participant 3)
>
> "I think at that point you just become angry at everybody ... you start believing that the whole thing is happening to you (again) and it brings back memories of the times you were mugged." (Participant 6)

The experiences described by the participants above point to negative attitudes towards others that might be generalised to all people. The words of Participant 9 and Participant 10 reflect the findings of a study by Mangavita and Heponiemi (2012:3, 5) that disappointment in others is one of the effects of exposure to violence. In a study conducted by Wood and Dennard (2017:2), paranoia was mentioned as one of the negative effects resulting from community violence. In this way, community violence exposure causes distress symptoms and in particular causes people to worry about the possibility of violence happening again in the future (Leino, Selin, Summala & Virtanen, 2011:404). This reaction was evident in the words of Participant 6 who feared that violence could happen again.

Lambert et al. (2012:8) report that such responses could possibly be a result of a perceived threat in a situation in which one may possibly become a victim. According to physiologically based theories, exposure to violent experiences in the community can result in people becoming aggressive towards others (Fowler et al., 2009:228). The participants' resentment towards the perpetrators of violence could possibly stem from such underlying aggressive feelings. Adolescents, especially, have been reported to display aggressive behaviours and the intent to use violence when exposed to violence (Kelly, 2010:67).

The sub-themes in Theme 2 confirm research findings that exposure to violence poses significant physical, psychological and social health risks for adolescents (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Richter et al., 2018:181). Exposure to different types of community violence may, however, affect adolescents differently; those who are closer to the event may exhibit more symptoms while being a victim is associated with stronger symptoms than witnessing community violence (Fowler et al., 2009:228-229, 241). Community violence is thus seen as a public health challenge that raises concerns over the impact of adolescents' exposure to community violence on their psychosocial functioning and development (Gill et al., 2014:1; Tavara & Cueto, 2015:306).

3.4.2.3 Theme 3: The effects of community violence during young adulthood

Constant exposure to violence affects people's emotional and behavioural responses to violence during adolescence and adulthood (Louw & Louw, 2014c:216; Richter et al., 2018:181). According to Kennedy and Ceballo (2014:72), the effects of traumatic events may over time either become less or more traumatic as one recalls them. Most of the participants described that their exposure to community violence during adolescence still affected them as young adults. What should thus be kept in mind, is that the participants' views (as young adults) were formed by their exposure to community violence during their adolescent years and could point to the long-term effects of community violence.

- **Sub-theme 3.1: Violence becomes normalised**

The participants were of the view that continuous exposure to community violence resulted in them normalising violence. Some participants explained this aspect as follows:

> "… yah, probably before that [exposure to violence] I thought it was something really bad and then after going through it I'm like OK, it's something that happens, yah." (Participant 5)
>
> "They [children] might as well get used to it because it is something that just happens … because it's something that you cannot do anything about, something you cannot prevent from happening either." (Participant 9)
>
> "Even now when I see these young kids … they look like they are used to it now, young kids are also growing up much faster, they are realising things much earlier. Especially

in the townships I feel like the violence is more normalised and accepted." (Participant 7)

"I think at a point you get used to it. I think you only get surprised at what the cause of the violence is ... So, if there's a protest, you're like okay, there's another protest but what are they protesting for?" (Participant 2)

As evident in the above quotes, constantly being exposed to violence may eventually result in violence being normalised and seen as a part of life (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Savahl et al., 2013:589). As an example, Kaminer et al. (2013a:326) state that community violence exposure seemed to be completely normal in a small group of Xhosa youths studied in Langa, a low-income community with a high prevalence of violence. Social cognition theories suggest that one's exposure to violence in the community may be a model for anti-social behavior, resulting in young people becoming perpetrators of violence (Fowler et al., 2009:228; Reidy, Holland, Cortina, Ball & Rosenbluth, 2017:236). This occurs because adolescents exposed to community violence may view aggression as legitimate and effective means to resolve conflict (Busby et al., 2013:256; Du Plessis et al., 2015:87). This same view of violence perpetuating violence was explained by some participants, feeling like it was a normal phenomenon which one just had to live with.

According to Blom (2006:25), environmental influences may lead to introjections, caused by children taking in everything from the environment without critically questioning it. As a contact boundary disturbance, introjects affects children's self-regulation and minimise their ability for healthy contact with the environment (Corey, 2013:199). In addition, children with a poor sense of self are at higher risk of confluence; another contact boundary disturbance in which they do not maintain a healthy personal boundary and follow the views and actions of others in an effort to be liked and accepted (Corey, 2013:200). The Gestalt perspective may explain how, over time, children can sacrifice their own opinions and views of circumstances whilst accepting the views of others without critiquing it (Blom 2006:32). In this way, their perceptions of community violence can be influenced by what they hear and observe in the peer group and community, views which can last into young adulthood.

- **Sub-theme 3.2: Living in fear even as a young adult**

Other participants explained that they still experienced the fears related to community violence that were present in their adolescent years. This constant fear was often associated with concerns that community violence could occur again as well as with uncertainty about how it could affect their lives in future.

"In my age group I think it's really affecting us coz now we live in fear thinking kuti [that] maybe this thing can continue happening and then what would our tomorrow hold for us if this continues happening. So, we end up being in fear." (Participant 1)

> "Community violence eh, people become afraid … every time we hear that there, there are xenophobic attacks ... yeah, you're now thinking of that incident and thinking that it can still happen. You never know how people react … it's like it's even worse coz you're just thinking if you meet someone, they're probably going to rob you or you'll get raped … so you'll just, you not, you don't feel safe ... you walk around scared all the time." (Participant 4)

> "I can't even come on my own this side. I have to call my mom to come and fetch me … even when I'm going, she's the one who's accompanying me … because I'm scared." (Participant 10)

> "You become more alert … based on what has happened to you, you become extra vigilant." (Participant 6)

> "We live in such a way that you should always be aware of what's going on around you. My experiences taught me that I must be more ready for violence mentally. … I can't even just walk around just because; I have to walk around with a purpose ... I'm always afraid." (Participant 7)

More than half of the participants in this study were still living in fear, even as young adults. In a study conducted by Schiavone (2009:101) exposures to community violence were described by the participants as causing them to experience a sense of vulnerability, fear and insecurity about the future. Chen (2010:403, 410) notes that the negative effects are felt long after exposure to community violence and an adolescent's life may be ultimately affected over the long-term. Concerns over the future, as described by the participants, were also found by Leino et al. (2011:400) in their study, indicating how persons exposed to violence do get distressed and worry about the possibility of future occurrence. As highlighted by the participants, the fear experienced can also affect people's day to day social relationships and functioning (Bacchini et al., 2011:270). Even in adulthood, some participants still presented with symptoms of trauma to the extent of being hypervigilant and always looking around in fear when in the community.

- **Sub-theme 3.3: Experiencing desensitisation**

Some participants explained that the constant exposure to community violence resulted in them being less affected by it.

> "… it's really getting worse coz back then it used to be like when we see or heard anything, it was a shocking thing … I'm like what is it really going on, like it's happening. But now it's no longer a shocking thing. I'm like oh ok, as usual these things are always happening. Thank God I wasn't there … Yah, it's getting as if it's normal now." (Participant 1)

> "I wouldn't say I'm used to it coz you can't, you can't get used to it but … you kind of get used to it knowing that there's a story that's gonna come up at night about this happening, so you kind of anticipate it and you expect it to happen." (Participant 8)

> "Yah, like I am now used to it coz I've heard a lot of people talking about it … I do think people can get used to it ... Because at first maybe their conscience might not allow

them to do that … and then if they fight it, then obviously, they'll get used to it if they keep fighting it … it'll end up being something that's a norm to them." (Participant 5)

From the above quotes, it appears that the participants tried to lower the emotional impact of community violence by viewing it as something to be expected. From a Gestalt theoretical perspective, these reactions can be explained by the process of desensitisation, involving the suppression of experiences to lower one's awareness of painful situations in which "sensory experiences and emotions associated therewith are not appreciated" (Blom, 2006:37). Desensitisation can thus result in the weakening of emotional responses to exposure to violence (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Savahl et al., 2013:589).

