

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**



**The impact of School Violence on Learning Outcomes: Experiences and Challenges of
Learners at Hanover Park and Manenberg High Schools.**

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**A Minor Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the award of the
degree of Master of Social Science in Social Work & Social Development**

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ABSTRACT

Research has established that adolescents' psychological well-being is significantly disrupted by exposure to violence (Sui et al., 2021; WHO, 2019). Youth, especially those in low socioeconomic environments, suffer both the psychological and physical consequences of violence. Violence within and around South African schools perpetuates a culture of violence, leading to educational delays and compromising youth safety. The surrounding community's social factors directly influence schools, increasing violence levels. School violence remains a pressing concern in many communities, with youth often exposed to a range of physical and psychological challenges. Youth exposed to persistent traumatic events, such as violence, tend to exhibit learning difficulties. Adequate learning necessitates a safe and conducive learning environment, yet the disruptive nature of school violence further exacerbates the challenges youth face, disrupting lessons and leading to curriculum delays, depriving youth of valuable educational opportunities (Child Trauma Academy, n.d).

The purpose of this research was to qualitatively explore the experiences of how school violence affects the learning outcomes of youth in South African high schools. The study was guided by a qualitative research design, using non-probability sampling to recruit participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with 16 high school youth who had experienced school violence. The study found that high school youth face daily exposure to various forms of school violence. One of the key challenges faced by the participants was their persistent fear of being victimized by violence in school and while travelling to and from school. The accounts provided by the participants depict a disconcerting reality in which school violence instils fear, vulnerability, and disruption, collectively jeopardizing the well-being and educational progress of high school youth in Cape Town. These findings underscore the pressing urgency of implementing measures to address these multifaceted challenges and create a safer and more conducive learning environment for the affected youth.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that a holistic approach be advocated, one that explores the challenges affecting youth across different microsystems in their lives. Collaborative partnerships among stakeholders, including community members, educational

professionals, and mental health experts, are essential for formulating and promptly implementing a policy proposal that addresses the various challenges affecting the learning outcomes of youth. Furthermore, stakeholders and policymakers should introduce comprehensive and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to provide constructive feedback. Moreover, there is an urgent need to promote safety and security in schools, foster a more supportive learning environment, and raise awareness about the effects of trauma on learning. Additionally, the study underscores the urgency of professional support for youth affected by school violence and advocates for the implementation of adequate support and care within South African schools.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION:

This chapter provides an introduction to the study investigating the impact and challenges of school violence on the learning outcomes of youth. This study aims to investigate the detrimental effect of school violence on the learning outcomes of youth in South Africa. It offers a comprehensive overview of the problem statement, research questions, research objectives, and the study's overall aim.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

During apartheid, violence dominated and controlled black South Africans (Von Holdt, 2013). Hirschowitz and Orkin (1997) shed light on the harrowing acts of the apartheid government during the 1980s and 1990s, exposing the aggressive nature of apartheid, which resulted in numerous casualties due to bombings, murders, property destruction, and other politically-motivated acts of violence. Ward et al. (2012) state that from 1976 through the 1980s, black youth increasingly engaged in political resistance, but many fell victim to state violence. Their study underscores the 1976 Soweto uprising as a clear illustration of violence directed at youth. Turton et al. (1991) highlight the impact of political unrest on South African black youth in 1987, describing incidents of necklacing, arrests, gathering disruptions, teargas usage, as well as beatings, harassment, shootings, killings, and rapes.

Ntshoe (2002) maintains that violence in schools hindered learning to the point that some schools had to shut down. Furthermore, the legacy of political violence during apartheid had a detrimental impact on the learning of an entire generation of youth. This ongoing political unrest led to psychological distress among youth, resulting in anger outbursts, anxiety, depression symptoms, and feelings of helplessness (Dawe et al., 1989; Turton et al., 1991; Hirschowitz & Orkin, 1997). Turton et al., (1991) argue that both micro- and macrosocial factors of violence contribute to psychological distress among youth.

The landscape of violence in South Africa has evolved from political violence during apartheid to its post-apartheid aftermath (Langa & Bowman, 2017). Post-apartheid violence entails intricate interactions and challenges emerging from various facets of an individual's life (Langa & Bowman, 2017). The surge in violence and crime in South Africa can be linked back to the 1950s Group Areas Act (Makota & Leoschut, 2016), which led to the relocation of black citizens to low socioeconomic status (SES) environments. In post-apartheid South Africa, youth are consistently exposed to organized crime, transitioning from street protests to street corners (Panday et al., 2013). Violence has transformed into an array of destructive behaviours. Scorgie et al. (2017) argue that the continuous violence in homes, neighbourhoods, and communities has spilt over into South African schools, eroding the safety of youth, especially those residing in impoverished environments.

Tintswalo (2014) emphasizes that youth living in low SES environments face high levels of crime and violence. Burton and Leoschut (2013) report that in 2012, 1,020,597 high school youth in South Africa were threatened with violence. Their study, based on statistics from 121 secondary schools in South Africa, indicates that more than a fifth of youth were victims of school violence, with 12.2% threatened, 6.3% assaulted, 4.7% sexually assaulted or raped, and 4.5% subjected to school robberies. School violence extends beyond physical harm, contributing to poor academic performance, reduced concentration, depression, and absenteeism among youth (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013).

Ward et al. (2012) underscore the need to acknowledge how violence adversely affects the mental health of young people. Frieze (2015) asserts that traumatic events can hinder learning and affect the psychosocial and emotional well-being of youth. Rossen and Cowan (2013) maintain that traumatized youth often focus on survival, impeding their ability to learn, socialize, and develop necessary skills. The psychosocial impact directly affects youth and ripples into the social systems they engage with (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Recognizing trauma among young people is therefore essential (Singer et al., 1995). Despite existing statistics and research on school-related violence in South Africa, there remains a gap in understanding how youth experience school violence to hinder their learning outcomes.

1.3 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

Conducting a study that examines the physical and psychological effects of school violence on the academic performance of young people is crucial. This research aims to inform stakeholders about the imperative need to recognize the impact of school violence on youth's learning outcomes. It further seeks to inform policymakers and youth stakeholders about the adverse challenges youth face in their educational outcomes. With secondary school violence on the rise in South Africa, policies have yet to fully acknowledge its impact on youth. Lastly, the researcher hopes that the findings of this research will inspire new insights into supporting youth who are exposed to school violence in South Africa.

1.4 RESEARCH TOPIC

The impact of school violence on learning outcomes: Experiences and challenges of learners at Hanover Park and Manenberg High Schools.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions are essential in shaping the direction and scope of a dissertation, ensuring that the research is focused, relevant, and meaningful (Creswell, 2018). The researcher used the following questions:

- What are the experiences of school violence among youth?
- What impact does school violence have on youth?
- In what ways do youth experience school violence as traumatic?
- How do youth experience school violence to challenge their learning?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

research objectives play an important role in shaping the research process, ensuring that it is focused, relevant, and meaningful (Creswell, 2018). The researcher used the following objectives to shape her study:

- Examine youth's experiences of school violence.
- Understand the impact of school violence on youth.
- Explore how youth experience school violence as traumatic.
- Investigate how youth experience school violence to affect their learning.

1.7 MAIN ASSUMPTIONS

This qualitative study assumes that South African youth attending schools in low SES environments are exposed to school violence. Furthermore, it is assumed that participants will provide insights into their experiences regarding how school violence traumatically affects their learning outcomes.

1.8. CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

1.8.1. Youth

The National Youth Policy (NYP) (2009, 2015, 2020) defines youth as individuals aged between 14 and 35 years. Furthermore, it specifies that the majority of youth s in secondary education fall within the age range of 14 to 18 years.

1.8.2. Violence

Yakeley and Meloy (2012) define violence as the infliction of physical and/or verbal harm upon another person, potentially resulting in physical or psychological injury to the victim.

1.8.3. School Violence

Power (2017) broadens the concept of school violence beyond mere violent acts occurring within school premises. It encompasses violent actions directed towards and among youth in the vicinity of the school.

1.8.4. Poly-victimization

Kaminer et al. (2013) define poly-victimization as exposure to multiple forms of violence or continuous exposure to a single type of violence. Research by Soler et al. (2015) demonstrates a strong association between poly-victimization and negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, re-victimization, and behavioral issues.

1.8.5. Trauma

According to Spence et al. (2021), trauma results from experiences that are physically or emotionally harmful. It leaves individuals feeling overwhelmed and impairs their ability to process, understand, and cope with daily experiences.

1.8.7. Toxic Stress

Johnson et al. (2013) define toxic stress as a prolonged and constant activation of the stress response. Prolonged exposure to toxic stress during sensitive periods of development in children and adolescents can hinder their development, leading to adverse behavioural and mental outcomes.

1.8.8. Learning outcomes

Mahajan and Singh (2017) characterize learning outcomes as quantifiable markers of academic achievement that arise from the implementation of imparted knowledge.

1.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As outlined by De Vos et al. (2005), researchers bear the responsibility of adhering to ethical considerations in the conduct of their research. Therefore, the researcher observed the following ethical considerations:

1.9.1. Avoidance of Harm

The researcher maintained strict confidentiality regarding all collected information to ensure the study did not cause any harm to the participants or the researcher during data collection. Social research should not inflict harm on participants or researchers (De Vos, 2005). Harm also pertains to the revelation of information that could potentially expose, endanger, or embarrass the participants, their families, or close relations (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). No personal information was linked to the participants in the study to prevent any harm.

1.9.2. Informed Consent

The researcher obtained signed consent from participants, including youth who were 18 years or older and parental consent for those younger than 18. Assent was also obtained from youth under 18. Participants were fully informed of the research's purpose and voluntarily signed the consent and assent forms, ensuring their familiarity with the study's aims (De Vos, 2005).

1.9.3. Non-Deception of Subjects

The researcher maintained transparency regarding the study's purpose and intentions. Participants were informed that the study was for academic purposes, and the researcher ensured accuracy in transcribing interviews to preserve a truthful record of participants' responses (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

1.9.4. Privacy

The researcher took great care to protect the privacy and security of both participants and herself during interviews. Interviews were conducted in private, quiet rooms to minimize interruptions (Creswell, 2014). No one else was within hearing distance during interviews to ensure privacy (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Participants were not pressured to share any information they were uncomfortable with during the interviews, respecting their privacy (De Vos, 2005).

1.9.5. Anonymity

The researcher made every effort to maintain participants' anonymity. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used during data analysis to ensure that identities remained undisclosed (Saunders et al., 2015). While total anonymity may be challenging to achieve, the researcher securely stored all participant consent forms to minimize any potential breaches of anonymity (Van den Hoonaard, 2003).

1.9.6. Confidentiality

Participants were assured that their names or any identifying information would not be disclosed in the study. Breaching confidentiality during research is discouraged as it may undermine trust, the researcher's credibility, and future research in the given institution or community (Israel, 2004). Participants were also informed of the mandatory reporting of child abuse, and the necessary steps in case of unreported abuse were outlined (Hendricks, 2014). Participants were not required to disclose any unreported abuse during the interviews, and the researcher provided them with appropriate resources and guidance if needed.

1.9.7. Voluntary Participation

The researcher should assure participants that they will not be harmed during the study (Creswell, 2014). Participants were informed about the nature of the study, and after gaining an understanding of its details, they made a voluntary decision on whether or not to participate. Participants should not be coerced or manipulated into taking part in the study (De Vos, 2005). Every participant in this study willingly chose to participate, and no form of pressure or manipulation was applied to involve them.

1.9.8. Debriefing

Debriefing allows participants to process their interview experience and its potential effects on them (Creswell, 2014). It also serves to correct any misconceptions participants might have about

the study (De Vos, 2005). After the interviews, participants were debriefed, and allowed to ask questions or provide comments about the study or their interview experience. This post-interview debriefing helped the researcher understand the emotions, thoughts, and feelings participants had regarding the interview process. It also aided in clarifying how participants interpreted the questions (Hughes, 2004). If participants showed any signs of distress during the interview, the researcher suggested seeking professional help. In such cases, the researcher provided information about the WCED's Safe Schools hotline, which offers youth free and professional online communication to discuss traumatic incidents.

1.9.9. Publication of Findings

The researcher presents the study's findings in an accurate and objective report. The report should be informative and comprehensible, allowing readers to gain a clear understanding of the study (De Vos, 2005). The researcher maintains objectivity in recording and reporting the study. The report's purpose is to offer readers an objective explanation of the study.

1.9.10. Cooperation with Contributors

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Department of Social Development and acquired a permit from the Western Cape Education Department to conduct the study. Each study participant was informed that the study was part of her master's degree and that the information gathered would be used to compile a report shared within the academic community.

1.10. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the extent of violence in South Africa, its impact on schools, and its impact on high school youth and their learning outcomes. This chapter also outlines the main research objectives, and the problem context, and provides a brief explanation of key study concepts.

Chapter 2 delves into existing literature regarding school violence, its impact on youth and its effects on learning outcomes. It provides a theoretical framework to enhance understanding of the impact of school violence on the learning process among youth. The chapter also presents the legislation and policies relevant to the research topic.

Chapter 3 covers the chosen research design, the identification of the study population, data collection and analysis methods, and discusses the study's limitations.

Chapter 4 presents an in-depth discussion of the study's findings, exploring participants' experiences of school violence and how it challenges the learning outcome of youth. The participants' responses are organized to address the research objectives and are analyzed using the two theories employed in the study.

Chapter 5 outlines the main conclusions and recommendations derived from the key findings of the study. It provides conclusions about the study's research objectives.

1.11. CONCLUSION

This chapter provides precise information about the research topic and study objectives, contextualizing the study within existing research on school violence in South Africa and its impact on youth. It also explains key concepts and addresses major ethical concerns. The following chapter initiates a comprehensive exploration of existing research on school violence.

Chapter Two:

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter embarks on an exhaustive review of preceding studies concerning school violence, its causal factors, and the physical and psychological ramifications it inflicts upon South African youth. Furthermore, it introduces relevant theoretical frameworks that underpin the study, concluding with a discussion of the policies and legislation about school violence and its implications for youth.

2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2.1. Youth and Violence in South Africa

Throughout South Africa's history, the youth have consistently been either directly or indirectly implicated in acts of violence (Ward et al., 2013). During the apartheid regime, black youth fell victim to institutional violence inflicted by the state, while white youth predominantly perpetrated this violence to maintain white privilege and dominance (Ward et al., 2013). Hefferan et al. (2016) narrate the historical impact of violence among youth during the Soweto uprising. Although youth initially engaged in peaceful protests against the apartheid system, they were ultimately overpowered by a forceful, aggressive, and armed police force (Pandey, 2012). Phakathi (2019) elucidates that in response to this violent suppression, protesters concluded that peaceful efforts alone could not dismantle apartheid. Consequently, they resorted to violent means to resist the apartheid regime (Dubow, 2015; Pandey, 2012; Phakathi, 2019).

Violence, both physical and psychological, profoundly disrupts youth, particularly those residing in low SES environments (Ntshoe, 2002; Ngqela & Lewis, 2012; Ncontsa & Shuma, 2013; Power, 2017). Makota and Leoschut (2016) argue that the Group Areas Act of the 1950s, which systematically confined black people to underprivileged areas, is responsible for the surge in crime and violence. Historically, political violence induced fear among black youth, as violence outside of schools mirrored the violence within educational institutions. Additionally, weapons intended for political opponents were frequently observed in urban schools (Ntshoe, 2002).

