

EXPLORING SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONG MALES IN THE GREATER CAPE TOWN AREA, SOUTH AFRICA

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Thesis Presented for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in the Department of Social Development
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

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December 2016

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ABSTRACT

The unofficial state of education in South Africa is announced annually by means of the Grade 12 results, also known as the National Senior Certificate. As a result, little attention is given to the more than half or at least 500 000 South African learners who drop out of the school system annually. Consequently, scholarly work dealing with topics relating to school dropout in South Africa is limited. This study moves the focus to a specific population group who are at risk of dropping out of school, namely male learners in poor communities.

An exploratory qualitative study was undertaken to determine what the main factors are that are influencing school dropout among males in the greater Cape Town area of South Africa. The participants in this study included 49 key informants, including male school dropouts, teachers, school principals, representatives of the Western Cape Education Department, and parents of male school dropouts. Using in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions, it was possible to establish that male school dropout is influenced by an array of factors of which some can immediately precede departure from high school while others could have happened years earlier in primary school or even before.

The thesis established in this dissertation is that most of the influences on male school dropout are primarily institutional. In other words, the underlying narrative emphasising male school dropouts as the main contributors to this outcome is misleading. Indeed, most of these influences are amplified by practices within the institutional context, especially the school. A localised theoretical framework for male school dropout in South Africa is constructed with the support of Rumberger and Lim's (2008) conceptual framework and can be understood within the school dropout models of both Finn (1989) and Tinto (1975). Furthermore, the total absence of school dropout records and statistics on a school and local district level keeps role players unaccountable for this action. As a result, teachers, school principals and Western Cape Education Department representatives are either ignorant of or paralysed by the complexities and extent of school dropout among males. Therefore, this study aims to lay the foundation for further research to inform and empower the aforementioned role players to address this problem.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank all who contributed to make this study possible. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the contributions made by the following persons:

- My wife, Reé, for supporting me on many levels through the time that it took to complete this study. Thank you for being my biggest supporter and believing in me. Thinking that you also gave birth to our twin girls, René and Ilse, during this time and often took the responsibility of looking after them so that I could study, makes me ever grateful for having you.
- All my family and friends who supported and encouraged me throughout this study.
- My supervisor, Dr Leon Holtzhausen, for encouraging and supporting me on so many levels through the whole process.
- My co-supervisor, Professor Susan Stone, for providing valuable contributions to this study and for hosting me during my time at the University of California, Berkeley.
- The participants, for giving their time, and for their openness in sharing their experiences and lives with a stranger.
- The University of Cape Town's Department of Social Development, who awarded me the John and Margaret Overbeek Bursary for each of my years of study.
- The University of Cape Town's post-graduate funding office, which awarded me the international travelling scholarship to spend time abroad.
- The University of California, Berkeley School of Social Welfare, for hosting me during my research visit to the United States of America.
- The National Research Foundation (NRF) for the financial assistance that they provided. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are my own and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.
- The Western Cape Department of Education for allowing me to conduct the research at their schools.

- The Community Keepers Board for allowing me to take study leave in order to spend time on this research, local and abroad.
- My language editor, Ella Belcher, and technical editor, Connie Park, for their assistance.
- Finally, a special thank you to God the Father for giving me the ability, opportunity and strength to be able to complete this thesis.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CTM	Circuit Team Manager
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
EMDC	Educational Management District Circuit
EMIS	Educational Management Information System
NSC	National Senior Certificate
SA	South Africa
SES	Socioeconomic status
SGB	School Governing Body
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
USA	United States of America

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I offer a contextual background to this study by introducing and giving the background to the problem, the research focus area, the motivation for undertaking the study, the statement of the problem, the rationale and the benefits. I further formulate the problem by presenting the specific research question and objectives and finally I provide an outline of the thesis and conclude the chapter. Before embarking, I would like to clarify the two central phrases and themes I use in this study. Firstly, *school dropout* is used for both an individual who has not completed his/her high school education and for the general occurrence of this phenomenon. Secondly, the word *influences* is used to describe the risk factors or predictors for school dropout. More detailed descriptions of both these terms are given through this thesis.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

South Africa (SA) is facing a school dropout crisis. It is estimated that more than 500 000 learners or 50% of those who enrolled in Grade 1 in 2002 never made it to Grade 12 (Spaull, 2014). Other researchers have found the percentage of learners who drop out before completing Grade 12 to be as high as 60% (Gustafsson, 2011; DBE, 2011). Despite these clear signs of a crisis situation, little is being done to address this problem. One of the reasons is that the unofficial state of education in SA is annually announced by means of the Grade 12 results, also known as the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results. There has been a substantial rise in these results over the past five years, jumping from 60.6% in 2009 to 78.2% in 2013, reflecting an increase of 17.5% in five years (DBE, 2014). However, this impressive rise has been met by stark criticism and even labelled as "grossly misleading" (Jansen, 2014) and it has been said that the NSC is in danger of "meaningless, worthlessness and irrelevance" (Maluleke, 2014). These concerns are fuelled by pass rates as low as 30% in some subjects and 40% in others (Spaull, 2014), and policy which prohibits children from failing grades more than once in certain phases. Therefore, education outcomes in SA seem to be doing worse than the annual NSC results indicate.

The population group that seems to be most at risk of dropping out of school is males in marginalised communities. For example, South African studies (Fleisch & Shindler, 2009; Strassburg, Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2010) have found that boys repeat at a much higher rate than girls and an international study by Rayment (2006) found that males are four times more likely than girls to have behavioural problems. Further, males seem to be more hostile towards others, have problems accepting authority, have aggressive outbursts and be disobedient (Rayment, 2006). These are all indicators of or influences on school dropout. More specifically, Coloured males seem to be most at risk. For example, Strassburg et al. (2010) found that 29% of Coloured boys (aged 16 to 18) are out of school, versus 18% of Coloured girls and that males are also more likely to participate in high-risk behaviour. On the other hand, females in SA mostly drop out of school because of pregnancy (Branson, Hofmeyr & Lam, 2013; Gustafsson, 2011) and many studies have been conducted on this specific area of school dropout among females.

In SA, and even the whole of Africa, the study of school dropout is still in its infancy (Munsaka, 2009; Hunt, 2008) and Munsaka (2009, p. 67) states that he "cannot emphasise enough the need for more in-depth studies to be conducted on school dropout in Africa". However, recent studies (Branson et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2011) which employed data from the National Income Dynamics Study of 2008-2011 and the 2009 General Household Survey has provided valuable information on the why and when of school dropout in SA. For example, according to these studies most learners abandon their school careers with less than two to three years from finishing (Branson et al., 2013), and most males drop out because of financial constraints (Branson et al., 2013). Despite these studies, little is still known about the influences of the school and family on male school dropout in SA as these 'softer' issues do not feature in studies using large national data sets.

In an effort to understand the school dropout phenomenon and develop policies and strategies to address this problem, it is vital to comprehend the influences on this phenomenon (Barry & Reschly, 2012; Lagana, 2004). Although hundreds of studies, especially in the United States of America (USA), have sought to understand the how and why of school dropout or graduation, it is still impossible to determine a definitive 'cause' for dropout. Professor Russel Rumberger, who has done more than 25 years' of research on school dropout, argues that "it is more accurate to refer to these various factors as 'predictors' or 'influences' rather than 'causes' of dropping out" (Rumberger, 2011, p. 159). It is also agreed that school dropout is

not a sudden act but a gradual process of disengagement (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce & Fox, 2011; Bridgeland, Dijulio & Burke Morison, 2006). As a result, the act of dropping out is influenced by an array of factors of which some can immediately precede departure from high school while others could have happened years earlier in primary school or even before. However, a better understanding of the influences on school dropout and the process involved is essential in addressing this serious problem.

The lack of empirical data on school dropout in SA led me to conduct a two-month research visit to the USA. This gave me an opportunity to engage with leading academics and practitioners in the fields of social work, education and mental health, with a specific focus on school dropout. A key insight from this visit was that school dropout cannot be addressed by schools alone but rather through a collaborative effort on all levels of society. This idea has also been proposed in SA by Panday and Arends (2008) and for such an effort to be possible, role players need a good understanding of the influences and complexities of this phenomenon. With this need in mind, this study is a step towards a united local and national effort in addressing school dropout in SA.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

At least 50% or more of learners who enrol in South African schools drop out before completing Grade 12 (DBE, 2011; Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2014). These statistics look even worse for males who are at greater risk of dropping out than females because of higher levels of grade repetition and problem behaviour, to name but two factors (Fleisch & Shindler, 2009; Strassburg et al., 2010). Despite this problem, little is known about the influences on male school dropout in SA when, for example, compared with girls who mostly drop out because of pregnancy (Branson et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2011; Grant & Hallman, 2008). Therefore, there is an urgent need for more information regarding the influences of school dropout among males.

Male school dropout is an important issue as research has proved that these individuals are more likely to be in prison (Sweeten, 2006), have lower levels of health (Reynolds & Ross, 2009), be unemployed (DBE, 2011), live on government assistance (World Bank, 2012), and have children who will drop out themselves (Rouse & Barrow, 2006), compared to those who complete school. Therefore, society suffers because of a loss of productive workers and rising levels of public expenses in social welfare, incarceration and health services.

An explanation of why male learners drop out of high school is needed in order to address this problem. The influences on school dropout for both males and females have been explored by a few South African studies. For example, longitudinal studies by Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard and King (2010) and Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, King and Townsend (2008) have verified a possible relationship between school dropout and specific factors, namely absenteeism, poverty and cigarette use and school dropout and bully behaviour among girls. Other South African studies (Fleisch & Shindler, 2009; Strassburg et al., 2010) have found that boys repeat at a much higher rate than girls. South African studies which involved learners and dropouts (Bingma, 2012; Inglis, 2009; Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008) or educators (Masitsa, 2006) to get their perspectives on why learners dropout found an array of influences on dropout, including factors such as household poverty, failing grades, teenage pregnancy, and lack of interest in school. Despite all the studies, little is still known about the extent of the influences on school dropout among males; this is the matter I attempted to investigate in this study.

1.4 PROBLEM FORMULATION

1.4.1 Topic

The topic for this study was school dropout among males in the greater Cape Town area of SA. I aimed to get a better understanding of the process surrounding dropout in order to address this local and national problem.

1.4.2 Main research question

This study was mainly concerned with uncovering the influences connected with school dropout among males. To this end, one basic question was explored: What are the influences on school dropout among males in the greater Cape Town area of SA?

By addressing this central question, I aimed to advance the South African knowledge of the topic at hand in order to curb this local and national problem.

1.4.3 Research aim and objectives

The overall aim of this inquiry was to explore the main influences on school dropout among males in the in the greater Cape Town area of SA. This was done by involving various role

players in the process, including male school dropouts, teachers, school principals, WCED representatives and parents of male school dropouts.

The two objectives for this study were the following:

The first objective was to explore the influences for why some male learners have dropped out of certain high schools in the greater Cape Town area of SA. This information offers a deeper understanding of the influences and process which eventually lead to dropout, something that is often missing in studies with large national data sets. By involving male dropouts and other important role players in this inquiry this data also adds a human voice to the school dropout debate.

The second objective was to explore a conceptual framework for understanding school dropout among males in SA. The common frameworks are limiting in the sense that these are mostly from the USA and have not been explored in the South African context. This outcome provides a basis for further research and interventions to address male school dropout in SA.

1.5 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The South African literature on school dropout is limited and it is uncommon to find a study with this topic as its central theme. Studies often include school dropout as a secondary matter to be considered as part of a bigger or seemingly more significant topic. By following a rigorous research process I found 17 South African studies (Branson et al., 2013; Bingma, 2012; Bongani, 2014; Dekeza-Tsomo, 2012; Dieltiens & Many-Gibert, 2008; Gustafsson, 2011; Strassburg et al., 2010; Flisher et al., 2010; Motala, Dieltiens & Sayed, 2009; Inglis, 2009; Flisher et al., 2008; Kannemeyer, 2008; Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008; Grant & Hallman, 2008; Masitsa, 2006; Terhoeven, 2009; Van Niekerk, 2014) published in the past 10 years with school dropout as a central theme. These studies include a combination of qualitative and quantitative investigations which utilised data from national or provincial surveys and/or individual surveys/interviews to provide valuable information about when and why learners drop out of school. I am only aware of two South African studies on school dropout that have focussed specifically on either males (Bingma, 2012) or females (Grant & Hallman, 2008) and there is good proof of differences. Further, little is known about the influences on male school dropout in SA when, for example, compared with girls who mostly drop out because of pregnancy (Branson et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2011; Grant & Hallman,

2008). Therefore, it seems logical to conclude that there is a true need for more knowledge about male school dropout in SA.

School dropout is important because it has serious negative implications for the individuals who drop out, their families, and society as a whole. Research has proved that these individuals are more likely to be in prison (Sweeten, 2006), have lower levels of health (Reynolds & Ross, 2009), be unemployed (DBE, 2011), live on government assistance (World Bank, 2012), and have children who will drop out themselves (Rouse & Barrow, 2006), compared to those who complete school. The public needs to bear an extra burden because of a smaller workforce and rising levels of public expenses in correctional services, health services and social welfare. Therefore, it seems clear that one can argue that dropping out of school is much more than an educational or even economic concern but a societal one which in SA has rightly been dubbed a "national crisis" (Metcalf, 2014, p. 17). Still, the extent of this problem in SA is unclear because "the quality of data collected by the Department makes it difficult to calculate Dropout rates accurately" (DBE, 2011, p. 2) and the DBE's Educational Management Information System (EMIS) is not geared to measuring and monitoring dropout (Panday & Arends, 2008). I agree with this view and also with the ministerial committee on learner retention's statement that the quality of the data "makes estimates of repeater rates quite uncertain and estimates of drop-out virtually impossible" (DoE, 2008, pp. xviii). Hence, although there are national data available about the extent of school dropout in SA, school and district data are missing. This situation is problematic as it allows the DoE to continue with their "rose-colored glass reporting" (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 17), meaning that they keep the general public unaware of the seriousness of the problem and lack a baseline against which to measure improvements.

1.6 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The motivation for this study was fuelled by my social work practice experience of the past seven years, having worked in communities and in schools with excessive school dropout rates. During this time, I was intrigued by two aspects of this phenomenon. Firstly, even though the number of learners per grade usually halved during the five years from Grade 8 to 12, no one at the schools seemed to care or even say anything about this matter, and upon enquiry no one really knew what the extent of the problem was. Secondly, because I knew many of the male learners who dropped out, I identified certain individual behaviour and practices and also school practices that seemed to be an influence on or indication of school

dropout. As I started looking for literature and research in support of what I witnessed, I discovered that very little was known about school dropout in SA, especially among males. Now, through this study, I wanted to establish what the true influences on male dropout are on a local school level and thereby contribute to this body of knowledge in SA.

1.7 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

In this first chapter of the thesis I introduced the problem and research area for this study. I also provided the rationale and motivation for undertaking this study as well as the research question and objectives I aimed to fulfil. In Chapter 2 of this thesis I review theory and literature on school dropout. This includes a discussion of the different definitions of school dropout and the data sources available in SA to establish the extent of the problem. I also review the relevant South African policies relating to school dropout and related factors in this country. Finally, I discuss international theories on school dropout as well as local and international literature and studies regarding the influences on school dropout. Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation of the research design and methodology I followed in this study, including an explanation of the processes I followed to identify the participants, the data collection methods and how I analysed and interpreted the data. I also discuss the ethical guidelines that I followed throughout this study. In Chapter 4 I present the findings of the study in the form of the themes, categories and sub-categories that emerged from the study. I also use quotations from the data to substantiate the findings as presented. In Chapter 5 I discuss the findings that I presented in the previous chapter. In this chapter I also offer my own interpretations of the findings and illustrate how they are supported by theory and other studies. Finally, in Chapter 6 I conclude the study by giving a summary of the findings of the study. I also make recommendations and suggestions for further research on the topic under investigation and reflect on the limitation of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I review local and international research, theory and models on school dropout. By familiarising myself with this information I was able to position my inquiry "in the context of the general body of scientific knowledge ... [to] indicate where [the] report fits into the picture" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 565). As mentioned in the previous chapter, most of the research and literature on school dropout is not gender-specific, meaning that it describes dropout as a general phenomenon and not distinctly for males and females. Most studies that do focus on one gender or another do so because of the focus on one specific factor, like Grant and Hallman's (2008) study on pregnancy-related school dropout and prior school performance. In support of this notion of a narrow focus of most gender-specific studies, Munsaka (2009, p. 3) states that most African studies on school dropout "have largely focussed on studying school dropout in relation to pregnancy related issues among female adolescents". Since most of the theory and studies as presented in this chapter are not specifically related to male school dropout, I use this general information about school dropout as a framework to position my own findings relating to male school dropout. Where I use studies that are not general for both genders, I specifically mention that the findings relate to male or female school dropout.

In this chapter I start by giving a brief explanation for the prominence of theory and literature from the USA as used in this study. Next, I explore the different definitions of school dropout and ways to measure this phenomenon. Then, I look at the various models and theories which can be utilised to understand the process of dropping out of school. Finally, I aim to answer the question of why learners drop out of school by investigating local and international literature and studies that aimed to describe the influences on school dropout.

2.2 THEORY AND LITERATURE FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The central reason for the prominence of literature and theories from the USA on school dropout in this study is that the topic under investigation has received ample attention in this

country. Devotion from researchers and policy makers has led to a comprehensive range of studies on various topics concerning this theme. For example, Rumberger and Lim (2008, p. 14) examined empirical studies published in the USA between 1983 and 2007 by using a combination of key words including 'high school', 'dropout', 'dropping out', 'graduation', and 'completion' and the search initially yielded more than 1 000 studies. They went further to identify those studies which utilised multivariate statistical analysis in which the dependent variable was dropout, graduate or completer and their final sample included 203 studies. On the other hand, among the handful of South African studies on school dropout I could only find five studies (Flisher et al., 2010; Fleisch, Shindler & Perry, 2010; Strassburg, 2010; Flisher et al., 2008; Sibanda, 2004) on school dropout which can in some way be classified within this category. Further, in perhaps the DoE's (2008, p. 3) most comprehensive report on school dropout and retention in SA, the authors mostly utilised terms which "originated in the USA". This lack in South African research is confirmed by Branson et al. (2013, p. 12) who state that the South African literature contains data on the influences for school dropout "but as yet does not decisively indicate which plays the most important role". Munsaka (2009, p. 3) likewise states that the "study of school dropout seems to still be in its infancy in Africa ...". When considering local theory or models for school dropout the picture looks even bleaker. I am not aware of any South African research which has tried to establish a localised theoretical framework to explain the school dropout process. Therefore, for those familiar with the topic under discussion, it will come as no surprise that I rely so heavily on literature and theory from the USA.

In a step to utilise the knowledge base in this country even further, I had an opportunity to spend two months in the USA at the University of California, Berkeley School of Social Welfare as a visiting student researcher. This visit included an opportunity for interaction with academics, practitioners and policy makers from the disciplines of social work and education, with a specific focus on school dropout. For example, I conducted an interview with Professor Russel Rumberger who has been publishing academic articles and books on the topic of school dropout for more than 25 years and is considered one of the most influential researchers on school dropout in the USA. This interview and the many other experiences in the USA had a profound impact on my understanding of the topic at hand, the most important being that school dropout is not an event but a process that begins, for most learners, many years before dropping out. With this as background, I now commence by discussing the definition of school dropout.

2.3 DEFINITION OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

Numerous South African and international authors (Barry & Reschly, 2012; Milacci & Zabloski, 2012; Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008; Masitsa, 2008) agree on a general definition of 'school dropout' which refers to an individual who is not attending school and left school before completing the highest grade attainable. When referring to school dropout in this study, this will also be the general definition and understanding of this term. However, upon closer investigation it becomes clear that a definition of school dropout is not as straightforward as this. In fact, defining what constitutes school dropout is a point of much contention among researchers, educators and policy makers alike, as measurements and dropout numbers are determined accordingly. Therefore, it is essential to have a good understanding of the different definitions before looking at the underlying factors, even if the aim of this study is not to do a calculation of any sorts. I next examine three practical ways of defining and measuring school dropout in an effort to get a better understanding of school dropout. I discuss status dropout, process dropout and event dropout.

2.3.1 Status dropout

Firstly, school dropout can be seen as a *status* held by an individual who is not attending school and has not completed school (Rumberger, 2011). This definition allows for a calculation of how many dropouts there are at a certain point and part of a specific group, for example males or females and in cities or rural areas. This is the definition which is commonly used when dropout rates are calculated through a national census, as illustrated by the South African Census of 1996 when the term 'dropout' was defined as any school-aged child who was not attending school and had not completed Grade 12 at the time of the census (Statistics South Africa, 2005).

Describing dropout as a status, however, has a few limitations. In his South African study, Sibanda (2004) explained that individuals can re-enrol in school which would then immediately change their status as dropouts. This definition is also influenced by the specific time when this measurement is taken as it can be at a period when a child is not formally enrolled in school, like the first day of school. As an illustration, Rumberger and Larson (1998) found that 19% of seventh-grade learners at a middle school in the USA only entered after the first school day. Another point to consider is that dropout rates according to the status dropout definition are misleading in countries with a low enrolment rate as many

individuals who are classified as dropouts have never even enrolled in school (Hunt, 2008). This is especially true in Africa where many countries have traditionally had low school enrolment rates. However, enrolment for primary education increased universally by 6% between 1994 and 2004 with the largest increases occurring in sub-Saharan Africa (27%) (UNESCO, 2007a). Especially in SA, enrolment rates are high, with 95% or more of children from all populations enrolled in school until age 15 or 16 (DoE, 2008). With this in mind, it seems as if the effect of enrolment rates will not be significant on this aspect of measuring status dropout in SA.

The literature and examples used above illustrate the usefulness of defining school dropout as a status, specifically in an attempt to establish how many children are out of school at a certain point in time. However, the shortcomings of this definition as noted place limitations on the usefulness thereof and therefore I explore alternative definitions below.

2.3.2 Process dropout

Another way of looking at school dropout is to consider it as a *process* (Finn, 1989; Rumberger, 2011). This definition focusses on the fact that most dropouts display patterns of school failure and other risk behaviours long before dropping out of school. According to Finn (1989, p. 133) school dropout is "a process of disengagement over time, and not a phenomenon that occurs in a single day or even a single school year". In accordance with the literature on early warning systems, a study by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012, p. 5) confirms that "behaviours manifested in sixth grade (spotty attendance, course failure in English or mathematics, and a record of misbehaviour) predict at least 50 percent of eventual dropouts". Defining school dropout as a process allows one to monitor a group of learners over a period of time, usually longer than a year, in order to establish who achieves a specific status.

This definition allows for a cohort rate measurement by calculating the number of learners who achieve dropout status over a longer period of time, such as the four years from the beginning of Grade 8 till the end of Grade 11 (Rumberger, 2011). This measurement also provides another significant statistic which is the percentage of high school enrollers who reach Grade 12 in the expected five-year period it takes to complete high school in SA. With this in mind, process dropout and cohort measurements are an ideal dropout measurement as it provides an idea of the academic progress of a specific group of learners (DoE, 2008). On the other hand, the challenge with this definition and measurement is that the data collection

process is more difficult and costly because it happens over a period of a few years. For example, participants in a study can move to another school or area and researchers usually lose track of them; therefore process dropout clearly also has limitations and is therefore not ideal for every situation. Next, I look at a final definition and way of measuring school dropout.

2.3.3 Event dropout

School dropout can also be considered as an *event*, which implies that one looks at the percentage of learners in a population who achieve a specific status (dropout) over a specific period (Rumberger, 2011). For example, the event may be that a learner formally notifies the school that he/she is withdrawing from the school or it could be less formal when a learner simply stops attending school. By using this definition one can measure how many of these cases occur over a specific period of time. In the same way, the DBE (2011) defines school dropout as the proportion of learners from a specific cohort who are enrolled in a given year who are then no longer enrolled the following year. This definition is ideal when measuring the average school dropout rates for a school, district or province. More specifically, it also allows a researcher to monitor in which grades dropout is more concentrated and illuminate the danger of dropout being spread among grades. In their South African study, Branson et al. (2013) utilised data to illustrate that dropout is low in primary school (Grade 1-7) but increases year-on-year thereafter and that dropout rates are higher for males than for females. By making use of this definition one can make this kind of measurement which would have not been possible with the definition of dropout as a status. Finally, when utilising the event dropout definition the issue of time is important as not only whether someone has dropped out but also when he/she dropped out is to be considered.

UNESCO (2007b) offers a definition which, although not using the same terminology, is similar to event dropout. This definition describes school dropout as "the percentage of pupils who drop out from a given grade in a given school year ... the difference between 100% and the sum of the promotion and repetition rates" (UNESCO, 2007b, p. 347). For this definition, grade repetition can simply be described as when a learner who has been in a specific grade for one year remains in this same grade when he/she was expected to be promoted to the next grade or completion of school (DoE, 2008). On the other hand, promotion is when a learner does move from one grade to another. The DoE (2008) endorses this definition and acknowledges it as a way to ensure that reporting schedules are within the international

guidelines set by UNESCO. Finally, a nationwide movement in the USA, Building a Grad Nation (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Fox & Moore, 2010), uses a similar definition and measurement for school dropout: the number of learners who drop out from a grade, school or district in a given year, divided by the total enrolments in those grades.

A notable shortfall of using the event school dropout rate is the fact that dropout is, as explained earlier, mostly not an event but a process which happens over a number of years (Rumberger, 2011). For this reason, the event dropout rate is usually lower than the status rate which includes the information regarding dropouts over a longer period of time. For example, dropout statistics in the USA varied in 2008 in such a way that the status dropout rate was measured at 8% and the event dropout was 3.5% (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). A South African example of this rate is found in Branson et al.'s (2013) study where they found that about 40% of the learners who were in Grade 11 in 2008 had dropped out of school without completing Grade 12 by 2010. On the other hand, the South African dropout rate when measured as a status is closer to 50-60% (Gustafsson, 2011; DBE, 2011). Therefore, measuring school dropout as an event offers a relatively easy way to do this calculation but seems to be inaccurate when looking at the true number of learners who enrol and eventually drop out before completing school.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, I employed a general definition of school dropout in this study. According to this definition, school dropout occurs simply when an individual who is still of school-going age is not attending school and left school before completing the highest grade attainable. This was seen to be an acceptable definition as I was not aiming to do a measurement of sorts. Still, the different definitions discussed above provided a broader understanding of the topic under investigation and assisted in the holistic study thereof, especially when looking at the extent of school dropout. In the following section I explain how the different definitions as explained above are utilised to measure the extent of school dropout in SA.

2.4 MEASURING SCHOOL DROPOUT

In Chapter 1 of this thesis I called school dropout in SA a national crisis, based on the 50-60% of learners who annually leave the school system (DBE, 2011; Gustafsson, 2011; Spaul, 2014). These statistics might give the impression that much attention is being given to this problem and that figures are tightly monitored to know whether the problem is being

successfully addressed or not. However, this is not the case in SA as policy makers and officials are seemingly giving little direct attention to the issue of school dropout. There are numerous explanations for this and one of these is that the data on school dropout is inaccurate and not important when compared to something like the NSC (Jansen, 2014; Maluleke, 2014). Next, I provide an outline of the general types of data and ways in which school dropout is being measured in SA.

2.4.1 Education Management Information System

In SA, the DBE's EMIS is the central data source for educational data in the country. EMIS is a function and unit within the DBE and has the responsibility to develop and keep up an information system for the management of education in SA (DoE, 2008). This integrated information system is realised through the collecting, processing, spreading and recording of educational data, including planning and decision-making, financial allocation, monitoring and evaluation, and national education information needs. The data sources for this system include various sectors within education such as Ordinary Schools, Adult Education and Training, Early Childhood Development, and Further Education and Training institutions. The implementation of the EMIS system is an effort to eventually move away from paper-based data to electronic data collection methods through institution-based administrative systems. However, there are a few challenges with this system, which leaves plenty of room for enhancement.

By their own admission, the "quality of data collected by the Department makes it difficult to calculate Dropout rates accurately" (DBE, 2011, p. 2). A report by the ministerial committee on learner retention (DoE, 2008, p. xvi) found that most South African studies of learner retention used flawed methodologies leading to misrepresentations of repeaters and dropout rates. As an illustration, Crouch (2005, p. 2) highlights that there are high repetition rates in the early grades and ways to take advantage of the system:

Much of the repetition is not reported as repetition ... because it is not based on academic failure. Enrolment is artificially increased in Grade 1 for several reasons. Parents in many areas have no access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) opportunities and principals face moral pressure to accommodate these children in an informal ECD which consists of early admission to Grade 1, but with the expectation that the child will sit in Grade 1 for two years. Furthermore,

the system contains incentives to boost enrolment, and it is easier to enrol a child early in Grade 1, and make him or her repeat the grade ... than to entirely make up a non-existent child in later grades. These children were (and are) typically under reported as repeaters. They appear, instead, as new intakes, but twice. While much of this sort of practice has been cleaned up from the system since the mid 1990's, some of it persists.

These flaws influence the quality of dropout data, as that which is reflected as dropout may in fact be repetition (DoE, 2008). For example, the Annual Schools Survey is a data set within the EMIS system but a report by the ministerial committee on learner retention (DoE, 2008, p. xviii) notes that the nature of this data "makes estimates of repeater rates quite uncertain and estimates of drop-out virtually impossible". Another problem with the EMIS data is that it does not "properly track learners who might have left during the year but who may have returned to school in the following year" (Motala et al., 2009, p. 262). As a final point, the ministerial committee on learner retention states that the EMIS data "does not constitute a complete accounting system and that it is flawed" (DoE, 2008, p. 10). This comes down to the fact that the data from the EMIS system is only as good as the record-keeping and registers of specific schools which in SA are commonly incomplete or missing altogether. Crouch and Vinjevold (2006) write about a practice called 'weeding' which also negatively influences the EMIS data. This is a practice whereby provincial educational authorities encourage schools to hold back learners in Grades 10, 11 and 12 who are performing badly and are at risk of failing Grade 12. This process is aimed at meeting national pass rates and it puts pressure on schools to use this method to give the impression that standards are being met. Clearly, this and similar practices are damaging the validity of the EMIS data and demand alternative sources for this kind of data.

From the above description, it seems clear that the EMIS system is not yielding the needed data to monitor school dropout effectively in SA. The available data are also giving researchers, policy makers and the public a false idea of the extent of the country's dropout problem. With this in mind, I am in agreement with the ministerial committee on learner retention's recommendation that "the data collection system (EMIS), should, therefore, be improved as a matter of urgency" (DoE, 2008, p. 139). Why these recommendations have not been implemented yet is unknown and a possible reason why school dropout is not getting the attention a crisis of this magnitude should have been given.

2.4.2 Other South African educational data sources

Existing data from studies undertaken in related fields have been a useful resource for educational and school dropout studies in SA. Fleisch and Shindler (2009) list five studies which can be utilised for educational data: the Birth to Twenty Study (Bt20), the KwaZulu-Natal Income Dynamic Study, the Cape Area Panel Study, the African Centre Demographic Information System, and the Agincourt Health and Demographic Surveillance System. Other data sources which have specifically been utilised for school dropout measurements in SA are the National Income Dynamic Study 2008 dataset (Branson et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2011), the 2009 General Household Survey (Gustafsson, 2011) and the 2007 Community Survey (Fleisch et al., 2010). For example, the 2009 General Household Survey provides useful data on school dropout and is cohort-based, meaning that the cohort must pass beyond their supposed school going years for complete calculations. Further, this survey allows for calculation by population group, gender and reason for leaving school, but not much more. In another South African educational study, Fleisch and Shindler (2009) utilised the Bt20 child cohort study in urban SA to describe the patterns of schooling among South African children. This study made use of a secondary analysis of the Bt20 data and proved the viability and usefulness of using this methodology to create an accurate picture of school going behaviour over time. Lastly, the DBE's Portfolio Committee on Education (DBE, 2011) has also utilised secondary data (National Income Dynamic Study of 2008) because by their own admission the quality of the EMIS data makes it difficult to calculate dropout rates accurately (DBE, 2011). It seems clear that there are reliable alternative data sources in SA which can be utilised to determine educational and school dropout statistics but the EMIS data have definite flaws.

The arguments raised above illustrate the absolute importance of quality data, not just to measure the extent of school dropout, but also to gain data about the influences associated with this phenomenon. The best way to address these issues is by implementing longitudinal studies whereby a selected cohort of children can be tracked through their entire educational career or through retrospective studies of school records (DoE, 2008). Longitudinal studies, however, are time- and resource-intensive while retrospective studies are similar and presuppose an accessible and reliable school record system. For these reasons these studies are seldom undertaken. A noteworthy alternative was recommended by the ministerial committee on learner retention (DoE, 2008) who proposed that more precise and detailed

information on school dropout will only be available if new ways of data collection is developed and implemented. Their suggestion includes keeping school registers containing the following information of each learner: identity number, full name, and grade in which enrolled. If these registers could be collected over time they could yield valuable data regarding various components of school dropout and related factors such as grade repetition and promotion of learners. A final recommendation by the DoE (2008, p. 10) was a "retrospective Educational Experience Survey" to be carried out every two years. This survey should be conducted with a substantial sample of people between the ages of 20 and 29 with the aim of tracking down a complete educational history of the respondents, including retention, further education, possible determinants of educational success or failure and more.

The above section illustrates that school dropout statistics in SA are unreliable and the DBE is not giving serious attention to this situation. It also seems as if current measurements do not include measurements like the process dropout rate which is seemingly the most accurate way to establish true dropout rates. Therefore, the intention of my study is not only to contribute to a better understanding of school dropout but to also use this information as a motivation for more accurate measurements of the extent of school dropout in SA. Next, I discuss the South African legislation and policies that are most relevant to school dropout in SA.

2.5 SOUTH AFRICAN LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

The influences on school dropout cannot be properly investigated without a good understanding of the South African educational policies and legislative framework related to this phenomenon. Particularly after 1994, the South African government was determined to ensure that policies and legislation, specifically around education, were constructed to ensure the promotion of the better life which was promised to all population groups. The government's commitment to quality education for all can particularly be seen in the national education budget which has grown to be higher than any other sector. For example, 20% of government expenditure for 2014/15 was allocated to education, amounting to R254 billion (Brand South Africa, 2014). Next, I explore relevant South African policies which particularly relate to the topic under discussion.

2.5.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996

Since 1996, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996a), Act 108 of 1996, section 29(1) guarantees the right to basic education, including adult basic education and further education which the State must make available and accessible. Section 29(2) of the Act also specifically stipulates that everyone has the right to receive education in the official language of their choice (RSA, 1996a). In order to promote this the State must consider all educational alternatives, including single-medium institutions. Put simply, the South African Constitution makes it clear that everyone has the right to attend school, and access should never be the reason why a learner drops out of school.

2.5.2 The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996

The South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996b) is aimed at redressing a variety of education-related concerns, including redressing the past injustices in educational provision; providing education of progressive quality to all learners; eradicating racism, sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination; and protecting and advancing the diverse cultures and languages of SA. Finally, this Act aims to uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators and to support their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the State (RSA, 1996b).

According to Section 3(1) of this Act it is obligatory for all children to "attend school from the first day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of 7 years until the last day of the year in which such a learner reaches the age of 15 years or the ninth grade whichever comes first" (RSA, 1996b). It also stipulates that this responsibility lies primarily with the parent or legal caregiver of a learner. Additionally, Section 3(3) of this Act requires that every provincial Member of the Executive Council must ensure that there are enough schools so that every child can attend school within his/her province. Also, Section 8(1) of this Act specifies that the governing body of a public school should adopt a code of conduct for learners, in consultation with learners, parents and educators. Section 8(2) requires that this code of conduct must be aimed at promoting a disciplined and purposeful school environment where quality learning can happen. Finally, Section 8(5) of this Act stipulates that a code of conduct must contain provisions of processes to safeguard the interest of a learner and any other parties involved in a disciplinary process. Disciplinary problems, suspension, and expulsion

of learners from school are influences for school dropout. These influences are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Section 9(1) of the SASSA Act 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996b) stipulates that a governing body of a public school may, after a fair hearing, suspend a learner from attending school for a period of one week; or pending a decision as to whether a learner is to be expelled from the school by the head of the department. More specifically, Section 9(2) states that if a learner is found guilty of serious misconduct and after a fair hearing may be expelled by the head of the department. According to Section 9(3), behaviour which constitutes serious misconduct can be determined by the Members of the Executive Council of a province. Section 9(4) mentions that a learner who is expelled from a public school may appeal against the decision. Of further importance is Section 9(5) which stipulates that when a learner who is subject to compulsory school attendance according to Section 3(1) is expelled from a public school, an alternative arrangement for placement at another public school must be made by the head of the department. This law strongly relates to school dropout as school attendance, misconduct and the disciplinary procedures followed are all influences on school dropout. I describe the relevance of these topics (misconduct and expulsion) in relation to the influences on school dropout in more detail later in this chapter.

2.5.3 The Policy on Learner Attendance

The Policy on Learner Attendance (RSA, 2010) is aimed at promoting regular school attendance and it provides standardised procedures for recording and monitoring learner attendance. Importantly, this policy stipulates that it is the responsibility of parents to ensure that learners attend school daily and that action should be taken by school authorities if a learner within the compulsory school age stays away from school without providing an explanation. The Policy on Learner Attendance (RSA, 2010) also provides specific guidelines regarding practical things like the school timetable to ensure that learners attend school on time. If learners are not present during the register period they are marked as absent and the class register is the official document whereby data about learner absenteeism is monitored and on which follow-ups with learners who are chronically absent are based. Finally, schools need to compile quarterly reports on learner absenteeism to the school governing body (SGB) and district offices to identify problem areas and determine the appropriate action (RSA, 2010). This policy is relevant for this study as school attendance and absenteeism are

potential influences for school dropout. I explore school attendance and absenteeism in more detail later in this chapter as possible influences on male school dropout.

2.5.4 The White Paper 6 of 2001

The White Paper 6 of 2001 (DoE, 2001) focusses on inclusive education and training because of the differences between learners and specifically their learning needs which are equally valued. This includes several differences in learners, such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, disability and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) status. It also seeks to increase the participation of all learners in the academic and other educational institutions and minimise barriers to learning (DoE, 2001). Further, this paper stipulates that some learners may require more intensive and specialised forms of support in order to progress and develop to their full potential. These forms of support are organised in such a way that they can provide various types and levels of support to children. For example, education to learners with disabilities should be provided through full-service schools and there are clear guidelines as to how these schools will serve the learners in need. White Paper 6 of 2001 (DoE, 2001) specifically refers to the fact that most learners with disabilities have either fallen outside the curriculum or have been forced into the mainstream education system. The failure to respond to the diverse needs of the learner population can influence school dropout

White Paper 6 of 2001 specifically refers to the commitment of the Ministry of Education to provide learning opportunities for learners who have experienced barriers to learning and development or who have dropped out because of the specific educational system's inability to accommodate their learning needs. This plan needs to be developed over the long term, and the short- and medium-term actions provide models for the future system-wide application. Finally, White Paper 6 elucidates the capital, material and human resource development, and the funding requirements of establishing an inclusive education and training system for SA (DoE, 2001). As far as I know, the implementation of an acceptable plan to address these needs is yet to see the light.

As a final thought, the South African policies and laws as described above make it clear that the South African government expects that each child in this country will go to school and will stay in school, and that each parent or caregiver will see to it that this is done. It is also clear that it is up to schools to accommodate a diverse learner population and ensure that every learner has the best possible chance of succeeding at school. I discuss this responsibility

of schools to accommodate and support all learners at their schools and the omission thereof later in this chapter as an influence on school dropout. Next, I discuss some models and theories explaining the how and why of school dropout.

2.6 MODELS AND THEORIES FOR SCHOOL DROPOUT

Various models and theories can be utilised to understand the process of dropping out of school. The two models I utilised for this study, namely Finn's (1989) model for dropout from school and Tinto's (1975, 1987) model for dropout in higher education, were especially designed to provide a better understanding of educational dropout. The theories I include differ in terms of the constructs they use to explain dropout and the components which are or are not specifically relevant to school dropout. Some constructs are generic and used for the explanation of various social phenomena. For example, studies on juvenile delinquency, gang involvement and school dropout have all made use of theories such as social control theory, strain theory and social learning theory (Akers & Jensen, 2006; Hay & Evans, 2006; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Agnew, 1985). Further, no theory is able to explain a phenomenon like school dropout in its full extent and therefore a combination of theories is ideal when studying this topic. For the purpose of this study, I selected the following models and theories: Finn's model (1989); Tinto's model (1975, 1987); the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977); social development theory (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996); and Rumberger and Lim's conceptual framework (2008) for the influences on school dropout. Some of these sources might seem outdated, but are seminal works on these topics and therefore legitimate for use, especially when coupled with more recent data confirming these theories, as done throughout this study. I give a brief explanation of each of these models and theories, and motivate and illustrate why these were all relevant for use in this study.

2.6.1 Finn's model

Finn (1989) used two models to explain school dropout. The first model (Finn, 1989), the "frustration self-esteem" model, proposes that learners' first step to dropping out of school is school failure. Without any support, a learner's school failure then leads to lowered self-esteem which in turn leads to problem behaviour, including truancy, skipping class, disruptive behaviour and juvenile delinquency. As this behaviour escalates, school performance worsens; consequently the learner's self-esteem decreases and his/her problem behaviour increases. Because of their frustration, learners also tend to shift their attention from school to

peer networks to mitigate the feelings of embarrassment at school. Finally, learners either leave school voluntarily or are expelled from school because of their problem behaviour. Finn (1989) argued that this state of affairs can be countered by changing school organisation through the promotion of more and closer interaction between teachers and learners and thereby restoring students' loss of self. I include this model as it strongly correlates with international (Rumberger, 2011; Hernandez, 2011; Allensworth & Easton, 2005) and local research (Strassburg et al., 2010; Dieltiens & Many-Gibert, 2008) which has proved that school failure is a strong influence on school dropout. However, I am not aware of any empirical evidence which supports Finn's (1989) exact pathway for school dropout but there are studies which confirm the separate factors forming part of the pathway as influences for dropout, including problem behaviour (Ou, Mersky, Reynolds, & Kohler, 2007; Branson et al., 2013) and negative peer networks (Battin-Pearson, Newcomb, Abbot, Hill, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2000; Kaplan, Peck, & Kaplan, 1997). Consequently, there is evidence for parts of Finn's model (1989) as influences or risk factors associated with school dropout and I discuss most of these factors later in this chapter.

According to Finn's (1989) second model, the 'participation-identification' model, a learner's lack of participation in school activities such as classroom participation, homework, and participation in extracurricular activities like sport leads to poor school performance and then to less identification with school. According to Finn (1989), these feelings of not belonging and not valuing school lead to less participation, poorer school performance, less identification with school and eventually dropping out of school. On the other hand, learners who can identify as being part of the school and are actively participating will perform better and have a smaller chance of getting involved in those activities which are associated with school dropout. As with Finn's (1989) first model, I am not aware of empirical data which supports this specific pathway; however, there are studies which support the individual factors which make up the participation-identification model. For example, engagement is an important part of this model and there is empirical proof of the influence of chronic absence (missing 10% or more of the school year, with or without excuses) on grades and dropout (Chang & Romero, 2008). In SA, Strassburg et al. (2010) also established that there is a correlation between missing class and school dropout. I provide an in-depth discussion of these factors later in this chapter.

Central to Finn's (1989) model is that of student engagement, which has strong connections to Hirsch's (1969) social control theory (cited in Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pangani, 2009). The social control theory holds that if an individual has feelings of attachment and belonging to a social institution, like school, and believes in the common values of that institution, there will be a strong connection. On the other hand, a weakened bond between the learner and the school can lead to disengagement in academic and social activities which can eventually lead to dropping out of school.

In addition, Finn (1989) argues that school dropout is a process which involves more than just the physical act of leaving school; it also includes an emotional and psychological disengagement. This implies that the physical act of withdrawing (leaving school) is the final step that is preceded by emotional and psychological withdrawal. Put simply, the process of school dropout, according to Finn, happens on two levels: the psychological level and the physical level. By implication, these manifestations can be identified at an early stage of the process and can be addressed. For example, an individual who continually struggles academically (physical manifestation) can start feeling worthless (psychological manifestation) and lose interest in school. However, if teachers are in close interaction with learners they will identify this process and act in an attempt to ensure that an individual does not continue with this process of disengagement which commonly ends in school dropout.

In conclusion, Finn's model (1989) is firstly useful as it is one of the few theoretical models that are specifically developed for understanding school dropout. Secondly, it offers a way to examine various influences for school dropout, including academic failure, peer influences and school climate. It also offers a unique way of organising these factors as part of a pathway with interrelated factors which eventually influences school dropout. This model is especially important as it offers a potential structure for early identification and prevention of school dropout by addressing influences during an early stage. I am not aware of any South African school dropout studies which have used this model but there are two African studies which have done so, namely Munsaka's (2009) study on the reasons for dropout in a rural area in southern Zambia and a study by Mapani (2011) about the factors contributing to boys dropping out in the Khomas region of Namibia. Both these studies effectively applied Finn's (1989) model to explain the school dropout process among learners in their countries and therefore this model has been used in the African context. In a similar way, I utilised Finn's

model in combination with other research on school dropout to answer my research question. I also used the model as a whole for the interpretation of the findings of this study.