Desensitisation is seen as an effective measure to deal with some of the effects of community violence exposure, however, it can also have an adverse effect on the norms according to which the phenomenon of community violence is interpreted (Mrug & Windle, 2013:955). In a study by Schiavone (2009:101-102), consistent statements by the child participants showed that they were desensitised to violence, which influenced their perception of violence. Busby et al. (2013:184) also acknowledged that boys in their study had become desensitised to violence to the extent of not experiencing any trauma. However, contrary to the above findings, Du Plessis et al. (2015:87) argue that young adults in South Africa are in fact not desensitised to all the violent trauma around them regardless of how much they are exposed to it. Thereby, exposure to community violence can lead to lasting traumatic effects.

- **Sub-theme 3.4: Lasting effects of trauma**

Some of the participants described that the trauma of being exposed to community violence during their adolescent years, still affected them at present.

"It can affect your mindset because you can become traumatised … so if that affects your mindset, it affects the way you see like the world." (Participant 8)

"I don't think so, I don't think you get can get used to … I think for instance I've been mugged three times … but all three times it feels like it's something that happened the first time … because the shock is still the same the fear is still the same … so I don't think you can ever get used to it." (Participant 6)

"I think it's emotionally ... Yah because those things, it never moves away from you. You always remember it. When you're alone you always remember." (Participant 10)

"I don't know; maybe this sounds funny, but it affects my dreams like sometimes I dream about such things. Like recently during the past week … I had this recurring dream about a guy that has been following me around … it seems like the guy wants to kill me or something." (Participant 5)

Numerous research studies show the high prevalence of adolescents' exposure to community violence and the many negative physical and mental health challenges because of the youth being witnesses or victims of community violence (Lambert et al., 2010:289). A study by

Shields et al. (2009:1204) also found that children were more traumatised by seeing violence in their residential areas as it is associated with the likelihood of them becoming victims. Exposure community violence can affect children's neurological, physical, emotional and social development and while they cognitively try to make sense of the world they live in, their views and opinions can easily be distorted by early exposure to community violence (Guerra & Dierkhising, 2011:3). As violence is often assumed to be a general problem in the community, Ngqela and Lewis (2012:90) advise on the importance of understanding violence. Children with no one to help them understand violence and its dangers are more vulnerable to violence exposure and its consequences (Voisin et al., 2011:233). Children whose parents do not have the capacity to support them, are at a higher risk for negative effects of exposure to community violence on their well-being (Johnson et al., 2016:2126). With the high levels of community violence in South Africa, authors advocate for accessible resources the support adolescents to work through the traumatic effects thereof (Rasool, 2017:9109, 9118; Visser et al., 2016:287).

- **Sub-theme 3.5: Community violence is unacceptable**

Most of the participants viewed community violence as unacceptable especially due to its hurtful nature.

> "If other people are harmed and if property is damaged, then no ... Cause you think it's loss of an innocent life …There's a shooting or fire ... damage to property, that property has to be restored … There are additional costs ... So, I don't think it's acceptable. … if you need to get a message across you can get it across but I don't feel like the violence is necessary." (Participant 2)
>
> "No, I don't agree with it. No, it's not [acceptable] ... Because most of the people focus on the violence but not focusing on their future ... Some things you can't accept them, you know ... Coz they are doing bad things." (Participant 3)
>
> "No, I don't think it should ever become acceptable although sometimes it seems like people are justified in how they react if they even if they act violently coz … they're trying to make up for something." (Participant 4)
>
> "… because if you think about it, mob justice is only committing another crime." (Participant 6)
>
> "I feel like it is hurting us, mentally and emotionally" (Participant 7)
>
> "More than anything I think it's sad because it is in the community where people are supposed to be working together, to uplift their surroundings because no one wants to live on the edge. Everyone wants to feel comfortable and safe so the fact that this is happening where you stay is sad." (Participant 8)

Jonathan et al. (2013:14) warn that a community that that finds violence acceptable has weak standards for reducing its effects. The participants' views of community violence as unacceptable therefore create opportunities to adopt similar thinking to mobilise people to do something about the high levels of violence in the community. The importance of doing

something about the situation is emphasised by Nicholson et al. (2010:200) who state that children with behavioural problems generally have challenges with handling emotionally unbearable situations, such as violence, and as they grow up it is important that they are assisted to develop a sense of reflection when facing emotionally demanding circumstances, which can help them react in socially acceptable ways instead.

- **Sub-theme 3.6: Community violence can be understood in some cases**

Some of the participants were of the opinion that community violence could be endorsed in some cases. Two of the participants qualified their approval of community protests by saying that these protests should not involve harm to people and acts of violence.

> "I don't think violence is the right way to go about it … but at the very same time the message needs to be put across." (Participant 6)
>
> "I never really understood the concept of violence, when you want something and then you damage property and what not … But I feel they're getting angry for something that they have no control over." (Participant 9)
>
> "I feel like in some cases community violence is actually [acceptable]." (Participant 7)
>
> "I think it's acceptable if only it's not including the killing of people, if it's just a protesting which is quiet … On one side it's an advantage, another side it's a disadvantage … So, if it wasn't happening, it means maybe we could be in the same situation we were in … they wanted to see a difference." (Participant 1)

Although violence may be acceptable under certain circumstances, as proposed by the participants. This view was observed in some participants' perceptions, who felt that community violence was acceptable especially when a change was needed in the community. Van der Merwe (2013:69) that violence in response to unacceptable conditions can be regarded as a form of communication. However, Lamb and Snodgrass **(**2013:7) warn that some adolescents may find it more challenging to decide whether violence is acceptable or not, especially when the society considers violence as a problem-solving technique. In this respect, Van der Merwe (2013:68) proposes that, if violence is used as a form of communication, it raises serious questions about the nature of such "communication skills and techniques." One risk associated with children exposed to violence is that they may become non-sensitive to the violence, as discussed in sub-theme 3.3, not care about other people and become violent themselves (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2015:1815). This risk is especially relevant in communities with high levels of community violence.

To this effect, some participants explained that violence in their communities were an increasing problem.

> "They're still the same because I don't really think much has changed, it has definitely worsened." (Participant 4)

"I keep hearing more and more [about incidents of community violence] …" (Participant 5)

"I think I would personally say it's worse." (Participant 6)

Recently, there has been an increase in violent offenses against young people and it is common for them to be exposed to violence in the community, with children being exposed to violence when going to school or in the homes they live in (Kelly, 2010:61). In their study Richter et al., (2018:18) mentioned extremely high amounts of violence in all urban South African environments, and these being the home, community, school, and amongst their peer and intimate relationships. Three participants felt that community violence was worsening and not getting any better, which coincides with prior research. Unfortunately, Bacchini and colleagues (2011:278) note that antisocial behavior is regular when one is exposed to a lot of violence frequently.

- **Sub-theme 3.6: No long-term effects**

Some of the participants explained that their exposure to community violence during adolescence did not have any effects on them during their young adult life.

"… so, it hasn't really affected me. Maybe it probably changed my thinking … Ok, so it doesn't really affect my day-to-day activity." (Participant 5)

"Not necessary … I would never say it it comes back to me; I think about it sometimes [but] it's just at that particular moment when I'm going to pass the place it happened." (Participant 6)

"It really happens but at times you just have to tell yourself that, ok this is the world that I'm living in, and at times I have to be just strong and accept that anything can happen." (Participant 1)

Violence is deeply normalised amongst South African youths because for a long period youths have partaken in violent related activities through politics, criminality or gangs (Ward et al., 2012:4-5), which essentially stems from the high violent levels largely all over the country. Contrary to some participants reporting continued experiences with trauma in their early adulthood, others reported that they experienced no effects. The researcher however relates this to desensitisation resulting from constant exposure to community violence, which was discussed in sub-theme 3.3. Fowler et al. (2009:249) confirm that chronic exposure to violence may also result in youths adapting to its effects, thereby learning to live with it. Participant 5 stated how community violence has given her a new perspective even, though it did not affect her daily life. Participant 6 reported that he does think about his traumatic incident only when he is exposed to the place where his mugging took place. It is however not something that still traumatises him as he continues to use the same route daily. However, many of the

participants agreed that the high levels of community violence affected their community as a whole and the well-being of families in the community.