Youth are consistently exposed to organized crime (Panday et al., 2013). Panday et al. (2013) analyzed literature on the transition of violence in post-apartheid South Africa, demonstrating that violence shifted from street protests to street corners.

In a quantitative study, Kaminer et al. (2013) investigated the high prevalence of violence among youth in South African schools. Their research reveals that 75.8% of youth were either direct or indirect victims of school violence. Sixty-four percent of youth witnessed their peers being physically assaulted, 20.7% encountered threats involving knives, 37.9% faced direct threats of physical harm, and 17.8% experienced physical violence. Studies confirm that individuals subjected to multiple forms of violence are at a greater risk of experiencing poor mental health (Collings et al., 2014; Cyr et al., 2014; Finkelhor et al., 2007).

Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) present a sequential mixed-method study examining the forms, causes, and effects of school violence on South African youth. The study demonstrates the ecological impact of school violence, as violence in communities directly affects schools, with youth arriving at school while carrying weapons. Bayat et al. (2014) offers an explanatory study investigating socio-economic factors impeding academic achievement among youth in the Western Cape, South Africa. Their research substantiates that 66.9% of youth were negatively impacted by violence and crime in their community. Furthermore, 76.5% were affected by gang-related issues, 66.2% by sexual abuse, and 72.9% expressed feelings of insecurity within their school environment.

Research has established that the psychological well-being of adolescents is significantly disrupted by exposure to violence (Sui et al., 2021). Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) argue that violence has both physical and psychological repercussions, potentially exacerbating daily stressors that impede an individual's natural ability to adapt to stress (Sui et al., 2021). The psychosocial impact of violence may lead to long-term effects, including aggressive behavior, toxic stress, and other symptoms. Nconsta & Shumba (2013) further assert that school violence may hinder concentration and academic performance among secondary school youth in South Africa. Mguzulwa and Gxubane (2019) contend that the psychological effects of violence need to be acknowledged, as many youth harbor distressing memories of violence and exhibit symptoms of traumatic stress.

2.2.2. Influence of Gang Violence on School Violence

Gang members, both within and outside schools, engage in physical violence, sexual violence, and vandalism on school property (Mguzulwa & Gxubane, 2019). According to Ngqela and Lewis (2012), gangsterism is a socioeconomic factor in the vicinity of schools that fosters a subculture of violence within educational institutions. The presence of gangs escalates the culture of violence in schools, leading to an increase in incidents of victimization among youth (Mncube & Steinmann, 2014). Studies indicate that the Number Gangs in South Africa are not confined to street corners or prisons; they also operate within schools (Pyrooz et al., 2011; Mncube & Steinmann, 2014).

Mguzulwa and Gxubane (2019) conducted a qualitative and exploratory research design to investigate the learning experiences of male high school youth involved in gang violence. Many of these youth experienced delays in their education as their academic focus was compromised due to their involvement in gang violence. This underscores the prevalence of gang violence in low SES environments, as youth express being chased, stabbed, threatened, and losing friends due to gang violence (Mguzulwa & Gxubane, 2019). De Lannoy (2018) argues that youth join gangs primarily out of the need for safety and security in their violent communities. Gang-affiliated youth imitate gangsters in the community, intimidating fellow youth and selling drugs on school property to establish gang territories (Magidi et al., 2016).

In a qualitative study, Mncude and Madikizela-Madiya (2014) highlight the traumatic impact of gangsterism among youth in schools, demonstrating that their safety and security are compromised due to the perpetual fear evoked by gang violence (Catani et al., 2009). This fear often leads to substance abuse as a coping mechanism to suppress painful memories (Rosenkranz et al., 2014).

2.2.3. External Factors Influencing School Violence

Hendricks (2018) presents an exploratory study investigating the influence of gang violence on school violence in South Africa. This study focuses on the Sarah Baartman District Municipality in the Eastern Cape as a case study, providing evidence that the escalation of violence has hindered schools from becoming safe learning environments. Hendricks argues that some schools have become environments of fear and danger (Hendricks, 2018). Khumalo (2019) asserts that schools

are an extension of society, and the social factors within communities unravel within schools. Youth living in low SES environments are more susceptible to higher levels of violence (Tintswalo, 2014). Bayat et al. (2014) demonstrate that 66.9 percent of youth in the Western Cape of South Africa are adversely affected by community violence.

In their study, Bayat et al. (2014) show that youth in the Western Cape of South Africa reported feeling unsafe in their school environment. Participants in the study expressed concerns about threats from community members while at school. They stated that school violence persists due to the lack of protection both within the school and in the surrounding community. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) defines school violence as aggression and victimization occurring within and outside the classroom, violence in the vicinity of schools, and during travel to and from school (DBE, 2015). Mkhize and Sibisi (2021) argue that the community plays a significant role in addressing school violence, emphasizing that the lack of community response to children's needs can lead to an increase in violence in and around schools.

Booth et al. (2012) demonstrate in their study that a lack of safety in a microsystem increases psychological distress among individuals. Their research further illustrates that a harmful environment hinders the overall well-being of individuals. Shields et al. (2015) argue that excessive aggression fosters an unsafe and hostile school environment. They state that youth who are victims of harassment at school experience feelings of powerlessness, rejection, defenselessness, anger, anxiety, fear, and psychological distress.

2.2.4. Polyvictimization

Finkelhor et al. (2009) conducted a study that examined the causes of polyvictimization. Their research demonstrates that adolescents living in violent environments are more susceptible to experiencing polyvictimization. Polyvictimization, as defined by Kaminer et al. (2013), refers to exposure to multiple forms of violence in different contexts. Burton and Leoschurt (2012) assert that schools in South Africa face numerous safety concerns. They illustrate that schools accommodate youth dealing with various emotional and behavioural difficulties, leading to extensive victimization among youth. Soler et al. (2015) indicate that polyvictimization is associated with behavioural problems, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal thoughts.

Botticello (2009) argues that the effects of violence among adolescents make them vulnerable to mental health problems, negatively affecting their psychological well-being.

Kliethermes et al. (2014) suggest that polyvictimization is a potential outcome of repetitive traumatic experiences occurring over an extended period. Collings (2014) presents an exploratory study investigating the effects of polyvictimization among 719 school-going adolescents in Durban, South Africa. The study's findings reveal that 90% of the participants were exposed to more than one form of victimization. Kaminer et al. (2013) state that youth experience both direct and indirect exposure to violence across different contexts, including home, school, and the community. Their study shows that 98.9% of their participants had witnessed community violence, with 40.1% having been direct victims of community violence. Additionally, 75.8% had experienced either direct or indirect exposure to violence in school. Studies indicate a clear link between poly-victimization and psychological stress, where victims of multiple forms of violence are more susceptible to poor mental health (Kliethermes et al., 2014; Collings et al., 2014; Cyr et al., 2014).

2.2.5. Sexual Violence

Njelesani (2019) emphasizes the rights of all individuals to live free from fear, abuse, and exploitation. Devries and Meinck (2018) discuss the role of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in eradicating sexual violence in schools and promoting a safe learning environment by eliminating violence against youth, particularly in education. Parker (2016) traces the evolution of policies in South Africa aimed at reducing and eliminating sexual violence and harassment among youth. However, sexual violence in schools persists (Hoosen et al., 2022).

Ward et al. (2018) present a quantitative study investigating the impact of sexual violence among youth in South Africa. In their study, 9,717 youth between the ages of 15 and 17 were recruited from schools, with 36.8% of boys and 33.9% of girls reporting some form of sexual abuse. Modisaotile (2012) found sexual violence among male and female youth to be perpetrated by teachers, while Jewkes et al. (2005) report that females are predominantly victims of rape in South Africa. Research indicates that schoolboys and male teachers establish dominance over schoolgirls

through rape and sexual assault (Modisaotile, 2012; Human Rights Commission, 2006). Chitsamatanga and Rembe (2020) argue that School-Related Gender-Based Violence violates the dignity, security, privacy, and agency of youth in South Africa, and note that sexual violence and poverty contribute to high dropout rates in secondary schools.

Sexual assault, or rape, has proven to be the most traumatizing experience that female victims claim to encounter (Conroy & Cotter, 2017). Gordon and Collins (2013) present a qualitative study investigating the impact of Gender-Based Violence on the identities and social interactions of females. Their study reveals that victims of sexual violence face pervasive fear, and the traumatic impact leaves them feeling hypervigilant, hyperalert, betrayed, and shameful (Littleton et al., 2006). Flisher et al. (1997) state that adolescents demonstrate adjustment difficulties after experiencing sexual violence, resulting in decreased social competence, poorer school performance, and increased sexual risk-taking behavior. Male victims tend to be more prone to exhibiting aggressive and delinquent behavior (Garnefski & Arends, 1998).

2.2.6. School Fights

Mncube and Harber (2013) present a mixed-method study exploring the reality of violence in schools. Their findings identify school fights as the most common form of school violence, involving physical and verbal disputes among youth, both within and outside of schools. They note that weapons are sometimes used in these fights. Furthermore, their research shows that school violence has a detrimental impact on the education of youth. According to Burton and Leoschurt (2012), fights are considered normal among youth, but they argue that the level of violence in these fights is concerning, as attacks have escalated in and around schools.

Mkhize and Sibisi (2021) argue that the extent of school violence is a result of easy access to weapons and the influence of gang and community violence. Their study reveals that youth bring weapons to school, either to use them in fights or as a form of self-defence. Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) state that disputes in and around schools can lead to serious problems, as physical fights may involve stabbings and shootings. Due to the increasing violence both inside and outside of schools, youth possess weapons as a form of self-protection (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013; Khuzwayo et al., 2016). Rellini et al. (2012) investigate how violence in low SES environments affects

learning among adolescents in South Africa, showing that the environment affects youth emotional, behavioural, and learning outcomes.

2.2.7. Corporal Punishment

Mahlangu et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study that examined the prevalence of corporal punishment in 24 secondary public schools in Tshwane, South Africa. The study involved 3,743 grade 8 youth and revealed that 52% of them had experienced corporal punishment in their schools. It argued that youth from low SES backgrounds were more vulnerable to corporal punishment. Moreover, corporal punishment persists in South African schools today and, as a result, socializes youth into adopting violent behaviours (Ma et al., 2012; Hecker et al., 2014; Breen et al., 2015).

The psychological effects of corporal punishment prove to be just as harmful as the physical effects (Mthanti & Mncube, 2014). The traumatic impact of corporal punishment leaves youth feeling humiliated and helpless, increasing their tendencies toward aggression and self-destructive behaviors. Furthermore, youth may exhibit a shortened attention span, attention deficit disorder, and impaired academic achievement (Mthanti & Mncube, 2014). Corporal punishment in schools has been shown to hurt social connections and education among youth. Moreover, some youth show increased absenteeism at school due to their fear of corporal punishment (Morrell, 2001).

2.2.8. Vandalism

Van Jaarsveld and Minnaar (2012) conducted a quantitative study involving a total of 685 secondary youth and 106 educators. The study revealed that vandalism hampers school safety in South Africa, with 18% of the youth and 25% of educators reporting vandalism as a significant problem in their schools (Van Jaarsveld & Minnaar, 2012). During the COVID-19 lockdown, over 408 schools were vandalized in South Africa (Mhlanga, 2020). According to Mhlanga (2020), youth in South Africa experience similar acts of vandalism in their homes and communities as they do in their schools, with digital devices being stolen from youth in their communities.

De Wet (2004) argues that school vandalism is not only a school problem but also a community problem. Catalano et al. (1999) state a clear connection between vandalism, poverty, living conditions, and dysfunctional family relationships, where various social problems combine to create an environment of learner unrest, possibly contributing to their violent acts of vandalism.

Ncontsa and Shumba's (2013) study demonstrated that youth suffered severe emotional distress over their personal property being vandalized and further stated that vandalism negatively impacts both learning and teaching.

2.2.9. Bullying in South African Schools

The Oxford English Dictionary defines violence as any physical act that causes harm, damage, or death (Stevenson & Waite, 2014). Burchell (2013) argues that this definition's narrow-mindedness fails to acknowledge violence as an abusive exercise of power, encompassing psychological and emotional violence or injury. Bullying poses a direct threat to the safety and well-being of youth (Burchell, 2013). Townsend et al. (2008) present a quantitative study on bullying in secondary schools, defining it as both physical and psychological harm. Rose et al. (2015) found bullying to result from adverse interactions between an individual and the various social systems they engage with, viewing bullying as more than just a linear relationship between a victim and a perpetrator. Hong and Espelage (2012) argue that persistent violence across multiple environments tends to become more acceptable, making such patterns entrenched among children and adolescents.

In sequential mixed-method research, Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) collected data from four South African secondary schools and found bullying to be a major problem in these schools. Additionally, more than 83.8% of the youth reported bullying as the most common form of violence in their schools. Ngidi and Molestane (2018) conducted a qualitative study exploring the prevalence and persistence of bullying in secondary schools in townships, finding numerous incidents of bullying, sexual and physical assaults, muggings, and threats of violence taking place in school restrooms (Ngidi & Molestane, 2018). Direct bullying in schools is commonly associated with physical aggression, verbal threats and insults, teasing, and theft of possessions. Indirect bullying involves spreading rumors, gossiping, and exclusion (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Furthermore, cyberbullying has proven to be more prevalent among high school youth (Protogerou & Flisher, 2012).

The traumatic impact of bullying can lead to fear among youth, resulting in increased absenteeism and decreased academic progress (Swearer et al., 2012). Vidourek et al. (2016) present data from the National Crime Victimization Survey in the United States, where 5,784 youth from grades 5 to

12 participated, showing that one in three youth was bullied. The survey data indicates that bullying traumatizes numerous youth, leading to feelings of fear and school avoidance. Lopez and DuBois (2005) illustrate the link between bullying and psychological stress. Hendricks and Tanga (2019) demonstrate that bullying leads to increased depression and anxiety among youth, with long-term effects resulting in low self-esteem and thoughts of self-destruction.

The consequences of school violence potentially place youth in long-term negative physical, emotional, and psychological stress, contributing to academic underperformance, impaired concentration, and even dropout from school (World Health Organization, 2019). Violence in schools has created a compromised learning environment, with educators spending considerable time addressing issues related to school violence instead of focusing on effective teaching (Human Rights Commission, 2008; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013).

2.2.10. Psychological Effects of School Violence on Learning

The trauma stemming from school violence can adversely affect the learning, behavior, and psychological well-being of youth. (Kuban & Steele, 2011). In a violent environment, the concentration of youth is compromised as their focus may be prioritized on their safety and security (Duplechain et al., 2008). Youth exposed to persistent violence, tend to exhibit attention problems, lower cognitive functioning, lower reading achievement, and may repeat grades (Jaycox et al., 2009). Furthermore, Kuban and Steele (2011) state that youth exposed to trauma are more likely to drop out or be absent from school. Perrotta (2019) explains that trauma can bring about critical changes in the brain. Carrion and Wong (2012) note that the Hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex (PFC) play crucial roles in processing memories and executive brain functioning, which in turn affect learning.

Shanks and Robinson (2013) explain that toxic stress results from repeated trauma, sustaining youth in a state of fear. Toxic stress involves a strong and prolonged activation of the body's stress-release hormones. Wilson et al. (2011) point out that the brain's alterations due to toxic stress could lead to a decreased attention span, which negatively impacts academic achievement. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2014), traumatic symptoms can create learning problems and interfere with school functioning.