2.6.2 Tinto's model

Sociologist Vincent Tinto (1975) noted that there was a wide body of research on dropout in higher education, yet little was known about the nature of the dropout process. More specifically, according to Tinto (1975), not enough attention was being given to a proper definition of dropout and the development of theoretical models to explain dropout was absent. He also felt strongly about the separation of different types of school dropout, including temporary versus permanent dropout as well as transfer to other institutions. Tinto's aim was to "formulate a theoretical model that explains the process of interaction between individuals and the institution that leads differing individuals to drop out" (1975, p. 90). Therefore, the eventual theory that was developed is more of an institutional theory for dropout rather than a systems theory for dropout, meaning that it focusses on the institution and not the individual.

Central to Tinto's (1975) model is the argument that dropout is influenced by a range of personal attributes that causes different individuals to act differently in different situations or conditions. These personal attributes include family background, skills and abilities, and prior school experiences (including goals and motivation). When a student then enrolls in an academic institution, according to Tinto (1975, 1987), there are two dimensions of that institution that determine whether a student will remain there, namely a social dimension that has to do with the social integration with the institution and the value of schooling, and an academic dimension that has to do with the academic integration or engagement of students in meaningful learning. These two dimensions can influence an individual's eventual schooling outcome either independently or separately, depending on the needs and characteristics of the student as well as external factors. However, for students to stay in a school they need to be integrated to some extent in either the social or the academic system. For example, students might only be engaged in the academic system of the school, yet as long as their social needs are met elsewhere and their goals remain the same they will stay engaged with the school (Tinto, 1975).

Rumberger (2011) underlines the insights that Tinto's (1975, 1987) model offers for a better understanding of the school dropout process. Firstly, the distinction between a commitment to

education and a particular institution is important, as learners who remain committed to their educational goals might just transfer to another school if they do not integrate into the social system of a school, and not drop out. Other learners might drop out and will not transfer to another school if their current experience diminishes their educational goals. Secondly, schools can have several sub-cultures that accommodate the different needs of students. Finally, the model acknowledges the important role external factors play in dropout. For example, external systems like families can assist learners in meeting their educational goals by providing the needed support. External events, like job prospects, can change a learner's evaluation of the cost of staying in school versus earning an income. Combined, these factors illustrate the value of using Tinto's (1975, 1987) model to explain the process of dropping out of school.

In terms of the usefulness of Tinto's (1975, 1987) model for my study on male school dropout in SA, I took the following into account: Firstly, it is one of the few theoretical models that are especially developed for the interpretation of engagement and dropout at educational institutions and not a general theory like most of the others I use in this study. In fact, Collings, Swanson and Watkins (2014, p. 928) have gone so far as to label it "the most endorsed" model for understanding student withdrawal and attrition. Secondly, the model has successfully been used in research on school dropout. For example, Rumberger and Larson (2008) drew on Tinto's (1975, 1987) model in a study where they developed and tested a model that found that higher levels of academic (e.g. doing homework) and social engagement (e.g. attending school) reduced the chances of dropping out of high school. Thirdly, I am not aware of any other South African or African studies on school dropout that have made use of Tinto's (1975, 1987) model to explain the findings of their studies. I could not find a cited reason for this absence of literature but suspect that other South African researchers were either not aware of this model or did not consider it useful as it was originally developed to understand dropout from higher education and not from school. Nonetheless, there is sufficient literature to support the view that this is indeed a useful model by which to understand school dropout (Rumberger, 2011). Therefore I believe this model added new depth to my study and the overall body of research on school dropout in SA.

2.6.3 Ecological model

The ecological model is a choice model in the social sciences and has been used widely for the explanation of various subjects in this field. For example, I utilised this theory as an

integral part of the conceptual framework for my own master's thesis (Geldenhuys, 2007) which focussed on the family experiences of male youth offenders. This model offered me the framework wherein I could investigate the reciprocal interaction between participants and their environment in order to get a better understanding of how this interaction influenced their antisocial behaviour (Germain & Gitterman, 1986). In order to accomplish my aim, I was able to explore the situation of the offender and his environment, and the fit between the variables. With this in mind, the ecological model offers an understanding of school dropout by focussing on the way learners' experiences are shaped by the settings or context in which they spend most of their time (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Central to the ecological model is the recognition that there are various contexts and factors that influence the development and functioning of a child. Bronfenbrenner (1977) specifically distinguished four contexts or environments that potentially have a direct or indirect influence on a child, namely the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. For the purpose of this study, these systems are represented by a learner's family, peers, teachers, school and communities or the values of these entities.

Firstly, the microsystem constitutes the immediate relationships an individual is involved with, including his/her immediate family circle. This system contains the most important relationships, including the child-parent and child-sibling ones. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), a child's development is influenced by the interactional processes which happen in this system. Secondly, the mesosystem refers to the circle of interaction that extends outside of the family domain. This circle involves the interactions and relationships in domains, including the school, peer groups, sports clubs, and more. These domains influence a child through the interaction between the child and the parts of these domains, including teachers, friends and coaches. Thirdly, Bronfenbrenner (1977) argues that the exosystem has an indirect influence on the development of a child through public policy decisions, like the educational or health systems. A parent's responsibilities can also fall within this system as it directly influences a family's socioeconomic status, which in turn determines the quality of life to which a child is exposed. Finally, Bronfenbrenner (1977) explains how, in the macrosystem, the values and beliefs of a particular society influence the development of a child. This includes the influence of cultural values and beliefs around issues like race and gender. For example, a cultural belief can be that it is acceptable for younger girls to drop out of school, or become pregnant, as they are not expected to finish school (Munsaka, 2009). A central idea

in this system is that development does not take place in a vacuum but occurs as a result of a continual interaction between the child and the stated interconnected systems.

The ecological framework is an acceptable model to utilise for a study on school dropout because of the following two reasons: (1) the foundation of the model is based on research and interventions with children and youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), and (2) the model allows the researcher to have a broad, systemic view of the individual and phenomenon being studied (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Therefore, this model allows for a focus on the specific age group concerned in this study and also looks beyond individual characteristics to the influence of families, schools and communities. In some of his later works, Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 120) refers to "the 'growing chaos' in families, schools, unsupervised peer groups and other settings in which children and youth spend extended periods of time", including the growing number of single-parent families, violence at schools, and poor academic achievement among marginalised groups. This 'chaos' is manifested in apathy, rebellion, delinquency and violence among youth. Therefore, by utilising the ecological model I was able to assess these factors as influences for school dropout, not as single events, but as the effect of various circles of influence on an individual.

The ecological model has specifically been used in studies on school dropout. For example, Jozefowicz-Simbeni (2008) examined school dropout from an ecological perspective by mixing the theory of the life stages of adolescents and that of the dynamics of a school system. This study (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008) provides a good example of the value of examining a phenomenon like school dropout from an ecological perspective as it illustrates the influence of various systems on this phenomenon. In SA, Inglis (2009) also utilised the ecological perspective in a study about the overall functioning of learners at risk of dropping out of school in a high-risk community in the Jamestown community of Stellenbosch in SA. Further, Munsaka's (2009) Zambian study on school dropout incorporated the ecological perspective in the theoretical framework to explore the risk factors associated with school dropout in a rural site of southern Zambia. In conclusion: in this section I have explained the ecological model and illustrated its relevance for my study; therefore I have clarified why I incorporated it as part of the theoretical framework to explain the findings of this study.

2.6.4 Social development model

The social development model displays similarities with the ecological perspective but whereas the latter is a general theory used for the explanation of various social occurrences, the former is used specifically for explaining anti- or pro-social behaviour. More specifically, the social development model focusses on a range of risk and protective factors associated with a specific phenomenon and it uses this evidence to predict the occurrence of specific anti-social or pro-social behavioural patterns among children and youth as they age (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). This theory hypothesises that there are multiple biological, psychological, and social factors at various levels in different social spheres (within the individual as well as in the family, school, peer group and community) which all contribute to some degree to the prediction of anti-social or pro-social behavioural patterns (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). Consequently, the idea of risk factors is prominent within this theory which made it relevant for the purpose of this study.

The social development model theorises that there are different social units with whom a child bonds: family, school, peers and community. According to this model, bonding consists of three elements: attachment, a positive emotional or affective feeling towards others; commitment, a sense of investment in a social unit; and belief in the morals and values of the social unit (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). Thus, bonds can serve as either risk or protective factors against negative behaviour, depending on the values and norms held by the group with whom the child is most firmly bonded. For example, for a child who has a strong bond with his/her family, where substance abuse is common, his/her family can be seen as a risk factor for later substance abuse. On the other hand, if the same child has a weak bond with his/her family, accompanied by a stronger bond with a teacher or group of friends who oppose substance abuse, his/her teacher or friends can serve as a protective factors against substance abuse. Consequently, the extent to which children are bonded with units will determine their commitment towards the held values and norms, which implies that an individual will adopt the beliefs and behavioural patterns of the social unit with whom they are most firmly bonded. This strongly correlates with both Tinto's (1975) model and Finn's (1989) 'participation-identification' model regarding a learner's connectedness with a school as well as the influence of the macrosystem in the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The social development model is classified as a theory for anti-social behaviour and has specifically been implemented for research focussing on the risk and protective factors

associated with delinquency, crime, substance abuse and gang membership (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hill, Howell, Hawkins & Battin-Pearson, 1996). It has also been successfully implemented in the construction of early prevention programmes aiming to prevent involvement in the mentioned concerns. Although these concerns differ in various aspects from school dropout, influences of this behaviour provide a starting point for examining the risk factors or influences associated with male school dropout. Research has also found that there are a range of risk factors associated with various types of problem behaviour and therefore this theory could be utilised for this study (Durlak, 1995).

For my study, I utilised the four development sub-models or stages as used within the social development model. These distinct, developmentally specific stages "incorporate notions of age-specific problem and prosocial behaviour" and include the following: preschool, elementary school, middle school and high school (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996, p. 154). These stages are separated by major transitions related to the environments in which children are socialised. For example, the move from the relatively self-contained elementary school phase to the more modularised environments of middle school is accompanied by shifts in the influence of the different social units with whom a child bonds. There are reciprocal influences between these stages where behaviour in one stage can be expected to affect development and behaviour during the following stage. This concept correlates with the literature on school dropout which illustrates that it is not a single event but a process which happens over many years (Balfanz et al., 2011; Bridgeland et al., 2006).

I am not aware of any African or South African studies on school dropout that have utilised this model but from the discussion above it is clear that the social development theory offers useful concepts that could be used in this study. This pertains especially to the similarities with the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and shared characteristics with both Tinto (1975) and Finn's (1989) school dropout models. An important commonality of these theories is that they all verify that a social phenomenon like school dropout is a developmental concern influenced by various factors and context which happens over a period of time and not just as a single event. With all of this in mind, the social development theory added additional substance to the theoretical basis within which I interpreted the findings of this study of male school dropout in SA.

2.6.5 Rumberger and Lim's conceptual framework

In their review of 25 years' research on school dropout, Rumberger and Lim (2008) drew on various theories (including those of Finn, Tinto and Bronfenbrenner) to construct a conceptual framework for "understanding the process of dropping out and graduation, as well as the salient factors underlying that process" (Rumberger, 2011, p. 154). This framework comprises individual factors associated with learners, and institutional factors associated with the three major contexts that influence learners – families, schools, and communities. In accordance, Luyten, Bosker, Dekkers and Derks (2003) contend that most literature on the risk factors for school dropout focusses only on one variable which may play a role and is analysed at a particular time. As a solution, Luyten et al. (2003) suggest a model whereby one categorises the multiple risk factors for school dropout by referring to factors linked to family, school and learner characteristics. Indeed, this is what Rumberger and Lim's (2008) conceptual framework offers and therefore I have used it in this study as the structure wherein I discuss the relevant local and international research and studies that have been conducted on the influences on school dropout. The community is the only part of this framework that I do not discuss as a separate theme but as part of all the others. I do this because Rumberger and Lim's (2008) categorisation of influences in the community context is done on the basis of influences like parental relationships' ability to provide access to family and friends, to social connections to the rest of the community, and to social relationships which arise from mutual trust and values that can help to supervise the activities of the residence, especially youth (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). These are all factors which I describe as part of influences on school dropout related to the individual, the family and the school. Next, I move from the theory and models that I used as a foundation for this study, to research literature on the influences on school dropout.

2.7 INFLUENCES ON SCHOOL DROPOUT

The most important question to be answered in this study was why male learners drop out of school. Thousands of international and a handful of South African studies have been conducted in an effort to answer this question. Researchers have employed both qualitative and quantitative methods and a combination of the two to better understand the process of school dropout. What remains clear through prominent international (Balfanz et al., 2011; Balfanz et al., 2010; Bridgeland et al., 2006) and South African research (DoE, 2008; Flisher et al., 2008; Masitsa, 2006) is the extreme challenge of trying to prove a causal relationship

between any single factor and school dropout. However, a large number of inquiries with similar findings do suggest that there are some factors which have a stronger influence than others. For this reason, Rumberger also advises that "it is more accurate to refer to these various factors as 'predictors' or 'influences' rather than 'causes' of dropping out" (2011, p. 159). In accordance, I employ the term *influences* to describe the various factors contributing to school dropout in this study.

Influences or predictors are those variables which are likely to increase the chances or likelihood of a future negative outcome for a learner, in this case, dropping out of school (Bowers, 2010). The presence of one influence would not necessarily lead to dropping out of school but the presence of several could increase the probability. This phenomenon is also termed 'cumulative risk', which implies that an increasing number of risk factors will bring a reasonable increase in problematic behaviour (Appleyard, Egeland, Van Dulmen, & Srouge, 2005). For example, because poverty can be an influence on school dropout a child from a poor family will not necessarily drop out of school. But, if the impoverished child is living with only one parent and is also being bullied at school, the cumulative effect of all these influences could eventually cause him to drop out of school. Further, if there are few or no supportive mechanisms to which individuals and family systems have access, the risk factors will be amplified with an increased chance for negative outcomes.

As mentioned earlier, I use Rumberger and Lim's (2008) framework to structure the literature and studies about influences on school dropout by focussing on the individual and institutional influences most relevant to the South African context. I mostly employ research from the USA but also include South African and African research where possible. In the subsequent sections I start by looking at the individual influences, followed by the institutional influences associated with school dropout.

2.7.1 Individual influences

Individual influences comprise those factors which have to do with the dropouts themselves, as opposed to institutional influences which have to do with structures or systems they form part of (Rumberger, 2011). Individual influences can be divided into four broad areas: educational performance, behaviours, attitudes and background. Next, I discuss relevant research and findings about these influences on school dropout.

2.7.1.1 Educational performance

Rumberger (2011, p. 160) contends that there is sufficient evidence that "educational performance, especially during high school, is the single most important influence of whether students drop out or graduate from high school". The South African research on this topic does not confirm this statement. For example, Branson et al. (2013) found only educational performance to be an influence for dropout, but not the most prominent influence. Other South African researchers like Strassburg et al. (2010) and Dieltiens and Many-Gibert (2008) cite aspects of educational performance as influences on school dropout but also not as the most important ones. This could be because primary concerns like poverty are more prevalent in SA and therefore respondents in studies have cited poverty rather than educational performance as an influence. However, even if South African research does not position educational performance as the single most important influence for school dropout it certainly is an important factor, and there are aspects of this subject which affect the likelihood of dropping out in different ways. These aspects include the following: failed subjects, retention/repetition, poor grades and test scores (marks), and student mobility. I will briefly look at each of these factors as there are various studies regarding different aspects of the influence of these specific areas.

Failing subjects at any point in a learner's school career can lessen his/her chances of successfully completing school. In their research on Chicago Public schools, Allensworth and Easton (2005) constructed *The On-Track Indicator as a Predictor of High School Graduation*. This indicator identified learners who had enough credits in Grade 9 to be promoted to tenth grade, and who failed no more than one semester of a core academic subject. According to this indicator, 81% of those who were on track in Grade 9 completed school four years later while only 22% of the off-track learners successfully completed school four years later. In other words, learners who were on track in Grade 9 were three and a half times more likely to complete school in four years than those who were off track. A noteworthy inference from this study is that addressing early high-school on-track rates can have a significant influence on the improvement of overall graduation rates. In a study by Silver, Saunders and Zarate (2008) it was found that the results of learners who passed algebra by the end of Grade 9 were telling: 70% of those who passed graduated, while only 35% who did not pass successfully completed school. In another USA study which was conducted in Long Beach, Kurlaender, Reardon and Jackson (2008) found that nearly one third of all learners who failed one or more

subject only 37% graduated, compared to the 75% of those who failed no subjects and who graduated. These studies have clearly proved that grade failure is an influence on school dropout.

Subject failure is strongly related to retention, also called repetition. Learners who do not meet the criteria for passing a grade during a specific year are retained in their grade. According to the South African ministerial committee on grade retention (DoE, 2008), grade repetition is used to afford an underachieving learner the chance to master the work required of that grade and to acquire the necessary skills. Strongly associated with this view is the belief that a learner who repeats a grade will improve academically and become motivated to work harder. However, there is controversy about the accuracy of this belief and it has been argued that the benefits "are at best short-term and that the long-term effects of grade repetition are harmful on academic achievement and other outcomes" (DoE, 2008, p. 7). The extent to which this proves the association with school dropout is contentious but what is sure is that retention or repetition is a strong influence for school dropout. For example, in a review of 17 studies published in the USA between 1970 and 2000 it was found that retention was positively associated with higher dropout and lower graduation rates (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). More specifically, Jimerson et al. (2002) found that repetition increased the rate of dropping out by 30-50% and that learners who repeated twice had a 94% dropout rate, compared to a 27% dropout rate for those who never repeated a grade. In another study (Alexander, Entwistle, & Kabbini, 2001) in the USA, it was found that even after controlling for other influences (like school performance and parental attitude) retention levels at all grades except the ninth grade were significant influences for school dropout. An interesting South African statistic indicates that 42% of Grade 6 learners in the country report having repeated at least one grade (Moloi & Strauss, 2005). In the light of the USA findings this South African statistic correlates well with the 50-60% dropout rate of the country.

With regard to SA, Strassburg et al. (2010) argue that retention is generally not as powerful an influence for school dropout in first world countries, but it is a considerable influence specifically for certain racial groups, like Coloured youth. Dieltiens and Many-Gibert (2008) support this statement and illustrate that Black learners are less likely to drop out of school than Coloured learners after failing a grade. Another factor strongly related to retention is being over-age. Most learners who are older than their classmates are over-age because of retention in earlier grades. Silver et al. (2008) found that 17% of learners in their study were

over-age and they were half as likely to complete school as learners who were of normal age, even after controlling for other academic and demographic characteristics. Li (2007) used a Bayesian proportional hazard analysis framework and found that learners who had reached their state's school attendance age are more likely to drop out than those who had not reached the compulsory school going age. In SA, Strassburg (2010) conducted a South African youth survey in which 10% of the respondents said they had dropped out because of repetition and the difficulties of being older than their classmates. Being humiliated by teachers and having to adjust to their peer groups were cited as specific challenges. I later specifically discuss race as an influence for school dropout, but what is clear from these findings at this point is that retention and being over-age or from a certain racial group can increase chances for school dropout.

Academic achievement is one of the most studied influences for school dropout. According to Rumberger (2011), it has consistently been shown that test scores and grades influence whether learners drop out or graduate from high school. In the USA, it is specifically middle and high school academic achievement that influences dropout and not elementary school academic achievement. However, a national study conducted in the USA, which included 4 000 learners and their parents, found that those learners who were not proficiently reading by Grade 3 were four times more likely to drop out of school than those who read proficiently (Hernandez, 2011). Overall, grades in middle and high school are a strong indication of graduation and dropout. Hunt (2008) confirms that low school achievement is a strong influence for school dropout in Africa. However, the only South African research (Branson et al. 2013) which specifically investigated the link between poor grades and dropout did not find this to be a strong influence. Branson et al. (2013) found that a limited number of males did cite poor grades as a reason for dropping out of school, but, this aspect was insignificant when compared to something like financial pressures. However, it is possible that limited finances were the ultimate catalyst for dropping out and therefore given as the primary reason.

Student mobility is another influence for dropping out of school. There are various reasons why learners attend more than one school, such as expulsion, voluntarily moving to a school better serving their needs, moving from one area to another, and more. There is often a time during such transition during which learners leave school for a while but then re-enrol at a later stage and at another school. Swanson and Schneider (1999) found that learners are twice more likely to change school during the first two years of school than during the last two.

Another study found that learners who changed high school once were more than twice as likely to graduate than learners who changed high school two or more times (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). In another study, Pribesh and Downey (1999) controlled for various other influences, and they confirmed that there is indeed some form of association with mobility and educational performance. There are multiple reasons for this association, such as psychological, social (friendships lost) and academic reasons (different curriculums). In SA, the fact that the EMIS data are school-based and not learner-based does not allow for data on the correlation between changing from schools and dropping out (DoE, 2008). I could also not find a South African study that makes reference to mobility as an influence on school dropout.

2.7.1.2 Behaviour

A learner's behaviour at school plays an important role in his/her school success. There are some behaviours, namely engagement, deviance, peers, and employment, that have positively illustrated an association with high school success or failure.

Engagement is an important part of the educational process and a significant influence on school dropout. In simple terms, it has been said that learners "have to be present and engaged in order to learn" (Chang & Romero, 2008, p. 3). Therefore, if a learner is not in class or at school he/she can obviously not engage with teachers to learn and develop academically. This 'absence' commonly manifests through being at school but not in class (bunking) or not being at school at all (absenteeism). A Namibian study by Mapani (2011) found that absenteeism is a minor influence on school dropout among males. More specifically, Mapani (2011, p. 166) writes that "absenteeism occurs when the value of education is not appreciated by the boy". Although there might be truth in this statement, there is certainly more to this than just a learner's attitude. For instance, the practices that are followed by a school could have a significant impact. An example is the occurrence of chronic absenteeism, which in the words of Balfanz and Byrnes (2012, p. 3) is "like bacteria in a hospital, [it] wreak[s] havoc long before it is discovered". One of the reasons why this happens is because of the difference in measuring daily attendance and chronic absenteeism. Daily attendance plainly reflects the average number of learners who are not at school on a given day whereas chronic absenteeism has to do with learners who miss more than 10% of the school year for any reason (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). For example, on a school's records it can seem as if the school has a daily attendance of 90%, but still has 40% of its learners chronically absent, because on various days different learners make up that 90%. In their study of a national sample of children in the

USA, Chang and Romero (2008) found that chronic absence (missing 10% or more of the school year, with or without excuses) in kindergarten directly correlates with lower academic performance in the first grade, especially among poor children. Therefore, missing school has a negative influence on academic performance, and it is an influence for school dropout. Rumberger and Lim's (2008) review confirmed this notion with 13 of their 19 analyses of studies which found that high absenteeism predicted dropout. In SA, Strassburg et al. (2010) found that dropouts bunked more classes and more often in the 12 months before leaving school than learners who did not drop out. Another interesting finding was that many respondents indicated that a lack of interest in school work, boredom and a feeling of being disengaged or alienated from school contributed to their decision to leave school.

A final indicator of engagement is participation in extracurricular activities (social, sport, cultural) but research on the extent that this influences dropout has varied. However, a study by McNeal (1995) found that participation in sport, especially among males, showed consistent effects as a factor which reduced dropout among males. This strongly correlates with Finn's (1989) 'participation-identification' model, as discussed earlier, which argues that a learner's lack of participation in school activities leads to poor academic performance and less identification with school. From these studies and the relevant literature it seems clear that there are various factors that illustrate a learner's engagement levels with a school and the subsequent risk for dropping out.

It is also important to look at the reasons why learners miss classes and are absent from school. According to Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), learners either do not attend school because they cannot (e.g. because of illness or family responsibilities), because they will not (e.g. because of bullying or unsafe conditions) or because they and their parents do not see the value in education and find something else to keep themselves busy with during the time they should be at school. These are all influences that I describe as separate categories in this chapter.

Deviant behaviour in and out of school influences learners' ability to devote time and attention to schoolwork and school activities. These divergent behaviours can include delinquent behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual activity and teenage pregnancy. There is evidence that involvement in all of these behaviours can predict school dropout and I now briefly discuss what research has found regarding some of these influences. A USA study by Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) developed three indicators for deviance, namely drug use, violent

behaviour and nonviolent behaviour, and these indicators were tested with a group of learners when they were 14 years old (and mostly in Grade 8). Another study by Newcomb, Abbot, Catalano, Hawkins and Battin-Pearson (2002) constructed four indicators for deviance at age 14, namely school problems, delinquency, drug use and sexual activity. Results from both these studies established that deviant behaviour at age 14 had a direct and major influence on early school dropout by age 16 and later school dropout by Grade 12 (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Newcomb et al., 2002). I take a more detailed look at the types of deviant behaviour that can influence school dropout in the subsections that follow.

Misbehaviour, both at school and outside of school, is one of the deviant behaviours associated with school dropout. Firstly, school misbehaviour is the commonest indicator for deviant behaviour and there is an array of studies which has proved this (Rumberger, 2011). For example, Ou, Mersky, Reynolds, Kohler (2007) found that misbehaviour in elementary school increased the chances of school dropout in high school. There are various ways through which misbehaviour contributes to school dropout, including being suspended or expelled or being sent to alternative schools. In SA, Branson et al. (2013) found that a limited number of males viewed suspension/expulsion as the primary reason for dropping out. That said, it is unlikely that someone will identify their own defiant behaviour as the main reason for their dropping out of school. It is also possible that something like inadequate financial resources was the catalyst for dropping out and for that reason cited as the primary influence. On the other hand, misbehaviour outside of school is often more serious and is referred to as delinquency which can potentially lead to criminal offences. One of the challenges with explaining delinquency and school dropout is whether the one leads to the other or whether both are caused by underlying factors. However, the aim of this discussion is not to solve this matter and therefore I will not aim to answer it but only look at the associations. For example, a study by Bernburg and Krohn (2003) found that a first-time arrest during high school doubled a learner's chances of dropping out while an appearance in court nearly quadrupled the chances for dropout. In SA, Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert (2008) refer to involvement in crime as economic 'opportunities' outside of school which contribute to learners' decision to drop out as there is little value in staying and completing school, compared to these opportunities. These findings are strongly correlated with Finn's (1989) "frustration self-esteem" model that explains how the escalation of this kind of delinquent behaviour usually leads to poorer academic performance that decreases self-esteem and increases problem behaviour in school as well. Another topic that goes hand in hand with misbehaviour is

involvement in gangs which I discuss later in this chapter as a peer influence. Put simply, misbehaviour, both inside and outside of school often serves as an influence on school dropout.

Teenage pregnancy and childbearing are major influences for school dropout among girls and therefore not a significant subject for this study. However, in Africa, these influences have enjoyed plenty of research attention, especially when compared to other categories. For example, Munsaka (2009) claims there are two kinds of research categories on school dropout in Africa. The first category, which includes the bulk of studies on school dropout, relates to adolescence pregnancy among females. The second category, according to Munsaka (2009), includes all the research examining the school dropout factors over and above pregnancy issues. While this might be true for the study of school dropout in Africa, it certainly is not the case in the South African context as I am only aware of one study by Grant and Hallman (2008) which focussed specifically on pregnancy-related school dropout. Important findings of this study were that poor performing girls were more prone to falling pregnant and they were also the ones who were most likely to drop out after their pregnancy. There was a clear correlation between educational performance and becoming pregnant as well as educational performance and returning to school after a pregnancy (Grant & Hallman, 2008). Other South African studies included pregnancy as one of the influences for school dropout and came up with varying results. For example, Branson et al. (2013) found that over 24% of females said they dropped out of school because of pregnancy or childbirths, compared to Gustafsson's (2011) finding that 42% of female dropouts reported teenage pregnancy as the reason for leaving school. This difference can be because of varying factors, including the data sources (SA Household versus SA Community Survey) which were utilised and the extent to which other influences like educational performance before pregnancy were included as questions. Still, teenage child bearing is a strong influence for school dropout among girls in Africa and SA and it is important because of the negative socioeconomic consequences, such as low educational attainment and higher rates of poverty and social welfare associated with this phenomenon. However, seeing that this study focussed on male school dropout this influence was understandably not part of the findings of the empirical study.

A final indicator of deviant behaviour is drug and alcohol use. There is mixed evidence on the relationship between substance abuse and school dropout. In the USA, Bray, Zarkin, Ringwalt and Qi (2000) found that there is a direct correlation between school dropout and both

tobacco and marijuana use, but marijuana had a stronger effect. Two longitudinal studies only found a strong correlation between adolescent smoking and school dropout (Ellickson, Bui, Bell & Mcguigan, 1998; Newcomb et al., 2002). In both these studies the consistent relationships were not influenced by other potential influences or confounding variables such as gender, family structure, delinquency, academic problems, sexual involvement. With regard to marijuana, most studies from the USA (Brook & Balka, 1999; Fergusen & Horwood, 1997) found a small effect between dropout and marijuana use. With regard to alcohol use, there are various studies (Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002; Wichstrom, 1998) that have proved a relationship with school dropout. However, a study by Ellickson, Bui, Bell and Mcguigan (2002) found that there was not a significant relationship between alcohol use and school dropout but that it was rather associated with other influences, including academic background and problem behaviour.

A South African study by Flisher et al. (2010) specifically investigated the effect of substance use as an influence for school dropout. This longitudinal study examined whether the use of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs predicts dropout among secondary school learners in Cape Town, SA. The study made use of a self-report instrument and included 1 470 Grade 8 learners of whom 54.9% dropped out of school between the onset of the study and four years later. Another South African study looked at the associations between methamphetamine use and a range of risk behaviours when comparing learners who had not used methamphetamine or cannabis and were not smokers with a group of learners who had done all these things (Pluddemann & Parry, 2012). In the follow-up survey among these 1 561 high school learners in Cape Town, 12 months after the original study, it was found that 43% of the learners were either absent from school or had dropped out (Pluddemann & Parry, 2012). By using an adjusted logistic regression model it was further found that methamphetamine use in addition to other substances at the time of the first survey was significantly associated with school dropout and absenteeism at the time of the second survey. In fact, those who had used the mentioned substances at the time of the first survey were found to be two and a half times more likely to be absent or had dropped out of school at the time of the second interview. Another South African study by Strassburg et al. (2010) included substance abuse as one of the possible influences for school dropout and this study concluded that substance abuse is one of various reasons for leaving school but specifically among Coloured youth who dropped out after age 15. This study further found that a greater number of youth who dropped out reported using drugs or alcohol (16%) while they were still attending school,

compared to youth who were still in school (3%). Bongani (2014, p. 50) also found that substance abuse 'caused' school dropout among learners in secondary schools around Johannesburg South, SA. The findings of all four South African studies (Flisher et al., 2010; Bongani, 2014; Pluddemann & Parry, 2012; Strassburg et al., 2010) both confirm and contradict some of the USA findings as discussed earlier. For example, most USA studies (Brook & Balka, 1999; Fergusen & Horwood, 1997) found a small association between dropout and marijuana use whereas the South African studies (Flisher et al., 2010; Bongani, 2014; Pluddemann & Parry, 2012) found a significant association. These differences could have been found because of the factors that they controlled for or the influence of other factors, such as poverty. However, my own anecdotal experience is that the influence of substance abuse among males who drop out is much higher than the statistics referred to above, and this is mostly because this topic is under-reported. Therefore, evidence of the extent to which drug and alcohol abuse predicts school dropout varies but what does remain clear is that there is some association between this area of deviant behaviour and leaving school before completion. The empirical chapter in this study (Chapter 4) sheds more light on this.

Peers can have a powerful influence on one another, especially during adolescence. The two peer influences which I discuss in this section, gang involvement and being bullied, are not necessarily peer influence in the true sense of the word, as the individuals who are part of these 'peer' groups are often much older than those being influenced. However, for the purpose of this study I discuss these as primarily being peer group influences.

Peers influence one another's attitudes and actions, and such influences can be either positive or negative for their school careers. Findings about the influence of peers on school dropout differ, and according to Rumberger (2011) studies struggle to prove a definite association between peers and dropout or graduation. I could find one study that showed that generally having friends or having friends who are committed and interested in school reduces the chances of dropping out (Fagan & Pabon, 1990). A possible explanation for these inconsistent findings is that studies define and measure peer relationships in different ways. However, one finding which is consistent is that having deviant friends who engage in criminal behaviour or dropout themselves does increase the risk of dropping out (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Kaplan, Peck & Kaplan, 1997). A specific form of peer influence which has proved to potentially have a negative influence is gangs.

In SA, anecdotal evidence specifically cites involvement in gangs as a reason for Coloured boys dropping out of school (Naidoo, 2008). Strassburg et al. (2010) confirm gang involvement as an influence for school dropout among Coloured youth who drop out after age 15. It is interesting that many of these gangs are essentially no more than informal youth groups who give themselves a name. They are quite different from the so-called 'super gangs' operating in these communities, such as the Hard Livings and Americans. According to Gillespie (cited in Swingler, 2014), many of these proto-gangs are informally formed among younger children and "less through safety and more from issues and style and commodity". However, Gillespie warns, these proto-gangs often evolve or become part of criminal or 'super gangs'; consequently young males who are members of such proto-gangs easily become involved in more serious gang activities. Considering the reasons why learners join gangs, Glaser (1998, p. 301) explains that conditions of instability, alienation and anomie create a space where gangs provide a "powerful alternative to schooling, attracting a large proportion of unemployed and non-school going male adolescents". Therefore, gangs thrive in certain environments and according to Pinnock (2016), most gang members are male school dropouts from broken families. This author further contends that most gang members around Cape Town grow up in fatherless homes and this causes them to carry a particular sense of shame with them. The father-love that they long for is often found in the gangs and young members then become involved in criminal behaviour to gain the gang leader's approval (Pinnock, 2016). These findings echo both Finn's (1989) 'participation-identification' model and the social development model (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). For example, according to the social development model, an individual who bonds with a gang where the other members have mostly dropped out of school will eventually also drop out (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). Therefore, gang involvement, either in both an informal and informal set-up, can be an influence on school dropout among males.

Another negative peer influence is that of being bullied. In SA, Flisher et al. (2008) verified a relationship between school dropout and bully behaviour, specifically among girls: in cases where bullying continued there was a direct effect on things like absenteeism and poor academic performance. In another South African study, Strassburg et al. (2010) found that 39% of dropouts reported being verbally bullied at their last school, compared to 19% of school going learners. Further, 23% of dropouts reported being physically bullied compared to only 8% of those at school. Mapani's (2011, p. 91) Namibian study on school dropout among boys found that bullying was common among boys and "in some cases a boy would

stay away from school just to avoid being bullied". Mapani (2011) also found that bullying made boys feel helpless and the emotional stress that was accompanied by this experience had a negative effect on academic performance. Bongani (2014) supports these findings as her study in Johannesburg schools found that bullying leads to absenteeism, poor academic performance and psychological distress, all of which contributed to school dropout. Although these findings vary on the specific ways in which bully behaviour influences school dropout there is agreement that it is an influence in some way or another.

Employment during high school can also be an influence for dropping out of school. For example, in the USA employment rates among 16- to 17-year-olds exceeded 30% in 2000 and although the responsibility of working can be positive it can also interfere too much with homework and school participation (Warren & Cataldi, 2006). However, working during high school is not necessarily detrimental to educational performance and can be moderated by accompanied factors, like the type of job, hours worked, gender, race, academic background of the learners and the local labour market characteristics (D'Amico, 1984; Warren & Cataldi, 2006). I am not aware of any South African research on the relationship between school dropout and employment, as in being employed while at school. However, some research is available on factors related to employment. For example, Branson et al. (2013) found that looking for employment was one of the commonest reasons given for dropping out, especially by males (22% of respondents). By implication, these respondents were not employed while at school but their effort to find employment influenced them to drop out of school. In another South African study, Strassburg et al. (2010) found that Coloured people have traditionally had better access to employment, compared to Blacks, and therefore Coloured learners are more inclined to leave school in order to work. This again refers to the potential opportunity of finding employment and therefore dropping out and not being employed while attending school. In SA, males who join gangs can be expected to sell drugs on behalf of the gang leader and in turn get remunerated for this. Therefore, if a school going child joins a gang and sells drugs on behalf of the gang such activity can be seen as a type of employment, although it is illegal. The influence of this kind of employment is something which is explored in the empirical part of this study. In summary, being employed while attending school can potentially be a positive influence but it seems as if the employment-related influences reported in the South African literature do in fact influence school dropout.

2.7.1.3 *Attitudes*

Attitude can be influenced by a variety of factors, including values, beliefs, goals and perceptions. These factors change as children grow older and go through developmental periods and biological changes. One longitudinal study (Alexander et al., 2001) in the USA collected a wide range of attitudinal and behavioural information on students from Grades 1-9. The findings from this study reveal that the learners' attitude did not illustrate a particular influence on school dropout until Grade 9 and that behavioural engagement showed the strongest effect (Alexander et al., 2001). Next, I look at two specific factors relating to attitude which have proved to be influences for school dropout.

Firstly, having short-term or long-term goals motivates learners to work towards something specific. In developed countries it is accepted that most children or their parents have at least a goal for them to finish school successfully and maybe also become better qualified thereafter. A USA study by Dalton, Glennie and Ingels (2009) found that of a group of sophomores in 2002 who expected to obtain a bachelor's degree, only 4% dropped out of high school. On the other hand, 21% of those who did not expect to finish school dropped out before completing high school (Dalton et al., 2009). In accordance, an African study by Mapani (2011) found that Namibian boys who dropped out did not value education and therefore did not have aspirations to complete school. This was further exacerbated by the respondents' parents' low value on education which usually influences children's own value on education. This perceived value of education then influences learners' ability to set goals. A study by Fobih (1987) in Ghana had a similar finding where dropouts saw the certificate awarded at the end of schooling as something that possessed no value for them. In SA, Dieltiens and Many-Gibert (2008) provide another perspective on this phenomenon by explaining that learners do not see the value of education because of others whom they know who did complete school but are still unable to find employment. Evidently, this has a negative influence on the learners' ability to be motivated to set and work towards the goal of completing school. These studies clearly illustrate the importance of goals and the potential effect the absence thereof can have on dropping out of school.

Secondly, learners' perception of themselves and their abilities has a significant influence on their school performance. An individual can have a general and a specific self-concept about a certain area of his/her life. For example, a learner can have a positive self-concept about his/her academic abilities but a negative self-concept about his/her social skills (Rumberger,

2011). A USA study by Romo and Falbo (1996) found that students' negative self-perception did indeed undermine their motivation and thereby increased their risk of dropping out. This finding strongly correlates with Finn's (1989) 'frustration self-esteem' model that focusses on the negative influence school failure has on self-esteem and the way in which this then leads to problem behaviour. I could not find any South African data on the potential relationship between a learner's self-perception and school dropout.

2.7.1.4 Background characteristics

There are certain background characteristics that influence school dropout. These characteristics can be divided into two main categories: demographics and health. The following demographic characteristics of learners have been found to influence school dropout: gender, race, immigration status and instructional language proficiency. For the purpose of this study, the influence of gender was of particular importance.

There have been contradicting findings for gender as an influence for school dropout. When looking at some of the most common reasons (like missing school) why learners drop out it is clear that these reasons lessen the chances for both male and females to complete school. On the other hand, males and females report different reason for dropping out of school. For example, in the USA, Dalton et al. (2009) found that 22% of males were suspended and 15% were expelled while only 9% of females said they were suspended and 3% were expelled. There are some common but also unique influences for school dropout of males and females. Results from studies on the influence of gender have controlled for various other influences. For example, Rumberger (1995) conducted a study where he controlled for family and academic background and found no significant relationship between gender and school dropout. However, after controlling for various attitudes, behaviours and indicators of educational performance in Grade 8, he found that females had higher dropout rates than males in this particular study in the USA. Another interesting finding is the difference in the relationship between gender and dropout when looking at sub-populations. A study by Crowder and South (2003) found that when using the entire sample and within a sub-sample of Whites, females had lower dropout rates than males. By looking at these factors from another angle one gets another perspective: I earlier illustrated that repetition is a strong influence for school dropout and South African studies (Fleisch & Shindler, 2009; Strassburg et al., 2010) have proved that boys repeat at a much higher rate than girls. For example, Fleisch and Shindler (2009) found that more than twice as many boys repeated grades than

girls. From the cohort in this study more than three boys repeated a grade for every girl and the gap between boys and girls who reached Grade 7 in seven years after starting Grade 1 was more than 10 percentage points (Fleisch & Shindler, 2009). Combined, these data sources illustrate that being male can be an influence on school dropout. On the other hand, as discussed earlier in this chapter, child bearing and pregnancy as influences on school dropout among females have been illustrated to be a strong influence on dropout and have been widely researched through African studies (Munsaka, 2009). Therefore, being male can be an influence on school dropout and a reason for the gender-specific focus of my study.

Race has been a point of contention in the discussion of educational outcomes and there are two general approaches explaining the differences in dropout rates among racial and ethnic groups. The first is based on the differences in educational performance where dropout is explained through the difference in the social context of families, schools and communities. Specifically, the differences in the availability of resources in these contexts are important. Two South African surveys (Strassburg, 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2005) have explored factors relating to race. Strassburg (2010) found that male Coloured youth between the ages of 16 and 18 years were more likely to be out of school than Black, White or Indian youth. What is interesting about this finding is the explanation, contending that this difference is because of better historical access which Coloureds had to labour market opportunities, particularly in the artisan sector, because of the policy of job reservation before 1994 (Strassburg, 2010; Lam, Ardington, & Leibbrandt, 2010; Dieltiens & Many-Gibert, 2008). Although this situation changed after 1994, the historical pattern of not completing school still persists among Coloured people, although they do not have better opportunities than Blacks (Dieltiens & Many-Gibert, 2008; Strassburg et al., 2010). Dieltiens and Many-Gibert (2008) also found that Black learners are less likely to drop out than Coloured learners after failing a grade. The second approach to explaining the differences in dropout rates between races and ethnic groups does not accept the difference in material resources in families, schools and communities as a sufficient explanation. This approach rather incorporates the sociocultural factors, specifically the cultural differences in values, attitudes and behaviours as an explanation for the differences in achievement and dropout between races (Ogbu, 1992). This view that is related to the influence of sociocultural values and attitudes is also relevant for South Africa as Black and Coloured communities and schools were marginalised before 1994 and through a poor educational system, the value of education was nullified. Twenty years later these values are still present in these communities, especially among older people, which

is a problem when one considers the large number of grandparents fulfilling the role of primary caregivers for children and youth in these communities.

Immigration status is another demographic characteristic which has been examined in studies on school dropout. In the USA, foreign-born learners have higher dropout rates than native-born learners with Davis and Bauman (2008) determining the dropout rate at 21% among foreign-born compared to 8% among native-born learners. In SA, Flisher et al. (2010, p. 44) found that "more than one in 10 children born outside South Africa" are not in school and that this increases to "more than one-third of children whose place of birth is unknown". Especially in the current South African situation where there are many Africans, especially from Zimbabwe, who have recently moved to SA, more data on this influence are much needed.

2.7.2 Institutional influences

The individual factors as discussed above are largely shaped by the institutional settings in which children find themselves, including their families, schools and communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Specific factors within these settings have been found to have a stronger influence on school dropout and although it is difficult to verify a causal connection between institutional factors and school dropout, there is sufficient proof that certain factors do influence the odds of a learner completing or dropping out of high school. Another common characteristic of the institutional influences is that they are mostly beyond a learner's control and are determined by the prominent role players in the institutions. In the following section, I discuss these influences in more detail, starting with the family context.

2.7.2.1 Families

Family background is one of the strongest influences for success in school. For example, a South African study by Masitsa (2006) involved 339 educators in the Free State province to elicit their perception on the influences associated with school dropout among learners in their schools. The influences as cited by respondents were ranked from 1 to 20 and five of the top six influences directly had to do with family concerns, namely the unemployment of parents, lack of parental support, not living with parents, divorce and separation of parents, and family conflict. Although these findings are based on one study, I illustrate in this section that there is good reason to believe that families and specifically parents play a determining role in their

children's educational success. Next, I categorise the family influences for school dropout according to Rumberger and Lim's (2008) model which consists of the following: family structure, family resources and family practices.