3.4.2.4 Theme 4: Effects of community violence on the community and on families

The high levels of violence displayed in acts of community violence is a complex problem for entire contemporary communities (Bacchini et al., 2011:286). The effects of violence in family and community settings are described by Stansfeld et al. (2017:257): "Exposure to violence may occur in domestic and community settings and both are related to increased risk of mental ill health." Violence affects communities in all aspects, leads to economic losses in the private and public sectors, and negatively affects the health and judicial systems (Patel & Taylor, 2012:1). Richter and colleagues (2018:185) report extensive short-term and long-term costs of community violence, which ultimately affect generations to come at a personal level, economically and socially. The research findings support the findings of other studies that describe the different ways in which community violence had an effect of their community and on families.

- **Sub-theme 4.1: Disturbance of people's daily lives and routines**

From the participants' descriptions it became clear that the high levels of community violence had an unsettling effect on the entire community.

> "… even the state of living, coz they end up even burning the houses, so it's left people in a plain ground like nowhere to go." (Participant 1)
>
> "Sime people can commit suicide because someone they care about is dead … So, you can't have food without money … you have to work for that money. So, how can you work when the shops are burnt … you can't go to work coz there's no work coz the shops are burnt." (Participant 3)
>
> "It's always going to have a negative effect on everybody around the situation." (Participant 6)
>
> "No-one will go to school, they'll close roads everything, no-one … can't even go to the shop … just everything just stops ... Yah, like it distracts the way things should be happening around the community." (Participant 10)
>
> "I think it messes with the livelihood of people." (Participant 9)
>
> "So, negatively because lives can be harmed …" (Participant 2)

It is clear from the participants' descriptions that community violence had a severe impact on the community and the lives of its members. In agreement with the above views, research studies show that the costs of violence personally and socially are very high and result in challenges to people's short and long-term social adjustment as well as in numerous public health problems (Richter et al., 2018:181). Sometimes people are forced to not go to work when violent activities are taking place in the community and yet, their work is an important

source of economic well-being which also affects the well-being of families and children (Hernandez & Grineski, 2012:375). The experiences shared by the participants above confirm that community violence resulted in the disturbance of their daily life routines which included non-attendance of school, loss of housing and even loss of lives. Community violence therefore causes numerous challenges for families who reside in the community (Lane et al., 2017:446).

- **Sub-theme 4.2: Community violence becomes a normal and accepted part of life**

A prominent theme in the research findings, was the participants' belief that the high prevalence of community violence in their community resulted in the normalisation of violence by large sections of the community.

> "Ok, 50% or even three quarters of my generation nowadays they are now influenced by violence and all that stuff. They just believe kuti [that], ok if we do something, if we fight then you could see kuti [that] this is the boss you don't have to mess around. So, yah (laughs), that's how we're living now … Yah, it feels like it's normal, it's a day-to-day thing." (Participant 1)

> "… you can expect it based on your knowledge of the place … I mean, to a point, yes I think it's [violence] something that's been made a norm to us." (Participant 6)

> "… and then you just end up getting used to it … It's kinda like now like a second nature … it's like that and it's like a sort of a a culture of crime. ... Some of my friends got trapped by a system of seeing violence every day and they fell victim to the same violence; they even look up these crime lords. It is now a reality" (Participant 7)

> "Ok I think violence has become acceptable, a lot of young people that grew up around violence at home and in the community also tend to be violent themselves when things don't go well. So, they grew up seeing violence and they think that it is justified to be violent, and that it is correct to react like that." (Participant 4)

> "I think watching it on social media plays a role in violent incidences that occur in the community because it sets a bad example." (Participant 10)

Most of the participants held the view that being constantly exposed to violence may eventually result in violence being normalised as a part of life, which was also found in other studies on the topic (Du Plessis et al., 2015:81; Savahl et al., 2013:589). Adolescents have learnt to react to violence with violence because this behaviour is what they encounter daily in their communities (Kelly, 2010:69). Some participants reported on how they viewed violence as now being a normal part of people's lives and how it is not surprising any more when it erupts within the community.

Some of the participants explained that in their community, many people see violence as an acceptable way to deal with social issues.

> "In a way for future purposes, if they think okay if we don't believe in something then that's the way [violence] we going to approach it. So, they think okay, if you don't like this, we're going to burn tires … So, it sets an example of sorts." (Participant 2)

> "So, they have to get used to it coz that's their only strategy they can use to get heard … I feel like because it's happening in uhhh in an environment where we see it, it kind of sets an example of the type of community we wanna grow up in and the type of community we'll have." (Participant 8)

> "A lot of young people who grew up around violence, community violence … also tend to be violent when things don't go well. So, they grew up seeing that and they think that its justified, that its correct to react like that … it becomes the norm, its everyday life … we don't ever expect it to get better, so it's just it's the norm, it happens." (Participant 4)

> "And its gonna become a norm that if uhmmm community violence is the answer, if that gets the government to listen to us, then we'll always do it so that the government gives us what we want." (Participant 9)

The National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (2020:14) defines social norms as unwritten rules that define acceptable behaviour in society. Two participants reported community violence as acceptable especially where community members were seeking important service delivery. According to Jackson, Huq, Bradford and Tyler (2013:14), however, people who morally accept violence as a tool to obtain something are more likely to be violent themselves should the need arise. These same people will most likely condone violent behaviour in other people and will not assist the police with investigations to enable prosecution of perpetrators. Because modelling is a central learning process, Ngqela and Lewis (2012:90) assert that adults showing violence as acceptable in solving problems, normalises its use; behaviour which the researcher believes is in turn carried into schools by children. The normalisation of community violence can negatively affect adolescents' moral development as this developmental stage involves the adoption of a personal value system, which includes views on upholding law and order in society (Louw & Louw, 2014b:382).

- **Sub-theme 4.3: Distrust and a lack of community involvement**

Two participants reported feeling distrustful of others and being unable to live a normal life out of fear and mistrust in other people.

> "You tend to have a certain picture of the community violence in your head … to say if I see a person that looks like this and like this and like this … then I'm most likely to be a victim of the community violence … So, I think everybody at this present point, based on that picture, have some sort of paranoia." (Participant 6)

> "Uhhh when I want to go outside, I say 'What if I'm being mugged?'" (Participant 10)

Distrust in others and paranoia are also evident in people ignoring information and turning a blind eye to incidents of community violence. This reaction was shown, albeit by one participant, who mentioned how turning a blind eye to violent situations has become an acceptable way of life in the community.

> "It also brought that culture of people not wanting to talk [snitch]. Often, we say we don't know anything, we didn't see anything. We just don't want to get involved; we are even afraid to do the right thing." (Participant 7)

The quotes above show how a general lack of trust in others and the fear of becoming involved in matters related to community violence can affect community members' involvement in their community. Fowler et al. (2009:248) state how clearly exposure to community violence results in psychological distress. Paranoia is a common symptom emanating from one's previous exposure to community violence (Freeman, Thompson, Vorontsova, Dunn, Carter, Garety, Kuipers, Slater, Antley, Glucksman & Ehlers, 2013:2673; Wood & Dennard, 2017:2). This constant worry, as reported by the participants, stems from fear that violence will occur again in the future (Leino et al., 2011:400, 404).

- **Sub-theme 4.4: Lack of trust in the police**

Some participants expressed their displeasure with the way crime was handled in their community, with one even expressing that he suspected that the police could also be involved in crime.