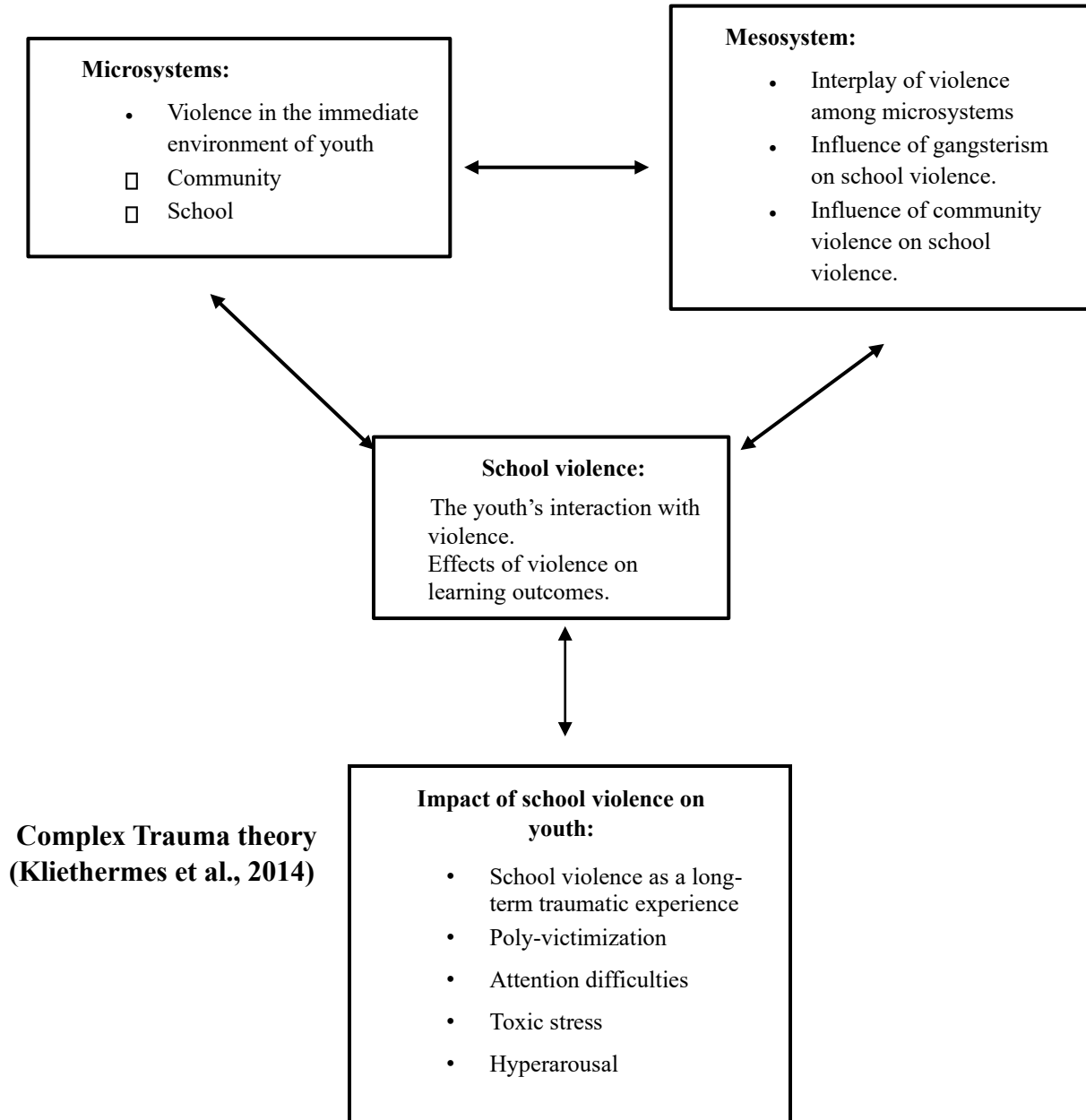
The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2015) provides an issue brief investigating the negative impact of maltreatment, particularly in youth whose developing brains enable them to adapt to their environment. The Child Trauma Academy (n.d.) argues that some youth are being misdiagnosed, labeled with a learning disability, because their brains have developed hyperalertness due to their traumatic circumstances. Consequently, they are unable to achieve the calm state of mind required for learning.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This section elucidates two theories utilized as a framework for the study: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Klietherme et al.'s (2014) Complex Trauma Theory. Diagram 1 provides a brief illustration of the interplay between these two theories. Each theory will be summarized, and its main characteristics will be discussed. Additionally, the interplay between the theories will be explored.

Diagram 1: Theoretical Framework Interplay

**Ecological Systems theory
(Bronfenbrenner, 1979)**



The diagram illustrates the interaction between two theoretical frameworks, emphasizing how an individual's physical environment can impact their psychological well-being. It depicts Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, highlighting the investigation of microsystems related to school and community violence and their influence on school violence. Additionally, it shows the interconnectedness of violence in the mesosystem, indicating that community violence can influence violence in schools. The diagram also illustrates how these systems contribute to school violence and its effects on youth learning. Furthermore, it incorporates Kliethermes et al.'s Complex Trauma theory, demonstrating how school violence can lead to long-term traumatic experiences for youth, resulting in poly-victimization, attention difficulties, toxic stress, and hyperarousal.

2.3.1. Ecological Systems theory

This study will utilize Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory to comprehend the manifestation of school violence among youth. Bronfenbrenner introduced the Ecological Systems theory in 1979, emphasizing that human development must be viewed through the lens of individuals' relationships with their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory is rooted in the pursuit of understanding individuals within the contexts of their various environments, emphasizing the intrinsic connection between an individual and their living environment.

The Ecological Systems theory is presented as a set of interconnected structures nested within each other, illustrating how the intimate systems of an individual's life are influenced by the broader society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) divides the ecological system into Micro, Meso-, Exo-, and Macrosystems, demonstrating how individuals actively influence their environment while also being shaped by the environment's conditions and constraints. The ecological systems are unpacked as follows: The microsystem encompasses an individual's direct experiences and social interactions within their immediate environment. The mesosystem comprises an individual's involvement in two or more microsystems. The exosystem includes the environment in which a developing individual is not directly located but is indirectly influenced by members of their microsystem. The macrosystem encompasses the broader societal systems, and institutional systems of a culture or subculture, derived from overarching ideologies or belief systems in society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the failure of a person to integrate into society can hinder their healthy and progressive development. The microsystem, consisting of an individual's immediate environment with daily face-to-face interactions, such as family, neighbourhoods, school, and peers, plays a crucial role in ensuring their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Development is not limited to the immediate environment but also extends to the surrounding environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) demonstrates how changes and conflicts arising from one microsystem can influence another through the mesosystem, where each microsystem influences the other. The ecology of human development is the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between a developing individual and the changing properties of their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b: 21). In the context of this study, this theory provides insights into how social factors in the neighbourhood and household systems may manifest in the schooling environment.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserts that systems are shaped by social patterns and interactions. Booth et al. (2012) illustrate how these social patterns and interactions impact the psychological growth of individuals. Moreover, in their investigation of the Ecological Systems theory in the context of psychological distress, Booth et al. (2012) note that a reduced perception of safety in a microsystem is associated with increased psychological distress among individuals in those environments. Applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical framework aids our understanding of how the elements of one's environment contribute to the psychological functioning of individuals in society. The theory underscores that an adverse environment hampers an individual's overall well-being.

This theory will facilitate an understanding of how violence in low SES environments affects the learning process among youth in South Africa. The environment significantly influences individuals' learning, emotional regulation, and behavioural skills (Rellini et al., 2012; Afifi & MacMillan, 2011).

2.3.2. Complex Trauma Theory

Kliethermes et al. (2014) delineate trauma as the outcome of harmful events experienced by individuals in their environment. Complex Trauma theory highlights repetitive traumatic experiences that persist over an extended period, particularly during sensitive stages of brain development. It emphasizes that the conditions in an environment can either impede or facilitate adolescent development (Kliethermes et al., 2014). The theory further characterizes complex trauma as interpersonal in nature and prevalent among children and adolescents (Kliethermes et al., 2014).

Kliethermes et al. (2014) assert that polyvictimization is a consequence of complex trauma in youth. Trauma may manifest as common stress reactions, such as chronic hyperarousal, insecure attachment, and dissociation. Additionally, the effects of trauma can disrupt emotional regulation development in individuals (Kliethermes et al., 2014).

Everyday exposure to trauma is exemplified by living in a hazardous community, residing in a volatile family environment, and experiencing emotional problems that lead to increased risky behaviour (Kliethermes et al., 2014). Research indicates that trauma exposure can potentially result in structural and functional alterations in brain development, with the stress response system of the brain being most affected (Kliethermes et al., 2014). Wilson et al. (2011) furnish neurological evidence of brain changes due to trauma exposure, demonstrating that trauma may lead to neuroendocrine dysregulation, a reduction in corpus callosum size, and diminished amygdala, prefrontal cortex (PFC), and hippocampus.

Structural changes in the brain are found to underlie post-traumatic symptoms such as attention difficulties, hyperarousal, and executive dysfunction (Kliethermes et al., 2014). The effects of trauma prompt the brain to adapt to high-stress environments, meaning that after a traumatic event, the brain is more inclined to focus on survival rather than learning (Kliethermes et al., 2014). Trauma may potentially result in memory loss, attention difficulties, and interpersonal challenges in adolescents, encompassing issues related to trust, victimization, and boundaries (Kliethermes et al., 2014).

2.3.3. The Interplay Between the Two Theories

This study investigates the impact of complex trauma on learning outcomes among youth exposed to school violence. Bucci et al. (2016) illustrate the connection between an adolescent's social environment, development, and long-term health outcomes. Therefore, by using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory, the researcher gained an understanding of how violence is interwoven into the immediate and surrounding environments of youth. This theory elucidates how violence in the broader community can permeate schools.

Moreover, this study sheds light on the psychological effects of trauma related to violence and how it hampers young individuals from pursuing their education effectively (Booth et al., 2012). Both of these theories demonstrate the intrinsic link between social factors in an environment and the psychological well-being of individuals in society. There is a pressing need to comprehend how various social structures contribute to persistent school violence in South Africa while underscoring the traumatic impact of school violence on youth. These theories highlight how social factors influence the overall development of individuals (Kliethermes et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

2.4. POLICY AND LEGISLATION

2.4.1. The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2030

The National Youth Policy (NYP) of 2030 in South Africa is designed to address the well-being of young people at local, provincial, and national levels. It builds upon previous NYPs from 2009-2014 and 2015-2020, with a particular focus on preventing violence among youth in the country.

The NYP (2030) recognizes that young people in South Africa face a range of psychosocial and socio-economic challenges, many of which stem from the legacy of apartheid. These challenges can lead to poor cognitive and behavioural outcomes, impacting academic performance throughout their schooling.

One of the key strategies of the NYP (2030) is to implement school safety programs to ensure that violence or threats of harm do not hinder teaching and learning. The policy acknowledges that youth are both perpetrators and victims of violence in society, and that this violence can have a detrimental effect on their quality of life.

The South African National Youth Policy (2030) is a framework that outlines the government's approach to youth development in the country. While I don't have specific information on the 2030 policy, previous iterations of the National Youth Policy have addressed issues related to youth and school violence. These policies typically aim to create safe and supportive environments for young people to learn and develop.

The NYP (2030) seeks to adequately implement programmes that aim to prevent violence in schools, inclusive of conflict resolution training, anti-bullying campaigns and the promotion of positive behavior. It aims to instill supportive services for youth, particularly youth who are victim of violence. providing adequate counselling and support to assist them in coping with the effects of violence. The NYP (2030) seeks to promote strong collaboration between government, communities and schools. It aims to address the root causes of violence to implement effective interventions.

In the context of this study, the NYP (2030) emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing violence among youth in South Africa. It highlights how violence can permeate various

aspects of young people's lives, negatively impacting their behavior and academic abilities. The policy also emphasizes the need to address broader social challenges, such as violence, that can affect academic performance among youth.

2.4.2. South African Schools Act: Regulations: Safety Measures at Public Schools

The South African Schools Act: Regulations: Safety Measures at Public Schools Act (2006) is a critical piece of legislation aimed at establishing safe and violence-free environments in public schools. The act prohibits any form of harm, whether direct or indirect, to anyone on public school premises, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding the safety and security of both students and teachers. It also prohibits the possession of dangerous objects on school premises, further enhancing safety measures.

Moreover, the policy outlines the necessity of implementing safety measures in schools. It emphasizes the importance of establishing safety committees at schools, developing safety plans, and reporting violent incidents to the relevant authorities. The South African Schools Act: Regulations: Safety Measures at Public Schools Act (2006) plays a crucial role in ensuring safety and security in public schools. Through the aim of instilling relevant regulations and procedures, it assists in creating a safe and conducive learning environment where youth can thrive academically.

In the context of this study, this act highlights the legal obligations of ensuring learner safety in public schools. It underscores the responsibility of school authorities and staff to take proactive measures to prevent violence and ensure a safe learning environment. By enforcing these regulations, the act plays a crucial role in protecting the safety and rights of youth in South Africa, contributing to their overall well-being and academic success.

2.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter delves into pertinent material relevant to the study. The literature review reveals that institutional violence and community violence spill over into schools. School violence exerts a traumatic impact on youth in secondary education, compromising their learning both physically and psychologically. By employing Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory and

Kliethermes et al.'s (2014) Complex Trauma theory, this study explores how the diverse social environments of youth interconnect and how persistent violence within these environments affects the cognitive abilities of adolescents. The next chapter will outline and unpack the methodological approach employed in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodological approach employed in this study, covering the research design, population and sampling procedures, data collection method, data analysis methods, data verification, and potential research limitations. It also discusses the researcher's reflexivity towards the study.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

For this study, a qualitative research design was utilized, enabling researchers to explore the unique realities of research participants (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research focuses on collecting individual responses from participants rather than relying on quantified statistics, aiming to understand the subjective experiences of the participants and recognize the significance and meaning of human behavior (Creswell, 2014). Unlike quantitative data, which relies on statistical analysis of numerical data, qualitative research often begins with observations and data collection without preconceived hypotheses. This form of research seeks to provide an understanding of the context of individuals to present an accurate interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2018).

This research required a holistic approach, seeking to capture the complex and diverse experiences and contexts of individuals and aiming to capture the subjective interpretations and experiences of youth exposed to school violence. A qualitative research design deliberately focuses on participants' realities (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The researcher aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of this complex problem by observing and capturing participants' expressions, emotions, and opinions, providing qualitative data to reveal how ongoing violence among youth can be traumatic and negatively impact their learning outcomes. Therefore, a qualitative research design was the most appropriate choice for this study, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their unique experiences and facilitating an exploration of various realities of research participants (Creswell, 2018).

Consequently, the study was conducted through a case study approach, seeking to do an in-depth study of particular cases in a real-life context (Creswell, 2018). Due to the scarcity of research on this topic, the researcher aimed to explore the diverse feelings, behaviors, and thoughts of the participants, using a case study approach to explore the complexity of how learning is challenged due to school violence. The researcher used this design to gain a comprehensive understanding of violence in these high schools, providing rich narratives and an in-depth analysis of the data to provide a contextualized understanding of how school violence impacts learning among youth (Creswell, 2018). Given the complexity of the study topic, a qualitative research design offers the necessary tools to comprehend human experiences (De Vos, 2005; Creswell, 2018).