2.7.2.1.1 Family structure

The family structure includes the type and number of individuals in a child's household and these factors can influence school outcomes. One example of a common type of family structure is single-parent families. For example, in the USA, 44% of households headed by women and having children under 18 years of age were living in poverty in 2009 (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). Further, there are certain family practices, such as supervision and monitoring, that enhance educational performance, and these have also been found to be lower in single-parent families, compared to two-parent families (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Studies (Perreira, Harris & Lee, 2006; Rumberger, 1995) have also specifically found that children living with both their parents have lower dropout rates and higher school completion rates, compared to those living in any other family structure. In SA, Fleisch et al. (2010) analysed the data of the 2007 Community Survey and had similar findings: they established that there was a much higher proportion of non-school going children (7.6%) who lived with relatives (neither parents nor grandparents) as the heads of the household than children who lived with their biological parents as the heads of the household (4%). Further, children who were living with a non-relative as the head of the household were even at greater risk with 10.6% of these children being out of school (Fleisch et al., 2010). In Tanzania, Al Samarrai and Peasgood (1998) found that female-headed households put a higher priority on their children's education. Grant and Hallman (2008) had similar findings in SA where they established that children living with their mothers were significantly less likely to drop out of school compared to those whose mothers were living elsewhere or whose mothers were deceased. Accordingly, Konate, Gueye and Nseka Vita (2003) found in Mali that there was proof that living away from parents had a negative impact on educational performance. Possibly the least favourable family structure is a child-headed home, which is becoming a more common sight in Africa and SA, mostly due to the HIV pandemic. In SA, Fleisch et al. (2010) found that 1% of children are head or acting as head of their household and 17% of these children are out of school. When looking at all these findings there are two ideas that emerge: firstly, single-parent families are generally a stronger influence for dropout than two-parent families,

and secondly, not living with a biological parent and specifically not living with a mother is a strong influence for school dropout, especially in the African and South African context.

Family size is another component of family structure that can influence a child's chances for school dropout or completion. However, research differs as to what extent family size influences school dropout and also in which ways. In Rumberger and Lim's (2008) review of USA research on school dropout they found that about half of the studies illustrated a correlation between family size and school success. For example, Boyle, Brock, Mace and Sibbons (2002, p. 4) found that the number of children in a household is a "significant determinant" of school access and success. The main idea is that more children require more financial and other resources from that family which can potentially contribute to stressors which negatively influence a child's ability to be successful in school. However, in developing countries, the exact opposite has been found as more family members mean more support in the educational process. For example, in Ethiopia it was found that with more children in a family the household tasks could be spread among siblings and so their opportunity to continue with their education is increased (Colclough, Rose, & Tembon, 2000). In Pakistan, Hakzira and Bedi (2003) found that although the increase in family size reduces a girl child's household work, the presence of younger children then again increases their workload. On the other hand, the presence of older sisters aged 13 to 20 years in western African families can have a positive impact on younger girls' educational attainment (Glick & Sahn, 2000). Something which is not clear from any of the above research is the exact number of family members or siblings that constitutes a too large or too small family. I was not able to find any South African research which specifically looked at family size as an influence for school dropout.

There are specific living situations in which families and children find themselves that can influence their risk for school dropout, including homelessness, being in foster care or being orphaned. A study in the USA found that only 50% of homeless children successfully complete high school (Burt, Aron & Valente, 2001). According to Zimmerman (2003), many children are fostered in African societies and there can be both positive and negative effects of this on the educational outcome of children. On the one hand, a child could be sent from a rural area to an urban area to be fostered by family members because of better educational opportunities in this area. On the other hand, foster children could be used for child labour and household duties, especially in rural African societies. As an illustration, Anderson

(2005) conducted a multivariate analysis of a sample of children from 11 211 Black households in SA and found that households invested more resources in children who were more closely related. Thus, the heads of these families were inclined to care better for their own children or those who were strongly related, compared to the foster children who were further related or not related at all. In a similar finding in Mali, Konate et al. (2003) found that the children of the head of the household of a foster family usually get favoured to be sent to school while those more distantly related or not related at all are at greater risk of being out of school. Finally, Hunt (2008) contends that there is clear proof that bereavement after the death of family members, especially parents, places children at greater risk of dropping out of school. Fleischer et al.'s (2010) research supports this argument as they found that 32% of South African children who were out of school had lost one or both parents. A key consideration as to what the influence of parental death or orphanhood is on a child's schooling is linked to the household context or the new carers. For example, joining a poor family will add to the financial constraints of the family, which increases the risk for child labour and dropout (Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010). In SA, the child support grant is intended to support orphaned children to continue their schooling but these funds are used at the discretion of carers who often use the money for other expenses, to the detriment of the child. Especially in African countries, the effect of AIDS and AIDS-related deaths on children cannot be ignored. For example, in Malawi it was found that 9.1% of children who lost one parent due to AIDS had dropped out of school the year following the death of the parent, but this rose to 17.1% for the death of two parents (Harris & Schubert, 2001, cited in Jukes, 2006). The reasons for this state of affairs could be that children need to care for their ill parent(s) or that there is a loss in income and rise in medical costs because of the illness and death. In conclusion, there is good proof that homelessness, foster care and orphanhood can be influences for school dropout and these factors are of specific importance in the South African context.

Another family structure which has an influence on school performance is residential mobility. In the USA, female-headed households with school-age children were three times more likely to change residence than married couples with school-age children (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2009). A combination of 13 studies found that children who moved around three times or more were three times more likely to drop out than children who stayed in the same school, even after controlling for prior school achievement and other factors (Reynolds, Chen & Herbers, 2009). Another study in the USA found that three or

more moves between birth and first grade increased the risk of dropping out by 70% for both girls and boys, after controlling for other factors (Ensminger, Hanson, Riley & Juon, 2003). Residential mobility is also associated with school mobility and the effect of these influences can be seen in the stress associated with moving from schools as well as the disruption of valuable social relationships. I could not find any data on residential mobility as an influence for school dropout in SA.

2.7.2.1.2 Family resources

Family resources is another category within families which is essential for educational success as such resources support the physical, emotional, social and cognitive development of children. There are two types of resources which have an influence on school dropout, namely financial and human resources. Firstly, financial resources offer a home environment with more developmental opportunities because of books and access to better schools and supplementary learning opportunities like tutors and extra-classes. Secondly, the human resources of parents, in terms of their own education, offer an opportunity to improve the cognitive development of children through the reading of books, assistance with homework and influencing the children's motivation and educational aspirations. Next, I look at research which has been conducted regarding the two types of family resources and the extent to which resources are associated with school dropout.

Internationally, a commonly used indicator for family resources is socioeconomic status (SES) which is constructed as a merged index based on measures of financial and human resources, like both parents' occupational and financial status (Rumberger, 2011). A USA study by Dalton et al. (2009) found that learners from the lowest SES set were five times more likely to drop out (12.4% versus 1.8%) than learners from the highest set. Croninger and Lee (2001) created another composite of risk factors within families and measured the combined effect thereof. Croninger and Lee's (2001) social risk index was based on five attributes of children and their families: disadvantaged minorities, linguistic minorities, household poverty, single-parent household, and mother or father dropped out of high school. These authors (Croninger & Lee, 2001) found that learners with at least one of these risk factors had a 66% higher chance of dropping out of high school, compared to learners with none of these risk factors. In Mali, Konate et al. (2003) found three main factors which contributed to high levels of school retention: someone to help with homework, not having to do domestic chores after school, and the presence of a lamp or table at home. Although the

last factor represents an extreme form of an under-resourced family/home, it illustrates something about household income levels in Africa and the vast difference when compared to a developed country. In SA, Branson et al. (2013) found that limited finances were the highest (23%) reason given by males and the second highest (18%) given by females for dropping out of school. Other characteristics of this group who dropped out because of financial constraints include the following: their annual school fees paid in 2007 were ZAR 154 compared to ZAR 330 among other dropouts; they most likely attended no-fee schools in rural areas; and, their average per capita income was ZAR 450 per month compared to ZAR 600 among other dropouts (Branson et al., 2013). Further, about 80% of the richest set of learners advanced at the anticipated rate, while the comparative figure in the poorest set was around 60%. This gap continues to widen in high school where only 20% of Grade 10 learners from the poorest set advance successfully compared to 50% of the richest Grade 10 learners. What seemed to be the main differences in school progress between rich and poor learners was a result of higher repetition rates among poor learners. For example, in a given time frame 30% of the poorest Grade 11 learners had repeated at least one grade, compared to only 8% of the richest Grade 11 learners (Branson et al., 2013). However, Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert (2008) argue that absolute poverty is unlikely to be such a major risk factor for school dropout in SA, considering the high levels of school enrolment despite the high levels of poverty. Fleisch et al. (2012) support this argument by stating that there is no meaningful relationship between poverty and learners not attending school and that it is rather the combination of poverty with other influences that ultimately leads to dropout. Therefore, low income in SA practically influences a child's educational development and performance through inadequate transport and long distances to schools, school fees that must be paid, and limited secondary school options (Human Rights Watch, 2004). What all the SA studies illustrate is that there is a correlation between the SES of a family and the educational outcomes of the children, albeit to varying degrees.

2.7.2.1.3 Family practices

Parents' capacity to promote the development and educational progress of their children is ultimately realised through the actual practices and behaviour they engage in (Rumberger, 2011). This parental capacity to promote development manifests through the relationships parents have with their children, their schools and communities – the 'social capital' which in this context refers to "the way adults in families and communities respond to the educational

needs of children" (Munsaka, 2009, p. 31). The parental practices, also called 'parental styles', include how much schooling parents expect their children to get, the supervision they provide, their assistance with homework, participation in school activities, and communication with the school. In the USA, Stone (2006) found that sustained home communication about school was associated with higher school performance and lower school dropout. This finding has also been confirmed by African studies, like Mansuka's (2009) Zambian study which found that parents of dropouts were generally detached from their children's education in the sense that they only interacted with the school when they were required to do so, mainly during school meetings, and when there were problems involving their children. In a study conducted in Botswana, Makwinja-Morara (2007) also found that the parents of school dropouts showed little interest in the academic affairs of their children. Mapani (2011, p. 163) found in his Namibian study among boys that "poor parental support in both academic and social lives of boys" was a significant influence on school dropout as it also led to other influences, like failure to appreciate the value of education among boys. The reason cited for the low levels of parental support in this study (Mapani, 2011) was that most of the parents were deprived of a good education before the independence of this country and did not see the importance of being involved in their children's education. In SA, most parents of Black and Coloured learners were also deprived of a quality education which most certainly influenced their ability to offer educational support to their children.

Higher levels of parental education are associated with increased access to education and lower dropout rates (Al Samarrai & Peasgood, 1998; Grant & Hallman, 2008) because uneducated parents often cannot provide the practical academic support needed by children and also because parents do not communicate the importance and benefits of education to their children. Some interesting African research has also been conducted on the influence of the gender and education of parents on the education of children. For example, Al Samarrai and Peasgood (1998) argue that in Tanzania the father's education has a greater influence on boys' education whereas the mother's education has a greater influence on girls' education. They found that a married mother's primary education can increase the probability of girls enrolling in primary school by 9.7% and in secondary school by 17.6%, but it had no significant effect on the enrolment of boys. The reasons cited were simply based on the specific gender's preference to see the child of their own gender succeed. I could not find any South African research on the relationship between family practices and school dropout, but what is clear in all the research regarding family resources is that a limited capacity to provide

the mentioned resources limits the potential educational success of a child and can be an influence on school dropout.

2.7.2.2 Schools

The school is an important context for influencing school dropout as it is the setting where the teaching and learning process 'formally' takes place. Demonstrating how much and what specific school factors influence dropout presents some methodological challenges but in assessing the extent of schools' influence, statistical modelling can be utilised after controlling for individual and other non-school factors. For example, in a study by Li (2007) in the USA it was found that 72% of variability in dropout was at the student level, 23% at the school level and 5% at the state level. Although this finding illustrates the influence of the school, it is insignificant when compared to the individual influence. I could not find any South African studies where statistical modelling has been used to control for schools' influence on school dropout when compared to other factors influencing this outcome. However, Dieltiens and Many-Gibert (2008) identified the poor quality of education as the primary reason for the high dropout rates in this country. In the following section, I explore the case for the influence of the school on dropout.

Rumberger and Lim's (2008) model which I utilised as the framework for this literature study classifies the types of school characteristics that influence dropout and completion rates as follows: student composition or characteristics of the student body, structural characteristics, resources, and practices. The first three of these features are not alterable by the school itself while the last can be influenced by the school. Next, I investigate research that has been conducted regarding these four categories of influences relating to the school context.

2.7.2.2.1 Learner composition

Learner composition, specifically social composition, has been found to influence learner achievement, apart from the effect of a learner's characteristics at an individual level. For example, Coleman (1988) concluded from his study of schools in the USA that social composition has a bigger influence on achievement than any other school characteristic. In accordance, Rumberger and Palardy (2005) found that the social composition of a school can have the same type of impact on academic performance as individual characteristics. Social composition may simply serve as a proxy for other school characteristics, with regard to the way these correlate with social composition. For example, both Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor and

Wheeler (2007) and Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin (2004) found that schools in poor areas generally have more inexperienced teachers as well as a higher teacher turnover. These findings are supported by Christle, Jolivette and Nelson (2007) who found that teachers in schools with a low school dropout rate had twice as many years of experience than their colleagues who taught in schools with a high dropout rate. Munsaka (2009) provides possible explanations for this phenomenon by noting that schools with high dropout rates have poor remuneration packages for teachers which might only then attract inexperienced teachers. He further observes that these schools generally have poor facilities which experienced teachers find discouraging and unattractive. Although Munsaka's (2009) finding on poor facilities resonates with the situation at poor South African schools, teachers at these schools are not paid less than teachers at better resourced schools. In fact, the South African government has created a single schedule for teachers and has adjusted salaries since 1996 to ensure that those who teach Black and Coloured learners receive the same compensation as those who teach White learners (Fiske & Ladd, 2008). In terms of experience, there are many experienced teachers (25 years or more experience) at schools with high dropout rates and the reason for their being there has everything to do with the pre-1994 system where teaching opportunities were determined by race and not by choice. Although these formal barriers were abolished after 1994 it is still very uncommon to find experienced Black, Coloured or White teachers teaching in a school of opposite colour; therefore most poor Black or Coloured learners are still being taught by teachers of their own race who might have experience but had a sub-standard education under the apartheid system. Therefore, there are different explanations for the exact ways in which learner and social composition influences school dropout, but what seems clear is that it does influence school dropout in some or other way.

In a provocative book on educational reform in the USA, Kahlenberg (2001) argues that intentional economic integration of schools will do far more to promote achievement than many other educational interventions. The main idea is that middle class schools perform better than poor schools and by mixing children from poor and middle class backgrounds the average SES of learners will increase, which will promote the outcomes of the poorer schools. In accordance, Mayer and Jencks (1989) illustrated that the effect of a certain social composition manifests through the influence which peers have on each other at school. There has also been some research on the influence of specific dimensions of social composition which has been found to influence dropout, like the proportion of racial or linguistic

minorities (Saatcioglu, 2010). Most of these studies confirm that the social composition of a school influences the outcomes of the school and serves as an influence for school dropout.

2.7.2.2.2 Structural characteristics

Structural characteristics of schools have been shown to contribute to learners' academic performance in a variety of ways. More specifically, the following characteristics have been found to have an influence on academic outcomes: a school's location (urban, suburban or rural), the type of school (public versus private), and the size of the school. I briefly explore each of these characteristics below.

Firstly, there are mixed findings about the influence of location on school dropout with Levine and Painter (1999) finding that the attendance of an urban school increases the odds of dropping out. Heck and Mahoe (2006) found that dropout is actually lower in urban schools while a study by Rumberger and Larson (1998) found that location does not have a significant effect. I could not find any South African studies that specifically looked at this correlation but studies on school dropout that were conducted in townships and rural settings (Bingma, 2012; Grant & Hallman, 2008; Sibanda, 2004) have all illustrated high levels of risk factors and occurrence of school dropout. Therefore, based on these findings, there is good reason to believe that location also has an influence on school dropout in SA.

Secondly, there are a variety of findings on the influence of public versus private schools. A study by Coleman and Hoffer (1987) found that private schools have higher graduation and lower dropout rates than public schools. Lee and Burkam (2003) conducted a study on the influence of the school on dropout and had a sample of 190 schools comprising 3 840 participants from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988. These researchers used multilevel quantitative methods and specifically examined the size and sector (private and government) of schools as an influence for dropout. Their findings supported the idea that dropout rates are lower in private schools than in government schools. In a study by Rumberger and Thomas (2000) it was found that learners from private schools transfer to public schools instead of or before dropping out. This implies that learner turnover rates are similar in private and public school. I could not find any South African or African research comparing public and private schools and school dropout but as far as I could establish, most of the South African studies I refer to in this study are based on data from public schools.

Therefore, it seems safe to accept that school dropout in SA is also more of a problem in public schools than in private schools.

Finally, there are inconsistent findings on the influence of school size on dropout. Rumberger and Palardy (2005) found that bigger high schools (more than 1 500 learners) serve as stronger influences for dropout than smaller schools, while another study (Pirog & Magee, 1997) found that learners were less inclined to drop out of larger high schools. Another study (Bryk & Thum, 1989) found that school size had no significant effect on dropout or graduation rates. Lee and Burkam (2003) found that school size as such was not a direct influence for school dropout, except to the extent to which other organisational features of a school, like instruction and student-teacher interaction, were concerned. A possible reason for these conflicting findings could be that bigger schools have some areas that are better (like curriculum) but other areas that are worse (like school climate). Again, I am not aware of any South African research that has investigated this particular influence on school dropout.

2.7.2.2.3 School resources

Resources is another characteristic of schools that influences the outcomes of learners. School resources include average expenditure per pupil, teacher salaries, the number of learners per teacher, and the number of teachers with advanced degrees. Koedel (2008), who looked at the relationship between resources and school dropout, found that teacher quality has an effect on academic success. A study by Loeb and Page (2000) found a direct association between per pupil expenditure or higher teacher salaries and school dropout rates – with dropout rates being lower where more is spent. This study (Loeb & Page, 2000) further found that dropout rates were reduced by 3-4% after teachers' salaries were raised by 10%. In SA, however, there has been proof that more resources and spending on teachers have not had the hoped for educational outcomes (Van der Berg & Moses, 2012), mainly because the previous discrepancies in teacher salaries first needed to be corrected after 1994. The implication was that resources were shifted to poorer or previously disadvantaged schools but only in terms of teacher salaries and not at any other level. There is also ample evidence that this resource shift has not had the hoped for outcome on the performance of these South African schools and that this country's educational outcomes are still inferior to those of other African countries with proportionately lesser resources (Van der Berg & Moses, 2012). I am not aware of any South African studies directly linking resources with school dropout, but because educational

outcomes and school dropout rates are closely related, this finding can also be applied to the subject under study.

2.7.2.2.4 School practices

School practices is the one area over which a school can have direct control. Most government schools have little control over the resources they have, the learners they serve, where they are located, and their size. However, they have control over the way the school is managed, the teaching practices used and the climate they create for learning and trusting relationships between teachers and learners. For this reason Rumberger (2011, p. 197) writes that school practices "is the area of school processes that many people believe holds the most promise for understanding and improving school performance". As a result, management, teaching practices and the nature of relationships between learners and teachers is an influence on school dropout that can and should be governed by schools themselves.

The quality and nature of the relationships between all those individuals forming part of the school community can have a significant influence on educational outcomes and school dropout. For example, Bryk and Schneider (2002) studied school reform in 12 Chicago schools by looking at years of longitudinal and performance data and conducting interviews with school principals, teachers, parents and community leaders. A significant finding was that effective social relationships (which they termed 'relational trust') between those who are part of the school network play a major role in school improvement. More specifically, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that the personal dynamics between teachers, learners and their parents influenced whether learners regularly attended school or not. They further found that in schools with a high level of relational trust, teachers were more likely to test new educational practices and work together with parents for the learners' success. The eventual outcome would be an improvement in the overall academic outcomes at these schools, compared to schools with weak trust relationships that saw nearly no improvement in things like mathematics and reading scores. Bridgeland et al. (2006) supports Bryk and Schneider's (2002) views as they argue that at least one strong, one-on-one relationship between an adult and a learner can help in addressing influences associated with school dropout. Finally, this same view is echoed by Elmore (2004) whose main argument is that school reform happens from the inside out, meaning that school management and teachers initiate change and a positive school culture; it does not happen through external mandates or standards. When

applying this principle to the topic at hand, the relationships between principals, teachers, learners and parents is something to be considered as an influence on school dropout.

In addition, studies by Aness (2003) and Bryk and Schneider (2002) have found that positive relationships between learners and teachers lowered the risk of school dropout, particularly among at-risk learners. Lee and Burkam (2003) found that learners were less likely to drop out of school if there were positive relationships between teachers and learners. These authors cite this factor as one of the most unnoticed school influences, especially among at-risk learners (Lee & Burkam, 2003). Bingma (2012, p. 109) found that "favouritism or what is perceived as favouritism may arise as teachers identify and nurture learners who display potential to do well and boost their school's pass rates and in future, matric results". Bingma (2012) further found that this kind of biased behaviour from teachers can influence the academic performance and levels of engagement of other learners and eventually influence school dropout. Therefore, the nature of the relationships between teachers and learners seems to be a sure influence for school dropout.

Another influence on school dropout which relates to school practices has to do with the disciplinary climate and practices at a school. Bryk and Thum (1989) found a correlation between school dropout and poor disciplinary climate, including disruptions in class and discipline problems at school. In an African study conducted in Ghana, Fobih (1987) showed that learners tended to drop out of schools where teachers treated learners harshly. This harsh treatment included unfair ways of administering punishment, which was the most cited cause for school dropout. In SA, Bingma (2012, p. 110) found that these kinds of negative actions from authority had the potential "to breed institutional resistance". Bingma (2012) further found that the male dropouts who participated in her study described how corporal punishment was sometimes brutally administered at the schools they attended and this mostly led to less engagement with the school. Another disciplinary practice that emerged in South African studies is not allowing learners at school for long periods of time. Bingma (2012, p. 113) quotes a school principal who confirmed this approach, stating that "it is often better to expel young men who cause trouble (at school)". Fine (1991) had similar findings in the USA where she found that students were discharged from school because parents did not respond to written requests for a school meeting. A guidance counsellor who participated in this study confessed that their school denied children their education by not allowing them at school

(Fine, 1991). Combined, these practices as discussed contribute to learners feeling less connected with the school, to such a point that they eventually leave for good.

In an Australian study by Smyth and Hattam (2002) the researchers interviewed 209 Australian learners who were on the verge of dropping out of school. They specifically studied the culture at these schools and defined it as the school's ethos guiding the interaction between teachers and learners, both in and outside the classroom. The findings were classified into three groups that epitomised the different cultures these learners experienced at school: (1) aggressive school culture; (2) passive school culture; and (3) active school culture. The aggressive school culture had to do with the way in which strong disciplinary actions were taken for various behaviours (some not so serious) which often made learners feel unwelcome and indifferent towards the school system. On the other hand, in the passive school culture learners felt that the teaching methods, school curriculum and testing procedures were not stimulating to them. This culture amounted to learners feeling that the school did not demonstrate any care about their academic success and overall wellbeing. Munsaka (2011) observes that the aggressive and passive school cultures are very similar since in both environments nothing is done regarding learners' challenges. Finally, in the active school culture as identified by Smyth and Hattam (2002), they found that the interest of learners took precedence over all else and made them feel that they could excel. This culture of quality relationships between teachers and parents is subject to the structural and organisational characteristics of high schools and can be determined by a school, apart from the social context in which it is functioning.

2.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I provided a theoretical framework and relevant literature regarding the influences on school dropout. I briefly discussed the definition and ways of measuring school dropout and also looked at the South African policies relating to school dropout in order to have a better idea as to what the legal associations are for the topic under discussion. The presentation of school dropout models and general theories that can be applied to the topic under discussion provided the scaffolding wherein the current literature and new findings in my study can be positioned. Finally, I discussed a broad range of international and local studies about the influences on school dropout in order to illustrate the complexity of the phenomena under investigation and what previous researchers have found. This chapter not

only lays a foundation for the findings in this study but also for future research on school dropout in SA as it covers an extensive range of theory and studies.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I aim to illustrate the value of my study. I do this by describing the processes which I followed to ensure that the findings in this study entail the type of information which can positively contribute to the knowledge on school dropout among males in SA. I provide a detailed discussion of the aspects of the research design and methodology which I followed for this study. More specifically, I focus on the following aspects: the research design, the sampling population, the data collection techniques and procedures, the analysis and interpretation of the data, and the ethical considerations. Before commencing with this discussion, I start by providing the context of the study as it serves as the basis for understanding the rest of the chapter.

3.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

As illustrated in the first two chapters of this thesis, there is a need for more knowledge about the influences on school dropout among males in SA. My effort to contribute to this need is represented in this study through which I purposefully selected two high schools on the basis of my expert opinion and anecdotal evidence for reasons why many males drop out from these schools. Although this is an insignificant sample when measured against the more than 26 000 schools in the country, this study is more about providing a deeper understanding of these influences than quantifying the extent of the problem. Therefore, the selection of these two schools and associated participants was acceptable for the aim of this study, as I also explain later in this chapter.

The two schools that were part of this study are located in communities which can be classified as underdeveloped ('townships') and were reserved for people of colour before 1994 and who are still the primary residents. Forms of demographic and social distress are rampant in these communities, particularly with regard to housing, unemployment, domestic violence, gangs, drug abuse, teenage pregnancies and the subject under study, school dropout. Learners from these schools are mostly from the Coloured population group, whose home language is

Afrikaans, and they reside in the communities where the schools are situated. These communities were all formed under the Group Areas Act (No. 77 of 1957) of the apartheid government which allocated specific areas where people of colour could live and own property. Specifically in the Cape Town area, this implied that large Coloured communities were declared 'White group areas' and Coloured people were moved out and their communities were broken up, despite much resistance. They were moved to outlying parts of the cities and towns which led to the forming of the communities such as those where the schools concerned in this study are situated. Therefore, the two schools and most of the participants involved in this study were either directly or indirectly (through their parents) influenced by the political and social climate that discriminated against these population groups.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this section I discuss the design and approach of this study which, firstly, has to do with the specification of what exactly needed to be investigated, and secondly, to ascertain the best way to go about this (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Huysamen (cited in Fouché & De Vos, 2005, p. 137), describes the research design as a process which involves the planning of the scientific inquiry. In this section I explain this 'plan' or 'blueprint' which I have put together to investigate the phenomenon at hand.

I decided on grounded theory as the research design for this study. This approach offered me an opportunity to follow a process whereby I could build "a theory from the ground up, brick by brick so to speak" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 499). It was ideal for this study as there is little knowledge and theory on male school dropout in SA and hereby I could build my arguments from the data which I collected through the individual interviews and group discussions (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2005). By utilising principles from the grounded theory approach as developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), I was able to reach this goal. These authors coined the term 'grounded theory' in referring to the inductive process whereby "theorists can theorise reality according to a set of empirically organised categories" (Henning et al., 2005, p. 115). Further, the emergent theories are inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon represented in the research and are therefore grounded in the researched reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, in this study, this was done with reference to the already constructed conceptual framework of Rumberger and Lim (2008) that was developed in the USA. Therefore, I used the grounded theory approach to construct

unique South African findings, in accordance with the already constructed framework of Rumberger and Lim (2008). I provide more details on this process later in this chapter, in line with the guidelines as provided by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

In terms of the research approach, I utilised an exploratory qualitative approach to investigate the influences on school dropout among males in two schools in the greater Cape Town area of SA. I was drawn to this approach as it offered the opportunity to describe and understand this phenomenon by eliciting participants' accounts of experience and behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Fouché & Delpont, 2005). In accordance, Nieuwenhuis (2007) describes the qualitative approach as a process through which rich descriptive data are collected with the purpose of developing a deep understanding of the phenomenon or context being observed or studied. I engaged with the various role players being influenced by this phenomenon with the aim of getting an in-depth understanding of the main factors which contributed to their eventual act of dropping out. This is in accordance with Knesting (2008) who refers to the use of the metaphor of 'unheard voices' to describe this approach of using the experiences of those who are part of the statistics to inform research. By following this process, I was able to illustrate that a certain number of respondents were chronically absent, were bullied, had poor relationships with teachers, and had uninvolved parents, to name only some of their problems. In addition, the exploratory design was ideal as it offered a way of gaining new understanding into a relatively unknown area of research with the aim of acquiring new insight in order to formulate a more precise problem (Babbie and Mouton, 2001; Shields & Rangrajan, 2013). With this in mind, my decision to follow an exploratory qualitative approach was a natural one as the topic under investigation is fairly unexplored, especially in SA, and this study was an effort to gain new insights into the given phenomenon.

It seems as if there is also a specific need for more qualitative studies on school dropout as such studies could possibly offer a deeper understanding of this topic. For example, Munsaka (2009) states that most African studies on school dropout have been confined to the quantitative approach and not many qualitative studies have been conducted on school dropout in Africa. This is also the case in SA where qualitative studies on school dropout have mostly been conducted by university students as part of their honours or master's degrees (Dekeza-Tsomo, 2012; Bingma, 2012; Ingles, 2009). For example, Bingma (2012, p. 40) explains the motivation for using a qualitative approach as a way to "engage and probe explanations of early high school leaving among male ex-learners in Orange Farm

Township". In addition, Ingles (2009) and Bingma (2012) also followed a purely qualitative approach by interviewing respondents with the aim of getting a more in-depth understanding of the influences of school dropout. Something that also became apparent through my investigation of school dropout literature was that the prominent South African studies (Branson et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2011) were quantitative, employing large national data sets. However, the findings of these studies were focussed on predictors like academic performance, retention and misbehaviour and did not report on the 'softer' influences on dropout, such as the relationships between learners and teachers. For this reason, I also hoped to uncover some of these 'softer' influences on school dropout by using a qualitative approach. In their countrywide report on school dropout in the USA, Bridgeland et al. (2006, p. 5) also explain their reason for following a qualitative approach: "[The] primary purpose of this report [was] to approach the dropout problem from a perspective that has not been much considered in past studies – that of the students themselves." With all of this in mind, I aimed to build on some of the previously mentioned South African (Dekeza-Tsomo, 2012; Bingma, 2012; Ingles, 2009) and African (Munsaka, 2009) studies and to explore new ways of investigating school dropout by incorporating localised ideas from the USA study by Bridgeland et al. (2006).

3.4 METHODOLOGY

This section on the research methodology focusses on the process and the specific type of tools and procedures I used to collect the data needed for this study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Fouché, 2005). In this section I illustrate the trustworthiness and credibility of the process and the instruments that I used as well as the steps that I followed in implementing them. Central to this process was making sure that the practices I followed were well grounded in theory and in line with what previous studies on similar topics had revealed. Figure 3.1 offers a summary of the most important steps of the research methodology followed in this study:

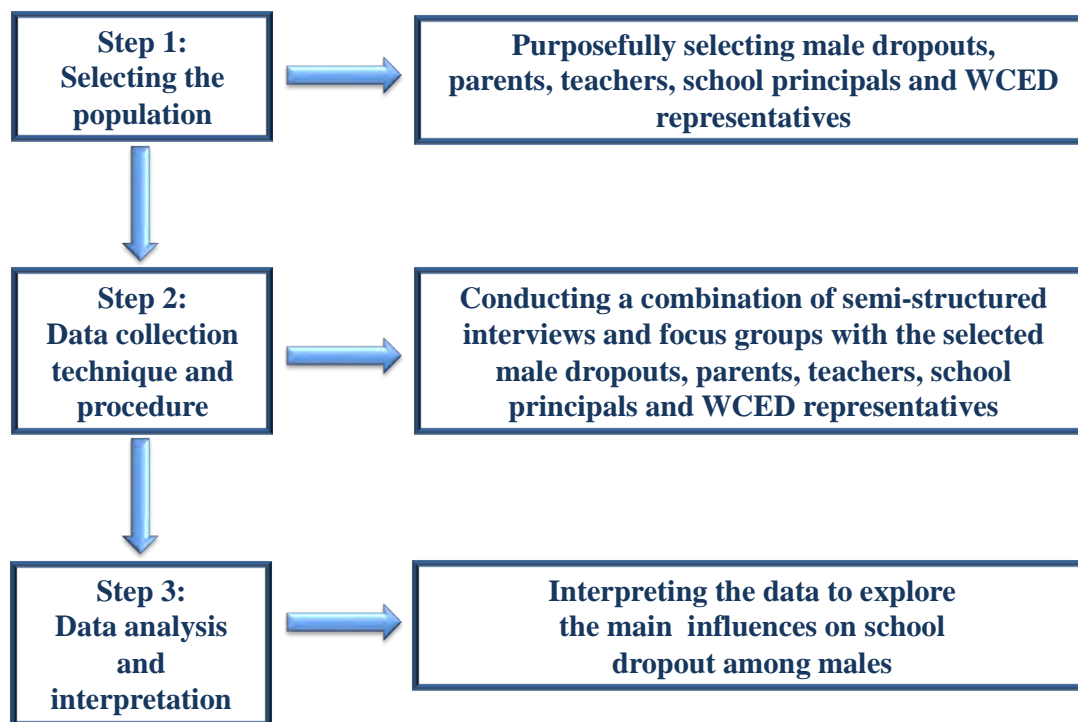


Figure 3.1: Research methodology in three steps

Next, I discuss the first step in the methodology I followed, namely deciding on the sample population.

3.4.1 Sample population

The first step in the sampling process is selecting a population which includes all the elements (people, events or other sampling units) with which the research problem is concerned (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Strydom & Venter, 2005). Next, a purposive or non-purposive sample is selected based on the choice of design which will determine the chances respondents have of being selected to be part of the eventual sample (De Vos, 2005; Strydom & Venter, 2005). For this study, I decided to make purposive sampling selections because of the specific aim of this study which was to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic according to the views of certain role players. Since these role players, especially the male school dropouts and parents of male school dropouts, can be a difficult population group to reach I selected a population where I could be certain that I would be able to engage with the intended participants (De Vos, 2005). For example, in a South African study like that of Ingles (2009) it was decided rather to interview learners who were classified as at risk of dropping out because of the difficulty of getting to the dropouts themselves. Therefore, it seemed as if my study might provide deeper insight into the topic as those who were directly

concerned with school dropout were also the participants and by doing a purposeful selection I would be certain to get hold of them.

Firstly, I purposefully selected two high schools based on the criteria which I compiled by using my expert opinion and anecdotal evidence. These criteria included schools which were both accessible and had high dropout rates. In terms of the former point, I had a previously established relationship with both schools which gave me a sense of credibility among the learners, teachers, school principals and parents who would all be instrumental in accessing and recruiting the dropouts. Fouché (2005, p. 282) describes this kind of context as an ideal research field as it is "easily accessible, where cooperation with respondents can easily be achieved ... [and the] researcher can move freely ... [and the] required information can easily be obtained". Therefore, getting access to these schools was straightforward. The schools were located in a geographical area that was convenient to me, taking into account my limited time as a part-time PhD student and also the financial and human resource capacity to make this study possible when considering that I live in the greater Cape Town area. Other SA studies (Bingma, 2012; Dekeza-Tsomo, 2012) on school dropout used similar criteria by selecting familiar schools with which they had a similar relationship. On the point of high dropout rates as one of my criteria for inclusion, I had anecdotal evidence that school dropout is a problem at these schools as it is common knowledge that the Grade 12 class is always only half the size of the Grade 8 class. Since the schools' unofficial process dropout rates are at least 50% they can surely be seen as schools where dropout is a problem. Therefore, the two schools included in this study clearly fitted into the criteria for inclusion.

To avoid revealing the identity of the schools, I have named them School A and School B. The reason for using these pseudonyms is that the results of the study could be of such a nature that the schools might feel exposed in a negative way through the findings of this study. Dekeza-Tsomo (2012) also followed this method by naming the two Eastern Cape schools which were included in her study School A and School B. Both School A and School B which I selected for this study are situated in the greater Cape Town area.

Secondly, I selected the following participant groups for this study: males who had dropped out from School A and School B, current teachers and school principals at School A and School B, WCED representatives affiliated with School A or School B, and parents of males who had dropped out from School A and School B. As I illustrated through the literature review in Chapter 2, school dropout is a process that is influenced by a range of individual

and institutional factors and therefore there are various role players that contribute to this process, including teachers and parents (Bridgeland et al., 2008; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). In Table 3.1 I provide an outline of the participants who were selected to participate in this study.

Table 3.1: Sample participants, size and method

Sample participants	Sample size	Sampling method
Male school dropouts	17	Purposive selection
Teachers	17	Purposive selection
School principals	2	Purposive selection
WCED representatives	2	Purposive selection
Parents	11	Purposive selection
Total sample size	49	

As Table 3.1 illustrates, there were a total of 49 participants in this study, representing five population groups. Next, I explain the purposive sampling process that I followed in selecting each of these samples.

The first sample included the male school dropouts as they were the main subjects in this study. I specifically decided to include these individuals as they were able to provide information regarding their own experience, behaviour and perceptions relating to the factors which contributed to school dropout (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Fouché & Delpont, 2005; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Babbie and Mouton (2001) also mention the importance of selecting respondents who have adequate time to be involved in the study. This group was ideal as most of them were idle and therefore readily available to participate in a research study. Specifically, the criterion for the inclusion was male dropouts who had dropped out of School A or School B during the past three years (2012-2015). This time frame ensured that the population was big enough so that it would not be impossible to recruit the participants; furthermore it was not so far in the past that participants could not remember the factors that influenced their dropout. On the practical side, the selection of the 17 male dropout participants was done through a sampling technique termed 'snowball sampling' (Palinkas, Howitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015; Strydom & Venter, 2005). In the words

of Palinkas et al. (2015), this entails the identification of "cases of interest from sampling people who know people that generally have similar characteristics who, in turn know people, also with similar characteristics". I specifically identified 'key informants' (Palinkas et al., 2015) who, in this case, were either teachers or parents who lived in the community surrounding School A or School B. These informants identified and approached certain male dropouts who matched the criterion for inclusion and these recruits then again identified and recruited other male dropouts who could also participate (Strydom & Venter, 2005). This approach worked relatively well, although I had to follow up regularly with the key informants who then again had to follow up with the dropouts they had contacted. This, however, is the reality of recruiting the specific target group and when compared to a study such as that of Bingma (2012), who aimed at recruiting 15-20 male dropouts but only managed to recruit 10, I did well by managing to recruit 17 male dropout participants. Hereby I managed to reach a saturation point with the data I received from them (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Although Babbie and Mouton (2001, p. 167) state that this procedure could result in samples with questionable representatives, they also mention that it is "used primarily for exploratory purposes". Therefore, this was not a problem as exploration was the primary goal of this study.

Next, I purposefully selected the school principals and some of the teachers to be part of the sample. These two groups were an obvious choice as they were closely involved in the educational process and therefore in an ideal position to provide an insider's perspective on the topic under investigation (Fouché & Delport, 2005; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Ingles (2009) and Munsaka (2009) also included similar groups (teachers and school principals) in their studies on school dropout and in both cases valuable information was added to their studies. Selecting the school principal participants was obvious as there are only one school principal at each of the two sample schools and therefore they were simply selected because of their position. In terms of the teachers, I selected all the grade head teachers for Grades 8-12 at School A and School B. I decided on these criteria for inclusion to ensure that these participants had a certain amount of experience in the school system and also because their position required more interaction with those who are most at risk of dropping out. This position includes having to handle those learners who are regularly absent, misbehaving in class, struggling academically and at risk of failing their grade. I also anticipated that these teachers would be the best persons to recruit more teacher participants and therefore I asked each of these teachers to invite one teacher from their specific grade to participate. Therefore,

I also followed a snowball sampling technique for this second group of the teacher population (Strydom & Venter, 2005). As mentioned earlier, there are questions regarding the representation of such samples, but for the exploratory aspect of this study these doubts could be seen as invalid (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In Munsaka's (2009) study a purposive selection of teachers was also done at the school attended by the dropout participants and eventually five teachers were included as participants. However, these teachers were not specifically the head of their grade but the only teachers at this small, rural school. Ingles (2009) also made a purposive selection of eight teachers, including the principal and the guidance counsellor. These last two individuals were then asked to identify six more teachers to participate in the study but eventually only the school principal and guidance counsellor participated. The lesson learned through these studies – which I suspect helped me in getting most of the identified participants to participate – was to involve the school principal and grade heads in this process. Had this worked perfectly I would have had 10 teachers from each of the schools, equally representing all the grades. However, in practice, eventually the grade heads did not each recruit a teacher and some of them did not even show up themselves. Therefore, the final sample was made up of 17 teacher participants. This number was still sufficient as there were enough participants to have a lively discussion and reach a point of data saturation.

The fourth sample population was the WCED representatives at the local Educational Management District Circuit (EMDC). There can be 20-40 schools within one EMDC and it could include 4-8 staff members, depending on the number of schools. School A and School B in this study represented two different EMDC districts. My decision to include these participants in the study was based on the fact that they represent the official authority to whom the schools report and who supposedly monitor the outcomes of the schools, including school dropout. Therefore, they should be able to convey an official stance on the influences on school dropout that have to do with the school and the WCED. No representatives from the WCED were involved as participants in any of the other mentioned SA studies on school dropout (Bingma, 2012; Ingles, 2009; Munsaka, 2012; Dekeza-Tsomo, 2012) and I felt that this was a missing voice. Consequently, I made a purposive sampling selection by inviting the Circuit Team Manager (CTM) and one other staff member at this office whom the CTM nominated. The CTM is the highest authority in an EMDC and seeing that School A and School B were in two different school districts I decided on the district that was geographically the closest to where I reside. The CTM nominated a senior educational specialist (social worker) who worked at this office as the other representative. Therefore, the

second participant in this category was also recruited through a type of snowball sampling. Since I had previously established a relationship with the CTM, it was fairly easy to recruit these participants.

Finally, the fifth sample population was the parents or guardians of males who had dropped out in 2012-2015 from School A and School B. The criterion was not that they had to be the parents or guardians of the male dropout participants in this study as this would have made it even more difficult to recruit the participants. Therefore, the criteria were simply that they also had to have male learners who dropped out at the specific schools and within the specific time frame. In his study, Munsaka (2009) interviewed the parents of the dropouts who were part of the dropout sample for this study and found it to be valuable to add another perspective to the data. On the practical side, I also followed a snowball sampling strategy whereby I recruited one or two parents and asked them to invite more parents to participate. This was the hardest participant group to recruit as some parents worked during the day and others were sceptical of participating. Eventually I managed to recruit a total of 11 participants (seven biological mothers, three foster mothers and one guardian). These were fewer than the 15-20 parents I had aimed at recruiting but when looking at the depth of data I collected from these participants it seemed that it was adequate.

3.4.2 Data collection techniques and procedures

I used two data collection techniques for this study, as illustrated in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Data collection techniques and participants

Data collection technique	Participants/data source	Number of participants/extent of data source
Individual semi-structured interviews	- Male dropouts	- 17
	- School principals	- 2
	- WCED representative	- 2
Focus groups	- Teachers	- 17
	- Parents/guardians	- 11

As illustrated in Table 3.2, individual semi-structured interviews were used for the individual interviews with the male dropouts, school principals and WCED representatives. For the teacher and parent participants I used focus group discussions. All participants received an introductory letter (Appendix A) before the actual interview and signed a consent form

(Appendix C) before engaging in an interview. Both these documents, as well as the interview schedules (Appendices D, F and G) were available in both Afrikaans and English, although only the English versions were included as appendices to this thesis. In the next section I provide a detailed discussion of each of these data collection techniques and explain how I utilised them in this study.

3.4.2.1 Individual semi-structured interviews

I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with the 17 male dropout participants, the two school principals and the two WCED representatives who were part of the sample population. Using semi-structured interviews is a preferred data gathering method in qualitative studies as it offers participants the opportunity to speak for themselves, as opposed to answering a predetermined selection of hypothesis-based questions which needs to be answered (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Therefore, the use of individual interviews offered me the opportunity to collect information regarding the subjective views and experiences of the male dropouts, school principals and WCED representatives regarding the phenomenon under study. Some of the SA studies on school dropout which I referred to earlier (Bingma, 2012; Dekeza-Tsomo, 2012; Ingles, 2009) also utilised individual interviews, involving dropouts and individuals at risk of dropping out. As an example, Ingles (2009) conducted individual interviews with learners who were classified as at risk of dropping out of school and this enabled the researcher to collect the data needed for the study.

The individual interviews worked well as they gave me an opportunity to have face-to-face interaction with the specific participants. I made sure that the participants understood the aim of the contact and interviews, and more importantly that they understood the questions. I could also probe and explore the areas which I deemed noteworthy. In his study on sexual offenders, Gxubane (2012) found individual interviews to be particularly useful for these same reasons. I conducted each of the 21 individual interviews on my own and each interview was 30-90 minutes long. Generally, the interviews with the male dropouts took 30-45 minutes and with the school principals and WCED representatives they took 60-90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in a space that the interviewees choose, including homes, the school and the EMDC area office. The interviews were conducted in the home language of the participants, which was Afrikaans for all the participants, except one whose home language was Xhosa, and he preferred to do the interview in English. My ability to speak both Afrikaans and English, and even some words in the dialect of Afrikaans which most of the

participants spoke, was put to good use. Each interview was also recorded with the participant's permission where after it was transcribed.