> "Often there's no justice, you know. A lot of people get hurt … and people are victimised, but the police do not provide enough help, so people are afraid and sometimes [violence] goes unreported." (Participant 4)

> "… coz I guess in community it's not something seen as wrong; it's a way of retaliation from community … when a criminal of some sort decides to intrude in the community … I think at that point you feel like you're doing something right because you feel like you're stepping in for the police for they're not doing anything." (Participant 6)

> "So somewhere somehow, I feel like they [police], I don't wanna ss-say that they're involved but there's something there." (Participant 7)

When community members do not observe justice being served on offenders, they may start to distrust the police service, as described by the participants. Participant 6 described a phenomenon that may stem from this situation, namely retaliation by the community members (Traynor et al., 2020:1). As described by Participant 6, the community members would not see such measures as wrong, but rather that they are doing the work of the police. The actions by the community could result in so-called mob justice, which Orock (2014:409, 423) describes as rebellious disciplinary measures; from which the researcher concludes that these actions may further fuel community violence.

Sub-theme 4.5: Economic impact on the community

The participants described the economic impact of community violence and the widespread impact it has on the community.

> "It is an expense for people because people must now put more security measures to make sure their families are safe. … Imagine when a low-income family's car gets stolen, often it is not insured so they can't recover it. Definitely, their everyday tasks become so difficult because they can't get around easily anymore. If they are in need of something they no longer have easy access, and they could also get robbed of their money. It's a major setback." (Participant 4)

> "You could take somebody who goes to work on a daily basis nine to five, working as hard as they can and there's somebody who's going to try and get their fortune without working as hard by just mugging the particular person." (Participant 6)

> "That affects the household because now not enough money is coming in and you still have these duties and responsibilities to do." (Participant 9)

The participants expressed how they felt that community violence causes financial challenges for families and communities. Several studies have pointed out how community violence affects a community's economic environment. Abt (2017:269) reports on community violence as a pervasive, persistent, and complex socioeconomic phenomenon. As community violence increases, there is a decrease in the overall well-being of that community (Savahl et al., 2013:386). Hernandez and Grineski (2012:377) state that violence only increases the problems associated with poverty. Dr. Hugh Waters of the RAND Corporation studied the costs of violence in a number of countries and deduced that in 2000, the total cost of interpersonal violence in the United States was $37 billion and the costs of violence were reflected in other countries where the burden was even more significant (Patel & Taylor, 2012:18-21).

- **Sub-theme 4.6: Harmful effects on families**

The participants described several ways in which community violence negatively affected families living in communities with high levels of community violence.

> "Uhhhh it can break family bonds ... If you say 'no, I feel things should be done this way' [through acts of community violence] but my family thinks it should be more traditional ... I go about my own ways of doing things. But it creates friction between the family, between me and my family." (Participant 2)

> "I think community violence breaks families up so they can be affected in many ways like through crime. … and then you can also have your children taking part in gang violence as well which can lead to an increase in crime." (Participant 8)

> "In, especially in townships I think it [community violence] has a huge role because the people that do the community violence within the community are people from the community. … So, I think it would hurt as a parent knowing that you're raising a kid to be a criminal of some sort, whereas you're also known in the neighbourhood because now when everybody knows that your child is the criminal … its automatically as though you're part of the whole thing because it's your child doing that." (Participant 6)

> "Yah it does cause [problems] if someone is dead. ... Cause sometimes when you, it happens, you say if it was me what was going to happen to my family?" (Participant 3)

> "Well, the thing is it's like if they could've, if one of the family members could've been a victim uhmm of community violence … that brings emotional pain." (Participant 7)

> "… which means the whole of the family is affected because one of them is affected because … like every day when they [family members] are sitting, she's crying or he's crying." (Participant 10)

Several participants in this study reported the effects that violence may have on families. Some described how family bonds could be affected, leading to the disintegration of the family; how differences in norms could lead to conflict between family members; or how the family's good name in the community is affected when a member is a perpetrator of violence. The participants also described the emotional distress when a member of the family is a victim of community violence; a situation that affects the whole family. The cost of pain and suffering caused by community violence cannot be quantified (Patel & Taylor, 2012:8). Gestalt theory links the effect of community violence on the entire family to the concept of holism, which views a person as an active part in a complex ecological system (Blom, 2006:22). Therefore, as explained by the participants, what happens to one family member can affect the entire family system.

Chen (2010:405) reports that there are many factors within the family that can help an adolescent to cope with exposure to violence. However, when parents lack the knowledge to help their child react appropriately in a violent situation, it may have negative implications on the well-being of their child (Johnson et al., 2016:2126). Kelly (2010:69) also states how anxiety in children may be caused by a lack of parental support. Kennedy and Ceballo (2014:78) highlight the role of the relationship between parents and their child, with open communication about community violence that may either heighten or lessen the consequences of violence or promote resilience. Family support can provide a "safe haven" for adolescents who are exposed to violence at their school or in their community and can act as a buffer against the harmful effects of the exposure (Mahlangu et al., 2014:75). On the other hand, a number of risk factors for youth have been found in the family dynamics, for example, family conflict, parental separation and poverty (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:69). As described by the participants in this study, exposure to community violence may increase such risk factors in the family system.

3.4.2.5 Theme 5: Causes of community violence

The participants mentioned various factors that they believed contributed to community violence, including poor socio-economic conditions, poor conflict resolution skills, criminality, a lack of faith in the justice system, and xenophobia. The researcher believes that social workers and other professional persons who work in communities with high levels of

community violence should take heed of these factors to devise preventive and early intervention strategies to deal with the problem.

- **Sub-theme 5.1: Poor socio-economic conditions and poor service delivery**

Most participants expressed poverty, unemployment, a lack of resources and poor service delivery as reasons for violence in their communities. Some of the participants' responses are given below.

> "I think poverty plays a major role … because the more poor people (are) from not having jobs, they will be hungry. Due to the fact that they want something to provide for their families, (they) then end up robbing people." (Participant 4)
>
> "Poverty … and then on the poverty part they might be doing it [acts of community violence] maybe to get money." (Participant 2)
>
> "I would say definitely it's like in my view its ehhh unemployment contributes a lot … coz what's painted down there is like is that violence and crime bring a lot of money and that's what's happening in the townships." (Participant 7)

Hand in hand with socio-economic problems, the participants highlighted poor service delivery as an aspect that triggered community violence.

> "In most cases its service delivery issues." (Participant 9)
>
> "It's because there's poor service delivery … Uhmm …they [the authorities] want money and by that they're busy abusing other people." (Participant 10)
>
> "It could be let's say service delivery … uhmm it could be load shedding … so people get angry and then they feel like they're not being heard. The only way they can be heard is if they maybe burn down a school ... so they get tired like their voices are not getting [heard] … and then they feel like the only way they can be heard is by … expressing it in a violent way." (Participant 8)
>
> "If uhmmm community violence is the answer, if that gets the government to listen to us then we'll always do it so that the government gives us what we want." (Participant 9)

The participants' views can be explained by the effects of poverty and disparities on communities. According to Foster (2013:23), research shows the link between an unequal status amongst different races and economic classes and worsened disparities; findings that provide evidence of violence being higher in poorer or disadvantaged communities. Poverty in a neighbourhood is often linked to social disorganisation, especially where countries experience substantial poverty and unemployment rates (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:77). Dissatisfaction with basic conditions often leads to riots which are almost always accompanied by violence (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:91).

The participants' explanation of community violence stemming from poverty and unemployment, could also be explained by Gestalt theory. Gestalt theory supports a positive view of people in that they are always attempting to self-regulate and to meet their needs

(Corey, 2013:194; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:223). However, if the environment is unsupportive or toxic, it affects people's ability to function effectively and negatively affects their social adjustment (Bom, 2006:24). Non-supportive or toxic environments can include those with severe socio-economic inequalities which in turn result in the use of violence and the normalisation thereof (Stansfeld et al., 2017:257). This situation happens as a result of people being dissatisfied with their livelihoods and trying to survive by any means (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:91).

- **Sub-theme 5.2: Poor communication and conflict resolution skills**

Some participants viewed community violence as a reaction to misunderstandings among community members. When people are unable to come to an agreement regarding anything because of a lack of conflict resolution skills, violence is likely to erupt to force the other party to do as the other wishes.