Furthermore, the researcher ensured that she gathered rich and detailed information from participants by also making use of an explorative and descriptive design. An explorative and descriptive design is an open-ended method that allows participants to express their experiences in their own words, providing the researcher with an in-depth understanding of school violence from the participants' perspective (Creswell, 2018), seeking to expose the fundamental structures and meaning of youth experiences.

3.3. POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.3.1. Study Population

The study population consists of South African high school youth attending schools in low SES environments characterized by high levels of crime and violence. In this study, a sample is a small subset of the total set of individuals (De Vos et al., 2005). The sample for this study comprised 16 high school students from the Cape Town Metropole in the Western Cape, South Africa, specifically from Hanover Park and Manenberg high schools. These schools are situated in low SES areas predominantly inhabited by people of color. The majority of the participants resided in these areas, where both Hanover Park and Manenberg are identified as hotspots for crime and violence. Persistent school violence is common in both areas, as South Africa grapples with high rates of crime and gang violence that spill over into these schools (Mullagee & Bruce, 2015). Therefore, these locations were suitable for conducting the study.

Meintjie et al. (2015) mention that after the forced removals of 1960s, Hanover Park was designated as a "colored township," and its population is currently predominantly composed of colored residents. Hanover Park has a long history of youth vulnerability, where young people both witness and experience community and school violence (Magidi et al., 2016). Secondary school youth in Hanover Park are victims of gang violence, which negatively affects their school attendance. Additionally, gang members wait at school gates when schools close to interact with youth (Magidi et al., 2016).

Like Hanover Park, Manenberg is renowned for its high crime rates and impoverished settings (Davids, 2020). According to Mullagee and Bruce (2015), violence and crime in Manenberg are the most significant challenges. Salo (2003) reports that youth in Manenberg are susceptible to gang violence and victimization. Lambrechts (2012) states that there is a 78% annual dropout rate in a high school in Manenberg, with an increase in youth gang membership in the area. Community violence prevents youth from attending school (Leggett, 2004). Additionally, youth experience high levels of crime, violence, vandalism, and theft while traveling to and from school, making them both victims and perpetrators of violence in Manenberg high schools (Mullagee & Bruce, 2015).

3.3.2. Sampling Technique

This study utilized a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, where participants were selected based on the researcher's judgment. They were chosen for their specific and unique characteristics that aligned with the study's population (Creswell, 2018).

Creswell (2018) distinguishes between probability and non-probability sampling as follows:

Probability sampling, which includes simple random sampling, cluster sampling, and stratified sampling, provides each potential participant with an equal chance of being selected for the study. This method allows researchers to generalize their findings from the sample to the larger population. On the other hand, non-probability sampling involves the researcher's judgment rather than random selection. Methods such as convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling are used. While non-probability sampling is often more practical and cost-effective, it

can lead to biased samples and limit the generalizability of the study's findings to the larger population (Creswell, 2018).

3.3.3. Sample Characteristics

The sample consisted of secondary school youth from the Cape Flats aged between 14 and 18 years. The researcher targeted both male and female youth currently in grades 8 to 12, particularly those who are Black or Coloured and have been exposed to school violence. A total of 16 youth were included in the sample.

3.3.4. Sampling Procedure

As De Vos (2005) notes, purposive sampling relies entirely on the researcher's judgment. The researcher selected participants based on the study's requirements. To access schools and select the study sample, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Department of Ethics at the University of Cape Town and a permit from the Department of Basic Education in the Western Cape (WCED). Subsequently, the researcher contacted the school principals, submitted her ethical clearance, WCED permit, and research proposal for their consideration.

Once approval and access to the schools were granted, the researcher obtained consent forms from youth aged 18 and older to confirm their participation. For youth under 18, consent was obtained from their parents or caregivers, who signed consent forms to approve their child's participation in the study. Afterwards, these youth signed assent forms to confirm their participation in the study.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION APPROACH

3.4.1. Data Collection Method

Given the rarity of this research, the researcher collected data through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. This approach allowed the researcher to gain detailed and in-depth interpretations of youths' experiences (De Vos, 2005). All interviews were conducted in English, recorded using a recording device, and supplemented with written notes to capture non-verbal gestures during the interviews (Creswell, 2014).

3.4.2. Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared before the interviews. This approach kept the interviews focused and enabled participants to freely express their views in detail and on their terms, unlike a survey (De Vos, 2005).

3.4.3. Data Recording

The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed for data analysis, with the participants' permission obtained before recording (Creswell, 2014). Written notes were also taken to document participants' gestures during the interviews.

3.4.4. Data Analysis

This study utilized Tesch's (1990) steps for data analysis, which provided a structured approach for the researcher to engage with the data. These steps facilitated the identification of various categories, themes, and patterns emerging from the dataset. Through Tesch's multiple stages of coding and analysis, the researcher successfully unveiled a range of meanings and structural aspects within the data (Creswell, 2018). The following steps were followed during the data analysis process:

1. Firstly, she began by preparing the data for analysis, transcribing all the interviews and recording initial ideas (Creswell, 2018).
2. Subsequently, she started coding the data, providing descriptive labels that aligned with the study's objectives, which helped in identifying patterns and themes in the data (Creswell, 2018).
3. Drawing from the data, the researcher began developing theoretical insights by linking codes and categories to existing literature and theories (Creswell, 2018).
4. Throughout the analysis, the researcher compiled thoughts, insights, and ideas about the data, aiding in tracking her thoughts and creating links between codes and categories (Creswell, 2018).
5. After completing the coding, the researcher sorted and combined the coded data, highlighting overarching patterns and themes (Creswell, 2018).

6. Finally, she wrote up the results of her analysis, including quotes and examples from the data to support her findings. This step ensured a coherent representation of the participants' narratives that accurately reflected the data (Creswell, 2018).

3.5. Data Verification

This study followed Creswell's (2014) data collection approach. In qualitative research, validity pertains to the procedures used by the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the research findings (Creswell, 2014). There are several methods researchers can employ to guarantee the ability to accurately assess the study's findings and to persuade the reader of their accuracy (Creswell, 2014).

Credibility

According to De Vos (2005), in qualitative research, credibility is utilized to demonstrate that the research data aligns with the research questions. The researcher ensured credibility by using a semi-structured interview guide that focused the interview on the study's topic, thus preventing the asking of misleading questions.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define transferability as the ability to generalize the findings of a study to the study population in another context. De Vos (2005) refers to transferability as the testing of a study's external validity. A theoretical framework can be used to generalize the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, the researcher utilizes the theoretical framework of the study as a method to generalize her research. Consequently, further research could be conducted on a larger study sample using a similar theoretical framework.

Dependability

Dependability aims to show that if different participants from the same study population were used while employing the same sampling technique, there would be similarities between the findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The researcher ensured dependability through a detailed description of how the data was collected and analyzed.

Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to confirmability as an indication of the objectivity of the study's findings and the methods employed to verify them. In the context of this study, the researcher analyzed and compared the findings with existing literature on the topic.

3.6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

3.6.1. Language

Racial segregation during apartheid contributed to the development of non-standard forms of Afrikaans spoken by Coloureds in South Africa (Bosch, 2000). Many Coloureds in the Western Cape speak 'Kaapse Afrikaans' (Anthonissen, 2013). Kaapse Afrikaans is potentially the home language of the majority of the study's participants. Some participants requested to answer the interview questions in Afrikaans, which posed challenges for both the researcher and the participants. Some participants found certain questions difficult to understand, leading the researcher to simplify her phrasing. Additionally, the researcher had to transcribe participants' use of slang and Afrikaans into English.

3.6.2. Financial

Financial constraints can impede the researcher's capacity to collect comprehensive and nuanced data (Creswell, 2018). The researcher encountered financial limitations concerning travel expenses. As a result of these constraints, she faced difficulties in traveling to research sites to engage with participants. Consequently, she had to schedule her data collection based on the availability of funds or access to a car.

3.6.3. Time

In qualitative research, time constraints can compromise the research quality, limiting both the depth of data collection and prolonged engagement with participants (Saldaña, 2021). Given that interviews were conducted during school hours, the researcher scheduled them during break times. Consequently, the time available for interacting with participants was limited, hindering the selection of a diverse range of participants. Moreover, the researcher's constrained time during interviews restricted her ability to fully engage with each participant.

3.7. REFLEXIVITY

Creswell (2014) notes that researchers holding themselves personally accountable for their biases can strengthen a study's validity. De Vos (2005) characterizes reflexivity as the researcher's capacity to construct an understanding of their cognitive world and comprehend their influence on those around them. I am passionate about exposing injustices and inequalities in society, influenced by both lived experiences and learned understanding. Although I do not reside in an area characterized by perpetual violence, my experiences with violence have left me with long-lasting traumatic effects of fear and distrust. I am a youth leader in my community church and have interacted with school-going youth from impoverished areas. Many of these youth have expressed being either victims or witnesses of ongoing violence. Their explanations of violent events have highlighted how stressful and fear-provoking such experiences can be. Furthermore, through engagement with academic literature, I have gained insight into how violence can hinder academic learning among youth.

3.8. CONCLUSION

This section detailed the methodology of the study. It explained the qualitative research design, study population, and sampling. It demonstrated that the study utilized a semi-structured interview schedule to collect research data. The chapter further elaborated on how interviews were recorded and transcribed. Finally, it presented the study's limitations and reflexivity. The following chapter presents the findings from interviews with the participants. It will highlight and discuss their experiences with school violence.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reveals the findings obtained from interviews conducted with 16 high school youth from the Cape Flats in Cape Town. The participants were invited to share their experiences concerning school violence in their educational institutions. The interviews delved into the traumatic consequences of school violence and how this trauma might impact their learning. This chapter initiates with a demographic overview of all 16 participants. Subsequently, the study's framework analysis is presented, accompanied by an in-depth exploration of the primary findings.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participant (adjust)

VARIABLE		NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Gender	Females	12	75
	Males	4	25
Race	Black	1	6
	Coloured	15	93
Age	<18 years	7	43
	18 years	4	25
	>18 years	5	31
	Average age	16.7	
Grade	<Grade 12	13	81
	Grade 12	3	18
Community type	Capeflats	16	100
SAMPLE SIZE= 16			

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 16 youth who participated in the study. The participants consisted of twelve females, making up 75% of the participants and four males, making up 25% of the participants. The majority of the participants identified as coloured (93%), while one student identified as black. Seven of the participants were under 18 years old at the time of the study, four participants were 18 years old and five were older than 18. Thirteen of the participants (81%) were under grade 12, while three (15%) of the participants were in grade 12.

All of the participants resided in the Cape Flats areas at the time of the study.

4.3 FRAMEWORK FOR DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS TABLE

Table 2: Framework of Analysis

THEMES	CATEGORIES	SUBCATEGORIES
External factors perpetuating school violence.	Influence of gangs on school violence	Gangsters fighting with youth
		Youth are affiliated with gangs
		Gangsters wait for youth outside school
	The Community's role in perpetuating school violence	Outsiders fight youth
		Lack of support
	The Community's Response to school violence	Disinterested
Unhelpful		
Poly- victimization	Community violence	Youth being robbed
		Youth being stabbed
	School violence	physical aggression
		verbal aggression
	Persistent violence	Weekly fights
		Witnessing violence
Victimization		
Experiences of school violence	School fights	Frequent class fights
		Threats
		Stabbings
	Bullying	Verbal bullying
		Physical bullying
	Use of Weapons	During fights
Used for protection		
Youth experiences of the physical impact violence has on their learning	violence disrupts learning	lessons are interrupted
		Rowdy youth

The psychological impact of school violence on youth.	Trauma as a result of school violence	Fear
		Anxiety
		Anger
		Withdrawal
		Loss of concentration
	Attention difficulties	Youth unable to regain focus
		Loss of concentration
		Shift in focus
	Toxic stress	Persistent fear
		feeling overwhelmed
Experiences of how trauma impacts learning outcomes.	Disassociation from school work	Inflicts learning
		Contemplated dropping out of school

Table 2 above presents the Framework of Analysis depicting the main themes, categories and subcategories that derived from the interviews which were guided by the research questions. The following section unpacks a detailed discussion of the findings found in each theme.

4.4. DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

4.4.1. External Factors Perpetuating School Violence

During the interviews, participants were asked to share their views on the external factors contributing to violence in schools. The aim was to gain an understanding of how participants experienced the influence of community violence on school violence. They indicated that gangsterism and a lack of community support to combat school violence are among the major external factors contributing to school violence.

4.4.1.1. Influence of Gangs on School Violence

The majority of participants highlighted the significant influence of gangsterism on both youth and school violence. They mentioned various challenges, including gang members engaging in fights with youth outside school premises, waiting for youth outside school grounds, and youth being affiliated with gangs.

Yes, after school, some of the children want to fight, and they are part of a gang then they call their gang and beat learners up outside. They (gangsters) wait for them after school. It happens a few times like they wanted to stab that boytjie (Afrikaans slang for boy) so he couldn't come to school. [Participant 5, female, 16, grade 10]

When they shoot outside, like last year miss it was gang fights, so we did walk to school, it was early in the morning, so the gangsters, they don't care they just shoot, they won't tell you "Come out of the way", they just start shooting miss... my fear is like when they hurt somebody of our school, the teachers are not even there that time, they can hurt, they can shoot a child or they can stab the child. [Participant 11, female, 19, grade 11]

The narratives above highlight the prevalence of gang affiliation among youth and its impact on school violence. Participant 5's comment about gang-affiliated youth using violence as an advantage in school fights aligns with Qwetha-Daza's (2022) study, which explores how crime and gangsterism influence learner behaviour. This underscores how youth involved in gangs can have a negative influence on the school environment. Furthermore, the narratives emphasize how gang violence victimizes youth in both their schools and communities. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which posits that microsystems are shaped by social patterns and interactions, with the interactions in one microsystem affecting those in another. The study by Magidi et al. (2016) also corroborates these findings, indicating how gang members from the community pose a threat to youth outside of school premises, and how gangsters engage with youth beyond the school property. Both narratives underscore that youth are victims of the unpredictable and abrupt nature of gang violence. Youth travelling to and from school may become caught in crossfires between rival gangs, in line with Magidi et al.'s (2016) research, which highlights the disruptive and unpredictable impact of gang shootings on both schools and communities.

The majority of participants highlighted that community gangsterism has a detrimental impact on their schools, particularly in terms of safety. Participant 11's narrative draws attention to the psychological effects of gangsterism, emphasizing her constant fear of gang violence. This aligns with existing studies, which demonstrate how gangsterism can lead to persistent feelings of fear, vulnerability, and powerlessness among youth (Mncude & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014; Van Wyk & Theron, 2005).

Many participants mentioned that gang-affiliated youth engage in acts of robbery and threaten other youth on school grounds. Moreover, they also noted that most fights involving these gang members occur after school, outside the school premises.

I had this one friend, we were in one class like that's not long ago, I remember, that was two years ago, he used to like sell stuff here on the school man, now there was this gang... they were like the 28's (gang name) and he was a luxury kid (gang name) they fought each other, so they did get him outside, they stab him there with a screwdriver. He didn't die, he did come back to school, so he did fetch his people. [Participant 8, male, 19, grade 12].

Gangs do affect school because you get the 28's, then they want to sell cigarettes in school now this is now for example, this is now the territory of the 28's, you can't now come to sell things... they want to take your stuff, or stab you, they want to take your money even when you say you dont have. They will fight you to take your money, or they say 'we will hurt you after school' ...so they stabbed this one boy, he was fighting for his life in the hospital. [Participant 12, female, 18, grade 11].