The framework for the individual interviews was an interview guide that I had developed for each of the participant groups (Appendices D, F and G). I started each of the interviews with a standard explanation of the goal and format of the interview. This 'softer' side of the interview helped to convince the participants that they were assisting me in learning more about the topic under discussion and that they were contributing towards the understanding of dropout in their community and in the country as a whole. More specifically, I found the framework for interview questions provided by Charmaz (cited in Henning et al., 2005) very helpful in constructing the questions for my interviews. A characteristic of these questions is that they strike the balance between being open enough that every participant can provide his/her unique insight but structured enough that topics as raised by the participant is explored in depth. For example, I deliberately directed the questions on certain topics at the individual's own experience and then explored these answers by asking more questions relating to the answers. I specifically tried to make this tone different from that of the interview schedules used in the South African and African studies I refer to throughout this study. As an example, Dekeza-Tsomo (2012) explored specific themes like grade repetition, poverty (school fees and transport to school), HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, death of parents, absenteeism and school attendance. Similarly, Ingles (2009) explored what respondents do during their spare time, how frequently they were absent, their relationship with teachers, and the kind of support that was available to them. Bingma (2012) held interviews with male dropouts and asked respondents predetermined questions regarding the way they spend their time with friends, their school attendance records, as well as their attitudes towards substance abuse. All these questions were in a sense aimed at getting a confirmation of specific factors which could or could not be related to school dropout. This is not what I aimed to do; rather, I wanted to provide a structure wherein participants could present their own ideas and experiences and then explore these according to a predetermined framework. This structure is basically the categories which I used to order the literature in Chapter 2. These individual and institutional factors (school and family) provided the context wherein respondents could give their own perspectives (see Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Therefore, the interview guides which I developed and used were structured under individual, family, school and general sections. Under each of these sections I asked general, open-ended questions through which I then further explored as respondents provided their perspectives and experiences within each of

these contexts. Finally, I also followed Bergman's (cited in Henning et al., 2005, p. 79) advice of "getting your foot in the door" by starting with the 'easier', less threatening themes and then easing into the more difficult ones. For the male dropouts, this entailed starting with the school factors and then moving to family and finally the individual factors (themselves). In the school principals' case, I started with the individual factors (of the male dropouts) and then move to family and community factors and finally the school. With most of the individual interviews, the strategies I followed seemed to work well as participants freely engaged in the conversations which produced in-depth data about the influences on school dropout. I restated and summarised the information as received from participants to determine the accuracy of the information and my understanding thereof. This contributed to the quality of data that I collected.

3.4.2.2 Focus groups

I conducted two focus groups with each of the teacher and parent participant groups. Morgan (cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2001) advises that three to five groups are ideal and that more groups will seldom provide new insights. Although I did not conduct as many focus groups as this with each of the involved groups, I found that the two discussions per participant group were sufficient as there was a strong correlation in the data collected. Due to known and unknown factors, the researchers in the South African and African studies on school dropout (Dekeza-Tsomo, 2012; Ingles, 2009; Munsaka, 2009) conducted only one focus group with each of their sample populations. Thus, it also seems as if this study is adding a new depth to this kind of data as I conducted more focus groups.

Through the focus group discussions I could draw upon participants' attitudes, feelings, beliefs and experiences in a way which is not possible through individual interviews or other techniques. The teacher participants seemed to find the group valuable as it offered them the opportunity to talk about a topic that they apparently never talk about, although it is such a prominent feature in their schools. These discussions generated a diverse range of perspectives around the topic which contributed to the richness of the data (Henning et al., 2005). The parents, on the other hand, seemed to experience the group discussion as a space where they could get together and "create meaning among themselves, rather than individually" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 292). More specifically, many of the parent participants felt as if they had been unfairly treated by the schools, which in many cases, did not allow their children at the school during the time before they dropped out. Combined,

these dynamics experienced by the teacher and parent participants gave me the opportunity to get a deeper understanding of the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding school dropout and, in the words of Babbie and Mouton (2001), to "find information [I] would not otherwise be able to access". This is especially true when looking at the findings as discussed in the next two chapters, as some of them have not featured in previous SA studies.

Another advantage of the focus groups is that they allowed me to collect a large amount of data in a short period of time. Each of the four focus groups took 90-120 minutes and for the number of participants and data I could gather in these time frames it was time well spent. Terhoeven (2009) conducted a focus group with a Teacher Support Team as "it was a way of saving time for teachers" (pp. 51-52) and I also found it useful for the same reason. Some of the other South African and African studies on school dropout to which I referred earlier (Dekeza-Tsomo, 2012; Ingles, 2009; Munsaka, 2009) also utilised focus groups as a data collection tool for their studies.

There are a few technical aspects related to the use of focus groups which I kept in mind while preparing and engaging in this process. Firstly, I aimed to recruit between six and ten members for each of the focus groups, in line with the ideal size as prescribed by Babbie and Mouton (2001). With the exception of the one parent group that comprised only five participants, the size of all the other groups was between these prescribed guidelines (seven on average) and this worked well as the discussions did not fall flat when some members decided to remain silent and not engage in the discussion. On the other hand, there were not too many members. If the group is too large, it becomes difficult to manage as participants might break off into smaller discussion groups. One of the reasons why I managed to recruit this ideal number of participants was that I followed Morgan's guideline (cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 292) to "over-recruit by 20 per cent to compensate for members not showing up". Further, I conducted the focus group with the teachers during the time of the school examinations as this is a time that teachers are usually more relaxed. Overall, the aforementioned strategies enabled me to get the most out of the focus groups with the teachers and parents.

As in the case of the individual interviews, I compiled discussion guides to provide the direction for the focus groups (Appendices E and H). All the guides consisted of open-ended questions to offer group members the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions around the topic under discussion. Very similar to the individual interviews, Munsaka's (2009) group

discussion guide with the dropouts consisted of eight questions which mostly focused on specific themes, including career aspirations, their family's support in their pursuit of education, the custom of forced marriages, and young people's integration into society as adults. One question referred to a factor which was raised in the individual interviews and I decided to possibly add something like this at a later stage. Again, I aimed not to ask specific questions but rather to provide the structure within the individual and institutional factors and then explore the topics as raised by the participants.

Finally, both group discussions with the teachers were held at the relevant schools. The one parent group discussion was held at the home of a parent in the community and the other at the school as the parents felt it was a neutral space, knowing that there would not be any teachers after hours at the school. I had to arrange with the school that they would open a classroom for me after hours where we conducted this group. This parent group was the one that consisted of only five members. Upon reflecting on this matter I realised that the poor attendance might have been because we had the meeting at the school and everyone did not feel comfortable meeting there because of negative past experiences with the school. I started each of the group discussions by discussing the guidelines and establishing the rules for the conversation. This included an opportunity for everyone to speak and respecting one another's viewpoints and opinions. The primary language for all four group discussions was the primary language of the participants, who were mostly Afrikaans-speaking. There were two participants in one of the teacher groups who preferred to speak in English but they also taught in Afrikaans at their schools and therefore could understand what everyone said. As mentioned earlier, I am fluent in both these languages and therefore could facilitate the discussions with ease.

3.4.3 Preparation and piloting of research instruments

Thorough preparation is essential for a reliable process of data collection and I prepared as thoroughly as possible. I contacted the principals of the selected schools, briefly explained the research I wanted to do at their schools and scheduled an appointment. This was about six months before I planned to do the research at their schools in order to make sure they were well informed and realise their commitment. Since I already knew both of the school principals and also had an official letter from the WCED (Appendix B) to illustrate the legitimacy of the study, it did not take much convincing for them to agree to involve their schools in the study.

The preparation for the individual interviews and the focus group discussions started when I made contact with the individuals' part of the sample or the key informants to establish whether they were interested in participating. Only one of the male school dropouts was younger than 18 years and had to get parental permission. I tried to make contact with all of the male dropout participants or those who recruited them at least one day before the interview but I only saw most of them again on the day of the interview. I contacted the school principals who then reminded the grade heads who participated and had to recruit one teacher for the focus groups. The parents were all contacted at least a day before the groups were held. Finally, I called and emailed the WCED representatives to confirm the date and time of the interviews. In other words, the preparation for all the interviews included basic administrative tasks to ensure that everyone knew when and where the individual interviews and focus groups would be held. This approach worked well, although one of the parent groups and a limited number of the individual interviews with the male school dropouts had to be rescheduled due to unforeseen reasons on the participants' behalf.

The other essential preparation I had to do was to pilot the interview schedules for the individual and group discussions. For the male dropout individuals, I randomly approached one male dropout who was standing on a street corner where I know these individuals usually gather. I introduced myself and explained what the aim of the contact was. This individual agreed to participate and recruit two of his acquaintances. We agreed on a date and time and I took his cell phone number. When I made contact to confirm our meeting, the male dropout informed me that he could not participate or assist with recruitment of others due to a family crisis. I randomly approached another male dropout who also agreed to participate and invite others. He also never returned my messages and eventually the planned meeting with him also did not take place. All of this showed that this is a population group which is hard to engage with in interviews. It was also the reason why I eventually asked key informants to assist with the recruitment of the male school dropout participants for the study. I was able to conduct an interview with the third male dropout I recruited and he recruited one more male dropout. For the teacher participants, I invited four teachers for the testing of the focus group interview schedule. I randomly approached these teachers at a high school where I was working as a social worker and verbally organised a date and time to meet with them at the school. Three of the teachers attended and the fourth came to excuse himself as he had an unforeseen matter to attend to. This confirmed the importance of over-recruiting (Morgan, cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The three teachers who attended included two female and one male. These

individuals had been teaching for 8, 30 and 32 years respectively. All the individuals who participated in both the pilot interviews were from a school and community which are very similar to the two that eventually formed part of the study. None of them were part of the eventual study. I did not conduct pilot interviews with a school principal, WCED representative or parents because these interview schedules were similar to the ones I used for the two schedules that I did pilot and could therefore adapt them accordingly.

After completing the pilot interviews, I provided feedback and had further discussions with both my supervisors to determine whether changes needed to be made to the interview schedules by measuring the outcomes against the guidelines as discussed in this chapter. Firstly, there were structural components that did not work ideally. For example, at the focus group with the teachers I gave a letter to each of them on which they could complete their personal information, as some could feel uncomfortable about providing personal information, like age, in the group. However, this interrupted the flow of the discussion and therefore I changed my approach by including the letter with the information and consent forms so that participants in the real interviews could complete it in their own time, before the actual discussion. In terms of the interview schedule, the questions and flow thereof worked well. All three teachers participated well and the data were interesting and covered a wide range of topics, mostly in accordance with the South African and USA literature. This confirmed that the questions were assisting in collecting the correct data (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). An interesting aspect was the strong focus on the influence of gangs, an influence which I was not expecting to be so prominent in this school and community. After the interview, I made five minor changes to the schedule, including a question which I took out because it was irrelevant, two questions which I merged and two sentences which were restructured to be clearer. The group discussion took just over an hour. Considering that I had made some adjustments to the schedule and that there would be twice as many participants in the final two teacher groups, I felt the planned 1.5 hours per group discussion would be enough time to complete the discussions.

3.4.4 Data analysis and interpretation

In this section, I explain the process I followed to analyse and interpret the data as collected through the individual interviews and focus groups. De Vos, Fouché and Venter (2005) describe this part of the study as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the data which have been collected. I followed the prescribed guidelines in executing this process

and aimed to be "explicit when writing [so that] readers can know exactly what was done and how" (Henning et al., 2005, p. 107). This approach is of particular importance so that readers can see the whole picture when looking at the particulars of how this process was navigated.

I considered making use of Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) for analysing the data as there are a variety of CAQDAS programs that offer advantages such as being able to access data with the press of a button. However, after careful consideration, I decided not to make use of a CAQDAS program for this study. There were two main reasons for this decision: firstly, the size of the sample and data was manually manageable, and secondly, it would be too costly and time-consuming to buy a program and learn how to use it (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In the words of Babbie and Mouton (2001, p. 507), one should steer away from a situation where you run the risk of eventually "spending more time practising [on the program] than doing research". With this in mind, I followed a process whereby I manually analysed and interpreted the data in this study. Other South African and African PhD studies to which I refer in this chapter (Munsaka, 2009; Gxubane, 2012; Damons, 2014) also followed a process of manual data analysis and interpretation which seemingly worked well. Next, I explain the process I followed in manually analysing and interpreting the data.

3.4.4.1 Grounded theory process

As mentioned earlier, a grounded theory research design was utilised for this study, in accordance with the guidelines from Strauss & Corbin (1990) and Henning et al. (2005). The grounded theory approach offered me guidelines whereby I could generate a form of theory regarding the factors contributing to school dropout among males, based on the data I collected from male dropouts, parents, teachers, school principals and a representative from the WCED. The complete process I followed to reach this aim is illustrated in Figure 3.2 below (the numbers next to each step indicate the sequence followed):

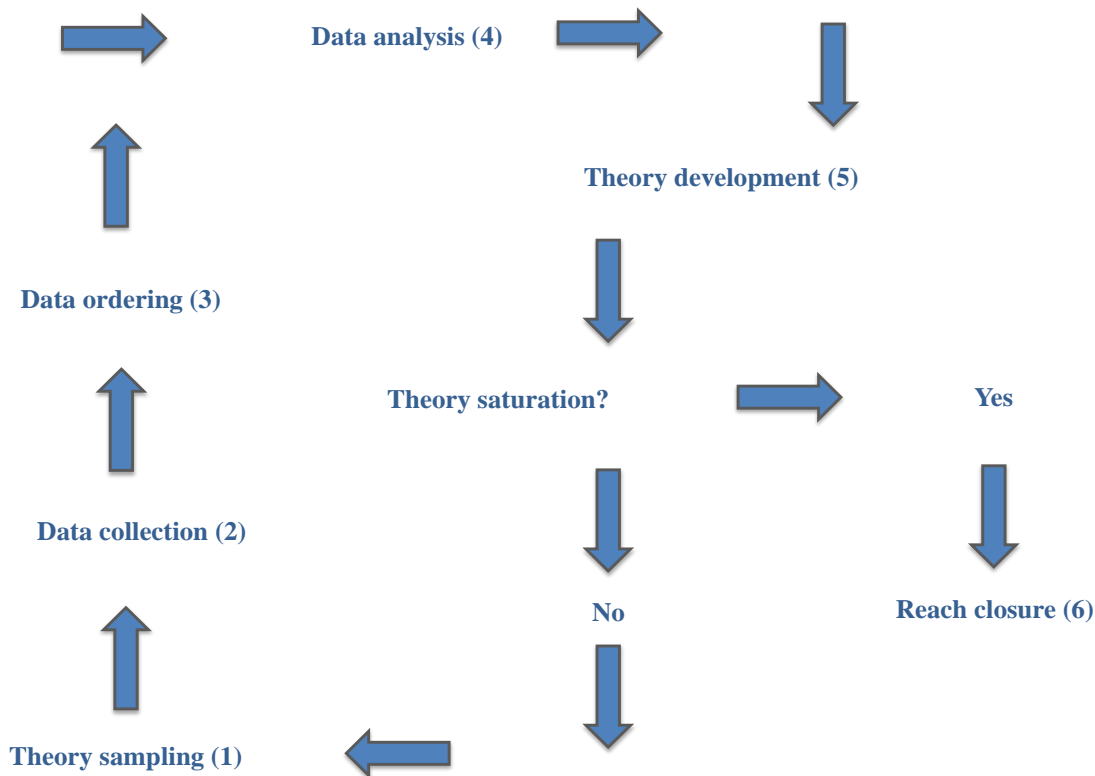


Figure 3.2: The process of data collection, ordering and analysis to build grounded theory
(Sources: Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Yin, 1998)

The theoretical sampling and data collection processes have already been explained in this chapter. With regard to ordering the data, I started by organising the raw data which I had collected through the individual interviews and group discussions, followed by a process of coding and categorising this information. Next, I built the theory by putting together the 'blocks' which I had assembled during the preceding stages of the process and provided an interpretation thereof. In the following section I discuss the processes I followed to construct the finding of this study.

3.4.4.2 Organising the data

As mentioned earlier, all the individual interviews and group discussions were recorded. I used two devices for the recordings to ensure that I had a backup if something went wrong with one or the other. The first device was my personal BlackBerry mobile phone on which I downloaded a recording App called *Parrot* and the backup device was my iPad tablet on which I downloaded another recording App, known as *HD Voice Record*. Both these Apps were available free of charge on the respective BlackBerry and Apple online App stores. These devices had a simple recording, storing and playback function which worked easily in

recording and listening to the conversations later. The only other data collection recording tool was the forms on which I collected the demographic details of the participants (same as 'demographic background' in Appendices D, E, F, G and H).

Organising the above-mentioned data was a continual process and not an event which only happened after I had concluded all the individual interviews and focus groups. By following this approach I ensured that the transcription process and data set as a whole did not become an unfocussed, repetitive and overwhelming mass of information. First I had to transcribe the 21 individual interviews and four focus groups. I followed Henning et al.'s (2005) advice to novice researchers to go through this slow process of transcribing the data themselves, as this process ensures that they "come (and stay) close to the data" (Henning et al., 2005, p. 105). I transcribed each of these recordings within three days after completing the interviews to ensure that the conversations were still fresh in my memory. This worked very well. Further, I assigned a code to each of the interviews and the recorded data. For example, male dropouts were coded as MD, my own abbreviation for 'male dropout', and each recording and transcription was appropriately coded as MD 1 – MD 17. In transcribing the data I listened to each recording and typed it in a Word document with a size 12 font and 1.5 spacing between each line, leaving enough space to make comments and notes during the coding process. This process worked well in controlling for and supplementing the reflective notes which I made during and after the interviews and discussions. In this way I was also able to start identifying emerging concepts and themes to eventually build a coherent interpretation of the data (De Vos, 2005). After transcribing all the interviews and group discussions, I read through each transcription and the notes a number of times. This assisted in refining my understanding of the data which I had collected, before I started with the coding process. Although these are general guidelines, Terhoeven (2009) and Gxubane (2012) followed a similar course of action in their respective South African studies on school dropout and male sexual offenders which display similarities with the topic under investigation in my study. However, these studies did not follow a grounded theory approach and for this aspect I particularly looked at the process followed by Damons (2014) and Holtzhausen (2004) in their respective studies on delinquent males and correctional social work. I found these two studies very useful and kept them close by while I was analysing the data as part of my own study.

3.4.4.3 *Analysing the data*

At first, I felt overwhelmed by this part of the study because of two reasons. Firstly, I realised that I needed to be extremely thorough in the process; in view of the extent of the data I needed to handle I had to avoid becoming negligent. For this reason I did not just dive into the data but first made sure that I had a carefully constructed plan for coding the data. I discuss this plan later in this section. Secondly, I did not find the literature on coding or the coding sections of relevant South African studies very useful; in some cases it was even confusing. My main literature reference sources (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; De Vos et al., 2008) only broadly covered this topic and I struggled to understand where my own study fitted into these writings. As for the relevant South African (Bingma, 2012; Ingles, 2009) and African (Munsaka, 2009) studies on school dropout, I found the coding sections in these studies to be lacking thorough explanations of how it ensured that this process was systematic and logical. Eventually, I found the writings of Henning et al. (2005), Saldana (2009) and Forman and Damschroder (2007) very useful in getting to grips with the coding process and employed these as my main literature sources for this section.

Saldana (2009, p. 4) explains coding as "the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis". Accordingly, this process is characterised by breaking down the data, conceptualising it and putting it back together in a logical way to support the outcomes of the particular study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), in this case the influences of school dropout among males. This approach is central to the process of building a theory from data. More specifically, according to the grounded theory approach, I started with the coding process whereby I coded the data by sentence or paragraph (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). I did not use single words but included verbs and adverbs to appear as part of the language of the codes and not just nouns and adjectives (Henning et al., 2005). This part of the process, namely assigning phrases and sentences to the data as opposed to using single words, was quite demanding. By doing this, the codes given were more explicit and precise; for example, where I could use a code like 'academics' I rather used the phrase 'failure to progress academically' as it was more descriptive of the phenomenon at hand. What I essentially did in each line, sentence, and paragraph was to read in search of the answer to the repeated questions, "What is this about? What is being referenced here?" The next step was to look at how the codes were related to each other through a process of inductive and deductive thinking. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe this as the part where the data gets put back

together in fresh ways by making links between categories. Next, I describe the process of generating the themes, categories and sub-categories in more detail.

3.4.4.4 *Generating themes, categories and sub-categories*

For the process of moving from codes to categories, I particularly liked Henning et al.'s (2005) visual illustration, as shown below.

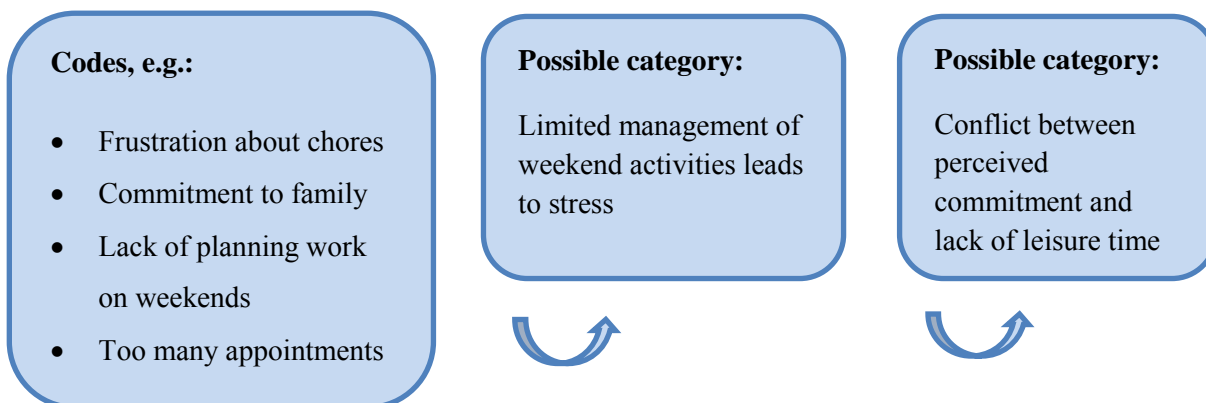


Figure 3.3: *From codes to categories (adapted from Henning et al., 2005, p. 106)*

It is clear from this figure that more than one category can possibly emerge from the same group of codes; this is mainly influenced by the context. Henning et al. (2005) advise that the ideal categories become clearer as one works through more of the data to eventually make a decision as to which category is the closest to the overall picture. In accordance with the grounded theory approach, this part is termed 'axial coding', which is a "set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (Straus & Corbin, 1990). During this stage of the analysis, I formed categories which were the closest to the groups of codes which belonged together while keeping in mind Rumberger and Lim's (2008) framework and the accompanying categories and sub-categories. Thereafter it was a continual process of adapting the categories to be as accurate as possible through this process of refinement in an effort to see that the findings are "crystallized" (Henning et al., 2005, p. 116). Through this process some categories emerged as more important than others and formed the scaffolding for the rest of the themes.

Next I followed a process of merging the categories from the various data sources to compile specific themes. I did this through a process of first identifying general and later specific themes within the data. Finally, I merged the themes and data of all the sources to compile the

final results and offer interpretations thereof. This was all done with Rumberger and Lim's (2008) framework in mind and therefore the categories and sub-categories as compiled have strong resemblances with this framework.

3.4.4.5 Offering interpretations

After I had coded and categorised all the data, I was left "with the all-important task of seeing the whole" (Henning et al., 2005, p. 106). Henning et al. (2005) provides certain questions which should be asked during this time, which focus on the relationships between the categories, what they say about each other, what is missing and how they address the research questions. I tried to answer some of these questions by meticulously writing down each step of the process and reasoning behind each action.

Central to this part of the study was the integration of the five data sets as well as the already existing literature on school dropout, as discussed in Chapter 2. In accordance with the rationale of including male dropouts, teachers, school principals, WCED representatives and parents as data sources, I aimed to merge these data through triangulation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). While there were some discrepancies between the exact descriptions of the main concerns associated with school dropout, the prominent data fitted within the framework I used as discussed earlier (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Munsaka (2009) used a similar approach in integrating the data from school dropouts, parents and teachers in his Zambian study and this study also helped me to navigate this process.

3.4.4.6 Searching for alternative understandings

According to Henning et al. (2005, p. 107), the construction of the data interpretation process should allow one "to 'move backwards' through the process from thematic pattern to categories to codes and then to 'raw' data". I liked this idea as it ensured that I leave a broad audit trail which also assisted with quality assurance. This approach was particularly important as the analysis took place concurrently with the data collection process. Damons (2014) followed a similar pattern in her study on socially marginalised boys in a similar context as this study. I then constructed the findings and categories after both my supervisors and I were satisfied that saturation of the data had occurred (Patton, 2009).

3.4.4.7 Presenting the data

The complete findings are presented in Chapter 4 of this study. The data are presented in plain written text as well as in tables, in an effort to assist the reader in seeing the composite picture. The discussion is done in accordance with the themes and sub-themes as they emerged from the data analysis of this study. Important direct quotes are used in the presentation as a means of making the data more authentic (De Vos, 2005). Overall, the presentation of the data is done in a way which makes it easily understandable as I only discuss and mix theory and literature with my findings in Chapter 5.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In terms of ethical considerations, I ensured that I followed certain guidelines throughout the research process in order to make ethically guided decisions through all my thoughts and actions. This included the following three fundamental principles that most codes and regulations advocate or promote:

1. **Respect:** The principle of respect involves various concepts such as autonomy, self-determination and the protection of the dignity of a community. To ensure that these principles were upheld, I obtained informed consent from the participants before engaging with them in the individual interviews or focus group discussions. For the one male dropout who was younger than 18 years old I also got consent from his parent before engaging in the interview. The participants were also given the option to decide whether they would like to engage in the interviews to ensure that participation was entirely voluntary. All participants were also made to understand that they were free to terminate their participation at any time before or during the individual interviews and group discussion. Although none of these things happened in my research process, I was prepared to handle such a situation with respect if it did come up.
2. **Beneficence:** Protecting the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the participants was a primary responsibility for me. I was able to comply with this principle as I am a trained and registered social worker with the skills to terminate interviews and refer participants for support if they had emotional breakdowns during the interviews. Managing this responsibility commenced with the first contact with the participants, as I ensured that they were fully aware of the purpose of the interviews, i.e. to do research and not to

deliver a service. As far as I know, there were no instances where participants became confused about the role I was fulfilling in the process. On the contrary, some participants were excited about the outcome of the study as they were keen to learn more about male school dropout in an effort to address the problem.

3. Justice: This principle refers to the assessment of the possible risk and benefit factors that are associated with the execution and completion of the study. The general guideline is that the potential positive aims from the study should outweigh the possible negative aims. If not, the study should not be undertaken. In this particular study, the data from both data sets will eventually contribute towards the knowledge base on the phenomenon and this will ultimately be to the advantage of the school and community.

Generally, the three above-mentioned principles apply not only to individuals but also to the community at large. In practice, I ensured that these principles were applied accordingly by following the following considerations:

1. Human subject protection: Participants, especially the male dropouts, could have been at risk for becoming emotional while their individual, family and school experiences and situations were being explored. For example, participants might have had a traumatic past which they had never talked about before and through the individual interviews these emotions could have been stirred. Had such situations arisen, I would have utilised my social work skills as explained above. Considering that I am familiar with the community and the resources that are available I would also have been able to make an appropriate referral if further support was needed.
2. Voluntary participation and informed consent: The recruitment of participants was handled in a very delicate way seeing that I am also involved in one of the schools as a social worker for the Community Keepers organisation. To safeguard the participants' relationship with the organisation I informed all the potential participants, especially the teachers, school principals and WCED representatives, that I would be conducting the interviews in my own personal capacity and not on behalf of the organisation. I announced this publicly when first talking to the schools about the study and then re-emphasised it to each individual before the interviews.
3. Privacy: The participants' privacy was ensured by conducting interviews in an environment in which they felt comfortable and where they were not exposed to others.

This differed for the various participants. Most of the male dropouts' felt most comfortable at their homes or at the homes of friends in the community. The teachers, school principals and WCED representatives all preferred meeting in their staff rooms or offices. The one parent group requested that we meet at one of their homes and the other at the school but that the meeting should take place during the evening when there were few or no teachers. Throughout all these arrangements it seemed as if the participants were happy that their privacy was being protected.

4. Confidentiality: I ensured that the confidentiality of all participants was protected by keeping all recordings and field notes in a safe for which only I have a key. All electronic data were stored on a computer to which only I have access. I am also the only one who knows the password. Five years after the completion of the study all the hard copies containing information will be burned and the electronic data will be deleted.
5. Anonymity: The names and identity of the participants as well as the research sites will not be revealed. For example, I have named the two schools included in this study School A and School B. Therefore these schools and the individuals involved cannot be identified. I also used codes for each participant to conceal their names and thereby ensure that the personal details of the participants remain unknown.

Before starting with the research, I submitted the research proposal to the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Cape Town and it was approved as ethical. Therefore, as far as I am aware, I followed all the required ethical guidelines to ensure that this study was conducted in an ethical way.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I presented the motivation for selecting the qualitative research methodology for this study. Specifically, I argued why this methodology was ideal for the aim of this study, namely to get an in-depth understanding of the influences on male school dropout. Further, I explained the rationale for the sample populations, data collection techniques and instruments I used for this study. Of particular importance was the interplay of the five sample populations, namely the male school dropouts, teachers, school principals, WCED representatives and parents of male dropouts, and how I merged the data from these groups to gain a better understanding of school dropout. I also discussed the meticulous process which I

followed in organising and analysing the data. Finally, I demonstrated that I followed certain ethical guidelines to ensure that this study will not cause harm to any of the participants. In the next chapter, I present the data that emerged from the process as described above.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present the findings which emerged from the individual interviews and focus group discussions that I conducted with the male school dropouts, parents, teachers, school principals and representatives from the WCED. These data represent the voices of those closest to the male school dropout phenomenon at the specific schools in the greater Cape Town area of SA. These findings hinge on the three broad themes which emerged from the data and corresponded with Rumberger and Lim's (2008) framework, namely individual influences, school-related influences and family-related influences. These themes might give the idea of uniformity in the data from the different data sources; however, there was a combination of similarities and differences in certain aspects of the data from all the participant groups. As for the similarities between the data groups; these made a strong case for the categories and sub-categories which I present. These themes were constructed through a process of forming collective data categories and sub-categories, in accordance with the grounded theory process that I followed and explained in the previous chapter. I also present the data from each of the data sources simultaneously, in accordance with the process of triangulation as explained in the previous chapter. This allows for an all-inclusive representation of the influences which contribute to school dropout among males in the greater Cape Town area.

I commence the discussion of each of the influences by classifying it as either a primary or proximal influence on male school dropout. This categorisation indicates the significance of a particular influence, based on the number of participants who mentioned it. I classified an influence as a primary one if it was mentioned by more than half of all the participants, ($n = 49$), with representatives from at least three of the five participant groups. Proximal influences are those categories that have been mentioned by at least a quarter of all the participant groups, with representatives from at least two of the five participant groups. I only use this classification as a means of clarifying which influences were cited by more participants and not to say that one is more important than the other. Indeed, due to the confluence of various

influences it is hard to classify any influence as more important than another and therefore this is rather just a way of reflecting on the participants' views.

In support of the findings, I also provide excerpts from the individual interviews and group discussions as direct quotes to authenticate my presentation of the data and also add a 'human voice' thereto. In the majority of instances where the participants gave similar views I only cited a representative example thereof. For the themes which significantly differed I included more quotations to substantiate the different perspectives on a topic. On a practical level, I used round brackets '(...)' for the words which I have added to clarify participants' messages and square brackets '[...]' to indicate the original Afrikaans language words in which most of the participants spoke. Finally, ellipses (...) were used to indicate where direct words from a specific participant were left out where they were deemed irrelevant to the specific context.

To identify the sources of the quotes I allocated codes and numbers to each of the 49 participants in this study. Specifically, each population group has their own code which is made up of a combination of the first letter of the words describing the group and then each participant within the group has their own number. For example, a male dropout is identified as MD, a female teacher as FT and a school principal as SP. These codes are used to identify the group and to safeguard the confidentiality of all the participants.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that this chapter is a description of the key themes and categories and not an interpretation of the data. The interpretation of the data is provided in the following chapter (Chapter 5). Next, I present the personal and demographic details of the participants of this study. These data provide the context and background of the five groups who participated in this study.

4.2 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

In this section I offer a brief profile, in table form, of each of the five sample groups of this study (see Table 4.1). These data are useful in providing background and context to the participants and some of the information is also useful in supporting certain findings. For example, one of the findings indicate that parents lack the skills to support their children academically and when one then looks at the parent participants' own education (as indicated in their profiles) it serves as further support to this finding. Next, I discuss the profiles of the male dropout participants followed by the other four groups.

4.2.1 Male school dropouts

Table 4.1 outlines the male dropout (MD) participants' number, gender, age at the time of the interview, population group, month and year when they last attended school and the grade they were in when they dropped out. I discuss each of these groups and also occasionally refer to them again in some of the arguments I formulate later in this chapter. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the profiles of the 17 male dropout participants.

Table 4.1: Participant number, gender, age, population group, month and year when dropped out, and grade when dropped out

Participant number	Gender	Age at interview	Population group	Month and year when dropped out	Grade when dropped out
MD 1	Male	22	Coloured	Feb 2012	9
MD 2	Male	18	Coloured	Feb 2013	10
MD 3	Male	20	Coloured	Jun 2014	10
MD 4	Male	19	Coloured	Jul 2013	9
MD 5	Male	21	Coloured	Dec 2013	12
MD 6	Male	18	Coloured	Dec 2013	9
MD 7	Male	18	Coloured	Jul 2013	9
MD 8	Male	16	Coloured	Jul 2013	8
MD 9	Male	20	Coloured	Dec 2013	11
MD 10	Male	18	Coloured	Feb 2014	9
MD 11	Male	18	Coloured	Oct 2014	9
MD 12	Male	18	Coloured	Jun 2014	9
MD 13	Male	18	Coloured	Jun 2015	11
MD 14	Male	18	Coloured	Dec 2013	9
MD 15	Male	22	Coloured	Dec 2012	10
MD 16	Male	18	Coloured	Nov 2014	9
MD 17	Male	18	Coloured	Nov 2013	8

4.2.1.1 Gender

All of the dropouts (100%) who participated in this study were male. This is not a significant finding as it was part of the criteria for being included in this sample. However, it serves as a

confirmation that the participants fitted the criteria for the sample and that the findings are relevant for this particular gender group. As explained in the first two chapters of this study, there are different reasons why males and females drop out of school. For example, there is already a significant amount of African research about school dropout among females, especially in relation to adolescent pregnancy (Munsaka, 2009). On the other hand, less is known about the most prominent influences for school dropout among males. Therefore, the sole inclusion of male school dropouts as participants is in accordance with the aims of this study.

4.2.1.2 Age at time of interview

The median age for the male dropout participants was 19 years, the oldest participant being 22 and the youngest 16 years of age. More specifically, 10 of the 17 participants (59%) were 18 years old, six were between the ages of 19 and 22 years (35%), and one was younger than 18 years old (6%). This meant that I needed parental permission to conduct an interview with one participant. Parental permission was granted. Apart from providing background for the participants, these data are important as they illustrate that none of the participants were still obliged to attend school (under the South African law) and therefore they were 'legitimately' no longer in school. Finally, being over-age in a particular grade can be an influence for school dropout, although this is not an implication of this finding. Still, I discuss this particular influence later in this chapter.

4.2.1.3 Population group

All of the male dropouts (100%) who participated in this study were from the Coloured population group. Although a small percentage of learners from other population groups also attended the two sample schools, these individuals mostly live in other communities and commute to these schools. Because these samples were only taken from the immediate communities where the schools are located, the chances for having male dropouts from other population groups were slender. Therefore, the fact that all the male dropout participants (100%) were from the Coloured population group is not a major finding but rather a confirmation of the geographical area where the study was undertaken. It does, however, limit the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalised to other schools and communities.

4.2.1.4 Month and year when dropped out

All the male dropout participants left school between February 2012 and June 2015. This time frame was part of the selection criteria as individuals should have last attended the selected schools no longer than three years before or not earlier than January 2012. The reason was that their recollection of school and the dropout related factors should still be fairly fresh in their memories. Although these data are also not significant in terms of being an influence on school dropout, they do provide the context for the maximum period since the male dropout participants left school and their subsequent experiences of this particular time. With this in mind, the male school dropouts all fitted this criterion and their memory of the influences which accompanied their dropout does not go further back than the time indicated.

4.2.1.5 Grade when dropped out

Two of the participants (12%) dropped out in Grade 8, nine of them (53%) in Grade 9, three in Grade 10 (18%), two in Grade 11 (12%) and one when he was at the end of Grade 12 (6%). Although the grades during which the participants dropped out are spread among all five grades, more than half (53%) of the participants dropped out in Grade 9. This is significant since it illustrates that Grade 9 is a year during which more males drop out of school when compared to the other grades; it indicates a detectable time during which individuals within the particular profile leaves the school system. There are various reasons for this phenomenon that have to do with both individual, school and family factors and I discuss these later in this chapter under the sub-categories of struggling academically and grade failure.

4.2.2 Teachers

The teachers who participated in the study were all employed at one of the two schools included in this study. Table 4.2 shows the information regarding this group's gender, age, population group, highest qualification, current position at the school and years in education. I discuss each of these groups in an effort to provide the context for the teacher participants. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the profiles of the 17 teacher participants.

Table 4.2: Teachers' number, gender, age, population group, position at school and years in education

Participant number	Gender	Age	Population group	Current position at school	Years in education
FT 1	Female	56	Coloured	Grade head	34
FT 2	Female	22	Coloured	Teacher	1
FT 3	Female	24	Coloured	Teacher	3
FT 4	Female	54	Coloured	Teacher	32
FT 5	Female	59	Coloured	Teacher	38
FT 6	Female	54	Coloured	Teacher	35
FT 7	Female	55	Coloured	Teacher	35
FT 8	Female	43	Coloured	Teacher	11
FT 9	Female	56	Coloured	Grade head	35
FT 10	Female	50	Coloured	Teacher	25
FT 11	Female	50	Coloured	Teacher	27
MT 1	Male	23	Coloured	Teacher	0.5
MT 2	Male	58	Coloured	Grade head	35
MT 3	Male	59	Coloured	Grade head	37
MT 4	Male	59	Coloured	Deputy principal	34
MT 5	Male	50	Coloured	Grade head	26
MT 6	Male	59	Coloured	Grade head	37

4.2.2.1 Gender

Six of the teachers participants were male (35%) and 11 were female (65%). The reason for this is mainly that the female teachers were more willing to participate in the study, especially at one of the two schools that were involved. A further illustration of this willingness is the fact that five of the six male teachers who participated were grade heads, which implies that I specifically asked them to participate. In terms of the main aim of this study, this was not a significant finding apart from giving context to the findings and also perhaps illustrating that female teachers were more open to participate in research at these schools.

4.2.2.2 Age

The average age of the participants was 46 years with the youngest being 22 and the oldest 59 years old. Only three of the participants were in their twenties (18%), none in their thirties (0%), one in her forties (6%) and 13 were 50 years or older (76%). Therefore, most of this group were in a later stage of their life and career, with a small portion being younger than 40 years of age. The reason for these high ages could have been that the grade heads were involved; however, it seems as if this was not the reason because six of the teachers (35%) who were older than 50 were not in the mentioned position. A possible explanation is found in the current situation at many previously disadvantaged schools where a big part of the teacher corps is close to retirement and it is a challenge to attract and maintain young teachers. In itself, the high average age of the teacher participants (46 years) is also an important part of the profiles of the teachers as it is indicative of the school system in which they were educated prior to 1994 when education for individuals from the Coloured population group was of a poor standard. Finally, the average age could possibly also say something about these teachers' enthusiasm and willingness to offer additional support to struggling male learners, especially if the learners seem defiant and unmotivated to be in class. This comes down to the relationship between teachers and learners, a topic I discuss later in this chapter in the section on school influences.

4.2.2.3 Population group

All the teachers (100%) were from the Coloured population group. There was only one non-Coloured teacher among all the staff at the two schools involved in this study and therefore this is not a significant finding. The main reason for this has to do with the pre-1994 regime in SA where these schools, situated in marginalised communities, almost exclusively attracted teachers from similar backgrounds. Even though there are many teachers at these schools who do not live in the communities where the schools are located they come from areas that are very similar. This demography illustrates that the data from this group should be accurate in terms of the ethnic and social perspective they have regarding the factors influencing school dropout among the specific group represented in this study.

4.2.2.4 Current position at school

In terms of position at the school, the teacher participants included one deputy principal of a school (6%), six grade heads (35%) and 10 teachers (59%) who did not have any additional

management responsibilities. The main reason for this mixture is the selection criterion that stipulated that the grade heads recruit one other class teacher from that grade to attend the group discussions. This worked well at the one school but at the other I struggled to get the grade heads together at the same time and eventually only one of them attended but they recruited enough other teachers representing all the grades. Overall, the teacher participants were well represented in terms of their position at the schools and the grades they taught. Therefore, the data as collected from them are well represented in terms of the different grades and levels of school management, considering that the school principals also participated in separate individual interviews.

4.2.2.5 Years in education

Finally, the average number of years that the participants had been in education was 26 years, and 11 of the participants (65%) had been teachers for 25 years or longer. This finding is significant as it illustrates how experienced the average teacher participants were; it implies that they made contributions to this study based on ample experience. This finding also indicates that the biggest percentage of participants were born and educated before 1994, and as mentioned earlier, the South African education system that catered for people of the Coloured population group at that time was of a poor standard. Therefore, the education that most of the teacher participants had received was different from that which they are now expected to teach at their schools and this could have an influence on the academic guidance and support learners receive. Similar to the effect of the teacher participants' age, this could also indicate that they are not as enthusiastic to build positive relationships with learners, especially those who seem disruptive, as they might have been at the beginning of their careers. I refer to these possible influences later in this chapter, under the school-related influences.

4.2.3 School principals

The two school principals who participated in this study were the principals of the two schools that formed part of this study. In Table 4.3 I provide some details about the principals' gender, age, population group, years in position and the years they had been in education at the time of the study.

Table 4.3: School principals' gender, age, population group, years in position and years in education

Participant number	Gender	Age	Population group	Years in current position	Years in education
SP 1	Male	64	Coloured	7	43
SP 2	Male	57	Coloured	5	36

4.2.3.1 Gender, age and population group

Both of the school principals (100%) were male. The average age of the principals was 61 years with the one principal being 64 and the other 57 years of age. Consequently, they were both in an advanced stage of their lives, similar to most of the teacher participants. This was not a significant finding as it is such a small sample, but it again helps to provide the context for the data as collected from them. Both school principals (100%) were from the Coloured population group, which was also not a significant finding, seeing that this is in line with the composition of the two schools.

4.2.3.2 Years in current position and in education

The school principals had, on average, been in their positions for six years, with the one having held this position for seven and the other for five years. In terms of their total years in education, these two principals had a combined total amount of 79 years of teaching experience. This was important as it showed how much experience they had of the school system, although a big part of it was in the pre-1994 system. Similar to the finding regarding the teachers, this could also be an indication that they were towards the end of their careers and maybe not overly enthusiastic to tackle the challenges posed at their schools any longer.

4.2.4 Western Cape Education Department representatives

The next group of participants comprised the representatives from the WCED. In terms of the governance of the school system, they represented the highest authority group who were part of this study. In the Table 4.4 I provide the same profile details that I used for the school principals, namely their gender, age, population group, current position, years in this position and years in education.

Table 4.4: Western Cape Education Department representatives' gender, age, population group, current position, years in current position and years in education

Participant number	Gender	Age	Population group	Current position	Years in current position	Years in education
WCED 1	Male	55	Black	Circuit Team Manager (CTM)	7	32
WCED 2	Female	25	White	Senior Educational Specialist (social worker)	2	4

4.2.4.1 Gender, age and population group

One of the participants was male and the other one female. There was a big age difference between the two participants as the one was 55 and the other 25 years of age. There is no significant meaning for any of these findings. In terms of the population groups, it was interesting that the one CTM was from the Black population group and the senior educational specialist from the White population group. This was interesting because 100% of the male dropouts, teachers, school principals and parents who participated in this study were from the Coloured population group. Therefore, the two participants with the highest authority, in terms of the WCED positions, were not representative of the rest of the participants who were either reporting to them (school principals and teachers) or being indirectly subject to their management and policies (learners and parents). This state of affairs could have an influence on the dynamics of the relationships between these officials but it is not something that came out in this study and it is therefore insignificant.

4.2.4.2 Current position

The one participant was the CTM and the other a senior educational specialist. In terms of structure, the CTM in this instance had 42 schools in his circuit. He had a team of six staff members who supported him in managing these schools, consisting of two deputy managers, one curriculum specialist, one special needs officer and two educational specialists (which included a social worker and a clinical psychologist). As for the senior educational specialist (social worker), she was the only school social worker in the circuit and therefore had to service all 42 schools in this area. This finding illustrates that both these individuals were

overwhelmed by the massive caseload they had in terms of the schools and principals, teachers, parents and learners they had to serve.

4.2.5 Parents and guardians

In this section I provide a profile of the parents and guardians who participated in this study. As explained in the previous chapter, the criterion for inclusion in this group was any parent or guardian of a male dropout who fitted the criteria for inclusion in the male dropout sample and not specifically the parents and guardians of the dropout participants. Nonetheless, this was still the most difficult participant group to recruit as many adults in these communities leave their homes for work early every day, only to return after dark as they commute to their places of work. Others were just not open to engaging in a conversation with a stranger. Eventually I managed to recruit a total of 11 female parents or guardians to participate in the study. All but one of these participants fitted the criteria for inclusion whereas one participant had a male child who was still at school but at risk of dropping out. I decided to include this participant as she was eager to participate and knew many parents in the community whose male children had dropped out. In Table 4.5 I provide the female parent's number, gender, age, population group, highest qualification, relationship with dropout, year in which the child dropped out and the grade in which the dropout occurred.