> "I think it might be a misunderstanding on something else … and then people fail to reconcile (with) each other then they end up fighting or protesting. … In this shop there was no cameras … They couldn't witness, ok this is what happened, so they just suspect that maybe he [alleged perpetrator] does something that they don't like. And then probably, we don't know, maybe he was wrong, maybe he was right … And then they started to exchange words and all the stuff. And then at the end they ended up doing things they could not have done if they could have just talked nicely and understand what's really going on" (Participant 1)

> "Because of the different thoughts that people have … people want things to go in different ways." (Participant 2)

> "Taxi drivers also fight about unreasonable things (like) taxi routes ... (and) maybe taking customers." (Participant 8)

> "I think its lack of communication because if you communicate well [one can reach an agreement]." (Participant 10)

A lack of communication and conflict resolution skills, as described by the participants, can result in the use of violence as a way to deal with conflicts. This is an important environmental aspect that plays a role in community violence, for example in public protests that are planned or impulsive community violence events which often occur in public settings between either familiar people or strangers (Abt, 2017:269). Nuh (2016:241) describes the social phenomenon of the use of violence to resolve problems as not only common but also alarming. Using community violence for conflict resolution is reported as having a big impact on people and communities due to the damaging and recurring nature thereof (Abt, 2017:269).

When violence is used as a conflict resolution technique in the community, it in turn teaches community members that violence is an appropriate way to deal with differences, and it normalises violence in children (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2015:1815). Alagözlü (2017:199, 207)

states that conflict is an inevitable part of communication, adding that the way people approach it is dependent on what their culture taught them. In this way, problems such as poverty can result in community social disorganisation (Van der Merwe et al., 2013:77). Alagözlü (2017:199, 207) emphasises the importance of understanding the nature of conflicts in attempting to build and restore peace educationally, socially, or politically.

- **Sub-theme 5.3: Lack of faith in the justice system**

Some participants ascribed the high levels of violence in their community to a lack of faith in the police, resulting in people taking transgressions by community members into their own hands.

> "Reacting in a violent way is a way of teaching them [perpetrators] a lesson … to hope to send a message to the rest of the people that are out there trying to mug people. … I think we've seen that in our country the response from police is … not of urgency as it is supposed to be." (Participant 6)

> "So, in most cases they [community members] feel that they're not safe because you would, it would happen that someone breaks in the house … the police find them then two days afterwards you see him walking down the street." (Participant 9)

> "And this uhm they usually say police don't respond on time ... so they [community members] took matters in their own hands, and they just lit the car and then started burning it. … people are really tired of the police not doing anything. The justice system is just … not in favour of the people. So, people end up not reporting coz when you report a crime, they [the police] don't come." (Participant 4)

> "…and then they just gonna like just ok take you [the offender] to a holding cell, you stay there for two days then you're out again." (Participant 7)

The participants described a lack of action by the police to be a significant factor that prompts community violence. People do not trust the police for protection and their confidence in the criminal justice system is often low (ISS Africa, 2020). The 2018 Afrobarometer Survey by ISS-Africa showed that 66% of people did not trust the police and 46% did not trust the courts. According to Hinsberger et al. (2016:1), people were rather willing to fight for their survival, and that only increased violence even further. Jackson et al. (2013:14) propose that people are most likely to use violence as a means to protect themselves when they feel threatened, regardless of how the legal authorities are viewed. The participants in this study also conveyed their mistrust in the justice system by reporting that mob justice was done as a disciplinary measure. However, such action is a criminal act committed by community members who were in fact acting out of frustration by taking on the duty of the police to protect and guard society. In this regard, the ISS (2020) report that violence has been normalised in the community to such an extent that citizens commit huge amounts of crime as they respond to the vast prevalence of crime in the country. These acts occur especially when citizens feel that the strategies put in place by the police and government are not working.

- **Sub-theme 5.4: Criminal elements in the community**

Some participants ascribed the high prevalence of community violence to criminal elements in the community.

> "Drugs uhhh affect or can make people be violent ... Yah, coz when you're high [on drugs] you don't know nothing." (Participant 6)
>
> "I've only heard of those [criminals], coz like everyone is scared … everyone says they are so dangerous." (Participant 1)
>
> "I know in [our community] there's a lot of gang violence." (Participant 9)

The aspect of crime and criminal activities, as alluded to by the above participants, has resulted in crime having been earmarked by the government of South Africa as an issue requiring attention (Leoschut & Burton, 2009:1). The authors further highlight that the youth, particularly males, are at higher risk of being either victims or perpetrators of crime. Additionally, illicit drug use is associated with direct and vicarious exposure to community violence (Collings, 2015:35). The participants reported drug use as a cause for community violence since one's mental functioning is impaired when under the influence of drugs. This view supports the statement by Jadidi and Nakhaee (2014:1) who underscore how abusing drugs affects a person's life in various ways, including physically, mentally, and socially. One other factor often associated with abuse of drugs, as shown by several studies, is that of gangs. Often gangs are seen as one of the reasons for violence, as also reported by Participant 9. Although the relationship between drugs and gangs is still under-researched, McClean (2018:149) describes how gangs are now known to be the main distributors of drugs; an aspect that can trigger violence in communities.

- **Sub-theme 5.5: The phenomenon of xenophobia**

The participants saw xenophobia as one of the causes of community violence in their community. Watts (1996 in Boepple, 2014:497) describes xenophobia as an irrational fear of foreigners by citizens of a country who view the foreigners as threats to their culture or resources. As a result, the foreigners are discriminated against.

> "I think it's the xenophobia." (Participant 2)
>
> "I just feel that people have this hatred towards people of other nationalities." (Participant 9)
>
> "For example, the xenophobic attacks, people might think that foreigners are … a threat to their economy." (Participant 5)
>
> "It makes the people [unemployed citizens] sitting on the side of the road feel as if uhmm eh their opportunity is being stolen [by foreign people]." (Participant 7)

Public protests in South Africa have happened due to several reasons, including xenophobic attacks as mentioned by the participants. Crush and Ramachandran (2014:1) state that "violent xenophobia has become a regular feature of South African life" but that most of these attacks do not reach the media and officials and remain mostly invisible. In South Africa, foreign nationals have ordinarily been blamed for all social problems primarily because citizens assume that they take over jobs, women and resources meant for them (Crush & Ramachandran, 2014:1; Everatt, 2011:3). This assumption is supported in this study by some of the participants' responses on the xenophobic phenomenon.

3.4.2.6 Theme 6: Solutions to community violence

The participants suggested two main ways of finding solutions to community violence. Some participants felt that people should change their thinking about the phenomenon, whereas others felt that communities should explore ways to resolve the underlying conflicts in the community.

- **Sub-theme 6.1: Accepting community violence as a reality**

Some of the participants suggested that accepting community violence as a part of life and dealing with their own emotions, can protect people against the harmful effects of community violence.

> "At times you'll be like 'ok this is my environment; this is where I'm living. I just have to be strong at some point but it's not easy … though it's not easy.' … No, no it doesn't [get easier observing people being killed over and over]." (Participant 1)
>
> "So, I have to in a way train how to deal with those emotions when I watch [scenes of community violence]." (Participant 8)
>
> "So, you you just have to accept it the way it is." (Participant 9)

The suggestions from the participants that people should accept community violence as part of life and (just) learn how to deal with their emotions, is refuted by Participant 1, who views it as ineffective ways of dealing with community violence. The researcher links these findings to the Gestalt concept of awareness, and specifically to the suppression of awareness. Gestalt theory views awareness of the self and the environment as a requirement for effective functioning (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:217). Suppression of awareness, according to Gestalt theory, occurs as a way of protecting the self against painful experiences, but in fact lowers the person's ability for self-regulation (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:217; Oaklander, 2006:23). By suppressing awareness, people limit their ability to effectively deal with a problem, in this case, the problem of community violence. People who suppress their awareness survive as fragmented individuals, which affects their holistic functioning and thus their well-being (Blom, 2006:22-23). Aisenberg and Herrenkohl (2009:303) explain that people

are constantly exposed to community violence, and they are forced to develop coping strategies to deal with the threats to their safety and well-being.