The narratives from the participants strongly suggest that youth who are gang-affiliated contribute to the perpetuation of gang activity on school premises. These accounts shed light on how these youth employ violence as a means of asserting dominance and power over their peers and rival gangs. Participant 12's narrative, in particular, underscores how gang-affiliated youth utilize theft and bullying to establish their dominance within the school environment. This aligns with the findings of Phillips (2021) study, which identifies power, respect, and status as motivating factors for youth to join gangs. They often believe that gang membership will provide them with financial gain and material possessions.

Participant 12's narrative further highlights how gangsterism leads to poly-victimization among youth, as gang members engage in various forms of violence, including fighting, stealing, threatening, and even stabbing fellow youth. Kliethermes et al. (2014) assert that residing in a dangerous community increases the risk of victimization. Both the participants' narratives point to the territorial marking by gang-affiliated youth and the illegal sale of substances on school premises. This parallels the behaviour of street gangsters who sell drugs on street corners to establish their territory within the community (Magidi et al., 2016). In this study, it can be argued that gang activity within schools is a direct reflection of gangsterism in the surrounding

community. Additionally, it's important to note that gangs often operate within a larger, organized framework controlled by prison gangs, and community gang members often act on behalf of prison gang interests (Van Wyk & Theron, 2005; Magidi et al., 2016). This interpretation aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory, which defines the macrosystem as the cultures and subcultures of systems in society. In the context of this study, it could be argued that the culture of violence is evident in the participants' lives.

Most participants indicated that community members exhibit gang-like behaviour.

Like one of my friends did klaap (afrikaans for hit) this other girly, but he is a boy. So her boyfriend came with children that dont anymore go school that want to keep them like gangsters, so he like fight with him and everything, with knives and everything [participant 3, female, 15, grade 10]

Like it's want to be gangsters, so they stand here by the fence, so the teachers always come to the corner because of the want to be gangsters, some of them jump over the fence, say two or three years ago, this school was a violent school, they stab each other in the office. [Participant 15, female, grade 12]

Mncube and Steinmann (2014), in their study, indicate that gang members use weapons to instill fear and intimidate youth. Furthermore, the above narratives shed light on the subculture of gangsterism within the community, as community members exhibit behaviour resembling that of gangsters. Both narratives indicate that community members use weapons to assert control over youth, thereby highlighting the prevalence of gangsterism in the community. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory states that subcultures emerge from the ideologies and activities within society's systems. The theory acknowledges that an individual's close interpersonal systems are shaped by broader societal forces, identified as exo and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the context of this study, it can be argued that gangsterism has become a subculture present in both the school and the community. The majority of participants reported gangsterism as an influence both within and outside the school, affecting school violence. The narratives above suggest that youth are directly and indirectly involved in gang-related violence.

Power (2017) defines school violence as occurring both within and around the school. Additionally, youth are affected by violence while travelling to and from school. The narratives presented align with this, as most participants mentioned that youth experience violence within school premises and while commuting to and from school. This indicates that some youth are targeted, threatened, stabbed, and even killed by individuals from outside the school when travelling home. Participants express their fear for their own safety and the safety of the youth around them.

4.4.1.2. The Community's role in perpetuating school violence

When inquired about the community's stance on school violence, the majority of participants indicated a negative attitude towards it. Many of them noted that youth depend on community members to intervene on their behalf within the school setting.

Learners on the inside go fetch them on the outside, they are their people, like for an example: I can't now defend myself, now I am going to go fetch my uncle to defend for me, and he's going to hit you, that's how it works here. [Participant 8, male, 18, grade 12].

They stabbed this one boy and he was my ex-boyfriend, we were grade 9, they stabbed him outside of school, they hit him first in school then he wanted to fetch his people then they got him, and stabbed him. He was fighting for his life in the hospital. [Participant 12, female, 18, grade 11]

Most participants pointed out that the community plays a role in perpetuating school violence. Participant 8's narrative draws attention to the interconnectedness of violence between the school and the community. This aligns with Sibisi's (2016) argument, which suggests that outsiders can easily access schools and inflict violence on youth. Furthermore, Participant 8 confirms this in their narrative, emphasizing that some youth rely on outsiders to intervene on their behalf, implying that conflicts may spill over from the school environment to the community. This is consistent with Nconsta and Shumba's (2013) argument about the direct relationship between community and school violence, highlighting how the surrounding environment influences violence within schools. Additionally, Khumalo (2019) argues that schools are an extension of society, where the activities within schools impact the community and vice versa. This supports Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory, which emphasizes that changes and conflicts

in one microsystem can affect another microsystem. The theory underscores the interdependence of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Most participants expressed that the community offers minimal to no support in addressing school violence. Participant 12's narrative highlights how the community's lack of support contributes to the perpetuation of school violence. This aligns with Phillip and Maritz's (2015) study, which argues that violence has become an accepted response among individuals living in high-crime environments. They contend that some community members see no wrongdoing in perpetuating violent activities. Therefore, it could be argued that the community's normalization of violence contributes to their lack of support in addressing school violence.

4.4.1.3. The Community's Response to School Violence

Many participants hold the belief that community members are indifferent to the harmful effects of school violence on youth.

When I look and sit back, I see it's our people in the community that do it, they know we come to school for better education they wanna bring us down, they dont help us come up. Therefore, I feel that the schools are going behind, because the community isn't giving 100 % help. So that is where it comes, youth from the school dropout standing by the fences threatening and having fights on school, selling cigarettes and drugs weekends. They come to school aggressive and take it out on children. [Participant 10, male, 18, grade 11]

Yes, because the schools here, people (from the community) will see children jumping into the school they won't try to prevent it and say you can't go in the school. They will still let children jump and if they see children smoking cigarettes, they (community members) won't say anything about school violence, they just neverminded. [Participant 12, female, 18, grade 11]

The majority of participants emphasized the community's disinterest in ensuring the safety of youth. The narratives provided above underscore the lack of concern among community members for the well-being of youth. In Participant 10's narrative, attention is drawn to how school violence has escalated due to community members' apparent indifference toward the overall well-being of youth. This observation aligns with the findings of Mhkize and Sibisi (2021), who emphasize the necessity for communities to address the residents' needs. They argue that the community's failure

to respond to these needs may exacerbate physical and social issues within the community. In the context of this study, the community's lack of interest in ensuring the safety of youth could increase their vulnerability to violence in and around schools.

Arguably, Participant 12's narrative suggests that community members can speak out against school violence but choose not to do so. Furthermore, it asserts that the community can play a role in combatting school violence. Bayet et al. (2014) provide evidence that the absence of protection in both schools and communities sustains school violence. Their study identifies that this lack of protection leads to increased psychological distress among youth. A harmful environment negatively impacts the holistic well-being of individuals (Booth et al., 2012). These studies collectively highlight the importance of community involvement in ensuring the safety of youth.

4.4.2. Experiences of school violence

4.4.2.1. School fights

The majority of participants reported involvement in school fights, illustrating that these altercations often occur both inside and outside classrooms.

Once a week fights happen...they fighting miss... a boy and a girl fighting so they throw each other with tables... I fear that the girl who started the fight will come for me [Participant 1, male, 13, grade 8]

After school they did fight, I dont know why, but the police came they uhm, how can I now say, they stopped the fight, but this one girl were like, she didnt wanted to stop, and the other girl had a knob on her head, like a big thing. The girl kicked her with her school shoe, so the girl got a knob on her head... I feel stressed out [Participant 6, female, 15, grade 11]

Two boys started a fight outside the class...everybody ran out to go see the fight. Whenever a fight happens at school then they start throwing bags or stones like they threw my friend, she had a hole in her head, and there was blood like all over her shirt and my clothes as well. The thing is when learners witness a fight they must get involved and start throwing stuff. If its not throwing stuff, then they push each other around. [participant 14, female, 19, grade 12]

The majority of participants emphasized the aggressive nature of fights among youth. The narratives above shed light on the extent of harm inflicted on youth during these altercations,

highlighting the pervasive violence that occurs both within and outside of the school environment. Notably, Participants 1 and 14's narratives draw attention to how youth harm each other by hurling objects during these confrontations. This observation aligns with the Department of Basic Education (2015), which states that school violence serves as an indicator of the prevalence of aggression and victimization, both inside and outside the classroom. Burton and Leoschut (2012) point out that school fights are often perceived as 'normal' among youth, but they argue that school violence encompasses abnormal attacks between youth. The narratives provided by Participants 6 and 14 affirm this perspective by highlighting the severe injuries sustained by youth during school fights.

Shields et al. (2015) assert that excessive violence among youth contributes to a hostile and perilous learning environment. Their study indicates that youth exposed to such violence often experience feelings of fear, vulnerability, and psychological distress. This finding resonates with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which underscores how one's environment influences the psychological well-being of individuals within society. This correlation is evident in the narratives above, as participants shed light on the psychological effects of school fights. Additionally, Participant 1 expresses a sense of fear regarding potential victimization by youth perpetuating violence, while Participant 6 indicates her distress concerning the prevalence of fights among youth.

Furthermore, a significant number of participants also reported the frequent use of weapons during fights in and around the school.

We came out of school and I was walking with this boy like he was walking with me and then like a few seconds after that there came another boy, but he doesn't attend our school and basically he kept the boy around the neck ...afterwards I just saw a knife..., as the boy wanted to stab him he stopped him and then he ran.. could have been me, since that day I said when travelling to school, I am going to take a uber to school... in school its threats and basically stabbings. But I am glad I am not at school when it did happen, because it triggers.[Participant 4, female, 15, grade 10].

*They stabbed this one boy, he was my ex-boyfriend, we were grade 9, they stabbed him outside of school... they stabbed him. He was fighting for his life in the hospital.
[Participant 12, female, 18, grade 11]*

They stabbed a boy that goes to school here outside here by the shop, and so everyone here went to go look, I thought it was my friend, but my friend doesn't go to school here. But his my friend from home, so I heard it was my friend who stabbed the boy, but it wasn't him it was another boy from the school that stabbed the boy. We saw how they chased him down the road. [Participants 15, female, 19, grade 11]

The narratives presented above paint a grim picture of school violence, with reports of youth being stabbed both on and off school premises. Participant 4's narrative underscores how the presence of weapons can transform seemingly ordinary interactions with youth into violent and fatal confrontations. This narrative also draws attention to the psychological impact that commuting to and from school has on youth. This observation aligns with Shields et al.'s (2015) argument that an unsafe environment contributes to psychological distress in individuals.

Participant 12's narrative further highlights the critical situations in which youth find themselves due to violent altercations outside the school property. These narratives are in line with Mkhiza and Subisi's (2021) study, which argues for the multifaceted nature of school violence, attributing it to various risk factors, including but not limited to violence in the surrounding environment and easy access to weapons. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory asserts that an individual's development is influenced by their relationship with their environment. The narratives provided above suggest that youth may be developing violent relationships within both their school and community settings. Moreover, Mncube and Harber (2013) highlight the interconnectedness of violence between schools and community violence. This corroborates the narratives above, as participants emphasize how youth become victims of the brutality of violence in and around the school property.

Additionally, many participants reported that youth frequently threaten to harm each other.

Being threatened ... like "after school I'm going to get you". Like yesterday there was an 'after school I am going to get you' [Participant 4, female, 15, grade 10]

There was a whole fight... he threatened my brother to say he was going to stab him and all that... a lot was going through my mind, I didn't know what to do and how to take it now it's my brother... I lost a lot of concentration... it was difficult for me to reset my mind [Participant 7, female, 17, grade 11].

Today, this morning, this one girl was talking to me and the other girl felt offended... but we were not talking about her; the more I am explaining that we are not talking about her, she threatened the other girl and said ill give you a huge smack. [Participant 12, female, 18, grade 11].

The narratives presented above shed light on how youth induce fear in each other by issuing threats of harm. Participants explain that these threats encompass the possibility of stabbing or physically harming one another. This finding aligns with Burton and Leoschut's (2013) study, which reports that high school youth are susceptible to succumbing to threats of violence and assaults within the school environment. Burton and Leoschut (2013) further note that among various forms of victimization among youth, threats of violence are the most common among secondary school youth. Kaminer et al. (2013) delve into the surge of violence among youth in South Africa and reveal that many youth are exposed to school violence, with most of them witnessing their peers being physically assaulted.

Burton and Leoschut (2013) also emphasize that threats among youth have adverse psychological effects, resulting in decreased school attendance and hindered academic performance. This observation resonates with Participant 7's narrative, where she underscores the psychological impact of threats on her ability to concentrate in class. Furthermore, this finding aligns with Osika et al.'s (2022) study, which notes that threats create a challenging learning environment for youth, leading to negative emotions that may cause disengagement during lessons. Moreover, Mncube and Harber (2013) suggest that youth often employ threats as a form of bullying.

4.4.2.2. Bullying.

All participants unanimously identified bullying as a prevalent form of school violence. Many participants expressed concern about the detrimental effects of bullying on youth.

I think it was last year, so this one girl , but she dont look so nice man, like her clothes isnt nice and stuff, this other girl and her friends were bullying her, so the child wanted to commit suicide when she went home, that wasnt right, the child was crying. [participant 5, female, 16, grade 10]

I feel like if bullying didn't happen to me then I would have been finished with school and I wouldn't have the need to do the year over again. So I feel like bullying had a big impact on my life... I fear the most that people will have something to say about me when I enter

the school gates... like with me, it happened in grade 8, a grade 12 boy bullied me for money and every day I was hit and it also came... so when I was bullied, I thought that I could do it to others as well. That is how I know it is wrong because I was bullied and I tried to do it to other children cos, it had me, it touched me, so I just wanted to get over it so I felt like okay I can also bully that child because I was bullied, but at the end of the day I realised its wrong, because I didn't like it, now how would that person feel when I am going to do it to them. [Participant 10, male, 18, grade 11]

I have experienced bullying, when I am with my friends some children come up to me and tease me about my size, and they also randomly come up to me and pick on me... sometimes the bullying... gets too much and I don't want to get affected by it so I thought of dropping out, but then I changed my mind. [Participant 13, female, 18, grade 11]

The majority of participants indicated the detrimental effects of bullying on youth. The narratives above highlighted the prevalence of both verbal and physical bullying among youth, with verbal bullying being used to demean others and physical bullying employed to establish dominance. These findings align with Ncontsa and Shumba's (2013) study, as their research reveals direct bullying manifested through physical and verbal aggression.

Participant 10's narrative underscores how youth who have been victimized by bullying sometimes perpetrate bullying on other youth, a phenomenon supported by studies like those of Wolke and Lereva (2015) and Burton and Leoschut (2013). Kliethermes et al. (2014) further indicate that repetitive traumatic experiences over an extended period may either hinder or promote adolescent development. Arguably, Participant 10's narrative affirms this concept, as he highlights how persistent bullying delayed his educational progress.

According to Burchell (2013), violence constitutes an abusive force that profoundly affects the psychological and emotional well-being of its victims. Participant 13's narrative corroborates this idea, emphasizing the overwhelming nature of bullying. Swearer et al. (2012) discuss the traumatic impact of bullying on youth, noting that it can induce fear and negatively affect school attendance. Most participants expressed that due to bullying, they contemplated dropping out of school. This aligns with Kliethermes et al.'s (2014) complex trauma theory, which posits that the outcome of trauma may lead individuals to disassociate from their environments. Rivara et al.'s (2016) study demonstrates the mental and emotional toll that bullying takes on its victims, leaving them feeling

rejected and isolated. Based on the narratives above, it can be argued that youth who are bullied face obstacles to holistic integration into the school environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) contends that an individual's inability to integrate into society hinders their developmental progress and underscores the significance of microsystems in an individual's life for their development.