Table 4.5: Participant parents or guardians of male dropouts' participant number, gender, age, population group, highest qualification obtained, relationship with dropout, year their child dropped out and grade the child dropped out of school

Participant number	Gender	Age	Population group	Highest qualification obtained	Relationship with male dropout	Year child dropped out	Grade child dropped out
FP 1	Female	58	Coloured	Grade 12	Biological mother	2013	10
FP 2	Female	29	Coloured	Grade 11	Guardian (sister)	2012	9
FP 3	Female	30	Coloured	Grade 8	Foster mother	2013	8
FP 4	Female	58	Coloured	Grade 9	Foster mother	2015	10
FP 5	Female	53	Coloured	Grade 7	Foster mother	2013	11
FP 6	Female	54	Coloured	Grade 4	Biological mother	2014	8
FP 7	Female	58	Coloured	Grade 9	Biological mother	2015	8
FP 8	Female	46	Coloured	Grade 8	Biological mother	At-risk son still at school	9 (currently)
FP 9	Female	59	Coloured	Grade 9	Biological mother	2012	12
FP 10	Female	42	Coloured	Grade 10	Biological mother	2015	9
FP 11	Female	32	Coloured	Grade 10	Biological mother	2015	8

4.2.5.1 Gender

All of the 11 parent and guardian participants (100%) were female, despite the fact that I specifically also tried to recruit males. According to the female participants, this was because males were generally uninvolved in their children's lives and many females had to take the

primary responsibility for their children. During the time of my study I also observed that many adult males were standing around in the streets during the day in both the communities where I conducted this study and therefore I also found it strange that none of them were interested in participating in the study. These findings can be seen as an indication of the low levels of male involvement in these communities and I specifically discuss this topic of male involvement and single-parent families as an influence on school dropout later in this chapter.

4.2.5.2 Age

The median age for the parent participants was 47 years of age, with the youngest being 29 and the eldest 59 years of age. More specifically, three were younger than 40 (27%), two were between 40 and 50 (18%) and six were older than 50 years of age (55%). Of the three participants who were younger than 40 (29, 30 and 32), only one was a biological mother, which implies that she had her child when she was a teenager. The other two were the primary caregivers for male dropouts from a young age. Of the older than 50 years' group, four were biological mothers, which implied that they were at least older than 30 when they had their male child who dropped out. Therefore, it seems as if nearly half of the participants (45%) were either younger than 20 or older than 30 years of age when they had their children who dropped out. This could have had an influence on their parenting styles but this topic was not explored to such an extent that it could be cited as a significant finding. Rather, it provides the context for the data that I collected from this participant group.

4.2.5.3 Population group

All the parents and guardians (100%) who participated in this study were from the Coloured population group. As explained earlier in this section, this information is not significant as most of the residents from the two communities which were involved in this study are from this population group. What this implies is that these parents were also, like the teacher participants, subject to a political system where they received inferior opportunities, especially in terms of their educational. I discuss this aspect in more detail under the next point.

4.2.5.4 Highest qualification obtained

On average, the highest educational qualification attained by the female parent participants in this study was Grade 9. Only one parent had completed her school career (9%) while eight

had dropped out in high school (73%) and the other two only went to primary school (18%). This information illustrates the low educational level of these specific female parents but also of most adults in the two communities represented in this study. This again has to do with the era in which they grew up when they did not have access to quality education. This is an important finding as one of the influences on school dropout is the educational resources that parents can offer their children; therefore this finding implies that parents were not able to provide such support. I discuss this aspect further under the section on family influences, later in this chapter.

4.2.5.5 Relationship with male dropout

Seven of the participants were biological mothers (64%), three were foster parents (27%) and the other one participant a guardian (9%). This indicates that most of the participants (64%) were the biological mothers of male dropouts, which is a positive factor in the sense that it indicates that these children grew up with at least one biological parent. I also discuss this point later in this chapter under the category of family influences.

4.2.5.6 Grade and year in which child dropped out

The female parent's male children dropped out when they were in various grades: four were in Grade 8 (36%), two in Grade 9 (18%), two in Grade 10 (18%), one in Grade 11 (9%) and one in Grade 12 (9%). The one other participant was still in Grade 9 (9%) at the time of the interview. This confirmed that most males dropped out between Grades 8 and 10 (72%), as also illustrated in the data of the male dropout participants. In terms of the years during which the dropout occurred, four of the participants' children dropped out in 2015 (36%), one in 2014 (9%), three in 2013 (27%), two in 2012 (18%), and then one participant's child was still at school (9%). This is not a significant finding but rather a confirmation that these participants did indeed fit the specific criterion for inclusion in this study.

In section 4.2 I presented the profiles of all the participants in this study. This information provides the background and context for the data which are to follow. I present that data as provided on the influences on male school dropout in section 4.3 below.

4.3 INFLUENCES ON SCHOOL DROPOUT

In this section I present the data on the influences on school dropout as obtained through the individual and group interviews I conducted. As explained at the beginning of this chapter, I present these findings on the basis of three broad themes with subsequent categories and sub-categories. In Table 4.6 I summarise the elements of the first theme with subsequent categories and sub-categories, followed by a discussion on the basis of headings that correlate with the table.

4.3.1 Individual influences

Individual influences is the one main theme that emerged from the data and it comprises those factors that have to do with the male dropouts themselves, as opposed to influences that have to do with structures or systems they form part of (Rumberger, 2011). This theme is divided into sections, according to the specific categories and sub-categories as constructed from the combined data of the male dropouts, teachers, school principals, representatives from the WCED and the parents. Table 4.6 illustrates the individual influences as they emerged from this study.

Table 4.6: Individual influences according to themes, categories and sub-categories

THEMES	CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
4.3.1 Individual influences	4.3.1.1 Educational performance	4.3.1.1.1 Struggling academically 4.3.1.1.2 Grade failure
	4.3.1.2 Engagement	4.3.1.2.1 Missing classes 4.3.1.2.2 Absenteeism
	4.3.1.3 Problem behaviour	4.3.1.3.1 Misbehaviour at school 4.3.1.3.2 Substance abuse
	4.3.1.4 Peers	4.3.1.4.1 Being bullied 4.3.1.4.2 Gangs

As illustrated in Table 4.6, there are four main categories within this theme: educational performance, engagement, problem behaviour, and peers. Secondly, there are a range of sub-categories within each of these main categories and I describe the findings relating to each of

these in detail. Next, I commence with the description of the findings which relate to the influences on school dropout that can be classified under educational performance.

4.3.1.1 Educational performance

This category includes the elements relating to educational performance which influences school dropout among males. More specifically, there were two influences which emerged from the data that fall within this category: struggling academically and grade failure. Next, I describe these sub-categories in the way they were presented by the participants in this study.

4.3.1.1.1 Struggling academically

All five participant groups in this study referred to struggling academically as an influence on male school dropout and it was classified as a primary influence. The male dropouts explained what the effect of their academic struggles was (feeling bad about themselves) and three of the other participant groups unpacked the foundational reasons why males struggle academically (lack of numeracy and literacy skills). Combined, these perspectives provide insight into the influence that academic struggles have on school dropout among males.

According to the male dropouts, academic struggles were an important reason why they dropped out of school. This made them feel as if they did not have a choice to continue with school as it was not within their capacity to progress through the grades and eventually complete school.

Relevant excerpts are provided below, as well as in the sub-sections that follow, as explained earlier.

Teacher would maybe tell me, 'Shane, fill this in.' Then I would struggle a long time and then I would ask, 'Teacher, come closer, come stand here.' Then I will take an hour to complete that page and so but with time I progressed ... at least I can read and write and so. It was very hard and I could not see that I would make matric ... MD 14

[Juffrou sal miskien vir my sê, 'Shane, vul die in.' Dan sal ek baie lank sukkel en dan sal ek vra: 'Juffrou, kom nader, kom staan hier.' Dan sal ek 'n uur vat om daai blaai in te vul en so maar ek het met tyd gevorder ... ek kan ten minste lees en skryf en so. Dit was baie hard en ek het nie vorentoe gesien dat ek miskien matriek sal maak ...]

To me the school work became too much. To me it started feeling as if I could not go on (because of academic struggles). Then I felt I must leave the school. MD 13

[Vir my het die skoolwerk te veel geraak. Vir my het dit begin voel ek kan nie meer uithou nie (vanweë akademiese gesukkel). Toe voel ek maar ek moet die skool los.]

These narratives illustrate how participants felt that they did not have the ability to progress academically. This sentiment led to feelings of helplessness which probably also affected their self-perception and confidence.

The teachers who participated in this study had strong feelings about the influence of struggling academically. In fact, this was the only influence which teachers mentioned in terms of educational performance and therefore highlights the significance thereof.

They are not ready for high school. He (dropout) arrives here and he does not understand what I am busy with in class ... He cannot read properly, he cannot express himself properly, he cannot calculate correctly. Now, he stays in Grade 8 or 9 until he sees things do not work. That is the basic reason why they drop out. I do not think there are any other reasons. Academics is the strongest factor. MT 4

[Hulle is nie gereed vir hoërskool nie. Hy (skoolverlater) kom hier aan en hy verstaan nie wat ek daarmee besig is in die klas nie ... Hy kan nie behoorlik lees nie, hy kan homself nie behoorlik uitdruk nie, hy kan nie reg bereken nie. Nou bly hy so tot graad 8 of 9 tot hy sien dinge werk nie. Daai is die basiese rede waarom hul skool los. Ek dink nie daar is nog ander redes nie. Akademie is die sterkste faktor.]

The main reason is the aspect of a lack of numeric and reading skills that does not exist. Now it is a child, a boy, he is proud and he feels embarrassed in class ... it is an embarrassment to him and he does not have any support and then he leaves the system ... I now observed one of them during this exam where he literally sat with an exam paper of four or five or six pages. He could not make out anything and he basically only wrote his name ... FT 7

[Die hoofrede is die aspek van die gebrek aan syfervaardighede en die leesvaardighede wat nie bestaan nie. Nou is dit 'n kind, 'n seun, hy is trots en hy voel verneder in die klas ... dit is 'n verleentheid vir hom, hy het geen hulp nie en dan verlaat hy die stelsel ... Ek het nou hierdie eksamen 'n kind waargeneem waar hy letterlik sit met 'n vraestel

van vier of vyf of ses bladsye. Hy kan nie kop of stert uitmaak nie en hy kan basies net sy naam skryf...]

These accounts highlight the influence of poor basic numeracy and reading skills on academic performance and school dropout. There were a few teachers who specifically highlighted this issue which implies that male learners cannot progress and finish school if they cannot read and write.

Both school principals who participated in the study identified academic struggles as an influence on school dropout. Poor reading skills were also specifically highlighted as the primary reason for male learners' academic struggles and eventual dropout.

One of the main reason why learners drop out is because they do not get along academically in class ... I say again, I think the biggest evil is that they are academically not strong ... the biggest problem (academic) is the reading. I feel learners, if they cannot read, they cannot do any other subject. SP 2

[Een van die grootste redes hoekom leerders wegval is omdat hulle akademies nie in die klas die mas kan opkom nie ... Ek sê weer, ek dink die grootste ewel is dat hulle nie akademies sterk is nie ... die grootste probleem (akademies) is die lees. Ek voel leerders, as hulle nie kan lees nie, kan hulle nie enige ander vak doen nie.]

If they are academically not strong, obviously they drop out then ... they do not read well and they must protect their self-image and they must be the hero to other children. Some of these boys have been involved in fights at schools but in the back of my mind I know we are sitting with an academic problem. SP 1

[As hulle akademies nie sterk is nie, obviously, dan val hulle uit ... hulle lees nie goed nie en hulle moet hulle selfbeeld beskerm en hulle moet hero wees van ander kinders. Van hierdie seuns was al betrokke by gevegte op skool maar ek weet hier in my agterkop, hier sit ons met 'n akademiese probleem.]

From these narratives it is clear that the principals also view academic struggles as an important influence on male school dropout. Further, their academic struggles lead to losing interest in school which can lead to various forms of disruptive behaviour at school, like fighting.

The officials from the WCED added their voices to the influence that academic struggles has on school dropout among males. In breaking this issue down, they referred to the fact that many of the male dropouts' academic abilities are not even on the level where they can pass grades in a mainstream school, but because there are so few alternative schools available they do not have a choice but to try and cope. This, almost inevitably, eventually leads to the dropout of these males.

They (boys who drop out) struggle academically ... and they actually do not even fit in the main stream ... Therefore, it is by far the academic system that makes that children drop out. WCED 2

[Hulle sukkel akademies ... eintlik nie in die hoofstroom eers pas nie ... So dit is by vër die akademiese stelsel wat maak dat die kinders uitval.]

From this excerpt it is clear that the academic programme which is followed in mainstream schools are often beyond the ability of those who dropout. The reference to the problem with the system is a further indication of an underlying problem to the concern raised by these participants.

Finally, most parent participants also mentioned the prominent influence of struggling academically. A few parents also highlighted numeracy and literacy skills as a basic problem and added that this problem is already detectable at primary school. Parents also observed that learners' academic struggles were a reason for their involvement in various forms of problem behaviour at school.

Our children ... cannot really read or write when they go to high school ... their language use and all those things are bad, bad, bad ... the problem is actually that they cannot read and write because at primary school the foundation was not correctly laid.

FP 10

[Onse kinders ... kan nie eers rërig lees en skryf nie, as hul na die hoërskool toe gaan ... hulle taalgebruik en al daai dinge is swak swak, swak, swak ... ding is eintlik hulle sukkel met kinders wat nie kan lees en skryf nie want op laerskool word die grondvlak nie reg gelë nie.]

The reason why they start smoking dagga ... many of them cannot read, they come from the primary school and they are academically not strong ... FP 7

[Die rede hoekom hulle ook begin dagga rook ... baie van die kinders kan nie reg lees nie, hulle kom van 'n laerskool af, hulle is nie akademies sterk nie ...]

These narratives again highlighted the problem of reading skills as well as the link between this problem and learners' involvement in negative behaviour such as substance abuse. It affects the male dropouts as they are frustrated because of their struggle with academic work and then they turn to negative behaviour such as substance abuse.

In this section I have illustrated that struggling academically is an influence for school dropout among males. This was confirmed by all five participant groups who were part of the study. More specifically, school dropout is influenced by poor literacy and numeracy skills which have their origin in primary school. The academic struggles also lead to negative behaviour such as fighting and substance abuse which further contributes to the school dropout process. Put simply, struggling academically is a significant direct and indirect influence on school dropout among males.

4.3.1.1.2 Grade failure

Grade failure is a proximal influence on male school dropout as some of the male dropout participants and all the other participant groups, except the parents, mentioned grade failure as an influence on school dropout. Both the male dropout participants and a school principal referred to the dropouts' frustration of not making academic progress, being older than their classmates because of multiple grade failures, and the combined effect of these realities on their self-image and morale. The teachers and WCED representatives spoke about the policies that contributed to the effect that grade failure had on school dropout. Although these factors resemble some of the issues mentioned under the previous sub-category, I discuss them as a separate influence because they were explicitly cited by the mentioned participant groups.

Firstly, the male school dropouts mentioned grade failure as a direct influence on their decision to leave school. In fact, some participants referred to grade failure or retention as the main reason why they dropped out. These participants talked about the frustrations of staying behind in a grade when classmates progressed to the next grade and particularly when this

happened repeatedly. The participants felt embarrassed about the direct consequences of being older than classmates.

When I failed the first time, I said to myself that I cannot sit like this much longer. Every year, your friends go and you stay. Then you get new friends, as you fail. Then I said to myself, 'I will not be able to continue like this. If I cannot go to the next standard then I am going to leave.' That is how I left school. (MD 4)

[Toe ek die eerste keer druip, toe het ek vir myself gesê ek gaan nie nog lank so kan sit nie. Elke jaar, jou vriende gaan, en jy bly. Dan kry jy nuwe vriende, soos jy mos nou druip. Toe het ek vir myself gesê: 'Ek gaan nie so kan aangaan nie. As ek nie na die volgende standerd kan gaan nie dan gaan ek maar los.' So het ek skool gelos.]

Jokes were made of us who were too old at school, all those things. Then I thought, 'No man (I am going to leave).' Then we said to each other, 'No man, these are a bunch of children who are here in the class.' Like, we are the oldest in the class. (MD 1)

[Jokes word gemaak van ons wat oud is op die skool, almal daai goeters. Toe het ek maar gedink: 'Nee man (ek gaan eerder skool verlaat).' Dan sê ons vir mekaar, 'Naai man, die is net 'n klomp kinders wat hier in die klas is.' Like, ons is die oudste in die klas.]

These narratives illustrate that grade failure directly influenced dropout among these participants. It seems as if the combination of repetitive grade failure and then being in class with others who are much younger influenced the eventual school dropout among these male participants.

One school principal mentioned grade failure as a reason for school dropout among males. He also pointed to the influence and relationship between grade failure and being older than classmates. In addition, he highlighted the influence that grade failure has on the males' self-image and the way in which this contributes to dropout.

Many of them are two years older than the grade where they are in and in that class, especially the boys, they are extreme about the image that they portray ... I think they cannot handle it that the younger children are possibly more intelligent than them. And it is then when they realise that there is no place for them in the class ... SP 2

[Baie van hulle is twee jaar ouer vir hulle graad waar hulle in is en in daai klas wil hulle mos nou die, veral seuns, hulle is geweldig oor die beeld wat hulle uitstraal ... Ek dink nie hulle kan dit verwerk dat die kinders wat jonger as hulle is miskien meer intelligent is as hulle nie. En dit is wat hulle seker agterkom, daar is nie 'n plek vir hulle in die klas ...]

As underlined in this quotation, being older than classmates because of grade failure influences school dropout. It affects males' self-image as they feel embarrassed about being in the class with younger children, and it eventually makes them feel unwelcome in their class and school.

Another important point that relates to grade failure was provided by a school principal, teachers and WCED representatives. This had to do with the national policy which stipulates that learners can only fail once in a phase, even if they do not have the academic competencies to do so.

Another reason for the dropout is the educational system. These children do not pass, but they are promoted (to the next grade). Now, he gets passed on and passed on, he cannot cope (and then drops out)! FT 5

[Nog 'n rede vir die skoolverlaat is die onderwysstelsel. Hierdie kinders word mos nou, hy slaag nie, maar hy word mos nou oorgesit. Nou word hy aangepass en aangepass, hy kan nie cope nie (en val dan uit)!]

Let me say, if a learner failed in Grade 7, he knows then he must pass Grade 8 and 9 and that he will only fail again in Grade 10. So now he gets to Grade 10 and then will probably fail again, then he knows he goes to Grade 11 and he cannot fail in Grade 11 so he goes to Grade 12. Where does that leave us (in terms of motivating children to excel academically)? SP 2

[Kom ek sê, as 'n leerder in graad 7 gedruip het, hy weet dan hy moet graad 8 en graad 9 slaag so hy gaan nou in graad 10 kan hy eers weer druipe. So nou kom hy graad 10 toe en dan gaan hy seker nou weer druipe, dan weet hy hy gaan graad 11 toe en hy kan nie in graad 11 druipe nie so hy gaan graad 12 toe. Waar laat dit vir ons (in terme van motivering vir leerders om akademiese te presteer)?]

From these quotations it is clear that the teachers and school principals alike were of the opinion that the curriculum and the promotion policy influence school dropout among males. This policy makes learners less motivated to work hard and leaves teachers with learners in their classes who are not on the required academic levels. Put simply, being passed from one grade to another without having the academic skills to do so also does not help to keep learners in school.

The findings from this section seem to illustrate that grade failure influences school dropout among males. Being older than the other learners in class causes embarrassment and makes male learners feel unwelcome; eventually this influences their decision to leave school. The policy of promoting learners from one grade to another without their reaching the required standards (as an alternative to failing) is also something that was cited as an influence for male school dropout.

4.3.1.2 Engagement

Engagement refers to the influences on school dropout which relate to the attitudes and actions that determine how much time an individual spends at school or is involved with school-related activities. In this study, two sub-categories relating to engagement as an influence on school dropout emerged: missing classes and absenteeism. In the following subsections I present these two influences as described by the different sample groups in this study.

4.3.1.2.1 Missing classes

Missing classes was cited as a proximal influence as male dropouts and parents stated that missing classes, or 'bunking', as many of them called it, was an influence on school dropout. Both these groups referred to the negative effect that missing classes had on academic progress and indicated that it was part of the culture of the schools they attended.

Many of the male dropout participants described how they regularly attended school but were not in class. This behaviour started as a trivial act of mischief which then eventually became a habit, leading to more time outside than inside the classroom. It had a direct influence on their academic progress and their overall commitment towards their schools and education in general.

... I saw that nothing happened with me when I stayed outside of class, I can do it every day. The next day I stayed out of many classes for a few days. Bunk three or four periods per day. Thereafter I started bunking the whole day. I am at the school but I bunk the whole day. It started getting worse. Later you don't even want to come to school anymore and then you stay at home for two weeks, and then you come to school again. MD 6

[... sien ek daar word niks met my gedoen nie, ek bly buite die klas, ek kan dit mos elke dag doen. Die next dag bly ek sommer weer 'n paar dae uit 'n klomp klasse uit. Bunk sommer drie of vier periodes per dag. Agterna dan begin ek sommer 'n hele dag te bunk. Maar ek is op die skool maar ek bunk die hele dag. Dit raak al erger. Agterna dan wil jy nie eers meer skool toe kom nie, dan bly jy sommer twee weke by die huis, dan kom jy weer skool toe.]

In the class maybe you get to the teacher and now I say, 'No, I am not keen on this teacher.' Now my friend says he is also not keen so now we both bunk. But on Fridays we permanently bunked, always during the last period. MD 11

[In die klas ook miskien nou, ons kom by die meester nou sê ek: 'Nei, ek is self nie lus vir die meester nie.' Nou sê die tjommie miskien nou self hy is nie lus nie nou bunk ons al twee sommer saam. Maar Vrydaes het ons perme gebunk, altyd die laaste periode.]

I was out of the class too much. That was the problem because I wasted my time at school. Then I rather left school. MD 13

[Ek was te veel buite die klas gewees. Daai was die probleem want ek mors my tyd op die skool. Toe los ek maar die skool.]

These narratives illustrate that missing classes was an influence on the school dropout of the male dropout participants. It seemed as if missing classes was something that happened in groups and that learners got away with it easily. Some made it sound as if it was a legitimate option to spend time outside of classes at their schools. Combined, this eventually contributed to their leaving the school system.

The parent participants stated that missing classes had an influence on dropout among males. However, they mentioned that this problem was exacerbated by teachers sending children out of the classroom and not wanting them in their classes. Therefore, missing classes often

started with not being allowed in class and this then led to an involvement in other activities during class times.

They bunked classes and then they smoked dagga. When we see them outside then we try and get them into the class. Now some of them were rude with the teachers, the Do-Not-Want-To-Listens (name of school gang) ... and then I get one of them, 'Why are you not in the class?' 'No, auntie Sally, the teacher does not want me in class.' Now I go to the teacher, now the teacher tells me, 'Yes, I do not want him in my class, he is a gangster and he is rude.' FP 9

[Hulle het klasse gebunk, dan het hulle dagga gerook. As ons vir hulle buitekant sien, nou probeer ons vir hulle in die klas kry. Nou van hulle was onbeskof met die onderwysers, die Williehories (naam van skool bende) ... en dan kry ek een van hulle: 'Hoekom is jy nie in die klas nie?' 'Nee, antie Sally, die juffrou wil my nie in die klas hê nie.' Nou gaan ek na die onderwyser, nou sê die onderwyser vir my: 'Ja, ek wil hom nie in die klas he nie, hy is 'n gangster en hy is onbeskof.']

Do you know how many children bunk, how many children sit outside and who influence the other children? And that is the Grade 8s ... see them standing at the garage. Then Mr Jones and Mr Walker come and they run after the children, all around the toilets with those two teachers ... that is not right. FP 9

[Weet julle hoeveel kinders bunk, hoeveel kinders wat buite sit en wat die kinders beïnvloed? En dit is is graad 8'ies ... sien hulle staan by die garage. Toe kom mnr. Jones en mnr. Walker, en hulle hardloop hier agter die kinders al om die toilets met daai twee onderwysers ... is mos nie reg nie.]

These narratives illustrate that some teachers would not allow male learner dropouts in their classes and when the learners bunked they got involved in illegal behaviour like smoking cannabis, commonly called 'dagga'. Although parents were aware of these incidents they felt powerless in addressing this issue and it eventually contributed to the dropout of their children.

Missing classes is an influence for school dropout, as illustrated in this section. This behaviour has an influence on academic performance but also provides an opportunity for learners to get involved in negative behaviour, like smoking cannabis. Interestingly, none of

the teachers, headmasters or representatives from the WCED referred to missing classes as an influence for school dropout or even cited it as a problem at the particular schools. This could be because they do not perceive missing classes as an influence on school dropout or that they have become accustomed to it. Another reason can be that teachers and principals are indeed the perpetrators in terms of this influence and not willing to admit it. Nevertheless, this remains an important insight as the male dropouts viewed missing classes as such an important influence.

4.3.1.2.2 Absenteeism

With the exception of the school principals, all the other participant groups cited absenteeism as an influence on school dropout among males. Participants especially referred to the influence that absenteeism has on academic performance and noted that it often serves as an indicator for those who are at risk of dropping out.

Many of the male dropout participants described absenteeism as an influence on their eventual dropout. Missing classes was cited as the initial act that eventually led to a habit of absenteeism or truancy. Another reason why some participants were chronically absent was that they did not want to go back to school to face possible disciplinary actions against them. Male dropouts also explained how they tricked their parents or guardians into thinking that they were still attending school while they were chronically absent.

So we are not in class for weeks, for a few months we are not in class and so we miss school work ... Become further and further behind with work and at the end of the day you know you can never go back ... MD 8

[So is ons nie vir weke in die klas nie, vir 'n paar maande nie in die klas nie en so mis ons skoolwerk ... Raak al verder en verder agter met die werk tot aan die einde van die dag dan weet jy jy kan nie eers teruggaan nie ...]

For a few days I made as if I was going to school but then I did not go to school, then I went to sit at a friend (friend's house) or so ... tonight when my auntie gets home then she asks me, 'Where were you today, I hear you were not in school?' ... then I tell her, 'I was at school.' MD 13

[Ek het paar dae gemaak of ek skool toe gaan, dan gaan ek nie skool toe nie, dan gaan sit ek by 'n vriend (se huis) of so ... vanaand as my antie by die huis kom dan vra sy:

'Waar was jy, ek hoor jy was nie in die skool nie?' ... dan sê ek weer: 'Ek was skool toe.']

I told her (mother) that something happened here at school. But I only told her later, she thought I was at school the whole year, writing exams and those kinds of things ... I was there at my friends' (house) and then we had drinks the whole time, until the school came out. I pretended that I do go to school. MD 17

[Ek het vir haar (moeder) gesê hier het iets gebeur hier by die skool. Maar ek het vir haar na die tyd gesê, sy het gedink ek was heel jaar in die skool, exams geskryf en daai goed ... toe was ek daar by my vriende toe vat ons drinks die heeltyd, tot die skool uitkom. Gemaak of ek skool toe gaan.]

These narratives illustrate how absenteeism had an influence on school dropout among this participant group. It directly affected their academic progress as they missed school work and also became involved in negative behaviour. The consequences of the negative behaviour also contributed to their not wanting to go back to school because of disciplinary actions that were awaiting them. The reference to regular absenteeism or even being absent for weeks or months also indicates that chronic absenteeism seemed to be a common occurrence for male dropouts.

A limited number of teachers, one school principal and some parents referred to absenteeism as a reason why males drop out of school. The influence of absenteeism on academic performance was mentioned and it was also cited as a good indicator for school dropout.

You can see those who stay absent, they don't come back and then in Grade 9 they are gone ... if you stay absent then you struggle more and more and the more you struggle the greater the frustration becomes. MT 4

[Jy kan sien hulle wat so afwesig bly, hulle kom terug en dan graad 9 is hulle weg ... as jy afwesig bly dan sukkel jy al meer en hoe meer jy sukkel hoe groter raak die frustrasie.]

They (male dropouts) are children whose parents cannot control them at all; they are children who stay out of school for 20 days, between 18 and 20 days they stay out of school. SP 1

[Dit is kinders waaroor die ouers absoluut geen beheer het nie, dit is kinders wat vir 20 dae, tussen 18 en 20 dae, buite skool was.]

From the quoted passage it is clear that absenteeism is seen as an indicator for school dropout. The more children are absent, the more they struggle academically and this leads to frustration and losing interest in school. These participant groups also seemed to blame the parents of the male dropouts for being absent.

The participants cited absenteeism as an influence on school dropout among males. Missing school means missing classes and this was detrimental to many of the males who were already struggling academically. When males stay away from school they often spend time together and become involved in negative behaviour such as using alcohol. Therefore, the data indicated that absenteeism has direct and indirect influences on male school dropout.

4.3.1.3 Problem behaviour

The involvement in problem or risky behaviour is an influence on school dropout among males. Two sub-categories emerged in this study, namely misbehaviour at school and substance abuse. Next, I present each of these topics as they emerged through the data that I collected in this study.

4.3.1.3.1 Misbehaviour at school

Misbehaviour was shown to be a proximal influence as it was mentioned by some dropouts, teachers, one school principal and some parents. Participants described how certain behaviour was associated with a potential risk of dropping out as it led to less association with the school and stronger association with negative influences outside the school.

Some of the male dropouts referred to various acts of misbehaviour they had been involved in but only a few of them made a direct connection between these acts and their eventual dropout. The misbehaviour at school often resulted in negative attention from teachers and school management with the eventual outcome being expulsion for definite or indefinite periods of time.

When I left school (dropped out), they accused me here at school of theft, that I stole cool drinks here at school. And thereafter I left school ... because I was always in

trouble at school. I gave the teachers a hard time, was awful and disobedient. Was suspended and chased away from school. MD 16

[Toe ek die skool gelos het, hulle het my hier by die skool verdink van diefstal dat ek drinks gevat het hier by die skool. En daarvandaan het ek die skool ... hoekom ek was altyd in die moeilikheid by die skool. Ek het vir die onderwysers 'n moeilike tyd gegee, was gruwelik gewees en ongehoorsaam. Was baie geskors en weggejaag van die skool af.]

That year, in Grade 8, I got suspended, the second day, for fighting. I had many problems that year, with the teachers, with the learners, and almost everyone ... the principal also ... sent me home, every day for five days of the week. MD 2

[Daai jaar, graad 8, toe word ek geskors, die tweede dag, vir baklei. Ek het baie probleme gehet daai jaar, met die onderwysers, die leerders, en so te sê met almal ... die skoolhoof ook ... stuur my huis toe, elke dag vir vyf dae van die week.]

The quoted passages illustrate how misbehaviour at school influenced school dropout among these participants. It affected them as they got suspended from school which then led to missing academic work which eventually just became too much. The legitimacy of these suspensions, on the part of the schools, is questionable. This matter is attended to in depth later in this chapter.

The teachers and one school principal viewed misbehaviour as an influence on school dropout among males. They described an evident pattern in the behaviour of most of these males as their negative behaviour became more frequent and disruptive.

One can see in their (male dropouts') behavioural patterns ... they come into conflict a lot (with teachers), they go to detention ... they go to the disciplinary committee because of transgressions and stuff, are rude towards the teachers and stuff ... they talk about drugs and so and that is an indication of the life they have out there (in the community). FT 10

[Ja, 'n mens kan aan hul (manlike skoolverlaters se) gedragpatrone sien, as hulle baie koppe stamp (met onderwysers), hulle gaan baie detensie toe ... hulle gaan tugkomitee toe as gevolg van oortredings en goed, onbeskofheid met die onderwysers en goed ... hy

gesels oor drugs en so en dit is 'n aanduiding van sy lewe wat hy daar buite het (in die gemeenskap).]

... and then they jump over walls, knock on doors, start swearing at teachers and I can tell you those guys ... those things eventually cause the children to be outside of the school, for good. SP 1

[... en dan oor die mure spring, aan deure klop, vir onderwyseresse begin vloek het en ek kan vir jou sê daai outjies ... daai lei dat die kinders eindelijk buite skool is, vir goed.]

From these quotations it is clear that there is a certain kind of misbehaviour at schools which influences school dropout among males. This kind of behaviour brings them into conflict with the school system and it seems as if they cross a certain line at some point. Once this has happened the chances are slim that they will ever play a positive role in the school system again. Through this process they also start bonding with individuals or groups with a different focus and values than that of the school which puts them even more at risk of dropping out.

More than half of the parents talked about their children's misbehaviour at school and how it contributed to their eventual dropout. They explained how this behaviour escalated to the point where they also felt helpless.

Their (the child and his friends') ways later turned against the principal, deputy principal; when I stood nearby I heard them say terrible things, mocking him (headmaster). I know, because I was at the school each day and I saw. FP 9

[Maar hulle manier (dié van die kind en sy vriende) het laterhand gedraai teen die hoof, onderhoof. Wat ek bystaan dan hoor ek sê hulle vir hom (skoolhoof) lelike goeters, tart hom uit, want ek was elke dag op die skool gewees en (het) gesien.]

As illustrated in this narrative, parents were aware of their children's misbehaviour and witnessed how it worsened. They were open and honest about this matter and many of them felt helpless about correcting or supporting their children in this process which eventually led to the children's expulsion or their voluntarily dropping out because of pressure from the school authorities.

This section illustrated that misbehaviour at school is an influence on school dropout among males. It is usually a clearly observable pattern that leads to a clash with the school system with the end being expulsion. The conflict also leads to less association with the school and increased association with individuals or groups who relate to this kind of behaviour.

4.3.1.3.2 *Substance abuse*

Substance abuse was shown to be a proximal influence as the male dropouts, teachers and one WCED representative made reference to this influence. Although the male dropouts made mention of this problem, they did not necessarily see it as a reason why they dropped out. On the other hand, the other participant groups cited substance abuse as a direct influence on school dropout. Cannabis or dagga, as it is called in the local vernacular, was a substance that was commonly used by male school dropouts.

Some of the male dropout participants described how they used substances in the time before they left school. Most of them also referred to the availability and use of substances at their schools. However, none of male dropout participants went as far as saying that substance abuse had a direct influence on their eventual dropout.

And they caught us often smoking dagga at school. We smoked (dagga) at school. Now, the Ai sits not too far from the school, the Rastaman. We run to the Rastaman. From the Rastaman we run to the school again. Then we clean our dagga and then we swing our slow-boats. Then we smoke the slow-boats at the school. From there we go straight home. MD 4

[En hulle het vir ons baie vang dagga rook ook op die skool. Ons het by die skool (dagga)gerook. Nou, die Ai sit nie ver van die skool af nie, die Rastaman. Hardloop ons na die Rastaman toe. Van die Rastaman af weer in die skool in. Dan maak ons onse dagga skoon en dan swaai ons vir ons slow-boats. Dan rook ons die slow-boats op die skool. Daarvandaan af kom ons straight huis toe.]

The last time they caught us we were at a house, we smoked okka pipe with dagga in ... the principal sent the police to the house because the children in our class told him where the house is, opposite the school. Then the police took us to school and then the principal said he had had enough of me. The next year my grandmother went to the

school herself ... then he (principal) said to my grandmother I am not allowed to come to school. MD 9

[Die laaste keer wat hulle ons vang was ons by 'n huis, toe rook ons okka pyp met dagga in ... die hoof het die polieste na die huis toe gestuur want die kinders het gepimp in die klas, waar die huis is, oorkant die skool. Toe vat die die polieste vir ons skool toe en toe sê die hoof hy het genoeg van my gehad. Die next jaar toe gaan my ouma self skool toe ... sê hy vir my ouma ek kan nie skool toe gaan nie.]

These narratives indicate that the participants' substance abuse had an influence on their dropout. It influenced their functioning and engagement with the school and also led to disciplinary action being taken against them. However, none of the male dropouts could recognise the relationship between their substance abuse and eventual dropout.

There were teacher participants and one representative from the WCED who agreed that substance abuse was a common influence on school dropout among males at their schools. More specifically, the teacher participants identified alcohol and cannabis (dagga) as substances that influenced male learners' behaviour both at school and in the community.

I do not think it is the alcohol abuse that makes them drop out but surely the abuse of drugs, that is a big influence because he now smokes drugs at the school; they are not shy anymore. He sits in the class and there's nothing going on, you can see (he used drugs). That is anything from Tik (methamphetamine) to plain dagga ... and then you can see in the class his attention is not there ... he is drugged. Therefore, he does not know what is going on in class. MT 5

[Ek dink nie dit is die drankmisbruik wat hul die skool laat verlaat nie maar seer sekerlik die misbruik van dwelms, dit is 'n groot invloed want hy rook nou al dwelms in die skool, hulle is nie meer skaam nie. Hy sit in die klas en daar gaan niks aan nie, jy kan sommer sien (hy het dwelms gebruik). Dit is nou enige iets van Tik tot gewone dagga ... en dan kan jy sien in die klas sy aandag is net nie daar nie ... hulle is gerook van die dwelms. So hy weet nie wat aangaan in die klas nie.]

From a young age, they already start to gamble, they smoke, use drugs at school and they portray these gangsters at school. I mean, I was in a class and one child actually imagined himself that he was getting high on some drug and I went to him and I was

like, 'What are you doing?' And he said to me, 'This is what I am exposed to' ... and drugs, they get addicted, and their lives evolves around getting money to get drugs. FT 3 (original quotation, not translated)

From these quotations, it is clear that drug abuse is a serious problem which is not only experienced in the community but also at schools. It affects children's ability to be present at school and to make the most of academic opportunities that are offered at school. It also directly influences their behaviour at school and it seems as if teachers feel unable to address this problem.

In this section I have shown that substance abuse is an influence on school dropout among males. It affects their physical behaviour in terms of what they do to get the substances and how they behave at school after use. Substance abuse influences male dropouts' attitude and behaviour towards school, which eventually leads to their losing interest altogether.

4.3.1.4 Peers

Peers can influence the actions and attitudes of their friends to such an extent that they eventually drop out of school. In this study, two peer-related sub-categories emerged from the data, namely being bullied and gangs. Next, I describe both these sub-categories as they developed from the data collected from the five sample groups in this study.

4.3.1.4.1 Being bullied

Being bullied was found to be a proximal influence on school dropout among males. It was mentioned by a handful of teacher and parent participants and therefore did not formally fit the criterion for inclusion. However, I decided to include it as a finding as the participants portrayed bullying as a silent, unspoken influence which gets little attention but plays a significant role in school dropout among males.

According to the teacher participants, bullying is something which usually happens to males who are withdrawn and this behaviour is often overlooked by the teachers or their parents. Boys who are bullied then drop out unexpectedly without anyone knowing why they left school.

It is usually that quiet child (who leaves school). I did not even realise it but then I came to see that there are some of those children ... who quietly leave the school because of

bullying, but we thought the child had moved or something. And years later I heard that that child had dropped out because of it (bullying). FT 2

[Dit is gewoonlik daai stil kindjie (wat die skool verlaat). Ek het dit ook nie eers besef nie maar ek kom toe agter daar is nogal van daai kinders ... wat ook die skool verlaat het as gevolg van bullying, stil-stil maar ons het nou gedink die kind het getrek of iets. En, ek het al jare daarna gehoor daai kind het verlaat as gevolg van dit (boelie).]

I have a case in my class where a boy left school because he was bullied by kids older than him. So, for me that is also a contributing factor that contributes to kids leaving. They are the kids, their parents don't have money to put them in a different school so then they just end up leaving the school because they are being bullied for food, for money and whatever. FT 3 (original quotation, not translated)

These narratives illustrate that bullying was something which happens among classmates and between older and younger grades. The usual victims of bullying do not disclose the fact to teachers or even parents in fear of being victimised and some drop out without teachers ever knowing why they left. These vulnerable learners often also come from families who do not have the social or financial means to support their children to find alternative solutions to this problem.

Parents spoke about bullying and gave examples of this kind of behaviour that was experienced by their children and others they knew. These parents also portrayed bully behaviour as something that often goes unnoticed for long periods of time, usually until it is too late. Being bullied was also referred to as something that contributes to less engagement in school and more engagement with other activities that are not conducive to school success.

The school principal said that a girl who was in his (my son's) class had told him why he (my son) did not come back to school. Because there were twins at the school that year and the twins assaulted him in the work-room ... hit him with a hammer, which is how he got the blue eye ... He (my son) did not want to go back because he is an introvert. During his teenage years he was bullied by many children. He probably felt that 'everyone does what they like with me'. ... After that he started getting involved with dagga (cannabis), he got addicted to Tik (methamphetamine) and today he is in rehab. FP 3

[Dat die hoof toe self sê, 'n meisiekind wat in sy klas was het vir die hoof gesê hoekom hy nie teruggekom het skool toe nie. Want daar was twins op die skool daai jaar en die twins het hom in die werkkamer aangerand ... met 'n hamer ook bygedam, dit is hoe hy die blou oog gekry het ... Hy wou nie teruggaan nie want hy is 'n introvert. In sy tienerjare is hy ook baie deur die kinders afgeknou. Vir hom het dit seker maar later van tyd gevoel, 'almal maak met my wat hulle wil'... Daarna het hy begin betrokke raak met dagga, hy het geraak by die Tik en vandag is hy in die rehab.]

From these quotations from teachers and parents, it can be seen that bullying is a direct and indirect influence on school dropout. It affects males directly by making them unmotivated to be at school because of the verbal and physical acts being committed against them. It indirectly influences them by making them more vulnerable to involvement in things like drugs or chronic absenteeism which then further contributes to the school dropout process. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this sub-category, this was not a significant finding as there were only a handful of participants in two groups who mentioned this influence.

4.3.1.4.2 Gangs

Involvement in gangs was cited as a primary influence on school dropout, as all the participant groups referred to this influence. Some of the respondents referred to gangs as something which lured males away from school as they could start earning an income through gang-related activities which then take precedence over school-related activities. Other respondents explained that the involvement in gangs becomes a lucrative alternative after dropout, as individuals have few other employment possibilities if they do not complete their schooling.

Many of the male dropout participants reflected on the negative influence of gangs on school dropout in their communities. Most of these participants referred to the pseudo-positive perception associated with being a gang member, especially in terms of finances, and how this entices males to join the gangs in their communities. In time, this involvement then lures them away from school as it becomes their livelihood. Interesting, however, was that most participants referred to gangs as an influence on school dropout in the lives of others they knew but not as an influence in their own dropout.

They (gangs) look what the children are in need of and then they maybe say, 'Look here, let me tell you what, I give you money then you go and sell the stuff (drugs) for me.' This causes the people to start smuggling ... children drop out of school because the child sees, for example, the one child sees maybe, 'By bro, they are busy smuggling and see how good he looks. He always has money, I am here at school and I never have money.' Now he will say to himself, 'No, but I also want money, I also want to be there, I also want to be able to dress like that.' And this could cause the child to leave school to do those things. MD 5

[Hulle (bendes) kyk basies wat die kinders te kort kom en dan sê hulle miskien nou: 'Kyk hier, kom ek sê jou wat, ek gee jou geld dan gaan verkoop jy vir my die goeters (dwelms).' Dit maak dat die mense begin smokkel ... die kinders verlaat skool because why die kind sien, maak 'n voorbeeld, die een kind sien miskien: 'My bro, hulle is besig om te smokkel maar kyk hoe goed lyk hy dan. Hy het dan altyd geld, ek is hier op die skool en ek het nooit geld nie.' Nou gaan hy vir homself sê: 'Naai, but ek wil ook geld hê, ek wil ook daar wees, ek wil ook so kan aantrek.' En daai kan maak dat die kind skool los om daai te doen.]

They must do tasks, if that man (gang leader) says you must do this and that ... when you leave school ... you get involved in the gangs, now they give you, your eyes are closed, open but you cannot see. They buy you Nike, everything from head to toe. Tomorrow they tell you, gun in the hand, 'Look, go and shoot so-and-so.' Tomorrow you go and do it and then you are sorry and then you get how many years in prison. MD 4

[Hulle moet take doen, as daai man (gang leader) sê jy moet die doen en daai doen ... jy los skool ... Jy raak betrokke by die gangs, nou hulle gee vir jou, jy is toe, jou oë is oop maar jy kan nie sien nie. Hulle koop vir jou Nike, alles van kop tot toon. More sê hulle vir jou: 'Kyk', gun in die hand, 'gaan skiet vir dinges en vir dinges.' More gaan doen jy daai en dan is jy spyt dan kry jy hoeveel jaar in die tronk.]

These narratives illustrate that gang involvement influences male school dropout. The perception is that many males grow up in needy households and therefore they are more susceptible to get involved in gangs because of the seeming opulence of the gang members. Their involvement in gangs seems to secure certain financial benefits to them although these

activities are often coupled with illegal activities which eventually deter them from attending and finishing school.