Zolkoski and Bullock (2012:2295) regard children who manage to survive amidst community challenges, as being resilient. Louw and Louw (2014a:431) provide a definition of resilience as an individual's characteristics which enables them to cope with as well as recover from a traumatic experience. However, resilience is not only dependent on individual characteristics but also on supportive and protective factors in families and communities (Louw & Louw, 2014a:432). Therefore, adolescents' resilience towards violence is strengthened when different factors in the self, the family and the community interact (Leoschut & Burton, 2009:4).

Ward and Ashley (2013:543-544) propose that children and adolescents who are raised in environments which expose them to risks may be protected by resiliency factors. Fowler supports this sentiment and mentions that adolescents can eventually learn to cope with violence in their communities (Fowler et al., 2009:249). Finding proactive ways of dealing with community violence, as discussed in the next sub-theme, may thus enhance adolescents' resilience.

- **Sub-theme 6.2: Find alternative conflict resolution strategies**

About half of the participants felt that there was a need to find alternative conflict resolution mechanisms to community violence.

> "You know I think now in our generation we are so different to the point that it's so surprising to see [the perceptions of] some of my age mates. Like this thing of violence, even in a small thing they like, 'ok let's just fight so that we end this thing'. As for me, I believe communicating can change things, I don't believe in all that violence." (Participant 1)
>
> "We can just communicate. I also thought violence was the right thing but now I could see that it doesn't change anything, it makes the situation worse." (Participant 10)
>
> "So, there are other nonviolent ways to go about it. [The negative effects of violence can be used] positively because it like evokes a thought process." (Participant 2)
>
> "Maybe they can go somewhere like the court or at police station so that they can solve their problem instead of fighting in the streets." (Participant 3)
>
> "I think there should be a better solution to it." (Participant 4)

As evident in the above quotes, the participants in the study felt that conflict could be resolved without the use of violence. However, Bacchini et al. (2011:282) note that there is a perception that violence is an effective tool for solving social problems if one has grown up frequently being exposed to violence that often involves antisocial behavior. Other studies also found that when violence is used as an 'appropriate' way to solve conflict in the community, it teaches and normalises the use of violence in children (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2015:1815). Participant

1 and Participant 10 recommended that violence could be solved through communication about problems. Mahlangu et al. (2014:76) report in their study that “strengthening adolescents’ communication and conflict resolution skills helps promote more respectful and equitable relationships across a range of settings.”

Participant 10 explained that, whereas she previously supported the use of violence, she now feels that the use of violence worsens a problematic situation. The researcher believes that educating adolescents on effective conflict resolution and communication can support such changes in perceptions on the use of violence. Gestalt theory proposes that people can make healthy choices in life, and by raising people’s awareness of themselves and their environment they can take responsibility for their choices in life (Blom, 2005:53; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:217).

3.5 SUMMARY

The research focused on young adults’ perceptions of community violence they experienced during adolescence. In this chapter the researcher discussed the research methodology, the ethical considerations for the study, as well as the research findings. The research findings indicate that community violence had a significant impact on the lives of the participants. The participants indicated how community violence affected and still affects their lives. They described the effects of community violence not only on themselves but also on the community. One of the findings that stood out, was that all the participants had been exposed to one form of community violence or another as adolescents. The key findings of the study, conclusions and recommendation will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa experiences a high prevalence of violence, including community violence, with adolescents exposed to different forms of violence in society. Violence is often a part of the daily life of many adolescents who grow up in poor South African communities and has long-term effects on their physical and mental health and well-being during adulthood (Scorgie et al., 2017:51). Past research on community violence has mostly been based on quantitative studies and often lacks a specific contextualisation that is descriptive of the people's experiences thereof (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012:87).

In this qualitative study, the focus was on young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during their adolescent years. The researcher aimed to capture the participants' perceptions based on their lived experiences of exposure to community violence (Padgett, 2017:6). The key findings of the research are summarised in this chapter, followed by conclusions and recommendations based on the findings. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of the achievement of the goal and objectives of the study.

4.2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore and describe young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during adolescence.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To theoretically conceptualise community violence and contextualise it within the South African context
- To explore and describe how participants were exposed to community violence during their adolescent years
- To explore and describe participants' perceptions of community violence as a phenomenon during their adolescent years
- To explore and describe participants' perceptions of the effects of community violence on them during their adolescent years
- To make recommendations for social workers who provide services to children, adolescents and families exposed to community violence.

4.3 KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The key findings of the empirical study will be discussed in this section focusing on the participants' exposure to community violence, the effects thereof on the participants during adolescence and during young adulthood, the effects of community violence on the community and families, perceived causes of community violence, and suggested solutions for community violence.

The participants' exposure to community violence

The research findings show that the participants experienced direct and indirect forms of exposure to community violence. They described community violence as a common occurrence in their community.

- All the participants were witnesses of violent events in the community. Most of the participants in this research were direct witnesses of community violence through observing events that either caused the destruction of property, injury of someone or the death of a person. The participants were also exposed to community violence through hearing about it from other people. Some participants were directly exposed to events of violence in the community, mostly being victims of robberies.
- Community violence included severe forms of violence such as vandalism, looting, beating and injuring people, and even killing people by measures such as setting them alight. The participants reported seeing the bodies of people following community violence either by directly witnessing it or seeing it on social media platforms. They described especially social media as a powerful way in which pictures and videos of community violence can spread among groups.
- The participants showed different reactions to exposure to community violence. While some expressed feelings such as shock and sadness and tried to avoid the scenes, others found it exciting and were drawn to the events.

The effects of community violence during adolescence

The research findings echo the findings of studies found in the literature on the effects of community violence on adolescents.

- Most of the participants told of how their free movement in the community became limited because of fear of being exposed to community violence, or because of fear for intimidation by the 'leaders' in the violent events. Community violence forced some of them to stay indoors and staying out of school.

- Their exposure to community violence affected the participants' personal well-being. They experienced emotions such as anger, shock, sadness, fearfulness, and feelings of helplessness.
- Trauma was experienced by most of the participants after they were exposed to community violence. With such trauma came other cognitive effects such as intrusive thoughts, being on the lookout for danger and worrying that they may be mugged or robbed whilst walking in the streets. Intrusive thoughts affected their daily functioning.
- Their exposure to community violence also affected how the participants viewed others. Some participants were annoyed and disappointed at how people were behaving violently instead of resolving problems amicably. These feelings seemed to become generalised to all people.

The effects of community violence during young adulthood

The effects of exposure to community violence in adolescence also persisted in adulthood in several ways for several participants emotionally and cognitively.

- Some of the participants still experienced some of the emotional effects of community violence, namely living in fear and experiencing symptoms of trauma.
- Other participants came to see community violence as a phenomenon that is part of life that they had to learn to live with.
- The participants also explained that the constant exposure to community violence resulted in them being less affected by it. This could be a sign that one becomes desensitised to violence to the extent of not experiencing any trauma due to the constant exposure to violence.
- Gestalt theory views this reaction as desensitisation as a way of coping. Other participants mentioned that their exposure to community violence had no effects on them in their young adult years.
- Some participants found community violence acceptable in some situations and not acceptable in others whilst some participants reported being indifferent about community violence.

The effects of community violence on the community and on families

The research findings show that community violence not only affected individuals, but also affected families and entire communities.

- The participants described how community violence affected their lifestyle, including their homes, schools, and even loss of life.
- Several participants in this study reported the effects that violence may have on families, including the eventual breakup of families especially when a member is a perpetrator of violence. When a member of the family is a victim of community violence, the whole family is affected. Community violence also causes financial challenges especially when a breadwinner is unable to work due to community violence.
- Because of a high prevalence of community violence, the social norms in the community were affected and violence has become accepted as a way of dealing with social issues.
- People started to distrust others to the point of not reporting violence to the police. In addition, community members started to distrust the police as they did not see justice being done to perpetrators of community violence.
- High levels of destruction, the loss of property and the need for additional security measures had a negative effect on the entire community's economic situation.

Perceived causes of community violence

The participants identified different causes for community violence, relating to socio-economic conditions in the community and personal elements.