4.4.2.3. Youth bring weapons to school

The majority of participants in this study reported that many youth bring weapons to school. They mention that youth do so as a means of protection, although some youth also use these weapons during school fights.

The learners, they feel like they must bring because when they go home and stuff the people want to rob the children, like this boytjie in grade 9, he did bring pepper spray, so he did spray them in class toe brunt almaal sé oe (then everybody's eyes were burning). And one boy brought a tazer to school, they did rob his friend, so he was scared they were going to rob him. [Participant 5, female 16, grade 10]

I know of people that brings knives to school, they came with the stuff to school, then they jump the fence during the interval and the person waits for them outside of school, but then everybody waits for them but then there is no fight... Throwing bricks, stabbing, there was an incident when they stabbed some person, a person from outside from a small gang came into the school and stabbed a learner, his white school shirt was red, but he is fine. [Participant 9, male, 18, grade 12]

Most participants indicated that youth bring weapons as a means of self-defence. The rise in crime in South Africa has led to an increase in youth bringing weapons to school (Khuzwayo et al., 2016; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Youth bring weapons to school to protect themselves from potential robberies while travelling to and from school (Khuzwayo et al., 2016). The narratives above validate this, as participants highlight how some youth carry weapons for self-protection or to potentially harm others. Additionally, Hendricks (2018) argues that certain schools have become environments characterized by fear and danger.

Davis et al. (2014) suggest that the brain responds behaviorally to threats. It could be argued that youth carrying weapons is a behavioural response to the perceived threat of violence during school hours. This corresponds to the narratives above, as participants draw attention to how past traumatic experiences lead youth to carry weapons out of fear of victimization. However, some

youth also bring weapons for confrontations with other youth. The narratives above emphasize that some youth carry weapons with the intent to harm others. Mkhize and Sibisi (2021) confirm this, as their study demonstrates that youth bring weapons to school and use them in fights, underscoring the dangerous nature of these altercations, with weapons inflicting severe injuries among youth during such conflicts.

4.4.3. Poly-victimization

When asked about various forms of violence, most participants mentioned that youth experience both direct and indirect victimization.

Some of the gangsters wait for the children outside, like some of them know the children that come to school...Like this boy, he was like a moffie (a male who has feminine characteristics) so we were on a group chat, so my twin sister, she's also now in my class, she did call the boy a moffie and uhm pussy cat and all this stuff. [participant 3, female, 15, grade 11]

Outside the school, but we could have seen it. They shot the man dead. Ja here by Dawoods bakery and so we had to go back into class. He was like a gang leader and stuff...after school, and some of the children want to fight, and they part of a gang then they call their gang and they beat the children (learners) up outside. They (gangsters) wait for them after school. It happened a few times, like they wanted to stab that boytjie (slang for boy) so he couldnt come to school. [participant 5, female, 16, grade 10]

I witness it more, and it happens more to me as well, because I am on school, I am part of the LGBTQ+, so every day I get bad comments and stuff. Sometimes I feel it and sometimes I dont feel it, because it happened since I came on school...it happened in grade 8, a grade 12 boy bullied me for money and every day I was hit ...And it also happened in my grade 9 year when I had a fight in class, in front of the teacher, when the boy hit a hole in my head, my face was swollen. [Participant 10, male, 18, grade 11]

There is a lot of bullying and children want to bring each other down... they fight with each other, some children sell drugs on school, they stab each other... Some of us are afraid to come to school... gangs do affect school... they want to sell cigarettes on school now, for example...They will fight you to take your money, or they say 'we will hurt you after school'. [Participant 12, female, 18, grade 11].

The narratives presented above underscore the various forms of violence that affect youth. They illustrate that youth are exposed to both physical and psychological harassment, experiencing incidents such as stabbings, robberies, physical and emotional bullying, and threats. Lussier et al.

(2016) define poly-victimization as exposure to multiple forms of violence or crime, including physical and emotional abuse and assaults. Cyr et al. (2014) define indirect victimization as the act of witnessing violent events. The majority of participants expressed that they had witnessed violent events more frequently than being directly involved. The findings of this study reveal that each participant has either witnessed or been a direct victim of two or more forms of violence.

Kaminer et al. (2013) confirm that youth are exposed to both witnessing and direct victimization of violence across various environments. Finkelhor et al. (2007) state that youth residing in violent neighbourhoods or communities are at a higher risk of being exposed to multiple forms of violence. In connection with this, both schools are situated in violent communities where youth are susceptible to various degrees of violence. Finkelhor et al. (2015) assert that poly-victims are more likely to experience incidents involving weapons and more severe injuries. This aligns with the narratives above, as participants draw attention to the deadly incidents of school violence. Participants express that youth are shot and stabbed both within the school and in the community. Studies indicate a clear link between poly-victimization and psychological stress, where victims of multiple forms of violence are more susceptible to poor mental health (Kliethermes et al., 2014; Collings et al., 2014; Cyr et al., 2014; Nilsson et al., 2015).

4.4.4. Experiences of how school violence impacts learning

4.4.4.1. School violence as disruptive

When asked about how school violence affects their learning, most participants indicated that it disrupts their learning. They mentioned that lessons are frequently interrupted when fights break out in the classroom.

If we learning in class then someone stands up and beats this other person while we still learning, the whole class period is stopped and the teacher talks to the people who were fighting, and we, the learners just sitting there quietly we don't know what to do, what to learn, some of us we don't like drama miss, we just at school to learn and stuff like that, so the teacher stops the period and focuses on the children fighting so it affects our learning. So, we don't know, I don't know how to say this but the period like just stops and we go to the next period and we still didn't learn anything. [participant 2, female, 15, grade 10]

Because like the lesson stops when there is a fight, it stops immediately, the teacher doesn't go on, she's trying to break the fight, or trying to get someone to break the fight... the teacher will go back to the work afterwards, not that same day, but like the day after she will go back. [Participant 7, female, 17, grade 11]

The narratives above reveal how violence disrupts learning among youth in the classroom. They illustrate the physical impact of school violence on youth. Participant 2's narrative underscores the eagerness among youth to learn, yet school violence hinders their ability to do so effectively. This observation aligns with Ncontsa and Shumba's (2013) study, which highlights how the learning environment becomes chaotic when youth are disrupted by fights. They argue that such conflicts result in an unnecessary loss of learning, making it challenging for youth to acquire the necessary knowledge for their lessons. This is exemplified through Participant 7's narrative as she emphasizes how violence places youth at a disadvantage in terms of their educational progress.

Furthermore, violence compromises the learning environment, as teachers shift their attention from teaching to addressing issues related to school violence (Human Rights Commission, 2008; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Kliethermes et al. (2014) state that the environment can either hinder or promote adolescent development. Youth must acquire the knowledge necessary for their education; however, it could be argued that the disruptive nature of violence during class impedes the learning process. The subsequent section will delve into the psychological impact of school violence on youth.

4.4.5. Learner's experiences of psychological challenges due to school violence

4.4.5.1 The traumatic impact of school violence on youth.

When questioned about the challenges of school violence, it was observed that more than half of the 16 participants reported experiencing trauma as a result of it.

Perfect et al. (2016) argue that trauma among youth can result in impaired functioning. Jaycox et al. (2009) support this notion by showing that youth exposed to continuous traumatic events like violence may exhibit attention problems, reduce cognitive functioning, and repeat grades. Furthermore, post-traumatic symptoms such as attention difficulties and executive dysfunction could be attributed to structural changes in the brain (Kliethermes et al., 2014). Bremner (2006)

explains the impact of trauma on the brain, illustrating that the sensation of fear causes individuals to be alert and reactive. However, the emergence of trauma symptoms may trigger an exaggerated alarm response in individuals. Additionally, Booth et al. (2012) argue that the perception of a lack of safety within a microsystem may lead to increased psychological distress among individuals.

Anxiety:

When asked whether youth experience anxiety due to school violence, most of the participants indicated that they do.

Yes,..yaww miss, like I panick and i didnt even come to school, ... coz like some of them (friends) asked am I okay, and I was like ya I'm okay but I am not. [Participant 4, female, 15, grade 10]

Yes I always feel anxiety. That's how I feel every morning, I don't want to come to school... Yes, I did want to skip school because of how I was feeling. [Participant 14, female, 19, grade 11].

The majority of participants expressed experiencing anxiety as a result of school violence. The narratives provided above shed light on how school violence consistently triggers anxiety in youth. Jackson et al. (2000) explain that disruptions in healthy emotional regulation can lead to anxiety in individuals. They further argue that prolonged anxiety may impede an individual's ability to overcome negative emotions. This observation aligns with the narratives above, as participants highlight how anxiety stemming from school violence often leads to youth absenteeism. Participant 4's narrative underscores how anxiety can contribute to youth being absent from school. This finding is in line with Kuban and Steele's (2011) study, which demonstrates that youth who have experienced trauma are more likely to miss school.

Anger:

More than half of the participants expressed experiencing anger due to school violence. The narratives below delve into both the physical and psychological impact of this anger.

Ja like when the teacher lash, it trigggers too much and I snapped, I was like that was too much. [Participant 4, female, 15, grade 10]

Anger can stop youth from learning, because it is distractions, lots of distractions. your mind can't function right. [Participant 8, male, 18, grade 12]

It's anger, it builds a strong hatred toward that person, but I just sit still, refresh my mind and I let it go and I say no its fine. it had me, it touched me, so I just wanted to get over it. [Participant 10, male, 18, grade 10]

The majority of participants emphasized that youth often experience anger as a result of school violence. Participant 4's narrative highlights how feeling emotionally overwhelmed can trigger hyperarousal in youth, which is in line with Kliethermes et al.'s (2014) complex trauma theory, which illustrates that hyperarousal may be a post-traumatic symptom in individuals. It aligns with Day (2011), who suggests that traumatized individuals may perceive non-threatening situations as threatening, leading to reactive survival responses. The study demonstrates that individuals may react with anger, which is closely associated with hyperarousal.

Participant 8's narrative emphasizes how anger disrupts the learning process among youth. According to Penning et al. (2010), traumatic experiences can evoke emotions like anger in youth. Participant 10's narrative portrays anger as an inappropriate response to school violence. Perrotta (2019) identifies that emotions like anger can be triggered at inappropriate times, and if not controlled, they can pose an ever-present danger.

4.4.5.3. Toxic stress

Most participants expressed that due to school violence, youth persistently live in fear. Furthermore, a significant number of participants fear becoming victims of school violence themselves.

Because of what happened to me I am going to ask my pa, I was like at least I know he will drop me off at the gate safely, fetch me by the gate and straight home, no need to walk anything, [Participant 4, female, 15, grade 10].

I fear the most that people will have something to say about me when I enter the school gates, and I fear the most that my day wouldn't be nice at school because of the person of I am ...I had feared when I had the fight and so the person was waiting for me off at school in front, so I feared what does he have on him to hit me and where is he going to now hit me, so he chased me with a pitbull and with a stick... I fear the most is that I am soon to be matric and it's still a long year and I might drop out. [Participant 10, male, 18, grade 11].

According to Shanks and Robinson (2013), toxic stress is the outcome of repeated trauma, which may result in youth constantly living in a state of fear. The narratives provided above emphasize the perpetual fear experienced by youth due to school violence. They express their fear of potential stabbings or shootings during violent events. A significant number of youth in this study articulated their fear when coming to and leaving school. Perrotta (2019) indicates that negative thoughts and emotions can develop in an individual when they have experienced a traumatic event. Participant 4's narrative corroborates this, highlighting her ongoing fear when travelling to and from school. Consequently, she sought alternative means of transportation to ensure her safety.

Bremner (2006) explains that cortisol is released when the brain detects a threat, enabling survival responses in individuals. Arguably, this could be observed in Participant 4's response to seeking alternative transport and Participant 10's contemplation of dropping out of school. However, Bremner also explains that an excessive and prolonged release of cortisol negatively affects the Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) and hippocampus, which are essential for learning. Participant 10's narrative draws attention to how ongoing school violence instils fear in youth. His narrative further underscores his constant fear of victimization. It could be argued that these narratives highlight how school violence may have induced toxic stress among youth. Furthermore, Kliethermes et al. (2014) indicate that exposure to trauma has a profound impact on the brain's stress response system.

When asked how violence affects their learning, the majority of participants expressed that school violence leaves them feeling emotionally overwhelmed.

Basically, for me, it's distractions, basically also fighting and everything ... I wanted to go to another school ... a lot of violent memories play in my head you can't focus on the work, the work is there like it's in your head, but it's also not in your head[Participant 4, female, 15, grade 10.

I didn't want to come to school anymore, and I used to cry every day, I wanted to commit suicide... but before that, I used to cry the whole day, I was very emotional, slept all day, and was afraid to come outside, was afraid to come to school because everybody always had something to say about me, I want to do this and that because someone had a comment to say, now I just feel like my whole day's down. Like when someone says a bad comment all the others come up and it plays in my mind... yes, these emotions prevent me from

*learning because sometimes the teacher explains something and I want to go to sleep.
[Participant 10, male, 18, grade 11]*

The narratives provided above shed light on the emotional consequences of school violence on youth. Participant 4's narrative draws attention to how school violence can trigger past traumatic memories in youth, resulting in them feeling emotionally overwhelmed. Perrotta (2019) argues for the importance of adequate brain functionality, emphasizing that the brain's anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) is responsible for regulating emotions. The study notes that the effective functioning of the ACC allows individuals to process painful emotions without becoming overwhelmed. From the narratives above, it becomes evident that traumatic memories hinder youth from effectively engaging in the learning process. It could be argued that Participant 10's contemplation of suicide highlights the detrimental effect of school violence on the emotional well-being of youth.

Kuban and Steele (2011) provide evidence of the negative impact of trauma on learning, behaviour, and psychological functioning. They argue that youth exposed to trauma are more likely to be absent from school. Carrion and Wong (2011) state that individuals with post-traumatic stress may struggle to suppress intrusive memories. The narratives above confirm this, as participants emphasize how their emotions distract them, shifting their attention away from their work. Moreover, Participant 4's narrative highlights how traumatic experiences can cause youth to withdraw from their schoolwork. Jaycox et al. (2009) explain the traumatic effect of violence on learning, demonstrating that persistent violence leads to attention problems among youth.

4.4.5.2. Attention difficulties

When asked about how trauma may impact their concentration, most participants mentioned that their emotions resulting from school violence hinder their ability to concentrate on their school work.

It's almost like you cannot focus on the work, the work is there, like it's in your head, but it's also not in your head [Participant 4, female, 15, grade 10]

A lot of concentration I lost...school violence stresses you out because you don't know what is happening next ... one day this boy threatened my brother saying he was going to stab him and all that... because that boy is like a gangster a lot was going through my mind, [Participant 7, female, 17, grade 11]

I lose concentration ... I am trying to focus on my work miss... I am thinking about the fighting at school and home, its difficult to take in the work miss... emotions cause me to lose concentration (participant proceeds to cry). [Participant 11, female, 19, grade 11].