The teacher participants confirmed the observations made by the male dropout participants. They provided more insight into the perceived reason why many young males join these groups and the relationship between this influence and the lack of positive role models in these communities.

The influence of the gangs and the role models that they see ... he (dropout) has more respect for his gang than for his parents or for the teacher. He earns money and therefore it is not even necessary that he comes to school. If he comes here (school), he comes to do business (sell drugs) ... it is a financial advantage but also his role model to look up to. It is his example in life; it is his father in life. And they look well after the children, do not make a mistake, they look well after the children. Those children wear the best shoes – ‘What do you need?’ – he gets what he needs (from the gang) and the business goes on ... the gang leader here in our community, but possibly everywhere, has more influence over that child than his parent or teacher. MT 5

[Die invloed van die bendes en die rolmodelle wat hulle sien ... hy (skoolverlater) het meer respek vir sy bende as vir sy ouers of as wat hy vir die onderwyser het. Hy verdien geld so dit is nie meer nodig om skool toe te kom nie. As hy hier is dan kom hy net besigheid maak ... dit is 'n finansiële voordeel maar ook sy rolmodel om na te kyk. Dit is sy voorbeeld in die lewe, dit is sy pa in die lewe. En hulle (bendes) kyk goed na die kinders, moenie mistake maak nie, hulle kyk goed na die kinders. Daardie kinders dra die beste tekkies– ‘Wat het jy nodig?’ – hy kry wat hy nodig het en die besigheid gaan aan ... die bendeleier hier in ons gemeenskap, maar seker maar oral, het meer invloed op daai kind as wat die ouer of die onderwyser het.]

From these quotations it is clear that the gang leaders have a strong influence in these communities, mainly because of their financial success. This self-styled positive image, combined with the lack of positive male role models, makes the involvement in gangs an inevitable future step for many of the young males in these communities. After the young males become involved in a gang, the gang leaders become the strongest influence in their lives and dropping out of school is a natural next step for many of these individuals.

The school principals, WCED representatives and parents substantiated the already mentioned influence of the gangs on school dropout among males in their schools and communities. The parents in particular voiced their concern over the financial benefits that the gangs offer to their children, especially in the cases where fathers are absent.

The leader of the gang takes over the father's role ... because now he buys that expensive pair of shoes of R800 which the father and mother cannot give. Nice jackets, Nike jackets. And then, now he does not listen to his father anymore, he does not listen to his mother, he now only listens to that gangster and his gangster friends ... later he goes and works for that drug dealer. That is now what I saw because that man now takes the father's place, what the father had to do, he takes. FP 9

[Die pa se rol, die leader van die gangsters (neem dit oor)... want nou koop hy vir die kind daai dure tekkie van R800 wat die pa en die ma nie kan gee nie. Gevaarlike jackets, Nike jackets. En daar, nou luister hy nie meer na sy pa nie, hy luister nie meer na sy ma nie, hy luister nou net na daai gangster leiers en sy gangster vrinne ... later gaan werk hy vir daai drug dealer. Dit is wat ek nou gesien het want daai man vat nou die pa se plek, wat die pa moes gedoen het, vat hy.]

The gangsters, because they sell drugs they are the revered ones ... drive grand cars and all the stuff and many of the young men now feel, 'I don't have to work one day, I also want to become a drug dealer, I also want to sell drugs.' ... Because many of the boys, I have heard them as they say, 'What do you want to become one day?' Then he will say that he wants to become a drug lord. Then he says he wants to become a drug dealer because he wants to have his own car, he wants his own house, and he wants a lot of money. FP 10

[Die gangsters, omdat hulle drugs verkoop is hulle net die gevaarlike een ... hulle ry grand karre en al die goete en baie van die jongmanne het nou daai gevoel: 'Ek hoef nie eendag te werk nie, ek wil ook 'n drug dealer word, ek wil ook drugs verkoop.' ... Want baie van die seuns, ek het al gehoor soos hulle sê: 'Wat wil jy eendag word?' dan sal hy sê hy wil 'n drug lord word. Dan sê hy hy wil 'n drug dealer word want hy wil sy eie kar hê, hy wil sy eie huis hê, hy wil 'n klomp geld hê.]

These quotations underline the earlier parts of this section and confirm that the gang leaders seem to become the role models for many of the young males in these communities. Becoming a gang member is something which boys aspire to as they perceive these groups as the financially successful people in their community. And because they look up to and respect the gang leaders they are also willing to participate in behaviour the gang leaders initiate or model and this mostly clashes with school-related values and priorities.

In this section I illustrated the prominent influence that gangs have on school dropout among males. Gangs serve as both a social and a vocational group to belong to and the activities males get involved in when belonging to gangs are generally not supportive of education or school completion. It also seems as if parents and teachers feel helpless against the force of gangs in their communities and some appear to have given up the battle. It is clear that gang involvement is one of the most significant influences on school dropout among males in the selected schools and communities.

In this section I provided an overview of the important categories and sub-categories which influence male school dropout within the individual context. The aim was not to critically engage with this data but rather present it as a summarised version as a background to the discussion in the next chapter. Next, I commence with the presentation of the influences on male school dropout within the school context.

4.3.2 Influences in the school context

The second theme relates to the influences associated with the school context in which an individual finds himself. I present this theme according to one main category and the accompanying sub-categories associated with this category. Table 4.7 provides an outline of the data that are subsequently discussed.

Table 4.7: School influences according to themes, categories and sub-categories

THEME	CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORIES
4.3.2 Influences in the school context	4.3.2.1 School practices	4.3.2.1.1 Poor disciplinary climate and practices 4.3.2.2.2 Poor relationship between learners and teachers

As illustrated in Table 4.7, there was one category, school practices, with three accompanying sub-categories, that emerged from the data. I commence with the discussion of these findings which relate to the influences on school dropout within the school context.

4.3.2.1 School practices

School practices entail the general manner in which things are done at a school. In this context this category relates specifically to how these factors influence school dropout among males. In this study, there were two sub-categories relating to school practices which emerged from the data: poor disciplinary climate and illegal practices; and poor relationships between learners and teachers. Next, I discuss these sub-categories as influences on male school dropout.

4.3.2.1.1 Poor disciplinary climate and illegal practices

A poor disciplinary climate and illegal practices was found to be a primary influence on school dropout among males as the male dropouts, a school principal, the WCED representative and parents referred to this concern. The data generally indicated that a poor disciplinary climate develops as a combination of learner misbehaviour and the practices used by teachers in reaction to this type of behaviour.

The male dropout participants indicated that the disciplinary climate at their schools as well as the practices which were followed contributed to their dropout. In terms of the disciplinary climate, participants described how they were often at school but not in class and when they were in class, the situation was not conducive to learning as there was often some kind of underlying commotion going on. In terms of the disciplinary practices, participants spoke about being sent home and not being allowed back at school before bringing their parents

with them. This led to their missing school for prolonged periods; eventually they did not return to school at all.

It goes like that (disorganised) all the time. So it circulates continually and then we must run at the school if we see the teachers. Then they chase us again; then we must jump over the vibe (vibracrete wall). Then they (school) call the ADTs (security guards), or maybe the SAPs (police) come, there comes a van, then we must jump otherwise they put us out (of school). MD 8

[Dit gaan die heelyd so (gedisorganiseerd). So circulate dit aanmekaar en dan moet ons hardloop op die skool as ons die onnies sien. Dan jaag hulle ons ons weer, so moet ons spring oor die vibe (vibracrete wall). Dan bel hulle miskien die ADT's (sekuriteit), of die SAP's (polisie) kom miskien; daar kom 'n van, dan moet ons spring anders sit hulle ons uit (die skool uit).]

Your parents must come to school; if they do not come to school then you cannot come to school. But we made it difficult for our people, because they had to stay out of work each day to come to support us at school, for the things that we have done. Later they also became tired of us because they had to stay out of work every day. And that was not good, and then they (school management) chased us away from school. MD 12

[Jou ouers moet skool toe kom, as hulle nie skool toe kom nie dan kan jy nie skool toe kom nie. Maar ons het dit self moeilik gemaak vir ons mense, hoekom, hulle moet elke dag uit die werk uit bly om vir ons nou hier te kom staan by die skool, vir die dinge wat ons nou doen. Later van tyd het hulle ook moeg geraak van ons, hoekom, hulle moet elke dag uit die werk uit bly. En dit was nie kwaai gewees nie, toe jaag hulle (skoolbestuur) nou maar vir ons weg van die skool af.]

Okay, they give you a letter, you must let your mother know that she must come to school now ... Now your parent must come again and again and again. The parent also is not keen for it; you also don't want to let the parent know about it each time. Now you start staying at home. Now later the parent finds out that she had to be at school that evening. Now you also don't want to go to school anymore because you don't want to bring your parents to school each time. MD 11

[Oukei, hulle gee vir jou 'n brief, jy moet jou moeder laat weet dat sy nou moet skool toe kom. Nou moet jou ouer amper so, weer kom en weer kom en weer kom. Die ouer raak ook nie lus vir dit nie, jy wil ook nie aanmekaar die ouer laat weet van dit nie. Nou begin jy by die huis te bly. Nou agterna vind die ouer uit vanaand moes sy by die skool gewees het. Nou wil jy ook nie meer skool gaan nie want jy wil nie elke keer jou ouers bring na die skool nie.]

From these narratives, it is evident that the male dropout participants' experiences of the disciplinary culture and practices at their schools were negative. The prevalence of not being allowed to attend school meant that they missed academic work, on the one hand, and on the other, had more exposure to and time for involvement in mischievous and even delinquent behaviour. The disciplinary climate at the schools seemed to not be positively correcting behaviour but rather discouraging, pushing learners out of school.

One school principal and one representative of the WCED also mentioned the disciplinary practice of sending learners home, only to be allowed back if their parents accompanied them to school. The principal commented that this practice was something that they did out of necessity, illustrating some kind of helplessness and frustration on their part. This explanation for the schools' behaviour was confirmed but also strongly condemned by the WCED representative.

If a child gives worse problems (continues with negative behaviour) he gets sent home and he does not come to school before the parent comes to school. The parent, the primary caregiver of the child, must then come to us. In many cases the parents take a week to come; thus, that child stays (out of school) for a week. SP 1

[As 'n kind erger probleme gee (voortgaan met negatiewe gedrag) word hy huis toe gestuur en hy kom nie skool toe alvorens die ouer nie kom nie. Die ouer, die primêre opvoeder van die kind, moet dan na ons toe kom. In baie gevalle vat die ouers 'n week om te kom. So daai kind bly dan 'n week (uit die skool).]

What is happening is that schools are getting away with murder by chasing away children. They say, 'Just because your parent does not want to come here, you are not going to come to my class.' That is the example I told you about the other district. I ask them, 'How could you expel children, you have no right?' They say, 'No, we didn't

expel those boys, instead we told them, 'Go and bring your parent here to a meeting with the governing body,' and these boys refused to bring their parents to a meeting. They don't have time to look at those difficult ones. It is like the old days, in apartheid, the police wants information from you; you don't want to talk; they beat the hell out of you until you confess. It is the same thing here, they come with illegal ways, but I can understand, it is survival things, they don't have time. WCED 1 (original quotation, not translated)

These passages confirm the disciplinary challenges experienced at schools and the teachers' and school principals' inability to handle these challenges in a positive way, which causes them to resort to illegal ways of handling discipline, like not allowing learners at school. Although this strategy is illegal, it seemed as if the WCED representatives were not taking any action against those school principals who were using these practices to push male learners out of school. The following quotation from the WCED representative provided some further insight into why schools make use of such illegal disciplinary practices.

Because, to survive, there is a policy here, it says, if a matric pass rate is below 60%, your school is identified as an underperforming school. And, you know, it is not lekker (nice) to be identified as an underperforming school. You know what, when you are an underperforming school, pass rate below 60%, it is hell. Every district official visits your school, they check everything, you must be 07:30 there (at school); another unannounced one will show up there, this curriculum advisor; it is really, even a director must show up there (at school), you can't breathe. They don't look at that (how many drop out). Because if they are really really serious, we must look at the throughput. How many started Grade 8, how many we have got now in Grade 12? Then we can congratulate you that you are doing well, your school. Not to start with 300 learners and then in matric you've only got 150 learners and then all of them have passed above 60%, we say your school is doing well. Meanwhile in between, you are using tactics of culling, get them out, there are some schools that are good at culling them out so that they get out of the system. WCED 1 (original quotation, not translated)

This quotation provides a better understanding as to why school principals and management endorse disciplinary measures which are evidently leading to school dropout among males. It seems as if the goal of meeting certain Grade 12 pass rates becomes more attainable if certain learners leave school before they get to Grade 12. Therefore, it seems as if the use of illegal

disciplinary measures becomes a way of pushing learners out of school so that the school has a better chance of reaching the minimum standards as set out by the WCED.

Parent participants described their frustration with the way the schools handled discipline and how their actions influenced school dropout. This further confirmed the notion of using illegal ways, in the name of discipline, to push male learners out of school.

Now the governing body sits and the governing body pulls and pulls and pulls and we do not know where we stand and when we eventually got here (at the school), the governing body said, first the headmaster called me in, then he said he does not want my child at school anymore and that he (my child) is going to become a gangster ... And when he said that then the governing body decided, okay then I must look for another school for my child. Now, what must we do? FP 11

[Nou sit die beheerliggaaam en die beheerliggaaam trek en trek en trek en ons weet nie waar ons staan nie en toe ons nou uiteindelik hier kom, toe sê die beheerliggaaam, eers die hoof vir my ingeroep, toe sê hy hy soek nie my kind hier by die skool nie en hy (my kind) gaan 'n gangster word ... En dit het hy gesê en toe besluit die beheerliggaaam, oukei dan moet ek 'n ander skool vir my kind soek. Nou wat moet ons nou doen?]

Now that child comes to school today, now that teacher does not want that child in school today. Now I ask, 'Sir, why do you throw that child out?' 'Yes, he must bring a letter from his mother; he must bring his parents to school.' Now I say, 'Sir, the child is losing work.' Now he says, 'That is not my problem; he must first bring his parents.' FP 9

[Nou kom daai kind vandag skool toe, nou wil daai onderwysers nie die kind in die skool hê nie, in die klas hê nie. Nou sê ek: 'Meneer, hoekom sit meneer dan die kind uit?' 'Ja, hy moet 'n brief bring van sy ma, hy moet sy ouers skool toe bring.' Nou sê ek: 'Meneer die kind veloor werk.' Nou sê hy: 'Dis nie my probleem nie, hy moet eers sy ouers gaan haal.']

These narratives further illustrate the negative effect of the disciplinary practices which were being followed, as experienced by the parent participants. The effect of not being allowed at school had an influence on the participants' children's academic work and parents also felt helpless to contest the illegal actions that were taken against their children. It is evident that

the schools had the sole authority to determine whether a learner should be allowed at school or not.

4.3.2.1.2 *Poor relationships between learners and teachers*

The evidence from the data indicated that poor relationships between learners and teachers were also a primary influence on male school dropout. The nature of the relationships made learners feel unwelcome at school and teachers felt unmotivated to be at school. School principals seemed to be aware of the negative relationships between some teachers and learners but were uncertain as to how this situation should be handled or how it could be improved.

Many of the male school dropout participants referred to the negative relationships that they had with teachers and how this contributed to their dropout. Teachers' behaviour, especially the way they communicated with these participants, made them feel unwelcome at school.

Most of the teachers always pushed me down. There are a bunch of children at the school who always said, 'Most of them (teachers) push me down.' Because I bunked classes they pushed me down. They will not motivate me to come to class. They tell me, 'You can stay away tomorrow and the day after tomorrow as well.' MD 6

[Die meerderheid van die onderwysers het my altyd afgedruk. Daar is klomp kinders op die skool wat altyd daai gesê het: 'Die meerderheid van hulle (onderwysers) druk my af.' Omdat ek nou klasse bunk druk hulle vir my af. Hulle sal nie like vir my motiveer om klas toe te kom nie. Hulle sê sommer vir my: 'Jy kan more en oormore ook wegbly.']

They (teachers) drove me out. Because the teachers said they are going to get rid of me. In accordance, I was never in class, my work deteriorated and I bunked classes. The teachers like to degrade the children. That is what happened to me (before I dropped out). MD 9

[Hulle het vir my weggewerk. Want die onderwysers het gesê hulle gaan my wegwerk. Volgens my, ek was nooit in die klas nie, my werk het agteruit gegaan, en ek bunk klasse. Die onderwysers like ook die kinders afdruk. Daai het met my gebeur (voor ek skool verlaat het).]

I left school because there was a teacher at school who did not like me. That is why. Now what he did to me, I will never forget that. He jerked and pushed me around. It is just that one teacher, man. If that teacher had not acted like that towards me, then I would probably have finished school. MD 1

[Ek het die skool gelos want daar was 'n onderwyser op die skool, in die skool, wat nie van my gehou het nie. Daai is hoekom. Nou wat hy gedoen het, aan my, ek sal dit nooit vergeet nie. Hy het vir my kom ruk, hy ruk vir my in die rondte. Dis net daai onderwyser man. As daai meneer nie so met my gewees het nie, dan was ek seker nou al klaar gewees met die skool.]

From these excerpts, one can see that the school dropouts had a negative relationship with teachers because of the way they were treated. They felt as if they were being targeted by specific teachers and this demotivated them from attending school. Because of this state of affairs the school dropouts lost interest in attending school as it was an overall negative experience.

A handful of teachers talked about the negative relationships between them and some learners and how this situation contributed to school dropout. According to them, these negative relationships developed because of continual misbehaviour and because teachers feel unable to handle or engage with some male learners in a positive way. However, there were two teachers who acknowledged that they and others did indeed target the learners who gave them problems and made sure that they left school.

I don't even want to confess, you get rid of him (learner who continually misbehaves) ... You walk into your class; you make the world hot for him. That is a bit negative but it happens. You (researcher) want us to be honest. There are some of us, we get rid of you (learner). FT 1

[Ek wil nou nie eers erken nie, jy werk hom half weg (leerder wat herhaaldelik probleme gee) ... Jy loop in jou klas in, jy maak ook sommer die wêreld warm vir hom. Dis bietjie negatief maar dit gebeur. Jy (navorsers) wil mos hê ons moet openlik wees. Daar is van ons, ons werk jou (leerder) weg (van die skool af).]

Look, for that child, for that boy (who gives problems), there is nothing that we can do for that child. That child makes life for you and everyone in that class hell. And the

child makes the school difficult, so what can you do (other than use negative behaviour)? FT 4

[Kyk, aan so kind, aan so seun (wat probleme gee), is daar geen salf meer te smeer nie want ons kan niks meer vir daai kind doen nie. Daai kind maak die lewe vir jou en almal in daai klas hel. En die kind maak die skool moeilik, so wat staan jou te doen (behalwe om negatief op te tree)?]

Yes, you would not like to hear the whole day your mother's this and your mother's that. That is what they say to you. You cannot create a healthy, proper atmosphere in class and provide the right education with such children in your class. You are there to protect the other children. FT 2

[Ja, jy sal mos nie heeldag wil hoor jou ma se die en jou ma se daai nie. Dit is wat hulle vir jou sê. Jy kan nie 'n gesonde, regte atmosfeer skep in jou klas en regte opvoeding gee met sulke kinders in jou klas nie. Jy is daar om vir die ander kinders te beskerm.]

From these passages, one can see that the teachers felt helpless in handling some of the male learners in their classes. They consequently turned to negative ways of managing their classes which in turn had a negative effect on their relationships with the learners. In some instances this situation became so severe that teachers targeted specific learners and made their time at school unpleasant with the hope that they would drop out. Therefore, the negative relationships between teachers and learners were exacerbated through the behaviour of both parties involved.

Both the school principals involved in this study mentioned that teachers at their schools directly contributed to dropout among males because of the negative relationships between these parties. They confirmed the negative engagement that some teachers have with learners but also strongly condemned it as something that should not be happening at school.

Then you get a percentage of teachers who will swear at the children ... such people do not belong in education. I have a minister (who is a teacher) who throws children's bags from the second floor. I mean, I do not know where his ministry comes in, and I have summoned this person to talk to him about his ways of working. Again, that is a small percentage (of teachers), but harm done to one child is big harm done. SP 1

[Dan kry jy 'n persentasie waar die onderwyser die kind sal uitvloek ... sulke mense hoort nie in die onderwys nie. Ek het 'n predikant (wat 'n onderwyser is) wat kinders se sakke van die boonste verdieping af gooi. Ek meen, ek weet nie waar predikantskap inkom nie, ek het al die persoon ingeroep en met hom gepraat oor werkswyses. Weer eens, daai is 'n klein persentasie (van onderwysers) maar skade gedoen aan een kind is groot skade gedoen.]

I want to touch on something else as well (that influences school dropout). I think that sometimes we should not look beyond the role of the teachers with learners who drop out of school ... the teachers often play a role in the reason why children do not want to attend school. SP 2

[Ek wil iets anders ook aanraak (wat skool-uitval beïnvloed). Ek dink somtyds moet ons nie verby die rol van die onderwyser ook kyk by leerders wat die skool verlaat nie ... die onderwyser speel ook baie keer 'n rol hoekom kinders nie wil skoolgaan nie.]

These narratives further illustrate that the teachers' negative verbal and physical behaviour towards learners influenced school dropout among them. The overall feeling from the school principals' was that there were a small percentage of teachers who behaved in this way but this had a sure effect on school dropout among males.

Parents described how the negative relationships between the teachers and their (i.e. the parent participants') children manifested through the way the teachers interacted with their children. This further confirmed the significant influence that poor relationships between these parties had on school dropout.

The teacher is not there when something happens, maybe it happens at home but now he heard about it and now he says, 'No, I do not want him in my class because he is a knife stabber or a gangster.' Do you understand? That is what happens ... I have heard it. It hurts the children. FP 9

[Die onderwyser is nie daar wanneer 'n ding gebeur nie, miskien is dit by die huis maar nou het hy dit gehoor en nou sê hy: 'Nee, ek soek nie vir hom in my klas nie want jy is 'n messteker of jy is 'n gangster.' Verstaan u? Dit is wat gebeur ... Ek het dit al gehoor al. Dit maak die kinders ook seer.]

You (teacher) want the child to have respect for you (teacher) but you do not show respect towards him ... Like the teacher who said to my child, 'Yes, you're here again,' or 'You know I do not like you.' Now I asked him (teacher), 'Sir, is it my child you are talking to?' 'Oh, sorry ma'am, I did not know it is your child.' FP 11

[Jy (onderwyser) wil hê die kind moet vir jou (onderwyser) respek hê maar jy toon dan nie eers vir die kind respek nie ... Soos die meester wat eenkeer vir my kind sê: 'Ja, jy is alweer hier,' of 'Jy weet mos ek laaik nie vir jou nie.' Nou vra ek hom: 'Meneer, praat jy saam met my kind?' 'O, jammer mevrou, ek het nie geweet dis jou kind nie.']

These parents had clearly experienced that some teachers were not interested in building positive relationships with their children. The teachers' attitudes are manifested in the way they communicated and especially through the practice of labelling certain learners. Parents also seemed to feel frustrated since they did not have any power to address this problem.

In this section I illustrated how a school's poor disciplinary culture and practices and the poor relationships between teachers and learners influenced school dropout among males. Especially the practice of sending learners home and then expecting them to bring their parents with them to school before being allowed back was something that all the participant groups, except the teachers, mentioned. This practice causes learners to miss school for a considerable amount of time. Furthermore, parents are generally not aware of what is going on at school. Some insight was also provided as to why school management uses these illegal disciplinary measures; it eliminates struggling learners who will most probably fail in Grade 12 and thereby influence the goal for pass rates as set by the WCED. These practices seem to engender negative relationships between learners and teachers, as illustrated by the way in which these parties interacted with each other. Consequently, male learners felt unwelcome at school and did not feel committed towards the school or education in general.

Next, I present the data relating to the influences on male school dropout in the family context as they emerged from the data in this study.

4.3.3 Influences in the family context

The third theme relates to the influences associated to the family context in which an individual finds himself. I present this theme according to three main categories and the

accompanying sub-categories associated with these categories. Table 4.8 provides an outline of these findings.

Table 4.8: Family influences according to themes, categories and sub-categories

THEMES	CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
4.3.3 Influences in the family context	4.3.3.1 Family structure	4.3.3.1.1 Single-parent families
	4.3.3.2 Family resources	4.3.3.2.1 Low socioeconomic status
	4.3.3.3 Family practices	4.3.3.3.1 Lack of parental involvement

As illustrated in Table 4.8, there were three categories, with one accompanying sub-category for each of these categories that emerged from the data. Next, I commence with the description of these findings which relate to the influences on male school dropout within the family context.

4.3.3.1 Family structure

This study identified various influences that were related to family structure, and entailed families where parents had never lived together, parents who were divorced, parents who were deceased, or foster parents. The common factor in all these settings was that each of these families was supported by a single individual, who was either a parent or an extended family member. With this in mind, the sub-category that emerged as an overarching theme for the presentation of these data is the single-parent family or structure. Next, I present the findings in terms of this influence on male school dropout.

4.3.3.3.1 Single-parent families

The data from this study indicated that being in a single-parent family is a primary influence on school dropout among males as it was mentioned by male dropouts, teachers and parents. Male dropouts found themselves in single-parent families because their biological parents were never married, divorced or deceased. Although these different situations might influence learners in a different way, the focus of this section is not on why participants found themselves in single-parent families but rather how this type of family structure influenced male school dropout.

A number of male dropout participants referred to the influence of various kinds of single-parent or foster-parent families. In a limited number of these cases, dropouts were living with their grandparents who were unable to provide the guidance and support they needed to stay engaged and progress in school.

One day they (school) called in my grandmother ... then they called her in and told her that I am not allowed to come to school ... Then they told me I am not allowed to come to school again. Then my grandmother cried in the office and I felt it with her because she tried to help me (to stay in school). MD 9

[Die dag toe roep hulle my ouma in ... toe roep hulle vir haar in en sê ek kan nie meer skoolgaan hier nie ... Toe sê hulle vir my ek kan nie weer skool toe kom nie. Toe huil my ouma in die kantoor toe voel ek dit saam met haar want sy het my probeer help (om in die skool te bly).]

Circumstances were not good at home (before I dropped out). See, I lost my mother and then I lost my father and then I stayed with my grandmother. Then I also lost my grandmother last year ... now I stay with my sister. MD 10

[Omstandighede was nie lekker by ons gewees nie (voor ek skool gelos het nie). Kyk, ek het my ma verloor en ek het my pa verloor en toe bly ek by my ouma. Toe verloor ek my ouma ook nou laasjaar ... nou bly ek by my suster.]

From these quotations, it appears that the absence of two parents or caretakers influenced the participants' ability to stay engaged and progress at school. Especially grandmothers had limited financial and social resources to provide the needed support and guidance to these learners.

A significant number of teacher participants in this study referred to the influence of single-parent families on school dropout. These participants felt strongly about the lack of support that this type of family structure offered to male learners. Specifically, the absence of fathers in these single-parent structures was noted as an additional influence.

What will be interesting is to do a survey of single-parent families because many of them (parents of school dropouts) are single parents. MT 4

[Wat interessant sal wees is om 'n opname te maak van enkelouers want baie van hulle (ouers van leerders wat uitval) is enkelouers.]

And then also absent fathers (influence male dropout). Ninety-five per cent of our parents are single parents and there is not a father in the house who the children can look up to. The absent father has a big economic impact (on the family), because especially the boys then feel pressured to rather go and work to help their family survive, because there is not a father. FT 4

[En dan ook afwesige pa's (wat uitval beïnvloed). Vyf-en-neëntig persent van ons ouers is enkelouers so daar is nie 'n pa in die huis waarna die kinders kan opkyk nie. Die afwesige pa's het 'n groot ekonomiese impak (op die familie), want veral seuns voel dan druk om liewers te gaan werk om die gesin te help om te oorleef, omdat daar nie 'n pa is nie.]

I am now thinking of one specific one (a dropout), Jakes. Jakes was involved in a knife fight, I took a long knife away from him, but Jakes's mother came (to school) two to three times after I called her in. Then the father came. The father does not live with the mother. (So he said,) 'No, Jakes is now again going to stay with me until there is structure in his life.' Until Jakes gets involved in the next fight and then again moves back to his mother. SP 1

[Ek dink nou spesifiek aan een (skoolverlater), Jakes. Jakes was in 'n mesgeveg betrokke, ek het net so lang mes van hom afgevat, maar Jakes se ma het ingekom (skool toe) twee tot drie keer na ek haar ingeroep het. Toe kom die pa, die pa bly weg van die ma. (Hy sê toe:) 'Nee, Jakes gaan nou weer by my bly dan gaan daar weer struktuur in sy lewe kom.' Totdat Jakes weer by die volgende geveg betrokke raak en Jakes dan weer terugbeweeg na die ma toe.]

As can be seen through these narratives, teacher participants talked about the influence of single-parent families on school dropout. This participant group focussed specifically on the absence of fathers and how such absence contributes to male school dropout as it leaves a social and financial vacuum and an absence of a male role model. The participants also mentioned the instability and insecurity resulting from moving between parents as a specific negative influence.

Parent participants also shed some light on the influence of single-parent families on school dropout and echoed the influence of absent fathers. This was interesting, especially in the light of the fact that these were all female participants.

The father's (lack of) interest in William is why William went further and further away. I was the one who helped, helped, helped but later it did not help anymore. The father showed very little interest in him. FP 9

[Ja, die pa se belangstelling in William, dis waarom William verder en verder weggegaan het. Ek was mos die ene wat vir hulle gehelp, gehelp, gehelp maar naderhand toe help dit ook nie meer nie. Die pa het baie min in hom belang gestel.]

The role model, the father figure they (male dropouts) don't always have. That is why the boys do not work. They have pain inside but the pain does not come out because they were not allowed to show it. To talk. Boys cannot always talk to their mother and at the end of the day if they are a big man they do not know where they fit in, how they will one day have a home of their own. FP 3

[Die rolmodel, die vaderfiguur het hulle nie altyd nie. Dis hoekom die seuns nie werk nie. Hulle het seer binne-in maar die seer kom nie uit nie want dit was nie vir hulle toegelaat nie. Om te praat nie. Seuns kan mos nie altyd met hul ma praat nie en op die ou einde van die dag as hulle 'n groot man is weet hulle self nie waar pas hulle in nie, hoe hulle nou eendag 'n huis van hulle eie moet hê.]

As can be seen from these excerpts, the parent participants voiced their concerns regarding the single-parent families, especially regarding the absence of fathers. The data seemed to confirm what the teacher participants said in terms of the absence of a potential role model for boys. The lack of verbal interaction with adult males also seemed to be a contributing factor to the influence which the absence of a father has on young males.

The data as presented in this section seemed to indicate that being in a single-parent family or being cared for by a single adult influences male school dropout. Male dropouts who are cared for by their grandparents find it challenging as they do not have the capacity to support these individuals. The lack of resources in most single-parent families also influences the extent to which support can be provided to the children. The absence of fathers in such single-parent families influences them in the sense that they do not have positive support and

guidance regarding their present conduct and future planning. The combined input from the participants makes it clear that school dropout among males is influenced by single-parent or similar family structures.

4.3.3.2 Family resources

The data indicated that a family's availability of resources influences school dropout among males. More specifically in the study, one type of family resource emerged as an influence on school dropout, namely the low socioeconomic status (SES) of a family, which involves a combination of the financial and human resources that a family has available. Next, I present the findings of this sub-category which has to do with the influence of having little human and financial resources on school dropout, as described by the participants in this study.

4.3.3.2.1 Low socioeconomic status

Low SES of a family was indicated as a proximal influence on school dropout as all the participant groups, except the school principals, spoke about a range of influences on school dropout relating to the SES of families. These influences included household poverty, poor housing conditions, children having to earn an income, and parents not seeing the value of education. Each of these could be sub-categories by themselves; however, none were mentioned by enough participants to be included as a separate category; therefore I use the term 'low SES' as a collective description.

According to the male school dropout participants, their families were struggling financially and by finding a job they could supplement their household income. In most cases these situations arose because only one adult was earning an income because of single- or foster-parent family structures.

I felt like that (dropping out) because I felt like going to work because my mother did not work, my auntie was the only one who was working, my father had a stroke and then I left school and then I got a job in Ceres ... That is why I left school, there was no income because my auntie was the only one who was working ... that is why I left school. MD 15

[Ek het so gevoel want ek het gevoel om te gaan werk want my ma het nie gewerk nie, my antie het alleen gewerk, my pa het 'n stroke gehad toe los ek die skool toe kry ek 'n

werk in die Ceres in ... Ja, en dis daai dat ek skool gelos het, daar was nie 'n inkomste nie want my antie werk allenig ... dit is hoekom ek die skool gelos het.]

Then I just wanted to help my sister. That is why I left the school. I decided to leave school and I told my sister that I am going to leave school and I told her that I am going to help you to get a better life for us. MD 10

[Toe wil ek nou maar net vir my suster help. Daai is hoekom ek die skool gelos het. Ek het self skool gelos en ek het vir my suster gesê ek gaan die skool los en ek het vir haar gesê ek gaan vir jou help om vir ons 'n beter lewe te kry.]

These narratives indicate that some male dropouts left school in an effort to raise an income to supplement their families' income. The honest way to do this was to find a job and earn an income in this way. Participants spoke about this decision to drop out as if it was something that they decided by themselves and not something that their parents or guardians asked or forced them to do.

Teacher participants empathetically spoke about the influence of household poverty on school dropout among males. According to the teachers, this influenced both their ability to learn and develop and also made them drop out in an effort to earn an income to support their families.

I think sometimes they (male dropouts) make it to at least Grade 10 or 11 but then they realise that they are not going to make it and then the economic reason make them think to rather leave school than carry on struggling. So sometimes there is an economic reason also. There is poverty which is also another reason. He (male dropout) feels he can assist around the house, assist with the finances of the home. MT 2 (original quotation, not translated)

The house itself also (contributes to school dropout). Many of our children stay in squatter camps, the Wendy (prefabricated) houses, in grandmother's yard or in someone else's yard. Or they live in a small room; there are four, five, six in one small room. There is no space, they cannot study, and everyone sleeps together. These are all things that contribute (to school dropout). FT 2

[Die woning self ook (dra by tot skooluitval). Baie van ons kinders bly mos nou in die squatters kamp, die Wendy opslaanhuisies, in ouma se yard of iemand anders se yard.

Of hulle woon in 'n kamertjie, daar is vier, vyf, ses in een vertrekke. Daar is nie spasie nie, hulle kan nie studeer nie, almal slaap bymekaar. Dit is alles dinge wat bydra.]

Their minds are not filled from a young age with 'you need to pass well', 'you must go further after matric', 'matric is not enough, you must qualify yourself further'. See, our children are not exposed to that (thinking about their future). FT 4

[Hulle minds word nie gevul van kleins af met, 'jy moet goed slaag', 'jy moet verder na matriek gaan', 'matriek is nie genoeg nie, jy moet vir jou gaan kwalifiseer'. Kyk, onse kinders word gedurig nie daaraan blootgestel nie (om oor hul toekoms te dink).]

From these narratives it is clear that teachers felt that a lack of financial resources influenced school dropout in various ways. In terms of the physical influence, the learners' living conditions made it hard to do homework and study at home. This influence, combined with the absence of social capital from parents or guardians to plan for tertiary education after school, seemed to be a potent combination which contributed to school dropout among males.

Parents also referred to the influence that a lack of financial resources had on their ability to support their children with their educational careers. They also shared what influenced their decision to eventually support their children to stay or drop out of school.

School is very important but as a parent, I mean, we are not rich people. We must work hard for a little money and we have many expenses. (It is difficult) to keep a child at school who stays in the same grade year in and year out and who does not really attend school, there are school fees that must be paid and there are school clothes that need to be bought and shoes ... the fact that they sit at school so long and do not progress, and then they get involved in gangsterism later at the school, then I feel the best is, take your child out of school and keep him under your care or let him get into a job then you know he is busy because idleness is the devil's workshop. FP 10

[Skool is baie belangrik maar as 'n ouer, ek meen, ons is nie ryk mense nie. Ons moet hard werk vir klein bietjie geld en ons het baie uitgawes. Om 'n kind wat jaar in en jaar uit in dieselfde standard miskien bly of wat nie rêrig skoolgaan nie op 'n skool te onderhou wat ... daar moet skoolfonds betaal word en daar moet skoolklere gekoop word en daar moet skoene gekoop word ... die feit dat hulle so lank op die skool sit en nie vorder nie, en dan kan hulle later betrokke raak by gansterism by die skool, dan

voel ek die beste is, haal jou kind uit en hou hom onder jou of laat hy in 'n werk kom dan weet jy hy is besig want ledigheid is die duiwel se oorkussing.]

As illustrated through this narrative, the combination of this parent's financial situation and the child's poor academic progress led to the decision to leave school. The potentially negative influences at school played a further role. Therefore, leaving school, from the parent's perspective, was actually an attempt to assist the child in moving in a positive direction.

The various influences relating to a family's SES seemed to influence school dropout among males in some way. The financial lack of families was seen in poor living conditions which made it difficult for male learners to engage academically when they were at home. In terms of the lack of social resources, the parents or guardians did not motivate or assist male dropouts in staying in school and planning for their future.

4.3.3.3 Family practices

Family practices reflect the way in which family members interact with each other, especially parents with their children. This situation manifests through the quality of the relationships which exist between family members. In this study, there was only one sub-category which emerged in relation to school dropout among males, namely the low levels of parental involvement. Next, I describe this sub-category in the way it was expressed by the participants in this study.

4.3.3.3.1 Lack of parental involvement

Poor parental involvement was indicated as a primary influence on school dropout as it was mentioned by all the participant groups. Participants described how this aspect had both a direct and an indirect influence on school dropout as many male dropouts did not receive support and guidance from their parents.

Male school dropout participants referred to the low levels of their parents' involvement in their lives and specifically in the area of their school or academic functioning. This lack of involvement had a direct effect on the participants' own interest and motivation to stay in school and complete their schooling.

If my mother maybe always supported me and was harder on me, asked me if I did my homework and my assignments, and cared for me (then I would have still have been in school) ... there was actually none of those things and then I realised, 'No, no one worries and therefore I am also not going to worry.' MD 16

[As my ma my miskien altyd geondersteun het en sy was hard op my gewees, gevra of ek my huiswerk gedoen het, take, en omsien na my (dan sou ek steeds in skool gewees het). Elke dag 'n bydrae maak en kyk dat ek in die klas is. Daar was actually niks van daai goeters gewees nie en ek het toe maar ook besef: 'Nee, niemand worry nie so ek gaan ook nie meer worry nie.']

My father was very disappointed (when I failed) and with that I moved to Delft because my father did not agree with it because I failed and I am not going back to do it (repeat the grade). Thus, my father was very disappointed and with that I decided, okay, it seemed as if my father was not interested in me anymore and then I moved to Delft (and dropped out of school). MD 5

[My pa was baie teleurgesteld (toe ek druip) en met dit het ek toe maar Delft toe getrek because why my pa het nie saamgestem met dit nie want ek het gedruip en ek gaan nou net nie terug om dit te doen nie. So, my pa was baie teleurgesteld en met dit het ek maar besluit, oukei, dit het gelyk my pa stel nie meer belang nie en toe trek ek Delft toe (en verlaat die skool).]

From these quotes, one can see how low levels of parental involvement contributed to school dropout. The fact that parents were not interested or involved in the academic functioning of their children eventually also made them believe that school was unimportant. This was communicated mostly non-verbally to the participants through their parents' seeming passivity and lack of interest in school.

Teachers and school principals explained how uninvolved parents contributed to school dropout. They also felt hamstrung in their ability to support males who were at risk of dropping out as their efforts to intervene were not supported by these learners' parents or guardians.

The answer that his friend gave (why he was not coming to school) was, 'Teacher, leave it, no one worries there (at his home)!' But I still did not get any reaction from my two

letters. And when I looked for a telephone number from the children who live across the road, their reaction was, 'Leave it teacher, because who are you going to call?' And he is Grade 10, he would have passed because he was academically quite all right ... she (mother) accepted that he was with the father's people ... (when she started enquiring about where he was it was) three months later. I wanted to ask her that day (when I saw her), 'Did you now realise after three months, that you have a son?' FT 1

[Die antwoord, by sy vriend was: 'Juffrou los maar, niemand worry daar (by sy huis) nie.' Maar ek het nog geen reaksie gekry van my twee briewe nie. En toe ek 'n nommer soek van die kinders wat oorkant hom bly, was die reaksie: 'Los maar juffrou, want wie gaan juffrou bel?' En hy is graad 10, hy sou geslaag het want hy was nou weer redelik akademies oraait ... sy (ma) het aanvaar hy bly by die pa se mense ... (toe sy begin uitvind is dit) 'n hele drie maande later. Ek wil amper daai dag vir haar vra (toe ek haar sien): 'Het jy nou na drie maande besef jy het 'n seun?']

You do not see those parents (of the male dropouts). The parents will only come when there are crises at school. It is a general problem in the community, they (parents) will come if there is a parent evening regarding results but then only 20-30% of those who must be here show up ... You sit with parents (of dropouts) who don't really care for their children. SP 2

[Jy sien nie daai ouers (van die seuns wat uitval) nie. Die ouers sal net kom as daar krisis by die skool is. Is 'n algemene probleem in die gemeenskap, hulle gaan kom as daar oueraand is oor uitslae of wat ookal, maar dan kom daar nie eers, daar kom 20-30% van die ouers wat hier moet wees ... Jy sit met ouers (van die seuns wat uitval) wat nie werklik omgee vir hulle kinders nie.]

The parents work from seven to seven. There is no supervision for the children with the result that the children do whatever they like and the parents are scared of the children. In primary school they take the children to school ... When it comes to high school then the child takes over. He tells the parent what he wants, where he wants to go and when he wants to leave school – the parents do not have a say. There is not enough authority because he (parent) does not have the authority in the home. FT 9

[Die ouers werk van sewe tot sewe. Daar is nie toesig oor die kinders nie en met die gevolg die kinders maak wat hul wil en die ouers is bang vir die kinders. Laerskool

neem hul die kinders skool toe ... As dit hoërskool toe kom dan neem die kind oor. Hy sê vir die ouers wat hy wil hê, waar hy wil gaan en as hy uit die skool wil gaan, die ouers het nie 'n sê nie. Daar is nie genoeg gesag nie want hy (ouer) het nie die gesag in die huis nie.]

From these narratives one can see that the teachers and school principals' experiences of the parents' involvement were negative. On the one hand, this affected their ability to support the learners who were at risk of dropping out of school as these parents could either not be reached or did not heed efforts to make contact with them. On the other hand, some uninvolved parents only engaged with the school in crisis situations where the teachers or school were seemingly the 'perpetrators' and this contributed to the negative relationship between teachers and parents. However, there was also some level of understanding for parents who worked demanding hours, which meant that the children had little supervision.

The WCED representative confirmed the school principals' and teachers' viewpoints and provided further insight into the reason why parents are hesitant to attend meetings with teachers at school.

They (schools) try and invite the parents, (and) say, 'Listen, so and so, please come and meet the teacher because your son is not coming to school regularly.' The parent will come for the first time, the other time he decides not to come because he is worried because he is always called to the principal's office. So, schools do try and invite the parents; that is one way but most of the time parents don't come, they feel intimidated and they don't know what to explain and that is the one problem. WCED 1 (original quotation, not translated)

This account from a WCED representative further illustrates the poor relationships between the school and teachers and the reasons why parents are uninvolved. They feel intimidated by teachers and their interaction with the school is a humiliating experience and therefore they draw back and do not engage with the school.

Parents explained how their situation at home made it difficult to be involved in their children's lives. Their responsibilities at work, their family structure and/or relationships within the family were mentioned as reasons for being uninvolved.

Then he (foster son) just got home one evening and said he was not going to school anymore ... then I said to him, 'You are not my child, you are my husband's child, you can go and work, it is none of my concern but you must let your mother know'. Then he said but he stays with us in the home ... His father works night shift but I am there during the day ... He told me it is also his mother's 'stuff' that is weighing him down. Then I asked him what he meant and he said it was about his mother who was not supporting him because their children are nothing to their father. Then he left the school ... FP 4

[Toe het hy (stiefseun) een aand net by die huis gekom, toe sê hy hy gaan nie meer skool loop nie ... toe sê ek vir hom: 'Jy is nie my kind nie, jy is my man se kind, jy kan gaan werk, dit is nie my worries nie maar jy moet jou ma laat weet.' Toe sê hy vir my maar hy bly by ons in die huis ... Sy pa werk mos night shift maar ek is mos nou daar in die dag ... want hy sê vir my dis sy ma se goeters ook wat op hom is (wat hom terughou). Toe sê ek vir hom hoe bedoel hy toe sê hy sy ma is nie naby hom om hom by te staan nie want hulle kinders is niks vir hulle pa mos nie. Toe los hy toe maar die skool ...]

His (the male school dropout's) father went to school and when the teachers said a lot of things about him not being in class, then his father said, 'Now, if he does not want to go to school, because we must buy him school clothes each second, third month, school shoes and school clothes and all those things, then he must rather leave school.' FP 10

[Sy pa het skool toe gegaan en toe die onnie toe nou 'n klomp goed sê van hy wat nie in die klas is nie, toe sê sy pa: 'Nou toe, as hy nie wil skoolgaan nie, aangesien ons vir hom moet skoolklere koop en elke tweede, derde maand skoolskoene en skoolklere en al die goed, dan moet hy maar uit die skool uit gaan.']