- Most of the participants expressed poverty and a lack of resources as a reason for violence in communities when people are fighting for access to basic necessities. Violence occurred in reaction to poverty, unemployment and making their voices known as reaction to poor service delivery. Community members also took matters into their own hands because of a lack of faith in the justice system and negative attitudes towards foreigners.
- The participants also highlighted individual factors as causes for community violence, referring to a lack of communication and problem-solving skills and criminal elements in the community.

Solutions to community violence

The participants felt that attempts should be made to protect people against community violence and its effects on the people in their community.

- Some participants suggested efforts should focus on findings strategies to address the conflict which led to community violence.

- Others took a more fatalistic view and suggested that people should learn to live with community violence as it has become a reality in their everyday lives.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are based on the findings of the study and the literature review:

- Community violence is a phenomenon that has long been part of South African communities and many adolescents are affected directly and indirectly by it in their day to lives from the day they are born until adulthood. Some of the types of violence adolescents are exposed to include mob justice, robberies, community protests, gang violence, car hijackings, gender-based violence and murder. In some communities in South Africa, for example those with high poverty and crime levels, adolescents are likely to be at higher risk of poly-victimisation. In addition, viewing scenes of community violence on social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp widen adolescents' exposure to community violence.

- Although not being direct victims of violence, it is noted that being a witness to community violence, hearing about community violence and viewing it on social media can have harmful psychosocial effects on the person, even leading to PTSD. The harmful effects can especially be relevant to extreme forms of violence that seem to characterise community violence in South Africa. In this regard, Gestalt theory proposes that harmful environments can hamper people's ability for effective self-regulation.

- Some of the reasons for community violence can be ascribed to community characteristics such as poor economic conditions, poor service delivery, criminal acts, xenophobia, and a lack of trust in the police and the criminal justice system. Persistent negative community characteristics may result in community members seeing community violence as an appropriate measure to make their voices heard. Individual and family characteristics such as poor communication and problem-solving skills and criminal behaviours can also contribute to community violence.

- The research findings gave insight into the reactions that people have towards scenes of community violence. Not all people react alike to incidents of community violence. Whilst some people may avoid any scene of violence at all costs, others were in fact excited and eager to see or even partake in the activities and in fact become perpetrators of violence.

- Exposure to community violence has negative effects on adolescents. Community violence is seen as a traumatic experience that results in emotional, behavioural, psychosocial, cognitive, and mental health challenges among adolescents and their

families. These effects can last into adulthood, which is also seen in literature that describes the long-term effects of community violence.

- Community violence is often normalised as an acceptable mode of conflict resolution, thereby negatively affecting community norms. Normalisation is described in the literature as one of the prominent effects of continued exposure to community violence. This effect may be especially harmful during adolescence as it is the life stage in which moral development is an important developmental task, involving the adoption of a personal value system that will ideally support pro-social behaviours.
- Furthermore, when community members use violence as a disciplinary measure or for retaliation, such as in mob justice or xenophobia, community members who were often victims of community violence also become perpetrators thereof. This situation contributes to the high prevalence of community violence.
- Many people are no longer shocked or surprised to hear of violent activities in their community, even where people have been murdered, because community violence is so common. This reaction can be ascribed to desensitisation as a way of coping with community violence. However, Gestalt theory describes desensitisation as an ineffective coping strategy as it undermines people's ability for self-regulation and for meeting their real needs.
- Community violence causes trauma, and it is important for people to find ways to deal with and prevent community violence. If not dealt with and the victims are not assisted to cope with the effects soon after an ordeal, it can become a never-ending cycle of poor psychosocial health. Communities need the help of professional persons as community members' views on solutions may be influenced by aspects such as normalisation or desensitisation and may therefore not be effective in addressing the risk factors that lead to community violence.
- The effects of community violence are not only felt by the individual person but also affects families and entire communities. The negative effects of community violence on communities can extend to factors such as safety, the economy, and the police and justice sector. The Gestalt concept holism explains that the individual and environment are interdependent. Community violence is likely to result in toxic environments, and what occurs in the community will also affect families and individuals. Interventions to deal with community violence thus need to focus on individuals, families, and communities.

In the following section, the researcher will make recommendations that stem from the key findings and conclusions.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section the researcher presents recommendations that can be considered by social workers. The researcher is of the opinion that the recommendations can also apply to other professionals who work with children and adolescents who are exposed to incidents of community. It may also be of assistance for social workers working with other types of violence for example domestic violence and bullying.

Recommendations for social work knowledge and training

- It is important for professionals working with children in South Africa to acknowledge and understand the phenomenon of community violence in its entirety. They should be informed of the types of exposure to community violence and the effects thereof which can last into adulthood. Social workers need to be aware of the reasons why community violence takes place to be able to implement preventive and mitigating interventions at grassroots level.

- It is also important for social workers to understand child development holistically and how community violence could jeopardise a child's full potential to develop physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially. When a child's development is threatened in one aspect, it affects all other developmental domains. Social workers therefore need to be alert to this effect to be able to understand what a child or adolescent may be going through at a particular point in their life stage.

- Knowledge on community violence can be transferred by means of social work conferences and work group meetings as well as publications in academic journals and newspapers and speaking out about community violence on national media platforms and social media.

- The effects of community violence are not only felt by the individual person but also affects families. Therefore, a holistic approach to service delivery must be adopted that focus on risk and protective factors in individuals, families, and communities.

- Social workers need to acquaint themselves with knowledge regarding community violence in the specific community in which they work to understand the extent of exposure of children, adolescents, and families to incidents of community violence. With this familiarisation comes an understanding of how community violence not only affects the individual child but also the rest of the family, whether one is a victim or a perpetrator. In this way, services and resources can be aligned with the needs of communities.

- Professional boards like the South African Council for Social Service Professions and training institutions such as universities need to consult on training on community violence to all social workers.

Recommendation for social work service delivery

Social workers need to reach out to schools and communities and implement awareness campaigns on how to minimise risk factors to community violence and enhance protective factors against it. These campaigns should target children and adolescents, parents, and families as well as teachers, and could play an important role in social work service delivery on prevention and early intervention levels.

- Children should be educated on community violence, the types of exposure and the effects thereof on them. When children understand the risks and effects associated with community violence, they may protect themselves better from becoming victims. Children need to be encouraged to speak up, even if it is anonymously, of incidents of violence taking place both at home and in schools.

- Awareness programmes must also be developed specifically for adolescents. The adolescent stage is associated with greater independence from parents, more involvement with the peer group, and a greater tendency for risk taking behaviors. Knowledge of community violence and the potential dangers they could face by placing themselves in harmful situations, can empower adolescents to avoid exposure to community violence.

- Due to the harmful nature of community violence and the severe consequences, social workers need to build children's resilience through programmes in schools and communities. Enhancing their resilience will allow the children to be able to handle the ordeal should they be victims of exposure thereby minimising the negative effects thereof.

- Awareness programmes should also be offered to educators to help them understand community violence, how it can affect children's learning and behaviour at school, and how they can help scholars who may have been affected by it.

- Because parenting is regarded as the most significant protective factor in contexts of community violence, it is important for parents and caregivers to have knowledge regarding community violence and how their children may be affected. Through community groups and campaigns, parents and caregivers can be empowered with knowledge of how to be sufficiently involved in their children's lives to prevent them from being exposed to community violence as well as being supportive to their children when they either become victims or perpetrators of community violence. Parents and caregivers also having

knowledge of alternative forms of discipline, could contribute to minimising violence which often begins in homes through harsh discipline methods. Parenting programs would be a good way to disseminate such information.

- Social workers can facilitate community support groups for persons affected in different ways by community violence. There could, for example, be groups for child victims of community violence, for parents or caregivers of such victims, groups for perpetrators of community violence as well as for parents or caregivers of the perpetrators. By sharing experiences and information, community members can be able to support one another whilst attaining healing from the harmful effects of exposure to community violence.
- It is also recommended that social workers and other service providers work together to prevent fragmented service delivery and provide more holistic services. In doing so, their interventions will be more impactful in addressing the phenomenon of community violence.