The majority of participants emphasized how school violence hinders the focus among youth during lessons. The narratives provided above highlight how youth struggle to concentrate after violent incidents in the classroom. Both Participant 4 and Participant 7's narratives underscore the challenges of comprehending schoolwork after a violent incident in class. According to Nconsta and Shumba's (2013) study, youth lose concentration in class due to their fear of becoming victims of school violence. Alagappan et al. (2005) corroborate this in their study, examining how the effects of school violence led to fear and loss of concentration among youth. Participant 7's narrative highlights how distress resulting from school violence causes youth to lose concentration in class. This aligns with Kliethermes et al.'s (2014) complex trauma theory, illustrating that a stressful environment compels individuals to prioritize their focus on survival. Duplechain et al. (2008) further confirm this by demonstrating how youth's concentration is compromised in a violent environment as their attention shifts to their safety rather than learning.

The majority of participants expressed their desire to learn, yet youth are constantly distracted by the traumatic effects of school violence. Participant 11's narrative highlights how emotions stemming from violence, both at school and at home, distract her from learning. Additionally, human emotions result from external stimuli, triggering diverse and complex reactions in individuals (Jack and Schyns, 2015). Furthermore, numerous studies report that human cognitive processing, including attention, learning, and reasoning, is influenced by emotions (Um et al., 2012; Vuilleumier, 2005; Jung et al., 2014). This corresponds to Jaycox et al. (2009), which identifies that youth exposed to persistent trauma like violence are more susceptible to attention problems and lower cognitive functioning.

When asked whether they could concentrate after fights broke out in class, most participants expressed that it was difficult for them to regain their focus.

I am thinking about the fight miss... I feel shocked, in disbelief, anger and anxiety It's difficult to take in the work and I lose concentration because everyone is talking about this fight and you are trying to focus on your work [Participant 11, female, 19, grade 11].

I could not concentrate, I just put my book in my bag and left everything because it was distracting. I came into the class ready to learn... once the fight stopped learners still think about the fight, and youth will say maybe the fight will continue after school... when the class is disruptive, I feel like I am wasting my time at school. When I feel like this then I just want to sleep in class [Participant 12, female, 18, grade 11]

Almost all the participants in this study expressed the lasting psychological impact of school violence on youth. Participant 11's narrative highlights how school violence creates a chaotic atmosphere in the classroom. Booth et al.'s (2012) study distinguishes that school violence psychologically hinders youth from effective learning, a theme prevalent among most participants in this study. The Child Trauma Academy (n.d.) contends that some youth are misdiagnosed with a learning disability when, in reality, trauma may prevent them from achieving the calm mindset required for effective learning.

Participant 12's narrative highlights how school violence leaves youth feeling despondent and draws attention to the disruptive nature of classroom fights. The narratives above underscore how fights disrupt the entire class, as participants express a desire to learn, yet the classroom environment is not conducive to learning. Relating these findings to the literature, one can see how violence traumatically impacts the cognitive functioning of individuals. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory, in conjunction with Kliethermes et al.'s (2014) Complex Trauma theory, indicates how social factors in an environment are intrinsically connected to the psychological functioning of individuals, where social factors in a learning environment negatively affect learning.

4.4.6. experiences of trauma on learning outcomes.

4.4.6.1. Disassociation from schoolwork

When asked about how they experience school violence to hinder their learning outcomes, many participants acknowledged that their emotions, resulting from violent events, led them to dissociate from their schoolwork.

I'll sit and I'll zone out, yaww once you do that, everything comes in (memories) but after time it went away because I did things to keep me busy, like go to friends, i didnt sit still, because once you sit still, the memories just comes back. I watch tv late nights... and I always think I have school tomorrow I need to study. [Participant 4, female, 15, grade 10]

Most of the time I was outside of school, then to be inside of school, because I was afraid to go to my classes, so I told myself I am going to sit outside the school the whole day and stuff, and I feel like if that (bullying) didn't happen to me then I would have been finished with school and I wouldn't have the need to do the year over again. So I feel like that (bullying) had a big impact on my life. [participant 10, male, 18, grade 11].

My emotions impact my learning because my brother is also a gangster, like when it is study time, and then they shoot and I am just thinking about the shooting. [Participant 15, female, 19, grade 11].

The narratives provided above illuminate youth's physical and psychological withdrawal from their schoolwork. According to Perkins and Graham-Bermann (2012), exposure to violence may lead to problems in adolescents' psychosocial development. Moreover, Perrotta (2019) states that violence-related trauma evokes intrusive memories and physiological changes that can last a lifetime. Participant 4's narrative highlights the coping strategy of staying busy to avoid unwanted memories. She recognizes her need to study but admits to watching TV instead of doing her schoolwork. One might argue that Participant 4's disengagement from her work is an attempt to avoid the need to sit still and concentrate while studying. Perkins and Graham-Bermann (2012) reveal that male youth are more likely to be absent from school due to bullying. This aligns with the findings presented above, as Participant 10's narrative draws attention to how bullying causes him to emotionally withdraw from learning. He explains that the fear of being bullied led to his classroom absences, ultimately resulting in him failing the year.

Hancock et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of executive functioning for successful learning, as it promotes logical and goal-oriented thinking. However, as Scaer (2005) notes, trauma disrupts learning over time. Participant 15 expresses how her concern for her brother's safety distracts her from her schoolwork. These studies collectively reveal the psychosocial effects of trauma on youth. School violence significantly interferes with how youth engage with their school work.

4.4.6.2. contemplating dropping out of school

When asked about how school violence impacted their school attendance, the majority of participants expressed contemplating dropping out of school.

Some youth fail the year, then they drop out, like example for me, I failed my first year when I came to this school, I wanted to drop out, but I had people who built me up and told me you can't drop out, and look where I am, I am in grade 11. They (youth) drop out with the purpose that people will laugh them out at school. You get learners who commit suicide, where youth are afraid to talk to the teacher because they don't trust the teacher. That is when they also drop out, they are not interested in school anymore. [Participant 10, male, 18, grade 11]

Because sometimes the bullying... I have experienced bullying, when I am with my friends some children pick on me.... I didn't want to get affected by it so I thought of dropping out, but then I changed my mind. [Participant 12, female, 18, grade 11]

I wanted to drop out of school because of things happening in school and home...the emotions build up every day. Like yesterday I was speaking with my friend and I just started bursting out in tears, but right now I feel it feel like I want to cry. That is why I always find a way out of class just to catch a breather. Yesterday I was sitting in class, I always find a way to get out of class, because it feels like I am suffocating in that class, like in every class I go to is because I feel that way... it is the emotions. That's how I feel every morning, I don't want to come to school. [Participant 14, female, 19, grade 12]

The narratives above emphasize that, despite the participants contemplating dropping out of school, they remain committed to completing their education. Participant 10's narrative highlights the importance of youth having a support structure, as he indicates how encouragement from relatives can motivate youth to stay in school. This aligns with the findings of Rellini et al. (2012), which argue that environmental factors contribute to resiliency in individuals, and an enriching environment stimulates emotional and behavioural regulation. This concept resonates with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory, which posits that an individual's microsystem consists of the face-to-face interactions they have regularly. Furthermore, Booth et al. (2012) argue that social interactions and patterns fuel an individual's psychological growth.

Participant 10's narrative further draws attention to how poor academic outcomes may lead to youth dropping out of school. Additionally, he mentions that youth have left school out of fear of being bullied for failing. Participant 12 expressed her initial temptation to drop out of school, but she changed her mind. This change of mind could speak to her ability to regulate her emotions and prioritize her focus. On the other hand, Participant 14 states that a combination of traumatic experiences at both home and school led her to contemplate dropping out of school. Although she has not dropped out, she frequently avoids attending class due to feeling emotionally

overwhelmed. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that school violence can inflict prolonged physical, psychological, and emotional stress on youth, resulting in negative academic performance and concentration issues, and potentially leading to youth dropping out of school (WHO, 2019).

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the main findings of the study, shedding light on the participants' experiences of school violence and their understanding of its traumatic nature. Additionally, it delves into the physical and psychological repercussions of school violence on their learning outcomes. The final chapter will delve into the key findings and offer suggested recommendations for addressing the issues discussed in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this qualitative study, we explore the experiences of high school youth in Cape Town regarding how school violence challenges their learning. The primary objectives of the study include unravelling the personal encounters youth have with school violence, understanding its repercussions on them, and exploring their experiences of school violence and how it impacts their learning outcomes. This chapter expands on the study's findings and provides in-depth recommendations and conclusions based on the research.

5.2. SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

5.2.1. Youth's Experiences of School Violence

The study findings reveal that participants experienced various forms of violence within and outside of school, highlighting the grim reality of violence in both settings. Participants emphasized the interconnectedness of violence within schools and communities, with gangsterism cited as a significant negative influence. Gangsterism's impact on school violence was noted, with instances of youth threatening, robbing, and stabbing others on school property. Many participants portrayed youth as directly or indirectly involved in gang-related violence.

Furthermore, the community's response to school violence was largely negative, with some community members seen as contributing to the issue. The study also uncovered a subculture of violence in schools, where violence has become normalized among youth. The study provided evidence of the fatal reality of school violence, with youth resorting to weapons during fights. It also revealed the grim reality of poly-victimization among youth, who experience various forms of violence both within and outside school grounds, including stabbings, robberies, and bullying.

Participants highlighted bullying as a major factor influencing youth dropping out of school. Common forms of school violence identified in the study included frequent fights, threats, and bullying among youth.

5.2.2. Understanding the Impact of School Violence on youth.

The majority of participants expressed feelings of insecurity while at school or during their commute to and from school. Furthermore, all participants unanimously concurred that school violence exerts a detrimental influence on the physical and psychological well-being of youth. They noted that school violence contributes to a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness among youth. Many participants emphasized that school violence severely disrupts the learning environment, with fights during class causing interruptions that delay their educational progress. A common sentiment shared by participants was that classroom altercations hinder the peaceful atmosphere necessary for effective learning

5.2.3. Understanding How Youth Experience School Violence as Traumatic.

The majority of participants described their experiences of school violence as emotionally overwhelming. Their narratives vividly illustrate the traumatic impact of school violence on youth, highlighting its adverse effects on both their physical and psychological well-being. Additionally, over half of the participants reported experiencing symptoms such as fear, anxiety, anger, withdrawal, and a diminished ability to concentrate due to school violence.

Youth experience anxiety and anger as a result of school violence, with findings revealing that they are anxious about being victimized during violent incidents, leading to school absences. The study also found that school violence evokes anger in youth, resulting in hyperarousal. Perpetual fear due to frequent violent incidents in and around school property was also reported, with participants expressing fear of becoming victims of school violence.

Furthermore, the study's findings show that school violence causes youth to be emotionally overwhelmed, potentially leading to withdrawal from school work. Many participants conveyed that the cumulative burden of these traumatic experiences had a detrimental effect on their psychological well-being and hindered their ability to learn.

5.2.4. Understanding How Youth Experience School Violence to Hindering Their Learning.

This study highlights that violence within and around schools significantly disrupts the learning environment for youth. It shows that school violence not only affects youth physically but also presents psychological and emotional challenges to their learning. Participants reported struggling to regain focus after fights in class, which hindered their ability to comprehend work and led to increased attention difficulties. Feelings of fear and distress caused by school violence also contributed to loss of concentration during lessons. A key challenge identified was the tendency to disengage from schoolwork due to overwhelming emotional distress.

Furthermore, participants revealed that traumatic memories from experiences within their households and communities also impacted their ability to concentrate in school. These narratives emphasized the overwhelming nature of emotions and memories associated with trauma. Many participants found it difficult to refocus after violent incidents in class and considered dropping out. However, having a strong support structure at home and school served as a deterrent against youth dropping out of school.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions drawn from the aforementioned findings, the following recommendations are proposed to address and overcome the challenges that youth face regarding the negative impact of school violence on their learning. These recommendations emphasize the roles that schools, youth, communities, researchers, stakeholders, government, and policymakers can play.

5.3.1. Safety and Support Challenges for Youth in Schools

The findings confirm that youth in these schools are affected directly or indirectly by various forms of violence. There is an urgent need for youth to feel secure in their learning environment and during their commute to and from school. Therefore, enhancing school safety measures is

necessary, including increasing security presence in and around school premises, deploying more security personnel for patrols, and providing conflict resolution support for both youth and staff.

Given the negative community response, there is also an urgent need to promote community involvement. This can be achieved through partnerships with local organizations, community centers, and law enforcement, creating safe spaces and fostering relationship opportunities for youth. Schools should educate students on the consequences of violence, and educational stakeholders and policymakers should implement programs highlighting the social and emotional repercussions of violence. Additionally, targeted interventions and community development initiatives should address the root causes of school violence, including poverty, social inequality, lack of opportunity, and the lingering effects of apartheid.

To help prevent violence, schools can incorporate curriculum-based activities that help youth and teachers identify violence, stay safe, and resolve conflicts non-violently. Schools should also promote critical thinking to challenge the notion that violence is a viable solution, instead of encouraging non-violent resolutions.

Given that youth experience violence, both in school and the community, educational and community stakeholders need to collaborate to combat violence directed toward and among youth. Collaboration between schools, communities, law enforcement, and social services is crucial to adequately address violence. Once these strategies and programs are implemented, it is essential to establish adequate monitoring and evaluation programs. Continuous evaluation and monitoring of violence prevention programs are necessary to ensure their effectiveness, making adjustments based on feedback and outcomes.

5.3.2. The Challenges Posed by Security Issues and the Impact of School Violence on Youth

The findings demonstrate that youth are insecure in and around the school premises. There is a need for safe transportation options for youth. The government should invest in school buses to ensure that youth commute safely to and from school. Additionally, there is a need for escorts for youth who feel unsafe travelling to school.

Youth stakeholders and policymakers should effectively address the violent disruptions in and around schools. They should develop strategies to adequately address classroom disruptions as well as implement restorative justice practices. The NYP (2030) emphasizes the significance of youth empowerment through their involvement in policy-making and implementation. However, it needs to recognize the importance of youth participation in decision-making processes related to school safety and violence prevention. To empower youth's voices through student councils or advisory groups.

There is a growing need to equip both youth and teachers with conflict management tools. The implementation of conflict resolution programs and peer mediation initiatives to assist youth in resolving conflicts peacefully and non-violently. Furthermore, stakeholders and policymakers should monitor and address bullying among youth. They need to implement anti-bullying policies which activate procedures and mechanisms for reporting and addressing bullying behavior.

These constant efforts would help create a safer and more supportive learning environment for youth. It addresses their feelings of insecurity and the negative impact of school violence on their physical and psychological well-being.

5.3.3. Psychological Challenges Due to School Violence

The study's findings provide evidence of the negative impact of school violence on youth, in terms of both their emotional well-being. Thus, the following is recommended to adequately address these issues:

The provision of relevant trauma-informed support services, providing easily accessible health professionals who can provide them with trauma-informed counseling and support services for youth who have experienced or been exposed to violence. These services will help them effectively process their emotions and assist them in coping with trauma. Providing youth counsellors, therapists, and support groups to adequately address the psychological effects of school violence on youth.

The issue of trauma among youth necessitates policymakers to adopt a more holistic approach when formulating and implementing policies to address and support youth experiencing trauma.

Educational stakeholders and policymakers should implement educational and awareness programs on the effects of violence on mental health, encouraging youth to seek the needed help and support. Alongside this, it is important to implement safe spaces within schools where youth can comfortably express their emotions.