From these narratives, one can see that parents' poor involvement in their children's lives stemmed from the complex situations in which they were living. This included being part of reconstructed families, not having support from a spouse or partners and feeling unable to support their children or to be constructively involved in their lives.

The data in this section indicated that poor parental involvement influenced school dropout among males as these individuals did not get the required support and guidance from their parents. Without this guidance they lost interest and motivation to attend school and eventually they dropped out. Such a state of affairs also negatively influences the way in

which teachers could support these learner's and intervene in their lives. The teachers felt that they did not get the required support from the parents of the male learners who were at risk of dropping out of school.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I presented the combined data as obtained from the five participant groups in this study. First, I provided the profiles of the participants to create a context for this data. Then I triangulated the data from these participant groups in an effort to provide a true reflection of the influences on male school dropout, according to the participants in this study. This was done on the basis of the themes, categories and sub-categories as they emerged from the data I collected, in line with the process explained in Chapter 3 of this thesis. As shown by the verbatim quotations, it was clear that there were certain influences that participants agreed on as being significant. Other influences were seen from different perspectives and confirmed the value of involving various role players in this study. In the following chapter I critically engage with the data presented in this chapter by summarising and focussing on previously unchallenged views and possible alternative ways of looking at male school dropout in SA.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I critically consider the findings of this study in relation to the prominent theory and associated studies on the influences of school dropout among males. By engaging and summarising the findings I focus on previously unchallenged views and the reasons why there is a need for alternative ways to look at school dropout, especially in SA. I regularly reflect on the central research question: What are the main influences on school dropout among males in the greater Cape Town area? Throughout this process I attempt to examine the complex interplay of influences as a whole rather than concentrating on specific influences on their own. Thereby I undertake to address what De Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot and Maassen van den Brink (2013, p. 7) refer to as the problem with "the majority of research on early school leaving" which aims to "pin-point personal and social characteristics of potential dropouts" while this is a holistic, multidimensional phenomenon. Consequently, this chapter cautiously provides an overview of factors that may influence school dropout among males, either by themselves or in association with other factors. All through this process I also attempt to reflect on other prominent themes like the case for male school dropout, the absence of school dropout statistics and the contribution I am hoping to make to the limited body of knowledge on these topics in SA.

Overall, the findings suggest a clear confluence of both individual and institutional influences on school dropout among males and is therefore consistent with prominent research on school dropout (Balfanz et al., 2011; Bridgeland et al., 2006), frameworks (Rumberger & Lim, 2008) and theory (Finn, 1989; Tinto, 1975, 1987), mostly from the USA context. However, there are also clear indications that there is a need for a localised framework for the understanding of male school dropout in SA. In terms of the contribution I am making to the South African body of knowledge, there are adequate indications that school dropout among males is a process with clear cautionary signs; it is indeed a grossly neglected topic that requires urgent attention by role players of various segments of society. I echo what some (Jansen, 2014; Spaul, 2014) have suggested: school dropout is an understated problem that needs urgent attention in SA.

Given these findings, I argue that the underlying narrative, emphasising individual influences as the main contributors to school dropout among males, is misleading. By focussing on the male dropouts it suggests that they are the main contributors to their own school dropout while the data indicate that there are school and family-related factors which also affect this process. De Witte et al. (2013) support this idea and state that "institutional factors (family and school characteristics) ... might give the impression that the weight to be given to individual student factors equals that of all institutional factors taken together". Indeed, this might be the impression but it certainly is not the case. The main reason for this categorisation was for practical purposes, a way of ordering the data. With this in mind, I argue that the focus should not even just be on all of these factors, considered under the individual and institutional, but on school dropout as an indication of the structural inequalities in which most of the participants find themselves. Furthermore, the total absence of school dropout records and statistics at both school and local district level keeps role players unaccountable for the high levels of school dropout among males. As a result, teachers, school principals and WCED representatives are either so ignorant of or paralysed by the complexities and extent of school dropout among males that they are taking, as far as I know, little or no intentional action on school or district level to address this problem. The result is that male school dropouts quietly exit the school system, only to become someone else's 'problem'.

In the discussion of the findings I refer to the themes, categories and sub-categories that I used for the presentation of the data in the preceding chapter. I also continue with the process of triangulation where I merge together the data from all the participant groups and my interpretations thereof, supported with theory and literature. As confirmed by one of the participants, "all of these problems will have a ripple effect on each other, it is interrelated" (MT 3). Other local South African (Bingma, 2012; Bongani, 2014) and African studies (Munsaka, 2009; Mapani, 2011) employed a similar approach to conduct similar studies relating to school dropout. Where I used rich data quotes in the previous chapter I only included short extracts, where needed, to accentuate or support my arguments. In the next section, I start by discussing the categories and sub-categories relating to the individual influences on male school dropout. This is followed by a discussion of the influences on school dropout in the school and family context.

5.2 INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCES

In this section I discuss the individual influences on male school dropout as they emerged from the data in this study. As mentioned in the section above, the large number of individual influences might give the idea that male dropouts are the architects of their own failure, engineering conditions favourable to dropout. However, this is purely because of the way in which I decided to categorise the finding, in line with Rumberger and Lim's (2008) conceptual framework. When considering the number of primary and proximal influences it further illustrates that there were, in fact, more primary institutional factors (three) than primary individual ones (two). Therefore, this categorisation is purely for practical purposes.

As a reminder of the individual categories and sub-categories that emerged from the data, I have copied a section of Table 4.6 that I used in the previous chapter. Table 5.1 provides the structure for the discussion of the findings to follow.

Table 5.1: Individual influences on male school dropout

CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
5.2.1 Educational performance	5.2.1.1 Struggling academically
	5.2.1.2 Grade failure
5.2.2 Engagement	5.2.2.1 Missing classes
	5.2.2.2 Absenteeism
5.2.3 Problem behaviour	5.2.3.1 Misbehaviour at school
	5.2.3.2 Substance abuse
5.2.4 Peers	5.2.4.1 Being bullied
	5.2.4.2 Gangs

Next, I critically consider the influence that educational performance, engagement, problem behaviour and peer influences have on male school dropout.

5.2.1 Educational performance

There were two influences on male school dropout that fell within the category of educational performance. The first, struggling academically, was a primary influence and the second,

grade failure, was a proximal influence on male school dropout. I next discuss these two influences.

5.2.1.1 Struggling academically

A primary influence on school dropout was struggling academically due to male learners who were "not ready for high school" as they did not "understand what (teachers) are busy with in class ... (they) cannot read properly, (they) cannot express (themselves) properly, (they) cannot calculate correctly" (MT 4). The main idea was that male dropouts did not cope with the academic demands of high school and this had a significant influence on their decision to leave the school system. This general finding is partly supported by prior research, both South African (Bingma, 2013) and African (Mapani, 2011; Munsaka, 2012). These studies also found struggling academically to be one of a few influences, although not a primary influence. For example, in Bingma's (2013) study on male school dropout in Orange Farm Township, struggling academically was cited as one of many factors that contributed to school dropout. Mapani's (2011) Namibian study on school dropout among males also only found that struggling academically was a minor influence on male school dropout. Similarly, Branson et al.'s (2013) South African study found academic struggles to be a less important influence than something like financial needs. Therefore, prior South African and African research did not find academic struggles to be a significant influence on school dropout, as was found in this study. What I found in this study are more in accord with Rumberger's (2011, p. 160) statement that educational performance is indeed "the single most important influence of whether students drop out or graduate from high school". While this seems like a straightforward finding, a more holistic consideration provides other insights and perspectives that help to understand this phenomenon even better.

The underlying narrative of struggling academically was focussed on either the male dropouts who felt that they "could not go on (because of academic struggles)" and therefore they "(had to) leave the school" (MD 13) or the teachers and school system that contributed to the core problem which was "the reading ... they (male dropouts) cannot read" (SP 2). The credibility of the first idea can be understood within both Finn's (1989) and Tinto's (1975, 1987) models for school dropout, as struggling academically has a negative psychological effect on learners which makes it difficult for them to integrate into the academic dimension of the school and later they do not feel part of or welcome at the school. More specifically, Finn's (1989) "frustration self-esteem" model poses a good understanding of the effect of struggling

academically, especially when there is no additional support available, as this continued struggle leads to a lowered self-esteem which then often again leads to problem behaviour, including bunking class and disruptive behaviour in class. Because of this frustration, learners tend to shift their attention from school to peer networks to mitigate the feelings of embarrassment at school. Finally, they either leave school voluntarily or are expelled from school because of their problem behaviour. This is the pathway that many male dropouts in this study followed, similar to Finn's (1989) description thereof.

The second part of the academic problem, as it emerged in my study, has to do with the fact that many learners arrived at high school while they could not "really read or write ... because at primary school the foundation was not correctly laid" (FP 10). This was a serious problem as the male dropouts did not have the capacity to progress academically and did not receive any additional support to do so. This provided valuable insight for the South African literature on school dropout as I am only aware of Branson et al. (2013) who made this connection before. In their words, those who drop out are "less proficient in reading and writing" (Branson et al., 2013, p. 15). Other general educational studies have exposed the dire situation in terms of numeracy and literacy. For example, Spaul (2013) found that more than half of the learners who are able to read by the end of Grade 4 cannot understand and interpret what they read. Although this is a general finding and not specifically connected to school dropout, there is international research on school dropout that explicitly supports this finding. In a national study in the USA, which included 4 000 learners and their parents, Hernandez (2011) found that those learners who were not proficiently reading by Grade 3 were four times more likely to drop out of school than those who read proficiently. In another study in the USA, Silver et al. (2008) looked at underlying academic reasons why learners dropped out and found that only 35% of those who did not pass algebra in Grade 9 eventually completed school. Therefore, although not beyond dispute, it is clear that poor literacy and numeracy skills were foundational to the academic struggles that influenced male school dropout in my study.

What seems to be missing in the findings and other theory is a more holistic view of this influence. For example, some male learners may fail in the academic system but continue therein as it is believed that school can provide the only credentials needed for a successful shift to work and adulthood (De Witte et al., 2013). Therefore, the problem is not necessarily a struggle with numeracy and literacy but with the school system as a whole that narrowly

caters for certain types of learners. Add to this the influence of the learner's family background and it becomes more of a systemic than an individual problem. Therefore, the findings in this study indicate that something like struggling academically should, in line with Bronfenbrenner (1977), be viewed more holistically to consider it as more than a reading and writing problem but something that is just as much influenced by the school and family. This insight could assist in using something like academic struggles as an early indicator of male learners who might be at risk of dropping out of school. For example, Allensworth and Eastern (2005) found that only 22% of 'off-track' learners (in terms of academic performance) in Grade 9 did finish school and therefore these data could be used to identify and support male learners who are at risk of dropping out.

5.2.1.2 Grade failure

The data from this study indicated that grade failure is a proximal influence on school dropout among males. Similar to struggling academically, not being able to progress from one grade to the next made male dropouts feel frustrated and disgruntled, and in many cases it was the final contribution to their decision to leave school as they felt they would "not be able to continue like (that)", if they "cannot go to the next standard (grade)" (MD 4). A study by Jimerson et al. (2002) provides further support for this finding by indicating that repetition increased the rate of dropping out by 30-50% and that learners who repeated twice had a 94% dropout rate, compared to a 27% dropout rate for those who never repeated a grade. That is a weighty statistic and although I did not specifically investigate the number of times that male dropout participants failed a grade I know from experience that many of them fail at least twice or more before dropping out. This is also confirmed when looking at the demographic data of the male dropouts in this study as most of them were a few years older than the average age for their grade at the time of dropping out.

The supposed advantage of grade failure, getting another chance to master work in a certain grade, did not seem to be of relevance in this study as there was no additional support for learners who were struggling academically. Therefore, I disagree with the DoE's (2008) argument that grade repetition as a practice automatically poses an advantage to repeaters as it provides underachieving learners another chance to master the work within a particular grade and be motivated to work harder. I cannot say with certainty that this is not true but what I found in this study certainly does not support this idea, mainly because there is no additional support for those who repeat. On the contrary, grade repetition had a negative influence on

male learners' motivation to learn and rather made them want to leave school. As one male dropout respondent explained, "Then we said to each other, 'No man, these are a bunch of children who are here in the class.' Like, we are the oldest in the class" (MD 4). Therefore, grade repetition had a negative effect on male dropouts' self-confidence and made them feel as if they did not belong in class and at school. As such, the apparent advantage of grade failure is not supported through the findings in this study. This finding can be understood within Tinto's (1975, 1987) model, explaining that something like grade failure makes it difficult for dropouts to integrate into the school system, as they do not associate with the academic dimension of the school. This leads to a connection with either the social system of the school or with that outside of the school. When there is no connection to the school as a system, the chances of dropout become much higher. Therefore, grade failure was a certain indication of a failure to connect with one part of the school system and a clear influence on male school dropout.

Upon closer investigation there was something else that struck me about grade repetition: the fact that it was so commonly accepted, as if it was normal, by most of the participant groups in this study. Similar to the common acceptance of the high dropout rate, no specific comments were made by participants about grade failure among males being a problem. This stands in stark contrast, for example, to my own advantaged education where grade failure was uncommon, even scandalous, and therefore not an option. Although there are various reasons for this state of affairs, one of them has to do with the racial discrimination of pre-1994 in SA where it was not expected of persons of colour to perform well academically and excel at school. This idea is supported by South African research by Strassburg et al. (2010) and Dieltiens and Many-Gibert (2008), who found that grade repetition is a stronger influence for school dropout among certain racial groups, especially the Coloured population. Strassburg et al. (2010) explain this with reference to the fact that Coloured people have traditionally had better access to employment than Black people under the apartheid regime before 1994. Because of this opportunity, Coloured learners were more inclined to leave school because they could more easily find a job in the unskilled labour market than the Black learners. Seeing that all the male dropout participants in this study were from the Coloured population group, a deeper understanding of the nature of this influence was possible.

Finally, similar to struggling academically, grade failure is clearly a wider problem than just an individual who does not progress from one grade to another. As illustrated, there are

influences on the school's behalf, and also on the family, which affects this outcome (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This is something that does not come through strongly in most current research on school dropout as most studies have a narrow focus without considering the interplay of influences (De Witte et al., 2013). By having a more holistic approach to the influence of grade failure there are options, like tutor support, that could utilise the potential benefits of repetition and make it more beneficial.

5.2.2 Engagement

Engagement as an influence on male school dropout in this study included missing classes and being absent from school. These were both proximal influences on male school dropout and next I discuss these two influences and the way in which they affected school dropout among males.

5.2.2.1 Missing classes

Missing or bunking classes was found to be a proximal influence on school dropout as male learners bunked "three or four periods per day" where after they "started bunking the whole day" (MD 6). Being at school but not in class was problematic as it reduced the amount of time that learners could potentially learn and develop academically. In the words of Chang and Romero (2008, p. 3), learners "have to be present and engaged to learn", and by bunking, male learners were clearly not engaged academically. This obviously had an influence on their academic progress which could then also be a separate influence on school dropout. In support of this finding, Strassburg et al. (2010) noted a correlation between bunking class and school dropout in SA. This finding is further supported by international studies (Chang & Romero, 2008; Rumberger & Lim, 2008) which also confirm this influence. However, the underlying narrative for this influence, as described in this study, portrayed the male school dropouts as those who "bunked classes (and) smoked dagga (cannabis)" (FP 9), giving the impression that missing classes was predominantly linked to the individuals' poor behaviour and resistance against being in class. Mapani's (2011) Namibian study provides another example of this kind of narrative where a school principal who participated in the study described how male learners were purposefully bunking classes as they were unmotivated to be there. Although these reasons for bunking might be true, I found that there was more to this influence than just deviant male learners who did not want to be in class.

One of the reasons why male dropouts were not in class was because of the way the school was functioning as they "saw that nothing happened with (them) when (they) stayed outside of class" and therefore they missed classes "every day" (MD 6). Although male school dropouts were the ones participating in this behaviour, there was little or no structure regulating truancy at school and the lack of structure made them continue with this behaviour. The effect of this state of affairs can be understood within both Finn's (1989) and Tinto's (1975) school dropout model as one could argue that male school dropouts felt integrated with the social system but not the academic system of the school and therefore choose to be outside of class where they felt more at home. When looking at the activities in which the male dropouts got involved while bunking, like smoking cannabis, it is clear that this kind of behaviour further exacerbated the problem. Mapani (2011) had a similar finding that illustrated how the schools' functioning influenced male dropouts' motivation to not be in class but rather outside. Taking this point further, there was an indication that not having certain male learners in class made it easier for teachers to manage some of their classes. Therefore, it suited teachers that learners bunked classes and they did not take any action to address this behaviour.

I am not aware of any South African research conducted before this study that reported on the possible omission on the schools' behalf that actually encourages bunking or missing classes. It is also not the type of insight to be found in quantitative studies in SA that employ large national data sets (Branson et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2011). As such, this study represents an alternative way of understanding the influence of bunking or missing class on school dropout among males that can hopefully contribute to addressing this problem in future. Indeed, this perspective might help to explain why missing class, especially among males, was such a common practice at these schools as it was not addressed by the schools. Therefore, missing classes was a clear influence on male school dropout and worked in collaboration with other institutional influences.

5.2.2.2 Absenteeism

The results from this study indicated that absenteeism is a proximal influence on school dropout among males. Similar to missing classes, being absent meant becoming "further and further behind with work and at the end of the day (knowing they could) never go back (to school)" (MD 8). This finding is supported by international research by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), Chang and Romero (2008) and the Namibian study on male school dropout by

Mapani (2011) which also indicated absenteeism as a minor influence on school dropout. More specifically, Mapani (2011, p. 166) argues that "absenteeism occurs when the value of education is not appreciated by the boy". Although this might be true, it is not something that came out of the data that I collected in this study. What it does indicate, however, is the common narrative that puts the blame on the individual male dropouts for being absent and dropping out of school, as mentioned earlier.

The data from this study indicated that absenteeism is often instigated by the school as male dropouts "start staying at home" because they "don't want to go to school anymore because (they) don't want to bring (their) parents to school each time" (MD 11). This 'disciplinary' practice of not allowing learners at school before their parents come to school is a common, illegal occurrence which I discuss in depth later in this chapter (under disciplinary climate and practices). For now, the point that I make is that the accepted notion that absenteeism is primarily an individual influence on school dropout is erroneous. Bingma (2012) also touches on this point, although not stating it explicitly, that school principals expel male learners illegally if they struggle to handle them at school. As such, absenteeism in this case is institutionalised by the school principals and teachers to such an extent that being absent or chronically absent becomes an accepted practice in which male dropouts then participate. Indeed, this confirms what De Witte et al. (2013, p. 7) writes when referring to "the majority of research on early school leaving" which aims to "pin-point personal and social characteristics of potential dropouts". However, data from this study indicate that absenteeism is an influence that, similar to missing classes, is the result of more than just unmotivated, poor-disciplined male learners who do not want to attend school. As in the case of missing classes, this argument is well supported by both Finn's (1989) and Tinto's (1975) school dropout models. On the one hand, male learners struggle to bond with the school and as they are not in school they bond with others whose priorities are not aligned with the primary activity that is supposed to happen at school, namely academic learning. Indeed, this also helps to explain why male dropouts become involved in other influences like substance abuse and gangs, as discussed later in this chapter.

Another insight was the occurrence of chronic absenteeism as a more specific form of absenteeism among males who dropped out. Although the teachers, school principals or WCED representatives could not quantify the extent of when absenteeism becomes problematic, they suspected that it was a serious problem among male dropouts who were

"out of school for 20 days, between 18 and 20 days, they stay out of school" (SP 1). As a result, participants did not realise that many males were chronically absent, based on the definition which classifies this influence as referring to learners who miss more than 10% of the total school days that there are in one year (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Therefore, chronic absenteeism is something that was not monitored on a school or district level; consequently it was like a "bacteria in a hospital [that] wreak[s] havoc long before it is discovered" (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, pp. 3). I could not find any references to chronic absenteeism in the African (Mapani, 2011; Munsaka, 2009) or relevant South African studies (Bingma, 2013; Branson et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2011) and therefore this seems to be a fresh insight into this problem.

5.2.3 Problem behaviour

Problem behaviour as an influence on male school dropout has to do with various types of behaviours that divert learners' attention and energy from academics and school to something else. In this study, there were two proximal influences classified within this category: misbehaviour at school and substance abuse. Next, I discuss these influences as cited by the participants in this study.

5.2.3.1 Misbehaviour at school

Misbehaviour at school was found to be a proximal influence for male school dropout as it leads to learners being "in trouble at school" because of giving "the teachers a hard time" (MD 16). What this indicated was that male dropouts participated in unacceptable behaviour at school, thereby defying the schools' code of conduct in some way or another, like stealing "cool drinks here at school" and being "awful and disobedient" (MD 16). These findings correlate with Ou et al.'s (2007) findings that misbehaviour at school increased the chances of school dropout. There are various ways in which misbehaviour contributes to school dropout, including being suspended or expelled or being sent to alternative schools. What I found in this study seemed to indicate that these actions played an important part in the eventual effect misbehaviour had on school dropout.

Firstly, misbehaviour at school had certain consequences, in line with the disciplinary procedures that each school had in place. As a teacher participant explained, "... they come into conflict a lot (with teachers), they go to detention ... they go to the disciplinary committee because of transgressions and stuff, are rude towards the teachers and stuff ... " (FT 10). Therefore, the actions associated with misbehaviour at school determined the effect

it had on school dropout. This finding is supported by Branson et al. (2013) who also reports that there were some males who viewed suspension/expulsion that followed as a disciplinary act as a reason for dropping out. Indeed, this again illustrates that misbehaviour at school is not solely an individual problem but also has to do with the way in which the school handles this kind of behaviour.

Secondly, misbehaviour at school was seen as a signal for other misbehaviour or delinquency outside of school. This finding concurs with the Rumberger's (2011) finding that misbehaviour at school is usually the best indication for delinquent behaviour outside of the house, as well as those of Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) and Newcomb et al. (2002), namely that deviant behaviour at age 14 had a direct and major influence on early school dropout by age 16 and later school dropout by Grade 12. Misbehaviour outside of school is often more serious and referred to as delinquency, which can potentially lead to criminal offences. One of the challenges with explaining delinquency and school dropout is whether the one leads to the other or whether both are caused by underlying factors (Rumberger, 2011). An example of behaviour that could be classified as criminal is the use of illegal substances, like cannabis. I specifically discuss this influence later in this chapter and in this section it is important to note that there is a possible relationship. A repetition of involvement in these delinquent kinds of activities eventually leads to expulsion or not wanting to come to school anymore to evade disciplinary actions that would have been taken against them.

Both these findings again confirm the fact that misbehaviour at school is more than just an individual influence but also has an institutional side to it. An essential part of this process and the eventual outcome is the way in which these consequences are executed, whether in a consequent and respectful manner or in a hostile way. If not, these supposedly remedial actions do more harm, rather than leading to positive behaviour, resulting in an institutional problem with relation to the disciplinary processes being followed at the school. In most of the cases in this study it seems as if the teachers and school management did not have effective remedial ways to address this kind of behaviour, which led to further hostility and an almost certain outcome of learners dropping out of school. I discuss this topic in more depth in a later section of this chapter (under disciplinary climate and practices).

This matter can also be understood within Finn's (1989) "frustration self-esteem" model as this model explains how the escalation of this kind of problem behaviour usually leads to poorer academic performance which decreases self-esteem and increases problem behaviour

in school as well. Another topic which goes hand in hand with misbehaviour is the involvement in gangs which I discuss later in this chapter as a peer influence. Put simply, misbehaviour both inside and outside of school often serves as an influence for school dropout. This can further be understood through the social development model (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). By bonding or not bonding with the school, male dropouts associate with the norms and practices of the school. Bonds can serve as either risk or protective factors against negative behaviour, depending on the values and norms held by the group with whom the child is most firmly bonded. For example, for a child who has a strong bond with his/her family, where substance abuse is customary, his/her family can be seen as a risk factor for later substance abuse. On the other hand, if the same child has a weak bond with his/her family, accompanied by a stronger bond with a teacher or group of friends who oppose substance abuse, his/her teacher or friends can serve as a protective factor against substance abuse. Consequently, the extent to which children are bonded with units will determine their commitment towards the held values and norms which implies that an individual will adopt the beliefs and behavioural patterns of the social unit with whom they are most firmly bonded. In most cases represented in this study there seemed to be an absence of positive bonds between male school dropouts and both their families and schools.

5.2.3.2 Substance abuse

Substance abuse was found to be a proximal influence on school dropout among males. It directly affected their ability to learn while at school as "you can see in the class that his (learner's) attention is not there, you can see when they come into the class, they are drugged. He does not know what goes on in class" (MT 5). Apart from this direct effect it had on learning, substance abuse also led to lower levels of engagement with school-related activities. These findings correspond with those from the male dropout studies of Bongani (2014) in SA and Mapani (2011) in Namibia who both found substance abuse to be an influence – albeit an insignificant one – on male school dropout. However, in view of the findings from Flisher et al. (2010), the question arises whether substance abuse may have been underreported in the mentioned studies. Flisher et al. (2010) examined whether the use of tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs predicts dropout among secondary school learners in Cape Town, SA. This longitudinal study made use of a self-report instrument and included 1 470 Grade 8 learners of whom 54.9% dropped out of school between the onset of the study and four years later. Therefore, more than half of those who used the mentioned substances

dropped out. This is a significant finding, and based on the sample size and methodology of this study by Flisher et al. (2010) there is reason to believe that it is a more accurate reflection of the true influence of substance abuse on school dropout, in comparison with what previously mentioned qualitative studies like those of Bongani (2014) and Mapani (2011) found. Seeing that I also found it to be a proximal influence the same can be said for my study.

The findings from this study indicated that male dropouts were regularly caught "smoking dagga at school" (MD 4). This was mentioned by school dropouts, teachers and WCED representatives, which gave the idea that it was an accepted practice at school as some participants also mentioned that "they (male dropouts) come into the class (while) they are drugged" (MT 5). Therefore, male dropouts were allowed in class while being intoxicated and this had a negative effect on them and the rest of their class. This indicated that the use of substances was either not well monitored by teachers at school or that it was such a big problem that it was beyond the control of the teachers.

The effect of substance abuse on school dropout can be understood within the social development model in which Catalano and Hawkins (1996) indicate that individuals will identify and honour the values of an institution or group if they are bonded with this entity. In this study, the findings all indicate that there was little or no bonding to the school and therefore the intended school practices were not honoured. Also, possible poor levels of bonding with their families makes it even more unlikely that practices will be followed. What then are left are peers who might engage in substance abuse and then it becomes inevitable to also succumb to this.

To emphasise the prominence and influence of cannabis, I again refer to data from this study, especially from the male dropouts' responses. By saying that they smoked cannabis on the school grounds and even had a supplier "not too far from the school" (MD 4), participants gave the idea that the use of cannabis was an accepted practice among peers and an activity that frequently happened at school. A teacher even claimed that learners "now smoke drugs (cannabis) at the school, they are not shy anymore" (MT 5). This finding is in accordance with South African studies by Bongani (2014) and Pluddemann and Parry (2012) who also found that the use of cannabis influences school dropout. However, these authors did not quantify the extent of this influence whereas the studies of Brook and Balka (1999) and Fergusen and Horwood (1997) in the USA found that there was only a small connection between dropout

and cannabis use. Again, when I think about my own experience I suspect that substance abuse is generally under-reported, partly because it is so much part of the culture in the communities involved in this study. Therefore, I also think this influence on school dropout is much greater than reported in this study but I do not have data to support this statement. However, it is clear that for those participants who did refer to or report on the use of cannabis saw it as something that indirectly influenced school dropout among males.

5.2.4 Peers

In this study, peer-related influences could be seen in the effect that bullying had as a proximal influence and gangs as a primary influence on male school dropout. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis, both these peer influences are not necessarily peer influences in the true sense of the word, as the individuals who are part of these 'peer' groups are often much older than those being influenced. However, there can also be peers of the same age involved in these influences and therefore I grouped these influences together under the peer-related sub-category. Next, I commence with the discussion of the influence of being bullied, followed by the influence of gangs.

5.2.4.1 *Being bullied*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I decided to include bullying as a proximal influence on male school dropout although it did not meet the criteria for inclusion in this study. This came as somewhat of a surprise to me as it is the one influence on which previous prominent South African studies (Flisher et al., 2008; Strassburg et al., 2010) on school dropout have reported on. I cannot say for certain why this was the case, but I suspect it has to do with the fact that this study focussed on males and because "[i]t is usually that quiet child (who leaves school). I did not even realise it but then I came to see that there are some of those children ... who quietly leave the school because of bullying" (FT 2). This view is echoed by Mapani's (2011, p. 91) Namibian study on male school dropout that found that "in some cases a boy would stay away from school just to avoid being bullied". This can be seen as a confirmation of the types of male learners who usually get bullied, as Mapani (2011) also found that it made boys feel helpless. This helplessness is what Bongani (2014) found as the catalyst which also influences other school dropout-related influences like absenteeism and poor academic progress. Therefore, the helplessness associated with being bullied seem to be a reason why this influence was underreported in this study.

The findings in this study indicate that bullying is seen as something that happens to girls and therefore conflicting with most of the other influences in this study which are accepted to be specifically male-related. Indeed, this perspective might help to explain why this silent influence is not getting the attention it should receive. In addition, Finn's (1989) model for school dropout offers a framework for understanding these findings as bullying leads to low levels of connectedness to the school. In this current study being bullied was also proof of the school environment that left male dropouts vulnerable and having to fend for themselves. Indeed, it was the combination of being bullied and not being willing or able to disclose this to someone that led to the process of withdrawal and eventual dropout. This view is also supported by Mapani's (2011) study on male dropouts in which he found that participants cited bullying as a common practice which leads to absenteeism in order to avoid being subjected to such behaviour. Therefore, the findings in this study, combined with what others (Mapani, 2011; Bongani, 2014) have found, indicate that bullying is an influence on male school dropout but also a topic that needs much more investigation.

5.2.4.2 Gangs

Gangs were found to be a primary influence on school dropout among males. This result comes as no surprise as the two communities represented in this study are notorious for their high levels of gang activities, mostly among males. It is also supported by anecdotal evidence collected by Naidoo (2008) who found that gang involvement is a reason for dropout among Coloured boys. Participants primarily cited the financial incentives of gang involvement as the reason for this occurrence as males see when they are "here at school (they) never have money" (MD 5) but when joining a gang they got access to finances. This finding is broadly supported by South African studies (Glaser, 2008; Strassburg et al., 2010) that also confirmed the influence of gangs on male school dropout. For example, Strassburg et al. (2010) found that gangs influenced learners who dropped out after age 15 because they were then legally allowed to leave school. A school principal who was interviewed by Naidoo (2008) confirmed this finding and also specifically stated that Coloured males are at higher risk of dropping out of school because of gang involvement. The data in this study also indicated that gangs influence school dropout as gang members fulfil a role model position for young males.

To emphasise the influence of finances I would again like to refer to data from this study, especially from parents. By saying that the gangs "(buy) that expensive pair of shoes of R800

which the father and mother cannot give. Nice jackets, Nike jackets" (FP 9), parents implied that males dropped out to join gangs because of their financial need. Although this statement gives the impression that it was primarily a financial need that led to gang involvement, vis-à-vis the fashion accessories, this need is clearly not on a basic level, like needing food and shelter. In fact, it was not as if the parents could not provide in the basic needs of their children; it was rather a case of wanting, not needing these things. Indeed, the male school dropouts' vulnerability to gangs seems to be more about their desire for identity and belonging. This perspective might also explain why something like poverty was not cited as a primary influence on school dropout. As such, I argue that the apparent 'success' of gangs and the accompanying influence they have on school dropout is evidence of the combined failure of the school and family institutions in these communities. This position can be understood within the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as all these factors had an influence on the dropout which also proved that it is not solely because of the individual males' decision to join a gang and drop out of school.

To take the above argument further: it seems as if single-parents families, especially where there was no father or male figure, left male learners vulnerable to gang influences. What I mean with this is that males' emotional needs as described above were not fulfilled within their families and this left them vulnerable to the effect of other male influences, especially those who are seemingly the successful ones in the community. The following quotation from a parent participant provides support for this argument: "[T]he father's role, the leader of the gang (takes it over) ..." (FP 9). What this implied was that young males long for a connection with an adult male and in the absence thereof they are more vulnerable to the influence of gang members. I discuss the influence of single-parent families and the absence of fathers later in this chapter (under single-parent families) but for now it is important to note the relationship between these two topics.

In support of my argument regarding the emotional vulnerability of male learners and gangs I turn to Glaser (1998). This researcher (Glaser, 1998, p. 301) contends that conditions of instability and alienation in families, schools and communities create a space where gangs provide a "powerful alternative to schooling, attracting a large proportion of unemployed and non-school going male adolescents". Further, both Finn's (1989) 'participation-identification' model and the social development model (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996) provide further insight. From both these perspectives, the male participants dropped out as they bonded with other

males who were already involved in gangs and who were mostly also school dropouts. By identifying with these individuals they were also more vulnerable to becoming involved in the same behaviour. Therefore, the findings from this study, combined with other studies and established theory, make it clear that gangs are a primary influence on school dropout among males. What is also clear is that the influence of gangs is not solely an individual issue but just as much a family and school-related influence as males get a sense of identity and belonging from gangs that families and schools fail to provide.

Next, I commence with the discussion of the influences that were categorised under the school-related theme.

5.3 INFLUENCES IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

In this section I engage with the data that were categorised as school-related. As illustrated in the previous section, many of the individual influences on male school dropout are partly shaped by the school environment and therefore the fact that there are only two influences that were categorised as school-related does not mean that the school plays an insignificant role in male school dropout. On the contrary, these two factors were both found to be primary influences on male school dropout, the same number of primary influences that there were under the individual influences theme. Further, the two school-related influences were also strongly connected to individual influences such as missing classes, being absent, and misbehaviour at school. Therefore, the influences in the school context, as found in this study, were significant and in the following section I critically discuss these data. I have copied a piece of Table 4.7 as a reminder of the one category and accompanying two sub-categories which I also discuss in this section.

Table 5.2: School influences on male school dropout

CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORIES
5.3.1 School practices	5.3.1.1 Poor disciplinary climate and illegal practices 5.3.1.2 Poor relationship between learners and teachers

Next, I will engage in discussing the school-related influences on male school dropout as experienced by the participants in this study.

5.3.1 School practices

According to the participants in this study, there were two sub-categories relating to school practices which influenced male school dropout. Firstly, a poor disciplinary climate and practices were cited as a primary influence and, secondly, poor relationships between learners and teachers were also cited as a primary influence. Before engaging in this discussion, I would like to highlight the fact that none of the following arguments are directed against the specific institutions or individuals involved but are rather intended to produce an honest interpretation of the data as provided by the participants in this study. Next, I commence with the description of the sub-categories as school-related influences on school dropout as they emerged from this study.

5.3.1.1 Poor disciplinary climate and illegal practices

The data from this study indicated that a poor disciplinary climate and illegal disciplinary practices were primary influences on male school dropout. The findings showed that the disciplinary climate at schools was not conducive to learning as it was "like that (disorganised) all the time" with learners running "at the school if (they) see the teachers" (MD 8). What this meant was that the school was not a structured, orderly environment, as was also indicated by the reported levels of absenteeism and missing classes. The negative sentiments were fuelled by the disciplinary practices being exercised at these schools. These practices, namely physical abuse and/or corporal punishment, are illegal in SA and they negatively influenced learners' feelings of connectedness to the school, thus leading to an array of problems, like disruptive behaviour and not being in classes or at school for extended periods. These findings concur with those of Bingma (2012), namely that corporal punishment was sometimes brutally administered by teachers, even though it is illegal, in terms of national laws. According to Bingma (2012, p. 110) this is the kind of disciplinary practise that leads to an environment that "breed(s) institutional resistance". These findings also concur with a study by Fobih (1987) in Ghana which found that learners tended to drop out where teachers employed harsh ways of treating learners, including unfair disciplinary measures. As a result, the poor disciplinary climate that was fuelled by the practices at the schools was found to be a primary influence on male school dropout in this study.

The disciplinary measure of sending misbehaving learners home and not allowing them back at school before attending a disciplinary meeting accompanied by parents was also

controversial. This measure was not successful as "they (parents) also became tired of us (male dropouts) because they must stay out of work every day ... and then they (school management) chased us away from school" (MD 12). This kind of behaviour was also seen in Bingma's (2012) study on male school dropouts as a school principal mentioned that "it is often better to expel young men who cause trouble (at school)" (p. 113). This approach was also found to be detrimental to male learners who were already struggling academically and disconnected from the school system (Bingma, 2012). Therefore, keeping learners away from school as an act of 'discipline' rather seemed to be a way of getting them out of the system, and based on my experience this is one of the biggest reasons why males eventually drop out of school.

Not being allowed at school had multiple effects on the male dropouts: they missed academic work, became involved in other negative behaviour while not attending school and got into the habit of being absent from school or not being in class. One participant explained it as follows: "[N]ow you start staying at home (because of expulsion) ... now you also don't want to go to school anymore because you don't want to bring your parents to school each time" (MD 11). Despite these obvious influences, school principals in my study seemed determined to enforce this practice which illustrated that this was a way of intentionally getting some learners to stay away from the school. A shocking revelation was the confession of a small group of teachers who intentionally worked at getting rid of some male learners from their classes by making "the world hot for (them)", even though they knew it was "a bit negative" (FT 1). This confession by a teacher was supported by other teacher participants in this specific focus group. I could not find any other studies on school dropout that cited this particular practice but it resembles the principle of 'weeding', as termed by Crouch and Vinjevold (2006), where learners are held back in grades in order to influence the NSC results and EMIS data. In a similar way, getting male learners to disengage with school and eventually drop out meant that these learners, of whom many were already struggling academically, would not be part of the group to write the NSC examinations and would therefore not influence this outcome which the DBE uses as the main criterion for judging a high school's success.

In terms of the legality of the disciplinary process that schools follow, as described above, SASA 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996b) is of particular importance. Section 9(1) of this law stipulates the learner's right to receive a fair hearing and then not being allowed to be expelled for more

than one week. However, the process as described in this study typically did not include a 'fair hearing' and was not enforced for one week only but for as long as it took for a parent to come to school. Therefore, the use of the disciplinary measure as described above is illegal. What makes it even worse is that the official authority to whom the schools report are aware of this practice, as revealed in an interview with a representative of the WCED who stated that "schools are getting away with murder by chasing away children ... they come with illegal ways, but (he) can understand, it is survival things" (WCED 1). Therefore, even the officials to whom the school principals report are aware of this illegal practice which is contributing to school dropout but they do not take any corrective actions, as far as I could establish, against such conduct.

When looking at the explanations for following the aforementioned disciplinary practices, in spite of the illicitness thereof, two reasons become apparent. Firstly, the school principals and teachers were struggling to manage their schools and classes through more moderate disciplinary actions. Therefore, this was a way of trying to maintain some kind of order in their classes and schools, but it was happening at the expense of some learners who were then also the ones who usually dropped out. As one school principal explained, "[T]he parent, the primary caregiver of the child, must then come to us, in many cases the parents take a week to come. Thus, that child then stays (out of school) a week" (SP 1). Therefore, school principals were open about their schools' implementation of this disciplinary action which to them had become an accepted disciplinary measure. With this in mind, I would like to reiterate that these findings are not intended to vilify the specific institutions or individuals involved; they rather comment on the structure and practices being followed and the resultant detrimental effect.

5.3.1.2 Poor relationships between learners and teachers

Poor relationships between male learners and teachers were revealed as a primary influence on school dropout as some dropout participants "left school because (of) a teacher at school who did not like (them)" (MD 1) and treated them accordingly. What this meant was that male dropouts did not feel welcome at school, to such an extent that they thought it better to leave altogether. These findings are consistent with Bryk and Schneider's (2002) finding that effective relationships between school principals, teachers, learners and parents contribute to engagement and positive educational outcomes. Bridgeland et al. (2006) also found that strong relationships between an adult and a learner at school serve as a protective factor

against school dropout. Therefore, these negative relationships and absence of 'relational trust', as described by Bryk and Schneider (2002), were clearly not supportive of a positive school environment where learners are motivated to learn and stay in school. These findings also build on Elmore's (2004) argument that school principals and teachers should initiate change in a school; in this case it would be a change in the nature of relationships between teachers, learners and parents. However, similar to the previously discussed influence, there is no mention of this influence in South African quantitative studies that employed large national data sets (Branson et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2011). Therefore, it seems as if this finding also provides a unique contribution to the understanding of the influences on male school dropout in SA.

To emphasise the negative effect of both verbal and non-verbal interactions between teachers and learners I again refer to data from my study. Experiencing that "most of the teachers always pushed (him) down" (MD 6) and hearing how a teacher called her child a "knife stabber or a gangster" (FP 9), made male dropouts and parents feel unconnected to the teachers and school. On the other hand, teachers spoke about the negative relationships which they had with some learners as "you would not like to hear the whole day your mother's this and your mother's that" (FT 2). Therefore, teachers felt as if they had no other choice but to respond in a negative way towards these learners. Put simply, the nature and tone of communication between teachers and learners revealed extremely negative relationships which influenced school dropout among males.

Upon closer investigation, it became clear that the negative relationships between teachers and learners were regarded as normal and part of the school culture. The one explanation, according to the teacher participants, was that they have negative relationships with a small group "to protect the other children (against those who are disruptive)" (FT 2) and therefore it was acceptable to make life hard for some of them. It seemed as if teachers were successful in establishing these negative relationships and making some learners feel unwelcome. Overall, negative relationships between teachers and some learners were part and parcel of the underlying culture at both the schools involved in the study and it appears as if this culture directly contributed to school dropout among males. These findings are consistent with those of Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Bridgeland et al. (2006) who found that effective relationships between school principals, teachers, learners and parents contribute to engagement and positive educational outcomes while also serving serving as a protective

factor against school dropout. Therefore, these negative relationships and absence of 'relational trust', as described by Bryk and Schneider (2002), were clearly not supportive of a positive school environment where learners are motivated to learn and to stay in school.

I further discuss this concept of 'relational trust' (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) with specific reference to the findings of this study. When considering the nature of the relationships between the teachers and learners as described in this study it is evident that there were low levels of relational trust between these parties. This finding is in accordance with the findings of Bingma (2012, p. 109) who writes that "favouritism or what is perceived as favouritism may arise as teachers identify and nurture learners who display potential to do well and boost their school's pass rates and in future, matric results". This is the exact opposite of what I described in this section but according to Bingma (2012, p. 110), a combination of these kinds of actions from authority had the potential "to breed institutional resistance". The phrase 'institutional resistance' was never used by any of the participants but comments of the male dropout and parent participants suggest that the negative relationships between them and the teachers and school principals had indeed led to some kind of resistance towards the school. Negative relationships between the stakeholders in this study seemed to contribute to the overall poor relationships between the different institutions being represented through this process, including the school and family. These observations also build on Elmore's (2004) idea that school principals and teachers should initiate change in a school – in this case it would be a change in the nature of relationships between teachers, learners and parents. Therefore, there is clear proof that the negative relationships between male learners and teachers led to a poor connection between learners and the school and this led to school dropout among male learners.

Next, I discuss the data that emerged from the study which were categorised as influences in the family context.

5.4 INFLUENCES IN THE FAMILY CONTEXT

In the following section I discuss the data that was categorised as influences within the family context. The family influences are, similar to school influences, also confluent to the individual influences and only categorised separately for structural purposes. Of the three family-related factors that emerged from, two were primary and one a proximal influence on male school dropout. Therefore, the primary influences on male school dropout as found in

this study are equally balanced between the influences in the individual, school and family context'. Each of the three influences in the family context was considered under a separate category and I have copied a section of Table 4.8 as a reminder of these categories. Table 5.3 includes this information.

Table 5.3: Family influences on male school dropout

CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
5.4.1 Family structure	5.4.1.1 Single-parent families
5.4.2 Family resources	5.4.2.1 Low socioeconomic status
5.4.3 Family practices	5.4.3.1 Lack of parental involvement

Following, I engage in discussing the influences in the family context on male school dropout as experienced by the participants in this study.

5.4.1 Family structure

In this study, there was one influence that emerged from the data as an influence relating to the family structure and that was single-parent families. Next, I describe this sub-category to gain a better understanding of the influence it had on male school dropout.

5.4.1.1 Single-parent families

Single-parent families were found to be a primary influence on male school dropout as many participants indicated that "many of them (parents of school dropouts) are single-parents" (MT 4). It seemed as if male learners who had grown up in single-parent families were more susceptible to influences that can lead to school dropout. This finding is supported by research by Bridgeland et al. (2006) who confirmed the influence of single-parent families on school dropout. In fact, Ishitani and Snider (2006) comment that scholars agree that single-parent families are the most significant family factor that influences school dropout. Related to this issue, both Perreira et al. (2006) and Rumberger (1995) have confirmed lower dropout rates for children living with both their parents; thus it is evident that single-parent families are indeed an influence on male school dropout.