Recommendation for services on macro level

- National and local governments must address different aspects that are seen as risk factors for community violence. These factors include poor economic conditions, poor service delivery, a lack of faith in the police and criminal justice system, xenophobia, and crime in communities. Social workers need to become advocates for change, advising the government to provide resources that are universally available to all children. Presentations in parliament are a possibility to enable the policymakers and lawmakers to also understand the far-reaching effects of community violence that go beyond the individual and affect entire communities and the country as a whole.
- Local governments must plan for the provision of safer edutainment places or play centers for children in their communities.
- The Department of Social Development (DSD) must monitor the implementation of relevant policies such as the National Child Care and Protection Policy (2019) which will be helpful in ensuring the safety of all children in South Africa.
- Social workers can liaise with law enforcers and legal practitioners on child well-being and community violence which will allow them to understand ways they can protect the child's best interests at all times in their own work.
- It is recommended that the Department of Social Development and the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP) collaborate on policy guidelines for working with children exposed to community violence. Information regarding how social workers can assist victims and perpetrators should be included as an intervention strategy.

Furthermore, they can advocate for the government to provide adequate resources to enable social workers to be able to fulfill their duties, including their required mandate of child protection.

Recommendations for future research

The widespread prevalence of community violence in South Africa indicates that more local research studies are needed.

- Further research is recommended for research on community violence with different groups, especially with younger children before they reach adolescents as well as with perpetrators of community violence. The research can widen professionals' understanding of the phenomenon.
- Research could also focus on parents and caregivers, which will allow a deeper understanding on a more intimate level of how families are affected by community violence when on either end of the spectrum of victims and perpetrators.
- Furthermore, research can be conducted to determine the effectiveness of prevention and early intervention services by social workers, for example programmes presented to children, parents and teachers.

In the following section, the researcher will indicate how the goal and objectives of the study were achieved.

4.6 ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study is to explore and describe young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced during their adolescent years. The goal of the study was accomplished by the achievement of the objectives of the study, which will be discussed next.

Objective 1: To theoretically conceptualise community violence and contextualise it within the South African context

The first objective of the study was achieved by the literature review on different aspects of community violence. The definition and different types of community violence, the prevalence and the risk and protective factors involved, the effects of community violence and the adolescent life stage were described in Chapter 2.

Objective 2: To explore and describe how participants were exposed to community violence during their adolescent years

To achieve Objective 2, the researcher provided the empirical findings of the study that indicated the types of community violence that the participants were exposed to, which involved direct and indirect forms of exposure. The research findings showed that community violence was a common phenomenon in the participants' community.

Objective 3: To explore and describe participants' perceptions of community violence as a phenomenon during their adolescent years

The research findings in Chapter 3 provided information on the participants' reactions to scenes of community violence, their views on the causes of community violence, and possible solutions to the problem of community violence. It was clear that the participants viewed community violence as negative and harmful, although that it could be understood in some instances.

Objective 4: To explore and describe participants' perceptions of the effects of community violence on them during their adolescent years

The participants indicated that community violence had negative effects on them during their adolescence. Personal effects included limits on them moving freely in the community, the traumatic effects of the exposure to community violence, their feelings of fear and helplessness, but also a change in how they viewed others, including the police and justice system. Of significance, is that many of the negative effects of their exposure to community violence during adolescence were still evident at the time the study was conducted, thus in their young adult years. The exposure to community violence not only affected them as individuals, but also affected families and the entire community.

Objective 5: To make recommendations for social workers who provide services to children, adolescents and families exposed to community violence.

In Chapter 4, the researcher made recommendations for social workers. These recommendations focused on social work knowledge and training, social work service delivery, services on macro level, and recommendations for future research.

With the discussion of the five objectives above, the researcher concludes that all the objectives of the study have been achieved and that the research question, as stated in Chapter 1, was answered.

4.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

With this study, the researcher intended to gain knowledge and understanding of experiences of adolescents on community violence and its effects thereof. The findings of the study show that the participants in the study, who were young adults, perceive community violence in a negative light due to the negative effects that the phenomenon had on them during adolescence and in young adulthood, as well as the negative effects on families and the entire community. The research findings supported literature on the harmful effects of exposure to community violence and point to the need for social workers to provide services that focus on healing as well as address risk factors and promote protective factors related to community violence.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I am interested in your views on community violence that you experienced when you were an adolescent. In this study, community violence is seen as violent incidences in a community or neighbourhood in South Africa.

I will ask your views about being part of or observing violent situations in the community, seeing community violence on TV or in the social media. We will not focus on violence that may have happened in your home or on bullying at school.

1. What type of community violence were you directly and/or indirectly exposed to when you were a teenager?
2. How often did you directly and/or indirectly experience the different types of community violence that you indicated?
3. If you were directly exposed to community violence, where did it take place?
4. What were your thoughts about the community violence at the time?
5. How did you react when exposed to community violence?
6. As an adolescent, were you ever expected or influenced by your friends or others to take part in acts of community violence?
7. In your opinion, why does community violence take place?
8. How, in your opinion, does community violence affect people's lives?
9. What influence did your exposure to community violence have on your everyday life during your adolescent years?
   Are there any consequences that you still experience?
10. How do you view community violence now that you are older?
11. In your view, can people become used to community violence? Please explain.

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Humanities 100.
1919 - 2019
Research Ethics Committee

28 July 2019

Dear Ms A Tandi

Project Title:	Young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced in a South African context during adolescence
Researcher:	Ms A Tandi
Supervisor:	Dr MP le Roux
Department:	Social Work and Criminology
Reference number:	18122401 (HUM053/0619)
Degree:	Masters

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 25 July 2019. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Maxi Schoeman
Deputy Dean: Postgraduate and Research Ethics
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za

APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Researcher: **Alice Tandi**
Degree: **MSW Play-based**
Intervention Contact details:0823394729

INFORMED CONSENT BY PARTICIPANT

Name of participant: _____

1. Title of the study

Young adults' perceptions of community violence experienced in a South African context during adolescence

2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe young adults' perceptions of community violence that they experienced during their adolescent years. The focus of the research is to obtain a better understanding of how adolescents view community violence.

3. Procedures

I will be requested to take part in a personal interview with the researcher. The researcher is interested in my views on community violence that I was exposed to when I was an adolescent. The interview is expected to last about one hour and an audio-recording of the interview will be made. All information will be handled confidentially and only the researcher and her supervisor at the University of Pretoria will have knowledge of what I share in the interview.

4. Possible risks

The interview will focus on my views about my experience of community violence as an adolescent. As my exposure to community violence happened a few years ago, it is expected that there will be less of a chance that I will feel distressed as a result of the interview. However, if I experience any emotional distress because of the interview, the researcher will refer me to a registered social worker or a registered counsellor in my area who can provide me with counselling free of charge.

5. Benefits of participation

I will not receive any payment or gifts for taking part in the study. However, the information that I give can help social workers to become aware of how teenagers may experience violence in the community.

6. Rights as a participant

I am aware that my participation is voluntary. I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, without having to explain why. There will be no negative consequences for me if I decide to withdraw from the study.

7. Confidentiality

The recording of the interview will be typed out word for word. Both the recording and the typed document will be handled with strict confidentiality and will be safely stored by the researcher. Only the researcher and her supervisor at the university will have access to this information. If I should withdraw from the study, my information will be destroyed.

The researcher will write a report on the study. My name or personal details will not appear in the report. I will be able to request the researcher to read the typed document on the information that I provided during the interview, if I wish to do so.

8. Contact details

If I need more information about this research, I can contact the researcher at her e-mail (alicetandi@yahoo.com) or on her cell number as provided above.

9. Data storage

I am aware that the research information will be stored for 15 years in the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, as stipulated in their policy.

10. Data usage

The findings of this research will be used for a research report and possibly for professional publications and conference papers. The findings may also be used for further research. If used for further research, the information will still be regarded as confidential, as described above. I provide permission that the research findings may also be used for future research.

10. Permission for participation in the research study

I, the undersigned, understand the information provided above. I had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and all my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I understand what the research is about and why it is being done.

I understand my rights as a participant and give my permission to voluntarily participate in the research study.

I have received a copy of this letter.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____