Schools need to foster a positive learning atmosphere which promotes respect, understanding, and empathy among youth. Stakeholders and policymakers need to continuously evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the above-mentioned interventions and emotional support services for youth affected by school violence, implementing the relevant adjustments as needed to better meet their needs.

Given the limitations of existing research, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive understanding of the traumatic elements within youth microsystems. This understanding is essential for comprehending the diverse realities that youth face and for implementing strategies to prevent retraumatization.

The implementation of these interventions can create the needed support for youth. Creating a supportive environment for youth which helps them heal and thrive both academically and emotionally.

5.3.4. Learning Challenges and School Violence

Based on the study's findings, it is evident that learning is negatively affected among youth who are exposed to school violence. There is an urgent need to train teachers in trauma-informed teaching practices to support youth affected by school violence and trauma, assisting them to regain their focus in lessons and effectively engage in their learning.

The findings demonstrate the need for youth to have an adequate support system both in and outside school. Through the implementation of peer support programs, youth can connect and support each other; fostering a sense of community and resilience among each other. There is a need to create interconnected supportive networks for youth. Encouraging the involvement of teachers, parents, and community members in addressing school violence. Providing an effective support network for youth affected by school violence. In addition to this, youth need to be

provided with positive role models and mentors who can inspire and support learners who are affected by school violence.

Through the implementation of the above interventions, it is believed that schools can create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment for youth affected by school violence. In turn, this will positively assist youth in achieving academic success.

Due to the limited understanding of the detrimental effects of school violence on youth learning, it is advisable to conduct further research into how such violence adversely affects the educational experiences of youth in South Africa. Furthermore, the study should encompass a broader sample size to comprehensively grasp the adverse impacts of school violence on youth learning. Increased research efforts in this area will aid stakeholders in formulating and implementing effective interventions and policies to support these vulnerable youths.

5.3.5. Recommended Adjustments to Policies:

The National Youth Policy (NYP) of 2030 is commendable for offering a comprehensive long-term framework aimed at fostering youth development and empowerment. However, it is notable that the policy overlooks the significant and detrimental effects of school violence on the learning process. It is imperative for the NYP to recognize and acknowledge the prevalence of trauma among youth, particularly in the context of South Africa, and to strategically address this issue within its framework.

This recognition should extend to understanding how exposure to violence in schools can trigger trauma among youth, consequently impairing their learning outcomes. While ensuring safety measures and providing adequate learning resources are crucial components of quality education, it is equally important to acknowledge the need for increased support systems for affected youth. A holistic approach is necessary to explore the diverse effects of violence on youth across different microsystems of their lives.

To effectively address this issue, collaborative partnerships among policymakers, including community members, educational professionals, and mental health experts, are essential. These partnerships should be geared towards formulating and expeditiously implementing a trauma-

specific policy proposal aimed at mitigating the physical and psychological effects of school violence on youth in South Africa.

Furthermore, it is important to note the provisions outlined in the South African Schools Act: Regulations: Safety Measures at Public Schools Act (2006), which emphasizes the importance of maintaining violence-free environments within public schools. While these policies acknowledge the necessity of implementing strategies to ensure the safety and security of both youth and educators, they do not fully address the profound physical and psychological impacts of violence on affected individuals.

Policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize the introduction of comprehensive and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to provide constructive feedback for refining policies aimed at adequately supporting youth who are exposed to school violence. This proactive approach will significantly enhance the quality of life for many South African youth, particularly those residing in low socioeconomic status (SES) environments where persistent violence is a prevalent concern. The traumatic impact of violence on youth should not be underestimated, and their need for adequate support should remain a top priority within national youth development agendas.

5.4. CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the impact of school violence on youth in South Africa, aiming to inform stakeholders and policymakers about the need to recognize and address this issue. It employs qualitative research methods, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory and Kliethermes et al.'s Complex Trauma theory to explore how various social environments and persistent trauma due to school violence affect adolescents' cognitive abilities. The research design seeks to capture the diverse experiences and contexts of individuals affected by school violence, using purposive sampling to select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the study. The study's findings highlight the traumatic nature of school violence and its negative impact on learning among youth. It emphasises the need for trauma-informed programmes and policies in South African schools. Recommendations include updating safety and security frameworks, promoting supportive school environments, educating stakeholders about trauma's

effects on learning, providing professional support for affected youth, and implementing trauma-informed learning and care practices.

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APPENDIX A



University of Cape Town
Department of Social Development Supervisor:
Dr Khosi Kubeka.

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH WITH YOUTH

Name of principal researcher: Keziah October Student no.: OCTKEZ002 Contact no.: 0714916133

Email address: OCTKEZ002@mvuct.ac.za

I, _____ (write full name) the parent/guardian of _____ (write child's full name), give permission for my child to partake in the research project conducted by a masters student in the Social Development Department at the University of Cape Town.

1. I understand that this project is designed to gather information about the traumatic impact school violence has on my child's learning outcomes.
2. My Child's participation in this project is completely voluntary and they may withdraw and choose not to participate at any time with no consequences. My child will inform the researcher if she/he decides to leave the study at any time.
3. My child will be interviewed by the researcher at a convenient location and time. The interview will last approximately an hour. During the interview, the researcher will take down notes. A voice recorder will be used during the interview to record the conversation. If my child does not want to be recorded, she/he will not be able to partake in the study.
4. The child will arrive at the interview on the date and time agreed upon by the researcher and the child.
5. My child will not be judged because of what they say in the interview.

6. I understand that the researcher will not use my child's name or any other identification information in any reports using information gathered from this interview. I know that my child's confidentiality as a participant will remain secure. All information will be kept safe and private.
7. I understand that the researcher will be using the information my child has provided during the interview to write a report. I know the researcher will present information to others and publish an article on the research.
8. I have read and understood the information provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction and voluntarily agree in allowing my child to partake in this study.

Parent's Signature

Date

Researcher's Name

Researcher's Signature

APPENDIX B



University of Cape Town
Department of Social Development Supervisor:
Dr Khosi Kubeka.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS 18 YEARS AND OLDER

Name principal researcher: Keziah October Student no.: OCTKEZ002 Contact no.: 0714916133

Email address: OCTKEZ002@myuct.ac.za

I _____ (Write full name) volunteer to participate in this research project conducted by a master's student in the Social Development Department at the University of Cape Town.

1. I understand that the research is designed to gather information about the traumatic impact school violence has on my learning.
2. My participation in this research project is completely voluntary. I am able to withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without consequences. If I decide to leave the study, I will inform the researcher before leaving the study.
3. I will be interviewed by the researcher at a convenient time and date set by the researcher and myself. A voice recorder will be used to record the interview. If I do not want to be recorded, I will not be able to partake in the study.
4. I agree to arrive at the interview on the date and time set by the researcher and myself. 5. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview, I understand that I have the right not to answer any questions or to end the interview.
6. I understand that the researcher will not use my name, or any identifying information in the report that uses information gathered from the interview.
7. I understand that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will be secure, it will remain private and safe throughout the entire research.

8. I understand that the researcher will use the information I have provided to write a research report, present the information to others and publish an article on the research.
9. I will be as open and honest as I possibly can during the interview. I know that no one will judge me because of what I say during the interview,
10. I have read and understood the information provided to me. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I voluntarily agree to partake in this research study.

Participants Signature _____

Researcher's Name

Date _____

Researcher's Signature

APPENDIX C



University of Cape Town
Department of Social Development Supervisor:
Dr Khosi Kubeka.

ASSENT FORM FOR MINORS

Name principal researcher: Keziah October Student no.: OCTKEZ002 Contact no.: 0714916133

Email address: OCTKEZ002@myuct.ac.za

What is research?

Research is what we use to find **new knowledge** on the way things and people work. Researchers use research findings to understand more about children and teenagers and the social issues or problems that affect their lives.

What is the project about?

This study seeks to examine the traumatic impact of school violence and how it affects the learning outcomes of learners. In other words, I would like you to share your experiences of how the violence you have witnessed at school has affected you personally and your ability to perform at school.

Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?

You have been invited to partake in this study because your voice, alongside your other classmates, is the most important contribution to this research study.

Who is doing the research?

I, Keziah October will be doing the research. I am a master's student in the Department of Social Development at the University of Cape Town. I am doing this research to gain needed information regarding my research topic and to complete my master's degree.

What will happen to me during this study?

During this research project, you will not be harmed in any way. You will be interviewed in a safe and quiet room where the researcher will ask you questions. If you feel uncomfortable with any question you have the right to not answer that question or end the interview.

What will I benefit from the study?

By sharing your experience on how school violence disrupts and distresses your ability to learn you will help teachers, researchers, stakeholders and the government to become more aware of the need to assist youth like yourself.

Will anyone know I am in the study?

Nobody other than the researcher will know your identity. Your name or any identifying information will not be used in the report or spoken about to anybody.

Whom can I talk to about the study?

If you have any questions, or comments after the interview session you can contact me at 0714916133.

Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?

YES	NO
-----	----

Has the researcher answered all your questions?

YES	NO
-----	----

Do you understand that you can STOP being in the study at any time?

YES	NO
-----	----

Signature of minor: _____

Date: _____

Semi-structured interview guide

Welcome:

Good morning/ afternoon (participant's name) and Welcome to this interview. Thank you for taking the time to talk about the traumatic impact of school violence and how it impacts your learning. My name is Keziah October, I am a Social Development student at the University of Cape Town.

You were invited to take part in this study because your voice holds a significant contribution to this study. Your experiences of school violence and its traumatic impact will bring this study to life. It will answer the unknown of how youth in South Africa are traumatically impacted by school violence and how it may affect their learning.

The topic of this study looks at: **The impact of school violence on learning outcomes: Experiences and challenges of high school learners**

The purpose of this study- is to investigate how South African youth perceive school violence to be traumatic, together with how it may affect their academic performance.

Before we start, I would like to say that you are respected and protected in this space. Your Identity will not be disclosed to anybody other than myself. Although I will address you by your name during the interview, I will not use your name or anything that will identify you when reporting this discussion. Your privacy will be protected throughout this research.

Guidelines:

There is no right or wrong answer to the questions. I will also not judge you or what you share in the space.

You have probably noticed a recording device in my hand. I will be recording the session as I don't want to miss any of your comments. Your input is very important; I may miss something if I write it down.

First section- Demographic questions:

- how old are you?
- What race do you identify with?
- Which gender do you identify with?
- Where do you currently live?

Second section- I am going to be asking about your experience with school violence:

- What comes to mind when you think about school violence?
- Do you think violence in the community and neighbourhood plays a role in school violence? Can you explain your answer?
- Can you explain how often school violence happens at this school? Daily, every second day? Once every week?
- Can you describe what is the most common form of violence at this school?
- What experience comes to mind when you think about school violence? Can you unpack how you felt before, during and after the event?
- Were you personally harmed during this event?
- What was going through your mind during this event?
- What do you feel like you were physically capable of doing during the incident?
- How do you react to violent incidence at school?
- What do you fear the most when coming to school and why? ● Why do you think violence happens so often in schools?

The third section- I am going to ask you how school violence has impacted you:

- Have you ever been a victim of school violence? If you are comfortable, could you share an experience you remember?
- Do you witness the violence more, or are you often a victim?
- Have you ever used violence in school? Can you share an experience where you perpetrated violence on somebody else?
- Why did you feel the need to use violence in that situation?
- Do youth bring weapons to schools? What is the common weapon among learners? ● Do you think gangsterism in the community impacts school violence? If yes how? ● Has there ever been an incident of sexual violence at school? How did this incident impact you?
- Is bullying common among learners? How would you describe bullying at this school?
- Has any of your possessions been vandalized or stolen from you? Can you recall an incident?
- Could you explain how your possessions were taken from you?
- Are some teachers violent toward the learners? If yes, in what way do teachers use violence among learners?
- Do youth often report violent incidents to teachers or the principal? If not why do you think this is the case?

- How would you describe the security at school?
- Do you as an individual feel safe at school? How would you describe your safety at school?

The fourth section- Now I am going to ask about how school violence has been traumatic for you

- How has school violence been stressful for you?
- Have you ever experienced sleepless nights due to school violence? What runs through your mind when you cannot sleep?
- Have you ever experienced nightmares or dreams about a violent incident that happen at school? How did you feel when you woke up?
- Do you fear coming to school? If yes why? If not, why?
- Can you explain the thoughts going through your mind when you realize you are in danger?
- Do you struggle to trust youth around you?
- After violent incidents occur at school, what emotions do you experience?
- (the researcher will write down the responses of participants) I am going to state a

few feelings that may occur through trauma, raise your hand if you have felt any of the following:

Shock, disbelief, fear, anxiety, shame, disconnectedness, anger, withdrawing from others, withdrawal from school, confusion, guilt and shame. Feeling sad and hopeless, Loss of concentration in school. Physical symptoms: Nightmares, insomnia, Difficulty concentrating, Aches and pains, Edginess and agitation

- Do you feel helpless when violent incidence happen? In what way do you feel helpless?
- Do you feel guilty for feeling the way you do?
- Do you feel supported? Do you speak to anyone about these feelings?
- Have you ever thought of dropping out of school due to school violence? What kept you from not dropping out?
- Do you know of a learner who dropped out of school due to school violence?

The fifth section- Now I am going to ask how trauma affects your ability to learn:

- How have these emotions impacted your learning?
- When you feel threatened at school, how does that affect your concentration?
- How have these traumatic events stopped you from learning?
- How has it made it difficult for you to learn? And why?

- Do you think school violence has affected your ability to pay attention in class? Can you explain how?
- How often have you skipped school due to school violence? Can you explain why? Ending questions:
- Of all the things we discussed, how do you feel trauma due to school violence impacted your learning?

Summarise the interview:

- I will now briefly summarise the interview...
- Do you think that this is an accurate summarization of the interview?
- Have I left anything out? Final question:
- Would you like to add anything else? ● Have we missed out on anything?

I would like to thank you for being a part of this study, your voice is significant in this study and your contribution is invaluable.

If you would like to speak to me on anything with regards to the study please feel free to contact me.

PERMISSION LETTER FROM MANENBERG HIGH SCHOOL



Manenberg High School
Hoërskool Manenberg
Tugela Road / Straat
Manenberg
7764
Tel: 021 6910050
E-mail: Manenberg_sec@wagschools.gov.za
Web address: www.manenberghigh.co.za



PRINCIPAL: CC WILLIAMS

07 September 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Keziah October: Permission to do research

This letter serves to certify that Keziah October has been granted permission to do her post graduated research at the above mentioned school.

I trust that you find the above in order.

Yours Faithfully

Mr CC Williams
Principal

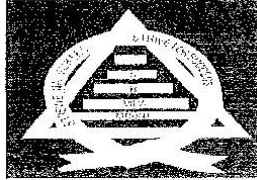


PERMISSION LETTER FROM MOUNT VIEW HIGH SCHOOL

*Hoërskool Mountview
Athwoodweg
HANOVERPARK
7780*

*POSBUS 36
HANOVERPARK
7782*

Tel: 021 300 0797



*Mount View High School
Athwood Road
HANOVER PARK
7780*

*P.O. BOX 36
HANOVER PARK
7782*

• *E-mail: admin@mountviewhigh.co.za*

13 September 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: Keziah October: Letter of permission to do Research

We wish to advise **Ms Keziah October** was granted permission to do her research on 22 till 23 February 2023 at the above mentioned school, regarding her post graduate qualification.

Thank you for taking cognizance of the above-mentioned.

Yours faithfully

MRS G. ABRAHAMS-MEYER