Looking at the reasons why single-parent families influenced school dropout, two points became apparent. Firstly, single mothers struggled to be the sole breadwinners and although one could argue that it is not necessary for a father to live with his family in order to support them financially, the data in this study suggested that fathers who were not physically present were mostly also not contributing financially to their biological families. I discuss this influence of the low SES of a family under the next point and at this point only note that this was a practical effect of being in a single-parent family. This finding was partly supported by a South African study by Fleisch et al. (2010) that analysed the data of the 2007 Community Survey and found that there was a much higher proportion of children who do not live with their parents who are out of school than those living with a parent. Secondly, the effect of single-parent families was seen in the emotional effect it had on male school dropouts. This was especially true for families where "the father was very little interested in (the male dropout)" (FP 9). This left an emotional vacuum, especially among teenage males who are in a life stage where they are establishing their identity and sense of self. As a parent participant explained, "[T]he role model, the father figure they (male dropouts) don't always have ... they cannot always talk to their mother and at the end of the day if they are a big man they do not know where they fit in" (FP 3). Therefore, male learners who lived in single-parent families without their father or an appropriate male role model seemed to be vulnerable to other influences that led to school dropout; combined with the school system that failed them this kind of situation was detrimental to many.

The above-mentioned findings are in agreement with those of various local and international studies on the influence of single-parent families on school dropout. These include the studies of Ferreira et al. (2006) and Rumberger (1995) who found that children living with both their parents have lower dropout rates and higher school completion rates, compared to those living in any other family structure. In SA, Fleisch et al. (2010) similarly found that there is a much higher proportion of children who live with a relative as the head of the household – in other words without parents or grandparents (7.6%) – who are not in school than children who live with their biological parents as the head of the household (4%). Furthermore, children who were living with a non-relative as the head of the household were even at greater risk with 10.6% of these children being out of school (Fleisch et al., 2010). Interestingly, in Tanzania, Al Samarrai and Peasgood (1998) found that female-headed households put a high priority on their children's education. Grant and Hallman (2008) arrived at similar findings in SA where they established that children living with their mothers were significantly less likely to drop

out of school compared to those whose mothers were living elsewhere or whose mothers were deceased. In my study I did not attempt to do this kind of comparison in order to agree or disagree with this idea but it seems as if living with a mother did not serve as a resource to prevent dropout in my study. This was probably because these mothers and families lacked the financial and social capital, as judged by their own education and employment statuses. I discuss this matter in more depth in the next two sub-sections but for now it is sufficient to say that the single-parent families, even if headed by a female, appeared to have an influence on school dropout among males.

5.4.2 Family resources

Family resources was the next family-related category that emerged from the data and in this study the influence of low financial and human resources was found to be a proximal influence on male school dropout. Next, I describe this sub-category as an influence on male school dropout.

5.4.2.1 Low socioeconomic status

The low SES of a family was found to be a proximal influence on school dropout among males as for many of their families there was "not an income because (his) auntie was the only one who worked ... that is why (he) left school" (MD 15). The pressure of these kinds of situations forced some male dropouts to leave school in an effort to find a job. This finding is not a surprise as previous South African studies (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2008; Fleisch et al., 2012) have had similar findings. In fact, the influence of something like the economic status of a family has been found to be the most significant influence on school dropout in South African studies like that of Branson et al. (2013). These findings also seem to concur with Dalton et al.'s (2009) statistics which indicate that learners from the lowest SES set were five times more likely to drop out (12.4% versus 1.8%) than learners from the highest set. It is also in accordance with Croninger and Lee's (2001) research that created another composite of risk factors within families and measured the combined effect thereof to find that learners with at least one of these risk factors had a 66% higher chance of dropping out of high school, compared to learners with none of these risk factors. Next, I unpack the findings of this study and how they relate to what has already been written on the topic at hand.

It was clear that the SES of families influenced their school dropout as it made young males feel that they also needed to contribute financially to their household by leaving school and

finding a job. This could be an indication of their sense of responsibility or that they were already contemplating to drop out because of other influences, like academic struggles or negative relationships with teachers. However, most of these male dropouts were not able to find a job to earn the income they were in need of and they did not know how to go about doing so. Therefore, the SES, added to other influences, contributed to the school dropout among the male participants in this study. But because they did not have the social support or capital to find employment they did not earn money and contribute in this way to their families. The effect of such situations was also seen in the type of living conditions where "there ... four, five, six (people were living) in one small room" (MT 2). This made it difficult for children to handle basic school-related activities, like doing homework and studying. These poor living conditions were also not conducive to social learning and stimulation, which means that the places that these families called home were not the places where optimal care and support were received.

The findings presented above seem to suggest that the lack of family financial resources is a minor influence on school dropout. This observation concurs with Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert's (2008) argument that absolute poverty is unlikely to be such a major risk factor for school dropout in SA, given the high levels of poverty and school enrolment. It is also in line with Fleisch et al.'s (2012) claim that there is no meaningful relationship between poverty and learners not attending school. However, this finding contradicts the findings of Branson et al. (2013) that limited finances were the highest (23%) reason given by males for dropping out of school. This difference can most likely be ascribed to the population who participated in this study. What seems to be similar to Branson et al.'s (2013) study is that being in a poor household can lead to other factors which also influence school dropout, including grade repetition. For example, Branson et al. (2013) found that, in a given time frame, 30% of the poorest Grade 11 learners had repeated at least one grade, compared to only 8% of the richest Grade 11 learners. Therefore, the low SES of a family influenced male school dropout in various ways and although the true extent is uncertain, it does indeed appear to influence individuals on many different levels.

5.4.3 Family practices

As discussed in the previous chapter, there was only one influence relating to family practices that produced a significant finding: lack of parental involvement. In the next sub-section I discuss this finding.

5.4.3.1 Lack of parental involvement

The lack of parental involvement in children's lives was found to be a primary influence on school dropout as participants indicated that their parents did not ask them "if (they) did (their) homework, assignments, and cared for (them)" (MD 16). They added that if they had received this kind of attention they would still have been at school. This extract seems to confirm the idea of passive parents who, in terms of educational involvement, did not give any support or guidance to the male dropout participants. Further, participants were of the opinion that such lack of support and involvement had an influence on their school dropout. These findings are consistent with findings from African studies by Mansuka (2011), Makwinja-Morara (2007) and Mapani (2011) and a South African study by Grant and Hallman (2008) who all found that parents of school dropouts were generally detached from their children's education. In the USA, Stone (2006) found that sustained home communication about school was associated with higher school performance and lower school dropout. The combination of these factors provides insight as to these parents' academic ability, which implies that most of them do not possess the skills to support their children academically as they most probably cannot read, write and/or count in a way to support their children.

In an effort to understand the parents' perceptions and attitudes towards education, an exploration of these participants' own levels of education offered some insight. According to the demographic data from this study, the average educational qualification of the parent participants was Grade 9. More specifically, only one parent had completed her school career (9%) while eight had dropped out in high school (73%) and the other two only went to primary school (18%). Further, the average age of the parent participants was 47 years, which means that most of them attended school before 1994 when education was not high on the agenda for the non-White population groups. Therefore, the little education that most of them received was of a poor quality. These findings are supported by Mapani's (2011) Namibian study that found that parents were also deprived of a good education before the independence of their country; this affected the kind of support they could offer their own children and consequently it also influenced school dropout. This finding is consistent with the findings of Cheung (2011) that effective collaboration between parents and the school can have a very positive effect on the ability of a child to utilise the available social capital being provided at the school. These low levels of education of the parent participants could have had multiple

effects on their attitude and actions in terms of their children's education. For example, a school principal's experience of "only 20-30% of those (parents) who must be here shows up" (SP 2) at parent evenings might be because parents felt intimidated by the teachers because they are on a much lower educational level than the teachers.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discussed the primary and proximal influences on school dropout among males, based on the data presented by the participants in this study. The concurrence between the different influences was noteworthy and confirmed that school dropout is not an event but rather a process that happens on various levels. My underlying argument regarding this process is that many of the individual influences which seemed like the male school dropouts' own fault were indeed fuelled by institutional issues in the family or school. Therefore, I have argued that schools and families are failing young males and these individuals are getting all the blame for dropping out of school. Indeed, what is needed in order to address this problem is a more holistic view of the school dropout process with a special focus on the school as an institution. A barrier to such an approach appears to be the DoE's fixation with the NSC results which only include less than half of the country's learners. The implication is that more than half of the country's Grade 12 learners do not even form part of these results. Combined, all these factors influence school dropout among males and in the following chapter I will provide a summary and some recommendations as to what can be done to address these matters.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The overall aim and outcome of my study was to determine the influences on school dropout among males in the greater Cape Town area and thereby contribute to the limited body of knowledge on this topic in SA. On the most basic level, I would say that I succeeded in doing this. For example, a key finding, namely struggling academically, as an influence, has not received adequate attention in SA and is mostly viewed as an individual problem although there are school-related and family-related factors that contribute to this influence. The findings also go beyond the merely descriptive accounts of the participants as they also establish connections between the various influences and specifically provide deeper insight into the institutional nature thereof. Further, this study underlines the distinct factors influencing males in dropping out and makes a case for the need to focus on them. These factors also confirmed the relevance of the international conceptual framework that was used and an alternative for understanding male school dropout in SA. Finally, I also examined the lack of adequate data measurements on school and district level and demonstrated how such measurements could assist in addressing school dropout by making school management and WCED officials aware of the extent of the problem. Put simply, I consider this study to be a noteworthy contribution to the knowledge on male school dropout in SA.

In this final chapter, I first present a summary of the findings that emerged from the study. Next, I offer recommendations, based on the results of the study, for all the role players involved. In the third section, I discuss the limitations of this study and how they potentially influenced the findings. In conclusion, I offer some recommendations for future research.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

The overall findings in this study encourage an altered and more integrated approach to viewing the influences on male school dropout in SA than prior studies. To substantiate this statement, I compare my findings to previous studies as examples. Firstly, the only South African study (Bingma, 2012) on male school dropout, of which I am aware, had comparable

findings in terms of the influences on male school dropout but failed to include and illustrate the connection of the various influences and stakeholders. Secondly, the prominent South African studies (Branson et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2011) that have made use of large data sets to investigate school dropout among males and females followed a narrow classification of specific influences that accentuates the narrative that blames, for example, male dropouts for their academic incompetence while there is proof that this is fundamentally a family- and school-related problem. Therefore, I propose that a localised framework with a more integrative classification of influences on school dropout be explored (see 6.5).

The prominent use of theories (Finn, 1989; Tinto, 1975) and a conceptual framework (Rumberger & Lim, 2008) from the USA proved to be useful and relevant for this study. For example, a distinctive feature of both Finn (1989) and Tinto's (1975, 1987) theories is the central role that the school plays in the school dropout process, and when looking at my findings and the prominence of this influence, it is evident that it provided a useful basis for building a narrative highlighting the school's influence on male school dropout in SA. For this reason, it is clear that both these theories are indeed relevant for understanding male school dropout in SA and can serve as a basis to build a localised theory for understanding the phenomenon. Rumberger and Lim's (2008) conceptual framework also proved to be a relevant and valuable resource for exploring male school dropout in SA. All of the influences as found in this study could be ordered within this framework and although the findings of my study eventually only yielded three of the four themes and only about half of the sub-categories (influences), there were still many similarities. For example, an in-depth investigation into a category like engagement, with its accompanying sub-categories like absenteeism and missing classes, could not be found in prior South African studies, but Rumberger and Lim's (2008) framework assisted me in making sense and ordering this important influence on male school dropout in SA. Therefore, this study proved that Rumberger and Lim's (2008) conceptual framework for understanding male school dropout in SA is useful and can certainly be utilised as a central building block in constructing a localised understanding of this phenomenon. Building on this framework, the categories and sub-categories as constructed through the grounded theory process serves as an example of an amended framework for understanding male school dropout in SA. This serves as a further confirmation that I did succeed in reaching this outcome of making a contribution on this level.

In the sub-sections that follow, I offer a separate, summative discussion of each of the primary influences and a combined discussion of the proximal influences under each of the main themes. As explained in Chapter 4, these classifications (primary and proximal) are not an indication of the reciprocal influence of these findings but rather an indication of their prominence, according to the participants in this study. However, these can also be seen as suggestion for a localised conceptual framework for understanding male school dropout in SA. Next, I commence with the presentation of a summary of the individual influences on school dropout among males as they emerged from the data in this study.

6.2.1 Individual influences

I found two primary and six proximal influences that fell within the individual influences category. The primary influences were struggling academically, and being affiliated to a gang. The proximal influences were grade failure, missing classes, absenteeism, misbehaviour at school, substance abuse, and being bullied. Next, I draw conclusions from the primary individual influences as they emerged from this study.

6.2.1.1 Primary influences in the individual context

Struggling academically was shown to be a primary influence on male school dropout in this study. This outcome confirmed what international research has established and South African studies have hinted at: struggling academically is indeed the best indicator of or influence for school dropout among males. The results further illustrated that the school system failed male learners by not teaching them basic numeracy and literacy skills. This state of affairs has led to a combination of academic incompetence and social alienation which made it nearly impossible for them to bond or associate with school and its accompanying activities. The question for these struggling male learners, I contend, was not if they would drop out but when they would drop out. Furthermore, the DoE's fixation with the annual NSC results has led to no one blinking an eye over the more than half of all learners who are not even included as part of the NSC statistics. Therefore, struggling academically was identified as a primary influence that mainly blamed males for their struggles while it was just as much a school-related problem in need of urgent attention. Unless this perception changes, there is little chance of addressing male school dropout on a large scale in SA as no one is being held accountable for this problem. In terms of the contribution to the South African knowledge, this finding is unique in the sense that it moves the focus away from the individual male

dropout to a more holistic view that includes the individual and school; therefore it highlights an alternative way of viewing and addressing this phenomenon.

Gangs were found to be another primary influence on male school dropout, as indicated by the findings in this study. Different types of neglect, instability and alienation in families and schools created an environment where gangs provide an alternative to school. For example, in single-parent families with no father figure, gang members became role models by providing in the emotional needs of young males through buying them various material things. In terms of the school, teachers had an opportunity to positively fill the emotional vacuum that was left by the family but it seemed as if they merely exacerbated the negative feelings of alienation. Combined, the gang activities and the advantage they held offered a seeming better opportunity and a future than school for many young males. In cases where they were not academically or socially connected to the school the chances were good that they would rather drop out and pursue a gang-affiliated 'career'. Therefore, the findings from this study illustrate that gangs influenced school dropout among males as they were lured into thoughts and actions that were not aligned with school engagement and completion. The findings also clearly illustrated that this problem is much more than just the presence of the gangs or the behaviour of the male school dropouts but also about the failure of the school and family systems to provide secure environments where positive learning and development can take place.

6.2.1.2 Proximal influences in the individual context

Grade failure was found to be a proximal influence on male school dropout. The combined, often repetitive, feelings of frustration, failure and humiliation made male learners feel unmotivated to continue with school and led to their dropping out. The findings also indicated that the supposed advantage of grade failure was not true for learners in schools where there was no additional support or interventions offered to those who struggled or failed. On the contrary, grade repetition had a negative effect on male learners' motivation to learn and rather made them want to leave school. Another insight from this study was that grade repetition was an acceptable norm at the specific schools, which made the chance for additional support even less. Combined, these factors led to emotional disengagement with the school and the eventual outcome was dropping out.

Missing classes and being absent from school were both engagement-related factors that were indicated as proximal influences on male school dropout. Both these influences appeared to be connected to the school system as common disciplinary practices did not allow misbehaving male learners in class or at school. Indeed, the findings showed that the school initiated this behaviour in many cases and therefore these influences had to do with individual behaviour as well as with the institutional practices at school. It was easier for teachers to manage their overcrowded classes and teach if these male learners were out of the class or school. Even though it may be true, in the case of such young male learners the combination of not being allowed in class or at school and other influences, like struggling academically or being bullied, led to the demise of a positive bond with the school. Finally, a lack of data and measurements to monitor the extent of absenteeism, especially chronic absenteeism, made this an influence that is only detected after learners drop out. Indeed, the term 'chronic absenteeism' does not feature in the data or even in the SA literature on school dropout and therefore this finding sheds some light on this unexplored topic. Combined, these engagement issues are easily identifiable and measurable on school level and if they are handled more seriously, males who are at risk of dropping out of school could be identified more easily.

Misbehaviour at school, including substance abuse, was found to be a proximal influence on male school dropout in this study. The misbehaviour at school included theft, fighting and defiance of teachers' and school principals' authority, which led to certain disciplinary actions being taken against male learners. These seeming remedial actions included not being allowed in certain classes or at school and they appeared to amplify negative behaviour and led to even less positive engagement with the school. Although the behaviour was mostly not delinquent of nature, it appeared to be predictive for later delinquent behaviour. As a result, misbehaviour at school was a proximal influence on male school dropout. Substance abuse was the other behaviour-related proximal influence that had an effect on school dropout among males. The effect of this influence was seen in the way it led to certain types of behaviour that negatively influenced male dropouts' connection with the school. For example, substance abuse led to actions such as stealing and selling substances in order to have the financial means to continue the cycle. The direct effect was seen in learners missing or not attending classes or being in class but not being able to concentrate and engage at an optimal level. Cannabis was by far the most prominent substance that participants mentioned and although it is illegal in SA, the findings from this study showed that it is as common as tobacco and alcohol in the given school contexts. With this in mind, I can conclude that

substance use, especially cannabis, was a common substance used by male learners in this study and the direct and indirect effects of this influence led to school dropout among males.

Being bullied was found to be a proximal influence on male school dropout in this study. Being bullied included things like being physically hurt and robbed of material possessions or being verbally ridiculed by fellow learners who were often older than the victim. The outcome for all these was the same: a diminished feeling of attachment and belonging to the school. Although this topic has received some attention in SA, it also needs significantly more attention in an effort to address the problem. This was also the only influence in the study that is typically associated with females and therefore underreported by males as being bullied can be seen as a sign of weakness.

6.2.2 Influences in the school context

In this study there was evidence of two influences on school dropout among males that fell within the school context category. Both these, namely a poor disciplinary climate and illegal practices, and poor relationships between teachers and learners, were primary influences. Next, I discuss the primary school-related influences as they emerged from this study.

6.2.2.1 Primary influences in the school context

A poor disciplinary climate and illegal disciplinary practices at the schools were found to be primary influences on male school dropout. The main argument was that schools use illegal practices in the name of discipline, which then promotes disengagement with the school and eventual dropout among male learners. It was found that teachers denied misbehaving learners access to the class or the school, and at times blatantly victimised them. These practices shaped the disciplinary climate that was marked by institutional resistance on behalf of the male school dropouts, leading to a constant state of disorder with learners running around and not being in class. School principals and WCED representatives were all aware of these illegal practices which were clearly contributing to school dropout among males. In spite of this awareness, none of these representatives could give an assurance that any kind of action was being taken to address such violations. Furthermore, the effect of these practices was mostly seen among males and therefore it provided a unique insight in relation to the topic under investigation. In terms of the contribution to the South African knowledge, it was also unique as it shed light on a primary influence on male school dropout that does not feature in quantitative studies using large national data sets.

Poor relationships between male learners and teachers were found to be another primary influence on school dropout among males in the school context. Participants described an off-the-record hostility between teachers and certain male learners which included negative verbal and non-verbal interactions between these parties. An effect on these negative relationships was a low level of trust between learners and teachers which was unfavourable for school engagement and progress. This seemed to be one of the biggest factors which led to alienation and withdrawal on the male dropouts' behalf as they felt totally disconnected from the teachers and school. In terms of the body of knowledge on school dropout, the effect of negative relationships was not a new insight but rather a confirmation of the importance and potential positive influence that trusting relationships between teachers and male learners can have. However, in the South African context it is also an influence that goes missing in quantitative studies that use big data sets; therefore it highlights an influence that is often ignored.

6.2.3 Influences in the family context

The findings from this study indicated that there were two primary influences and one proximal influence on school dropout among males that had to do with the family context, based on the classification used for this study. The two primary influences were single-parent families, and parents' lack of involvement in their children's education. The one proximal influence in the family context was the low SES of a family. Next, I discuss the primary influences and then the proximal influences on school dropout in the family context.

6.2.3.1 Primary influences in the family context

The findings indicated that single-parent families were an influence on school dropout among males as such a family leaves an emotional and financial vacuum that one parent finds difficult to fill. This was especially evident in families where there was not a father present. The financial pressure that such a situation placed on families where there was only one parent or adult earning an income often forced males to find a way – be it legal or illegal – to earn an income and contribute financially to the family's income. The absence of a father or male adult also left a social and emotional vacuum in young males' lives that made them more vulnerable to be lured into gang-related activities. Combined, these financial and emotional implications of being in a single-parent family appeared to put males in a position where they were more at risk of entering the trajectory that eventually led to school dropout. Although

other research has looked at these family influences, this study seems to be the first in SA that has made the connection between the absence of fathers and male school dropout.

I found that parents' lack of involvement and support in their children's academic careers was a primary influence on school dropout. This manifested in poor support and supervision, little or no assistance with academic work and low levels of communication and participation in school-related activities. Teachers and school principals shared their frustrations about uninvolved parents who made little or no contribution to their children's educational careers. Teachers experienced a lack of communication between the school and the families because they got little or no feedback and engagement from parents of male dropouts. Another factor that contributed to low levels of parental involvement was parents' low levels of education that consciously and unconsciously made them feel unable to be involved in their children's education. With this in mind, it seemed logical to conclude that parents' lack of involvement in their children's academic careers is an influence on male school dropout.

6.2.3.2 Proximal influences in the family context

The low SES of a family influenced school dropout among males as it limited the financial and human resources children needed to stay engaged and progress in school. Household poverty influenced school dropout because learners did not have the basic needs to support basic development, like proper housing conditions where they have a space to do homework and study for exams. As the children got older, they found themselves in a situation where they might be struggling academically and lacked basic needs at home; therefore the option of dropping out to earn an income became very tempting. It was far more lucrative to drop out and earn a living. Parent participants also referred to the influence of the cost of keeping children at school, like uniforms, books and transport, especially when they were not making academic progress and were getting into trouble. The lack of human or social resources could be seen in parent's inability to assist their children in planning for their future. Therefore, the low SES of a family seemed to influence school dropout among males in this study.

Next, I make some recommendations based on the above findings that could assist in addressing male school dropout in SA.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the findings on school dropout among males as presented above, I propose the following recommendations on practice and policy level that could assist the various role players involved in this study in addressing the phenomenon under investigation. I have divided this section into four categories: recommendations for schools; recommendations for the WCED; recommendations for families; and recommendations for social workers and other mental health professionals. Before commencing with the discussion, I would like to point out that no recommendations are made for individual male dropouts. The reason is that the influences on male school dropout, as illustrated in this study, primarily arise within the various institutions which they form part of and therefore the recommendations are directed towards these role players. Next, I commence with the recommendations for schools.

6.3.1 Recommendations for schools (teachers and school principals)

It is clear that male learners need to master basic literacy and numeracy skills in order to have a chance of succeeding at school. These foundational skills need to be instilled in primary school and such action would require a concerted effort between teachers and parents. With this in mind, it is suggested that teachers, especially in primary school ensure, that all learners master these skills. This can be done through the implementation of a basic literacy programme, in addition to the standard curriculum. Such a programme, which could be incorporated into the school day or be offered after school, should involve parents to such an extent that they are empowered to continue the learning process at home.

Findings from this study indicated that teachers struggle to administer positive disciplinary actions against male learners who are disrupting their classes. It is recommended that school principals get additional support from the WCED or another educational expert to assist the school in developing a discipline strategy for their school. Teachers would benefit through this, coupled with additional training, and be in a better position to manage their classes in a more positive way. This will ultimately assist teachers in establishing more positive relationships with male learners who are giving disciplinary problems in their classes.

With regard to the combination of influences as reported in this study, it is clear that there is a need for a form of school-based support service to offer additional support to at-risk male learners. It is suggested that schools appoint a social worker or counsellor who is permanently available at school. If schools do not have the resources to do this, it is recommended that

they identify a community-based organisation in their area with this kind of expertise and offer them a space at their school from where they can deliver a support service to learners. Another option is to identify teachers who are interested in supporting learners on a one-on-one basis and get a community-based organisation to offer training to them. Their teaching periods could then be organised in such a way that they have some additional time available to provide support to at-risk male learners.

Results indicated that there are some influences, like struggling academically and absenteeism, which can act as early warning signs for male learners who are at risk of dropping out. It is recommended that school principals develop an early warning system, based on the results from this study, whereby teachers can identify and monitor male learners who are at risk of dropping out. Reporting of this data would be monitored by the school principal or other senior staff members on a monthly basis to identify those male learners who are at risk and offer support to them before it is too late.

The findings illustrated that parents sometimes feel apprehensive of the teachers and the school because of the distant relationship that often exists between them. It is suggested that school principals and teachers establish a parenting committee to act as a bridge between the school and the community. Through this committee positive events and interaction between parents and teachers can be promoted in an effort to build trusting relationships between these parties. These types of relationships will offer the platform whereby parents can engage with the school in a positive way and thereby be more involved in their children's education.

6.3.2 Recommendations for the Western Cape Education Department

Findings from this study indicated that male school dropout is the result of a convergence of influences on various levels of functioning and not the result of a single event or factor. These included influences that were related to social conditions, housing, safety and more. With this in mind, it is suggested that the WCED work together with other provincial departments like the Western Cape Department of Health, the Western Cape Department of Social Development and the South African Police Services to develop an integrated policy and strategy to address school dropout. For example, when the WCED only implements a programme on literacy, only one of the various influences on school dropout is addressed, but if this happens in collaboration with a programme by the police to address the trading of substances at school it can make a bigger impact. Therefore, such a strategy or programme

will ensure that a wider range of influences is addressed and not just a single influence, thereby to ensure that the problem of school dropout is addressed in a more holistic way.

Results from this study indicated that data on school dropout, both in general and specifically with regard to males, are not being recorded and monitored on a school and district level. Consequently, it appears necessary for the WCED to implement a policy and system whereby dropout data are recorded by schools in order for them and their districts to monitor the extent of the school dropout problem. This data ought to be reviewed annually in order to identify tendencies and see if dropout is getting better or worse.

The findings indicated that teachers and school principals are using both formal and informal illegal disciplinary actions aimed at pushing male learners out of school. It is recommended that the WCED address this problem by first presenting workshops to schools in order to make them aware of the national legislation and policies that should regulate their behaviour and then suggesting alternative options of handling at-risk learners. Further, the fact that male learners are often denied an education through these illegal practices calls for a specific portfolio or even a full-time position to be created within the WCED on a local level so that these illegal practices can be monitored, acted upon and eradicated.

The results indicated that teachers, school principals and WCED representatives all suspect that there are some influences on male school dropout that are more prominent than others but they are not sure. If, however, they knew what the influences were on male school dropout in their schools they could make an effort or develop a strategy to address these problems. I therefore recommend that the WCED collaborate with local universities to promote and support more studies on school dropout in order to grow the knowledge basis of this topic and then make the relevant information available to the mentioned parties in order for them to have a better understanding regarding the problem at hand.

6.3.3 Recommendations for families (parents and guardians)

The data from this study indicate that single-parent families, especially where there is no father figure, are a primary influence on school dropout among males. It is therefore recommended that single parents identify male family members or friends who can serve as positive role models to males growing up without fathers. The school and teachers can also play an important role in recruiting participants to fulfil this role.

Data from this study revealed that male dropouts do not primarily become involved in gangs because of their apparent lack of material possessions, but rather because of what these possessions represent: a need for identity and belonging. Therefore, it is suggested that parents make more time to establish trusting relationships with their children by spending more time with them in an effort to provide a sense of belonging and identity.

6.3.4 Recommendations for social workers and other mental health professionals

The results from this study indicated the great need there is for a stronger focus on the ‘softer’ influences on male school dropout, like the relationships between male school dropouts and their parents and teachers. It is recommended that social workers and mental health professionals get involved at schools to assist in addressing these concerns, as part of their intervention strategies for the communities they work in. This can happen in the form of school-wide campaigns or programmes focussed on addressing issues like parental roles and responsibilities, bullying and positive discipline.

Findings revealed that there is a myriad of influences on male school dropout and in particular some school and academic factors being prominent. Therefore, it is recommended that social workers and other health professionals who do work in schools get additional training regarding the complexities of male school dropout and the school systems in order to be effective when engaging in school-based services.

Next, I address the limitations of this study.

6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were a few limitations to this study that I would like to discuss in this section.

The first limitation had to do with the context of the study as the respondents were restricted to certain schools and communities in the greater Cape Town area. This limitation makes the transferability of the results restricted to schools and communities similar to the ones in which the study was undertaken.

Secondly, there were some of the teacher, school principal and WCED representative participants who knew me prior to the study as a social worker at their schools and in their communities. This could have made it difficult for them to engage in an honest and objective way. In an attempt to overcome this challenge, I communicated the aim of the study to these

participants at the first contact as well as before the interviews and discussions. This seemed to work well when judging by the richness of the data I collected from them. Therefore, this could potentially have been a positive aspect as people often take some time to trust people and in this situation there was already some kind of trust that enabled them to be more honest and open towards me.

A third limitation is related to the recruitment of the male school dropout and parent participants, especially in one of the communities involved in the study, where it was extremely difficult because of safety concerns in this area. Some specific housing blocks in this community had to be avoided because of safety concerns. Consequently, potential participants from these areas were not considered for inclusion in the study.

A fourth limitation was that I relied heavily on literature and research from the USA to situate my findings, because the literature on the influences on school dropout in SA, especially among males, is scant. Therefore, although I relied on this literature and models to uphold my findings, I would recommend that consideration be given to the applicability of this literature to the South African context, in view of the cultural and political diversity in this country.

Another limitation was that the data I collected from the participants, especially the male dropouts, may only have reflected the events that prompted their final decision to drop out and not the root cause or long-term problem that influenced their dropout. For this reason, the influences on school dropout as cited in this study can possibly be seen as triggers and not the real reasons why participants dropped out.

In spite of these limitations, there is sufficient proof to support the trustworthiness of the process and the results as obtained in this study. Upon reflecting on each step of the process I can confidently state that I was meticulous in following the plan as set-out in Chapter 3 of this study. This plan and process was derived from the writings of Babbie & Mouton (2001), Henning et al. (2005), Palinkas et al. (2015) and others. For example, with the individual interviews I followed Bergman's (cited in Henning et al., 2005, p. 79) advice of "getting your foot in the door" by starting with the 'easier', less threatening themes and then easing into the more difficult ones. Further, the fact that the results in this study could be understood within the prominent school dropout models (Tinto, 1975; Finn, 1989) and frameworks (Rumberger and Lim, 2008) and also corresponded with local and international results on the same topic.

Combined, the research process as followed in this study supports the trustworthiness of the results that I presented.

Finally, when looking back on this study and the research process I followed, there are two things that I would have done differently. Firstly, I would rather have included fewer participants per school but more schools in order for the findings to be more representative of the greater Cape Town area. It would have been ideal to include other South African cities and provinces in order to shed some light on this national crisis. However, I did not have the capacity and resources to do this and considering the explorative nature of this study it was probably better this way. I now have a better understanding of the extent and complexities of undertaking such a study and am in a much better position to do something similar on a bigger scale in the future. Secondly, I would be more intentional in dealing with my own cultural barriers which influenced the original lens through which I viewed school dropout. My initial attitude made me fall into the trap of blaming individuals for their dropout and when I later looked more analytically at the issue it became apparent that many of these influences are actually institutional in nature. Consequently I had to rewrite a significant part of this dissertation as this viewpoint was integrated into the whole process. However, I suspect that this is part of the research journey.

6.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Seeing that this research is a ground-breaking study in SA, as there are several new findings or views on the topic under discussion, the results can be used as a basis for future research. Therefore, I recommend that further research be conducted as explained below.

Male school dropout is mostly seen through the lens of a single discipline, like social work or education, while this study showed that it is a multifaceted phenomenon. Therefore, I suggest a further study where researchers from various disciplines, such as education, social work, psychology, health, and correctional services collaborate with each other to provide a more holistic view of this complex problem in SA.

There is a need for a localised framework for the influences on school dropout in SA. Therefore, I suggest a further study to focus solely on developing a framework with reclassified categories to be more descriptive of the institutional nature of this phenomenon.

Of urgent need is a longitudinal, quantitative study looking at the extent of school dropout, especially among males, on a school, district, provincial and national level. Such a study would give a better idea of the true extent of the problem at hand and can be used as a baseline to measure the future status of this problem.

Based on the type of data that one would get from the research suggested above, a study on the financial cost of school dropout would be beneficial. Again, this costing should be broken down to a local, provincial and national level in order for all to see what school dropout is costing their cities and provinces in terms of finances. This might bring some urgency among policy makers to act urgently upon this problem.

National longitudinal studies on the life course of male dropouts can be beneficial to gain a better understanding of the true influences of both school dropout and school success. As mentioned earlier, the type of study that I employed is possibly only a reflection of the triggers or final incidents that lead to school dropout and not the root causes and a study as suggested would provide much more depth to the true contributors.

A study investigating programmes or practices that promote literacy and numeracy among boys will give schools and the DoE valuable insight into the kind of strategies that could be followed to address one of these primary influences on school dropout among males.

Teacher and school management feel helpless in handling discipline and order in their schools; therefore a study to determine the root causes of this situation would assist in understanding it better and finding possible ways of addressing the problem.

Parents and guardians are in great need of support and guidance; however, schools are unsure what this kind of support would entail. Therefore, a study focussed on the parents' experiences and needs would provide valuable insight to teachers and school management as to how they can support parents and involve them as part of the educational process.

6.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I presented a summary of the key findings of this study. A central idea of this study which I again emphasised was the fact that male school dropout is a holistic problem which is influenced in various contexts. I offered recommendations to all the role players involved in this phenomenon that could assist in addressing male school dropout in their

schools and communities. My discussion of the limitations of the study was aimed at reflecting my realistic expectation of the usefulness of the findings presented in this thesis. Finally, I offered some recommendations for future research which again referred to the need for a more holistic view on male school dropout in SA.

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APPENDIX A

**INTRODUCTORY LETTER SENT
TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS**

The University of Cape Town Faculty of
Humanities
Department of Social Development
Rondebosch
Cape Town
South Africa

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a registered PhD student at the Department of Social Development at the University of Cape Town. I am conducting a study on the factors contributing to school dropout among males in certain schools in the greater Cape Town area. In order to conduct this study, I need to interview males who have dropped out of school, their parents, teachers, school principals and representatives from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). I also have the official support of the WCED to conduct this study.

I would hereby like to invite you to participate in this study by engaging in an individual interview or group discussion with me. The interview or discussion will focus on your experience and beliefs regarding school dropout among males. Participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to do so. If at any stage during this interview you feel that you cannot continue, you are free to terminate the interview or leave the group and withdraw from the study. I would like to assure you that your identity will not be disclosed in any way and we are under legal obligation to protect your privacy at all times. Your answers will be combined with those of other individuals, and the answers you give will never be identified as yours.

If you are willing to participate, I kindly request that you sign the attached consent form. If you are younger than 18 years old, your parent/guardian must first sign the consent form before you can engage in an interview with me.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions regarding the research or requested participation. My cell number is 082 828 5648 and email address GLDPHI002@myuct.ac.za.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Yours sincerely

Philip Geldenhuys

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE WESTERN CAPE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



Directorate: Research

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ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mr Philip Geldenhuis
PO Box 4141
Ida's Valley
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7609

Dear Mr Philip Geldenhuis

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: EXPLORING THE EXTENT AND PREDICTORS FOR HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONGST MALE SCHOOL LEAVERS IN THE GREATER CAPE TOWN AREA, SOUTH AFRICA

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **28 February 2015 till 30 June 2015**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard
Directorate: Research
DATE: 16 March 2015

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Employment and salary enquiries: 0861 92 33 22
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APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM TO ALL PARTICIPANTS

I hereby agree that I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any stage during an interview or group discussion. I also understand that all information is confidential and that my identity will not be disclosed in any way. I undertake to do my utter best to assist in gathering accurate data by answering all questions truthfully.

Participant

Name and surname:

Date of birth:

Physical address:

Telephone number:

Signature:

Date: Place:

If participant is younger than 18 years, parent/guardian of participant

Name and surname:

Physical address:

Telephone number:

Relationship/position:

Signature:

Date: Place:

Witness/researcher

Name and surname:

Signature:

Date: Place:

APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH MALE DROPOUT

1. Demographic background

- 1.1 What gender are you? (If female, terminate interview.)
- 1.2 How old are you? When were you born?
- 1.3 What is your home language?
- 1.4 What population group do you belong to?
- 1.5 In which country were you born?
- 1.6 With whom do you currently live? If not your parents, how long have you been living with these people?
- 1.7 At any time, did you leave or stop attending high school before completing Grade 12? (If not, terminate interview.) If you answered YES to the above question, when did you last attend high school? (Year and month) What grade were you in then? Did you pass that grade?
- 1.8 What is the name of the last school you attended?

2. First, we are generally going to talk about school dropout and the general reasons why you left school.

- 2.1 As you look back on the time before you left school, are there specific events or things which played a determining role in your eventual dropout? Could you describe these? How did they affect the eventual act of dropping out of school?
- 2.2 How would you describe how you viewed education before dropping out? How, if at all, has your view of education changed?
- 2.3 If you had to go back to school, do you think you have the ability to succeed in school or would you struggle to progress and matriculate? Why would you succeed or not?

3. Now we are specifically going to talk about the role of the school.

- 3.1 Could you tell me more about the extent of school dropout in your school?
- 3.2 Tell me more about the reasons why males drop out of school?
- 3.3 Is there anything which the school did to support males to not to drop out of school?
What more can be done?

4. Next, we are going to talk about the influence of your family.

- 4.1 Tell me about the education of your family members. Has anyone of them dropped out of school?
- 4.2 What was your parents'/guardian's reaction when you dropped out of school? Were they aware of the possibility that you would possibly drop out or did it come as a surprise?
- 4.3 Was there anything they said or did in an effort to help you stay in school? How did this make you feel?

5. I would also like to talk about the influence of the community.

- 5.1 Are there any community concerns which you haven't mentioned, which contribute to school dropout among males? How do these concerns contribute to dropout?
- 5.2 What do most of these males who drop out of school do on a daily basis?

6. Finally, I have a few general questions.

- 6.1 What would have helped you to stay in school?
- 6.2 Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during the interview, specifically regarding school dropout?
- 6.3 How did you experience this interview? What was it like to talk about your school dropout?
- 6.4 Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP WITH TEACHERS

1. Demographic background

- 1.1 What gender are you?
- 1.2 How old are you?
- 1.3 What is your home language?
- 1.4 What is the name of the school where you teach?
- 1.5 What is your current position at this school?
- 1.6 How long have you been in this position?
- 1.7 If this was not your first teaching job, how long have you been in education?

2. First, we are going to talk about the general reasons why male learners drop out of school.

- 2.1 Tell me more about the reasons why males drop out of school at your school. Why, in your opinion, do these factors contribute to school dropout?

3. Next, we are going to talk about the influence of male learners' family background on school dropout.

- 3.1 Tell me about the family's influence on the school dropout of the males. How does this influence school dropout?
- 3.2 Could you tell me about the involvement of the parents of the male dropouts?

4. I would also like to talk about the influence of the community on male school dropout.

4.1 Are there any community concerns which you haven't mentioned, which contribute to school dropout among males? How do these concerns contribute to dropout?

5. Next, we are going to talk about the influence of the school on male school dropout.

5.1 Could you tell me more about the extent of school dropout at your school? What percentage of males who enrol in Grade 8, do you think, drop out of school before completing Grade 12?

5.2 Are there early warning signs for males who drop out of school? What are these signs?

5.3 Could you tell me more about the school's policies or interventions to assist male learners who are at risk of dropping out of school? Why are these effective or not?

6. Finally, I have a few GENERAL QUESTIONS.

6.1 What do you think are the most important things which would ensure that males do not drop out of school? Why are these things so important? How should one implement these?

6.2 Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during the interview, specifically regarding school dropout among males?

6.3 Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

1. Demographic background

- 1.1 What gender are you?
- 1.2 How old are you?
- 1.4 What is your home language?
- 1.5 What is the name of the school where you are employed?
- 1.6 What is your current position at this school? (If not school principal, terminate interview.)
- 1.7 How long have you been in this position?
- 1.8 If this is not your first position in education, how long have you been working in this sector?

2. First, we are going to talk generally about male school dropout at your school.

- 2.1 Would you tell me more about the extent of male school dropout at your school? What percentage of males who enrol in Grade 8, do you think, drop out of school before completing Grade 12?
- 2.2 What are the individual characteristics which you have observed in males who drop out (in terms of behaviour, competencies and attitudes)?
- 2.3 Are there early warning signs for males who drop out of school? What are these signs?
- 2.4 Could you tell me more about the school's policies or interventions to assist male learners who are at risk of dropping out of school? Are they effective? What more can be done?

3. Next, we are going to talk about the influence of male learners' family background on school dropout.

- 3.1 Tell me about the family's influence on the school dropout of the males. How does this influence school dropout?
- 3.2 Could you tell me about the involvement of the parents of the male dropouts?

4. I would also like to talk about the influence of the community on male school dropout.

- 4.1 Are there any community concerns which you haven't mentioned, which contribute to school dropout among males? How do these concerns contribute?

5. Finally, I have a few general questions.

- 5.1 What do you think are the most important things which would ensure that males do not drop out of school? Why are these things so important? How should one implement them?
- 5.2 Is there anything that you might have not thought about before that occurred to you during the interview, specifically regarding school dropout among males?
- 5.3 Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX G

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH WESTERN CAPE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATIVE

1. Demographic background

- 1.1 What gender are you?
- 1.2 How old are you?
- 1.4 What is your home language?
- 1.5 What is your current position at the WCED?
- 1.6 How long have you been in this position?
- 1.7 What educational position did you hold before you were appointed to this position?
- 1.8 If this is not your first position in education, how long have you been working in this sector?

2. Based on my interviews with male school dropouts, teachers, school principals and parents, I have compiled the following questions relating to male school dropout in your school district.

- 2.1 Could you tell me more about the extent of school dropout among males in your district?
- 2.2 Is school dropout among males something which is specifically being focussed on or being addressed in your district? If, yes, please tell me more about the ways in which it is being addressed.
- 2.3 How does the WCED know if a learner drops out of a school in your district?
- 2.4 Generally speaking, what are the main factors contributing to male school dropout at schools in your district?

- 2.5 In my interviews, many teachers, parents/guardians and even male dropouts themselves have referred to absenteeism and the influence thereof. What are the processes a school needs to follow when a child is absent for a prolonged period of time?
- 2.6 In my interviews, parents and male dropouts referred to being asked to leave their schools by teachers or school principals. How does this process work?
- 2.7 In my interviews many dropouts referred to missing school especially when they get sent home with a letter stating that they cannot be allowed back into class before their parents come to school. Are you aware of this widely used intervention?
- 2.8 On what conditions can a school deny a male learner access to school?
- 2.9 What do you think are the most important things which would ensure that males do not drop out of school?
- 2.10 Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during the interview, specifically regarding school dropout among males?
- 2.11 Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX H

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP WITH PARENTS OF MALE DROPOUTS

1. Demographic background

- 1.1 What gender are you?
- 1.2 How old are you?
- 1.4 What is your home language?
- 1.5 What is the highest grade that you attained at school?
- 1.6 Did your male child drop out of school before completing Grade 12?
 - 1.6.1 In what year was he in Grade 8 for the first time?
 - 1.6.2 When last was he in school? In what month and year did he drop out of school?
 - 1.6.3 In what grade was he when he dropped out? Did he pass that grade?
- 1.7 What is the name of the school that he last attended?
- 1.8 What is your relationship with this particular male dropout?

2. **First, we are going to talk about the general reasons why male learners drop out of school.**

- 2.1 Tell me more about the reasons why your child dropped out of school. How, in your opinion, did these factors contribute to school dropout?
- 2.2 Tell me about your child's attitude towards school and education.

3. Next, we are going to talk about the influence that the school had on your child's dropout.

- 3.1 Could you tell me more about the school's influence on the dropout of your child? Are there specific things at the school which significantly contributed to the dropping out of your child?
- 3.2 Tell me about the school's efforts to support your child to stay in school. Why did this work or why did it not work? How were these efforts communicated to you?
- 3.3 According to your understanding, could your child return to school after he dropped out?

4. Now we are going to discuss the role of your family.

- 4.1 Tell me more about the first time that you realised your child might drop out of school. Is there anything you did in an attempt to support him and prevent him from dropping out?
- 4.2 What was your reaction when he eventually dropped out?

5. Next, we are going to talk about the influence of the community.

- 5.1 Are there any community concerns that you haven't mentioned, which contributed to your child's dropout?

6. Finally, I have a few general questions.

- 6.1 What do you think would have helped your child to stay in school and eventually pass Grade 12?
- 6.2 Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during the interview, specifically regarding school dropout among males?
- 6.3 How did you experience this interview? What was it like to talk about your child's school dropout?
- 6.4 Is there anything you would like to ask me?